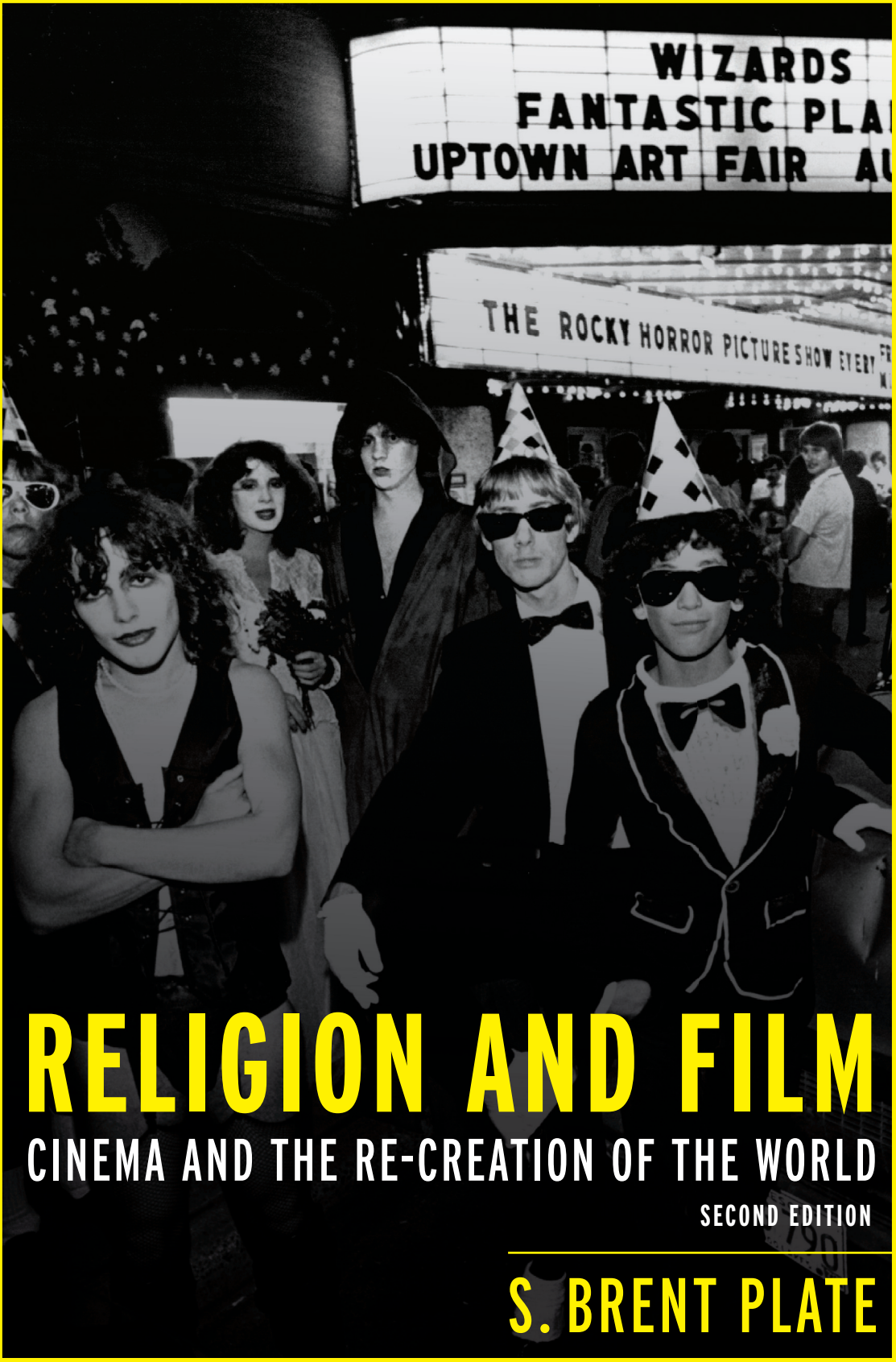

RELIGION AND FILM

CINEMA AND THE RE-CREATION OF THE WORLD

SECOND EDITION

S. BRENT PLATE

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Columbia University Press
New York

Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex
cup.columbia.edu

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Plate, S. Brent, 1966– author.
Title: Religion and film : cinema and the re-creation of the world / S. Brent Plate.
Description: Second edition. | New York : Columbia University Press, 2017. |
Includes bibliographical references and index. | Includes filmography.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017002049 | ISBN 9780231176743 (cloth : alk. paper) |
ISBN 9780231176750 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9780231545792 (e-book)
Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—Religious aspects. | Religion in motion
pictures. | Religious films—History and criticism. | Religion and literature.
Classification: LCC PN1995.5 .P53 2017 | DDC 791.43/682—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017002049

Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent
and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design: Jordan Wannemacher
Cover image: © ZUMA Press Inc. / Alamy Stock Photos

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In 120 years of cinema, much has changed and much has stayed the same. The technologies have all gone through radical transformations, becoming lighter, faster, cheaper, and more ubiquitous, with the result that the real world is increasingly difficult to distinguish from the screened world. Much has changed merely in the eight years since the first edition of this book was published, with incredible advances in CGI and digital projection allowing us to imagine other worlds—thereby also reimagining our own world—in unprecedented ways. Even so, so much stays the same: after a century of radical breakthroughs in technology cinema remains an almost exclusively audio-visual medium (as of writing this, 4-D remains a niche experience), engaged by audiences as patterns of light displayed on a flat, rectangular surface with sound projected from someplace near the screen. And while television, video games, and the Internet increasingly occupy our audio-visual time and energy, cinema continues to be a vital component of contemporary life often intersecting with other new media.

The second edition of *Religion and Film* responds to some of the technological cinematic changes, especially as they raise the stakes for the "recreation of the world." But this new edition chiefly responds to shifts in our intellectual investigations of the medium of cinema as well as the lived practices of religious life. In recent years, both cinema studies and religious studies have moved away from pure scholarly interpretation of

"texts" toward the audiences who participate in cinema and religious life. Religion and cinema take place in environments that are, at heart, physical and trigger material processes of communalizing, mythologizing, ritualizing, symbolizing, and conceptualizing. Reflecting these changes, I've expanded my studies on the reception of film, which I explain further below. First, some notes on my use of the terms *film* and *cinema*.

Cinema is a medium, in the capacious sense of each of those terms. That is, cinema is not simply a term for a formal storyline expressed in audio-visual format, nor does it refer solely to the watching of a movie. Instead, cinema is a medium in the way that Marshall McLuhan's notions of the automobile are a medium: there is a two-ton metal and plastic object with wheels that is a motorcar at the heart of it all, yet this is inextricable from the machine as a status symbol, as well as the automobile industry, the interstate highway system, a decentralization of urban life, and a reconceptualization of space and distance. Likewise, cinema connotes psychic, social, and religious environments surrounding the making and watching of the audio-visual film, all of which are imbricated in a network of perception, fandom, and devotion. *Cinema is a material media practice* that is constantly embodied and re-embodied in and through bodies, time, and space.

Strictly speaking, "film" denotes a physical medium that up until recently stood at the core of cinema: the strip of plastic material on which a series of still images are captured, processed, and eventually projected. Films were created by running a photographic substrate through a camera recorder, then developing that film, printing it, and running it through a projector that re-presented the scene captured by the camera. As a medium in the larger motion picture industry, as well as in indigenous, local creations, this has been almost completely replaced by digital image-capturing technologies, and so "film" is somewhat anachronistic. (Referring to the "movies" allows a bit more media neutrality, though this term is itself shorthand for "motion pictures," which was intended originally to distinguish them from still photographs, from which early cinema evolved.) Yet even when moving images are digitally created and presented, material-based decisions are still made that affect production and reception, and it is these decisions that occupy my interests in the first part of this book.

Digital versus photochemical issues aside, I prefer the use of the term *cinema* over *film*, as it opens several avenues for inquiry. (This book's title keeps the simple terminology of "religion and film" because it has become an established scholarly tag for discussing the relation.) For *cinema*, I follow a number of scholars who use the term to invoke the larger apparatus in which movies are created, watched, and continue to affect the lived lives of audiences. Historians of early cinema Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz argue that the late nineteenth-century invention "formed a crucible for ideas, techniques, and representational strategies already present in other places" (Charney and Schwartz 1995: 2). Even into the early twenty-first century, cinema has continued to be part of a matrix of cultural, political, social, artistic, and religious technologies and meanings. These broader concerns form the basis for the second and third parts of this book. At the same time, I will refer to the interpretable objects at the heart of it, and in these cases I will use the inadequate-yet-pragmatic term *films*.

The key shift I have made in this second edition is enlarging and refining categories for exploring the multiple dimensions of the religion-cinema nexus. In the first edition, I separated the four chapters into two sections: the first section was called "Religion Making and Filmmaking" and the second, "Religious Participation in the World on Screen." (It was written for the excellent "Short Cuts" series for Wallflower Press, which meant the book was itself short.) As I've continued to investigate religion-cinema relations, and read more in the cognitive sciences and cultural anthropology, I've found that it is imperative to split this second part into two sections, to think about what happens to people, particularly their bodies, *in the act* of watching and listening to films *and* how that affects life *after* the cinematic experience. Thus, chapter 3 from the first edition has been rearranged, supplemented, and split so it now comprises two chapters on the audience's experience of cinema (chapters 4 and 5). Chapter 4 of the first edition has been rearranged and expanded to examine life beyond the screen (chapter 6 here). I have also added significantly to the conversation around the sacred spaces of cinema and the place of pilgrimage, both on-screen and in life offscreen (especially in the new chapter 3). The original introduction and first two chapters have also been modified significantly, hopefully to make the arguments more clear and coherent.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book makes an argument by analogy. I argue that religion and film are *like* each other, and that their similarities exist on a formal level. As a preliminary demonstration of the relations, consider the following two quotes:

> Whatever its shape, the [camera] *frame* makes the image finite. The film image is bounded, limited. From an implicitly continuous world, the frame *selects* a slice to show us. . . . Characters enter the image from somewhere and go off to another area—offscreen space.
>
> (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 216)

> The most salient characteristic of ritual is its function as a *frame*. It is a deliberate and artificial demarcation. In ritual, a bit of behavior or interaction, an aspect of social life, a moment in time is *selected*, stopped, remarked upon.
>
> (Myerhoff 1977: 200)

Two well-known scholars of film and a well-known anthropologist discuss their respective objects of enquiry—cinematography, ritual—describing their functions with similar language. Cameras and rituals *frame* the world, *selecting* particular elements of time and space to be displayed. These framed selections are then projected onto a broad field in

ways that invite its viewers/adherents to become participants, to share in the experience of the re-created world. The altar and the screen are thus structured and function in comparable fashion. I will argue in the introduction that we can see these commonalities more fully if we understand the ways filmmaking and religion-making are bound under the general guise of *worldmaking*.

Films and religions arise from and play themselves out within specific cultures, yet each can be generically recognized in spite of cultural differences because each uses the same tools and raw materials. I am not blithely eliding cultural differences here, simply saying that no matter what culture films come from they are made with cameras and projectors and come into being through procedures such as cinematography and editing. The same is true of the myths, rituals, and symbols of religious traditions: even if drastically different from setting to setting, all religions seem to include some form of them as part of their tradition. And because religion and film are structured like each other, they have a tendency to borrow from each other, unwittingly or not. This latter point will require further argument and forms one of the key theoretical emphases of this book.

That said, this is not a book that surveys the various manifestations of religion *in* film (for example, studies of images of Jesus/the Buddha/angels on film, or the "spot-the-Christ-figure" method); much less is it a work of theology and film. Nor does it remain within a single genre, regional cinema, or time frame. Nor does it work from any single religious perspective. Rather, by examining films and genres from around the world—including Hollywood blockbusters, Dutch drama, Japanese animation, science fiction, avant-garde, and documentary films—I aim to emphasize some of the underlying dimensions of what is called film form, and then relate these to the underlying forms of religious structures found around the world. Thus, I retain the more neutral, and ambiguous, terminology, "religion *and* film," holding up both sides with more or less equal weight.

While religion and film is a relatively recent and increasingly vital field of scholarly inquiry within religious studies, the relation between religion and film is as old as cinema itself. If the origin of cinema dates to the Lumière brothers' first public screening for a paying audience in December 1895, then the first decade of cinema saw at least a half-dozen filmed versions of the life and passion of Jesus Christ, including those

made by the inventors of film themselves, Thomas Edison and Louis Lumière. Not long after, the "father" of Indian film, D. G. Phalke (2007) was inspired by a film of the life of Christ and set out to project the pantheon of Hindu deities on-screen. Film theorist André Bazin quipped, "The cinema has always been interested in God" (1997: 61), while director Jean Epstein went one step further: "I would even go so far as to say that the cinema is polytheistic and theogonic. . . . If we wish to understand how an animal, a plant, or a stone can inspire fear, respect, or horror, those three most sacred sentiments, I think we must watch them on the screen, living their mysterious, silent lives, alien to the human sensibility" (2007: 52). And all of this occurred decades before there was such a phrase as "religion and film."

Yet while the actual relation between the two is now over a century old, the critical academic enterprise of religion and film is relatively young. Early studies, sporadic titles appearing from the late 1960s to the 1980s, were particularly grounded in Paul Tillich's theology of culture. From a humanistic point of view, film was understood to tell us about the human condition; thus attention to film helps us understand more about this thing called humanity, its destiny and purpose. The works of Pasolini, Dreyer, Bresson, Bergman, and other European auteurs, alongside Kurosawa and Ozu, were prominent in these studies. By the late 1980s a new wave of scholars, chiefly in religious studies, reacted to this earlier paradigm that found religion and film only in "serious," art house films. This second wave of scholars began to pay attention to popular Hollywood films because, it was argued, this is what the masses watch and thus when we investigate popular films we find out something about mass culture in general. Both of these earlier movements tended to emphasize the verbal narratives of the films, and thus the studies were often indistinguishable from literary interpretations (for more on the history, see Lyden 2003: 11–35; Plate 2005a; Wright 2006: 11–32).

In the past two decades a third wave of religion and film studies has emerged with at least two primary concerns. The first is a move away from literary models of interpretation toward medium-specific models; i.e., scholars from religious studies are now engaging more fully with film criticism and theory. (Unfortunately, few film studies scholars have taken on issues of religion in any serious and critical way.) The second concern is a move from formal and narrative analyses of specific films toward

audience reception and how the viewing of film itself is similar to participation in religious ceremonies. This present book situates itself within this third wave, alongside other works (see, e.g., Johnston 2007; Lyden 2003; Marsh 2004; B. Meyer 2015; Rindge 2016; Sison 2012; Wright 2006).[1]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Like filmmaking, book writing depends on a significant production crew. In recent years, I have been fortunate to work with, talk with, eat with, and commune with many great people who implicitly and explicitly have contributed to this book. First I want to thank Glenn Perkins for excellent copyediting, and Wendy Lochner and Kathryn Jorge at Columbia University Press for seeing the project through. The office of the Dean of Faculty at Hamilton College has assisted in the research for this book in a number of ways, and I especially want to thank Patrick Reynolds for his support. I also want to thank my co-directors, co-editors, and co-producers: Yoram Allon, Megan Ammann, Timothy Beal, Robin Blaetz, Christopher Boesel, Linda Ehrlich, Betsy Flowers, Chaz Gay, Doug Gay, Simon Halliday, David Jasper, Tod Linafelt, John Lyden, Scott MacDonald, Birgit Meyer, Darren J. N. Middleton, Jolyon Mitchell, David Morgan, David Nienhuis, Crispin Paine, Antonio Sison, Brittney Smith, Rachel Wagner, and John Whalen-Bridge, as well as the many students in my religion and film courses at Texas Christian University, the University of Colorado, Hamilton College, and the Graduate Theological Union. Each one has helped me see differently.

Finally, many thanks to my executive producers: Edna Melisa, Sabina Elli, and Camila Elli.

An earlier version of chapter 4 was originally published as "Religious Cinematics: The Immediate Body in the Media of Film," in *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts & Contemporary Worlds* 1, no. 2–3 (2005): 259–75. An earlier version of chapter 6 was originally published in Charles Lippy, ed., *Faith in America*, volume 3 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 101–18. Short sections of the preface and introduction also appear in Manuel Vásquez and Vasudha Narayanan, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Material Religion* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

RELIGION AND FILM

INTRODUCTION

Worldmaking On-Screen and at the Altar

All invention and creation consist primarily of a new relationship between known parts.

—MAYA DEREN

The lights dim, the crowd goes quiet, and viewers begin to leave worries of this world behind, anticipating instead a new and mysterious alternative world that will soon envelop their eyes and ears. The screen lights up with previews of coming attractions, each beginning with that same deep, male voice:

"In a world where passion is forbidden . . ."

"In a world where you must fight to be free . . ."

"In a world where your best friend is a dog . . ."

The voice of so many of those trailers was Don Lafontaine, who died in 2008 and once stated the goals of successful film advertisements: "We have to very rapidly establish the world we are transporting them to. . . . That's very easily done by saying, 'In a world where . . . violence rules.' 'In a world where . . . men are slaves and women are the conquerors.' You very rapidly set the scene" ("Film Trailer Voice-Over" 2008).

From the trailers through the ending credits, films create worlds. They do not passively mimic or directly display what is "out there"; rather, they actively reshape elements of the lived world and twist them in new ways that are projected on-screen and given over to an audience. The attraction and promise of cinema is the way films offer glimpses into other worlds, even if only for ninety minutes at a time. We watch, hoping to escape the world we live in, to find utopian projections for improving our world, or to heed prophetic warnings for what our world might look like if we don't change our ways. In the theater we live in one world while viewing another, catching a glimpse of "what if?"

Yet in the practice of film viewing, these two worlds begin to collide, leaking sounds, images, and ideas across the semi-permeable boundaries between the world on-screen and the world on the streets. Such world-colliding activity is entertainingly exemplified in Woody Allen's 1985 *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Here, the fluidity between the worlds is enacted when the actor named Tom Baxter (played by Jeff Daniels) steps down off the screen and enters the "real world" in which Cecilia (Mia Farrow) sits, seeking relief from her otherwise troubled life (figure 0.1). In Allen's film, two worlds cross and both characters are altered because of their shared desires that transcend the boundaries of the screen. (Allen is clearly

FIGURE 0.1 Still from Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Tom Baxter comes down off the screen and enters the New Jersey world where Cecilia lives. Those on-screen look on.

indebted to the many similar playful scenarios seen in Buster Keaton's 1924 *Sherlock Jr.*) Nonetheless, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* does not let go of the fact that there *is* a screen in place between Tom and Cecilia. The screen is a border that is crossable, yet there are distinctions between the two sides, for example when Tom enters Cecilia's world and takes her out for a night on the town and tries to pay for dinner with the fake prop money he has in his pocket. The couple eventually comes to realize they live in two worlds and a permanent connection is impossible. Of course, all this takes place *on*-screen, and not in the real world per se.

Woody Allen's film, while delightfully self-referential about the experience of cinema, also tells us much about the experience of religion. Religion and cinema both function by re-creating the known world and then presenting that alternative version to their viewers/worshippers. Religions and films each create alternate worlds utilizing the raw materials of space, time, and physical objects, bending them each in new ways and forcing them to fit particular standards and produce particular desires. Film does this through camera angles and movements, framing devices, lighting, costuming, acting, editing, and other aspects of production. Religions achieve this through setting apart particular objects and periods of time and deeming them "sacred," through attention to specially charged objects (symbols), through the telling of stories (myths), and by gathering people together to focus on some particular event (ritual). The result of both religion and cinema is a re-created world: a world of recreation, a world of fantasy, a world of ideology, a world we may long to live in or a world we wish to avoid at all costs. As an alternative world is presented at the altar and on the screen, that projected world is connected to the world of the everyday, as boundaries, to a degree, become crossable.

This book is about the connection of the world "out there," and the re-created world on-screen and at the altar, and how these worlds affect one another. The impact, furthermore, is often so great that participants do not see differences in the worlds but rather as a seamless whole. Religious and cinematic worlds are so encompassing that devotees cannot understand their personal worlds any other way. My hypothesis is that by paying attention to the ways films are constructed, we can shed light on the ways religions are constructed, and vice versa. Film production borrows millennia-old aesthetic tactics from religions—at the dawn of the twentieth century filmmakers and theorists were more self-conscious about

this than they are at the start of the twenty-first century—but contemporary religious practices are likewise modified by the pervasive influence film has had on modern society. In general, the first part of the book focuses on similarities of aesthetic tactics between religion making and filmmaking. The second and third parts concentrate on the ways religious practices, especially rituals, have incorporated the re-created worlds of cinema and the ways in which film viewing operates like a ritual.

Herein, I play the role of editor, or perhaps of *bricoleur*, juxtaposing film theory and religious theory in order to highlight how both religion and film are engaged in the practice of *worldmaking*. As the avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren has intimated, invention and creation do not operate by bringing something into being "out of nothing" (a troubling myth of creativity perpetuated by Christian theology and a romantic view of the modern artist alike) but of taking what is already known and creating a new relationship (1987: 69). There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new relationships between old substances. Along these lines, I adopt the language of the great Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who once wrote of the social value of "intellectual montage," in which new and revolutionary ideas might spring from the juxtaposition of previously separate filmic images. And to be interdisciplinary about it, I juxtapose Eisenstein with the words of religionist Wendy Doniger, who suggests of the comparative study of religion: "The comparatist, like the surrealist, selects pieces of *objets trouvés*; the comparatist is not a painter but a collagist, indeed a bricolagist (or a *bricoleur*), just like the mythmakers themselves" (1998: 77). Worlds, religious and cinematic, are made up of borrowed fragments and pasted together in ever-new ways; myths are updated and transmediated, rituals reinvented, symbols morphed. The theoretical images I present through this book will be familiar to many readers, as I rely on relatively standard theories of religion and film, but by lighting them up side by side, I hope to re-create the understanding of the relation between them.

In the remainder of this introduction I briefly examine the concepts of worldmaking and re-creation more fully from a religious studies standpoint. Then I introduce the ways cinema participates in worldmaking activities through filmmaking techniques, and ultimately draw up a brief outline of the chapters of this book.

RELIGIOUS WORLDMAKING AND RE-CREATION

In the background of my argument are the world-building and world-maintaining processes of religion brought out in Peter Berger's now-canonic work *The Sacred Canopy*. We humans, the sociologist of religion suggests, collectively create ordered worlds around us to provide us with a sense of stability and security, "in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world" (1967: 27). Reality, like religion and like cinema, is socially constructed to a large degree, allowing its members to engage with it on deeply felt, personal levels. Cultural productions such as film offer conduits of significance between the individual and the cosmic order of the universe. And if culture staves off meaninglessness at the societal level, religion does so at a cosmic level by constructing a "sacred canopy" that keeps the threatening forces of chaos at bay.

Ever important is the way human laws and regulations are made to be seemingly embedded in cosmic structures. The *nomos* (the meaningful societal order) must be understood as being in sync with the *cosmos* (the universal, metaphysical order). There is a dialectical, ongoing process between the human and divine realms, and it is religion that supplies the link: "Religion implies the farthest reach of man's self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being. Put differently, religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant" (27–28). Indeed, Berger himself states that while most of history has seen religion as key to creating such a meaningful totality, in modern times "there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization" (27). Science has most importantly made the attempt, but here I am suggesting that we think about cinema as another audacious attempt (see Bradatan and Ungureann 2014). Cinema may be part of the symbol creating apparatus of culture, yet it can also aspire to more, to world-encompassing visions of the nomos and cosmos.

The philosopher Nelson Goodman similarly understands the culturally and socially constructed nature of the world. In his book *Ways of Worldmaking*, Goodman approaches the topic from an epistemological

standpoint rather than Berger's sociological one, and he draws an analogy between philosophy and the arts to understand how we humans go about creating worlds around us. "Much but by no means all worldmaking consists of taking apart and putting together, often conjointly: on the one hand, of dividing wholes into parts and partitioning kinds into subspecies, analyzing complexes into component features, drawing distinctions; on the other hand, of composing wholes and kinds out of parts and members and subclasses, combining features into complexes, and making connections" (1978: 7). The activity of world creation is a process of taking things apart and putting them back together, of reassembling the raw materials available, of dissection and analysis, and of mending fragments. Such philosophical/religious activity is easily translatable in terms of filmmaking, through the framing of space via cinematography and reprojecting it on-screen, or with its partitioning of time through edited cuts, which are then recombined in the editing room. More on this in the following chapters.

I borrow the language of worldmaking from Berger and Goodman, but in the background is the work of Immanuel Kant, Émile Durkheim, and others. Meanwhile, the scholar of comparative religion William Paden has synthesized many of these studies, offering evocative and accessible ways to approach both religion and film. In Paden's view, religions each posit and construct their own version of "the" world through various organizing categories made up of the activities, behaviors, beliefs, language, and symbol usages of persons and communities. By looking at religious systems as "worlds," as opposed to the relatively disembodied examination of texts and doctrines, the student of religion can come to understand the broader environmental constructions of religious practices and traditions within particular places and times. Paden writes, "Religions do not all inhabit the same world, but actually posit, structure, and dwell within a universe that is their own. . . . [A]ll living things select and sense 'the way things are' through their own organs and modes of activity" (1994: 51, 52). "Any world," he states elsewhere, "is an open-ended, interactive process, filled with various and complex sensory and cognitive domains, encompassing both representation and practice, both imaginal objects and bodies-in-performance" (Paden 2000: 336). Central here are the processes of selection and organization, of an active, performative, ongoing creation of the world. Such language runs uncannily

parallel to the language of film production, as each film offers specific geographies, times, languages, and personas, and is filled with many sensory details (though, unlike religion, film must remain limited to sight and sound, and arguably, touch), intellectual suggestions, imaginary and "real" objects, and performing bodies.

On the broadest and most abstract level, worldmaking utilizes the spaces and times that are available in the physical world, significantly incorporating common elements such as earth, air, fire, metal, wood, and water, and the objects created from them. Worldmaking is a performative drama in which humans are the costume designers and liturgists, scriptwriters and sermon givers, cinematographers and saints, projectionists and priests. All the world's a stage, and all worlds are stages. The dramatic activity is what humans partake in when we attempt to make meaning of the spaces, times, and people that make up our lives. And it is what filmmakers, artists, and religious figures offer to this human drama.

How do religions accomplish such worldmaking? Two of the most powerful components found across religious traditions are myths and rituals, replete with symbols. Symbol-infused myths and rituals create worlds for their adherents, who periodically and temporarily participate in these constructed worlds. The worlds of myths (whether they concern the creation of the universe or tell the tale of a great hero) cannot be inhabited directly but can be participated in from time to time through the ritual retelling, reenacting, and remembering of the stories. Christian communion recalls the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jewish Passover reenacts the exodus of the ancient Israelites. Janmashtami celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna. And the hajj ultimately reenacts the Prophet Muhammad's triumphant entry into Mecca and his circling of the ancient Arabic shrine, the Kaaba. Rituals and myths are intertwined, setting their participants within a world that is simultaneously here and now, just as it is part of an enduring history of "then and there," all of which meshes to foster identity, belonging, and tradition.

When we get to analytical descriptions of mythic and ritualistic operations, we begin to see the dramatic nature of worldmaking unfold. Myths and rituals assist in the creation of worlds through activities that frame, exclude, focus, organize, and re-present elements of the known world. Anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks to the function of rituals,

indirectly noting the power of mythic story: "A ritual provides a frame. The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated 'Once upon a time' creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales. . . . Framing and boxing limit experience, shut in desired themes or shut out intruding ones" (2002: 78). Meanwhile, Paden offers this definition for the function of ritual: "The basic feature of ritual is its power of focus. . . . In ritual, what is out of focus is brought into focus. What is implicit is made explicit. All ritual behavior gains its basic effectiveness by virtue of such undivided, intensified concentration and by bracketing off distraction and interference" (1994: 95–96). Similarly, for myth, Paden claims that it is "a definitive voice that names the ultimate powers that create, maintain, and re-create one's life," and that it works by "organizing and presenting reality in a way that makes humans not just conceivers but respondents and partakers" (73, 74). I am not suggesting these brief examples are comprehensive definitions of these terms, and we will see many more in the chapters that follow. Rather, I am here introducing the ways myths and rituals participate in the larger processes of worldmaking. As should be becoming apparent, myths and rituals operate like films: they utilize techniques of framing, thus including some themes, objects, and events while excluding others, and they serve to focus the participants' attention in ways that invite humans into their worlds to become participants.

Worlds are not merely created once and for always; they must be kept going, maintained. From time to time people will see through the constructed nature of the world and ask questions, poking holes in the sacred canopy. Or disaster and disease strike, and the ordered life we have come to know does not make as much sense. So sociocultural systems like religion continually have to legitimate the world that has been created. Worldmaking, in other words, is deeply bound to what Berger calls "world-maintenance." Because there is a dialectical process between the projected societal views of the cosmos and individual inquiry and creativity, the world must be maintained on a perpetual basis. For reasons that I hope to make clear, I am transposing world-maintenance as "re-creation" in order to get at the dynamic dialectics that Berger, Goodman, and Paden highlight. The world is not simply built but is constantly being maintained through rebuilding, reconstruction, recombining.

The hyphen is injected into re-creation to remind us how to pronounce this word in a way that resonates with its deeper meaning. Modern English

has transformed the term into "recreation"—as in "recreational vehicle," or departments of "parks and recreation"—it is something we do to *get away from* the world. Yet at the heart of the idea, even if we forget it, is the activity of creation. Recreation is a way to re-create the world, which often means taking a step back from the world to see how it is put together, if only to figure out how it can be rearranged. On those days of re-creation, the world looks different. We see what we should have seen all along. We remember what is truly important, or what really needs changing.

That recreation, including moviegoing, occurs on the weekends in the modern world is not accidental. These two days coincide with the Jewish and Christian holy days, when good folk of the world attend religious services, participate in their "true" communities, and take time to be in touch with their Creator. At least, that's the idea. As the Western world has grown restless with its religiosity, new forms of re-creation have emerged, one of which is of course the world of cinema. Indeed, what preacher's sermon can compete with multimillion-dollar special effects? What Sabbath meal can steer us away from the possibilities that such beautiful people as Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet might fall in love? Indeed, many priests and pastors are now incorporating film clips into their sermons, creating a multimediated spectacle of the Sunday morning worship service.

The Jewish tradition of the Sabbath is particularly insightful as a way to approach the re-creation of the world as it relates to film. "On the seventh day, God rested," we are told in the mythical language at the beginning of Genesis. But in Genesis's second chapter we read that the Creator was not so passive at this time. If religions, in contemporary religious studies language, are centered on that which is "sacred," then the Jewish and Christian traditions would be first and foremost centered on the Sabbath day, for that is the first thing that God blesses and makes holy (Heb. *kadosh*) according to the scriptures: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen. 2:3). As Abraham Heschel puts it in his classic little book on the Sabbath, "It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world" (1951: 10). Contrary to popular opinion, the idea and practice of the Sabbath is not hollowed out by a list of rules and regulations leaving a community in a state of passivity but rather is an active, vital time. Judaism has a strong tradition of understanding the Sabbath as the

completion of creation, that on the seventh day God did not refrain from creating as much as God created the Sabbath. The Sabbath, in this view, is the "real world," the rest of the week a necessary other world. "The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath" (14; Heschel is quoting from the Zohar here). The world of the Sabbath, like the worlds established by and through many religious rituals, confront participants with an alternative reality.

If the Sabbath is the day we turn "to the mystery of creation" and "from the world of creation to the creation of the world," then film mimics this process. Film makes us wonder about the world again, makes us say "Wow!" or offers images that allow us to see things in a new way. This is not to say all films accomplish this, for there seems to be somewhat of an inverse relation between the spectacular images of film and the capacity for the viewer's imagination—the more dazzling the image, the more depressed the imagination—but then again, the challah bread, the candles, the chanting, and the recitation of prayers are not foolproof ways to stir our minds and bodies either. At its best, the Sabbath puts people in touch with their Creator, with their family, and with the created world. At its best, cinema puts people in touch with the world again in new ways. In both of these, people are connected with their world only by gaining some distance and experiencing another world beyond the here and now.

To be active consumers and participants in front of the movie screen, altar, or Sabbath table—in order to maintain the hyphen in re-creation—it is necessary at times to dissect and analyze, to take things apart and then recombine them, as Goodman suggests. As students of religion and film, we must see, hear, feel, and think through how these worlds are made and re-created. Such are the goals of religious studies and film studies programs across the world, and such is the aim of this book.

FILMIC WORLDMAKING AND RE-CREATION

The re-creation of the world is perhaps so obvious in the cinema that we tend to overlook it. In the beginning, every film opens with the production studio's "vanity card," whether that of Paramount, Universal, Legendary,

or another studio. Many of these logos self-consciously demonstrate how the world is not simply being reflected on-screen but is being actively reimagined. These moving logos repeatedly portray a predominant theme through their scenarios: the heavens and earth are connected through the productions of cinema. The logo for Universal depicts a spinning Earth, with a thousand points of light appearing across the continents (presumably movie theaters) as the view zooms out to show the whole globe, and the name "Universal" spins into place as a belt spanning the planet. Dreamworks's logo begins with an image of still water, into which a fishing line is dropped, then the camera moves up to find a boy cradled in the curve of the "D" of "Dreamworks" as the name hangs, suspended in midair and surrounded by clouds, evoking a lunar look on the world below. Elsewhere, Warner Brothers displays the "WB" shield floating among the clouds; the now-defunct Orion showed its eponymous star sign; and Paramount and Columbia both set their icons so high up on a pedestal that only the clouds and a few other mountain peaks can join them in their pantheon of world imagining. The presence of clouds, stars, and sky in other logos continues the "not of this world" theme. In short, cinema connects the *nomos* and *cosmos*, creating its own sacred canopy.

Film production companies are fully cognizant of the other worlds and ethereal perspectives they provide for their viewers, and they gleefully promote these perspectives as they reaffirm a cosmology that evokes a "looking up" to where the wondrous things are. The audience looks up to the screen as the screen allows us to look up even further to the cosmos. Cinema offers a glimpse of the heavens, of other worlds above and beyond earthly existence, even as these other worlds must be relatable to the visible worlds on earth. The screen is the channel through which we are inscribed into the great cinematic canopy.

Such posturing is not far from the need for religious worlds to legitimate their worldmaking activity. As Berger suggests, "Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference." Further, "Probably the most ancient form of this legitimation is the conception of the relationship between society and cosmos as one between microcosm and macrocosm. Everything 'here below' has its

analogue 'up above.' By participating in the institutional order men, *ipso facto*, participate in the divine cosmos" (1967: 33, 34). Likewise, cinema projects a particular human order onto a screen, promoting its productions as a link between the "here below" and "up above"—on mountaintops, in the clouds, encircling the earth. Transcending this-worldly concerns, rules, or behaviors the cinema enables a god's-eye view of things, even if we have long ago given up the "heaven above/earth below" cosmic separation. Through it all, the cinema screen is literally larger than life.[1]

Filmmakers and theorists, alongside production companies, realize the re-creative activity of film production, and they tend to understand worldmaking in terms of *space* and *time*. Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film*, suggests the spatial significance of the larger-than-life images and the ways in which worlds are remade when projected on-screen: "Any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before" (Kracauer 1997: 48; cf. Benjamin 2002: 117 and Plate 2005b: 105–12). And editor Paul Hirsch connects worldmaking to the temporal dimensions of filmmaking when he claims, "Film is truth, but it's all an illusion. It's fake. Film is deceptive truth! . . . Editing is very interesting and absorbing work because of the illusions you can create. You can span thirty years within an hour and a half. You can stretch a moment in slow motion. You can play with time in extraordinary ways" (1992: 188–89).[2] Through the technology of cinema—through the camera lens, editing room, and projection equipment—a new world is assembled and presented on-screen. Viewers see and hear the world, but in entirely new ways because everyday perceptions of space and time are altered. Such time and space travel are not foreign to the procedures of religious worldmaking. In fact, if one were to substitute the word "myth" for "film" in Hirsch's comment, we would come across a popular definition of myth: "Telling lies to tell the truth." And through the re-creation of time and space, we have a world, created anew.

In the 1950s, the aesthetician and film theorist Étienne Souriau made a scientific stab at distinguishing several layers of "reality" when dealing

with film, and inadvertently offers some suggestions to religious studies scholars interested in cinema:

1. Afilmic reality (the reality that exists independently of filmic reality)
2. Profilmic reality (the reality photographed by the camera)
3. Filmographic reality (the film as physical object, structured by techniques such as editing)
4. Screenic (or filmophanic) reality (the film as projected on a screen)
5. Diegetic reality (the fictional story world created by the film; the type of reality "supposed" by the signification of film)
6. Spectatorial reality (the spectator's perception and comprehension of a film)
7. Creational reality (the filmmaker's intentions)

(Buckland 2000: 47; cf. Souriau 1953)[3]

I deal with almost all of these levels throughout this book, though not in any systematic, layer-by-layer way. I note them here to indicate the multiple layers of reality that one must engage when dealing with cinema. It is not enough to encapsulate the narrative arc and suggest some religious implications from a literary perspective; rather, the edited, cinematographic, and projected layers of cinema's re-creation of the world must be taken into account, as well as the spectator's perception.

While these seven layers are each of individual interest, the full implications simply delimit the more general analogous relations I am attempting here. One could, I suppose, discuss each of these layers in ways that relate to Clifford Geertz's extensive, though not unproblematic, definition of religion: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1973: 90). Souriau's level 2 could relate to Geertz's point 3, Souriau's level 4 could relate to Geertz's point 4, Souriau's level 6 could relate to Geertz's point 5, and so forth, though nothing like this is my interest here. The key point I take from Souriau for now is the general distinction between the *afilmic* and *diegetic* realities, the world "out there" and the world that is created "on-screen," but also their mutual implication; I fold in the notion of *spectatorial reality* in the latter half

of this book. Also crucial to point out here is that there is no simplistic "real world" versus "film world." They are all set within a continuum of reality.

Finally, to bring this theoretical cinematic and religious re-creating of the world down to a more concrete level, consider the following brief note on the production of Terry Gilliam's film *Tideland* (2005; figure 0.2):

> Terry Gilliam filmed his newest movie, *Tideland*, in Saskatchewan last fall, racing to complete the location shots before winter set in. The Mitch Cullin novel on which the film is based is mostly set in West Texas, but Mr. Gilliam had substituted the Canadian prairie instead. The evening after he wrapped, it started to snow, and the cast, crew and director all saw this as an omen. . . .
>
> Most of *Tideland* takes place inside a long-abandoned farmhouse, and the set was a miracle of grunginess and dilapidation in which cobwebs had been applied, brand new walls had been distressed to look old and water-stained, and ancient household implements had been knocked around until they looked even older. But as the camera tracked around and the crew moved props in and out, they accidentally created

FIGURE 0.2 Still from *Tideland*.

