

Ceremonial Cinema:
World-Creation and Social Transformation through Film as Ritual

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Abstract

The journey to the cinema and our experiences there form part of what is effectively a screening ritual geared toward affecting audiences. The power of cinema largely derives from being removed from general society – presenting an ideal traditional ritual space of liminality. Within this space and in familiar patterns, viewers' attention and emotions are guided and synchronised by the film, which are pre-determined by canonical codes like narrative logic and generic features. Ceremonial thresholds separate but also connect, and in cinema, they serve to initiate and encode spectators' experience as part of a fundamentally social activity. When we visit the cinema to watch a film, the encounter is not only shaped by exciting moving pictures or engulfing sound, but also by the people watching with us, as we become part of a social ritual.

This study aims to identify and explore the various connections and unavoidable entanglements between the spheres of film and ritual, particularly in terms of the ritualistic aspects that extend beyond the cinema before and after the screening. This includes basic phenomena that Ritual Studies take as its domain of inquiry – thresholds, liminality, collective effervescence and *communitas*, symbols, etc., and the broader effects or functions of these phenomena such as social identity, social structure, social cohesion, and social transformation. The diverse experiential qualities, effects, and broader influences of film may seem disconnected, but they share a deeper commonality that this study argues is the source of film's profound social influence: each presents an instance or aspect of what is here called 'film as ritual.' It aims to explore the robust presence of film production and film spectatorship beyond the physical location of the cinema and considers viewer engagement in terms of pilgrimages and participation within an extended media landscape and its related narratives of symbolic significance. Ultimately, the study addresses film's transformational power and influence by mapping it onto social ritual theories and exploring its world-building capacities.

The global fascination with films, which clearly includes social viewing experiences and encounters with film beyond the confines of the cinema, establishes film as ritual as a highly extended and culturally diffuse phenomenon. Film as ritual relates to collective identity creation and social relations through extensions of the cinematic experience beyond a mere physical place that provides the opportunity to watch a movie. The notion of film as ritual helps us come to terms with how films affect and influence people, their actions and their way of looking at the world – essentially *transforming* them, in some or other way.

Key terms: ritual; media ritual; world-making; threshold; liminality; *communitas*; myth; pilgrimage; identity; social transformation; social solidarity; social conflict; citizenship; activism.

CEREMONIAL CINEMA: World-creation and Social Transformation through Film as Ritual

R Janse van Rensburg

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INTRODUCTION

1. The cinematic ceremony

'Ceremony' might not be the first word that comes to mind when one thinks of movies. In fact, our engagements with film can be related to ritual and its patterned ceremonies in a wide variety of ways. Viewing a film is itself a thoroughly ritualistic experience. This is especially true within the space of the cinema that reveals society's desire for rituals, organising functions and, in turn, elucidates cinema's highly valued social and ritual features. Since this thesis focuses on the rituals that *precede* and *follow* the screening, allow me to offer the briefest of sketches of the cinematic ceremony itself.

Firstly, the journey to the cinema and our experiences there is part of a screening ritual that is effectively ritualised and therefore is geared toward affecting audiences. This cinematic ceremony starts punctually, at a designated time, and we arrive dressed up at the dazzling 'picture palaces' (Kracauer & Levin, 1987) with its plush red carpets and luxurious velvet seats. There we 'sacrifice' our money to the gatekeeper at the ticket booth and gather our feast of celebratory food. Quietly we cross the threshold at the auditorium doors and join the rest of the congregation in the liminal space of darkness. In silent reverence, we focus our stare on the altar screen, awaiting the light that illuminates and reveals wonderland. In this collective state, we surrender self-awareness as we forget our own selves and identify with larger-than-life characters while exploring their world. Therefore, we come to identify ourselves as "a pure act of perception" (Metz & Guzzetti, 1976) as the hidden 'apparatus' of film construct a new reality before our eyes. The filmmaker creates meaning and can "make visible the invisible, express the inexpressible, speak the unspeakable" (Broughton, 1978) through their spellbinding editing, cinematographic world-making, and generic patterning. Due to the cinema's technologically superior audio-visual equipment, the audience is thoroughly immersed in this world of film in a regressive dream-like state induced by the cinema (Metz, 1976 & 1982). Within the hallowed grounds of the cinema, its devotees are brought into the reality of the vibrant image, the virtual realm, and we dream together as we enter the quasi-mythological worlds of film.

This power of cinema largely derives from being removed from general society – presenting an ideal traditional ritual space of liminality. There are many thresholds to be transcended entering this liminal ritual space, from the mall or movie house façade to the lobby filled with promotional material and branded refreshments; to the screen frame and red curtains; to the advertisements, trailers, logos¹ and opening credits – these all serve as doorways for the awareness of spectators (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015). Like temple doorways, these thresholds also serve to create an isolated space that removes the audience from the mundane operations of society. During this experience, viewers are thus not in the everyday world; much like the 'other worldly' experiences offered by other cultural rituals, they are in a liminal in-between space as they participate in a distinguishable encounter from other experiences and surroundings. We journey into various carefully crafted film models of reality that stand in reflexive

¹ Although often overlooked, film companies' moving logos quickly place the audience in another world as they often depict the predominant theme of the heavens and earth as "connected through the production of cinema" such as Universal's spinning earth that zooms out to include the whole globe, the DreamWorks logo where the camera lifts from still water to a lunar point of view onto the world below, or Orion's star filled skies. See Plate (2008:10).

contrast to our own for our edification, where the audience experience a "phenomenological reduction" of the real world and a "putting into parentheses of its real existence" (Baudry & Williams, 1974).