> little pathways of relative orderliness, and Mr. Gilliam several times called for more dust.
>
> (McGrath 2005)

In the making of film—which is not far from the making of religion—through symbolic sounds and images, scenarios can be substituted, just as afilmic weather encroaches on profilmic realities, and even entropy can be created on-screen. On the flip side, viewers end up seeing this re-created world on-screen and believing in the fiction because such belief is how we humans survive our everyday life. We go to the cinema and to the temple for recreation, to escape, but we also crave the re-creative aspects, maintaining the canopy of meaning over our individual and social lives as we imagine how the world could be. *What if?*

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Through this book I look at religion and cinema through the lens of worldmaking. I take this approach because it reflexively provides a way to view the world in which humans live, and not just the world as projected on-screen. There are seemingly two (and often more) worlds, but those continuously affect each other. Ultimately, it is the points of contact between the worlds that concern me. The active nature of worldmaking also shifts focus away from mere representational analyses of film, or simple accounting for theological doctrine *in* film, toward the ways entire worlds might be created on-screen and at the altar. By situating the relation of religion and film in the context of worldmaking, it becomes possible to tease out relations between diegetic, afilmic, and spectatorial realities, most especially, and to regard the ways religions and films exist betwixt and between these types of reality. To do this, I have set the book into three heuristic sections, taking us from the creation of films, to the watching of films, to life beyond cinema.

The first part of the book, which I've titled "Before the Show: Pulling the Curtain on the Wizard," comprises three chapters, each discussing the ways the afilmic world is captured and put into the diegetic world. Here I deal most specifically with what is called "film form," juxtaposing

film theory with theories of religion, thinking through how myths (chapter 1), rituals (chapter 2), and sacred spaces (chapter 3) might be experienced by way of cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène. The creation of a film is physical work, generally undertaken by a large number of people who aim to represent and, as I suggest, re-create a particular world and make it accessible to an audience, triggering mythological and symbolic dimensions across those worlds. Chapter 1 begins with a number of well-known, Hollywood productions, exploring the mythological dimensions of films such as *Star Wars* (1977), *The Matrix* (1999), *Big Fish* (2003), and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), especially noting the re-creation of mythology through formal components of cinematography and mise-en-scène. And since myth is generally a human activity that can only be comprehended and continue to exist through an ongoing performance in ritual, chapter 2 makes note of several lesser-known international films that generate their ritualistic impact through the creative conduits of cinematography and editing. Noting the relations between ritual, cinematography, and community creation the chapter examines *Antonia's Line* (1985) with attention to the ups-and-downs and side-to-sides of camera angles, and how vertical-hierarchical social structures, particularly with regard to gender, are cast in tension with horizontal-egalitarian communities. Turning to the function of editing, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Ron Fricke's *Baraka* (1992) both re-create the world through particular editing techniques revealing deeper ideologies indicative of the worlds of the filmmakers themselves. Chapter 3 then focuses on how diegetic film spaces and places are created through mise-en-scène. Starting with a variety of animated and science fiction films and moving into Fritz Lang's classic *Metropolis* (1927), I analyze the vertical landscape of city life, pointing out how buildings create orientation points within urban space and how films borrow from religious tradition and sometimes replace it. The chapter then breaks into a second, horizontal dimension, and notes a number of "pilgrimage" films that reorient perspectives not around verticality, but toward horizontality, with special attention given to the French-Moroccan production by director Ismaël Ferroukhi, *Le Grand Voyage* (2004), and David Lynch's non-surrealistically surreal *The Straight Story* (1999).

Part 2, "During the Show: Attractions and Distractions," shifts focus away from film form per se to examine how these forms connect with viewers in the space of the theater or viewing room, creating a spectatorial

reality, to use Souriau's term. The focus in this section is on what happens in the movement from screened film to sensuous, perceiving bodies. Chapter 4 looks at the affective power of *The Exorcist* (1973) and questions why horror film, in spite of the fake blood and guts, and in spite of everyone in the audience knowing it's fake, still works to move the spectator's body, causing emotional anxiety and even physical fainting. Then, the chapter switches to examine actual dead bodies in light of Stan Brakhage's avant-garde documentary film *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971). In the act of seeing another's body, with one's own embodied vision, mortality is an inescapable problem, and I argue for a peculiar form of "religious cinematics" whereby the seemingly distant and voyeuristic approach to film collapses into an intimate engagement with one's own body. The second chapter of this section (chapter 5) zooms in on the close-ups of the human face on-screen and uses this cinematic device to ask about the ways films may encourage us to see differently, to reframe our sense of reality in ethical terms, starting with Thomas Edison's controversial film of 1896, *The Kiss*. Drawing on contemporary studies in the cognitive sciences around facial recognition, the chapter concludes by pointing to an ethical function of cinematic experience.

Finally, the experience of cinema goes beyond the watching of individual films. In the final section, "After the Show: Re-Created Realities," I show how films have, Tom Baxter–like, come down off the screen and infiltrated religious rituals such as weddings and bar/bat mitzvahs. Films not only *represent* rituals, they actively alter the ways traditional rituals are enacted. Here I look especially at the ways popular films like *Star Wars* are incorporated into traditional religious rituals like weddings and bat mitzvoth and how films such as *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) create brand new rituals. This final chapter ends by revisiting sacred space, not as it is re-presented in diegetic reality, but how it is present in afilmic reality, and how films have inspired people to go out and "do likewise," seen through the influence of films such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–3) and Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* (2007).

Through these three sections I demonstrate the ways that, in the end, there is no simple "two worlds" view. Afilmic and diegetic realities in the early twenty-first century cannot be separated. Each has infiltrated the other to such a degree that the layers are largely indistinguishable and impinge of the spectatorial realities of audiences. The late film critic Roger Ebert gets at the role of cinema in modern life by quoting from and

expanding on a comment by his longtime friend and sparring partner Gene Siskel: "Siskel described his job as 'covering the national dream beat,' because if you pay attention to the movies they will tell you what people desire and fear. Movies are hardly ever about what they seem to be about. Look at a movie that a lot of people love, and you will find something profound, no matter how silly the film may be" (2011: 159). Cinema is never just an escape, never just light on a screen, never just a world "over there" or "up there." The diegetic realities of cinema constantly collapse into the afilmic world, supplying both form and content for humans' sacred strivings. They do this before the show, during the show, and after the show.

PART I

BEFORE THE SHOW

Pulling the Curtain on the Wizard

1

AUDIO-VISUAL MYTHOLOGIZING

The penultimate scene in Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003) reveals the truth of the tall tales told by Edward Bloom (played by Ewan McGregor and Albert Finney) over the years. To the surprise of his disbelieving son Will (Billy Crudup), as well as the viewers of the film, the scene of Edward's funeral shows how the father's fables actually contained within them a kernel of truth. For the most part Will, as well as the viewers, assumes he just made it all up. Early on in the film Edward recounts a story of an ostracized giant who lived in a cave on the outskirts of town and who is eventually befriended by Edward's cheerful demeanor. Via camera angles and some computer-generated imagery, the giant, Karl (Matthew McGrory), appears at least twice the size of an average man throughout Edward's retellings, probably at least twelve feet tall (figure 1.1).

Later on we hear the story of Edward's stint in the army, fighting in the Korean war, where he comes upon the conjoined twins, Jing and Ping (Adai Tai and Arlene Tai), singing for the enemy troops. In the funeral scene at the end of the film, viewers are introduced to Karl through a high-angle shot that gets viewers wondering for a few seconds whether Edward's stories were true, as Karl initially appears very tall indeed. A couple shots later there is a medium shot with the "giant" talking to other people, and it is revealed that he is no giant, just a rather tall man (figure 1.2). There really was a Karl, and he was tall, only perhaps not twelve feet

FIGURE 1.1 Still from the beginning of *Big Fish*. Via camera angles, Karl the giant appears at least twice the size of an average man.

FIGURE 1.2 Still from the end of *Big Fish*. Through a medium shot at Edward Bloom's funeral it is revealed that Karl was indeed a very tall man, though perhaps not a "giant."

tall. And a side-angle shot of the twins at the funeral at first makes it appear they are corporeally connected, but then one of them walks off with another character. Twins? Yes. Conjoined? No.

Big Fish gets us thinking about the power of stories, the power of their fictions, and the ways they construct identities and worlds for their

tellers and hearers. Furthermore, it gets us thinking about the audio-visual construction of such worlds.[1] Through decidedly visual means, the stories Edward tells in *Big Fish* are both initially exaggerated and eventually brought back down to earth. While verbal narrative and the overall soundtrack is strong throughout the film, there is nothing verbally mentioned about the size of the giant, nor about the exact nature of the twins, yet the visual effects display Edward's stories in larger-than-life form. The film is a tribute to storytelling, to the power of the imagination in creating identity, telling the religious-minded viewer a great deal about the importance of myth in the construction of sacred worlds. But it also *shows* a lot about the power of audio-visual mythologizing and its contribution to worldmaking.

With such notions in mind, this chapter explores mythologizing in the form of filmmaking, looking to the ways stories are created in and through the audio-visual medium, with particular attention to both cinematography and mise-en-scène. I discuss two mythological films, George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) and the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* (1999),[2] focusing on a single scene in each in which the props, characters, framing, lighting, and overall scenario offer clues to the mythological structures given in the films as a whole. I analyze how mythological references operate in film not simply as a part of verbal narrative trajectories but also through creating a scenario in which carefully placed objects and carefully chosen characters are shown in relationship to each other on-screen, and then offered to viewers to infer deeper connections. To conclude, I return to larger theoretical questions of the relation between myth and film, with some attention to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

MYTH AND FILM

Woven through this chapter, and picked up again in the conclusion, are two corollary questions on the relation of myth and film. First, what does an examination of film lend to the study of religion, specifically its myths? Second, how might an understanding of religious myths and world re-creation offer a more critical analysis of film than currently takes place in most film studies?

While more complete answers emerge in what follows, I suggest up front that an answer to the first question begins like this: films can show how myths operate beyond their existence as verbal stories, even as many scholars still tend to believe myths are composed of words that can simply be read and linguistically interpreted. To the contrary, myths, like films, are created in and carried out through visual, tactile, olfactory, and other sensual modes. A second part of that answer is that myths are always "mash-ups," always assembled through bits, pieces, and found objects that have been borrowed, begged, stolen, and improvised. Film has been and continues to be a natural medium for mash-ups due to its multimedia origins in theater, photography, and focus on everyday life (Louis Lumière's *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* [1895] and so forth). Attention to the sources of films suggests something about the sources of myths as well: both rely on establishing connections between the world out there and the world right here, and this only occurs in a mediated form, whether spoken, written, performed, or filmed.

The start of an answer to the second question would be this: thousands of years and thousands of cultural locations have provided contemporary filmmakers with a storehouse of grand stories that are endlessly adaptable into the audio-visual medium of film. Because myths are inevitably mash-ups, directors and screenwriters can cull from stories told through the ages, and told again in ever-new forms. To miss the begging, borrowing, and stealing that mythmakers/filmmakers do is to miss the compulsions of filmmaking in general to create new stories often by retelling old ones. And to deny the mythological origins of so many contemporary films is to risk denying something of the very humanity of the films as well. Unless film theorists and critics understand the power of myth, they will not understand the full power of film.

There is no space to go into extensive definitions of myth here, nor is it necessary for my interests. I start with a straightforward articulation by the historian of religions Wendy Doniger, who suggests that a myth "is a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past, or, more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered" (1998: 2).[3] Important to me, as for Doniger, is that a definition of myth must deal with the ways myths *function*, how they do what

they do and how they do them to people. The primary functions of myths are to make meaning, make memories, and make communities.

Myths are stories loosely based on real events, or they serve as explanations of realities that are extended, enlarged, engorged, and riffed on as they are retold, like the tale of the fish that got away and every time the story is retold that fish keeps getting bigger and bigger. The moral of the big fish story is that we are all susceptible to the exaggerations of the storyteller if we were not there to witness it firsthand, and the story does not work if the fish were actually caught—for that would supply observable, tangible proof. The weird stories of humans formed from dirt, elephant-headed deities, sibling rivalries, and jealous demons all stick with us and stretch our imaginations, and we don't always mind their untruths. Myth does not truck in scientifically verifiable proofs, which is why ancients and moderns alike have found a weakness in myth, but this is also precisely the point at which myth receives its power. It becomes "true" because it is told, because it is believed (or at least some element is believed), and more importantly, because it is acted upon.

Big Fish is not just a mundane fish story. It goes to great lengths to approximate something larger, and that is a *cosmogony*, an account of the creation of a world. The opening shots are from underwater, with fish swimming across the screen, and eventually the "big fish" makes its way across the film frame. The scene mimics creation stories from around the world: the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* begins within water associated with chaos; the chaotic waters play a critical role in the Iroquois creation story of the "woman who fell to earth"; and the Jewish-Christian account found in Genesis begins in similar fashion: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind [the spirit] from God swept over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2). In the beginning is water, unformed substance, potentially dangerous and potentially life-giving.

The eponymous fish in *Big Fish* is Edward's own family, his own world. He is a fish who constantly needs water, while his wife Sandra (Jessica Lange) is "caught" with the glint of his wedding ring as a lure, and he ultimately catches (and soon releases) the fish on the day his son Will is born. Throughout the film, Edward's fish stories are the stories of *his* world, beginning with the creation of his world (his wife and son) and ending with his own death as he returns to the water. There is an initial

friction in the film between father and son, shown specifically through Will's work as a journalist (he writes stories about "real events") in contrast to his father's fables. But in the end Will begins to find the power of his father's grandiose stories through his participation in them at his father's deathbed. Will realizes that participation in the stories is what brings life, even in and after death. Edward Bloom helped create his world, thereby creating a living cosmos for his family. In learning to believe the stories, his son Will learns something about himself, who he is, where he has come from, and he ably carries on the tradition to his children, as evidenced in the final scene.[4] Myths may be fictions, but they are believed to be true in a deeper sense than historical investigations can provide because they tell something that the facts alone cannot. They are embodied, performed, and memorable.

Myths are powerful not just as cosmogonies, not just answering questions about *where* we come from, but because they supply answers to questions about *who* we should be. Prominent among such mythologies are hero myths, stories about individuals who have a world taken away from them and then battle back, often going on great and extensive journeys to do so and emerging triumphant in the face of adversity (though it is often a paradoxical view of triumph). *Big Fish* is more or less a hero myth: it is the big tale of Edward Bloom's journey through life, alongside his family. Likewise, it seems that every other animated film, from Walt Disney productions to Japanese anime, seems to find its basic narrative structure in hero mythologies. From *Pinocchio* to *Shrek*, *Finding Nemo* to *Princess Mononoke*, there is something deeply relevant about the otherworldly realm of heroes. Perhaps it has to do with a normative conception of what should be "children's stories," something inspiring and that might be aspired to. A hero myth fosters a sense of identity, of who one might be, and of the ethics and therefore choices one must consider to become such. And in this way we quickly slip into the realm of ideology, to which mythology is closely linked. We shall return to this connection later.

In the introduction I quoted from anthropologist Mary Douglas, who indicates the framing power of story: "A ritual provides a frame. The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated 'Once upon a time' creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales" (1992: 78). Intriguingly, and critical to the personal connections involved

with mythology, Douglas goes on to quote Marion Milner's research into child psychology in relation to framing: "the frame marks off the different kind of reality that is within it from that which is outside it; but a temporal-spatial frame marks off the special kind of reality of a psychoanalytic session . . . makes possible the creative illusion called transference" (ibid.). Like mythology and ritual, like the psychoanalytic session, filmic worlds become manifest in viewers' minds and bodies and offer another world that may be entered. That other world is accessible as one crosses the bordering frame, making possible the "creative illusion called transference." Myths, like psychoanalysis, do not work unless some sort of transference occurs, some groups and individuals believe the stories to be true, or true enough, crossing borders, entering into them, and allowing them to affect their lives. People live by stories, and our own stories are an amalgamation of events we have lived through combined with the stories of others, in other times and places. Like myths, our own stories are also mash-ups.

MYTH AND MISE-EN-SCÈNE

A careful look at two scenes from the beginnings of two masterfully mythical films sheds light on the nonverbal ways mythologies are depicted. Through staged and shot scenarios, myths are triggered, brought to life. *Mise-en-scène*, briefly put, refers to everything that is seen inside the frame of the film: decoration, props, lighting, costume, colors, and characters, as well as how the framed image is set up through camera angles (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 156–90; Gibbs 2002).[5] Film sets are created spaces, and every object and visual orientation, every costume and color that the viewer sees on-screen is the result of a highly thought-out process on the part of directors, cinematographers, production designers, and others. Props have meanings as much as the words spoken by main characters, and camera angles can express cosmic significance.

Star Wars (i.e., the original, "Episode IV") and *The Matrix* are arguably two of the greatest mythological films of the twentieth century. They mix and merge cosmogonies and hero myths in multiple ways, generating brand new mythologies for the twenty-first century. The films'

writers and directors self-consciously incorporate the myths of multiple religious traditions into their re-created worlds. While plenty of people have commented on the narrative similarities between the films and the older verbal myths from Buddhist, Daoist, Christian and other traditions, the audio-visual components of the films also re-construct those myths, offering re-created worlds for their viewing, listening audience (see Lucas interview in Mitchell and Plate 2007: 261–66). My arguments here only touch on the larger narrative of each film, as I want to home in on one scene each, demonstrating how much can be contained audio-visually in two or three minutes of filmmaking.

STAR WARS: COSMOS VERSUS CHAOS

After the production company credits—here an animated view of the logo "20th Century Fox" rising like a mega-skyscraper above the Hollywood skyline, with cloudy sunset in the background—*Star Wars* shows a black screen with the simple and now well-known phrase "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away . . ." Immediately we are ushered into the realm of myth. Compare this introduction with Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." In each rendering we are given the standard deployments of narrative introductions: at the start of a story one should provide the setting, in terms of time and place. The audience has to know where and when the world is that they are observing.

The beginning of *Star Wars*, as George Lucas, 20th Century Fox, and others know, introduces viewers to another world, a "marked off time or place" that generates an expectation of something fantastic to come. What initially sets *Star Wars* apart from films about more everyday life, and what begins to set myths apart from regular stories, is the ambiguity provided in its setting. The time and place are given, yet they are not specific. There is no "14 April 1832" given here. Instead, it is "A long time ago . . ." But how long is long? To a paleontologist two million years might be a long time. To my two-year-old daughter, five minutes seems an eternity. Genesis's "In the beginning . . ." is likewise vague. When, exactly, was the beginning? The beginning of what? And the same is true for the spatial setting: "a galaxy far, far away" or when "God was creating the

heavens and earth." In other words, myths provide a built-in ambiguity that makes them applicable to a variety of people in a variety of times and places. Lucas understands this, and he inscribes it in the beginning of his film, turning a science fiction story (most of which begin with precise dates sometime in the future) into something mythical. Lucas's "time" is further confounded by the fact that most science fiction films take place in the future and deal with technology beyond our present day, but here he is setting it in the past. *Star Wars* looks futuristic, but we are told that the story has already occurred.

Like all stories, myths begin with and are framed by a setting in time and space. Films achieve a similar effect in audio-visual ways through what are known as "establishing shots," usually long (or extreme-long) shots that show the viewer the most general setting possible. Standard Hollywood films might show a large image of a city (the Manhattan skyline shot from across the East River; Chicago with its John Hancock Tower; London with the Houses of Parliament), and then slowly zoom in to more and more local neighborhoods and streets until reaching the main character's location within the city. Visual and audio clues along the way (automobiles, clothing, musical genres, or hairstyles) indicate the temporal setting.

In *Star Wars*, the establishing shot that follows the verbal "A long time ago . . . " provides a further introduction to the mythic structures of the film and demonstrates why the film is not just another film about boy-meets-girl or good guys versus bad guys. The shot is set in outer space, with nothing but stars dotting an otherwise black sky—no planets or anything to give us an initial grounding. Immediately thereafter, the title "STAR WARS" appears on-screen accompanied by a bang of orchestral music (by John Williams). The audience is jolted, excited by what is to come. As the triumphant, heavy-percussion music continues, a prologue scrolls up the screen, further setting up verbal details of what has happened and what is to come. Viewers are caught up in the narrative, thrust into the middle of the action through these words and music.

But the grander mythical cues come just as the prologue scrolls up the screen and disappears into the ether; here the film is not about Princess Leia or rebel forces or empires. In this precise instant when the words go away, the jubilant music also all but disappears, leaving only a solo flute playing alongside chimes. For five seconds there is utter calm: the

heavens are in their place, the music plays softly, soothingly; there is a cosmic order to the universe. But all we are allowed is five seconds, for then the camera, which has been stationary until now, tilts down to reveal a blue and orange planet below, with other planets visible in the distance. As the camera tilts downward, violin strings frantically rise up and the percussion crashes just as two space ships are caught in battle, firing lasers at each other. Chaos erupts into the cosmos. Wars emerge in the midst of stars.

By setting up the establishing shot in outer space, by suggesting an ordered calm to a universe and then introducing chaotic elements, Lucas triggers many elements common in cosmogonies. In the beginning, chaos and cosmos are in battle. In myths as diverse as the Hebrew, Iroquois, Babylonian, and Greek creation stories, the grand struggle in these myths' "establishing shots," is that of cosmos versus chaos. And through history, such myths indicate, this battle perpetually remains just below the surface of things as humans (or other volitional, sentient creatures) enter into this struggle, creating their own social order. *Star Wars*, writ large, is about stars and wars, cosmos and chaos, and then about relating the human social order to the cosmic order, the "here below" to the "up above," as Peter Berger put it (1967: 34). Through all the episodes of *Star Wars* there are conflicts, political wagers, and power struggles, as protagonists and antagonists battle to retain authority over the social order, continually rooting claims in the cosmic structures around: republicans, democrats, federalists, and monarchists can all be found, just as can the other spiritual realm of the Jedi Knights. Another key visual clue relating the cosmos to the social order happens halfway through the original film, when Luke (Mark Hamill) returns to his home to find his family slaughtered. He stares off at the dual suns about to set over his home planet of Tatooine and there makes his decision to accept what George Lucas's intellectual mentor Joseph Campbell called the "hero's adventure" (Campbell 2008). Having lost it all, Luke turns toward the cosmos (and the wise elder, Obi-Wan Kenobi) to figure out how to make his next move.

In the beginning, audio-visually and mythologically, all the remaining ten-plus hours of the *Star Wars* films are set up within the few seconds of the establishing shot and soundtrack in the first film. The film announces itself as far more than a space-age story and instead tells us

that these wars are the wars of all humankind. Which is to say it is no less ambitious than a myth (see also Gordon 1995; Lyden 2000).

THE MATRIX: MYTHICAL POSTMODERN PASTICHE

The character Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) is introduced in the first scene of *The Matrix*, donning a tight, black, shiny outfit, and performing martial arts feats that leave a trail of police officers down. There is much to be said here about the mise-en-scène, including her clothing and the fact that she is introduced sitting at her computer terminal in a ramshackle hotel room, number 303. The scene is action-packed, with fast-paced music, stunning special effects, gunfights, and superhero-like hand-to-hand combat, including Trinity's vertical run across walls and leaping from rooftop to rooftop across a city street twenty-some floors below. The viewer is left amazed but confused as to how all this can happen in the "real world," especially since the first shot of the film is of Trinity's computer screen with green display characters that tell us the date: "2-19-1998." Not long into the film we realize again the ambiguous settings of myths whereby the actual date is an illusion and the real date is something unknown; it is probably one hundred years later than people perceive, but no one really knows. This is an apocalyptic myth, foretelling the potential end of the world. Just as the beginnings of worlds are ambiguous, so are the ends.

Much has been written on *The Matrix*'s connections to Buddhism and Christianity (e.g., Flannery-Dailey and Wagner 2001). While these theological or doctrinal analyses are interesting, my concern is simply to point out how differing mythical worlds are created on-screen visually within the first three minutes of the film. The action of scene one, centered on Trinity in room 303, gives way to scene two, introducing viewers to Neo (aka Thomas Anderson; played by Keanu Reaves) who is sedately sprawled across his desk in his apartment, 101. (At the climax of the film, Neo will re-enter the original room 303, where fate gets the better of him, and Trinity will restore him.) Neo's apartment is nothing short of a cave: dark, dank, and dreary.[6] As with Trinity in scene one, we initially meet Neo through his green-tinted computer screen. The entire film, including the

"Warner Brothers" logo at the beginning, is green-saturated; suggesting something of a fecund, or possibly fetid worldview. Neo sleeps as his computer performs a search for one "Morpheus," and international news bulletins flash across the screen, illuminating Neo's face. The searching abruptly stops to show a blank screen, while the words "Wake up, Neo . . ." scrawl across the screen. And Neo does so. Neo's computer screen tells him to "Follow the white rabbit," and then predicts a real knock at his real door. All this time, the camera frames Neo from behind his computer, as he faces the monitor in front, the computer screen providing his only lighting. The effect is a standard filmic trick of lighting and character development: half of his face is lit, the other half obscured in the dark. He is two people, divided within himself (figure 1.3).

The knocked-upon door opens to several people looking to have a good time. They also wear black leather and rubber clothing, similar to what Trinity wore in the previous scene. They pay Neo some money through a slightly opened door, and he goes and finds a special computer disk. What is on the disk, we never find out, but we are led to believe the computer program is not strikingly different from hallucinatory drugs. The lead male takes the disk from Neo and exclaims, "Hallelujah! You're my savior, man! My own personal Jesus Christ!" The man takes a look at Neo's pale complexion and dour face and suggests Neo needs to get out a bit more, get a little "R&R." He turns to his companion "Dujour," who happens

FIGURE 1.3 Still from the second scene in *The Matrix*. "Neo" is introduced in his room, 101, with the lighting showing how he is a divided person.

to have a white rabbit tattooed on her shoulder. Neo recognizes the tattoo as the sign given through his computer, and he follows, Alice-like, down the rabbit hole. The hole gets grander and more upside-down as the film continues.

As Neo walks around his dark apartment in this early scene, the viewer continues to find clues to the myriad myths that are strewn across the film. The chiaroscuro lighting effect reveals several stations of a windowless space. The computer disk for the partygoers is found in a book entitled *Simulacra and Simulation*. Those familiar with postmodern theory will recognize this as a collection of essays from the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard. The volume, however, is revealed to be a simulated book, with carved-out pages that offer a hidden storage space, much like we see in other movies with guns or bottles of whiskey in the center. The hollowed-out part that contains the special stash comes in the middle of an essay entitled "On Nihilism," which is Baudrillard's essay on Nietzsche and his atheism. In the late nineteenth century Nietzsche was around to tell us God was dead, but in the new world of "simulated transparency," Baudrillard suggests, "God is not dead, he has become hyperreal" (1994: 159). Relatedly, in a single essay entitled, "Simulacra and Simulation," Baudrillard offers his postmodern inversion of Plato's allegory of the cave, in which there are successive stages of the image. In the beginning, an image is a reflection of a basic reality (this is what religious icons around the world are based upon). But eventually that grounding in reality disappears and is swallowed by the ubiquity of the image itself in a mass mediated society, leading to the final stage in which the image "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard 1988: 170).[7] Due to the prominence of mass media in our lives, we can no longer claim anything to be more real than anything else, including gods and goddesses. (The character Morpheus will even quote Baudrillard later in the film as he introduces Neo to the Matrix, saying, "Welcome, to the desert of the Real" [1994: 166].) *The Matrix* as a whole is premised on a two-worlds view, in which the simulated world appears to be the real world but is in fact a computer program. As Hindu sages, the Buddha, and the Gnostics claimed millennia ago, our perceived world is an illusion, *maya*.

So in approximately three minutes of edited time at the start of *The Matrix*, we find reference to myriad mythologies, both religious and secular, ancient and postmodern: from ancient philosophy (Plato's allegory

of cave) to postmodern inversions of it (Baudrillard's simulacra), from nineteenth-century fantastical tales (Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, à la the white rabbit) to the larger prophetic figures of Jesus Christ and the Buddha. Neo as Jesus Christ the Savior is invoked through the conversation at the door but also through his continually referenced anagram as the "one." In the third installment of *The Matrix* (*The Matrix Revolutions*, 2003) Neo sacrifices himself, with arms in cruciform, as a "deus ex machina" speaks, "It is done," referencing the last words of Jesus Christ in the Christian gospels. The Christic-redemptive dimensions are fairly obvious to anyone growing up in Western, Christian cultures, and little more needs to be said here.

Neo's other prophetic incantation as the Buddha is suggested through the first words addressed to him, "Wake up, Neo . . ." The literal translation of the "Buddha" is the one who has awoken ("enlightenment" is an abstraction of a more primary metaphor of waking from sleep). Further, Neo's words to the partygoers at his apartment door are "You ever have the feeling that you're not sure if you're awake or still dreaming?" Meanwhile, the final song of the film is entitled "Wake Up" (by Rage Against the Machine), and dreaming references abound in the film. Indeed, Neo, Morpheus, Trinity, and others, function as *bodhisattvas*, beings who have achieved enlightenment, meanwhile postponing it in order to help others to see through this illusory life.

And this is where the leather or rubber clothing worn by people existing in the "matrix" itself is more than a fashion statement. Throughout the film, when characters enter the false world of the matrix, they usually wear leather. Such clothing is "second skin," which takes on two connotations. First, the clothing is itself taken from another animal (typically a cow), so that leather clothing is skin on skin. Also, as skin it stretches and curves, so while providing a surface coating to one's actual body, it both reveals the contours of the body as it simultaneously hides the body; it reveals and conceals at the same time. Its existence functions on a level of simulation, as second skins extend the two-worlds narrative emphasis of the film. Just as the bodies walking around inside the matrix are residual self-images of the real bodies of the people in the pods, so the second skins worn by the characters reinforce the simulated bodies.

In the end, what we find is that *The Matrix*, like *Star Wars*, is a contemporary mythological story that combines multiple myths from multiple

traditions and tells them through clothing and camera angles, props and percussion. And while this may be construed as a critique of the postmodern age, with its predilection toward pastiche, it is also concomitant with myths throughout the world and at all times. Critics of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) complained that so much of it was a rehash of the original *Star Wars*, somehow missing the fact that it's all rehash; there is no original. All myths are pastiches. All myths borrow from previous myths in order to construct something new. As James Ford (2000) suggests in a survey of *The Matrix*, "Myths are constantly adapted to new cultural contexts and worldly realities." What is important to mythic stories is not originality but rather a unique way of combining old forms in new fashions, which prompt us to ask: to what purpose are these being retold?

WORLDMAKING AND FILMMAKING: AN IDEOLOGICAL WARNING

There is much more to say about *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* in relation to mythology, and many have done so. In relation to *Star Wars* this includes the hero's journey undertaken by Luke Skywalker, or the grand Dao-like opposing energies of "the Force" used by the black-clothed Darth Vader and the white-clothed Skywalker. For *The Matrix* the further mythic relations would include comment on the place of "Zion" as the longed-for place of return from exile, the role of "Thomas" Anderson (the Syriac roots of Thomas are related to a "twin," just as the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas plays on this relation of Jesus and Thomas), and Morpheus playing the role of the pagan lord of the dreamworld. But before suggesting mythologies are simply positive things that help people create and maintain meaning, purpose, and order in their lives, or before offering a neat conclusive interpretation, I want to end with an ideological critique of the mythology brought forth in the mise-en-scène of *The Matrix*.

In scene three of *The Matrix*, Neo and Trinity meet in a nightclub full of leather-clad revelers and make a connection that lasts through the remaining three films. This initial meeting begins the journey of "waking up" for Neo, as Trinity helps to clue him in to how the world actually

works. At the beginning of the film we find a strong white female character (Trinity) and a strong black male character (Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne). Trinity and Morpheus are both insiders to the matrix, with a lot of knowledge about the reality of the two worlds. They are enlightened. Neo, the good-looking white male, is not enlightened, at least not initially, and the first half of the movie demonstrates his profound ignorance. He eventually does wake up to understand and experience the truth of the two worlds created by the matrix, but it takes some time. Through most of the film he is far behind the knowledge and understanding of other characters like Morpheus and Trinity.

Nonetheless, the climatic scene, in which Agent Smith seemingly kills Neo, demonstrates another prominent mythology that filters through this film: the Hollywood myth of white-supremacist romantic relationships. Just as the Wachowskis culled a variety of myths to create a new, hybrid telling of myth, they also pulled from Hollywood, which as a whole has become a serious contender for creating the most prominent mythologies of the contemporary age. Thus, what we see through *The Matrix* is a hybridizing of mythologies, most prominently Christian and Buddhist. Yet what prevails over both these traditions in the end is the Hollywood myth of white, heterosexual relations between good-looking people.

As Neo is killed in the matrix, his real body also undergoes a death. His body is framed by the camera; he lies back in his chair with his brain jacked into the matrix, and Trinity looks lovingly upon him. He dies in both worlds, but Trinity comes down upon him like a spirit and kisses him (figure 1.4). The couple's kiss is framed with what appear to be fireworks behind them (they are actually the evil sentinels trying to break in with lasers). Trinity's kiss restores life to Neo: he is resurrected, with obvious Christic allusions. Yet after all the special effects, all the new and original ways of telling old stories, *The Matrix* relies on the same old Hollywood scenario: good-looking white male and good-looking white female, kissing at the end of the film in the rain or under fireworks or in the midst of chaos in general. Just when we were sure that a strong white woman or a strong black man might take the lead, in the end these characters are simply props for the good-looking white male, who plays the role of the Savior, the Buddha, the One. This does not deny the strength Trinity or Morpheus portray through the film, but as the trilogy of films

FIGURE 1.4 *The Matrix* ends like every other Hollywood film, with a good-looking white woman kissing a good-looking white man, under stars/rain/fireworks.

move on it becomes more and more clear that all others are there to make way for Neo.

In *The Matrix*, as in religious traditions, ideology is deeply implicated with mythology. They are inextricable. Yet this link should not stop anyone from considering myth as critically important for the creation and maintenance of human worlds. It is naïve to suggest mythology and ideology are separate, and equally naïve to think one can be understood without the other. Instead, I am sympathetic to the French playwright, poet, and theorist Hélène Cixous when she considers, in language appropriate to the mythology of *The Matrix*, "For me ideology is a kind of vast membrane enveloping everything. We have to know that this skin exists even if it encloses us like a net or like closed eyelids." Yet, she continues, "we have to know that, to change the world, we must constantly try to scratch and tear it. We can never rip the whole thing off, but we must never let it stick or stop being suspicious of it. It grows back and you start again" (Cixous 1986: 145). Cixous's challenge is to create critical and creative responses to the representations of religion in film, and to worlds constructed through film. Mythic mash-ups re-create the world just as cinematic mash-ups re-create audio-visual mythologies. In all cases identities are formed and re-formed with very real implications.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested two corollary questions that form the basis of my filmic analyses in relation to myth. The first had to do with rethinking myth in light of film. The second was the other way around: how an understanding of film might be rethought based on what we know about how myths operate. Through this chapter, through a couple films, I have highlighted the ways some filmmakers utilize elements of cinematography and mise-en-scène to tell a mythical story in audio-visual form. Sometimes that form reaffirms the verbal plot, sometimes extends it, and sometimes hints at worlds alternate to those created merely through words. At the same time, I have tried to show how understanding the power of mythical stories, and how they function in human's lives, might offer something to the student of film, suggesting some of the reasons myths are powerful on a human level, a topic to be furthered in the second and third sections of this book. To conclude I offer a few more thoughts on these corollary questions.

Films such as *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* have functioned to reintroduce the power of myth for our contemporary lives, and they succeed precisely because they have borrowed from the powerful themes, ideas, symbols, and narratives of myths through the ages. The stories of film are often created through a blending of mythologies, achieving this in verbal dialogue as well as through a careful use of visual symbols, including props, clothing, and camera angles, with accompanying soundtrack. Their existence as a mash-up is part and parcel of what all religious myths are about: begging, borrowing, and stealing. This is part of what gives them all such great power to affect people's lives. Throughout history, myths have been created by borrowing other cultures' myths, setting differing mythologies alongside each other, and then honing the story down to make a new point that becomes identified with an emerging community. Rip. Mix. Burn. Christianity took the mythologies and rituals surrounding the Jewish Passover—Jesus was Jewish, and the "last supper" was a Passover meal—and turned it into the thoroughly Christian activity of Communion. Just as the Jewish Passover is focused on remembrance of liberation in the form of the exodus out of Egyptian slavery, the Christian Communion centers on remembrance of the body

and blood of Christ as the path to liberation. Which is to say nothing of the many borrowings from pagan stories of sacrifice by early Christianity or the borrowings by the ancient Israelites of earlier agricultural myths and rites.

Contemporary films have tapped into this power and will continue to do so. (Why write a new story when South Asian mythologies provide thousands of pages of wonderful tales to copy from?) Filmmakers, like all artists, beg, borrow, and steal from various sources to produce a final artwork. The resulting framed and edited series of images and sounds is both unique and *un*-original: the juxtapositions may be one of a kind, but the individual pieces are borrowed, and it has all been said before. This is not in any way to diminish the role of the artist in society but to recast it, freeing it from its roots in the Romantic/Christian traditions that conceive of art being created ex nihilo, out of nothing.

Meanwhile, students of religious and film studies have to walk that careful line between praising the great imaginative stories of old and paying attention to the subtle ways these stories might maintain oppressive systems of power. Oftentimes the individual components that are "mashed up" are not put on the same playing field so that one mythological structure emerges as prominent, and attention needs to be drawn there, as is the case with *The Matrix*. The borrowings can be put into the service of liberatory forces, just as they can be used to reaffirm dominant powers.

The begging and borrowing also cuts across media. In so doing film productions point out the multimediated ways myths operate. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* highlights this point, though I do not want to devote too much time to a film for which as much ink has been spilled as fake blood in the film (Beal and Linafelt 2006; Landres and Berenbaum 2004; Plate 2004). Gibson's film is a mythical, multimediated mash-up par excellence. For the film he drew on a millennium's worth of Passion plays, the Stations of the Cross, the writings of nineteenth-century (anti-Semitic and possibly insane) mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich (channeled through Clemens Brentano), Renaissance and Baroque paintings (especially from Rembrandt and Caravaggio), the New Testament gospels, some brief historical scholarship, and a century's worth of "Jesus films" (from early films on the life and passion of Jesus to Sidney Olcott's *From the Manger to the Cross* [1911] to Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings* [1961] and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* [1988]). Gibson

FIGURE 1.5 The beginning of *The Passion of the Christ* looks like a slasher film. With the full moon and fog amid the trees, we just know someone is going to die.

also drew on the horror film genre. The mise-en-scène of the first scene is ripped from the filmmaking styles of John Carpenter or Wes Craven—spooky garden, fog machines rolling, creepy hooded figure with snake—you just know someone is going to die (figure 1.5).