In pictures: The rituals and thresholds of the cinematic ceremony



Figure 1: The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985)



Figure 2: True Romance (1993)



Figure 3: True Romance (1993)



Figure 4: The Last Action Hero (1993)



Figure 5: The Last Action Hero (1993)

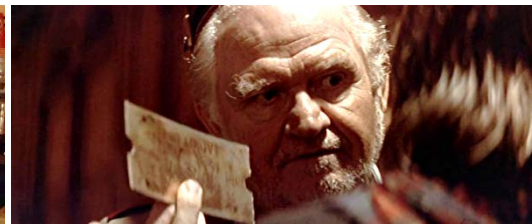


Figure 6: The Last Action Hero (1993)



Figure 7: The Purple Rose of Cairo (1985)



Figures 8-10: Dreamworks logo, Universal logo, Orion logo

The cinema offers a highly ritualistic experience within a liminal backstage space removed from society (Figure 1) where the anonymous audience attention is focused on the big screen and from where the light reveals the world of film for the audience to enter on a journey (Figure 2). Various thresholds and points of entry to the worlds of film function as doorways into the awareness of spectators that serve to encode the experience, such as the movie house or mall façade (Figure 1) with its ticket booth (Figure 3) and the lobby filled with descriptive posters and promotional displays (Figure 4), branded refreshments (Figures 5), and the ticket tearing usher (Figure 6), to the screen frame with red curtains (Figure 7), and the advertisements, trailers, cosmically creative logos (Figures 8-10) and opening credit sequences.

In familiar patterns, viewers' attention and emotions are guided and synchronised by the film, which are pre-determined by canonical codes like narrative logic and generic features. This highlights the extent to which partaking in these screen stories conform to more traditional ritual forms, such as their "high degree of physical performativity...and scene-like dimensions" (Nünning & Nünning, 2014).

Ceremonial thresholds separate but also connect, and in cinema, they serve to initiate and encode spectators' experience as part of a fundamentally social activity. When we visit the cinema to watch a film, the encounter is not only shaped by the exciting moving pictures or the engulfing sound, but also by the people watching with us, and we become part of a social ritual. Viewers experience a sense of the shared emotional empowerment and effervescence of a social ritual, even when watching a film alone and thus as only part of an *imagined* community. As part of an actual group, these emotions are further amplified by way of emotional contagion (see further Hanich, 2018). In addition to the fascination of the film's patterned production, narrative conventions, and the various social customs that have developed around film reception, there was also the enchantment of the formally structured visits to the entertaining cinemas of yore and their ceremonies – all of which (much like church services) set such visits apart from general daily activities. Therefore, these visitations are not only a matter of entertainment; individual viewers partake in a social ritual that constitutes a unique collective audience, shaping our respective experiences. Certain films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) or *The Sound of Music* (1965) have cultivated cult-screening events where the audience collectively express their adoration by dressing in costumes, speaking or singing along, and happily throwing popcorn at the screen during key scenes. Members of the audience are thus pulled into the world of the film not only via identification but also via a socio-ritual experience, marked by emotional effervescence (Durkheim & Swain, 2008) and shared perspective-taking, in itself, a positive encounter since "the experience of a prolonged emphatic immersion is curative" (Kohut cited in Strozier, 2001:347).

The social viewing experience of the ceremonial cinema thus enhances our individual emotional connection to occurrences onscreen. It allows us to feel connected to the audience and society at large while opening our eyes to new worlds and experiences beyond our own. Such an event combining suggestive content that stays with us long after the initial screening, with a powerful rush of emotional effervescence and sense of connection to other people, has the potential for effecting individuals beyond the moment and site of the encounter.

For many, the term 'ritual' evokes mysterious images of ancient tribal or religious ceremonies, but since the more classical theorists like Arnold van Gennep and his seminal ritual research in 1909, or Victor Turner's in the 1950s, and the more contemporary theories of Catherine Bell in the 1990s, as well as Couldry's media ritual framework in the 2000s, this perception within a ritual theory, has significantly shifted and its inner-workings are better understood, also beyond exclusively religious or spiritual senses of the term. Today, ritual is relevant in various fields of study, from Anthropology and Religious Studies to Sociology and Media Studies. Many such connections between ritual and film going have been recognised by theorists and scholars to varying degrees of explicitness. In more general terms, ritual's attending sense of *communitas* was claimed as essential toward developing social cohesion (Turner, 1985; Andrew, 1986; Deleuze, 1988) and then the presence and influence of ritual liminality in the media (Turner, 1992; Couldry, 2003). The connection between a film's spatial significance and the typical ritual characteristic of world-making has been recognised (Kracauer, 1997) and the various roles films can play in culture relative to the ritual within which they appear (Andrew, 1986). The similarities between ritual and film's temporal and spatial technicalities have also been considered (Dorskey, 2003) and its typically ritualistic, highly patterned, and repetitive sequences (Nünning & Nünning, 2014). Other scholars further documented how

film functions like religion by way of ritual and world-making (Plate, 2008) and the part modern media and its own various rituals play in the creation and redefinition of the myths through which society understands itself (Lyden, 2003).

The contribution of this study is to build further on these recognised and now well-established connections between film and ritual and the notion of film production and spectatorship as ritual.

In pictures: The cinematic audience as community



Figures 11-13: *Cinema Paradiso* (1988)



Figure 14: *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985)

During the screening, the audience journey into the world of film and the individual identities of viewers shift to the background through their shared experience and muscle movements such as established during the musical accompaniment of the soundtrack, when they laugh together, or gasp from shock or surprise (Figure 11-13). As ritualised bodies part of a social experience, they become synchronised by way of such emotional entrainment and experience a sense of social cohesion and emotional excitement or effervescence, or *communitas* (Figure 14).

2. The viewing ceremony's social value *beyond* the cinema building

In 2020, the world was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to drastic changes as the world we knew was briskly swept away. As our movement became severely restricted by global lockdowns and social gatherings were limited if not non-existent, social hubs like restaurants, bars, and cinemas, became empty sites. We were left to wonder what happens to the 'ceremonial cinema' and its many affordances during 'the new normal'. People seemed to miss most in their lockdown and quarantine the connection and socialisation of public life and their communal hubs of interaction. The cinema was missed not only for its big screens and loud sounds, but people missed the connections they made and the experiences they shared. This is evidenced by how people attended group screenings of films online, with film festivals like SXSW following suit.

The global fascination with film and creating collective encounters with film beyond the cinema establishes film as ritual as a highly *extended* and culturally *diffuse* phenomenon. Film as ritual relates to collective identity creation and social relations, thus extending the cinematic experience to more than just the physical place that allows watching a movie. The parameters of this study extend film as ritual beyond the locale of the cinema and into what occurs before and after the screening in terms of film production and film's world-building and *communitas* capacities. The global fascination with films and creating social

viewing experiences and encounters with film beyond the cinema establishes film as ritual as well being a highly extended and culturally diffuse phenomenon. This establishes a role for film as ritual relating to collective identity creation and social relations while extending the cinematic experience to more than just the physical place that provides the opportunity to watch a movie.

3. Viewing as transformative ritual

One such extension of film as ritual involves the many well-known instances where films affect and influence people, their actions, and their way of looking at the world – essentially *transforming* them, in some or other way. Indeed, Jones (2011) goes as far as to link this cultural consumption of cinema to the pursuit of identity. I knew nothing of film's socio-ritual affordances when I first encountered those sculptures of light in the dark cathedral of cinema at the age of five, but that did not make it any less of a (trans)formative experience. I found it so affecting that I would not leave my father's side for days on end. It literally took me decades before I could re-watch *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) for fear of being moved to tears. When I finally watched it a second time, I was surprised when it was not the climactic goodbye scene that moved me this time but the subplot of the broken family. It amazed me that the responses of friends and acquaintances to this film could be similarly diverse, yet all of them deep-felt and profound in their own ways. I wondered: Could there be many more such worlds of effect and meaning 'hidden in plain view' in my ongoing weekly visits to the dark temple, just as I missed the story of tension and divorce during my first viewing of *E.T.*?

In pictures: The multiple perspectives of film worlds



Figures 15-16: *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)

The ritual worlds of film combine and present many different narratives by way of particular rituals of film production, thereby creating multiple perspectives that affect audience members in diverse ways. *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) ostensibly revolves around the story of friendship between a boy and a little alien abandoned on earth (Figure 15), but the film also explores the themes of family bonds, social tension, and divorce (Figure 16).

I am not alone in experiencing the powerful effects, and long-lasting changes brought about by film. Most viewers can attest to having been moved in both mundane and profound ways; a good movie captures our attention, stirs our feelings, and elicits a response. From the earliest days of cinema, audiences attested to its transformative effects. Pušnik (2015:56) interviewed octogenarians who vividly recalled how their world opened up as they marvelled at the ocean for the first time on screen. An 85-year-old accountant freely admitted to actually losing bladder control as a boy from the pure excitement presented by the new moving pictures. Think of how film dialogue has penetrated popular vernacular, for example, "There's no place like home" from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or "I'll be back" from *The Terminator* (1984). Or think of cinema's profound impact on fashion trends. For example, *Annie Hall* (1977) made masculine clothing for women popular, while Madonna created the trend of underwear as outerwear in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985). Films have furthermore become so entrenched in our daily lives that some fans extend the film world into their own as they dress up like their favourite characters – as in the earlier

examples of *The Sound Of Music* (1965) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) screenings (Plate, 2008; McCulloch, 2016) – or adhere to their overt or implicit principles as though they were religious tenets – as many a *Star Wars* (1977) fan religiously follows the 'way of the force' (Schultes, 2016). Films like *Malcolm X* (1992) and *Selma* (2014) influenced race relation conversations (Platinga, 2021), while films like *On the Beach* (1959) and *The Day After* (1983) influenced views on the spread of nuclear weapons (Boyer, 1984: 824).

Without a doubt, such examples showcase the immense social influence of film as it affects everything from fashion, language, and technology, to identity, gender issues and political values. Arguably, the very social experience of going to the cinema had an immediate impact on society – together audience forgot their demographic differences as they collectively entered another world. With this dissertation, I want to argue that such influence and transformative capability is better understood and accounted for when considered within the frame of ritual theory, especially when it comes to broader socio-cultural transformations.

In pictures: The model worlds of film transform the real world



Figure 17: *The Terminator* (1984)



Figure 18: *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985)



Figure 19: *Selma* (2014)



Figure 20: *The Day After* (1983)

The worlds of film have had a vast and formidable influence on the world and transformed diverse social spheres, from popular vernacular (Figure 17) and fashion (Figure 18) to civil rights debates (Figure 19) and nuclear proliferation (Figure 20).

4. Aims and scope

The diverse experiential qualities, effects, and broader influences of film enumerated above may seem disconnected, but they thus share a deeper commonality that I argue is the source of film's profound social influence: each presents an instance or aspect of what I will call here 'film as ritual.' This study then aims to identify and explore the various connections and unavoidable entanglements between the spheres of film and ritual, particularly in terms of the ritualistic aspects that extend beyond the cinema

before and after the screening ². This includes basic phenomena that Ritual Studies take as its domain of inquiry – thresholds, liminality, collective effervescence and *communitas*, symbols, etc., and the broader effects or functions of these phenomena such as social identity, social structure, social cohesion, and social transformation. I aim to explore the robust presence of film production and film spectatorship beyond the physical location of the cinema and consider viewer engagement in terms of pilgrimages and participation within an extended media landscape and its related narratives of symbolic significance. I aim to analyse film's transformational power and influence by mapping it onto social ritual theories and exploring its world-building capacities.