I rehash a few of these sources of Gibson's film for two reasons. First, to suggest that the film is not a "historically accurate" account of the last hours of Jesus of Nazareth, in spite of what some have suggested, but is another mythological mash-up. Second, to illustrate that audio-visual mythologizing involves multimediated mixings. The sources are sometimes literary, but they just as often come from painting, sculpture, photography, drama, or the history of cinema. Likewise, myths are also multimedia events.

The deeper implication of this chapter is that, for a religious study of cinema, films are not simply verbal narratives. They create and re-create the world through color, form, design, sound effects, symbols, movement, and music. My suggestions here, while brief, can be thought about in a variety of ways. By taking the sensing human body as a basis for interaction with the world and a central conduit for religious life, religious studies might take a cue from film studies by observing the visual and acoustic (and bodily in general) ways humans participate in the process of world-making. That myths might be *seen* as well as *heard* is not unusual within religions. Navajo sand paintings, Tibetan *tangkas*, and Japanese gardens

are all visual, material modes of mythologizing. Such imagistic objects spatialize sacred stories, give them body, allow them to be interacted with through human bodies and their sense organs. Films remind us that myths are meant not to be intellectual, cerebral exercises but to be embodied. This begins to bring us close to the realm of ritual and sacred space, ideas taken up in the following chapters.

2

RITUALIZING FILM IN SPACE AND TIME

The opening shots of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) introduce an orderly world created through vertical and horizontal camera movements and primary colors. Shot one begins in the sky, blue with scattered clouds, as the camera tilts down to the vertical array of a white picket fence (figure 2.1). Eventually red tulips appear against the white fence with blue sky in the background. Bobby Vinton croons his 1963 hit "Blue Velvet" behind slow-moving images. The larger themes of the film could have fit anywhere, yet Lynch makes clear that this is the United States, as the red, white, and blue composition of the first shot is extended by the proverbial white picket fences of American suburbia. The next several shots are edited together so as to alternate between horizontal and vertical spatial orientations. Red, white, blue, and yellow colors dominate, while mundane images of fire trucks and crosswalks, with neighborly firemen and crossing guards appear.

The audience is eventually brought inside, into a living room where a woman sits sipping coffee while watching daytime television. It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood until we get a glimpse of what the woman is watching: a black-and-white close-up of a man's hand holding a revolver. This is the first subtle disturbance in the so-far cosmically ordered world—not much, just an old crime movie, but the image of the gun in close-up is enough to knock the neat and tidy perspective off kilter (more

FIGURE 2.1 Still from the first shot of *Blue Velvet*. The vertical dimensions, picket fence, and red, white, and blue colors lead viewers into a cosmically ordered life in the United States.

on this in chapter 5). The next images bring us back outside to a man watering his garden, just as strange rumbling noises begin to emerge from the water spigot. A kink in the hose halts the water flow and while the man attempts to untangle it, he suffers a stroke. The camera then resumes its downward tilt, this time passing below Mr. Beaumont—who is now lying on the grass with water still spurting out of the now-phallic hose and a dog attempts to drink the water—delving into the earth below. We enter the creepy-crawly domain of bugs and insects as they scamper over each other, all of which is reinforced by an eerie soundtrack heavy on non-diegetic sounds, making viewers feel as if they are truly in that underworld. Over the next hour and fifty-eight minutes of the film that underworld rises to the surface (Drazin 1998).

Though drastically different in genre and plot, *Blue Velvet* imagistically begins with revelations of a world similar to what the *Star Wars* opening shots reveal: cosmos above, chaos below. These two films present worlds both radically new and entirely ancient: in this most modern of visual media we find filmmakers relying on primeval cosmologies where peace and harmony exist *above* and chaos subsists *below*. Yet, rather than leaving us in the mythically distant "long time ago and far, far away," *Blue Velvet* brings the cosmos down to earth, to our neighborhood,

connecting with the mundane, sometimes ritualized, tasks of watering the lawn, going to school, and watching television. And then it unveils the chaos that lies under the very ground on which we walk. The macrocosm is transplanted into the microcosm; the world out there is funneled into the here and now.

This chapter connects one of the most crucial elements of religion, namely ritual, to two of the most crucial dimensions of filmmaking, namely cinematography and editing, while mise-en-scène continues to be important. *Blue Velvet* shows, at least in one sense, what rituals are capable of doing: through framing and selecting colors, sounds, and synchronized movements, film brings the cosmos into the present space and time, allowing people to interact with the alternative world, enacting the myths that help establish those world structures. Those mythologies may be about galaxies far away or the dramatic world of our own neighborhood. This is not to say that *Blue Velvet* is itself a ritual; rather, its formal structures are akin to the formal structures of ritual—it is constructed *like* a ritual.

This chapter pays attention to segments of films, specific shots or scenes that function metonymically to reveal something about the larger narratives of the film and the material structures from which they borrow. After a brief theoretical section relating ritual and film more generally, the following sections focus attention on the constructions of space and time in relation to cinematography and editing. The second section explores films that home in on community and the ways gender is constructed in space through cinematography, especially focusing on Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line* (1995). The films analyzed rely on a strong sense of horizontally ordered space, in distinction to the often vertical dimensions of mythologized film, to produce sacred communities. The third section turns to Ron Fricke's *Baraka* (1992), with special reference back to Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). Both films operate similarly, without characters or dialogue, instead re-creating the world through the chronological displacements and spatial connections that editing allows. Meanwhile, the aims of each can be easily differentiated: the early film praises the worker and Soviet society in a fairly specific locale, the later film praises a nebulous "spirituality" found around the earth. In both, editing becomes the everyday elixir that makes the movies, and that ultimately produces something sacred.

RITUAL AND FILM

This chapter is framed by two intersecting questions: What does a study of ritual's forms and functions tell us about the ways films are created? Conversely, what does an examination of filmmaking uncover about the aesthetic impulses behind rituals? Partial answers are unfolded throughout the following, and returned to in the chapter's conclusion. A few introductory comments about ritual in relation to filmmaking help get us going.

Definitions of rituals can be found throughout a great deal of literature on the subject, and I have already given a few excerpts of definitions from scholars like Barbara Myerhoff, Mary Douglas, and William Paden who have emphasized the ability of rituals to frame, select, and focus. In the chapters that follow, I add a few more definitions, but for the sake of simplicity, here I offer what I understand to be a useful, pragmatic definition, especially with regard to the "two-worlds" argument I have been making. Anthropologist of religion Bobby Alexander suggests, "Ritual defined in the most general and basic terms is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed. . . . Traditional religious rituals open up ordinary life to ultimate reality or some transcendent being or force in order to tap its transformative power" (1997: 139; cf. Grimes 2000, 2006; Schechner 1993; J. Smith 1987; Turner 1991). Alexander's definition of religious ritual could well be applied to Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, with its notion of two worlds ("everyday life" and an "alternative context"), alongside the opening up to something other and transformative (see introduction). And as with the films analyzed here, the sense of "transcendence" does not rely on anything supernatural; there are entirely natural means of transcendence.

The altar and the screen create transitions to an alternative world, a world set apart from our everyday lives. They function as "portals," semipermeable boundaries between the two worlds that allow movement back and forth: we use them not simply to enter the other world but so that something of that other world can be brought back and everyday life might be transformed. Even so, one has to know how to access the openings. In *The Matrix* the characters had to be transported through

particular telephonic "landlines" (access from one world to the other was, curiously, hardwired, and cell phones did not allow access). In other movies—e.g., *The Ninth Gate* (1999); *The Time Machine* (2002); *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (2016)—there are various objects and codes that have to be accessed in order to travel to other times, places, and dimensions. For Harry in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (2001) it is Platform 9¾ at King's Cross station.

A ritual is not unlike one of these codes, unlocking channels between worlds. If done correctly at the correct time and place, rituals *promise* to provide passports between worlds, and the transformation is effected by performing special activities: maintaining the correct chant, the right frame of mind, or the perfect body posture; taking place in particular spaces; wearing special clothing; keeping the right rhythm. We need rituals in part because, as Berger tells it, "men forget" (1967: 40), and they allow us to remember the past as well as our present associations. For the practitioners of the traditions, these performances all help bring the alternative world into the here and now, not simply "representing" (i.e., symbolizing) but "re-presenting" (i.e., making *present*), "re-membering," and "re-creating" that other world. The idea behind rituals is that they make the alternative world real in the here and now. Of course this is all an idealistic form of what rituals might do; actual results may vary.

Worlds are constructed and re-created in and through space and time. Likewise, ritual takes place, in time, helping to construct the larger worlds of which time and place are a part. Five times a day, in accordance with the sun's rising and setting, observant Muslims all over the world pray, and they do so facing the central shrine of Islam, the Kaaba. Similarly, the space of Jewish synagogues around the world is oriented so that the ark, which houses the Torah scrolls, has the congregants facing Jerusalem and, ultimately, the remains of the great Temple. Observers in both traditions perform rituals in their present space and time, and they are linked to a larger community in the here and now, just as their spatial orientation embeds them within a historical continuity. These rituals are rhythmic, conducted according to a cosmic sense of time, and they re-enact ancient myths and traditions from other places and times. By performing rituals in a present place, humans are connected with and remember the past. Ideally, space and time, past and present, become fused in the ritual setting.

Films are created through similar spatial and temporal dimensions. If rituals use sensual things like sacred spaces and times, flowers, music, candles, symbols, images, and chanted texts to connect with the great myths of old, then filmmakers work similarly with and manipulate afilmic space, time, props, movement, color, sound, and a screenplay. The world beyond is condensed, reordered, brought to us here, and projected on a screen: afilmic reality becomes diegetic reality. Through the cinematic production process, time and space are shown to be malleable elements of the cosmos. Ultimately, film viewing can itself become a ritual, creating a "spectatorial reality" in the place of the screening (see chapters 4–6), but it is not necessarily so.[1]

Space is re-created on-screen through the various components that make up the shot, especially cinematography and mise-en-scène. A shot of a man from a low camera angle emphasizes one thing about him, usually that he is important and has authority (and it typically is a "him"). A camera that tilts down in a shot can serve to create a connection between things above and things below: stars in their cosmic order in relation to spaceships at war. Film theorist Robert Kolker discusses the physical space created in films, suggesting "[o]nly film can make things look 'real' by means of fabricating and composing reality out of a trick occurring in space." Kolker continues by noting Buster Keaton's spatial creations: "Our response of Keaton's images is . . . the response of our fantasy of what the world might have looked like. Even in Keaton, though, we do not see the world itself. We see its image. Its memory. And that remains present strong enough, present enough to surprise and delight us" (2002: 23). All camera movements and angles help create a spatial world that transcends technological apparatuses, that points toward another world, toward "what the world might have looked like." And if done just right, the representation becomes "present enough" to affect us, to make us feel we are there. This is language uncannily similar to the language describing ritual.

Space is re-created on film for narrative and ideological purposes, just as it helps to create a character's identity and relationship with her or his world. What I am interested in here are the ways camera movements replicate or challenge existing cosmological structures—as in *Blue Velvet* and *Star Wars*—and bring these structures down to earth, to an environment to which viewers can relate to the space, and to each other. The

choice between tilting a camera up and down or setting up a horizontal tracking shot to create a scene is a choice that defines the space of the filmic image, including the relations between characters, each other, and their environment. Likewise, rituals are also conducted within spaces arranged along X, Y, and Z axes: the bride walks down the aisle from the back to the front, the Torah scrolls are lifted up, one bows down as part of meditation.

The essential element of time on-screen is created through the processes of editing, of taking individual shots and placing them next to other shots.[2] A shot, as the great Soviet proponent of editing Sergei Eisenstein suggested, is "a piece of an event" (Mast, Cohen, and Braudy 1992: 132), and the mixture of shots can create a "potential energy." For Eisenstein this energy was of central importance for filmmaking, as it re-created the overall event depicted but also highlighted particular elements of the event for sociopolitical effect. Time is captured on film, sped up and slowed down so that individual objects or sequences can be seen with greater clarity. The editor Paul Hirsch brings out the magic qualities involved: "Editing is very interesting and absorbing work because of the illusions you can create. . . . You can play with time in extraordinary ways" (1992: 188–89). The editing of shots creates the proverbial sum that is larger than its parts. A world can be re-created through editing. Magical things can happen. Eons can be traversed in seconds.

Contemporary Hollywood films have been estimated to average around 800–1,200 shots in a ninety-minute feature presentation, which means that a single shot does not stay on-screen for any more than five seconds, on average. Action films have even more cuts, meaning the individual shots are even shorter in duration. When reviewers discuss films as "fast-paced," they are referring not just to movement of characters or cars on-screen but primarily to the effects of rapid editing. On one level, such speed marks a contrast with traditional religious iconography whereby religious adherents sit in front of a "static" image for lengthy periods of time in order to receive the *baraka*/*darshan*/blessings of the gods and goddesses (though that too is an idealistic understanding of how adherents actually do contemplate images). That contemporary U.S. films include so many cuts—many more than earlier films or even most films from other parts of the world—begins to suggest something of the relation between speed and the constructs of a culture that sees itself as

fast-paced. Films create worlds, and religious adherents are altered by their experiences of cinema, including their experience of time.

Rituals and films both operate in and through the physical dimensions of space and time, morphing and massaging, re-presenting, re-membering, and re-creating an alternative world out there in order to bring it into the here and now, connected through performances at the altar and the screen. In the following sections we will look at some examples of space and time operating on-screen in ways that have religious resonances. In later chapters we will pick up these threads and examine how space and time in diegetic reality have altered space and time in afilmic reality.

SPATIALIZING WORLDS AND CINEMATOGRAPHY

Most screenwriters have a certain set of stock narrative structures from which to create a screenplay—whether writers are conscious of it or whether these stories somehow archetypically reside in the unconscious is not my interest here. The hero journey is a prominent template for screenplays (e.g., *Gladiator* [2000]; *Braveheart* [1995]; *Shrek* [2001]) as are rite-of-passage stories, including coming-of-age tales (*The Sandlot* [1993]; *The Lion King* [1994]; *The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys* [2002]), weddings (*Four Weddings and a Funeral* [1994]; *The Wedding Planner* [2001]), and deaths and funerals (*The Funeral* [1996]; *The Big Chill* [1983]; *The Lovely Bones* [2009]). Other rituals like pilgrimages are habitually retold for the cinema (see chapter 3). Often mixed with these traditional rituals are further narratives about the merging of two worlds. Paden suggests, "Religions create, maintain, and oppose worlds" (1994: 53), and the opposition of two or more created worlds becomes a great narrative device, especially when set in a larger ritualized story. *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) are both good examples about the rite of passage that is a wedding, but through the ceremony two different worlds are brought, indeed forced, together: Hindu parents who practice arranged marriages are mixed with a younger generation who are a bit uneasy about the arrangements; Protestant and Greek Orthodox families must get along for the sake of their relatives' love interests.

CONTRASTING WORLDS, CONTRASTING SPACES

Other films such as Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) explicitly rely on the creation of dual sacred spaces—in this case, the theater and the church—to create its conflict. Tornatore carefully sets up the two worlds within the first few minutes, opposing the impoverishment of the church ritual (in which altar boys regularly fall asleep) to the dynamism of the movie theater (in which a deep sense of ritualized community occurs through shared laughter and tears). In each of the spatial worlds portrayed in *Cinema Paradiso* light is underscored within the spaces. At the start of the film the church is introduced through a narrow sunray coming through a small window high up, barely able to illuminate the vast space below. In contrast, the theater projector's light pours through a lion's mouth, a mouth that, in the visionary eyes of the young Toto (Salvatore Cascio), roars a powerful roar. There is little question which lit space, and ultimately which ritualized world, is the most significant for the life of the community.

Similarly, Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat* (2000) sets up two contrasting spaces, and through these spaces, contrasting worlds. The establishing shot of the film frames a quaint French village set on a hill. It is obvious that the church is at the center of the town, and at its highest point (figure 2.2). The first shots inside the church alternate between low angle and high angle, emphasizing a dramatic verticality. This space is contrasted with the chocolate shop, just around the corner from the church. The pagan protagonist, Vianne (Juliette Binoche), comes to town "riding on the wind" and sets up a chocolate shop, just in time for the Lenten season, when the good Christians of the town are getting ready to abstain. Into her small shop she invites people who have been rejected from other parts of the social life of the village. Through straight-on, medium shots, Vianne is depicted behind the counter as if tending bar or presiding, priest-like, over a ritual, while townspeople sit on stools and sample her sweets, creating rituals that are both profane and profound. The horizontal emphasis of the chocolate shop is pitted against the church, and especially the Comte Reynaud (Alfred Molina), who somewhat sternly runs both the political and religious life of the town. A significant early shot is taken from the opening of what will become the chocolate shop, and the wide-angle camera is forced to point high to take in the height of the church towering above it (figure 2.3).

FIGURE 2.2 Still from the first shot of *Chocolat*. The church stands at the apex of the village, orienting space as well as social life.

FIGURE 2.3 An early shot in *Chocolat* looks out from the soon-to-be chocolate shop onto the imposing church towering above.

FIGURE 2.4 The comte, while standing as an "upright" figure throughout *Chocolat*, eventually gives in to his desires and is later found sleeping in a horizontal position in the chocolate shop.

In the end, Comte Reynaud is transformed when he breaks into the chocolate shop and gives into his desires, gorging on the sweets until he falls asleep. He is found by the priest the next morning, sleeping in a horizontal position in the front window of the chocolate shop, in the shadow of the towering church (figure 2.4). At the conclusion, the two worlds become more or less reconciled: Vianne experiences a transformation of her own, the ups-and-downs cross with the side-to-sides, and the larger community is renewed.

GENDERED SPACE IN *ANTONIA'S LINE*

Few films set up two distinct worlds through their spatial orientation like Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line* (cinematography by Willy Stassen). Winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1996, the film tells the story of Antonia (Willeke van Ammelrooy) and her "lineage": her daughter Danielle (Els Dottermans), granddaughter Thérèse (played by several actors, including Veerle van Overloop), and great-granddaughter Sarah (Thyrza Ravesteijn). Bookended by her own dying day, the film moves back in time to introduce the creation of Antonia's family in a

small town in the Netherlands, and the community that forms around them. Similar to *Chocolat*, Gorris's film also contrasts a vertically oriented world with a horizontally oriented world: the first being represented through a traditional Christian, male-dominated church, while the other world is re-presented from the point of view of powerful-yet-outsider female characters and others who gather in the courtyard of her farm buildings. Both of these films structurally compare two communities, two forms of power wielded within the communities, and the difference that gender might make in understanding the sacred.

In the beginning, not long after World War II has ended, Antonia returns to the land of her ancestors along with her daughter, Danielle. They come back to pay last respects to Antonia's dying mother, a slightly crazed, pious woman. Why Antonia left the place we never find out, though it might have had something to do with the war; then again, once we meet the mother on her deathbed, we get a suggestion it might have been for familial reasons. As Antonia and Danielle step off the bus, they are framed by the camera below a sign that reads "Welcome to our Liberators," a greeting intended for the British, American, and Russian forces at the end of the war, but which takes on a secondary connotation when these two strong women walk beneath it. Indeed, through the course of the film they "liberate" many people along the way. Even so, Antonia is not a separatist and does not rely on setting up her own oppositional space and rituals; instead, she is able to move among the various important spaces of her town and of the film. For her mother's funeral, and through other scenes, Antonia attends church services not because she believes any of it but because she seems to feel it a duty to be a part of the larger social structure. She also visits the male-dominated pub at several points. Her ability to move between, and remain strong within, the various locations demonstrates her ability to transcend gender-defined spaces.

The courtyard of her farm becomes the site where the prominent ritual functions of community take place. Sunday mornings are set in the church, and high and low camera angles take precedence, replicating the hierarchical authority structures set within the church. It is a male-dominated world, and verticality reigns. Sunday afternoons are spent in Antonia's courtyard, where an ever-increasing community of people is welcomed to sup at the great outdoor table. In these shots, the group of people is generally viewed through medium shots, at the level of the

seated supplicants. Antonia, while ostensibly the head of this creedless community, does not sit at the head of the table. Instead, all persons are gathered at the same level, just as the camera shoots them on a horizontal plane. Interestingly, one of the only times we see a high angle shot in this environment is when the great-granddaughter, Sarah, is sitting high in the barn, looking down on the activities of the courtyard. Late in the film we learn that Sarah is actually the narrator of the whole story of the lineage of Antonia, and her looking down on the characters reveals something about imaginative storytelling. From her perch, Sarah is able to imagine all the souls who have died through the generations, dancing together in the courtyard. In other words, in the space of the courtyard even verticality is transposed into a creative, collective community that transcends time to gather all its members together.

Ritual studies scholar Lesley Northrup has written astutely about the gendered differences that verticality and horizontality make in ritualized settings. Northrup critiques some of the dominant modes of understanding ritual, especially interpretations by comparative religions scholar Mircea Eliade and his followers, who emphasize the vertical dimension of the sacred. In Eliade's view there is a "hierophany" in which the divine "comes down" to the earth, creating an *axis mundi*, a central axis connecting the earth to the heavens. Such cosmological comprehensions are reaffirmed in sacred architecture, and such building patterns are ultimately replicated in cinematographic constructions of the sacred (more on this in chapter 3). Northrup suggests, "Sacred space, far from being simply an adjunct liturgical consideration, is a core datum in women's ritual experience" (1997: 58). And while we moderns know there is no up or down in space, films take much from the preeminence of the vertical, establishing powerful characters through points of view that emphasize height. And it is little secret that such characters are usually male.

Significantly, and just as importantly, Antonia's courtyard stands not only in juxtaposition to the church but also to the Schopenhauer-inspired, atheistic outlook on the world given by Antonia's dear friend "Crooked Finger" (Mil Seghers). Having survived the war, Crooked Finger refuses to bathe or leave his book-bedecked cave of a home. And while death awaits everyone, the spatiality of the death of Crooked Finger in comparison to Antonia's death tells a great deal about the worlds in which they live. A brief shot of the dead body of Crooked Finger, hanging from the

rafters in his home after he kills himself, emphasizes a dramatic verticality. His body is elongated, pointing like a pencil from floor to roof, as he dies alone (figure 2.5). In contrast, Antonia's death, like her friend Lara's before her, occurs in the horizontal space of the bedroom, with her surrounded by family and friends (figure 2.6). Even in death, or especially there, a supine, horizontal orientation creates an invitation to community, bringing people together ritualistically, while the vertical precludes others.

Antonia's Line and *Chocolat* both present gender differences through spatial means. There are men's worlds, hierarchically and vertically ordered, and there are women's worlds, egalitarian and horizontally ordered. The binary oppositions are not always so neat and simple, but when reduced to the stark spatial dimensions of height, length, and width, the camerawork engenders a powerful tension in the worlds of the films. The "female spaces" of these films are generally accepting and affirming (except to rapists and spouse-abusers) and offer a different sense of community to the hierarchy from above.

In creating such spatial worlds, these films (including *Cinema Paradiso*) re-present the possibility of re-created ritual activity through new orientations. The films are, on the surface, antireligious: the Christian church in

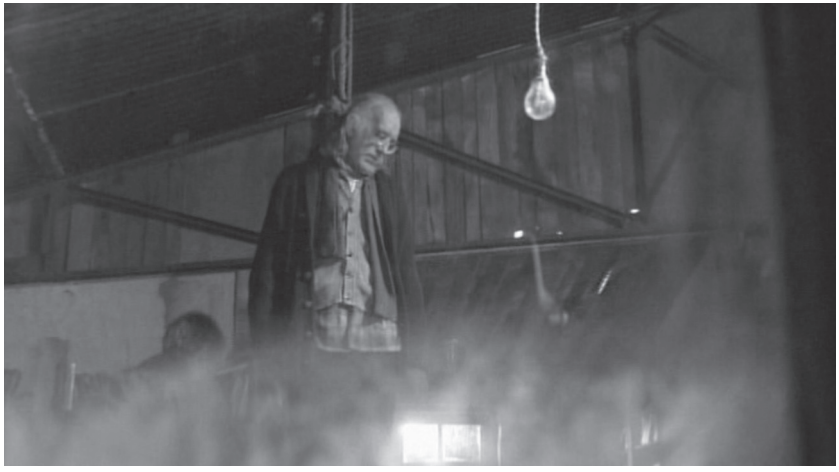

FIGURE 2.5 In *Antonia's Line*, the character Crooked Finger dies in a dramatically vertical position, and alone.

FIGURE 2.6 Still from *Antonia's Line*. In contrast to Crooked Finger's death, Antonia dies horizontally, surrounded by friends and family.

each comes off looking a bit silly, sad, and incapable of relating to the alternative realities created in the Paradiso movie theater, Antonia's courtyard, or Vianne's chocolate shop. But if one frees oneself from looking only at the representation of religion *in* film and looks at broader structures of worldmaking with regard rituals, one can see how each of these films offers an alternative world that is itself deeply religious in its creation of community through ritualized means in sacred times and spaces, bolstered through grand stories of the past that reaffirm life in the present.

EDITING THE EVERYDAY: PRODUCING THE SACRED

Ritualizing occurs in space (J. Smith 1987) but also in time (Grimes 2014: 263ff.), and religious worlds are constituted through spatial and temporal dimensions. Likewise, filmmakers capture afilmic space and time for the purposes of re-creating a world on-screen. Turning now to the temporal elements, this section suggests how time and space are re-created through the vital activity of editing. After another look at *Cinema Paradiso*,

I examine two films that work with a series of profane images but through their juxtapositions, their explosive montages, to produce a sacred world. I look at segments of these films, separated by seven decades, that speak to the rhythms, repetitions, and re-creations of ritualized life.

CUTTING UP TIME AND SPACE

Editing connects. Editing reconnects. Editing even goes so far as to link totally unconnected fragments of space and time with other fragments of space and time. That is the truth of the technical enterprise. Editing takes one framed image (a "shot," including its actors, costumes, lighting, and so forth) and connects it with another image, even if that image is out of sync, out of time, or out of place with the previous shot. As Francis Ford Coppola suggests, "[T]he essence of cinema is editing. It's the combination of what can be extraordinary images, images of people during emotional moments, or just images in a general sense, but put together in a kind of alchemy. A number of images put together a certain way become something quite above and beyond what any of them are individually" (Coppola 1994). Editing can create tension, putting viewers on the edge of their seats, or resolve it, as viewers meld into the world on-screen. Editing produces "alchemical" actions that re-create worlds.

In some films, everyday life, or the "profane," is filmed and then edited in ways that juxtapose one person/place/thing with another, thereby creating something larger and more powerful than its parts. The profane literally means "outside the temple" (from the Latin *pro-fanus*). It is ordinary life and time. There is nothing inherently wrong or bad about it, but it is not to be confused with things that are sacred (that which is "set apart"). The sacred are those objects, persons, times, places, and texts that are set apart from everyday life, are believed to contain power, while their power fascinates just as it remains mysterious (Durkheim 1915). Sacred times, places, and objects can bless or curse, and may function as orientation points for religious worlds.

Beyond the spatial contrasts between church and theater, *Cinema Paradiso* also explicitly references the role of editing and the sacred. David Chidester claims, "The meaning, power, and ownership of the sacred are inevitably contested" (2015: 182), and they are clearly contested in *Cinema*

Paradiso. Father Adelfio (Leopoldo Trieste) presides over the two sacred spaces—church and theater—and watches a private first showing of all films screened at the Paradiso, censoring any violence or public displays of affection between the actors. At every point that is objectionable, the priest rings a bell, signaling to the projectionist Alfredo (Philippe Noiret) where to make the edits. (Cinematically this mimics the ringing bells of the church that signal when the people of the village are to leave their profane life and go to the sacred church services.) Alfredo dutifully cuts out the scenes from the celluloid film and while he is supposed to splice them back in before he sends the reels back to the film distributors, he often forgets. The result is a projection booth filled with strips of excised film, which fascinates the young Toto (figure 2.7).

Over time Toto steals some of the edited strips and keeps them in a box under his bed, along with a picture of his father, who he eventually finds out was killed in the war. In a nighttime scene, reminiscent of a child's bedtime prayers, Toto takes out the images and looks at them, re-enacting the scenarios from the film frames. Later, when Toto's family house burns, we learn that it was these highly flammable celluloid strips that caused the fire. At the end of the film, a grown-up Toto (Jacques Perrin) sits watching a film by himself in a small screening theater. Alfredo, who became somewhat of a surrogate father for Toto, edited the film as a

FIGURE 2.7 Still from *Cinema Paradiso*. Alfredo the projectionist edits out scenes of passion while the young Toto is enthralled by the excised images.

gift for Toto before he died. The film is made up from those censored strips: the kisses, the near-nude images, and the passion that was initially denied the moviegoers at the Cinema Paradiso, all edited together into an alchemical whole. Now a successful filmmaker himself, Toto sits weeping as he watches kiss after kiss, cathartically celebrating passion at the same time he mourns the death of his friend. There are fewer filmic representations of the sacred better than the censored, edited film strips that function through *Cinema Paradiso*. They are set apart, placed in a box under a bed and left hanging on walls; meanwhile they contain the potential to catch fire and kill but also to inspire, to retain memories, and to orient life. Cinema is a paradise, a special, potentially explosive, re-creation of space and time.

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA AND *BARAKA*

At the height of the Soviet experiments with editing—what Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, and others referred to as *montage*—Dziga Vertov gives us a day in urban socialist life. In *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) workers are productive, happy, and have time for play, sport, and recreation. The film wavers between social documentary and experimental production, and when the cameraman-protagonist investigates profane times and spaces, transformations take place. Armed with his camera the cameraman becomes priestly, shamanistic, taking in the sights, sounds, spaces, and temporal unfoldings of the world, and re-creating them in new ways. The cameraman is the modern-day mystic, and there is no need to find supernatural worlds; it's all available in the here and now, as long as we are trained how and where to look.

While the film appears to be centered on a single city in a single day, with sun up and sun down, it was actually filmed across several Russian cities, over many days. The film viewers experience a collapsing of space and time, just as they are invited to participate in this remade world: the opening and closing shots frame the entire film as a presentation within a film theater. Self-referentially, the film notes its own world-making capabilities through editing. This is particularly apparent at one point when a horse-drawn carriage moving down a street suddenly halts. But the horse doesn't stop, only the film frame does. The film then cuts to

an editing room, where we find editors peering through strips of film, attempting to assemble a whole out of the imaged parts. All of a sudden a horse seems to have stopped in its tracks, or a girl's smile is extended throughout time, as the profane activities of life are halted, examined, scrutinized, praised, and then spliced back into the ongoing machinations of urbanity and projected large for film audiences. The movements of a horse or the facial expression of a child are highlighted and brought to a grander life through the activities of a man with a movie camera, alongside editors in post-production rooms, who looks at the otherwise overlooked.

Man with a Movie Camera shows how history is made up of the small events, the everyday, the profane. This is cinema not simply as reality but, more importantly, as "truth" (*kino-pravda*, as Vertov called it, "cinematic truth") in which the camera operator simply goes out into the streets and *captures* what is there to be seen. Yet by focusing on the everyday, and taking what is captured to the editing room, the film gives insights into the extraordinary events of life: birth, death, love, work, play, and community, all juxtaposed. In a day's time, in what seems to be a single city, we see the range of life, the potentially miraculous, and it is only through the world's re-creation that the sacredness of such profane activities can be perceived.

Similarly, though with significant distinctions, the director of the 1992 experimental film *Baraka*, Ron Fricke, suggests, however vaguely, that his film is "a journey of rediscovery that plunges into nature, into history, into the human spirit, and finally into the realm of the infinite." The film was shot with a large-format 70mm camera, offering precise definition of many remote places, and was filmed in twenty-four different countries around the world. Like Vertov's film, it contains no words, has no main characters or even a guiding narrator, yet the film tells a story audio-visually. It is arguable whether it is the audio (stunning music, synchronized from instruments played around the world) or the visual (stunning images, synchronized from shots taken around the world) that plays the key role here. What is true is that they blend almost seamlessly through the editing process to produce a vision of the world that draws connections between places, times, and traditions, creating sweeping prescriptions of the sacred: prayer across traditions, temple architecture, rhythmic chants, holy texts.

Baraka is a Sufi word meaning "blessing," etymologically related to "breath," and as we watch and think and listen, we realize the direct relations between blessing and breathing. There are few religious traditions that do not take breath as an atomic component to their worlds, just as the human body needs breath, constantly, without stopping. How could religious worlds fail, then, to accommodate such physical necessity? *Baraka* shows us a world of tactility, of visuality, of scents and aural impulses, of inhalation and exhalation. In so doing it provides a window onto the lived, felt experiences of religion and culture.

Baraka begins its presentation with the same images that most films begin with in their production credits: lofty heights, clouds, mountaintops, and lunar landscapes. Fricke shows these images in the first few shots, introducing viewers to the cosmic order of things yet leaving out anything human. The first shots of the film display the Himalayas, the grandest elevations in non-aviated human life, conjuring with them thoughts of some of the longest lasting religious traditions in human history, the mythologies of what has come to be known as the Hindu tradition. The *Mahabharata* tells us, "At the time of creation, the Grandfather, full of fiery energy, created living beings." Some time later in the story we learn that these early creations occurred in the Himalayas (see Doniger 1975). In the beginning of *Baraka* then, we the viewers are quickly transported into a creation myth.

Continuing on, the third shot tilts up a mountain, which is cut to a fourth shot that tilts down a totally different mountain, thousands of miles away in Japan, eventually settling on a Japanese snow monkey in a high-altitude hot springs.[3] The audio-visual mythology links geographies, and becomes connected to the animated lives of animals. Here it is difficult not to read an alternative cosmology into the film, this time an evolutionary theme. That hunch is reaffirmed a few minutes later through shots of the famous Galapagos iguanas, creatures on the islands that inspired, alongside the finches, Charles Darwin's early work in *The Voyage of the "Beagle."* Darwin thought the iguana "hideous-looking . . . stupid, and sluggish in its movements" (1913: 411), but its aquatic abilities, like no other lizard in the world, provoked Darwin to think about variation and ultimately natural selection. *Baraka* includes all: creation myths from around the world, and scientific accounts, often mythically told,

about the world's origins. As with *Man with a Movie Camera*, the sun frames *Baraka*, shining in the morning and eventually setting, showing a day in the life. Only Fricke's day is much more metaphorical and mythological: the day is the day of the earth, on a grand scale, not just Bolshevik Russia. This day is also something of a *yuga* in the Hindu sense, an epoch that begins and ends, only to allow a new age to begin.

Startling, edited juxtapositions in the film include an image of a stack of human femurs cutting to a stack of military artillery, Scottish bagpipes mixed with Japanese koto drums serving as a soundtrack behind images of burning oil refineries in southern Iraq. The world is portrayed as if it has all been seen and done, and will be seen again, in another age, with more birth, life, violence, death. Most of the film shows various worlds in which humans live, as viewers hover over and pass through environments of urbanization, religious rituals, military build-up, the aftermath of genocide, the moon and stars in rotation, mass transport, or animals in the service of humans, to name but a few of the scenarios. And yet, thanks to expressive editing of sound and image, the film does not completely allow a distanced viewing.

Ron Fricke makes his worldly point a bit more subtly than Godfrey Reggio, with whom he worked as cinematographer and editor on the Reggio-directed *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982; the title is from the Hopi, "life out of balance"). *Koyaanisqatsi* showed the mixture of everyday life with global politics, sped up and slowed down, edited together and mixed with Philip Glass's minimalist score. But Fricke succeeds in places where Reggio tries to make too fine a point. *Baraka* displays a fundamental ambiguity between the cyclical view of a world heading into a spiral that may continue on into another world and that of a world spinning out of control. The final scenes of *Baraka* hint at a diminished sun, the end of a day. Yet it's never clear whether the film has an apocalyptic message—the end of the world as we know it—or just part of an ongoing cycle of decay, death, and rebirth, with the whole thing starting over again at "the end."

While alike in many formal dimensions, *Man with a Movie Camera* and *Baraka* contain one strikingly similar scene. The scenes are worth comparing for the ways they serve metonymically to stand for the films' views as a whole. Fricke might have been making a direct reference to Vertov's scene of the cigarette factory woman in which a smiling young woman is shown leaving the factory and possibly going out for an

evening of socializing (figure 2.8). Vertov's socialist vision is of the worker as sacralized, lifted beyond her profane life to interact with something more transcendent. This transcendent is not a god, nor is it found in a religious space; rather, it is the life of the worker, acting for the good of the society as a whole, that creates the transcendent in the 1920s Soviet world.

Fricke's worker is found in Indonesia, six decades of modernization and globalization later. The mundane, repetitive task of filling papers with tobacco, trimming the ends of the cigarettes and stacking them, alongside a warehouse full of other women doing the same chore is shown only for a minute or so in real time, but just that is plenty to drive home the point that this work is no longer meaningful within a local community, or to the individual (figure 2.9). There is only global consumption. Soon

FIGURE 2.8 Still from *Man with a Movie Camera*. Vertov's cigarette factory worker performs her repetitive labor with a smile on her face: she contributes to the good of the society.

FIGURE 2.9 Still from *Baraka*. Fricke's cigarette factory worker performs her repetitive labor in the midst of hundreds of other laborers: her task is bound to a faceless global capitalism.

after the cigarette factory scenes, *Baraka* cuts to a man standing at a Tokyo subway stop smoking a cigarette, seemingly unaware of all the life that surrounds him. For Vertov's socialist ideals, the world is small enough to still maintain a direct relation between the work of the individual and the larger society. For Fricke's globalized, overindustrialized world, work is a profane activity that cannot reach transcendent significance for the individual. The world created in *Baraka* is one so vast it rarely speaks to a personal life within it—though it does do that significantly, from time to time, through its long takes of close-ups of people.

CONCLUSION

Myths and rituals are emphasized throughout this book for two reasons. First, they have had profound power over individuals and communities for millennia, and the contemporary age is no exception, in spite of certain liberal, rationalist strains that have attempted to eradicate them. You might be able to exorcise "God" from society, and even from religion, but myths and rituals are lasting human endeavors because they function at

levels of worldmaking, and it is not possible (at least sanely) to go without worlds. Second, they are interconnected: myths need rituals to survive, to live on into ever new permutations, while ritual needs myth for its rootedness in the creations of worlds and the stories—whether read, danced, or depicted—to become sustaining for individuals and communities.

In the end, just what do watching camera movements and editing cuts teach us about religion? At least this: the student of religion can learn about the ups and downs, and side-to-side movements, of rituals and ask what difference they make. An awareness of space, in two or more dimensions, can challenge us to rethink the spaces in which religions take place. Is verticality simply a matter of up and down (sometimes a cigar *is* just a cigar), or does it serve to construct a world of hierarchical power? Likewise, can rituals become more egalitarian through operating on a more horizontal plane? There are no blanket answers here, and a strict dichotomy between vertical and horizontal is not helpful. Nonetheless, spatial dimensions can often be ideologically charged, displaying gender roles and other identity formations within worlds. Meanwhile, the juxtapositions of film editing can highlight connections within the world in ways we never thought possible. Time is malleable, and the seemingly chaotic movements of a place like New York's Grand Central Station, depicted in *Baraka*, can be sped up through time-lapse photography to reveal a strangely satisfying order. Even urban life has its patterns. Chaos seems to hide in the cosmos, and vice versa. Editing and cinematography provide new perspectives, re-creations of cosmos and chaos, the sacred and profane.

Filmmaking has long relied on ritual components, whether filmmakers know this or not. Space and time, flowers and candles, songs and sensual objects all make up the alternative worlds at the altars of the world's religious traditions. Editors and cinematographers reproduce and ultimately re-create the lights and sights and sounds of rituals, sacred and profane, and put them on-screen, inviting viewers to take a step across the boundary of the screen. The two worlds are attached, interconnected, and each impinges on, impedes, and enlivens the other.

3

SACRED AND CINEMATIC SPACES

Cities and Pilgrimages

Between 2:00 and 3:00 P.M., Eastern Standard Time, on Monday, April 30, 2012, a set of steel columns was installed atop 1 World Trade Center in New York City, making it, at 1,271 feet (387 meters), the tallest structure in the city (figure 3.1). Far from being a completed building, this vertical milestone was nonetheless symbolic enough to warrant several newspaper articles and a gathering of dignitaries to watch. Carol Willis, the founder and director of the Skyscraper Museum in Battery Park City, stated: "I'm very pleased that downtown has an axis around which the rest of the buildings can revolve; to use a Jungian term, *the axis mundi*" (Dunlap 2012).[1]

Carl Jung, like other theorists of religion, used the term *axis mundi* to indicate a "cosmic axis," a "center of the world," a place of centralized sacred power that links the here below with the up above. The scholar of religion Mircea Eliade (noted in the previous chapter for the masculine-orientation of this space) claimed that the axis mundi was a nearly universal concept: "Every microcosm, every inhabited region, has a center; that is to say, a place that is sacred above all" (Eliade 1991: 39). Eliade may overstate the universality of such a site, but certainly we can find examples of grand sacred centers around the world. Natural phenomena such as trees (the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, India) and mountains (Mount Tai, China) can be world centers, as can humanly built structures such as churches (St Peter's Basilica, Rome), temples (Angkor Wat, Cambodia),

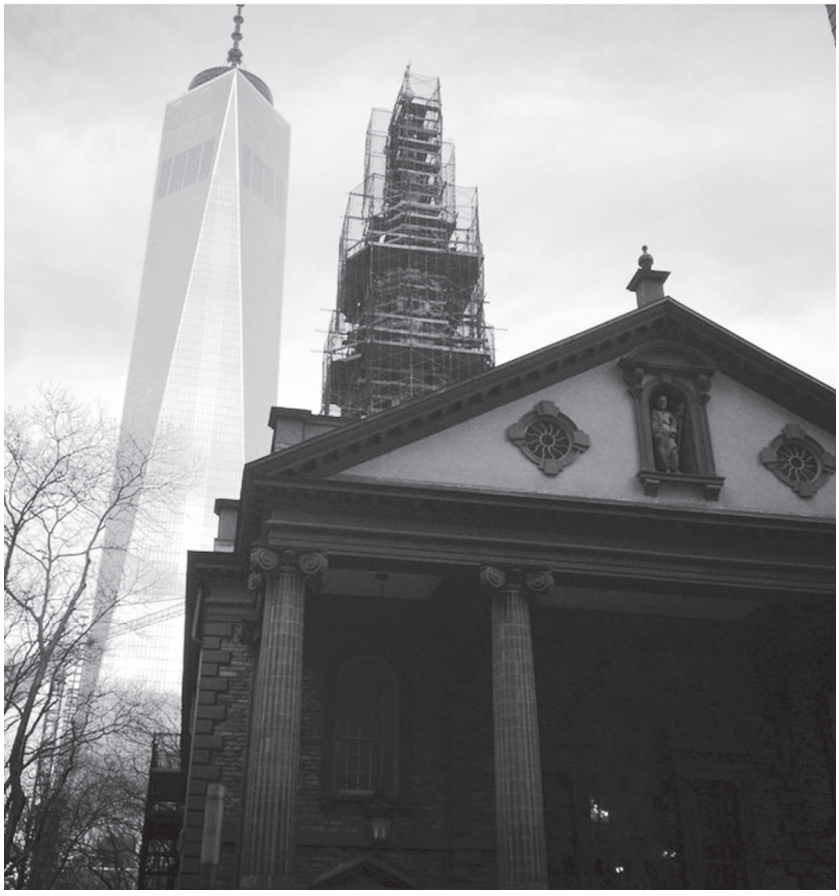

FIGURE 3.1 One World Trade Center, with Trinity Church in the foreground. Photo by S. Brent Plate.

and shrines (the Kaaba, Mecca). Even entire cities (Jerusalem, Banaras, Luxor, Kyoto) have been considered cosmic axes, as well as the human body (seen in Daoist illustrations of *qi* meridians).

With so much historical gravitas given to the sacred center, Willis's discussion of the World Trade Center as an axis mundi becomes a bold claim about what is basically a very large office building. Then again, perhaps she is implicitly stating what so many already know: that money and the pursuit of wealth constitute the sacred for the twenty-first-century

United States. Tall office buildings are both the symbol of that sacred aim and the image that drives the desire. We'll return to some of these topics through this chapter.

Our initial concern is not whether the axis mundi is economic, political, or religious, or how universal such a concept may be, but how prominent structures in space create a sense of orientation, belonging, and power, and how constructed spaces help guide religious activity. We see this in the diegetic spaces of cinema via cinematography and mise-en-scène, spaces often analogous to sacred spaces in afilmic reality. The first section of this chapter looks at animation and science fiction films to examine some of the ways urban and sacred spaces operate, concentrating in particular on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) as an especially apposite depiction of spatial relations in cities.

At the same time, urban structures don't just go *up*, they also go *out*. Their prominence makes them a magnet for people and places oriented on the flat planes around them, like baby calves that must repeatedly gather around the mother cow for feeding. The center, however big or small, local or utopian, is a place for sustenance, education, and identity all at once. Vertical sacred spaces aspire with their spires; horizontal landscapes are bodies, circuitries that circulate and foster social communication. The power of sacred space ripples across the horizon, and in many instances people embark on pilgrimages to connect themselves to sacred sites, and as they do they reinvest sacred power in these particular places. To demonstrate the horizontal power of space, the second part of this chapter turns to two very different "pilgrimage" films, Ismaël Ferroukhi's *Le Grand Voyage* (2004) and David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (1999). What we find is that the sacred center is not always so central.[2]

BUILDING RELIGION UP: VERTICAL URBAN SPACE AS SACRED SPACE

In the previous chapter, looking at the films *Antonia's Line* and *Chocolat*, I noted distinct contrasts of verticality and horizontality and their connections to gendered spaces. I mentioned how the action of *Chocolat* is set up through its establishing shot depicting the French village with the

church at the pinnacle (see figure 2.2). Towns and villages throughout Christian Europe typically have a church at their highest point or center. Often these churches feature a bell tower, whose habitual ringing has provided an audio alignment for residents, keeping them in cosmically ordered time as well as space. The church is, at least initially, the axis mundi of the villagers' lives—in the diegetic reality of *Chocolat* and afilmic European towns alike—and it is height that establishes this prominence. Placing the important things at high elevations is part of how religious institutions are legitimated, to use Peter Berger's spatial metaphors, by "*locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference. . . . Everything 'here below' has its analogue 'up above'" (1967: 33).

Religiously speaking, height has been a predictable way of demonstrating power and connection with the divine realm, a space generally imagined as "up above." This is not always the case, even within the Western monotheistic traditions, but it is true often enough to be significant. The word *altar* comes from the Latin, *alta ara*, a "high place" for offering, and we might recall that both Moses and Muhammad received their revelations not on the plains below, but up above, on mountains. Height, center, power, and orientation have deep-seated interrelations. Religious authorities and city planners have comprehended this fact and put it to use. So have filmmakers.

Urban spaces, like films, require planning. Some cities, like some films, do this better than others. Urban planning and cinematic production design both entail practical decisions based on the social relationships among the people within those environments; economic, political, cultural, and religious activities on large and small scales; and the overall appearance and flow of the urban landscape (see Lynch 1960). Similar to urban planners, filmmakers aim in part to create a diegetic world of space, then to bring characters into the space where action takes place. This intention is particularly evident in establishing shots. A generalized space is depicted first: the French village in *Chocolat*, the stars in *Star Wars* (see chapter 1), the blue sky and white picket fence in *Blue Velvet* (see chapter 2). Characters are then folded into that space transforming it into a *place*. As prominent human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan puts it: "What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (1977: 6). Part of the activity of creating and maintaining worlds of both religions and cinema is to turn space into

place, as adherents and film viewers find their places within a space (see Tweed 2006).

City building takes decades and centuries, but filmmakers can create, erase, and reimagine urban space with relative ease. Even so, this shared activity of city building has provided longstanding connections between film and urban structures. The German writer and director Wim Wenders is one of those attentive to the relations between cities and cinema: "Film is a city art," he has stated (1997: 93). Some decades earlier, the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein saw architecture as film's "undoubted ancestor": "Victor Hugo called the medieval cathedrals 'books in stone' (see *Notre Dame de Paris*). The Acropolis of Athens has an equal right to be called the perfect example of one of the most ancient films" (1989: 117). Walking through a city is like a montage, building following building adding up to a more or less coherent whole, with prominent tall structures to guide the wayfarer through an urban narrative.

THE AXIS MUNDI IN ANIMATION AND SCIENCE FICTION

Unlike historical dramas, romantic comedies, or even thrillers, animation and science fiction allow a much broader range of possible worlds. An urban setting for a rom-com requires production designers to make the city scenes look enough like afilmic reality to generate believability, and thus form a connection between world of audience and world of film; it doesn't matter whether or not someone watching the film has ever been to New York City, people around the world recognize it as a real place where romantic relationships *can* take place. In animation and science fiction the believability factor is extended: there are still rules and correspondences between afilmic and diegetic realities, but the rules can be bent to a greater degree, and the differences between the worlds on- and offscreen can be broadened. (Curiously, science fiction writers have been using the term *world-building* since the 1970s, and those interested in creating their own sci-fi films and novels go to "world-building workshops" instead of just "writing workshops.")

In Disney/Pixar's *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), the diegetic world is constructed from the ground up. With this freedom that animation allows,

filmmakers chose to create the city of "Monstropolis," a topsy-turvy world in which humans are the scary beings, the ones who contaminate, and the monsters' world must be kept separate from the world of the humans. Issues of purity abound. The only connections across worlds are through doors that appear in the monsters' factory and lead directly into children's bedrooms; the monsters cross the threshold for only a few seconds to scare the children and capture their screams—the screams power all of Monstropolis. In order to show how anal-retentively spic and span, how orderly the monster's world is, their urban life is highlighted in a number of shots, looking like the Upper West Side of Manhattan but without the trash and dog poop. At the start of the film the viewer is introduced to Monstropolis when the two main characters, Sully and Mike Wazowski, walk out their front doors and off to work, with Randy Newman's boppy piano music providing the soundtrack. The camera tilts up to show their path. Framed at the end of the tree-lined street and dominating the city skyline is a domed building looking very much like St. Peter's Basilica (figure 3.2). The shot is but a few seconds, and no comment is made, nor are characters ever depicted going to a religious service, but animators took the time to draw in Michelangelo's dome design to anchor the well-functioning city, showing that monsters too might need an axis mundi. In the sequel, *Monsters University* (2013), a similar domed building is the main university building and functions like a sacred space due to its collection of monuments to the past as well as creating a space for ceremony. Much of the crucial action in the second film takes place under the dome.

From a very different perspective, Shane Acker's stunning CGI animation film *9* (2009), offers a postapocalyptic, post-human vision. Unlike the apocalyptic *District 9* of the same year, there are no humans to be found in this world. Now it's just machines versus machines, but some of the machines retain a ghost within. The good robots are burlap-sack puppets with machinic innards and numbered "1" to "9" by a benevolent, now-deceased robot master. They hole up in an old cathedral, half-intact after so much of their city has been blown apart. The leader of the cowering cathedral-dwelling robots, 1, presides over them in a papal-looking cape and hat. He's against science and technology, has seen the destruction it has wrought, and compels the other robots to stay in the cathedral, while 9 is the brave nonconformist. True to Protestant-fueled Hollywood mythologies, 9 is the scrappy single individual who plays the heroic, salvific role,

FIGURE 3.2A–B Still from *Monsters, Inc.* (*top*) showing "Monstropolis," a city with a central building that looks a lot like St. Peter's Basilica, Rome (*bottom*). Image by Fczarnowski, reproduced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

FIGURE 3.3 Still from *9*. Standing high up in the cathedral, the burlap sack robot 9 looks out at the factory where the evil "beast" lives. The two buildings are competing world centers.

his messianic mission mirrored in the stained-glass Christ imagery of the cathedral. The film highlights the spaces of the cathedral over and against the factory where the evil, robotic "beast" carries out its plans for destruction of the last soulful breath (figure 3.3). Ultimately the cathedral burns and the good robots retreat to a third space, the library, where they find the information they need to save themselves, opening a book titled the *Annuls of Peracelsus*. (The actual Paracelsus was a Swiss, Renaissance-era occultist, and there are numerous hermetic symbolic references throughout the film.) With the new information gained, the human soul lives on, Golem-like, within the burlap skins of these little robots.

Monsters, Inc. and *9* reaffirm traditional Western sacred space, with a central church as marker of orientation. Yet *9* also begins to suggest the replacement of this central sacred site with a different type of building: the library. The axis mundi becomes secularized.

The films of Japanese artist, writer, and director Hayao Miyazaki have continually queried the boundaries and affective powers of sacred spaces. In *Spirited Away* (2001) a family crosses a threshold from normal life into an old carnival world, and its members are transformed in the process. *Nausicaä* (1984), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), and *Princess Mononoke* (1997)

nod to Shinto traditions, with sacred spaces created by camphor trees and primeval forests (see Thomas 2012). In *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), a young witch-in-training named Kiki must perform a self-apprenticeship by taking her black cat, broom, and black dress to a foreign city to practice her skills. It's set up as a rite of passage, though she must accomplish the work in a place separate from her own home and family. As she flies through the sky on her broom, she comes across a lovely little city named Koriko. Just one look is all it takes to convince her this is the place to carry out her training. In the DVD commentary, Miyazaki comments on the construction of the fictional animated city of Koriko, and through the film we follow the lines and crossings of its streets and alleys, the open and closed spaces of its hills and parks. He says he wanted the setting of time and space to be vague. He wanted the city to look like the 1950s if World War II never happened, and then he modeled Koriko after several European cities, most notably Stockholm. (Most Japanese viewers thought it was a European city and Miyazaki gleefully conveys how "he deceived them beautifully"!) The city is, quite literally, u-topia, no-place, a world unto itself.

In the no-place of animated scenes, at the apex of Koriko, stands a clock tower, a profane site that gains a strong sense of power since it stands where in afilmic reality a church steeple might rise (figure 3.4). In fact,

FIGURE 3.4 Still from *Kiki's Delivery Service*. The city of Koriko has been scrubbed of traditional sacred spaces. Instead, a clock tower stands as the axis mundi of the city.

Koriko's urban space is quite thoroughly scrubbed of sacred sites, which, considering the town is modeled on a European city, makes the absences all the more glaring. The clock tower functions as an axis mundi for the world of the film, and for the city within the film. It stands at the high point in the city, surrounded below by a bustling marketplace, and here is where the final climactic scene takes place: a dirigible crashes into the tower and Kiki proves her worth by rescuing a young boy as she swoops in on her broom to catch his fall, in the process proving her witch powers. The townspeople are united and endeared to Kiki by this heroic event, surrounding the clock tower.

Traditional sacred spaces are not the only prominent buildings that anchor cities and stand against chaos in films; other structures like libraries and clock towers can operate in this regard. Likewise, in afilmic reality, literary theorist Roland Barthes discusses the Eiffel Tower in terms evoking the axis mundi, saying it is the "universal symbol of Paris . . . whose sole mythic function is to join . . . earth and heaven" (1982: 237). (One of the jokes about films set in Paris is that every room in the city has a view of the Eiffel Tower.) Another illustration is the Mall in Washington, DC, a collective sacred shrine for the United States, in a "city at the center of the world" (J. Meyer 2001: 2). As cities around the world developed through history, they shifted their legitimation structures from religious centers to secular cultural, political, and economic centers. One classic film makes that change in spatial orientation a central preoccupation of its production design: *Metropolis*.

METROPOLIS

When the son of an Austrian architect, Fritz Lang, finished *Metropolis* in 1927 the tallest building in the world was the Woolworth Building in New York, completed in 1913. With its impressive height of 792 feet (241.4 meters) and neo-Gothic architecture, the Woolworth Building was dubbed the "Cathedral of Commerce" by Congregationalist minister Parkes Cadman. In awe of the structure, Cadman exclaimed, "When seen at nightfall bathed in electric light as with a garment, or in the lucid air of a summer morning, piercing space like the battlement of the paradise of God which St. John beheld, it inspires feelings too deep even for tears"

(1918: n.p.). Like Carol Willis reflecting on the World Trade Center a century later and only two blocks away, Cadman relied on religious language to express the affectations of the secular skyscraper.

As human populations shifted from villages and small towns to cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sacred spaces and their centers also shifted. Tuan notes this and previous historical shifts, discussing urban spaces in terms reminiscent of both the axis mundi and Berger's sacred canopy, yet here it is in relation not to a specific religious building but to the city itself, what sometimes gets referred to as a "cosmopolis." Tuan says the city is "a center of meaning, par excellence." This is because "[t]he traditional city symbolized, first, transcendental and man-made order as against the chaotic forces of terrestrial and infernal nature. Second, it stood for an ideal human community. . . . It was as transcendental order that ancient cities acquired their monumental aspect" (1977: 173). Urban spaces, from ancient Alexandria to medieval Baghdad to modern Paris, are places of order and orientation, made so through their rational designs, monumentality, and their ability to at least make it *seem* as if their citizens are safe. In the modern world, like the ancient Tower of Babel, it has become height that most ably supplies the monumental status, as skylines reach the realms of the mythical, extending human conception and belonging on a grand scale. There's a reason they're called skyscrapers. As with the World Trade Center, economy and technology, not a church on a hill, are the cosmicizing forces of the future and present alike, and their iconic buildings stand as axes mundi.

Through its mise-en-scène, the silent *Metropolis* reveals some of the social tensions of the early twentieth century: forces of secularization came to the fore in Western nations at the same time as global urbanization was under way—it was in the first two decades of the century that the populations of both Germany and the United States became more urban than rural. The establishing shots of the film portray a heavily industrialized environment, with homogeneous workers below the city walking in robotic sync with each other. The next scenes shift upward to the "Club of Sons" where the elite live, where cultural, sporting, and leisure activities occur. Struggle between the classes ensues, with a wide range of characters leading to a fairly convoluted plot. (There has been widespread agreement since the release of the film that the scenarios are spectacularly imaginative while the plot leaves a lot to be desired.) Lang's

film makes many religious references to establish his mythical mash-up: the robotic Maria as the Whore of Babylon, the real Maria as a messianic and/or John the Baptist figure, the dynamics of creator versus created, and numerous biblical references such as the Tower of Babel, the sacrifice-consuming Moloch, and nods to the book of Revelation (see Donahue 2003).

Lang was fascinated with New York City and buildings such as the Woolworth Building. His visit to the city in the 1920s inspired much of the futuristic film set for *Metropolis*, in an age in which "skyscrapers had risen to the status of film stars" (Neumann 2006: 37), a fact reaffirmed by Charles Seeler and Paul Strand's 1921 documentary film *Manhatta*. Contributing to the urban fantasies of *Metropolis* was Erich Kettelhut, a prominent production designer who sketched an early vision of the city of Metropolis that was striking in its visual commentary: a Gothic church at the city center dwarfed by massive commercial buildings, eerily prescient of the contemporary scene in lower Manhattan (figure 3.5; cf. figure 3.1). But Lang didn't like this scenario, didn't want the idea of the church to be imagined as central to the futuristic city, even if it was engulfed in larger structures. Surviving production design sketches show Kettelhut's Gothic church with crossed lines through it and Lang's scribbled words: "Away with the Church. Tower of Babel instead." Indeed, the massive "New Tower of Babel" ultimately dominates the city center in early scenes of *Metropolis* (figure 3.6). Lang wanted a futuristic city, but he also wanted a dystopian city. He was enamored with tall buildings even as his film indicates a dis-ease with a heavily urbanized and industrialized life (Neumann 2006). Again, Tuan is helpful here, sounding as if he is commenting directly on *Metropolis*: "Ancient capitals began as ritual centers of high import. Splendid architectural settings were required for the enactment of sacred dramas. In time ceremonial centers attracted secular populations and activities. Economic functions multiplied and submerged the city's religious identity. However, the feeling for drama and display remained as did the form and style of religious rites which branched into the secular sphere" (1977: 173).

Lang once described himself as "born Catholic and very puritan" (Grant 2003: 163), and the ending of *Metropolis* falls back on a decidedly (and, for many, disappointing) Christian mythology. The disparate threads of the jumbled plot of the film converge on a Gothic church—not shown

FIGURE 3.5 Early production sketch of the city of Metropolis. Slightly visible are Lang's words: "Away with the Church. Tower of Babel instead." © Erich Kettelhut, reproduced by permission of Deutsche Kinemathek.

FIGURE 3.6 Still from beginning of *Metropolis* with the Tower of Babel as central space.

until the end—where the false Maria is burned at the stake, the real Maria flees from the twisted inventor Rotwang, and reconciliations occur. At the entrance to the cathedral, as the mayhem subsides, the "head" (symbolized by Joh Fredersen, master of the city) and "hands" (symbolized by Grot, a leader of the workers) meet through the mediation of the "heart" (Freder, son of Fredersen). The chaos overcome, the corporeal order restored, the cosmopolis can go back to its ordered ways, with the church as orientation point (figure 3.7).

Metropolis constructs an initial axis mundi out of the New Tower of Babel, grounding the dystopian world of the film. Yet as we look closer at this and other films discussed in this chapter, we find oppositions opening up between spaces: cathedral versus factory versus library in *9*; clock tower replacing church in *Kiki*; church versus technology tower in *Metropolis*. These spaces create antitheses, and in that tension they become central visual symbols that ground their respective worlds. It is in part this opposition that establishes the sacrality of space. David Chidester

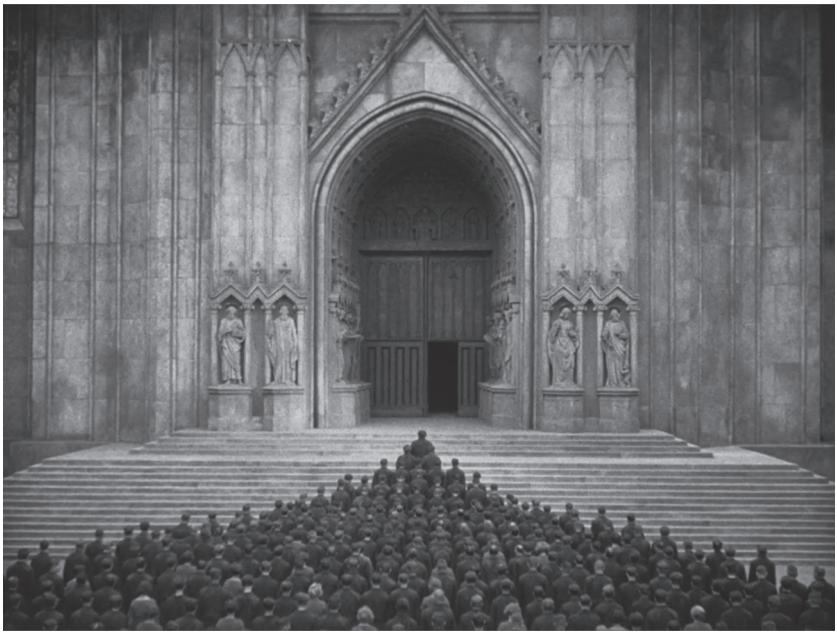

FIGURE 3.7 Still from the end of *Metropolis*. The Gothic church becomes the place of reconciliation.

and Edward Linenthal have argued that sacred spaces, along with being identified with ritual activities and orienting components, are always contested, comprising "hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession" (1995: 17). This contestation occurs internally, within one space, and externally, as spaces compete with each other for prominence. The one space needs the other; they are mutually constitutive in their claims to sacredness.

HORIZONTAL SPACES AND PILGRIMAGE

The image of a tall building as a still image, whether we are on the streets of Manhattan or looking at Miyazaki's filmic cityscape, is powerful for

its orienting functions. The visual site speaks to solidity, provides a focal point, and thus denotes a sense that the world is ordered, the sacred canopy is in place, and the forces of chaos are kept at bay.

The fact is we don't stand still, staring upward in awe. We are creatures that move and are restlessly seeking, exploring, and roving through space on a horizontal level. The stories of our lives are travel stories, and our journeys from one place to another, even when only metaphorically, provide us with another kind of orientation. In his spatially oriented book *Crossing and Dwelling*, theorist of religion Tom Tweed argues that "religions are not only about being in place but also moving across" (2006: 123). Religions are constructed in and through space, and in and through movements across places. Our afilmic worlds are lived in the horizontal planes below the tall buildings, and generally apart from them. On the one hand, this means we ordinarily exist in profane space, not in the "set apart" structures of power and orientation, though we are occasionally given access and told to journey to the sacred sites. On the other hand, individual and collective movement in and through space sacralizes elements of the horizontal dimension; it is moving from one site to another that partially constructs the sacredness of certain spaces, particularly along well-worn trails and roads. While the horizontal sacralizing plays itself out in a variety of ways, here we will explore the widespread human activity called pilgrimage.

Drawing on the ritual theories of Arnold van Gennep, Victor and Edith Turner elevated pilgrimage to a practice worthy of study in the 1970s, and their influence is felt across religious studies and anthropological approaches today (Turner 1973; Turner and Turner 1978; cf. Van Gennep 1960). Because there are many easy-to-find references to the Turners' theories of pilgrimage, I provide only a quick sketch of some of the key elements. A pilgrimage entails (1) separation from home, from that which is familiar; (2) entering a *liminal* space, a "threshold" realm that is "betwixt and between" normal social positions and thus allows egalitarian relations, while the pilgrim travels to a site that is designated sacred or of great significance; (3) ultimately returning home, having been transformed both spiritually and bodily. This simplified structure is an ideal theoretical model to examine a great many religious journeys across the world. It is also ideal for the flow of a film narrative, and countless films have adhered to its basic tenets even while dressing it in various forms and genres.

It's a helpful structure to have in mind, but partly because the Turners set up their theory of pilgrimage in a clear, idealistic schema, it is easy to take it apart and show holes in it. John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991) have shown that the seeming egalitarian nature of *liminality* is not always so equal. Others, like the anthropologist Jill Dubisch (1995), are skeptical toward the category of pilgrimage altogether, wondering if use of such a broad term doesn't distract us from recognizing some of the distinct behaviors and practices that occur along the journey. The glaring question of the divide between "tourism" and "pilgrimage" has been a recurrent issue (Plate 2009; Reader 2014) and is picked up again in chapter 6. For now, I keep the structure loose enough to examine how two dramatically different films recast some of the same questions about the nature and function of pilgrimage.

MAKING THE HAJJ: *LE GRAND VOYAGE*

One of the greatest pilgrimages in the history of humanity is the Islamic hajj, the journey to Mecca that every capable Muslim must take at one point in his or her life. It is the fifth of the Five Pillars of Islam, and every year millions of Muslims leave their homes, travel great distances to converge on the holy city in the Arabian peninsula, perform a number of rites, commune with fellow Muslims, and finally return home transformed, carrying the honorific title *hajji*.[3] The culminating act is the circumambulation of the Kaaba, the black cube that stands at the heart of the Great Mosque, which itself stands at the heart of the city of Mecca (figure 3.8). There is little question that the Kaaba is the axis mundi of the Islamic world: "the first Sanctuary appointed for mankind was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a guidance to the peoples" (Qur'an 3:96, Pickthall trans.).

That the hajj can be a transformational event is brought out in Spike Lee's film *Malcolm X* (1992) based on *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Haley. Taking time away from his civil rights work in the United States, Malcolm made the journey to Mecca in 1964, one year before he was assassinated. In Lee's film, Malcolm's pilgrimage is told through a voiceover of Denzel Washington as Malcolm X, reading a letter he wrote to his wife Betty Shabazz back home in the United States. (The film version of the letter differs from the version as printed in the

FIGURE 3.8 Still from *Le Grand Voyage* showing the Grand Mosque in Mecca, with the Kaaba—the axis mundi of Islam—standing at the center.

Autobiography, but key passages are the same.) At one point Malcolm's voice merges into the voice of Betty (Angela Bassett) reading the letter to a group of followers in New York, then the film cuts back to Malcolm again, thus tying together the two spaces. The audio-visual editing connection between America and Arabia is matched by the soundtrack: Duke Ellington's "Arabesque Cookie" plays in the background. (Ellington would himself travel through the Middle East in 1963.) "Today with thousands of others I have proclaimed God's greatness in the sacred city of Mecca," Malcolm writes to Betty. "It was the only time in my life when I stood before the creator of all and felt like a complete human being. . . . I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and prayed to the same God with fellow Muslims whose eyes were blue, whose hair was blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And we were all brothers" (cf. Malcolm X 1964: 339–41; figure 3.9). Here we find the egalitarian dimensions that the liminal element of pilgrimage aims to engender, and the ritual can entail deep social change, as the next sequence of Lee's *Malcolm X* suggests when it follows Malcolm back home to New York and we hear about changes in his civil rights work. By no means do such changes always occur, but there are many accounts of hajjis who have been changed personally and socially through the journey.

Pilgrimage-induced transformations are also seen in *Le Grand Voyage* (2004), written and directed by French-Moroccan filmmaker Ismaël

FIGURE 3.9 Still from *Malcolm X*. Malcolm visits Mecca in 1963 and finds fellow Muslims of all races and skin colors.

Ferroukhi. The fictional story is simple enough: an aging, devout man wants to make the hajj before he dies, and he demands that his teenage son take him to Mecca to perform the rituals and ultimately walk around the Kaaba. The family is originally from Morocco and have emigrated to the south of France; they have an old car that the son, Reda, will drive as father and son cross southern Europe, travel through Turkey and Syria, and ultimately make it to Arabia and Mecca. It is a "road movie," for most intents and purposes, but the question of where it stops being a road movie and becomes a spiritual transformation story is part of its intrigue. The father (Mohamed Majd), who remains nameless through the film, retains the old ways, speaking Maghrebi Arabic, praying regularly, and reading his Qur'an. Reda (Nicolas Cazale) has assimilated, speaks French, wears denim jeans and Stan Smith Adidas, and has a girlfriend at home whom he very reluctantly has to leave for what seems to him a ridiculous journey.

Together father and son say goodbye to home and family in southern France and set out into unknown territory where people speak strange languages and the directions are not always clear. This sense of "unknown territory" is doubled for the father in that he is already an immigrant living in a strange land, and it is arguable that Reda and his father are not really on the same journey: they occupy two different *places*, yet both are in

precisely the same *spaces* through almost the entirety of the film (recall Tuan's distinction of space and place). Each is living in his own world, even as they sit side by side. Many humorous encounters with passengers they pick up along the way (an old woman, a Turkish man, a sheep) fuel the differences between father and son. As they drive across northern Italy Reda wants to stop and see Milan, to which his father snaps, "You think we're tourists?" Reda is unsure what the difference is and would rather be a tourist than a pilgrim, but he cannot actually be either. He's just a driver, an angry (though obedient) young man.

Fact and fiction cross each other throughout. There is some autobiography in the film, as Ferroukhi's own father drove across Europe to make the hajj, and he and his father had their own set of differences—the investigations of generational differences among immigrant families are key to the film. Ferroukhi says he is a "cultural Muslim," more of the spiritual-but-not-religious variety, even as his film is deeply sympathetic to the devotional life and rituals of Islam. In order to create a verisimilitude of the pilgrimage, the filmmakers themselves traveled from France to Arabia, filming along the way. They needed special permissions to film in Mecca during the hajj, and there were a number of setbacks, but in the end they walked through the streets with cameras and captured the faces, movement, and behavior of people who were not acting out a scene but there to fulfill their religious duties. Most people, Ferroukhi says, just glanced at the camera and went on their way. Which means that many of the shots of the final scenes in Mecca break out of the fiction film genre and gravitate toward "documentary," thus confusing genres. Through the editing process, real scenes from Mecca were spliced with staged scenes filmed in Morocco so that afilmic and diegetic realities converge and turn into a further diegetic reality.

In a vital sense, the car is the center point of the world of *Le Grand Voyage*, a place in which and around which action, relationships, and a lot of silence happens. It is a mobile axis mundi. The car provides the confines that keep father and son together: it is a place where they eat, sleep, argue, laugh, and stare out the windows at passing people and landscapes. The car is also a place of protection and harbors them from the elements, from freezing snow to blazing sun. Of course, the car also moves and provides them with transportation, and even when it breaks down at a few spots, it is the absence of the car's mobility that shows how crucial it is. As to the particular modes of transportation for the hajj, the father says it is

better to go by foot than by horse, but horse is better than by car, which is in turn better than by boat, which is better than a plane. He's settled for a "good enough" method, though when they share road stories with fellow pilgrims from Egypt and Jordan the listeners are impressed that they made such a long journey by car. The film, through its silences, its images of a variety of landscapes, and a subtle soundtrack by Fowzi Guerdjou, brings the audience into the space of the car, and hence on the journey.

Once in Saudi Arabia they encounter other pilgrims from all over—Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt—and caravan with them for the final days. As with Malcolm X, we see a myriad of races, ethnicities, and customs coming together in the liminal space of the hajj. Toward the end of the trip, with the car stopped in a sandy desert, the father begins to do ablutions in preparation for *salat* (prayer). Reda rests against the car and, for the first time, expresses genuine interest in the journey, asking his father, "What's so special about Mecca?" The father sits down next to him and answers him with standard doctrine, reflecting his simple faith: that Mecca is the center for Islam, that the hajj is the fifth pillar, that Muslims come from all over the world to purify their soul. But as he explains it to his son he becomes more gentle, certainly more so than he has been in the film until now (figure 3.10). The father, for the first and only time, offers gratitude for Reda's driving him to Mecca, saying "God bless you." As they both lean against the car, shaded from the hot sun, the father

FIGURE 3.10 Still from *Le Grand Voyage* with Reda and his father on the *hajj*. Their relationship, in connection with the car, is the axis mundi of the film.

stares off into the distance saying, "I've learned a lot on this trip." Looking directly at his father Reda replies, "So did I." Their mutual smiles at this point affirm their new connection. When they drive the final leg, both seem content, their individual worlds brought together in the place of the car, setting the stage for the final climactic scenes in Mecca.

In an interview, Ferroukhi suggests that Reda is "disconnected" from his heritage and ultimately from himself. "So we are watching a real rediscovery of a part of himself that he has lost touch with. The voyage is, in part, just that: Reda's rediscovery of himself" (Toler 2007: 35). Does this mean he recites the *shahada* (the profession of faith) and begins to believe in the tenets of Islam? That's ambiguous. What is not ambiguous are the final shots in which Reda sells the car, walks to a taxi, and stops to give money to a begging woman before leaving (to home, and his girlfriend, we presume). This is contrasted with an earlier scene where he questions his father for giving *zakat* (alms) to a widow as their car is broke down in the Syrian desert.

Reda rediscovers himself, his culture, his religion, and his father, through the journey, through the physical movement through space. Unlike *Malcolm X* there are no letters written to those back home. Nor are we given internal dialogues or made privy to interior intentions and motives, save what we read on the faces of the actors. The film, like the pilgrimage itself, is an external activity. Reda's transformation is made apparent in one final scene of almsgiving.

The "center" of the hajj is the Kaaba, the powerful beacon that beckons the faithful. Even if the Kaaba was barely mentioned or depicted, the entire journey of *Le Grand Voyage* was predicated on its existence, on its mythic, symbolic, and ritualistic pull. The Kaaba is the ideal, utopian center of Islam, calling Muslims to it, just as the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral in Spain is the end point of the pilgrimage called the Camino de Santiago, or the *sangam* (confluence) of the Yamuna and Ganges Rivers in India is an end point of the pilgrimage of the Kumbh Mela. But the sacred center of *Le Grand Voyage*'s world is also a car. Kaaba and car fuel each other's power, and are dependent on each other's presence. A more generic way to put this is that a pilgrimage is played out through both the journey and the destination: the journey is just an aimless wandering unless it has a goal; the sacred destination has no authority if no one struggles to reach it.

THE STRAIGHT STORY

The previous chapter began with close attention to the first minutes of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, which like many of Lynch's films (e.g., *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*) contains disturbing sequences trotted out through surrealistic methods of cinematography and discomfiting electronic music by Lynch's longtime collaborator Angelo Badalamenti. Once the initial blue- or starry-skied vertical orientations are established—the connections between "up above" and "here below"—Lynch's films weave in and out of chaotic journeys through horizontal space. At the same time, Lynch's journeys are not *escapes from* some place in the way they are in many road movies (e.g., *Easy Rider* [1969]). Instead Lynch's treatment of the road highlights a vital component of many pilgrimages: "the road in Lynch's films is a space of reunion . . . a space of community and communication" (Orgeron 2002: 32). On the journey new communities are formed, distinct from the social structures "back home." The Lynchian construction of a traveling community is very much in keeping with what Victor Turner discussed as *spontaneous communitas*, a group coming together within a ritualized setting to form something of an "anti-structure," following an alternative and rather undefined set of social rules and order (Turner 1991: 132). Turner and Lynch both find this interconnected, mobile setting to be essential to reformations of the more stable structures of the normal social fabric, a kind of momentary, ephemeral fracture in the status quo that ultimately reinvests social life with a new charge of energy.