Given that much has already been written about the cinematic ceremony, the following two related questions will lead my investigation:

- What is the ritual nature of film production and spectatorship, specifically *outside* and *beyond* the cinema and/or *after* the event of film-going? Put another way, how does film as ritual's power extend beyond the cinema as a physical site and cinema-going as a face-to-face event?
- How do these insights about the nature of ritual help us better account for the so-called 'power' of films, in this case specifically understood in terms of film's capacity for broader socio-cultural transformation and world-building?

5. Methods and approach

In this qualitative and theoretical study, I thus draw on the insights of ritual theory to make a scholarly contribution to film theory by exploring the ritual qualities of film production and spectatorship, thereby investigating the effects and power of film.

I take as a heuristic point of departure for Seligman's (2008) notion of ritual as a *unique and contextually particular frame for action and orientations*, in combination with the following conception of ritual by Couldry (2003:21-22), comprising *three layers of increasing complexity*:

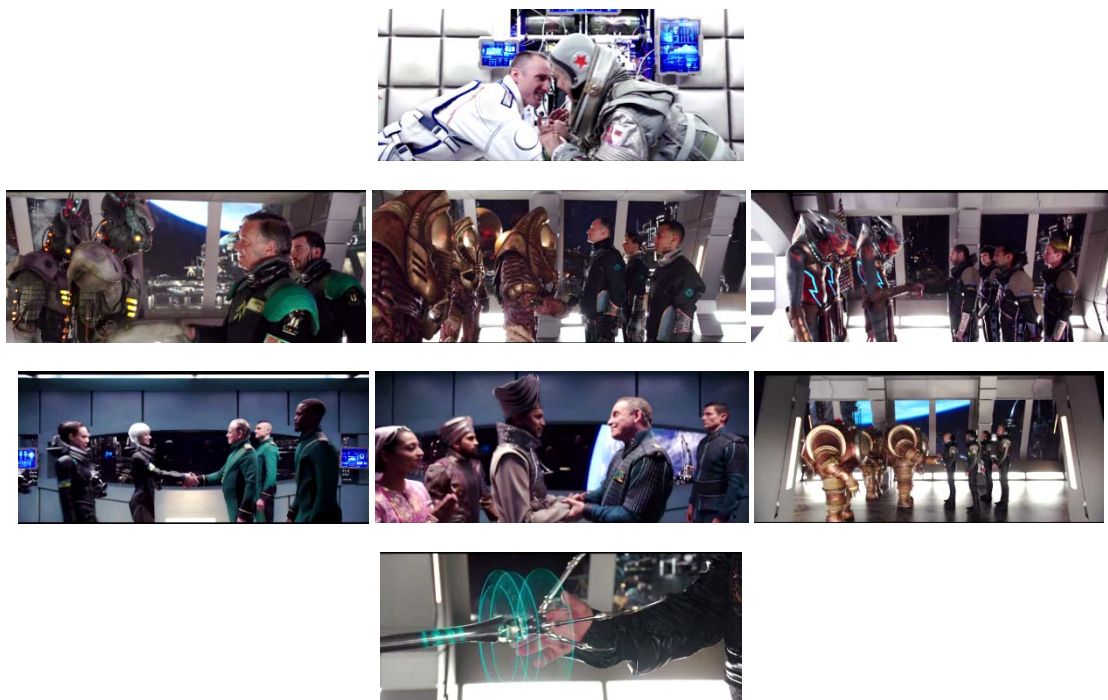
- ritual as repeated action;
- ritual as repeatable and patterned actions with specific symbolic meaning ascribed to them; and
- ritual as repeatable and patterned action with its symbolic actions having a transcendent referent such as a religious entity or the social structure.

With this unfolding, layered definition, we can consider different phenomena in increasingly complex ways. For example, when we consider the social sphere through such a specific ritual frame and when further applying Couldry's definitions to a social ritual such as a handshake, we witness the repeated action when people shake hands upon meeting. We recognise the handshake symbolically affirms social solidarity, and lastly, we realise the transcendent referent is social cohesion. Similarly, when we consider the Catholic Mass ritual, we witness the repeated action when the congregation kneels and receives bread and wine at a Sunday service. We recognise that the bread and wine symbolically refer to the body and

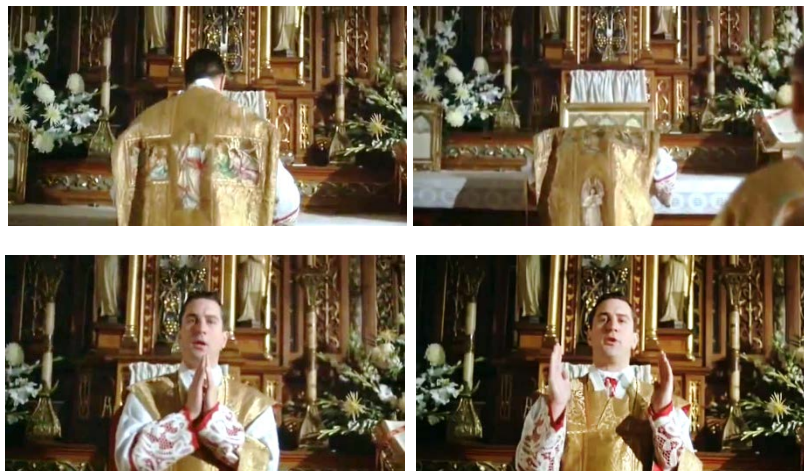
² This study's emphasis on ritual aspects of film *before* and *after* the screening entails that the study for the most part adopts a *macro-social* perspective rooted in key concepts of ritual theory. However, this is not to deny other equally productive perspectives that a study of film as ritual could adopt. A further study could for instance address the local, embodied, 'face-to-face' dimension of our ritual encounters with film. And, for such an essentially *phenomenological* approach to film as ritual, the work of Vivian Sobchack would no doubt prove indispensable. See, for example, Sobchack (1992; 2004; 2016).