Even watching a film by Lynch becomes such an interruption of normal life: cinematic experience as anti-structure. What the audiences of Lynch's films think they know about the world on-screen is constantly reoriented and subverted as characters change places, are transported through space and time, or turn out to be someone other than who they were. The double meaning of Lynch's 1999 film *The Straight Story* is that it is both a story about a person named Alvin Straight and a straightforward story in which no crazy killers roam through some metaphysical headspace. Which may make *The Straight Story* one of the strangest of all of Lynch's films, a point affirmed by the fact that it is the only Lynch film to receive a "G" rating in the United States ("U" in the UK) and was distributed by Walt Disney Pictures.

The Straight Story prompts questions about what is the most important element of a pilgrimage, the journey or the arrival. We again find two centers within the world of the film, a destination point and a transportation device, but this time the destination is also in motion, and far from sacred in any conventional sense. The film is "based on a true story" in which the real life Alvin Straight (played by Richard Farnsworth in the film) drove a 1966 John Deere riding lawnmower across northern Iowa in 1994 ("Brotherly Love" 1994). Straight was seventy-three years old, legally blind, and recovering from hip surgery. His lawnmower, with its small trailer, was the real-life Straight's world, and it becomes the central spatial place of the film—though it offers little protection against the sometimes chaotic natural elements.

The clashing of afilmic and diegetic realities continues when Straight's destination is revealed: Mount Zion, Wisconsin. The Midwestern town was named for the original Mount Zion, one of the most sacred places in the world: a hill in Jerusalem and site of the ancient temple, a world center that has been calling people to it for thousands of years (see Psalm 137). To be clear, it's not the town that Straight is journeying to see, it's what's in the town: his estranged brother, Lyle Straight (Harry Dean Stanton). Lyle has suffered a stroke, and Alvin makes the journey to make amends before either of them dies. Alvin explains their differences: "Anger. Vanity. You mix that together with liquor, you've got two brothers that haven't spoken in ten years" (though there's a lot more of a Lynchian dark side to Alvin than the story straightforwardly tells). So he sets out on the lawnmower, leaving his home, daughter Rose (Sissy Spacek), and friends (sort of a trio of "Job's comforters") in Laurens, Iowa.

Lynch's crew filmed on location, trekking through the 250-miles of cornfields, thunderstorms, barns, small towns, and above all country highways that the real-life Straight passed during his six-week journey. Viewers are brought into the space of the film, and hence also across the space of Iowa, through carefully planned cinematographic tilts and pans and Badalamenti's melodic, lilting music (the soundtrack too is distinct from other Lynch films). The diegetic space is matched by the temporal pacing, which is deliberate and plodding, with many long takes. (In the hierarchy of pilgrimage transportation, given by Reda's father, it would seem that a lawn tractor is just below walking, and just above horse riding.) To give a sense of what it would have been like to travel at an average

speed of five miles per hour for several weeks, the film takes its time, introducing various characters along the way. Several points of connection with people en route create a *communitas* of the road.

Alvin's pilgrimage, like many ancient and modern ones, is not undertaken simply to see his brother, and certainly not for sightseeing. The lawnmower, and the weeks spent on the deafening,[4] stinky machine getting nowhere fast is Alvin's penance for past sins. *The Straight Story*, and Straight himself, is sweet and decent on the surface, but reading between the lines brings out the creepy-crawlies below the surface. We realize that Alvin was a raging drunk who caused great misery to others, including hints that he had something to do with Rose's loss of her children (Kreider and Content 2000). In spite of the fact that he has fourteen grandchildren, he lives a lonely life, clearly estranged from family. Why he and Rose live together is unclear. And when Alvin encounters a group of weekend warrior bicycle riders and they ask him about getting old, he replies, "The worst part of bein' old is remembering when you was young." On the surface this is a folksy response, a kind of sideways insult to the young and strong bikers, and cause for chuckles. Reading deeper into the story, and piecing together some of his history from snippets of conversation with strangers, his response is meant quite literally: he remembers bad experiences and behaviors of his younger days, and he'd rather not recall them.

Alvin eventually approaches the end of his journey, the stages of his penance seemingly near complete. At the border of Mount Zion he even drinks a beer at one last stop, and the scene is set up so the viewer is left wondering if he will "fall off the wagon," get drunk, and mess the whole thing up. But he doesn't. When Alvin finally comes upon Lyle's shack on the outskirts of town, Lyle, wearing a bathrobe, hobbles out on a walker to greet Alvin, telling him to sit on the porch with him. Little is said between them for a good minute. The final scene condenses all the work of pilgrimage into a simple edited series of shot reverse shots between Alvin, Lyle, and the lawnmower. Adjusting his eyes to the outside light and getting some sense of what this visitation means, Lyle narrows his eyes at the lawnmower sitting in his yard. He asks, "Did you ride that thing all the way out here to see me?" Alvin responds, "I did, Lyle." With Alvin's penance well under way, and the sibling reconciliation begun, they look out, side by side, then briefly at each other and finally they each look up, while the camera itself tilts upward, merging into a night sky punctuated with stars (figure 3.11). The starry sky is the same image that

FIGURE 3.11A–C Still sequence from the final scene of *The Straight Story*. Lyle looks at the lawn tractor (*top*), realizing what his brother went through to see him, then looks up toward the sky (*middle*). Alvin looks at Lyle, then he also looks up (*bottom*).

began the film, and to which the viewer is brought at several points during the film. The here below meets the up above. Do the brothers patch things up and get on? We don't know, but the cinematography shows us that the axis mundi, the place of dwelling, is here on this porch, at this time, somewhere on the edge of Mount Zion.

CONCLUSION

Who we are, how we engage in the religious activity of worldmaking, and how we interact with others are all in some way dependent on the places in which we live and breathe and have our being. Religious traditions enable humans to "make homes and cross boundaries," as Tweed puts it (2006: 54). Perhaps it's obvious that a tall building is a thing that grounds people and places, provides an orientation point as well as a sense of identity. It is a point of connection, whether to city pride, to the economic power of the nation-state, or the gods. With the tall building we know *where* we are and, along with that, *who* we are. At the same time, as we've seen in this chapter, there are a number of places, a number of "wobbling pivots" (J. Smith 1972), that are not so high and yet serve similar means, depending on the world in which they exist. The human body, in the form of a brother or father, friend or lover, is also an axis mundi, enticing us to step out into unknown, liminal space and make a journey.

We've seen a range of ways that traditionally religious as well as profane spaces are set within cityscapes and landscapes, providing orientation and meaning within films, just as they do in our everyday lives. This back and forth between worlds shows us, again, film's appeal in our lives, the projected mythologies of cities and buildings and families that reflect and produce our values. Even in the contemporary city, where the religious space is burned, banished, and brushed out, the sacred specter remains in new forms. Whether the economic corporation can supply adequate rites and myths and symbols is another question.

The terrorists who flew jetliners into the twin towers of the former World Trade Center knew about the axis mundi, knew that such a striking symbol could itself be struck. If you want to induce chaos, then take out a cosmic orientation point. And if you want to show resilience, build

another tower in its place, and find in it a new axis mundi. Tuan says, "To build is a religious act, the establishment of a world in the midst of primeval disorder" (1977: 104). To this I would add, to create film in a chaotic world is a religious act, imposing order through camera frames, lighting, soundtrack, mise-en-scène, and editing. And then we wonder if all artistic acts are religious acts. From a critical perspective, this tautology leaves much to be desired. Yet, as I've been implicitly arguing throughout this book, religions need to be understood as artistic acts. Not all art is religion, but there is no religion without the artistic act of framing and selecting and the re-creative act of setting out on a journey.

PART II

DURING THE SHOW

Attractions and Distractions

4

RELIGIOUS CINEMATICS

Body, Screen, and Death

Cinema's creation myth goes something like this: On a wintry night, three days before the end of 1895, the Lumière brothers projected several films onto a wall of a dark Paris cafe. A bemused audience had gathered to see the latest in a string of imagistic inventions that emerged through the nineteenth century—from reconceived camera obscuras to the newer camera lucidas and stereoscopes, from the daguerreotype to photographic film and eventually color photographs—each offering fascinating new modes for re-creating the world. The viewers that December night were apparently not disappointed. The Lumières' films were all silent, single-reel, lasting less than a minute each, portraying everyday events of modern urban life such as workers leaving a factory, the demolition of a wall, and, most famously, a train arriving at a station. The latter was shot with the film camera mounted on a train platform, as if the cinematographer-cum-viewer were waiting for the train themself, and the action unfolds as the train moves toward the camera. In popular retellings of the initial viewing, some of the Parisians watching *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* that evening jumped from their chairs and even began to run away as the train seemingly came through the walls of the café. Early filmmaker Georges Méliès reflected on that first night: "We were open-mouthed, dumbfounded, astonished beyond words in the face of this spectacle" (Toulet 1995: 15). With this screening, and a popular retelling of the event, we are firmly in the realm of myth.

A number of scholars have attempted to demythologize these origins of cinema, particularly when the retelling smacks of a pedantic, contemporary viewpoint looking back on "those" naïve viewers in the beginning.[1] Whether or not viewers in that café actually got up from their chairs may never be known for sure, but one does not need to go any further than the local multiplex to observe the ways the audio-visual experience of film works to move viewers' bodies: audiences sit engrossed in the scenes transpiring on-screen, jumping back in their chairs at suspenseful moments, weeping at poignant scenarios acted out with a soundtrack of strings, hiding their eyes at the scary parts. There are visceral reactions to films.

To go a step further toward proving the extreme bodily responses possible among the fin-de-siècle Parisians, one merely needs to attend a contemporary screening of a 3-D film: here audiences actively reach out to grasp objects and creatures that seem to come off the screen and into the theater space. The 3-D (and 4-D) film is the latest in a series of technological inventions in film production and projection, and it takes its place among more than a century's worth of new modes of reinventing the world on film. In each of these developments one thing remains constant: the perceiving body in the screening space is an active body, perpetually in motion, like those viewers in *Cinema Paradiso* (figure 4.1). Richard

FIGURE 4.1 Still from *Cinema Paradiso*. Inside the theater there are visceral reactions to the films, from laughter to weeping.

Dyer has suggested, "The Lumières ushered in a new technology, that has become ever more elaborate, reveling in *both showing and creating the sensation of movement*." Indeed, Dyer goes on, the term *movie* "catches something of the sensation we expect when we go to the cinema" (1994: 7, emphasis added).

I have titled this chapter "religious cinematics," which means I am initially concerned with Dyer's phrase "showing and creating the sensation of movement." I take up the issue not just of the "moving picture" but also of the viewer's "moving body" and of the relations between the two. These relations have much to do with religious ritual, especially when particular film images and sounds strike the senses and cause the body to move in response to a formalized liturgy of symbolic sensations. Here I continue conversations on ritual built up previously, but I switch focus from examining cinema "Before the Show" (the subject of chapters 1–3) to cinema "During the Show" (this chapter and the next). By focusing not simply on some religious form or content *of* a film but on the bodily *responses to* film, I take seriously the formal environment of cinema, the ways the medium engages the body's sense perception, and how these are parallel to the ways religious rituals have often operated.

The first section introduces some of the theoretical, critical dimensions of a religious cinematics, how film is never merely image and/or sound but perceived in multiple ways, affecting the various senses of the human body and causing it to shudder or sob, laugh or leap. Via the body-based phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others, I chart a bodily movement that is pre- or subconscious, before or beyond rational awareness, as it behaves in the cinematic environment. Beyond intellectual and linguistic frameworks, the cinematic body begins to believe, and also to doubt.

The body becomes most firmly situated within a religious cinematics when the film viewer confronts images of death, pain, and suffering, whether in a horror flick or a 16-mm avant-garde film. Section two looks to early screenings of *The Exorcist* at Christmas season in 1973 for particular examples of cinematic bodies. Audience responses reveal the peculiar power of horror films and show how the body reacts to the fakery of blood, monsters, chainsaws, demon possessions, and dismembered body parts even when the rational mind knows it's all a put-on. The horror film "tells us that our belief in security is a delusion, that the monsters are all around us" (Prince 2004: 4), digging deep into existential territory.

The third section briefly queries how modern, industrial society has attempted to push death and the dead body out of the way, making it invisible. Within this modern context, the final section looks to Stan Brakhage's "unwatchable" silent film, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), an avant-garde, quasi-documentary about actual corpses in a morgue. The reality of these dead bodies makes the visual encounter a particularly challenging series of images to behold. In the sensual confrontation with the diegetic dead body on film, I suggest that a religious cinematics has a potential to escape its mediated confines and bring a viewing body face to face with a kind of death. As such, moving films and moving bodies merge in an experience that is deeply, if not ideally, ritualistic in its activity. A renewing function of filmic ritual emerges, ultimately turning the cinematic body toward an ethical practice of experiencing cinema, a topic that forms a central part of the next chapter.

RELIGIOUS CINEMATICS: FROM FILM TO BODY AND BACK

About the making of the avant-garde film *Wavelength* (1967), Michael Snow stated: "I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings and aesthetic ideas" (Sitney 2002: 352; see also MacDonald 1993). In response to such a statement one might immediately raise the questions: What possible "religious inkling" could be expressed in a film that for forty-five minutes does little more than slowly zoom in on a small picture from across a somewhat empty room? What does the "nervous system" have to do with it? To put it more generally, what is the nature of the relationship between the formal components of avant-garde filmmaking and religious experience? I cannot be certain if what I have to say here resembles the intents of Snow, or even Brakhage, but it provides one line of inquiry into the relation between religious ritual and the corporeal, nervous activity of experiencing the audio-visual medium of film.[2]

Like the scientific investigations of its variant spelling "kinematics," and more specifically with that of its etymological cousin "kinetics" ("The branch of dynamics which investigates the relations between the motions of bodies and the forces acting upon them" [*Oxford English Dictionary*])

religious cinematics is concerned with the human body being acted on by the audio-visual forces of film, forces that stir the body to move (see Plantinga 2009). Films operate by framing and selecting, sifting and sorting, compartmentalizing and cataloguing, as the perceiving body takes in its audio-visual impulses and impressions. To better understand this interaction, we must first break down the relation between film and body and analyze the two types of media that exist in the cinematic experience.

The first is the medium of film, in which the sounds and images of the afilmic world are recorded and projected through various apparatuses of film production. The bodies of directors, cinematographers, producers, and editors use technological mechanisms to capture or create sounds and images from the world "out there" (even if this is only the world of the animator's imagination). Sounds and images are then filtered through the processes of framing, shaping, bending, condensing, and reshaping, and varied by differences in tone, volume, light, color, frame size, film stock, computer editing programs, projector bulbs, screen resolution, and audio speakers, among other technical constraints. The result is a world that is re-created through the medium of film. We may recognize the train on the screen from our experiences in the world outside, but its structure, shape, and power have been altered through its filmic appearance. The train on the screen is both like and unlike the afilmic train. Analysis of such cinematic processes formed the bulk of the first three chapters of this book.

What is perhaps more challenging is the idea that the other side of the equation—i.e., the body—is also part of a mediated system. Sense perception is the medium of the body (Plate 2012), and the sounds and images of the film medium are engaged by bodily sense receptors, most specifically the ears and eyes. Meanwhile, important cross-sensory responses occur so that the body is ultimately *touched* and stirred to movement, just as vibrant images of cooking food in films like *The Scent of Green Papaya* (1993) or *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994) may stimulate the salivary glands and trigger taste perceptions. While the technological apparatus mediates afilmic sounds and images, bodily perceptions also mediate diegetic sounds and images, generating meaningful sensations for those in the audience. The medium of sense perception is the corollary to the medium of film. There is no such thing as cinema without both.

With the media of sense perception and film at the forefront, we are in the realm of *aesthetics*. In its etymological guise, aesthetics is the study

of that which "pertains to sense perception" (from the Greek, *aesthetikos*), and if we want to understand everything from theories of art to judgments on beauty to cultural tastes, we have to start with the body and its senses. Human sense perception performs an analogous role to that of artistic and communications media, functioning through processes of filtering, selecting, framing, forgetting, and predicting. Perception is not passive or lying dormant waiting for some impulse to strike; instead, it is active and constantly propelling the human body to action. Writing on the active nature of the visual perception of film, cognitive psychologist Jeffrey Zacks states, "Vision (as well as hearing and the other senses) exists in order to allow us to act" (2014: 169). Functioning as passageways between the world inside and the world outside, sense perception controls input and output of information and thus binds and shapes the body. In so doing bodily perception shapes and controls the abstract thoughts of the brain (see Gallagher 2005; Noë 2004). It is ultimately this sensual, mediating experience that causes the body in the theater (or wherever) to move, bringing us to cinematics.

We can see cinematics at play through the impact of filmmaking activities like editing, and we will look at other examples in the next section of this chapter. Thelma Schoonmaker has won several Academy Awards for editing and has been cutting films for Martin Scorsese since *Raging Bull* (1980). She says she and Scorsese will preview a film to audiences a dozen times, looking especially at their body language. "When you're in a movie with an audience, you can feel where a film is dragging," she said. "People start to move. They fidget." Her response then is to go back and cut the film differently, often to make shorter takes. At other times, as with *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), she kept the takes long since Scorsese wanted it that way, "to test the patience of the audience just a bit. Because that's what the whole movie is about" (Hynes 2014). The rhythms and juxtapositions of editing elicit bodily responses, and these responses are a product of our perceptual apparatus. A long take eventually makes people impatient, uncomfortable, fidgety. On one hand, we learn that a train arriving at a station on film will not hurt us; on the other, we learn physical and emotional responses to film production, knowing when to laugh, cry, scream, or be bored.

Human sense perception is trained from infancy by cultural and technological forces to categorize sights, sounds, and smells of the world,

working with an array of hardwired neurological matter. How we see, how we touch, and how we taste are all part of a social construction of reality—which isn't to say reality is solely socially constructed. But where sociologists like Peter Berger tend to stress the role of language in this process, an emphasis on aesthetics points toward a more primary locus for worldmaking: the senses of the human body (B. Meyer 2015; Plate 2014). By learning which smells and sights to privilege, which to shun, and which might make us get bored and fall asleep, we construct our worlds. And in learning (even subconsciously) what camera tilts and zooms, long takes and jump cuts, vibrant costuming, and sound effects "mean," we are able to construct our cinematic worlds. From the sense impressions that we take in from the world around us our perceptual system selects particular sounds, tastes, images, and feelings, arranging them within the reflective capacities of our body-mind, and we forget all that does not pertain to us. Most of this is largely on an subconscious level, with our rational mind having little say over the matter. However, we do make somewhat free, conscious choices about the general types of films we watch, and these choices can pave the way for a kind of perceptual cinematic training, as I note in the next chapter. From our neural pathways to our subconscious bodies to our volitional decisions, our worlds are created and maintained in a familiar way, which allows us to get along in social environments.

Ritual, then, like cinematics, engages these sensate processes and heightens the perceptual environment: "The basic feature of ritual is its power of focus," Paden states. "All ritual behavior gains its basic effectiveness by virtue of such undivided, intensified concentration and by bracketing off distraction and interference" (1994: 95–96). Rituals are condensations of cosmic powers in their ideal form, but they are also a series of framed and focused sensations that make the body move in particular ways: stand up, bow down, look left, then right, weep at the funeral, laugh at the wedding. Like film, rituals both *show and create* the sensation of movement. Through these movements, thought is produced. Body movement and emotions are not the secondary reaction to internal thinking, they are primary and generate thought itself (see Damasio 1994). These affects, as Donovan Schaefer puts it, are the "propulsive elements of experience, thought, sensation, feeling, and action that are not necessarily captured or capturable by language or self-sovereign 'consciousness'"

(2015: 23). Religious traditions have long understood organically what cognitive science is now finding through careful observation.

Over the course of human development, what emerges out of the sensuous interaction with the world is what the philosopher Merleau-Ponty calls the *aesthesiological body*, an entity in which sensation ("aesthesio-") and rational thought ("-logical") work together, and sometimes against each other. The aesthesiological body stands in contrast to a rationalized approach to perception, stemming in particular from Descartes's mode of seeing, whereby vision operates from a single-point perspective, observing the world from a stable place. Merleau-Ponty argues that Descartes, while attempting to be phenomenological, did not go far enough with his descriptions. If the body is immobile, and the object observed is likewise still, the eye can see a *measurable* thing, and the thinking subject begins to believe he or she can easily calculate and quantify, thus gaining knowledge. This, according to Merleau-Ponty, was Descartes's visual mistake—a mistake with epistemological consequences—and he counters the stillness of certainty when he states "vision is attached to movement" (1993a: 124). This statement may seem innocuous in itself, but it has important repercussions.

Vision is not something that resides in the mind, or the *cogito*, or the *ego*, a place of final assurance and knowledge that something is there and knowable. With the cinematic, aesthesiological body we must confront the enigma of "overlapping": "the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen." The "self" implied here is not the assimilating self which is assured of its beliefs, but "a self by confusion . . . a self, then, that is caught up in things" (ibid.). The whole and certain self that sees clearly is abandoned in Merleau-Ponty's writings in favor of a seeing eye that is in medias res. "I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it" (138). Though Merleau-Ponty spent little time writing about the cinema, his notions here have much to do with the cinematic interrelations of filmic image and sensing body.[3]

Because ideas are never separate from the bodies that help produce them, one of the more intriguing dimensions to Merleau-Ponty's articulation is a certain affirmation of *doubt* within epistemological language. An early essay on the painter Paul Cézanne delves into the question of uncertainty, particularly as it is manifested through the disjunction between the world as immediately sensed and the acculturated meanings

that accrue through the activities of perception. Like most of Merleau-Ponty's later writings, "Cézanne's Doubt" critiques the myth of objectivity (1993b). He shows that instead of clear distinctions between subject and object, there is what he ultimately theorized as a "chiasm," a place of intertwining, "as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand" (1967: 131). At the risk of spending too much time extrapolating Merleau-Ponty's ideas, I suggest that "doubt" is the product of the clash between the two components of the aesthesiological body, when the *aesthesio* confronts the *logical* and discrepancies emerge. There is something that is seen and experienced that is not graspable by the logical mind, and a rationalizing consciousness will never be able to make sense of it all. With the doubting, empirical subject, we have a sensing body that remains open to the world, to its nonrational ebbs and energies, and therefore is capable of moving and being moved.

It is doubt that stirs up the fidgeting, tearful, tense body that moves in front of the two dimensions of the motion picture. And it is doubt that opens the doors for the believing body to experience a larger world. For psychoanalytic film theorist Christian Metz, the subjectivity of the film viewer is ultimately split, simultaneously containing multiple perspectives and viewpoints, wavering between fact and fiction: "I shall say that behind any [filmic] fiction there is a second fiction: the diegetic events are fictional, that is the first; but everyone pretends to believe that they are true, and that is the second; there is even a third: the general refusal to admit that *somewhere in oneself* one believes they are genuinely true" (1977: 72, emphasis added). Metz's analysis could just as well be applied to the activity of religious myth and ritual: participants often rationally know the ancient story they are reenacting in their rites is fictional; meanwhile, somewhere within the self is the tinge of recognition that the story might in fact be true, and the ritualizing bodies act as if it were so.

This "somewhere in oneself," I suggest, is the sensing body in motion—that moving entity that escapes the rational mind, that stirring of the leg muscles that makes us want to run from the projected images, that corporeal impulse to bow down before a deity that we know is not somehow "above" us, that urge to outwardly sing to a supreme being that theologically already knows the depths of the heart. There is the still body of certainty, sitting smugly in its chair, naysaying the special effects, the bells

and smells. And there is an aesthetic engagement with film and with ritual through the body that believes and doubts, that gets up and moves when the upbeat music erupts and the congregation rises, that jumps in its seat when the killer emerges from the shadows.

CONFRONTING THE HORROR OF *THE EXORCIST*

The day after Christmas 1973, a new force came to town. Released on limited screens in major U.S. cities, *The Exorcist* quickly generated high box office sales, long lines, and a lot of disgust. The name above the title was William Peter Blatty, author of the 1971 bestselling novel of the same name, while William Friedkin, best known at the time for *The French Connection* (1971), directed. The film's content centers on theological topics, most especially the possession of a little girl named Regan (Linda Blair) by the Devil himself. Father Merrin (Max von Sydow), a priest full of doubts, is called on to perform an exorcism. The tagline for the film read: "Somewhere between science and superstition, there is another world. The world of darkness." In spite of the religious content throughout, I'm not going to analyze the film plot; instead, I want to point to the physical-emotional responses to it, the ways cinematic bodies were moved by the film.

By early 1974, newspapers across the United States were writing about "*The Exorcist* Phenomenon," splashing affective headlines like "Fans Line Up to Have Stomachs Turned" (*Milwaukee Journal*), "An Experience in Hysteria for Some Viewers" (*Pittsburgh Press*), "*Exorcist* Really Makes Viewers Ill, Not for Faint Hearted" (*Boston Globe*), and "*The Exorcist*: Fainting and Fleeing" (*Los Angeles Times*). A twenty-minute documentary on the cultural impact of *The Exorcist*, ostensibly from 1974, appeared on the Internet a few years ago and offers excellent sources for examining the impact of the film.[4] For the documentary, cameras stayed in the lobby and captured people walking out of the theater with hands over their mouths, shuddering, shaking their heads, crying, and talking excitedly (figure 4.2). When interviewed, frightened and freaking audience members said things like, "It makes my heart beat too fast"; "I don't know what happened, I just fainted; it was frightening"; "Probably the grossest

FIGURE 4.2 Still from a documentary on watching *The Exorcist*. Audience members often came rushing out of the screening in a frenzy, talking fast, sometimes fainting, and generally a little out of control of their own bodies.

thing I've ever seen"; and "It scared me to death." Extra security was hired at the theaters to help manage the crowds. When ushers and ticket office workers were interviewed, several made mention of the number of people throwing up and the many others who fainted. David Sheehan, a news commentator in Los Angeles, says he interviewed theater owners and confirmed that approximately a dozen people were fainting during *every* screening. At one point, the camera actually captures a woman stumbling out of the theater and falling down. A common refrain for those who watched the film *and* those working at the theaters and watching the watchers was, "I've never seen anything like it." Most who fainted or walked out with legs trembling did not go back inside, though a number did. During the screenings, random screams were reported, the kind of screams like in a Beatles concert, not even necessarily in response to a particular scene.

The Exorcist was groundbreaking in its explicit images of tormented bodies, green goopy vomit, and masturbation with a crucifix, but clearly part of the chill of it all came from the soundtrack. The filmmakers used

the sounds of pigs being driven to slaughter for the noise of the demons being exorcised, and one of the biggest shocks, frequently commented on by original film viewers, was the voice of the devil coming out of Regan's mouth. The incongruity of the sweet little girl with the grotesque sounds shocked many. (The voice was, in fact, spoken by Oscar-winning actor Mercedes McCambridge, who drank raw eggs and whiskey and chain-smoked in order to get her voice crackling and deep.) Between the sights and sounds of the film, the bodies of the audience began to move.

The entry for "horror film" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* begins with this definition: "motion picture calculated to cause intense repugnance, fear, or dread" ("Horror Film" 2010). Here is a genre in which the very definition is bound up with the affect: the film is *calculated* to shake up the audience in specific ways. The encyclopedia entry goes on to note details about the content of such films, the ways that such calculations might take place ("incidents of physical violence," "psychotic or evil characters," "terrifying monsters or malevolent animals"), but horror may be unique among film genres in that affective reception stands at the basis of its definition.

Horror films, in the broadest sense, have been around as long as Jesus films, with Georges Méliès's devil in *The Haunted Castle* (1896) and Thomas Edison's *Frankenstein* (1910) being early examples. The genre forms an important component in cinema history, not to mention contemporary life. Some have even argued that the modern horror film functions as a "rite of passage" for contemporary adolescents, analogous to the terrifying initiation rituals of various cultures around the world (Twitchell 1985). Other astute observers from religious studies have shown close links between horror and religion, often drawing on the work of Rudolph Otto, Sigmund Freud, and others to trace the mysterious, fear-inducing, uncanny nature of things sacred (Beal 2002; Cowan 2008).

With the horror film, Merleau-Ponty's aesthesiological body can be detected in the audience. Audience members in films like *The Exorcist* become "immersed" in the world of the film, and distinctions become blurry, producing the doubt that Merleau-Ponty pointed toward, in which the self is "caught up in things." The horror film spectator can attempt to sit back, detached, and logically say this is all fake (the green vomit is pea soup, the head spinning is just a doll), but the sensing body reacts on another level, the level "somewhere in oneself" that says it might be true.

Perhaps not "true" in the logical sense that it was *really* a devil-possessed child on-screen, but true in its aesthetic sensibility that goes beyond the screen to suggest that right down the street, on the second floor of a house, the incarnation of evil may be lurking. The effects of the film stick with the viewer, infiltrating the present state of being.

Writing on the horror genre, film historian Stephen Prince accounts for the paradoxical appeal of horror film, its attractions in spite of the uncomfortable feelings it produces:

> The experience of horror resides in this confrontation with uncertainty, with the "unnatural," with a violation of the ontological categories on which being and culture reside. . . . Audiences never tire of being frightened because they never stop feeling frightened about their fellow human beings and the world they collectively inhabit. What must be done to remain human? This is the great question that horror films pose, and it is a question that gets asked again and again because it can never be answered.
>
> (Prince 2004: 2–3)

Prince is giving an intellectual assessment from a logical perspective (I doubt anyone who vomited in *The Exorcist* was thinking about the "violation of ontological categories"), but his analysis offers critical approaches to horror and its relation to the cinematic body of ritual. The body's reactions to a horror film trigger intellectual questions; the sensed sounds and visions of the film, in a real sense, haunt the mind, revealing a split between logic and the aesthetic. To say that one is real and the other not is to miss the deeper operations of human life. By stirring the body through sensational sounds and images, horror film makes us doubt, eradicating the certainty of a logical self.[5]

Doubt left the theater where *The Exorcist* was screened and infiltrated afilmic reality, lingering in bodies well after audiences churned back out on the streets. Many were so thrilled to be afraid they returned for second or third viewings. Catholic priests across the United States received phone calls and visits from people who had seen the film and believed themselves to be possessed, or just needed some heavy counseling to distinguish the real and fake and gain some theological comfort. There was at least one report of a person being committed to a mental institution

after the film—which is not to say it was solely the film that drove someone to insanity (Fiske 1974). Between the religious content and affecting presentation, screenings of *The Exorcist* exhibited how thin the lines can be between religious, cinematic, and everyday worlds.

THE "REAL" DEAD BODY IN MODERN LIFE

With horror films we are in the realm of fiction. The deaths, the monsters, the demon possessions, while haunting our everyday afilmic life, nonetheless retain a certain distance from the world of the viewers. There is still a space for the logical mind to say it's all fake, the blood is not real, and the demon voice is an actor getting paid a good deal of money. These are *representations* of suffering and violence, diegetic deaths. Then again, in the afilmic reality of modern life there is also an established division between death and life, between the dead body and those left behind who must deal with the physical reality of the corpse. As Philippe Ariès concludes in his study *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, "In the modern period, death, despite the apparent continuity of themes and ritual, became challenged and was furtively pushed out of the world of familiar things" (1974: 105–6). The banishment of death is the outcome of social and philosophical currents of modernity.

The modern philosophies of Descartes and others aimed to make clear distinctions, separate subject and object, and thereby leave little room for doubt. This helped pave the way for the scientific method, with all its advances and attendant violence. Among other social and cultural actions, this meant the subjugation of the body and the hiding of its most affecting state, the corpse. All that is associated with death is to be kept, literally, out of sight in modern, civilized society, just as activities of the human body in general (its desires, lusts, and fears) were often deemed indecent and uncivil. Historian Thomas Laqueur explains it this way: "Corporal politics—making manifest the body in all its vulnerable, disarticulated, morbid aspects, in its apertures, curves, protuberances where the boundaries between self and the world are porous—is somehow indecent." Decency, like purity, is a matter of maintaining strict boundaries, and one of the most important for the functioning of modern society is

the division between death and life, manifested most succinctly in the partition between dead bodies and living bodies. Laqueur continues by quoting the great liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill on "civilization" and the seemingly necessary act of keeping certain things invisible: "In fact, it is a sign of the 'high state of civilization,' of the 'perfection of mechanical arrangements,' that so much can be kept hidden" (1992: 14; cf. Mill 1977). Where Descartes wanted to see and calculate the world, albeit from a static perspective, Mill takes the bifurcation between subject and object even further and wants to keep some objects hidden; the "high state of civilization" relies on the denial of certain images. Chief among these are images of pain, suffering, death, and the body.

Such "refinement," such new practices of seeing and not seeing, changed how death, and thus life, was understood. One consequence was that these new practices and ideas changed the ways the dead body was dealt with. Gary Laderman has extensively studied modern dealings with dead bodies and commented on crucial progressions in embalming technologies—the "restorative art"—especially after the U.S. Civil War. Funeral directors often point out the necessity for the deceased's family and friends to actually see the body of the one who has died, so presentation of the corpse is of the utmost gravity, but a sense of refinement must be maintained. The result of the embalming process is a body that is a representation itself, a dead body representing a living one. Laderman sums up the credo of many funeral directors: "The epitome of a successful funeral was one with an open casket and an embalmed body that appeared familiar and nonthreatening to the visitors" (2003: 105). The embalmed body, akin to the filmic body, *appears familiar*, though unlike the horror film it is crucial that it be nonthreatening. The embalmed body is not simply a dead body but also a representation of a living body, made up so it takes the sting away, buffers the shock of death.

Because death so challenges human meaning, purpose, and order, it has to be viewed at a distance, masked, represented, and ritualized. Indeed, some of the oldest rituals in human evolution center on death and burial. The ritual environment allows a connection to death, to acknowledge that the sister, father, or friend is no longer alive, and that we survivors will eventually meet a similar fate. A century ago Émile Durkheim noted how "[t]he foundation of mourning is the impression of a loss which the group feels when it loses one of its members. But this very impression

results in bringing individuals together. . . . Since they weep together, they hold to one another and the group is not weakened, in spite of the blow which has fallen upon it" (1915: 401). Death rituals allow a place for grief to gain expression, just as they cushion the shock of the loss, placing the death within a surviving, sensual community that touches and weeps together.

Within this modern milieu, cinema becomes an especially fertile medium through which to explore a connection to our inevitable fates. Through new technologies that break down the subject-object distance, cinema brings images of actual death and actual dead bodies into a screened space, confronting viewers with a *memento mori* (Latin: "remember that you must die") and thus challenging the living to live better. The visible confrontation with the dead body on film strikes the aesthetically perceiving body and thereby reawakens the senses (and ultimately perhaps the entire conscious system).

Cinema was built with the technological tools that emerged from Enlightenment science and that very often turned film production into a spectacle, maintaining strong divisions between subject and object (i.e., we are "here," watching, safely separated by the screen from the things "out there" in the world). Yet cinema has also shown this re-conceived world to a mass audience, eager to see new things in new ways. Thus, instead of simply maintaining a firm subject-object split, cinema has created a new perspective on the world and allowed a crossing of otherwise prohibited borders, a different way of viewing—and ultimately experiencing—material structures and events.

Conceptions and experiences of how the world works are dramatically different at the beginning of the twenty-first century than they were at the beginning of the twentieth, due in part to the influence of film. From Eadweard Muybridge's photographic experiments with bodies in motion to Dziga Vertov's reconstruction of the city in *Man with a Movie Camera* to Stanley Kubrick's reconsideration of space and technology in *2001* (1968), filmmakers have re-created the "reality" of the world, offering viewers new ways of looking at and understanding space and time, life and death. As Walter Benjamin suggested, what were once overlooked structures—"our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories"—are brought into a new focus, glimpsed from a new angle. Benjamin continues on the impact of cinematic

technologies: "With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. And just as enlargement not merely clarifies what we see indistinctly 'in any case,' but brings to light entirely new structures of matter, slow motion not only reveals familiar aspects of movements, but discloses quite unknown aspects within them" (2002: 117). By offering a vision of everyday life in an innovative, challenging way, film can change perceptions of the familiar and unfamiliar. This is not merely about seeing with a new "perception" but about the revelation of "entirely new structures of matter." Diegetic realities cut into afilmic realities, and things are not as they appear to the unaided eye (Crary 1990). Perhaps more than with any other object, this is true of the image of the dead body.

THE "REAL" DEAD BODY IN AVANT-GARDE FILM

Writing at the end of the 1970s—a decade of massive changes in cinema, with sex and violence increasingly shown on-screen—film critic Amos Vogel commented: "Now that sex is available to us in hard-core porno films, death remains the one last taboo in cinema. However ubiquitous death is—we all ultimately suffer from it—it calls into question the social order and its value systems; it attacks our mad scramble for power, our simplistic rationalism and our unacknowledged, child-like belief in immortality" (1980: 78). The confrontation with death brings about doubt, reminds us of our vulnerability, and even challenges the cosmic structures built up through our myths, rituals, and symbols. Cinema can be seen to play a vital social role here. Vogel points out a few documentary films that have tackled the topic and its "ferocious reality": Georges Franju's filming of slaughterhouses in *The Blood of the Beasts* (1949), Alain Resnais's Holocaust examination in *Night and Fog* (1956), Ahmed Rachedi's revelations of French torture in *The Twilight of the Damned* (1966), Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971), and Thierry Zeno's collection of images of death around the world in *Of the Dead* (1979). Ultimately there is an important distinction between representational images of blood, suffering, and death, as in the diegetic world of a horror film, and the images of actual dead bodies, as in a documentary. Vogel is drawing our attention to the actual images. He is conscious that these

too are ultimately framed and edited representations, but they move toward re-presentation, of making the dead body present again to a cinematic audience.

Stan Brakhage, and many in the avant-garde tradition, worked toward something of a "magical" mode of filmmaking in the twentieth century, not by going back before the Enlightenment to some pure, innocent, prescientific place but through a retrained perception, enabling a transcendent experience in and through media, not unlike Paul Cézanne before him (see MacDonald 1993). In his quasi-mystical manifesto of 1963, "Metaphors on Vision," Brakhage tells of the relations between filmmaker-as-artist and visionary holy person:

> The artist has carried the tradition of vision and visualization down through the ages. In the present time a very few have continued the process of visual perception in its deepest sense and transformed their inspirations into cinematic experiences. They create a new language made possible by the moving picture image. They create where fear before them has created the greatest necessity. They are essentially preoccupied by and deal imagistically with—birth, sex, death, and the search for God.
>
> (Brakhage 1978: 120)

Brakhage makes the link between the religious and the artistic clear: "Suppose the Vision of the saint and the artist to be an increased ability to see—vision" (120). When the medium of cinema takes afilmic reality, frames, edits, and turns it into a film watchable in one sitting, time and space are compressed and reconfigured, and the viewer experiences a new relation to the world.