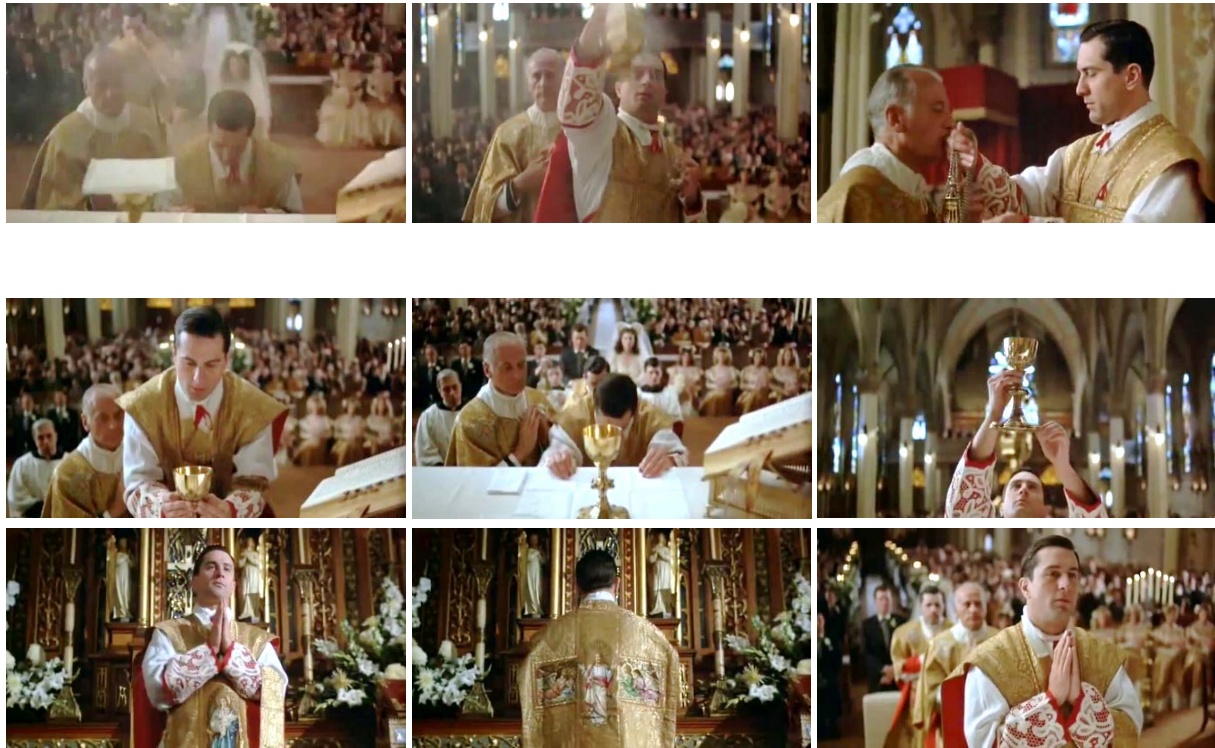
blood of Christ, and we realise the transcendent referent is God into whom the congregation is symbolically absorbed by consuming the bread and wine. When we apply such a ritual frame of action to film, we witness various repetitious cinematographic framing techniques that create symbolic relationships between these objects in the screen within narratives that also have the social structure as transcendent referent. Specific object relations such as in *The Matrix* (1999), where a phone looming large in the foreground with smaller figures in the background creates anticipation that not only will the phone ring, but the call will have important consequences for the characters. The observable repetitious and patterned rituals of film allow recognisable cues for viewers. At the same time, symbolic value can be determined within the film's totality, and indeed, by the time the adventures and phone calls in *The Matrix* are over, the transcendent referent of the social structure has been referenced and dissected.

In pictures: Diverse ritual sequences with symbolic meaning and a transcendent referent



Figures 21-28: The social ritual of the handshake in Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets (2017)





Figures 29-41: The intricate religious rituals of Mass in *True Confessions* (1981)



Figures 42-44: The patterned and sequenced rituals of film in *The Matrix* (1999)

A supposedly simple handshake (Figure 21-28), the complex particulars of Catholic Mass (Figure 29-41), and the visual constructions and relationships of film (Figures 42-44), are all diverse rituals that have a repetitious surface nature of repeatable patterning and particular sequencing, but these highly patterned ritual sequences also have a deeper symbolic reference and meaning, as well as a transcendent referent, whether sacred or social.

Building upon this working definition, I consider the more traditional model of ritual by drawing on the seminal perspectives of Durkheim and his followers (Durkheim 2011; cf. Kapferer 2004: 35; Grimes 2006), while referring to the work of Geertz (1993) to understand religion's *function* in society rather than its theological *content* and ritual's world-making function related to this. Turner (1969) discloses more fundamental and universal ritual concepts such as the dynamics of ritual, the liminal space of ritual, and

symbolism, while citing Van Gennep, also as discussed by Kapferer, points to ritual as not only capable of organising cognition but creating meaning (Van Gennep 2004; Kapferer 2004, 2013).

Bell (1992) provides views on social control, internalisation, and the ritual body, while Grimes, especially in the context of Couldry's work (Couldry, 2003) reveals an interdisciplinary take on ritual, that alongside Rappaport (1999) and his standpoint on ritual action also widens our understanding of ritual beyond the traditional field of conventional ritual and merely affirming social boundaries and power structures. I also reference prominent instances of film theory (Kracauer, 1987; Andrew, 1986) and Film and Religion scholarship (Lyden, 2003; Plate, 2008). The study, moreover, is informed by philosophers such as Mircea Eliade (1974) as well as linguist and anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1981).