The reconfiguration of space and time into a singular aesthetic experience is also a key trait of ritual, as we have seen in earlier chapters. Avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren puts it this way: "A ritual is an action distinguished from all others in that it seeks the realization of its purpose through the exercise of form. In this sense ritual is art; and even historically, all art derives from ritual. Being a film ritual, it is achieved not in spatial terms alone, but in terms of Time created by the camera" (1965a: 6). Film production records and reinvents time and space themselves,

offering new perspectives on the sacred and profane, the fabulous and mundane, life and death.

Brakhage was obsessed with "birth, sex, death, and the search for God," and in his filmic approaches to death, he turned to the search for God and the dead body simultaneously, wanting to see all of it *as if* for the first time. The dead, unmoving body is re-created through his camera, which is then sensually perceived by the cinematic body of the film viewer. One of the best examples here may be *Sirius Remembered* (1959), where, in the search to create a meaningful new symbol of death because the old inherited symbols had lost their value, Brakhage placed the body of his much-loved and now-deceased dog, Sirius, in the woods near his house and filmed the carcass at various stages of decomposition over several seasons. Rather than being the gruesome spectacle that many in modern, sanitized society might expect after such a description, the 11-minute silent film creates a loving rite of mourning and meaning-making out of death, and the relation to the mutable, fallible body. "This is an age which has no symbol for death," Brakhage claimed in the early 1960s, "other than the skull and bones of one stage of decomposition . . . and it is an age which lives in fear of total annihilation" (1978: 121). Seeking a new image of death, a way to aesthetically experience it before the abstractions of the "logical" body, Brakhage's camera intrudes into and crosses the line between death and life. "Suddenly," he recalls on the death of his dog, "I was faced in the center of my life with the death of a loved being which tended to undermine all my abstract thoughts of death" (Sitney 2002: 172). The emotional and sensual encounter with a dead body affects abstract thinking.

But nowhere is the confrontation with death more immediate than in his 1971 film, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes*. The title refers to the literal signification of "autopsy" (*auto* = self; *optic* = vision) and the film consists of thirty-one minutes of silent documentation of autopsies filmed in a Pittsburgh morgue (figure 4.3). Vogel called it "an appalling, haunting work of great purity and truth" (1980: 78). Dead bodies are cut into, cut apart, opened up, skin peeled back, organs removed and measured, until there is almost nothing left that resembles a human body. Many of Brakhage's films tend to work on an abstract, even mythical, level, rarely engaging with the historical world. This film, to the contrary, "anchors itself to the historical world relentlessly" (Nichols 1991: 79), becoming

FIGURE 4.3 Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* displays faceless coroners working on bodies like car mechanics on transmissions.

practically hyperreal. In distinction to the horror film genre, *The Act of Seeing* confronts the cinematic body with a real body, becoming strikingly dissimilar to the thousands of fictional dead bodies we see in films all the time. In fiction films, the (fictive) death is portrayed with conventional symbolic actions: usually something like a close-up of the dying victim taking his last gasp of breath while lying in his lover's arms, revealing the deep secret of his life, as the heavily stringed musical score crescendos and the camera moves on. Such a representation of death, Vivian Sobchack suggests, "does not move us to inspect it" (2004: 235). We remain sedated in our seats, understanding the necessity of death within the film's narrative; sad perhaps, but there is little offering to actually think or feel our way through death itself. However, Sobchack continues, "while death is generally experienced in fiction films as representable and often excessively visible, in documentary films it is experienced as confounding representation, as exceeding visibility" (ibid.).

Brakhage's film, by threatening to cross the subject-object divide, confounds representation as viewers catch a glimpse of im-mediacy, a point at which the media of film and sense perception seem to break down, leaving the viewer in an almost pure presence (see Kickasola 2006).

Because a majority of us moderns have seen hundreds, even thousands, more fictional, represented deaths than actual deaths, our eyes have been trained to see death in particular ways. If a display of real death then breaks into our aesthetically constructed world, our bodies do not know what to do with it. We writhe, turn our heads, feel our stomachs churn, walk away. The first time I watched Brakhage's film in a graduate student seminar on avant-garde film, about one-third of my fellow classmates walked out during the screening and never returned to class that semester. *The Act of Seeing* is excessive and resists symbolizing and narrativizing. We have the rational capacity to deal with represented death (sometimes it can even become cathartic), but we are rarely given the structures to face real death. What we are left with is our cinematic body reacting viscerally to the dead and dissected body. The moving body of the observing viewer reacts and responds to the still body that is being acted on by coroners. Doubt ensues.

The clinical approach of the coroners in the film is disturbing (they move on the bodies like a car mechanic on a transmission), but Brakhage's camera remains strikingly nonjudgmental, indeed, clinical. He is careful not to reveal the faces, and therefore the identities, of the dead bodies. Interestingly, the faces of the coroners performing the autopsies are not seen either, with two exceptions: once a custodian's face is seen as he cleans up after, and at the very end a coroner is shown in a pure-white, cadaver-free room speaking his report into a recorder—the return of the rational, linguistic order. We understand the necessity of performing autopsies, so the activity itself cannot be thought of as unethical. This is just Enlightenment science, with its removal of magic, its pure dissection, objectifying what is most feared.

Yet Brakhage's camera dissects the dissection process, unveiling something else, not unlike how anthropologist Michael Taussig considers the power of "defacement" as a mode of understanding how the despoiling of something beautiful and/or sacred can in itself become mysterious and thus reaffirm the sacred. Related to certain societies' ritual acts of unmasking, there is a hidden magic that is brought into the open, but its

liberation often requires the violence of defacing, cutting, or desecrating. The act of defacement "brings insides outside, unearthing knowledge, and revealing mystery. As it does this, however, as it spoliates and tears at tegument, it may also animate the thing defaced and the mystery revealed may become more mysterious, indicating the curious magic upon which Enlightenment, in its elimination of magic, depends" (Taussig 1999: 4). Alongside ritual practices, Taussig relates defacement to the activities of contemporary art, and a curious parallel emerges between the human body and film. He quotes from Thomas Elsaesser on editing: "It is the cut as the montage principle that makes the energy in the system visible and active" (ibid.). Editing, in ways that would have resonated with Eisenstein, is a defacing that reveals deeper powers. Taussig doesn't mention Brakhage's film, though he certainly could have, as we find the film editor and cinematographer (Brakhage was both), acting not unlike the coroner, carving up material, taking apart the seemingly seamless beauty of the "world as it is," and transgressing a natural order. But in these activities of editing and dissection, other mysteries are unearthed as energies are made visible and active.

The Enlightenment's visual technologies brought the cosmos closer. Attempting to chart the workings of the universe, new tools were created to see better and clearer, to demonstrate that it was not magic at the heart of the workings of the world but rather natural causes and effects. And yet, in these discoveries, before the rational body describes its new chartings and categories for the ways things work (before the coroner speaks his report for the record), there is the cinematic body that simply has seen the dead body, and has been moved in response.

By resituating the dead body in the midst of the cinematic experience, Brakhage's film re-creates the world. Nowhere is this truer than during the few moments where the camera gazes for lengthy periods of time on a human face that is slowly being peeled back from the top of the head to nose, allowing the coroners access to the skull and ultimately the brain (figure 4.4). The body is literally defaced, and through such activity the mysteries of the human brain—this soft spongy stuff responsible for tremendous acts of creation, invention, and destruction—is revealed. Even with all the advances of science we really know little about how this bodily substance can produce activity in the world. This gap in knowledge, then, between inhabited body and knowledge about that body, and through the

FIGURE 4.4 Brakhage's filming in a morgue shows defaced bodies, revealing the hidden depths of the human body.

process of defacement, creates a curious magic. (It is one thing to write this, but another to see it.)

Brakhage's film may be the most literal rendition of Benjamin's analogy of the medium of filmmaking as compared to the older visualizing practice of painting: "Magician is to surgeon as painter is to cinematographer. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue" (2002: 116). What is revealed is "an entirely new structure of matter," one not accessible to the social life of the status quo. From a distance, the film camera offers glimpses into another world—outer space, outer Mongolia, or the inner cavities of the body—while through its framing, editing, and projecting, film production resituates the relation between cinematic body and world, confusing them so that an intertwining between subject and object emerges. "[W]ith all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching and compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing

an object," the camera brings us to "discover the optical unconscious" (117). Through Enlightenment technologies, cinema touches a nerve.

The Act of Seeing strikes at primal fears: the fear of invasion of one's own body, the fear of contact with the dead body, the fear of death itself. In bringing insides outside, in crossing the boundaries between death and life, the viewer transgresses socially imposed divisions. Social divisions keep the pure and impure separate, and little instantiates these categories better than the socially imposed differences between life and death. Brakhage's film offers the opportunity to be "uncivilized," to reclaim a magic relation to bodies, and ultimately to one's own body, to see with one's own eyes. To be moved, not to rational knowledge but to an aesthetic, bodily response—even if that response is utter quiet—is the affective power of the religious cinematic experience.

CONCLUSION

In a postindustrial, postmodern information society, the cinematic experience supplements traditional ritual. At the turn of the twentieth century, film became a magic medium, offering the possibility to re-enchant a Western world that increasingly explained itself away with scientific rigor (Moore 1999). Soon after the invention of cinema Albert Einstein would elucidate how things in the physical world are not all they appear to be, as would Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque through artistic means, and Ferdinand de Saussure through linguistic means. Things don't appear as they are, nor do they say what they seem. Yet this gap in representation between event and the mediation of the event could be magically collapsed with film, reestablishing the mythic order.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, when the fully "magic" possibilities of cinema have somewhat subsided, film nonetheless offers a reconnection to the workings of the world via ritual means. This is especially true in relation to that most critical of religious and ritual categories, the confrontation with death. In relation to death rituals, contemporary societies are sorely *out of touch* with the body of death. Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes has stated how "most of us know little about what happens at death in what our forbears used to call 'this' world. Even the mundane

actions surrounding death—embalming a body, building a casket, cremating a corpse, adapting a funeral rite—are foreign to us. Even though media and movies traffic in death, only a few of us preplan funerals" (2000: 221). Death marks a division between this world and the next, yet we push it aside, making it arbitrary as a verbal signifier, or even "invisible" (Ariès 1987). Avant-garde and horror, each in its own way, make the invisible visible again by showing and creating movement, stirring the cinematic, sometimes doubting, body to respond.

5

THE FACE, THE CLOSE-UP, AND ETHICS

Face. Typeface. Rock face. Face of a wave. In your face. Deface. Interface. Face off. Face down. Losing face. Two-faced. Egg on my face. Feed your face. Put on a good face. Flying in the face of. Façade. Face of the deep. Face of the waters. Faces of cards and clocks. Facing death. Facing fears. Facing an uncertain future. Vis-à-vis.

Our language is littered with the face, this primal and primary place of aesthetic, ethical, and religious experience. The visage permeates the metaphors of our conversations, especially when that language describes human social interactions and even when metaphorical descriptions work to anthropomorphize nonliving objects (face of a rock, water, wave, card, clock, future). Giving an object a face lets us engage it, making it sensually, consciously, and linguistically accessible.

Like all metaphors, there is a bodily basis to the verbal language, and the widespread use of facial terminology shows how consequential the human countenance is. Its gravity is summoned by the late, prolific, and insightful neurologist Oliver Sacks, who himself had congenital prosopagnosia, the inability to recognize faces. He starts off an essay with the following paragraph, worth quoting at length for its summation of the role of faces in social life:

> It is with our faces that we face the world, from the moment of birth to the moment of death. Our age and our gender are printed on our faces.

> Our emotions, the open and instinctive emotions that Darwin wrote about, as well as the hidden or repressed ones that Freud wrote about, are displayed on our faces, along with our thoughts and intentions. Though we may admire arms and legs, breasts and buttocks, it is the face, first and last, that is judged "beautiful" in an aesthetic sense, "fine" or "distinguished" in a moral or intellectual sense. And, crucially, it is by our faces that we can be recognized as individuals. Our faces bear the stamp of our experiences and our character; at forty, it is said, a man has the face he deserves.
>
> (Sacks 2010: 36)

We are neurobiologically wired to look at faces, to make faces, and to connect with others through our faces. Cultural practices like filmmaking and ritualizing reaffirm the face-to-face encounters but also put twists in the wiring, as we learn to distinguish between faces and the moods they reveal, their symbolic signaling of comfort, harm, or power. Our bodies learn how best to respond, whether it be fighting or fleeing, worship or a smile.

The last chapter cleared a space for exploring the relations between bodies and film, producing a cinematics between moving film image and moving, sensing body. Here we zoom in one level to locate the place of the face within that cinematic structure, to see how images of faces on-screen produce effects in the bodies, and thus also the emotions, of the audio-visual audience. Particularly when the cinematographic technique of the close-up is used, the movie screen functions not unlike the icons of religious traditions.

As noted in cognitive studies of human development, and as will be developed in the first section below, the earliest infant communications occur through sense perceptions involving the body, the face, and the eyes. One of the first connections infants make with the world is via a *mutual gaze*, described by philosopher Mark Johnson as "a primordial form of human intersubjectivity, a form of shared meaning and communicative intention" (2007: 38). Briefly exploring some cognitive dimensions of faces in human evolution, we will see how the face is situated within a larger human story. The second section shows how the face-to-face encounter is developed in religious traditions through the frontal visual engagement with icons, as ritualized devotion utilizes the power

of the mutual gaze. The following section compares ritualistic practice with the cinematic use of close-ups as larger-than-life faces of actors on screen capture our attention and transpose our moving bodies into a relationship with the characters in the diegetic world of the film. The audience is stirred to mimic the faces and bodies of those on-screen, crossing the screened divide between diegetic and afilmic worlds.

What is opened up via such encounters with the face of the other, to use the language of the religio-ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, is an ethical challenge to cinematic bodies. The final section outlines some of the ways this occurs. In the sensual, face-to-face meeting, an ethical response is elicited through the same audio-visual technologies that produce disgust, fear, terror, and laughter. Through film the face and body of the other become something supremely real; therefore, I argue, we need to turn our attention to particular kinds of films that demonstrate faces of diverse races, classes, ethnicities, and genders in productive ways.

THE BIOLOGY OF THE FACE

Evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould once demonstrated how Mickey Mouse changed appearances through the years (figure 5.1). Defying the effects of age as only an animated mouse can, Mickey began looking younger. From his first incarnations as "Steamboat Willie" (when Mickey was a mischievous little mouse and animation was meant for adults) to later scenes in the 1970s (when Mickey's audience was children), his head and eyes got bigger. Gould examined biological studies that show how the shapes and relative sizes of eyes and heads of developing humans change over time. He then made his own measurements of images of Mickey from *Steamboat Willie* (1928) to *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (1947) to *The New Mickey Mouse Club* (1977–79) to argue that Mickey's appearance changed from a grown up physiognomy to a juvenile one. (The fact that Mickey is an animated mouse and not a human is not really the point here.)

There are strong reasons for this evolution, whether or not Disney animators were conscious of the fact. Drawing on the work of Korand Lorenz, Gould suggests how "[w]hen we see a living creature with babyish features, we feel an automatic surge of disarming tenderness" (1980: 101).

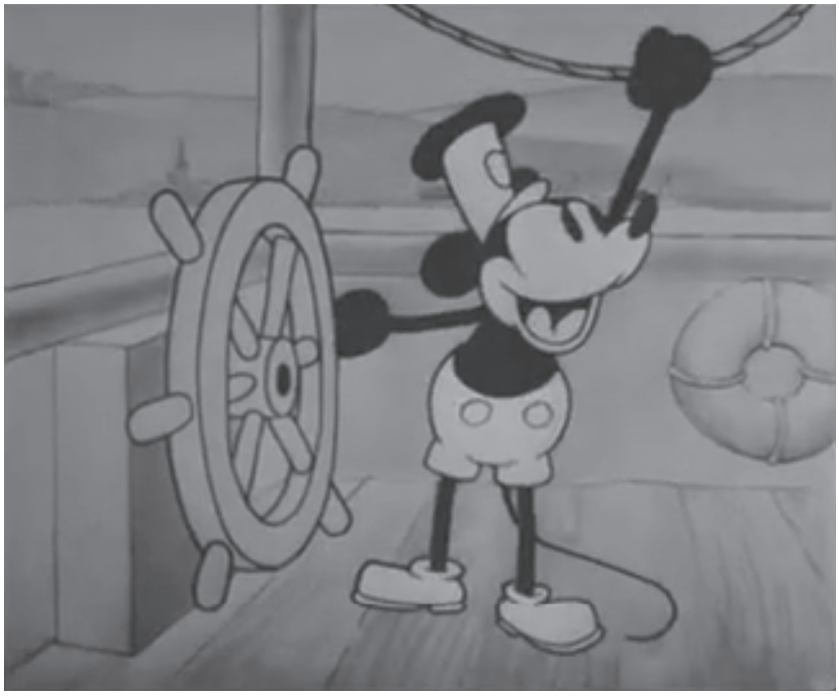

FIGURE 5.1 Still from *Steamboat Willy*, before "Mickey Mouse" existed, and he still had relatively small eyes.

These babyish features include large eyes, bulging craniums, and retreating chins, "abstract features of human childhood [that] elicit powerful emotional responses in us, even when they occur in other animals" (104). We humans have evolved to take care of our young, and our aesthetic responses have also adapted; our body moves in response to images of young faces. Disney animators and stuffed-animal manufacturers alike have understood this emotional impulse and put it to work in their designs to sell products.

Shifting from a scientific to an artistic perspective, comic book creator Scott McCloud has theorized on the power of comics and cartoons like Mickey Mouse, asking why and how such simple forms can be so popular around the world. At one point McCloud discusses "cartooning as a form of *amplification through simplification*. . . . By stripping down an

image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (1993: 30, emphasis added). Cartoons, comics, and animated films work because they draw on the kinds of face-oriented biological structures that Gould pointed to: we see faces in the clouds, in cereal bowls, or on objects around the house, and the ubiquitous form of the simplified face is behind the evocative power of emoticons like :) or ;).[1] McCloud says that the abstracted simplicity of a cartoon face like the smiley face ☺, which is nothing more than a round circle with two dots and a line, allows us to connect with the comic world.

Ultimately, McCloud argues, the simplified abstraction of comics and cartoons is potentially universal because we can project our own identities onto the face. This is probably true to an extent, but considering the psychological centrality of the mutual gaze and the social significance of the face-to-face encounter, we also must consider that the simplified face is potentially symbolic of *another* person, just as the large eyes of Mickey Mouse or the rotund faces of Hayao Miyazaki's young heroines, or actual human children, elicit emotional responses from us more-or-less logical adults. Self-centered as we may be, we have also evolved to respond to others, and facial recognition is key to our connections. So we also project the image of *others* onto simplified forms, seeing Elvis in the clouds or Jesus in a piece of toast, or we feel tenderness toward an animated animal (Guthrie 1993). Visions of natural and supernatural others appear to people in afilmic and diegetic reality alike and have been extolled (e.g., *The Song of Bernadette* [1943]) as well as parodied endlessly (Jean-Luc Godard's *Hail Mary* [1985]).

Some of the first recognizable images that children draw are of people, and especially of faces. This creative activity is so common that in 1926 University of Minnesota psychologist Florence Goodenough used children's drawings as the basis of a straightforward way to measure intelligence in children, developing the "Draw-A-Person" test. It usually took less than ten minutes, requiring only pencil and paper, and it turned out to correspond moderately well with lengthier, comprehensive IQ tests, though it fell out of practice by the 1970s. Like most tests designed to evaluate human maturity and progress, it is not without problems and has severe limits as a marker of a child's intellectual or emotional intelligence. But what is interesting is how, in example after example, the earliest drawings of a "person" are little more than a face, a round circle with a couple

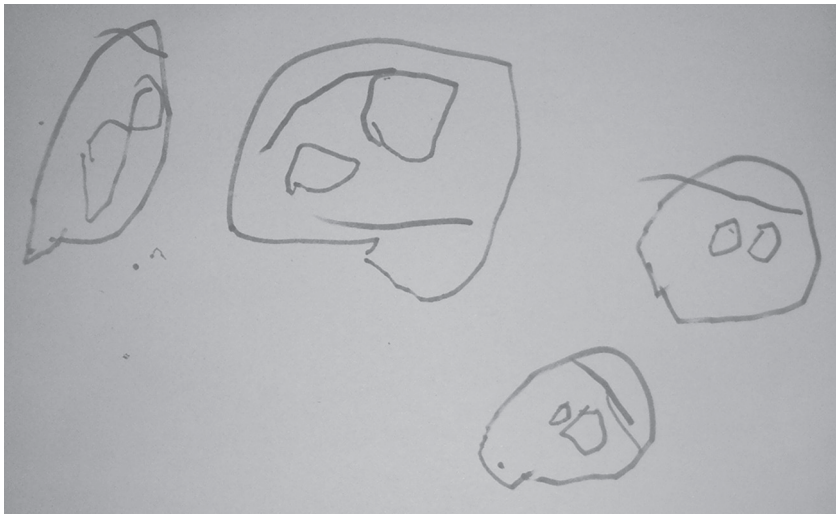

FIGURE 5.2 Drawing of her "family," by the three-year-old daughter of the author. Photo by S. Brent Plate.

dots and lines in it. My own daughter's drawing of her "family," done around age three (figure 5.2), shows not only the simplicity of the faces but also the "amplification through simplification" of the entire family (mama, papa, sister, herself) turned into faces. The family is simplified into four round circles with dots and lines. When children mature they begin to add body parts, sometimes just straight lines projecting out of the face, with no torso, and eventually full torsos and filled-in details like fingers. From the earliest "mutual gaze" to the creative output of young children, the face is a foundational feature of human social life.

An award-winning essay by neurobiologist Doris Tsao provides some neurological evidence for the crucial place of the face in human life and anatomy, reporting on studies that partially support McCloud's simplification thesis. Her lab investigated how a group of cells in the frontal lobe of macaque monkeys are singularly programmed to respond to faces, and only to faces. These "face-only cells" are located at a couple regions of the monkey's brain, suggesting that the human brain probably has similar cells devoted solely to face perception. Through fMRI techniques Tsao's results "show that we can understand face cells: Each cell acts as a set of

face-specific rulers, measuring faces along multiple distinct dimensions—vertical, horizontal, and round shapes primarily" (2006: 73). She identified single cells in the brain that have as their sole function the recognition of faces—most neurons are multitaskers, involved with a number of brain functions. Tsao's work, along with that of other neurobiologists, begins to show the sheer amount of brainpower devoted to recognizing, identifying, and classifying the faces of others. Significantly, too, the cells in the macaque brain did not respond to images of everyday objects, hands, or even entire bodies but did slightly respond to images of apples and clocks, both with round features. Because faces are so important, it would seem, round shapes also catch the visual attention of many of us primates.

Even more important for visual perception are the eyes—round shapes (eyes) within round shapes (faces)—and social connections between people often hinge on eyes meeting eyes.[2] Psychological experiments have shown again and again how infants connect with their caretakers through a mutual gaze, and indeed from a very early age babies show a preference for looking at those who look back at them and tend to ignore those who don't. One study documented one-month-old babies and found that 25 percent of their waking hours were spent exposed to faces (Sugden, Mohamed-Ali, and Moulson 2014). In child development, attention to the eyes of others "can provide a powerful means for learning about both the external environment and the internal states of others," and "[i]n the absence of any hostile or negative cues, mutual eye contact is one of the main markers of friendship" (Nurmsool, Einav, and Hood 2012: 417; cf. Johnson 2007). While there are many other contextual markers that provide information about the status of social relationships (smiles, frowns, blushing cheeks, vocalizations, body posture), there is little question that a mutual gaze—looking and simultaneously being looked at—establishes powerful social bonds. Social structures are constructed through such sensual encounters, and inabilities to process and recognize faces have been cognitively linked to patients with Alzheimer's, autism, schizophrenia, and other conditions (Baron-Cohen 1995). Facial recognition, as we've seen in suspense and sci-fi films like *A View to a Kill* (1985) and *Minority Report* (2002), is the stuff of robots and computer intelligence, but it's also hardwired into the biosocial matter of *Homo sapiens*.

Then again, it is also critical to note that studies of facial expression show how much the perception of faces relies on learned processes. The

maturation of the individual, alongside cultural differences in the ways emotional states are interpreted, contributes to differences in the identification of emotions through faces. Such identifications are not universal. One group of cognitive psychologists showed how there were key differences between how "Western Caucasians" and "East Asians" interpreted facial expressions of emotion. They conclude that "these once biologically hardwired and universal signals have been molded by the diverse social ideologies and practices of the cultural groups who use them for social communication" (Jack et al. 2012: 7242). There is biologically inherited matter that makes up our bodies, including our brains and faces, but there also are sociocultural forces that allow us to perceive and interpret, and thus find our place among our own communal collectives. Key among these social cues are the faces of others, seen in our mothers and our media alike, which teach us to see and then to respond by moving our lips, tensing precise muscles around our eyes, loosening our jaw, and other nonverbal gestures that signal our inner state in outer ways, visible to others.

I have taken time, though there's plenty more to say about this vast field, to describe some of relevant biological studies that undergird the importance of faces in human life and the ways that we learn to perceptually interpret the world. With these cognitive studies in the foreground, I turn to the sensual activity of devotion, showing the place and function of faces within religion and cinema. This continues the conversation on "cinematics" developed in the previous chapter, as our interest is in the function of bodily sense perception in the construction and maintenance of religious worlds. Religious and cinematic experiences occur in and through the body, and in and through the semiporous sense organs that regulate borders between the self and the other.

THE FACES OF RELIGION

The cognitive importance of face perception suggests several noteworthy things in a study of visual images used across religious traditions. Most significantly, it speaks to the power of frontality in images and icons, how images of faces *look back* at viewers and thereby establish a relationship between deities and devotees.

Diana Eck describes this in the religious activity of *darshan*: "The central act of Hindu worship, from the point of view of the lay person, is to stand in the presence of the deity and to behold the image with one's own eye, to see and be seen by the deity. . . . The prominence of the eyes of Hindu divine images also reminds us that it is not only the worshiper who sees the deity, but the deity sees the worshiper as well. The contact between devotee and deity is exchanged through the eyes" (1998: 3). Across India, this devotional gaze occurs in temples, as well as at home prayer niches, makeshift shrines at bus stops, and shops in small villages and large cities. Key to the devotional engagement with many of the divine images (*murti*) is that the iconic faces are revealed and thus offer blessings. The icons are often adorned with clothing, flowers, and jewelry, but the face generally remains exposed, allowing visual, and sometimes tactile, interaction. Even the aniconic Shiva linga, a popular abstract sculptural form used in devotional ceremonies, often portrays a face, either carved into it, or painted on (figure 5.3).

The mutual gaze between deity and devotee that occurs through *darshan* also takes place in front of television and film screens; the deities are not beholden to particular media. Philip Lutgendorf has discussed ways the megahit film *Jai Santoshi Maa* (1975) uses *darshanic* exchange both *within* the film's diegetic world through a shot-reverse-shot structure (figure 5.4), but also as audiences came to the theater and performed acts of *puja* (devotional offerings) in front of the screen (2003; see also McLain 2016). Mythical and devotional films of South Asia (Dwyer 2006) carry the iconic devotion of *darshan* into cinematic space, where the faces of the deities and saints become central to eliciting audience interaction. This is true even as the audiences rationally *know* it is an actor playing the role of goddess or saint, but they find that the countenance of the divine is a powerful force that aesthetically reaches through the screen into afilmic reality.

In the Christian context the iconic tradition likewise emphasizes the faces, and eyes, of the holy figures being depicted. There is a spiritual energy manifested through visual contact, such that authorities have feared icons because the power they reveal is not easily controlled. These concerns came to a head in the "iconoclastic controversy" of the eighth and ninth centuries in Europe, a wide-ranging theological debate over the role of images in religious life. Theological historian Margaret Miles

FIGURE 5.3 Shiva linga at Jambukesvara temple in Srirangam. Photo by Ilya Mauter. Used under Creative Commons license 3.0.

FIGURE 5.4A–B A shot reverse shot in *Jai Santoshi Maa*. The top shows a medium shot of Santoshi Maa seated at her altar. The next shot reverses this and peers out from over the shoulder of Santoshi Maa to view the devotees making offerings to her, cinematographically completing the *darshanic* gaze.

has argued that the controversy is linked to the ways images emphasized the eyes: "An increment of viewer engagement, and thus of potential for worship of the icon itself, was inaugurated by the frontal presentation of holy figures. In frontal presentation, the icon's large eyes held the worshipper's gaze, encouraging devotion to the icon rather than to its prototype" (1998: 165). Like the primary mutual gaze between infant and caregiver, Christian devotional encounters with icons privilege a face-to-face meeting. And as with Hindu *darshan*, multiple senses are engaged in the overall devotional practice. I am not intending to diminish those other elements, only to locate the important place of the face and the eyes within the multisensual practices (see Pentcheva on *poikilia*, 2010: 143ff).

Iconoclasm has also occurred on the film screen, in a way that indirectly indicates the power of the face. In 1961 the big-budget *King of Kings* was released, directed by Nicolas Ray, director of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), starring James Dean. *King of Kings* was a box-office flop and critical failure, but one thing it did was bring the face of Jesus back to the screen after its banishment with the institution of the Motion Picture Production Code, implemented in 1930 (Black 1996; Reinhartz 2009). Over three decades the Production Code cracked down on filmic displays of sex, drug use, criminality, and violence; it also included restrictions on depictions of miscegenation, "lustful kissing" (on which more below), and "ridicule of the clergy." Overall, the principles of the code, eventually backed by the Catholic Legion of Decency, prohibited a film from "lowering the moral standards of those who see it." To its designers' credit, the code actually acknowledged the power of the cinema in the afilmic lives of people (in contrast to dismissals from those who continue to argue that it's all "just entertainment"). Intriguingly, one of the effects of the code was to banish the figure of Jesus, as somewhere in the midst of the rhetoric it was believed that any filmic images would profane the sacred figure. As a result, from Cecil B. DeMille's *The King of Kings* in 1927—just before the Production Code was enacted—until the 1961 release of Ray's film—when the code had lost much of its influence—there were no major motion pictures about the life of Jesus.[3] Some well-attended films did have Jesus as a character, but they only portrayed his hands or gave a view of him from behind, never showing the full body or face (e.g., *Quo Vadis* [1951], *The Robe* [1953], *Ben-Hur* [1959], figure 5.5). Perhaps it is significant that *King of Kings* was released at the start of the 1960s, a decade that

FIGURE 5.5 Jesus is a character in *Ben-Hur*, but neither his full body nor his face is ever depicted. Instead, under the Production Code, only the hand of Jesus could be portrayed, here reaching out to Judah Ben-Hur.

FIGURE 5.6 Jeffrey Hunter as Jesus in *King of Kings* (1961). It was the first facial depiction of Jesus in over thirty years, and Hunter's visage became an iconic vision of Jesus in film.

turned many social mores upside down, bringing a more humanized Jesus to the screen. Indeed, the face of actor Jeffrey Hunter, with his vibrantly blue eyes, has become one of the most iconic images of Jesus in contemporary times (figure 5.6). And, particularly because of his blue eyes, his visage has also become a point of critique for those wanting a more racially and historically correct image of Jesus. The impact of the face extends from creation to critique.

Mickey Mouse and animated characters, as well as images of Shiva and Jesus, are often portrayed with large faces and large eyes, and they are positioned to be seen face-first. From three-dimensional icons to moving picture images, the power of the face has been exploited to stir audiences to action, to get the body moving. The "presence" invoked through frontally facing icons—at the altar and on-screen—is both praised and feared because it harkens back to prelinguistic, primordial forms of human meaning-making, and religious authorities again and again have hedged such images through legal restrictions, linguistic restraints, as well as iconoclasms. Encounters with the face, particularly in religious settings, can transport viewers to a transcendent realm "beyond," but perhaps they are always also pointing "before," before language, before anyone makes propositional meaning, back to a mutual gaze with one's first love.

THE FACES OF CINEMA

In 1896, Thomas Edison recorded and then projected a film of a man and a woman kissing, face-to-face, lips-on-lips (figure 5.7). The couple was clothed up to the neck, and by contemporary cinematic standards there was nothing lurid about the physicality of the kiss. Nonetheless, the fifteen-second scene, the first-ever cinematic kiss, was enough to cause consternation in journalists' opinion pieces and preachers' sermons of the time. (And since there was a prolonged lip-on-lip engagement, there's no doubt it would have been censored by the Production Code standards forty years later, nor would it have made Father Adelfio's cut in *Cinema Paradiso*!) The original "Kiss" was actually a restaged scene from a New York musical called *The Widow Jones*, but the film's controversy had much to do with the close-up, tightly framed, and projected quality of the kiss itself, and the ways the new medium challenged old views of the world.

The newspaper *New York World* had set up the staged scene and published a full-page article on it, stating: "For the first time in the history of the world it is possible to see what a kiss looks like. . . . The real kiss is a revelation. The idea of a kinetoscopic kiss has unlimited possibilities" (Williams 2006: 290). Visceral reactions to the kiss were quite strong, including that of painter John Sloan, who commented: "When

FIGURE 5.7 Still from Thomas Edison's *The Kiss*.

only life-size it was pronounced beastly. But that was nothing to the present sight. Magnified to Gargantuan proportions and repeated . . . it is absolutely disgusting. . . . Such things call for police interference" (Cone 2006). Retrospectively, contemporary film scholar Linda Williams suggests that with each "new media" technology, whether the printing press or lithography or networked computers, we learn about the lived world—including sex—in new ways. Edison's film, Williams says, was cinema's first sex act (2006).[4]

The power of the filmed kiss derives from at least two sources, both specific to the cinematic medium. First, in the anatomizing of the body and its movements the camera is able to frame, focus, and thereby recreate the human body and the human world, topics we have seen in previous chapters. But second, as the John Sloan quote indicates, there is something of the gargantuan proportion, the larger-than-life image, that

confronts us. Both of these qualities are bound up with what came to be called the "close-up."

One hundred years ago, Harvard psychologist Hugo Münsterberg got interested in the new medium of the moving pictures, and how this unprecedented conveyor of reality shaped its audiences. For Münsterberg, the moving picture became a unique art form, separate from theater and literature, chiefly because it focused the audience's sensual attention in new ways. He dealt with the aesthetics of film form, finding some parallels with theater, but there was one point at which the movies differentiate themselves. He puts the difference this way: "That one nervous hand which feverishly grasps the deadly weapon can suddenly for the space of a breath or two become *enlarged and be alone visible on the screen*, while everything else has really faded into darkness" (Münsterberg 1916: 87, emphasis added). What he saw as ultimately unique in the dark cinematic space was not so much the movement of the picture, though that was part of it, but the close framing, the enlargements, and the ways the gargantuan proportions capture our perceptual focus. (Looking back to the beginning of chapter 2, recall it was the close-up of the gun in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* that gave the clue that not all was right with the world.) "The close-up has objectified in our world of perception our mental act of attention and by it has furnished art with a means which far transcends the power of any theater stage" (87–88). And as actors became more and more like demigods, close-ups of the face allowed audiences to step into another reality, as if through a looking glass.

Through the cinematic close-up the audience's senses are focused, bringing them face-to-face with another body, and hence another world. Film theorists for the next several decades became enamored of such worldmaking processes. Béla Balázs's 1924 *Visible Man* notes how "film calls for a subtlety and assurance in depicting facial expressions of which actors who just appear on the stage can only dream. In close-ups every wrinkle becomes a crucial element of character and every twitch of a muscle testifies to a pathos that signals great inner events" (2010: 37). In 1957, still speaking with some of the mythical wonderment of the big screen, Roland Barthes extolled the face of Greta Garbo: "Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented

a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced" (Barthes 1972: 56). And in 1960, Siegfried Kracauer published his influential *Theory of Film*, highlighting the spatial significance of the larger-than-life images and the ways in which the face is the pivot that offers a re-creation of the world: "Any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before" (1997: 48).

Critics repeatedly remark on the dreamlike quality of the close-up of the face, how it allures spectators and even becomes something other than what we thought of as a face: a twitch signals a great event, looking at it is like drinking a love potion, and instead of eyes we find lakes and craters. The unmediated face of our family members is utterly familiar and appealing to us, but cinema, like religious iconography before it, turns the face into something other, something awe-inspiring and tinged with inaccessibility. In this push-pull tension we begin to sense something of a sacred otherness. More recently, *New York Times* film critic A. O. Scott (2014) brought this point home:

> The camera adores the human face. The apotheosis of the cinematic art, the point at which it has been said (by wiser critics than I) to approach the condition of holiness, is the close-up, which endows an individual visage with aesthetic dignity and ontological gravity. The great movie stars are not necessarily the most talented actors, or even the best-looking human beings, but rather those whose eyes, mouths and cheekbones compel attention when rendered in two dimensions. Their magic is in their singularity.

The face in close-up reaches out across the screened divide between diegetic world and audience world, performing magic on the sensual, rapt attention of those watching, not unlike the functions of iconic images of Jesus and Mary, Shiva and Parvati, Avalokitesvara and Maitreya, Shirdi Sai Baba and Amadou Bamba (see Eck 1998; Green 2014; Morgan 2005; Roberts and Roberts 2003; Whalen-Bridge and Storhoff 2014).

MIRRORING THE SCREEN

Cinema privileges, indeed is built upon, the eye and the ear. To see a close-up of a filmed face, and all its volcanic craters and protuberances, is not to kiss it. Yet here again the boundaries between afilmic life and diegetic realities on screen are more porous than at first believed. In his brief survey of cinematic kissing, from Edison on up to the present, Scott (2014) suggests, "Cinema may not have invented kissing, but I suspect that over the course of the 20th century, movies helped make it more essential. . . . [Movies] established a glamorous iconography and an elegant choreography for an experience that, in real life, is frequently sloppy, clumsy and less than perfectly graceful." We can't even kiss these days without our labial actions being compared to the big-screen smooches. But the thing about a screened kiss, as Scott insightfully continues, is that it can't be faked. We know the horror film is filled with fake blood and fake dismembered body parts; we know the costumes of the period drama are all made up; we know Godzilla is a guy in a rubber suit; and you actually can't see the Eiffel Tower from every window in Paris. But a kiss is real. They are often clichéd (recall Neo and Trinity from chapter 1), and we know the bodies are "acting," but apart from the CGI versions, a screened kiss means two bodies are engaging in an intimate act, face-to-face. And that is something that triggers an emotional response on the part of the audience.

The faces and bodies in the audience mirror the large-scale faces and bodies, emotions and activities, on-screen, a widespread occurrence that has piqued the curiosity of contemporary cognitive scientists, though Münsterberg was already pointing in that direction a century ago. He saw this type of reflective activity at play in the movies and ultimately found its power there: "Our imitation of the emotions which we see expressed brings vividness and affective tone into our grasping of the [movie's] action. . . . The visual perception of the various forms of expression of these emotions fuses in our mind with the conscious awareness of the emotion expressed; we feel as if we were directly seeing and observing the emotion itself" (Münsterberg 1916: 123–24). Films move us to tears and laughter and fear, even though it's all fake. When we watch and listen to events on screen, our body moves in response, whether the scene

being acted out is a love scene or horror scene. We cringe, cry, laugh, and wonder just as we notice those on-screen doing the same thing.