Admittedly, the power of film to inspire change was recognised by people such as Hitler and Lenin and can be shown to bring about more ominous change such as *Triumph of the Will* (1935) gathering Nazi support, or *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), attracting Ku Klux Klan member numbers and establishing it as a nationwide movement in America. Similarly, the cultural phenomena that is film have also been rife with criticism of its voyeuristic exploitation of suffering people (Lyden, 2003:30), capitalist propaganda and being "implicated in the maintenance of ideological and economic domination" (Lyden, 2003:31) while also having no "transcendent referent" (Lyden, 2003:66), thus merely worshipping itself (Lyden, 2003:12) and only representing "the interests of the dominant" group (Lyden, 2003:132). Much of this criticism can be traced back to mass culture theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who believed no good can come from popular culture, including film, since it is steeped in this "capitalist propaganda", and many film schools still remain close to this assumption (Lyden, 2003:31). However, this does not detract from the simultaneous productive emancipatory potentials of film as ritual. Henry Jenkins theorises that engaging with popular culture is a form of play where we connect with others while we attempt to make sense of the world and process culture as we seek out, select, and recombine information. This culture of knowledge sharing allows many new avenues for mythological expression and understanding as our worldviews are constantly and collectively deconstructed and reassembled. In the same vein, John Lyden looks beyond mere ideology and domination when considering film in society. He supports a stronger viewer-oriented methodology as he ultimately seeks to widen the understanding of film's function within society toward art and a cultural phenomenon akin to religion and its world-making capabilities. Thus, while it would be imprudent not to mention this large, somewhat older body of work on ideology and propaganda in light of film as ritual (for example, see Kracauer, 1997), given that my interest is in the more recent line of research regarding the *positive* potential of film as ritual, there will only be brief references to this where relevant.

Since ritual entails a tangible expression but writing about it can easily become overly abstract, I concretely but briefly demonstrate some of these key points and connections by way of various smaller 'in pictures' case studies. I make use of these vignettes since a single case study would not suffice, as neither a single film nor even a single franchise would be able to demonstrate the great variety of phenomena, permutations, and manifestations of ritual covered in this study. As this brief overview already suggests, it would be impossible within the space of a single dissertation to work with ritual and all its related theories, and I, therefore, identify and distinguish a set of key theses about ritual (set out in Chapter 1). Similarly, given that much has been written about the cinematic ceremony itself, I, instead, turn my attention to the less-explored film as a ritual *before* and *after* the screening in a cinema (Chapters 2 and 3, respectively).

6. Chapter overviews

Chapter 1

Ritual intersects and connect with the worlds of film in many ways. In Chapter 1, I identify and distinguish a set of key ritual theses that will set up my film analyses in the chapters that follow (in other words, this functions as a literature review). I will hence explore

1. the "Social solidarity (and emotional effervescence) thesis" that critically consider social solidarity, as well its relationship to emotional effervescence or *communitas* (which is considered as a crucial element to any kind of social cohesion);
2. the "Ritual and myth thesis" that relates how myths assist society in making sense of itself;
3. the "Ritual as world-maker thesis" that explicate the model worlds of order that rituals create similar to that of religion;
4. the "Ritual as journey thesis" whereby participants are considered pilgrims on a journey through a ritual world filled with symbolism;
5. the "Liminality in ritual thesis", "Ritual as creative anti-structure thesis", "Ritual as channelling of conflict thesis", and the "Cultural reflexivity through ritual thesis"; that is how ritual liminality as a space is removed from general society, its structure and functions, which then proceeds to reflect that structure but acts as creative anti-structure that offers alternative perspectives and insights to that structure (thus relieving social tension and channelling social conflict);
6. the concept of "cultural capital" and its relation to movement within the social structure and the ability to influence that structure; and the
7. "Media as ritual thesis", that is how film as ritual functions within the media landscape.

These theses are then employed as key perspectives and a springboard for the in-depth critical examination of the relationship between film and ritual.

Chapter 2

In light of the theories of ritual discussed in Chapter 1, I proceed in Chapter 2 to reveal the first set of connections between ritual and film under the rubric "before the screening." With this, I am referring to a series of general rituals (both film-specific and broader), which *precede* the local viewing experience as I reflect on the constantly innovating production of rituals and the rituals of production of film. I will investigate Lyden's claims that film functions the same as religion and myth – how film does so by creating symbolic models of the world that reflect and stand in conversation with the real world and by way of which the real world's challenges and structures can be critically considered. I will show that the ritual function of world-making as a central concept to religion and the creation and maintenance of social order has allowed film rituals a space within which to function to satisfy secular society's ongoing need for the ordering functions traditionally fulfilled by the rituals of religion and myth. I will conclude the section by illustrating how this function of film plays out in the real world as it addresses the social theories of ritual in terms of defining reality within the social solidarity thesis and the channelling of repression and conflict thesis.

In the next section, I will investigate the various repetitive and patterned rituals of production that go into the creation of the world of film. I will further illustrate how film fulfils the same function as religion and

myth in more film-specific terms and rituals by referring to Plate's analysis of the similar religious ritual world-making techniques employed by film and the related production rituals that seek to construct film worlds. I will show how these ritual world-making production techniques operate by focusing on such archetypal ritual characteristic procedures as found in film like the repetitious and sequenced structuring of specific units of meaning; the patterned cinematographic and editing techniques that create readable significations for the audience; and the framing of the film world in terms of focusing the visual presentation and the creation of meaning.

In the final section of this chapter, I will examine the groupings of film types known as genres and their function as social rituals of transformation. I will analyse film genres as a particular instance of rituals of production and how mainstream film genres fulfil similar functions to that of religious rituals and myth. I will continue to show how film genres function as rituals of social transformation through their particular repetitious yet highly adaptive patterns, which rearticulate myths and worlds.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I examine experiences related to film *after* the screening and the "footprints" (as Plate calls them) it extends beyond the viewing experience and into the real world. I will begin by detailing the geographical locations of media sites within the media landscape and how these play into narratives of significance that elevate some places to positions of symbolic significance and power, and thus how visitations to such places of memory establish visitors as pilgrims in search of meaning and life orientation within this symbolic landscape. I will, furthermore, investigate how these places present opportunities for social integration and cohesion based on dispute and fighting for consensus as clashing values and ideologies are negotiated as people share conflicting ideas and exchange cultural capital.