It doesn't take cognitive scientists to notice how emotions are almost contagious, but they have made advances in figuring out why this is so (see Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994). Other studies indicate that, against conventional wisdom, external bodily movements and sensations can stimulate (if not produce) emotions, not just the other way around. One study showed how smiling can make people happier and more positive, even if the "smile" is forced by the physical act of holding a pen in the mouth between clenched teeth (Wenner 2009; cf. Adelmann and Zajonc 1989). Our external actions can drive our internal states of emotion. Jeffrey Zacks, a cognitive psychologist with a strong interest in film, wrote a book-length study analyzing the effect of film form from a cognitive science perspective. Key to his argument is the presence of a mirror system within the body-brain through which we see others doing a task or expressing an emotion and we do likewise. The presence of mirror neurons and the "mirror system" in general has been theorized about for several years; it's an evolutionary trait that has helped us acquire new skills, learn from others, and ultimately become empathetic. Cinema, Zacks argues, hijacks this engrained ability and turns it for its own purposes: we end up paying money to see something that makes us weep and laugh and panic. In so doing, cinema, and art and literature in general, imbricates its worlds within our memories and helps to build perceptual models in our body-brains that enable us to psychologically and physically navigate our social and religious existence. Even if fictional, the world on-screen changes our world offscreen.

There is a caveat: "The more you find yourself lost in a good book or movie, the less able you are to sort out fact from fiction. . . . The more you are transported, the harder you have to work to resist the influence of the fictional world on your beliefs and attitudes" (Zacks 2014: 108). Which doesn't mean we should live without fiction, without large faces on screens, nor can we. Indeed, according to other evolutionary accounts, it is fiction that has allowed us to evolve as far as we have. As one recent telling by Yuvah Noah Harari bluntly puts it, "The real difference between us and chimpanzees is the *mythical* glue that binds together large numbers of individuals, families and groups. This glue has made us the masters of creation" (2015: 38, emphasis added). We became human because we could tell,

perform, and believe in myths, in the fictional work of the imagination. And because we developed the ability to mimic what we perceive, we have been able to suture ourselves into other worlds. Myths supply a binding story that connects great groups of people, allowing them to work, fight, and love together in ways other primates and hominoid species have not been able to do. All of which shows deep affinity for the power of rituals that are connected with the myths: even if the participants in the rituals do not "believe," they still go through motions that demonstrate, among other things, their commitment to the collective.

What Harari doesn't account for is audio-visual fictions. He focuses on verbal narrative forms. But I'd say that what we *Homo sapiens* really use and need are sensual fictions, myths that flesh out our imaginations. Because of the audio-visual fictions of performance, ritual, and cinema we can also think "what if?" and feel our body in other worlds, and we can share that feeling alongside others. (In one strong sense James Cameron's *Avatar* [2009] was "about" the experience of cinema: we the audience enter the world on-screen as avatars, just as Jake Sully enters the Na'vi body.) As the film projector projects worlds, so we humans can project our once and future worlds with their creative impulses, loves, fears, and desires, mimicking the screen. This is what metaphorical language allows, but it also exists in sensual, affective forms that are not easily narrativized: the scent of green papaya, the face of Garbo, the first glimpse of the monster from the depths. Such effects are deeply bound up with myth, but we need to get beyond the idea that myth is just a collection of words that are told or written. Myth is embodied. This is clearly true for cinematic mythologies, and by looking at the effect of cinema in the present, we might rethink our understandings of myths and their transmissions in the past to find not some words on paper or decipherable markings on a wall but traces of sensual engagement.

It is important to be able to separate fact and fiction (just because I was affected by *The Exorcist* doesn't mean I am possessed by a demon), but it is also important that the cinematic experience centers on civil, perhaps even "good," fictions. This mythical glue is powerful, and life and death hinge on it. Garbage in, garbage out, as the old saying goes, and if the films we watch are garbage, our mirror system will be stimulated to produce garbage. For this reason, I argue, a critical intervention into the mechanisms of both religion and cinema is essential to ethical living in the modern world.

CINEMATIC ETHICS

Ultimately, the centrality of the face in the religious and cinematic aspects of human life, along with our evolved abilities to mimic other people and be changed in the process, is part of what provides a basis for cinematic ethics. With the mirroring system, cinematics takes a new tack, moving us toward the emotional-based activity of empathy. In the last chapter I discussed ways moving pictures meet the moving bodies of the spectators. The examples there had to do with images that repulsed and pushed back against the cinematic body—even as we return to watch and are repelled again and again. Moving in the other direction, we talk about films that "draw us in" or keep us on the "edge of our seat." One way or another, the cinematic body moves in response to the screened world.

Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas placed the experience with the other at the core of ethics, and it was the *face* of the other that compelled ethical action: "Even when I shall have linked the Other to myself with the conjunction 'and' the Other continues to face me, to reveal himself in his face. . . . Reflection can, to be sure, become aware of this face-to-face, but the 'unnatural' position of reflection is not an accident in the life of consciousness. It involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in face of the other and under his authority" (1969: 80–81). Not least on account of the infant's primary gaze, the face remains at the core of existence. Levinas was clear that we cannot reduce the other to something like ourselves, behaving well because the other is *like* us. Instead, there is a radical difference in the other that confronts us and always challenges our own sense of being whole, calls us into question, keeps us in doubt. There is no Cartesian *cogito* at the base of being ("I think, therefore I am"); rather, it is a confrontation with another that stands before everything. In distinction to the existentialist philosophy of his time, a key element of Levinas's philosophical schema is that ethics precedes ontology: our very selves, the state of *being* itself, rely on something other than our selves, something that demands we respond to it. We are not independent, self-authorizing beings but are made up from our relation to others, beholden to the ethical activities of treating the other well.

Other scholars have worked out Levinas's ethics in relation to film in more detail, even noting how the philosopher influenced brotherly

Belgian filmmakers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne and how their cinematography enacts a Levinasian encounter (Cooper 2006, 2007). I want to do something perhaps a little simpler and take Levinas's suggestive language about the face-to-face encounter and think about this through cinematic close-ups and the filmic face of the other. There isn't the space for a full working-out of this schema, but I want to briefly create an addendum to Levinas's ethics. While Levinas's thought has been taken to some extremes of abstract thinking, to the point where his central image of the face of the other is only imagined metaphorically, it is important to come back to the aesthetics of the face-to-face encounter itself. Levinas wrote against "aesthetics" and had little time for art and cinema,[5] but if understood in its materialist guise his philosophy seems to demonstrate a significant way that aesthetics contributes to such ethics. Indeed, we might rethink the manner in which the visual, material encounter with the face is actually an aesthetic encounter, not just a metaphor. Prior to the rational activity of visual categorization (especially regarding the race, ethnicity, and gender discernible in the other's face), and prior to the other that speaks, is an aesthetic experience: the other is seen and heard, even smelled and touched. Sensually understood, aesthetics precedes ethics.

In the previous section I quoted from film theorists on the power of the filmic close-up. Here, I turn to contemporary filmmaker and theorist David MacDougall, who pushes this idea in directions that resonate with Levinas's ethics. He notes the presence of facial close-ups in European portraiture and in films such as Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928; figure 5.8) and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966)—to which I would add Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996)—and he begins to find a unique, media-specific power of film within them, as so many theorists have before him. "In films the close-up creates a proximity to the faces and bodies of others that we experience much less commonly in daily life. The conventions of social distance normally restrict proximity except in moments of intimacy. . . . The face is for most of us the locus of another person's being" (MacDougall 2006: 21). By crossing the typical boundaries set in place by social custom (in Western societies we do not stand too close to other people and stare at their faces), films allow an experience with the face of an other that is not always possible outside the cinematic environment. Viewing a variety of films from a variety of

FIGURE 5.8 Still from Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*. The entire emotional content of the film is carried by Maria Falconetti's face.

cultural locations allows us "to go beyond culturally prescribed limits and glimpse the possibility of being more than we are. They stretch the boundaries of our consciousness and create affinities with bodies other than our own" (16–17). The cinematic face of the other does not simply trigger our emotional sensibilities, it begins to trigger affinities and perhaps ultimately empathy, and thus supplies a grounding for ethical viewing in the cinema that continues to have effects beyond the screen. When the mirror system encounters close-ups of faces on screen, viewers don't just feel the same emotions; over time they begin to experience the feelings of the other, as if from inside (Morgan 2012; Plantinga 1999, 2009).[6]

What is interesting is how many secular film theorists point toward something like a *practice* of watching particular types of films, as if mimicking St Ignatius's spiritual exercises or a Buddhist Eightfold Path. There are "right" films, some of these critics claim (and I agree with them): ones that edify, that can change our way of seeing the world beyond the screen, that can make us better people (see Sinnerbrink 2016). Similar

to MacDougall, film theorist Kaja Silverman (1996) once developed an "ethics in the field of vision" and utilized two useful phrases borrowed from psychoanalysis for ways of seeing and identifying: idiopathic and heteropathic identification. The standard Hollywood trick is to rely on idiopathic (*idios*, "one's own") modes, where the film is created for viewers to seamlessly enter into its world. This is possible because the film is shot and edited to reaffirm dominant cultural values and images. There is clear statistical evidence that the big-budget Hollywood film (and television) production industry overwhelmingly privileges white, male bodies that are generally heterosexual and middle class (S. Smith, Choueiti, and Pieper 2016). We see white, male faces on screens of Hollywood films more than any other face, and we listen to white, male actors speak more than any other character. Even when brown and black or female characters are portrayed, they tend to serve as background to the white, male heroes (see discussion of *The Matrix* in chapter 1).

Idiopathic identification reaffirms this dominant demographic, and cinema has relied on it for over a century. Since close-ups can be used for vivid emotional responses, they can have strong ideological ramifications. Scholar of U.S. religion Judith Weisenfeld, for instance, has argued that the use of close-ups in D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) helped create a visual vocabulary that easily wove in and out of racist tendencies in U.S. culture. "Griffith's demonstration of the emotional power of the close-up shot," Weisenfeld (2016) argues, "depended upon the construction of white racial innocence and inherent white female virtue, on the one hand (and both tied to a naturalized Christian nationalism) and the ever present specter of black male violation on the other" (figure 5.9). Close-ups of faces, while producing a "magical" effect, can also maintain the worlds of a culturally dominant, even racist, ideology.

In heteropathic identification (*hetero*, "other"), the subject "identifies at a distance from his or her proprioceptive self" (Silverman 1996: 23). In most films, there is *initially* a heteropathic identification taking place, as audiences are transported to galaxies "beyond," to fantastic futures, pasts, and worlds where anyone can be a hero. Yet by the end of a film, no matter how many light years we have traveled, all the same cultural values are reaffirmed as audience members assimilate the filmic world back into their own. In spite of traveling all the way to Pandora, where blue-beings seemingly float through a mystical landscape, as in *Avatar*, we emerge

FIGURE 5.9 Still from D. W. Griffiths's *The Birth of a Nation* shows Elsie being pursued by one of the black militia characters (played by a white actor in blackface).

from the theater reaffirmed that it is the good-looking white male who can save these other worlds. The same is true of almost every top-grossing film. The worlds off-screen and on-screen mesh and merge without a problem because everything looks so familiar.

To the contrary, heteropathic identification would mean those cinematic experiences are truly *other*, in ways that do not allow a simple journey back to the afilmic world. Silverman, admittedly idealistically, suggests this might occur "through the creation and circulation of alternative images and words" that would "make it possible for us to identify both consciously and unconsciously with bodies which we would otherwise reject with horror and contempt" (81). She points to experimental, independent films by filmmakers such as Isaac Julien, Harun Farocki, and Chris Marker, each of whom has portrayed stories of bodies of others that cannot easily be subsumed into the dominant cultural story (Julien's *Looking for Langston* [1989], figure 5.10; Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* [1989]; Marker's *Sans Soleil* [1983]). As Levinas maintained, the face of the other cannot be understood because

FIGURE 5.10 Still from dream-like sequence in Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston*. The film takes a lyrical, impressionistic look at Langston Hughes, poet of the Harlem Renaissance. It was shot in black and white by cinematographer Nina Kellgren.

it is like us (idiopathic), but ethics must rely on a radical otherness of the face, even if it disrupts the mirror processes.

Beyond psychoanalytic and philosophical idealism, cognitive science has begun to show how our perceptions can be changed, investigating ways we can shift from idiopathic to heteropathic modes of identifying. As with any religious tradition, there is a practice involved, as our sense perceptions can begin to be trained, disciplined to take on new attitudes and behaviors. One of the threads that runs through a number of research projects is that different images can produce different perceptual processes.

As infants grow and mature into children and ultimately adults, a process of "perceptual narrowing" occurs. In the first year of life the individual's senses pick up on many signals through aural, tactile, gustatory, visual, and olfactory organs. Just after birth, the infant is broadly tuned—making little discrimination between various sounds, feelings, tastes, sights, or smells—and thus little "meaning" is initially made

from the sensations. But quickly the perceptual body begins to pick up clues about the sensed impulses, and neural pathways are established throughout the body-brain as the baby learns that some of these sights and sounds and smells are more important than the others. The pathways that are used more (e.g., the ones that let me know *this* face is connected with warm embraces or *that* taste is connected with sweetness and nourishment) are established while "synaptic pruning" cuts away unnecessary and nonmeaningful connections, a process lasting through childhood. This focusing allows for quicker processing of relevant sensations by eliminating other competing neural processes. The basic neural building blocks are in place from the beginning, but experience shapes the ways they are used, and ultimately how humans construct their worlds through sense perceptions (Flom 2014; Huttenlocher 2002).

Not surprisingly, babies in their first year are exposed primarily to close family members who tend to be of the same ethnic and racial background. Studies have shown that by nine months infants demonstrate perceptual narrowing, which includes their ability to discriminate among faces of their own racial group but not of other racial groups. The old comment "They all look the same to me" has some grounding in reality, and psychologists have termed it the "own-race bias" (Kelly et al. 2009; Meissner and Brigham 2001). The effect stems from several factors, not all well understood.

However, some evidence suggests that the own-race bias can be partially overcome. One study showed that exposure to other-race faces through picture books can keep the perceptual window open, meaning that the infants continue to distinguish faces of people of other races longer (Heron-Delaney et al. 2011). Another study used a clip from Wayne Wang's film *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) to show how exposure to a film with strong Asian-American characters can lead toward less-biased responses to situations off-screen. The study group was made up of Euro-American undergraduates who were asked to put themselves in the place of the main character in the film, June (Ming Na-Wen), and imagine how she felt. The clip shown was one that expressed June's conflicted state between being an "American," while still living by her mother's "Chinese" standards. By putting themselves in the place of the "outgroup" (here the difficulties of being Chinese-American), the Euro-American study group offered less-biased responses to follow-up questions (Shih, Stotzer, and Gutiérrez 2013).

Neuroplasticity, the ability of neural pathways to adapt and change through external and internal stimuli, occurs over the life-span, though in lesser degrees as humans grow older. A number of studies in the cognitive sciences have shown that exposure to visual images can and do change the abilities of humans to perceive. What some of these studies begin to suggest is that because we learn to see, we can learn to *see differently*. The bodies and faces of others in afilmic reality, and images of bodies and faces of others in photographs and films, affect our perception and change how we view the afilmic world. An "ethics in the field of vision," as Silverman puts it, relies on biological as well as cultural processes as cinematic bodies mediate between the world on-screen and the world outside.

CONCLUSION

In the end, I do not wish to sound so naïvely optimistic (though maybe a little so) as to imagine that the world would be a better place if we all watched experimental and "world" films more often, but one way or another there are strong ethical and transformational components involved, particularly as religious cinematics has to do with how our bodies relate to the screen, and to the bodies of others off-screen. Like minimalism and a few other artistic movements, perhaps, but also like a Buddhist orientation toward "mindfulness," the religious cinematics of viewing films develops as a spiritual-sensual discipline, a ritualized form of viewing that stimulates connections between the world on-screen and on the streets. Experimental documentary filmmaker Nathaniel Dorsky has articulated a "devotional cinema," which he says "subverts our absorption in the temporal and reveals the depths of our own reality, it opens us to a fuller sense of ourselves and our world" (2007: 407). And avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren argues that certain films engender a "creative use of reality" (1960) suggesting the filmmaking and watching processes are much like ritual processes; both demand a "de-personalization of the individual" (1965b: 10), and through this de-personalization comes a passage (a rite of passage) into a larger world outside of the self. Films, these commentators and makers suggest, can be transformational, but only as they lead beyond the self.

The experience of cinema, like any ritual, is never simply a solitary experience. It is, if anything, a kind of "public intimacy," as Rachel Moore suggests (1999: 5ff.).[7] As the viewer becomes conscious of her or his sensing body perceiving words, music, and images, she or he also becomes conscious of the self's relation to, and dependence on, others. Victor Turner expressed the activity of ritual in this way: "In the action situation of ritual, with its social excitement and directly physiological stimuli, such as music, singing, dancing, alcohol, incense, and bizarre modes of dress, the ritual symbol, we may perhaps say, effects an interchange of qualities between its poles of meaning. Norms and values, on the one hand, become saturated with emotion, while the gross and basic emotions become ennobled through contact with social values" (1967: 30). A ritual, for all its aesthetic components, is never merely art for art's sake, but entails connections between one's self and one's body, and ultimately (even if only idealistically) with other bodies in the world including a transformative aspect that is both interior and exterior to one's self.

Religious cinematics is thus not merely a methodology, or a "reading" of films, but contributes to a larger socio-ethical dimension. This ethical dimension is relevant for critical approaches to film that attempt to highlight issues of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. Ideologies are always at play in viewing structures. By returning viewers to the faces and bodies of others through defamiliarization and refamiliarization, the cinematic rituals of film viewing offer the possibility for aesthetic, ethical, and religious re-creation. We may be hardwired to perceive and recognize faces, but our brain offers an incredible amount of plasticity that allows ever-new experiences to confront us, vis-à-vis.

PART III

AFTER THE SHOW

Re-Created Realities

6

THE FOOTPRINTS OF FILM

Cinematic After-Images in Sacred Time and Space

In front of Philadelphia's stately Museum of Art—with its extensive, well-respected collections of Asian and American art—one can find the footprints of "Rocky" at the top of the great steps. Tourists from all over the world make mini-pilgrimages here as they climb the enormous stairway leading from street level to the museum. Many stop to take their picture alongside this little hunk of cement with its indentations of the soles of Rocky's Converse high tops (figure 6.1). Jumping up and down with arms raised, these tourist-pilgrims take pictures for social media sites, as if to say, "Look, I stood where Rocky stood!" Rocky, of course, refers here to Rocky Balboa, the character played by Sylvester Stallone in the film *Rocky* (1976) and its sequels. While Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood is well known for the footprints and handprints of famous movie stars in the walkway outside, the impressions there are accompanied by the actors' real names, people who have actual hands that can make an imprint in setting cement. But in the case of Rocky's footprints, there is no Rocky; he was only a fictional character in a movie.[1]

The religious landscape of the Planet Earth is littered with just such footprints of film. Far from being immaterial—nothing but light projected on a two-dimensional surface—filmic images have leapt off the screen and entered physical, three-dimensional spaces, leaving their after-images in cement, religious consciousness, and ritual practices. Like the

FIGURE 6.1 The footprints of "Rocky" at the top of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Screenshot of Internet search for "rocky footprints."

character Tom Baxter in Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* (see introduction), film has stepped down from the screen to meet up with life beyond cinema. But while *Purple Rose* depicts the intertwining of afilmic and diegetic realities, the two worlds yet remain within the diegetic world of Allen's film. In this concluding chapter, I argue that cinematic images actually do leave the screen, and their after-images appear in the streets, stairways, parking lots, weddings, funerals, cities, and wilderness of the United States and elsewhere, re-creating sacred times and spaces.

The first part of this book outlined the formal structures of religious worlds and cinematic worlds—the "altar and the screen" for short—and indicated ways they are analogous. Those three chapters examined how religion and cinema both build their worlds through the framing and selecting activities of, on the one hand, mythologizing, ritualizing, and sacralizing, and on the other hand, editing, cinematography, and mise-en-scène. In the second part (chapters 4 and 5) we turned to look at the effect of filmed worlds on the cinematic bodies of the audience, how the senses are stimulated to produce laughter, disgust, and even potentially an ethical response to the faces of people we do not often encounter in afilmic life. Through these bodily responses, the affective nature of cinema shows affinities with the affective nature of religious life. Now we

come full circle to see how diegetic reality (e.g., a character named "Rocky") can alter the actions of people in afilmic life (e.g., tourists who follow in "Rocky's" footsteps). It is not enough simply to chart religion *in* film; rather, we need to comprehend how films wend their way into religious life and change it from the inside.

Through this final chapter I delineate times and spaces in which religion and cinema meet, often well beyond the altar and the screen. The first two sections look at reconstructions of sacred time, the ways cinema has re-created traditional rites of passage as well as created new, secular rituals, as is the case with the cult followings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Then we turn to questions of space and the re-creation of sacred space through cinematic means. Films have brought the world closer, but they have simultaneously prompted people to get up and travel to far-off lands, making pilgrimages to places that have been made sacred because they have been framed and selected as part of a filmic world. At times rituals must be reinvented; at other times they are built from the ground up, and media such as film are integral to ever-evolving religious traditions.

RITUALS AND WORLDMAKING

Some years ago, as part of a weekly response to class readings in a course I was teaching, one of my students discussed how her brother had chosen *Matrix*-style clothing—leather trench coats, sunglasses, and so forth—for his wedding. I have seen the *Matrix* trilogy on many occasions, have shown *The Matrix* to my classes for years, and have read a lot about the films and their reception (recall chapter 1). I know there are many aficionados of these films, but until I read my student's paper I had not thought about the ways it leaves its own formal confines and infiltrates the lives and ritual structures of people. This provoked me to think further about how films have affected rituals, particularly rites of passage.[2]

For at least the last twenty years "theme weddings," including those based on films, have been a hot trend in the wedding industry. Many wedding planning guides offer a variety of themes, from Renaissance to underwater weddings, from Hawaiian to Scottish to fairy-tale lands, and

the ever-popular Elvis impersonator presiding. Online sites offer a plethora of theme wedding packages including Roaring '20s themes, Disney themes, Star Trek themes, and a generic "Hollywood theme" that includes the bride driving up in a white limo and greeting a crowd of "fans," with the wedding becoming something of an awards show. Internet searches reveal couples having theme weddings based on films such as *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca*, and *Braveheart*, and just in the few months I was revising this chapter, I received a number of news notifications about film-based theme weddings. One couple got married at the Cherry City Comic Con in Salem, Oregon, after having bonded over a love of *Star Wars*, tattoos, and classic cars; a man dressed as a Wookie oversaw the ceremony, and the vows included lines like "Your Padmé, your love, your best friend." Another couple in Manchester, England, made the news with their "Harry Potter" wedding, while a Florida couple asked strangers to crash their "Wedding Crashers" themed wedding (figure 6.2). And lovetripper.com, a resource for honeymoon planning, offers a list of "romantic

FIGURE 6.2 The wedding of Angie and Tom Linder at the Viva Las Vegas Wedding Chapel, 2010, presided over by "Darth Vader." Photo by Angie Linder. Used by kind permission.

movie quotes" to "spice up your love letters," including one-liners from *The Bridges of Madison County* ("This kind of certainty comes but once in a lifetime"), *West Side Story* ("Goodnight, goodnight, sleep well and when you dream, dream of me . . . "), and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* ("A faithful heart makes wishes come true").

Similar film themes can be created for b'nai mitzvah (mitzvoth; see Oppenheimer 2005). Indeed, Woody Allen's 1997 film *Deconstructing Harry* depicts a *Star Wars*–themed bar mitzvah, complete with the child cutting the cake with a light saber. Yet the scene did not stem from the imaginative mind of Allen—always quick as he is to confuse reality and film—but from life itself. The online partypop.com offers suggestions and planning for bar mitzvahs with themes like "Back to the Future," "The Terminator," and "Lost in Space." Or note this "Titanic-themed" bat mitzvah, reported by the Associated Press:

> Thirteen-year-old Lisa Niren, described by her sister as obsessed with "Titanic," got the bat mitzvah of her dreams over the weekend.
>
> A hotel ballroom was transformed into the luxury liner, with 12-foot steaming smokestacks at the buffet table, phosphorescent artificial icebergs and a "steerage" section for the children. . . .
>
> The piece de resistance was a gigantic photo, 10 feet above the floor, featuring Lisa's face superimposed over actress Kate Winslet's body in a famous "Titanic" scene on the prow of the ocean liner. Lisa appeared to have teen heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio smiling over her shoulder. . . .
>
> "This is incredible," said Heather Levy, a friend of Lisa's mother. "A lot of people do things for their children because they love them, but this goes beyond all that. I'm just standing here smiling."[3]

Such weddings and b'nai mitzvoth make up a small but growing percentage of all ceremonies conducted in the world, yet their existence indicates some of the ways young people and couples are searching to "personalize" their rituals. These are significant events in their lives, and cinema provides a "sacred canopy" that makes sense to many during these transitional periods.

Meanwhile, plenty of religious traditions are realizing this need for media updates and are happily incorporating film into their liturgies. This seems to be particularly true among evangelical Christian churches.

In fact, it seems that the more theologically conservative a church is, the less problem it has drawing a congregation's attention to a screen in the middle of a Sunday morning sermon and playing a clip from a film. Meanwhile, mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches tend to relegate film to the adult education courses on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights.[4]

We also find the footprints of film in Hindu temples like the Sri Gaayatri Mandir in Minneapolis. During services, between offerings and readings of scriptures, *bhajans* (devotional songs) are sung. There are various *bhajans*, many more "traditional," but some of the songs have been borrowed from Hindi devotional films or are sung in a Bollywood song style, a style that connects with the diasporic community. Ethnomusicologist Anna Schultz conducted field work at several *mandirs* and concludes an article on the practice by stating: "Mass-mediated music is ideal for creating an imagined diasporic community. In the case of Hindi film song, language provides an aura of authenticity; and melodies, style and dance provide a means of connecting individuals with larger groups to engage in a unisonance that is truly sonic" (2014: 401–2). Through these brief examples, we begin to see how cinema (not merely the sacred texts of the religious traditions) is a binding force that supplies the energy for what Peter Berger would call "world-maintenance."

There will be plenty of critics who see these examples as succumbing to entertainment and consumerism, one more step in the commodification and secularization of religious traditions. And there may be something to the charge. But there is more to it than that.

My student whose *Matrix*-inspired brother reoutfitted his matrimonial wardrobe had been reading Ronald Grimes's thoughtful work, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Grimes plays with the possibilities of having renewed rituals to keep us contemporary humans inspired, to give us meaning in the patterns of our lives, and to connect within a society that too often produces alienation. Throughout his book, Grimes is concerned with what seems to be a growing absence of rites of passage in the modern age, and he offers an interesting, if not extreme, quote from the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*: "The absence of rites of passage leads to a serious breakdown in the process of maturing as a person. Young people are unable to participate in society in a creative manner because societal structures no longer consider it their responsibility to intentionally establish the necessary marks

of passing from one age-related social role to another" (2000: 91). Humans have an ongoing need for ritual, as many have suggested, but Grimes also raises the concern that "traditional rites themselves can become so ethereal that they fail to connect with the bodily realities and spiritual needs of those who undergo them" (100). And this is where the need for reinvented rites becomes crucial. The *Matrix* marriage had an air of novelty to it, but perhaps it was a way to lighten what some felt was an overly solemn occasion. (Marriage should be fun, right? So why not relax a little?) Perhaps it is the assumed solemnity of the occasions that produces alienation and disconnection, and new media create a sense of lightness and approachability.

Since a Jewish boy is automatically a bar mitzvah at age 13 and a girl at age 12 is automatically a bat mitzvah, with or without the ritual, perhaps the theme of the festivities is not important. But others *do* see the ritual as intertwined with coming of age. Concerned with the stodgy old ways of creating bar/bat mitzvah rituals and parties, several years ago Gail Greenberg wrote a popular book and created a company called "MitzvahChic." She describes the neologism this way: "MitzvahChic holds that the meaning and the joy, artfully expressed, are what make the celebration magical. MitzvahChic is a blueprint for how a family can have an amazing bar mitzvah experience and use their emotion to electrify their party" (Greenberg 2003: xiv). Greenberg, and it seems many others who have heeded her advice, realizes there is still power in ritual, and a reinvention of rituals is vital to religious tradition. Not wholly advocating the throwing out of tradition, or simply suggesting anything goes, the MitzvahChic approach attempts to bring the deep significance of the older traditions together with personal meaning in a contemporary age.

As quantified evidence for the role of popular media in the shaping of contemporary religiosity, Lynn Schofield Clark has offered a number of intriguing studies on media and adolescent religious identity in the United States. Her 2003 book *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media and the Supernatural*, based on hundreds of interviews with teenagers and their families, demonstrates how many contemporary youth express their own understanding of religion, spirituality, and the supernatural through media symbols. Television shows and films such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *The X-Files*, *The Sixth Sense*, and the *Harry Potter* series help shape the ways U.S. teens understand themselves to be "religious." Clark suggests, "A great deal of evidence suggests that the media play an

important role in how young people form and articulate their identities. Young people learn from and identify with characters they watch and with celebrities they admire. Their choices for media consumption have a lot to do with the identifications they hold according to their participation in different racial, class, gender, and friendship groups" (2003: 17). Among other interesting findings, Clark's ongoing work demonstrates how the secularization thesis (or the critique of it, for that matter) has not taken account of the role of media in actively shaping what can only be called religious worlds within U.S. culture. While nontraditional religious movements are replacing traditional religious institutions, media such as film, television, comic books, and video games are replacing traditional institutional worldviews with new articulations, new descriptions and depictions, of very old religious categories like good and evil, angels and demons, sex and death, and god (see Forbes and Mahan 2017; Laderman 2009).

Ritualizing and worldmaking are necessary to religion, but the same old ritual in the same old way, the same old message in the same old medium, leaves people feeling disconnected. Central to re-ritualizing processes is the necessity of attention to the *media* of transmission. From orality to literacy, printing presses to the Internet, "tradition" becomes abstract and stale if everyone repeats the same things in rote manner through the same medium. To invent new and meaningful rites, many people now turn to film (and other forms of media such as television, comic books, and games) to help them through stages of life. These media have become familiar, comfortable. In many instances it may be just good clean fun, but in other very real ways films offer linguistic and symbolic registers and means of understanding the world from vital, new perspectives, touching on sensual aspects that words alone are too limited to deal with.

CREATING NEW RITUALS: FROM *ROCKY* TO *ROCKY HORROR*

New media alter old rituals, but they also produce brand new rituals in places and times the traditionally minded religious person might not think to look. When I was first writing about new film-based rituals,

thousands of people were camping on the streets—a few, notably, had been camping for more than a month—waiting for tickets to go on sale for the latest installment of the *Star Wars* series (*Star Wars—Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, 2005). These fans were dressed in *Star Wars*–specific costumes, spending time with friends along the way, just to be able to participate in that special, set-apart time and place where they can watch a favorite film. The religion of *Star Wars* has often been noted in popular and scholarly literature alike, and devotees of the film franchise even at one point opened a "Jedi Academy" in Romania. Indeed, since the 2001 Australian national census, tens of thousands of people have continued to mark "Jedi" as their religion. For England and Wales, the number was 176,632 in the 2011 census, and the UK-based Church of Jediism claims over 200,000 members worldwide (Castella 2014). Responding to this religious and political movement, Chris Brennan, director of the Star Wars Appreciation Society of Australia, stated, "This was a way for people to say, 'I want to be part of a movie universe I love so much'" (Taggart 2001).

Brennan's words are telling, especially when compared to a definition of ritual given by Jonathan Z. Smith: "Ritual is a means of performing *the way things ought to be* in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things" (1982: 63, emphasis added). *Star Wars* fans reenact and recollect an alternate reality—standing in line for days and even weeks, dressing the part, being with like-costumed and like-minded people, participating in a world (both on the streets outside the theater and as part of the filmed world on-screen) that expresses "the way things ought to be"—a reality in contradistinction to the humdrum existence of office spaces, mortgage installments, and traffic commutes.

Just after the release of *The Exorcist* in late 1973, reporter Judy Klemesrud wanted to know why people would spend so much time in line (often several hours), in the middle of winter, to buy tickets for a film that had caused people to faint, others to vomit, and overall did not receive very favorable reviews (see chapter 4). She stood in line with people at the Cinema I theater on the East Side of Manhattan and struck up conversations. There were those who had read William Peter Blatty's book and wanted to check out the adaptation, and then there were those she describes as "I-must-be-crazy-to-be-here" people. The latter claim was a badge of honor and linked people together. One of those she interviewed said, "I

want to be part of the madness. . . . There's a little bit of morbid curiosity in all of us" (Klemesrud 1974: 109). A director of operations of Cinema 5 theaters in New York City observed the fanatical responses and said, "It's like a cult" (Van Gelder 1974: 15). Of course, the commonality of *Exorcist*-goers, like *Star Wars* fanatics, has its limits. Most people in the *Exorcist* lines were young, "the long-haired high school and college crowd in blue jeans and casual jackets," according to Klemesrud. But she also noted that one-fourth to one-third were black, which was an especially high number for an East Side theater. The physical experience of standing in line for *The Exorcist* or *Star Wars* becomes something of a ritualized activity that binds groups of people, especially those who want to stand apart yet connect to others who also stand apart, to feel a little crazy, and do something alternative to their everyday lives.

Perhaps no other film, blockbuster or otherwise, has created a greater ritualized following than 1975's *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. While it's tempting to write-off *Rocky Horror* as a campy production with little ethical or religious value, it has nonetheless elicited a mass cult following since its debut. The plot line is a retelling of the bourgeoisie (represented by Brad and Janet—played by Barry Bostwick and Susan Sarandon) encountering another, alternate social reality (here at the underworldly castle home of Dr. Frank N. Furter—Tim Curry) and being transformed by the experience. "Normal" social behavior is mocked throughout the film: polymorphous perversions and various acts of violence (the reason it is a "horror show"), including cannibalism, are demonstrated on-screen, turning Brad and Janet's traditional values upside down. The plot itself parallels Victor Turner's (following Van Gennep's) tripartite scheme of religious ritual, as Brad and Janet go through processes of separation, liminality, and reincorporation (Turner 1973).

But it is in the audience reception of the film where the true religious dimensions surface, as it *functions* to enact audience interaction, and participants also go through the three-part ritual process. Liz Locke (1999) relates Turner's ideas of *communitas* to the cult following of *Rocky Horror*: "What Turner calls 'normative communitas' doesn't only occur at the end of RHPS. . . . It also happens in RHPS communities. . . . Their community is held together by fellow thespian aspiration as well as by love of the film." Now, more than forty years after its creation, in almost any major city across the United States and elsewhere, at the liminal hour of

Saturday Midnight, one can still find a screening of the film and a devoted crowd of people still gathering, donning costumes related to the film, along with their special "props." A fair number of people have now seen the film over 1,000 times. Those who have never attended a screening are termed "virgins" (and often are made to wear a lipsticked "V" on their foreheads). Indeed, an entire vocabulary and behavioral code has been developed in relation to the screenplay (figure 6.3).

Examining the cult following of *Rocky Horror*, sociologists Patrick Kinkade and Michael Katovich place it within a larger phenomenon of secular filmic cult audiences, like those that have grown up around such diverse films as *Harold and Maude* (1971), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), and *Eraserhead* (1977). Drawing on previous work, they define "cult film audiences" as "a type of secular cult organization, and cultish attachments to these films replace a charismatic actor with a document granted

FIGURE 6.3 Gathering at the Sugar Club in Dublin, Ireland, for the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, 2008. Photo by Sebastian Dooris, https://www.flickr.com/photos/sebastiandooris/2579258004/in/album-72157605611401280/. Public Domain.

charismatic appeal" (Kinkade and Katovich 1992: 192). Such a definition is intriguing for how it redefines traditional central sacred figures, implicitly noting the ways that media affect what can only be called "piety." Cult film audiences "construct ritual and belief systems through their viewing experience. Cult film attachments, therefore, become obsessions and enduring shared foci for habitues" (194).

Such behaviors are readily apparent at screenings of *Rocky Horror*, as audience members enact ritual activities in tandem with other audience members and in conjunction with the film scenes. Audience members perform events that mimic the events on-screen: the audience throws rice at the point when Brad and Janet get married at the beginning of the film, and people bring actual pieces of toast with them so when Dr. Frank N. Furter proposes a "toast," the audience throws their toast at the screen. These responses have been repeated and codified over the years, so that now one can attend a *Rocky Horror* screening across the world and encounter the same performative actions. Cult audiences of cinema, or other religious activities, including those at *Rocky Horror* screenings, include alienated members of a society who find connection, meaning, and solace within such liminal activities while a type of communitas is formed. People belong to something, and they know it through their actions and behaviors, their use of clothing, objects, and speech (see Weinstock 2008).

One could easily and cynically interject that many seemingly grassroots cult followings are in fact created as publicity stunts. Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is a clear demonstration of how this can happen, and while it has become one of the top-grossing films of all time (and the highest grossing "independent" film), it seems to have done so by mimicking the disenfranchised aspects of the cult film phenomenon. A mythology of persecution was built up around the film production—the backstory cast Gibson as an "outsider" who must fund his film by himself (the fact that he *could* come up with the $30 million by himself should probably alert us to the fact that he was anything but an outsider), defying the Hollywood industry that shunned him and reviewers that panned the film—just as the film ostensibly tells the story of a social outsider pushed down by the socio-religious authorities. In reality, Gibson and his marketing people were Hollywood insiders who know the code. In like manner, advertisers and theater managers probably did a lot to spark the

Rocky Horror cult itself.[5] Thus, at a certain point one might be tempted to suggest that there is some "pure" grassroots ritual process standing in contrast to these "artificial" commercial constructions.

Yet rituals, like myths, and culture in general, are always a production, however ongoing and transforming, made up of economics, social life, legal issues, cultural symbols, human bodies, religious institutions, communal interactions, and personal beliefs. I am not suggesting that some films proffer "pure" rituals, stemming from the untainted underground life of the alienated, while others are merely industry standards. The details are too complex, and each instance has its own set of conditions along a continuum. What I am pointing to is the fact there *never have* been any authentic rituals. They are all borrowed, shaped by the media of their day (whether inscriptions in clay or CGI), and made real because they are performed by people who gain bodily, emotional, and intellectual benefits from them. Cinema is simply part of a much larger historical chain of cause and effect in which rituals and worlds are re-created.

BRINGING THE SACRED HOME

Cinema has found its way into some of our more important passages, whether repeated weekly or yearly, or occurring in the span of a lifetime. Cinema has also re-created our spaces. As numerous historians of the technology have indicated, cinema changed the experiences of space in the modern age, bringing the world closer and seemingly making it smaller (see Elsaesser 1990). Some of the initial shrinkage was brought about through what came to be known as "actuality films," footage of "actual" events and people. The Lumières coined the phrase, and indeed the first films of cinema, including *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, are considered part of the genre. These were scenes of everyday life that when projected on a large screen allowed access to spaces that most people did not occupy in the afilmic world, even if the afilmic events occurred just across town.

By the first years of the twentieth century, a new twist on the genre emerged through the "traveling actuality" film, in which filmmakers placed cameras on transportation devices (e.g., trains, carriages) in order

to bring the seated spectator on a virtual journey. (Vertov was using this style in *Man with a Movie Camera*.) Early film historian Tom Gunning argues: "The early genres of cinema . . . visualized a modern experience of rapid alteration, whether by presenting foreign views from far-flung international locations or by creating through trick photography a succession of transformations which unmoored the stable identity of both objects and performers." Such imagery collapsed "the space and time formerly required for an experience of global tourism" (Gunning 1995: 16). The world grew smaller, more easily navigable, as foreign lands were made familiar. The effect was again a re-created world; the old patterns of identity and belonging were disrupted.

By extension, *sacred* space was also reconfigured for religious communities. Christian groups in particular spent significant time looking at images of the "Holy Land," which allowed distant sacred spaces to be brought home. Just before the Lumières' famed invention, and continuing its influence through the early days of cinema, there was the stereoscope, a device that allowed a 3-D view of still images, promulgated in the United States through the Underwood & Underwood Company, among others. Stereoscopes were used to great effect when pictures of Palestine were taken and brought to waiting audiences in churches back home. The Underwoods, as religion scholar Rachel Lindsey puts it, "were in the business of transforming the Bible from a text that was read into a space that was inhabited through the optical marvel of the stereoscope" (Lindsey 2017). In a companion volume to many of the Underwood's 3-D photos, entitled *Traveling in the Holy Land Through the Stereoscope*, Jesse Lyman Hurlbut wrote how "the most perfect conditions are furnished for concentrating and holding the attention, and so enabling us to gain a distinct sense or experience of location in one hundred places in Palestine" (1900: 11). Cinema picked up on these currents and furthered the effects of the stereoscope, re-creating the spatial relations between viewers in the United States and the Holy Land (figure 6.4).

In 1910 a Congregationalist minister from Connecticut named Herbert Jump would state, "the modern motion picture offers the most colossal opportunity for making a fresh moral and religious appeal to the non-churched portions of the community that has arisen in the history of recent Christianity." Jump saw the motion picture as a religious tool, a "sort of graphic esperanto, a universal language," bringing images of

FIGURE 6.4 Stereoscope from the Holy Land. "The Tomb of Our Lord," "New Calvary," outside of Jerusalem, Palestine. Underwood & Underwood, 1896. Image from the Jesse Lyman Hurlbut Collection at the Pitts Theology Library, Emory University.

travel through Palestine, as well as biblical scenes, to people around the world (2002: 226). In his pamphlet-manifesto, "The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture," Jump quotes at length from the University of Chicago anthropology professor and early proponent of cinema's educational possibilities, Frederick K. Starr, who said in defense of cinema: "I have looked upon weird dances and outlandish frolics in every quarter of the globe, and I didn't have to leave Chicago for a moment" (222). If the world is brought closer and space collapsed, so could God's word be brought closer and, as Jump put it, made "more universal" through cinematic technology. Meanwhile, Christian missionary organizations such as the Salvation Army and Church Missionary Society began employing cameramen and projectionists in order to provide footage from missions abroad. Churches would show these films in order to encourage the spiritual lives of those back home. Through audio-visual media (silent films accompanied by spoken commentary), audiences began to feel they had a closer connection to the "Word of God," a theological concept already radically transformed by the invention of another medium a few centuries earlier: the printing press.

In spite of these many early enthusiasms, two decades later religious detractors of cinema seemed to triumph in Christian-heavy cultures. By the late 1920s, as religious support for film began to diminish, we find this telling example: "the Christian Reformed Church's newsletter accused film of being associated with the lower classes of humanity, appealing to corrupt tastes, and giving a 'false view of life.' Films were deemed culpable for ruining family life, as women neglected duties to children and husbands while they ran off to see movies" (Lindvall 2007: 9; see also Cosandey, Gaudreault, and Gunning 1992). While film still had its supporters and audiences, much of the early interest in the authoritative religious uses of cinema waned, at least from the perspective of elite leadership. However, as popes and other Christian leaders released encyclicals, statements, and books condemning or offering warnings about the negative influence of cinema, the people in the congregations often had little problem switching from church to theater and back again. (My own devout Christian grandmother told me the story of how when she was a girl in the 1920s and '30s she went to a fundamentalist church. She figured out how to sneak out with her older sister, saying she was going to Sunday School, and went to the movies with just enough time to sneak back into church as the services were concluding!) On through the twentieth century, sacred spaces shifted ground as the perceived world "out there" was brought home in newsreels, and the screen became a serious threat to the sacred dominance of the altar.

CINEMATIC PILGRIMAGES

In constructing his spatially based theory of religion, Thomas Tweed suggests, "from the wanderings of nomadic clans to the round-trip journey of jet-plane pilgrims, religions have prompted travel" (2006: 124). In this final section I want to amend Tweed's comment to ask about how cinema also prompts travel in ways akin to the religious journey, again pushing the question as to whether cinema can function *like* religion and inquiring into how the religious aspects of cinema continue "after the show" into film-induced, secular pilgrimages.

A few summers ago I was driving across the United States and my itinerary took me through Iowa. I had some extra time and so decided to take a detour into the northern parts of the state, stopping at the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, a Catholic shrine built through the long and hard work of Father Paul Dobberstein in the twentieth century. It's an impressive series of structures made from stones and gems collected from all over the world, embedded in cave-like dioramas of the Stations of the Cross, the Garden of Eden, and a replica of Michelangelo's *Pietá*. Thought to be the largest human-made grotto in the world, it is a religious (specifically Catholic) pilgrimage site, and busloads of Catholic and curious people journey there in all seasons. By the 1950s, the site was already drawing over 100,000 people a year, and many continue to visit today. I had never spent much time in Iowa myself, and the only reason I knew about the shrine was because it made a brief cameo in David Lynch's *The Straight Story*. While not completely out of the way, the actual Alvin Straight would most likely *not* have driven by the grotto. Instead, Lynch used it as a backdrop to a scene of Straight driving by in his lawn tractor, as if to reaffirm that the film really was a pilgrimage story (see chapter 3).

Since I had made it this far into the cornfields and straight county roads of northern Iowa, I went in search of Straight's nearby hometown of Laurens. Not knowing exactly what, if anything, I'd find, I drove to the center of the small town, recognizing the main street from the filming sequences in *The Straight Story*. I pulled up in front of a store that looked like the hardware store from the film (in afilmic reality it was a pharmacy) and went inside to ask some questions about whether there was any material remainder of Alvin Straight's life around. Within ten minutes, three people began to assist me, getting on the phone to others, and eventually pointing me to the town's actual hardware store where a man who knew about such things could help me. I drove over to the store and met with a worker who happily left his post and drove me down the street to an old garage. He opened it up to reveal a nearly abandoned room with some rusting implements and cobwebs, yet in this place was Straight's 1966 John Deere lawn tractor, and the homemade trailer he dragged those 300 miles. (This was the "real" tractor and trailer, not the props used in the film.) If one didn't know any different, this was just a garage with maintenance tools, like many other garages all around the area. But I was giddy and hopped on the tractor, asking the man to take a picture of me

on it, to register proof that I had been there, a process made more efficient by Facebook. The garage was not vertically high, like the sacred spaces of cathedrals, nor was it different in kind from any of its surroundings, but I was drawn to this space because it made me feel some sense of connection, some sense of grounding in the middle of Iowa, a foreign land as far as I was concerned. And it was cinema that established the grounding.

The questions that emerged from my experience underlie many of the topics of this book. Was my visit a pilgrimage? After all, I traveled through space to reach a location that was special to me as an admirer of Lynch's film. Or was this just tourism, a film buff's quest for collapsing the distance between afilmic and diegetic realities? Was I different from the devout Catholics over at the grotto, who came for personal and spiritual reasons? Or, then again, maybe some of those at the grotto are actually better considered "tourists" and are not there for pious intentions after all? Finally, does the fact that I was brought to these spaces by a film make the experience any less authentic? In chapter 3 I discussed the narrative of *Le Grand Voyage*, in which Reda and his father are divided on their respective statuses as tourists or pilgrims: Reda would rather be a tourist, but his father is by all means a pilgrim. Questions were raised about the differences between the two, and I continue to raise them here. Can film-induced travel be considered a pilgrimage?

The films of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–3) are some of the most successful of all time, and their merchandising franchises have made the filmmakers and production companies a lot of money. The narratives within *LOTR* are clearly mythic stories, with heroes, evil characters who threaten the order of the world, and grand quests that must be undertaken to save the world. The mythology came through the pen of J. R. R. Tolkien, who borrowed his ideas from Norse and Celtic mythologies. Tolkien's tales were then filtered through Fran Walsh's screenwriting, Peter Jackson's directing, an enormous production crew, an ensemble cast of characters, and, crucially, the islands of New Zealand, Walsh and Jackson's homeland. Through these various filters, Middle-earth (initially emerging from the imagination of a middle-aged professor of Medieval literature in England) becomes conflated with New Zealand, so much so that the New Zealand tourist board unabashedly states it is "Home of Middle-earth" and promotes "Middle-earth itineraries" for tourists (see

newzealand.com). Indeed, according to some statistics, New Zealand saw a 50 percent increase in tourist visits after the 2001 release of the first film in the series (Pinchefsky 2012). From Norse gods to New Zealand, film has left its footprints.

We could explore example after example of similar occurrences. "Film-based" or "movie-induced" tourism is the topic of tourist boards around the world, with many producing "movie maps" or supplying tour itineraries through filming locations (Beeton 2005). Rosslyn chapel in Scotland saw spikes in attendance after the novel and film *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) made it the potential site of the fictitious Holy Grail, and there was a large increase in visits to Devil's Tower in Wyoming after *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). Even Dyersville, Iowa, which had no tourists before *Field of Dreams* (1989), began to see tens of thousands of people coming to town in the years that followed. And then there are those who went to Normandy, inspired by the epic battle in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), only to find that while this was indeed the site of an important World War II battle, it was not the location where the film was shot (that was Ireland), resulting in some disappointed tourists (Keeble 1999). By most any sociological definition, such activities lend support to the notion that these cinematically charged sites have become sacred. Through this, the sense of sacred space in modern life is shifted, beyond both the altar and the screen, but also impossible without them.

Then again, we still might draw a tenuous line between "tourism" and "pilgrimage" in order to account for the activities and intentions of those who travel. It is one thing for someone to fly across the world, get driven to a film site, take a few pictures, and go home, and another thing for someone to walk hundreds of miles through unpredictable weather conditions and uneven geography in order to be in the presence of a relic or historically significant site. It's not all about intention, though partly it is, but more about the physical experiences of people who travel, how they do it, and what they do. Details of the ritualized activities matter. Which makes one final example worth paying attention to.

Every year on the Stampede Trail near Denali National Park, Alaska—a remote part of the earth for all practical purposes—up to a hundred people from around the world arrive to visit Fairbanks Bus 142, aka "The Magic Bus" (figure 6.5). The 1946 transportation vehicle used to operate in the city of Fairbanks, but when it was decommissioned it found a new

FIGURE 6.5 Pilgrim/tourists to Fairbanks Bus 142, site of Chris McCandless's final home. Photo by Paxson Woelber, 2007. Reproduced under Creative Commons 2.0 license.

life as a makeshift home for a family helping to build a road in the area. When the roadwork was abandoned the bus stayed put as a hunter's shelter.[6] In 1992, twenty-four-year-old Chris McCandless took up residence in the bus for more than a hundred days until he died of starvation, a story first told in a book by Jon Krakauer, and then re-created by Sean Penn in the 2007 film *Into the Wild*.[7] McCandless (played by Emile Hirsch in the film) was from a well-off family and had just graduated as an honors student from Emory University when he decided to get rid of all his belongings and travel, seeking the wild across North America and ultimately to Alaska. With little more than a bag of rice, a .22 caliber rifle, and a copy of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* he set out into the backcountry near Denali, managing to survive for more than three months on squirrel and bird meat and foraging food like mushrooms and wild potato seeds. But it seems the latter contained a toxin that weakened him

to the point he could not leave (see Krakauer 2015). Hunters found his body in the bus two weeks after he died: his body weighed 67 pounds.

In the wake of McCandless's death, and the magazine article, book, and film that drove his story to mythic status, many websites, YouTube videos, and pages on Flickr and Facebook have been established to help potential tourists/pilgrims find their way to the bus and to share their experiences with others. McCandless's audio-visual story stirred something in people, something they wanted to imitate, to shed the trappings of modern life and quite literally follow in his footsteps. Some of these journeys occurred before the film, but they have clearly increased significantly since the film's release. The many seekers that do make it to the bus write notes and essays in notebooks that are then left behind for others. They tell of personal transformations, of promises to change things in their lives when they return home, all combined with a lot of gratitude to McCandless for his inspiration. One visitor stated, "Some things cannot be adequately described in words. The bus is one of those things. You will not truly understand the conditions of Chris' experience until you sit down in the folding chair where there once was a driver's seat and just absorb the feeling of silence and isolation."[8] And every year or so, another journalist posts a story premised on trying to figure out why this place continues to draw people to it. Ending a thoughtful overview of it all for *Outside* magazine, Diana Saverin (2013) sums up a lot of sentiment with a quote from one of the many pilgrims who made his way up the Stampede Trail: "The bus is where McCandless's journey ended . . . and the rest of ours begins."

Out of the hundred or so who read the book and/or watch the film and head to Alaska each year, a few, unprepared for the harshness of the Alaska terrain, end up having to be rescued after getting themselves too deep into the wilderness. One Swiss woman died trying to reach the bus. Locals complain that too much of their energy, and tax dollars, are spent on these rescues and would rather it stop. There is talk of demolishing the bus, moving it, or turning it back into a hunter's shack. (A local brewery has capitalized on the situation and created a replica bus 142, replete with rust, and a chair out front so that tourists can sit and have pictures taken in the iconic pose of one of McCandless's last self-portraits.) Many of the locals can't understand what the allure is all about. "It's some kind of internal thing within them that makes them go out to that bus," says a

state trooper. "I don't know what it is" (Saverin 2013). For years there have been political discussions about changing something, arguments against encouraging people to come, but for now the visitors keep coming, keep being inspired by McCandless's mythology, by the bus that still stands, and by their own journeys.

At some level, the bus goes beyond its ordinariness, beyond an old metal shell that supplies shelter in the tundra. And at some level, the journey there goes beyond tourism, beyond safety and comfort, where danger is real and death lurks. The struggle to arrive, and the contestation of the space, builds up the sacrality of the place and the pilgrimage to get there. Sacred space is often contested space, and a rusting bus on the edge of the wilderness is as close to the sacred as many moderns might get. Its footprint made heavy by a film.

CONCLUSION

In Clifford Geertz's well-known definition, religion offers symbols, powerful and pervasive moods and motivations, as it formulates "conceptions of a general order of existence" (1973: 90). As we sit down with our popcorn or toast—dressed as a Wookie or Dr. Frank-N-Furter—waiting for the feature presentation, we hear the voice-over for the coming attractions: "In a world where you have to fight to be free . . ."; "In a world where love is within reach . . ."; "In a world . . ." We the viewers are invited into other worlds, alternate renditions of reality that through seamless editing, precise special effects, carefully placed cameras, and elaborate props offer views of the world that seem, in the words of Geertz, "uniquely realistic." Cinema, like religion, tells of another reality, of a world that could be, of a world that viewers want to live in, with stimulated moods and motivations. Cinematic bodies have their eyes and ears opened to differing ways of imagining the world outside the film theater. In the audiovisual experience of viewing film, human bodies and minds have an experience that becomes internalized, ultimately affecting behaviors, attitudes, practices, and beliefs that are acted out well beyond the screen. We find the experience of cinema somehow transformed, translated, and transposed into the Alaskan wilderness, the prints in cement, and Saturday night haunts that constitute contemporary religious life.

To conclude, I leave one final footprint. In Austin, Texas, between the state's capitol and judicial buildings, there is a six-by-three-foot granite monument with the Ten Commandments chiseled in a quasi-Gothic script (in King James English of course), with decorative flourishes—the Christic Greek *chi-ro* characters, Stars of David, and an American flag—surrounding the words (figure 6.6). This monument was erected in 1961, and my research reveals little controversy over it for its first four decades. But in the 2000s, the Austin monument became one of many contested sites in the United States in which church-state relations have been put to the test. A case arguing that it represented a government endorsement of religion went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court; its defenders argued that these commandments pay tribute to the religious and legal history of the United States (see Boston 2005; Flowers 2000).

What rarely seems to come up in such arguments is that the plethora of Ten Commandments monuments outside courthouses, capitols, and urban squares in the United States today actually came into being through publicity stunts of the great filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille. In the mid-1950s, DeMille was finishing his second version of *The Ten Commandments*, famously starring Charlton Heston as Moses. To promote the film, DeMille got in touch with the Fraternal Order of Eagles, a nationwide association of civic-minded clubs (founded in 1898, interestingly enough, by a group of theater owners), who had been distributing copies of the Ten Commandments to courtrooms across the country as "guidance" for juvenile delinquents. DeMille and the FOE upped the symbolic stability of the Decalogue by commissioning hundreds of granite monuments of Moses's tablets to be placed outside courthouses across the United States, including in Austin. DeMille died in 1959, but the FOE continued to plant the monuments through the 1960s, and they are now the focal point of Supreme Court decisions that directly affect the division of church and state.[9]

Cinema has left its footprints in cultures, societies, political discourses, the wilderness, and religious consciousness around the world. These footprints are not those of abstract thought but of material structures in physical time and space. Films progress from their two-dimensional, light-projected status, to incarnated, three-dimensional spaces. And the point at which things become interesting is when we realize that film has so permeated cultural consciousness that people forget how material "reality" can have its origins in ethereal light projected onto a screen.

FIGURE 6.6 Across the United States, Ten Commandments monuments remain near courthouses, the vestiges of a publicity campaign by Cecile B. DeMille for his movie *The Ten Commandments* (1956). This one is near the courthouse in Austin, Texas. Photo by Alan Kotok, https://www.flickr.com/photos/runneralan/9057315767/in/photolist-eNn7qF. Reproduced under Creative Commons 2.0 license.

There is no "Rocky," and granite Ten Commandments are as much vestigial publicity stunts as they are statements about God-given law as the origin of the modern legal system. The image is confused for the real, and we realize therein that the real is always already imagined, and oftentimes primarily imaged.

In the contemporary, secular world, cinema exists beyond celluloid or digital code. Film has come down off the screen, infiltrated old rituals and fashioned new rituals. It has made its marks in cement, rusted old buses, and these places become, in turn, an alluring topography that attracts people to them. Cinema merges into the public spaces of civic life as it engenders court cases promoting deep political dialogue that harkens back to the founding of the nation, long before the moving, refracted-light image was a twinkle in the eyes of the Lumière brothers or Thomas Edison.

NOTES

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

1. These three "waves" are of course historical generalizations, meant to serve heuristic purposes. I believe there is still important work being done on European and "art house" films, and attention to individual films as complete "texts" can serve many critical purposes. In truth, each of these "waves" continues to ebb and flow.

INTRODUCTION: WORLDMAKING ON-SCREEN AND AT THE ALTAR

1. Which of course makes one wonder about the impact of films seen on small screens, but for now that's another account.
2. The philosopher Stanley Cavell was way ahead of some of this argument as he turned to the projections of film as a way of understanding the world. His book *The World Viewed* (1979) argues that the world as it is holds a distinct relation to the "world viewed" on screen and that the two are not entirely distinguishable, even if the screened world goes out of existence when the film is over. Yet just below the surface of Cavell's writings is a suggestion that cinema is ultimately a private, anonymous experience, which I find unhelpful.
3. Souriau's work has not been translated into English, but good overviews include Buckland 2000 and chapter 3 of Lowry 1985.

1. AUDIO-VISUAL MYTHOLOGIZING

1. On the relation of films and myths, director Tim Burton says, "I grew up loving movies. So I realize that I love the mythology, folk tale kind of thing . . . because that's

basically what movies are as well. . . . They were just variations on all the kind of classic imagery that way, and symbols" (Schwartz 2005: 177). For more on *Big Fish*, and especially the book on which it was based in relation to myth, see Doty 2006.

2. The original film was billed as written and directed by the Wachowski brothers, Andrew and Larry. Since that time, the two have gone public about being transgender and taken the names Lilly and Lana. To avoid anachronisms, and hopefully confusion, I simply refer to them as the Wachowskis.
3. My understanding of myth is indebted especially to Wendy Doniger from this book and her earlier *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (1988), as well as to William G. Doty's extensive *Mythography* (2000) and to the now-classical works of Émile Durkheim (1915) and Mircea Eliade (1987).
4. In a kind of *mise-en-abyme*, the screenplay of the fiction film *Big Fish* borrows liberally from the real-life story of the writer Christopher Dickey and his father, the novelist James Dickey, as told in the younger Dickey's *Summer of Deliverance* (1999). In the film, the son William is a journalist working for *Newsweek* in Paris; in real life Chris Dickey worked for *Newsweek* in Paris. In the film, the father Edward was a southerner who told grand stories; in real life James Dickey was a southerner who wrote grand novels. The setup works as journalist versus storyteller, fact versus fiction. In both film and memoir we find fraught relationships that were, more or less, reconciled. This backstory was not in the original novel, *Big Fish* by Daniel Wallace, published about the same time as Dickey's memoir, but Dickey's book was in print a few years before screenwriter John August adapted Wallace's novel. In a personal email correspondence with me, Chris Dickey says he inquired a bit about the relations but there were denials all around. The parallels seem quite clearly more than coincidental, and the real life/fictional life divide becomes blurry.
5. *Mise-en-scène* began as a theater term but was quickly adapted to early cinema. Literally meaning, "to put onto stage," mise-en-scène has been a serious topic of scholars and critics of film almost since the beginnings of film theory.
6. In a related direction, in *Alien Sex*, Gerard Loughlin notices close parallels between the cinema, the church, and Plato's cave, suggesting, "the suspension of the real is necessary for faithful living, for being able to see and live by the light that burns in the dark" (2004: 35).
7. Baudrillard (2004) argued against the use of his book in *The Matrix*, saying the filmmakers got it wrong. This is a much deeper philosophical argument than is possible to present in the space here.

2. RITUALIZING FILM IN SPACE AND TIME

1. Ron Grimes's work has been important in maintaining distinctions between "ritual" and "media." They have many things in common, as I am arguing throughout this book, but cannot simply be equated. See especially his chapter "Ritual and the Media" (Grimes 2006: 3–13). See also Lyden 2003.

2. The sense of time is also created through soundtracks that foster slow or fast pacing, and even the rate of movement of the camera panning or tracking. I don't disregard these, but in these examples I am focusing on editing.
3. Though filmed across twenty-four countries, nowhere in the film is there any indication of where particular images are from. Over the years, websites developed in which people posted their ideas of what scene was where. Now, the official website of *Baraka* hosts an interactive page that shows where scenes were filmed: http://www.barakasamsara.com/baraka/locations.

3. SACRED AND CINEMATIC SPACES: CITIES AND PILGRIMAGES

1. In her classic book *The Death and Life of American Cities*, Jane Jacobs sees the importance of what she calls "landmarks." These visually prominent structures (often because of height) are "prime orientation clues" and "clarifiers of city order" (Jacobs 1992: 384, 388). Her book was originally published in 1961, and she used Trinity Church in lower Manhattan as an example of a landmark. By then the church had been overtaken in size by the office buildings around it, but it was a "landmark" because of its distinction from its surroundings, its functional use as a church in contrast to the business functions of nearby buildings.
2. I hasten to add that the "journeys" discussed here are, in general, willful undertakings, not to be confused with the journey of the forced exile. There are other ways to think about these links, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to develop them.
3. The term *hajji* has, unfortunately, been used recently as a derogatory term by the U.S. military fighting in the Middle East. But it remains, and has been, an honorary name.
4. Many new lawnmowers emit between 90–100 dB of noise at a couple feet from the engine, and a 1966 model would easily top that. Exposure to that much noise over long periods, even with earplugs, would have seriously damaged his hearing. See https://www.chem.purdue.edu/chemsafety/Training/PPETrain/dblevels.htm.

4. RELIGIOUS CINEMATICS: BODY, SCREEN, AND DEATH

1. Rachel O. Moore argues that this retelling of "naïve spectatorship" reassures "us of our superior position as spectators, while at the same time they enact our felt affinity to the primitive faced with our disappearing world" (1999: 4). I am deeply grateful for Moore's work in her book and have gleaned a great deal from it, but I think her analysis here misses something about the power and necessity of mythology.
2. There have been a number of recent works in film theory relating the body to the cinematic experience. In the background of this chapter are studies such as Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (2000) and *Touch* (2002); Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (1993); and Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts* (2004). Each of these works is, in turn,

especially indebted to the corporeal philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

3. Luce Irigaray's feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty is important: Merleau-Ponty gives too much emphasis to vision (Irigaray 1993). There is much that is culturally gendered and sexed within the aesthetic make-up of the body: the "distant senses," such as the eyes and ears, are traditionally asserted to be a masculine register while the "proximate senses," such as touch and taste, are claimed to be feminine. Nonetheless, what Merleau-Ponty ultimately does is to show the relations, the synaesthesia even, between vision and touch, and I think therefore he offers many opportunities for rethinking the gender of aesthetic construction. Irigaray somewhat acknowledges this, but at times she seems to reaffirm too much of the "traditional" sensual rendering whereby touch is feminine and vision is masculine.
4. The documentary as it exists in several places online is uncredited, with no production details, dates, or names of participants interviewed in it. Nonetheless, it's a fascinating view, accessible on YouTube at https://youtu.be/6OtrZoqN-xo.
5. When we writers write about films in this way, we are pretending to be the "logical" subject without doubt. It is part of scholarly work (Merleau-Ponty's, Prince's, or my own) to analyze *as if* we could objectively pin down our subject matter. With the possible exception of some poetry, the use of coherent language to respond to bodily sensed effects will always miss the mark. The best we can do with language is point to the event itself and hope it might trigger something in the reader's body and memory.

5. THE FACE, THE CLOSE-UP, AND ETHICS

1. The original computer emoticons (emotion + icon) were proposed by Scott Fahlman at Carnegie Mellon University in the early 1980s. To indicate whether an electronic post was a joke, he suggested a colon, hyphen, and close parenthesis: :-) . He also suggested :-(as a serious, neutral sign, but people quickly saw it as a frown, indicating sadness. There is something here about our deep-seated face readings, that we can't become too abstract or move too far from physical reality when it comes to faces.
2. Of course this is not to say blind and vision-impaired people cannot have intimate and vibrant social lives, but they establish meaning in different ways, through other sense connections.
3. The French film *Golgotha* (1935) may be the one exception, though it was seldom seen. At the same time, the British Board of Film Censors (founded 1912) banned depictions of Jesus, and there were no British images of Jesus until the late 1940s—he was even edited out of *Golgotha* (Reinhartz 2009: 15f)
4. As a side note, I would add that each new media technology has also revealed new dimensions of the structures of religion.
5. Levinas inherited an idealist framework of "aesthetics," embedded in theories of beauty and art, which is not how I am using the term throughout this book.
6. Theories of empathy are important, but more than I can get into here. For example, there is good current debate about the interrelations of facial mimicry and "deeper"

body states like empathy (Coplan 2006). There is something of a lag time between emotional mimicry and empathy. The former is almost automatic, occurring in the body, without reflective thought. The latter is based on an *understanding* of the emotions of the other; it thus requires other cognitive processes (believed to involve the cortex; see Preston and de Waal 2002). What this suggests to me is, again, the operations of the aesthesiological body as part of a religio-ethical cinematics.

7. Moore (1999) develops this idea in light of work by theorists Boris Eikhenbaum and Giuliana Bruno.

6. THE FOOTPRINTS OF FILM: CINEMATIC AFTER-IMAGES IN SACRED TIME AND SPACE

1. The *Rocky* films have become so engrained into the consciousness of people around the world that the massive art museum, opened in 1877, is sometimes overshadowed in popularity by these footprints, based on the 1976 film. Travel and tourist webpages are filled with reviews of the museum and accompanying images. Most reviews of the museum mention the Rocky footprints, and many tourist reviews of the museum are actually only about Rocky. One entry even blatantly suggests, "A group of us visited this museum, from 'Rocky' fame, on a whim . . ." as if no one ever went to museums except for their famed background appearance in movies. See http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/North_America/United_States_of_America/Pennsylvania/Philadelphia-860659/Things_To_Do-Philadelphia-Philadelphia_Museum_of_Art-R-1.html.
2. Thanks are due to my former student Katherine Rodriguez, who discussed her brother's wedding. Also, some of the research in this section was aided by my former student assistant Megan Ammann, whom I wish to thank for her help.
3. "Girl Gets Titanic Bat Mitzvah," *Associated Press*, October 29, 1998, http://www.vho.org/News/GB/SRN29–30_98.html#3.
4. An interesting side note, as an independent study with my student Tiffany Austin revealed, is that within church educational materials that incorporate films, there is a correspondence between the length of film clips shown and the theological conservatism of the church group. In a survey of curriculum resources for various Christian groups, it is clear that the more conservative the church and their corresponding curricula, the shorter the film clips and biblical passages. Conservative churches place more emphasis on shorter biblical passages (usually 1–2 verses) and shorter film clips (usually 1–2 minutes), while the more liberal mainline churches offer advice for lengthier quotes and clips (often up to 10 minutes). However, the theologically conservative churches unabashedly offer the film clips in the main Sunday service while the more liberal churches relegate such cultural interactivity to "adult education" courses. Cf. conservative publications such as Belknap 2001, and the slightly more left-leaning Fields and James 1999, and Abingdon Press's periodical *Reel to Real: Making the Most of the Movies with Youth*.
5. An account of the earliest audience participation rituals at *Rocky Horror* may be found at http://www.rockyhorror.com/history/howapbegan.php.

6. Mickey Hines tells a great story of the history of the bus and his family at http://www.stampedetrail.info/history.php.
7. Krakauer first wrote "Death of an Innocent" for the January 1993 issue of *Outside* magazine. He expanded the story into a book, *Into the Wild*, published in 1996. Krakauer has followed up on the story through the years, responding to theories on why McCandless died. My concern here is not so much about McCandless and his death, but how the mediation of his real-life story becomes part of a mythic structure that many people have attempted to re-live.
8. From http://www.christophermccandless.info/into-the-wild-bus.html. See other accounts at http://www.christophermccandless.info/ and http://www.stampedetrail.info/.
9. When I researched the first edition of this book, the FOE website included a short article by DeMille titled "Why We Need the Ten Commandments": http://www.foe.com/events/ten-commandments.aspx (originally accessed March 15, 2008), but it is no longer available.

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The Bridges of Madison County. Directed by Clint Eastwood. 1995. USA.
Chocolat. Directed by Lasse Hallström. 2000. UK/USA.
Cinema Paradiso. Directed by Giuseppe Tornatore. 1988. Italy/France.
Close Encounters of the Third Kind. Directed by Steven Spielberg. 1977. USA.
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Directed by Ang Lee. 2000. Taiwan/Hong Kong/USA/China.
The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys. Directed by Peter Care. 2002. USA.
The Da Vinci Code. Directed by Ron Howard. 2006. USA/Malta/France/UK.
Deconstructing Harry. Directed by Woody Allen. 1997. USA.
District 9. Directed by Neill Blomkamp. 2009. South Africa/USA/New Zealand/Canada.
Easy Rider. Directed by Dennis Hopper. 1969. USA.

Eat Drink Man Woman. Directed by Ang Lee. 1994. Taiwan/USA.
Eraserhead. Directed by David Lynch. 1977. USA.
The Exorcist. Directed by William Friedkin. 1973. USA.
Field of Dreams. Directed by Phil Alden Robinson. 1989. USA.
Finding Nemo. Directed by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich. 2003. USA.
Four Weddings and a Funeral. Directed by Mike Newell. 1994. UK.
Frankenstein. Directed by Thomas Edison. 1910. USA.
The French Connection. Directed by William Friedkin. 1971. USA.
From the Manger to the Cross. Directed by Sidney Olcott. 1911. USA.
The Funeral. Directed by Abel Ferrara. 1996. USA.
Gladiator. Directed by Ridley Scott. 2000. USA/UK.
Golgotha. Directed by Julien Duvivier. 1935. France.
Le Grand Voyage. Directed by Ismaël Ferroukhi. 2004. France/Morocco/Bulgaria/Turkey.
Hail Mary. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. 1985. France/Switzerland/UK.
Harold and Maude. Directed by Hal Ashby. 1971. USA.
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. Directed by Chris Columbus. 2001. UK/USA.
The Haunted Castle. Directed by Georges Méliès. 1896. France.
Images of the World and the Inscription of War. Directed by Harun Farocki. 1989. Germany.
Into the Wild. Directed by Sean Penn. 2007. USA.
Jai Santoshi Maa. Directed by Vijay Sharma. 1975. India.
The Joy Luck Club. Directed by Wayne Wang. 1993. USA/China.
Kiki's Delivery Service. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. 1989. Japan.
The King of Kings. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. 1927. USA.
King of Kings. Directed by Nicholas Ray. 1961. USA.
The Kiss. Directed by Thomas Edison. 1896. USA.
Koyaanisqatsi. Directed by Godfrey Reggio. 1982. USA.
The Last Temptation of Christ. Directed by Martin Scorsese. 1988. USA/Canada.
The Lion King. Directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff. 1994. USA.
Looking for Langston. Directed by Isaac Julien. 1989. UK.
The Lord of the Rings trilogy. Directed by Peter Jackson. 2001–3. USA/New Zealand.
Lost Highway. Directed by David Lynch. 1997. France/USA.
The Lovely Bones. Directed by Peter Jackson. 2009. USA/UK/New Zealand.
Malcolm X. Directed by Spike Lee. 1992. USA/Japan.
Manhatta. Directed by Charles Seeler and Paul Strand. 1921. USA.
Man with a Movie Camera. Directed by Dziga Vertov. 1929. Soviet Union.
The Matrix. Directed by the Wachowskis. 1999. Australia/USA.
The Matrix Revolutions. Directed by the Wachowskis. 2003. Australia/USA.
Metropolis. Directed by Fritz Lang. 1927. Germany.
Mickey and the Beanstalk. Directed by Hamilton Luske and Bill Roberts. 1947. USA.
Minority Report. Directed by Steven Spielberg. 2002. USA.
Monsoon Wedding. Directed by Mira Nair. 2001. India/USA/Italy/Germany/France.
Monsters, Inc. Directed by Pete Docter and David Silverman. 2001. USA.
Monsters University. Directed by Dan Scanlon. 2013. USA.

Mulholland Drive. Directed by David Lynch. 2001. France/USA.
My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Directed by Joel Zwick. 2002. USA/Canada.
My Neighbor Totoro. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. 1988. Japan.
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. 1984. Japan.
Night and Fog. Directed by Alain Resnais. 1956. France.
9. Directed by Shane Acker. 2009. USA.
The Ninth Gate. Directed by Roman Polanski. 1999. Spain/France/USA.
Of the Dead. Directed by Theirry Zeno, Jean-Pol Ferbus, and Dominque Garny. 1979. France/Belgium.
The Passion of Joan of Arc. Directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer. 1928. France.
The Passion of the Christ. Directed by Mel Gibson. 2004. USA.
Persona. Directed by Ingmar Bergman. 1966. Sweden.
Pinocchio. Directed by Norman Ferguson et al. 1940. USA.
Princess Mononoke. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. 1997. Japan.
The Purple Rose of Cairo. Directed by Woody Allen. 1985. USA.
Quo Vadis. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. 1951. USA/Italy.
Raging Bull. Directed by Martin Scorsese. 1980. USA.
Rebel Without a Cause. Directed by Nicolas Ray. 1955. USA.
The Robe. Directed by Henry Koster. 1953. USA.
Rocky. Directed by John G. Avildsen. 1976. USA.
The Rocky Horror Picture Show. Directed by Jim Sharman. 1975. UK/USA.
The Sandlot. Directed by David M. Evans. 1993. USA.
Sans Soleil. Directed by Chris Marker. 1983. France.
Saving Private Ryan. Directed by Steven Spielberg. 1998. USA.
The Scent of Green Papaya. Directed by Tran Anh Hung. 1993. France/Vietnam.
Sherlock Jr. Directed by Buster Keaton. 1924. USA.
Shrek. Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. 2001. USA.
Sirius Remembered. Directed by Stan Brakhage. 1959. USA.
The Song of Bernadette. Directed by Henry King. 1943. USA.
Spirited Away. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. 2001. Japan.
Star Wars—Episode III: Revenge of the Sith. Directed by George Lucas. 2005. USA.
Star Wars—Episode IV: A New Hope. Directed by George Lucas. 1977. USA.
Star Wars: The Force Awakens. Directed by J. J. Abrams. 2015. USA.
Steamboat Willie. Directed by Ub Iwerks and Walt Disney. 1928. USA.
The Straight Story. Directed by David Lynch. 1999. France/UK/USA.
The Ten Commandments. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille. 1956. USA.
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Directed by Tobe Hooper. 1974. USA.
Tideland. Directed by Terry Gilliam. 2005. Canada/UK.
The Time Machine. Directed by Simon Wells. 2002. USA.
Titanic. Directed by James Cameron. 1997. USA.
The Twilight of the Damned. Directed by Ahmed Rachedi. 1966. Algeria.
2001: A Space Odyssey. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. 1968. UK/USA.
A View to a Kill. Directed by John Glen. 1985. UK.

Wavelength. Directed by Michael Snow. 1967. Canada/USA.
The Wedding Planner. Directed by Adam Shankman. 2001. Germany/USA.
West Side Story. Directed by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise. 1961. USA.
The Wolf of Wall Street. Directed by Martin Scorsese. 2013. USA.
Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory. Directed by Louis Lumière. 1895. France.

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