In the next section, I will investigate the many options available to fans of films, apart from pilgrimages, to extend their participation in the world of film beyond just a viewing experience. I will consider the many media platforms available for transmedia narrative extension and the audience searching for extended experiences with the film world across hybrid media spaces, and the many pilgrimage opportunities it may offer. I will also scrutinise the collective participation of audiences within such extended film world-related experiences as they jointly make sense of these complicated extended worlds, and then furthermore their subsequently developing role as co-authors of these experiences.

Finally, I will explore the political implications of film as ritual in creating community and activating the civic imagination to participate beyond the popular culture scope as active political citizens and in the active and pro-active creation of emerging culture.

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF RITUAL: THESES AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. Introduction: The complexity and fluidity of ritual

Ritual exerts a wide range of influences and can be considered active in a wide array of human activities. Our understanding of ritual, what it does and how it is done has changed much over the last century. Consider Catherine Bell's distinction between two structural patterns typically exhibited by ritual and the models of ritual flowing forth from this distinction (Bell, 1992:20-23). The first, earlier structure, according to Bell, marks ritual as action and thus distinct from belief and symbols. As such, ritual is considered as mostly unreflective action that merely expresses prior ideas. The second structural pattern of ritual that was hypothesised later establishes ritual as the mechanism by which action and thought/belief may be integrated and aligned with one another. The two structural patterns allow for more ideal and creative functions when both are active in a ritual.

The understanding of ritual theorists has consequently developed from positioning ritual as a confirmer and enforcer of traditional values and behaviours toward placing ritual as a creative and mutual interaction between the individual and the social sphere. This development is illustrated by Bell's take on the three progressive ritual models (Bell, 1992:20-21). The first model of ritual positions ritual as a traditional ceremony of actions where social structure representations and individual behaviour and experience can interact. This model establishes ritual as the process by which individual ideas and behaviours are socially adopted and affirmed. The second model of ritual positions ritual as the process where the wider continuous ontological sphere and the ever-changing social world can interact. The third model places ritual as a creative anti-structure to the traditional social structure where the needs and demands of both the individuals of the community and the collective social order can be mediated as they come in communication with one another when both structural patterns are active in this model.

Developing through phases of sub cognitive ritualism, functionalist ritualism, and code-seeking structuralism, ritual theorists' understanding of ritual has thus undergone a re-orientation in emphasis from representation to an emphasis on the process, thus greatly alleviating concerns of domination and power structures. Theorists' conception of ritual has moved beyond understanding it as a mere *affirmation* of power structures, progressing toward ritual being recognised as also being able to *redefine* those power structures, and then finally and most profoundly, toward acknowledging ritual as a *transformation* mechanism and establishing it as a *maker* of meaning. Rituals are quite changeable and malleable as their context and symbols can be altered; thus, allowing rituals to be capable of transformation and being changed while also having the ability to be linked and fused with other rituals. The understanding of ritual participation and participants have changed since although traditional rituals were set in real-time and take part in by various members of society and thus assisted organic solidarity, modern media ritual may also allow the imagined global audience as a sense of community by way of its virtual solidarity across multiple platforms and at any time.

Ritual participants go on a journey through the ritual process shaped around a central idea often encapsulated by a 'totem', the guiding symbol of the ritual and filled with related symbols that are continually assessed and categorised by participants as sacred or profane and thus stand in a recurrent

state of dynamic tension. Assimilation and integration of these dynamically opposing symbols lead to new associations, insights, conclusions, and ways of thinking. Denser and more homogeneous symbols tend to lead to narrower and more concrete thinking, while more diverse and looser symbols stimulate more abstract and relativistic thought. Rituals may thus have a universal or archetypal underlying journey principle that may be applied, adjusted and appropriated in many ways, but since not all rituals have the same aim, cultural clout, or impact, the following three ritual definitions (as mentioned earlier) help to distinguish between different ritual *levels* of intensity and significance when we consider (a) ritual as repeated action, (b) ritual as repeatable and patterned actions with specific symbolic meanings ascribed to them, and (c) ritual as repeatable and patterned action with its symbolic actions having a transcendent referent such as a religious entity or the social structure (Couldry, 2003:21-22).

The above outline of ritual only begins to illustrate the complexities, fluidity, and mutability of ritual to not only affect participants but also to constantly change and update itself to suit a specific context and need, as well as the social requirements of that specific time. With such an intricate and far-reaching topic, it would be impossible to offer a comprehensive ritual theory. In what follows, I distinguish a set of general theses aimed at explicating the key aspects of rituals and their typical effects. As will be seen, these theses indicate how ritual lies at the root of society and culture in that it not only shapes thought, identity and the social structure but also brings changes to these structures. This set of ritual theses may well not always be entirely consistent with one another and, in fact, at times may even oppose and contradict one another, but they do highlight different and important perspectives of ritual that collectively form a "collage" for critically assessing the complex relationship between ritual and film in the chapters that follow. The following series of ritual theses has therefore been crafted for the express purpose of theorising the multifaceted notion of *film as ritual*.

2. Ritual theses

2.1 Social solidarity (and emotional effervescence) thesis

The social solidarity thesis considers ritual as something that fundamentally *unites* society. The thesis has several advocates and was explored by Catherine Bell, Randall Collins, and Erika Summers-Effler within a tradition essentially established by Émile Durkheim. Further theorists such as Robertson W Smith, Edward E Evans-Pritchard, Myer Fortes, and Nancy D Munn go so far as to describe social solidarity as "a requirement of society", which in turn makes ritual "an indispensable element in the creation of that solidarity" (Kertzer, 1988).

Critics of the social solidarity thesis of ritual consider it too simplistic to adequately address society's complexities, arguing that it only legitimises and strengthens socially dominant groups. According to Stephen Lukes, the emotional effervescence created by the ritual – rather than uniting a community – only strengthens the socially dominant group through a "mobilisation of bias" (Lukes, 1975: 289-291, 300, 305). However, while the likes of Lukes do criticise such power issues of ritual, they *do not* deny that ritual greatly contributes to forms of social solidarity (Bell, 1992:172) and therefore recognise the worth of considering ritual from the perspective of social solidarity. As such, I briefly delineate three major strands of this thesis.

Goffman on social ritual systems of communication

While Durkheim (1995 [1912]) famously held that the theory of religious ritual could be expanded to include secular life and that ritual is the core mechanism that binds society together, it was Erving Goffman who extended Durkheim's conception of ritual qualities to include *all* focused interactions when he considered socially acceptable formalised interactions as a kind of ritual that seeks to confirm or re-establish social solidarity (Goffman, 2002, 1967). Consequently, as mentioned earlier, even a simple greeting with a handshake qualifies as a ritual since there is a socially repeated action and particular sequencing with symbolic reference and meaning with a shared focus of attention that affirms solidarity (the social as a transcendent referent) and the attendant symbols of that solidarity. Goffman considers ritual in terms of its role in social interaction. He considers ritual order as a system of communication in which a person constructs a 'face' or identity considered as a kind of "sacred thing" (Goffman, 1967:19) in ritual social exchanges, as this ritual order seeks to deal with the fundamental tension that lies at the core of human social life. Therefore, ritualised social interaction is about "face-work", where ritual means playing oneself within a situation where one can lose and save face (Goffman, 1982) by way of the "habitual and standardised practices" (Goffman, 1967:13) of deference (ibid.:56) and demeanour (ibid.:77) as designated by avoidance and presentational rituals (ibid.:70-71). Consequently, "face" becomes an obligational currency (Goffman, 1982:9) with face prepared and put together in more secluded "backstage" places and played out in public "frontstage" places (Goffman, 2002:53-54) where the interactions of faces play out and "expressive order is sustained" (Goffman 1967: 9). Since most social encounters and responses are conventionalised and ritualised, there are only certain options of action and response available in a given situation determined by immediate and long-term goals of individuals within the encounter (ibid.:7).

The communicative conduct between different people is also governed by such ritualised conventions leading to specific obligations and expectations within social situations (Goffman, 1982:50), such as greeting a family member with a hug but a boss with a handshake. Since such social rituals honour what is socially valued, ritual improprieties lead to "moral uneasiness" (Collins, 2004), and so being in the right face is confirmed by behavioural evidence, while losing face and embarrassment is corrected through further conventionalised responses and rituals, which allows for meta-reflexivity and elasticity within the ritual system (Goffman, 1982:105-112). When bumping into someone, Person A may simply say "excuse me" while person B replies with "no problem", thus repairing equilibrium, affirming social solidarity, and allowing Person A to save face. The formal actions and events that sprout from these social engagements orientate people to become "self-regulating participants" within the plethora of social and ethical rules and rituals that collectively also determine how a given culture sees humanity and define its reality (Goffman, 1967:19-45). These interactions demonstrate the moral character of such rituals and how it inhibits behaviour even on micro-level social exchanges (Summers-Effler, 2006:136).

Social ritual interaction chains and emotional effervescence

The key to the social solidarity thesis is that successful ritual generates a communal feeling of positivity and collective-emotional effervescence. Sociologist Randall Collins (2004) proposes that this collective effervescence consists of group-focused solidarity. Since I consider Collins and Summers-Effler's views to be similar, I will be discussing them in tandem. According to Collins, this state is reached during "occasions that combine a high degree of mutual focus of attention, that is, a high degree of intersubjectivity, together with a high degree of emotional entrainment" and which further "result in feelings of membership that are attached to cognitive symbols; and also result in the emotional energy of individual

participants, giving them feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action" (Collins, 2004:42). Consequently, such feelings of solidarity are usually "focused on symbols, sacred objects" (Collins, 2004:109) which are to be respected otherwise a transgression of disrespect will be followed by the group's moral outrage while also attesting to non-membership of the group and thus negatively impacting social cohesion and solidarity. In a similar vein, Erika Summers-Effler, argues that group-focused solidarity "is composed of positive, enthusiastic, and moral feelings toward the group that will change to righteous anger if the boundaries of the group are transgressed," while also consisting of individual-focused emotion energy "which is a positive feeling of enthusiasm, confidence, and a willingness to initiate interaction" (Summers-Effler, 2006:138). For Collins, the different levels of emotional effervescence generated in interaction rituals are "like the psychological concept of "drive", but it has a specific social orientation" which Summers-Effler considers as the "fundamental drive behind individual behaviour, group activity, culture and networks" (Summers-Effler, 2006:139). We engage with them to maximise our experience of emotional effervescence. Individuals carry this emotional effervescent energy and symbols with them as part of their "stock of symbols" (Collins, 2004:118) from individual interaction to interaction, each with their own unique situational demands, which essentially means that *past* interactions determine the emotional energy and symbolic capital currently available in *present* encounters (Collins, 2004:81). Summers-Effler theorises that "the meaning of the interaction and the strategic reason behind the interaction might be situated in many interactions in the future so that a single moment has not only a multiplicity of meanings but a multiplicity of emotional consequences for various series of interactions that unfold from a particular moment" (Summers-Effler, 2006:140). Interaction rituals thus form *chains* as past experiences determine how we direct our social world into the future in response to those interactions with "the results of the last interaction (in emotions and symbols) becoming inputs for the next interaction" (Collins, 2004:118).

The main takeaway regarding these interaction ritual chains for my purposes is that individuals learn where and how they will receive the greatest emotional effervescence pay out through these interaction ritual chains. We thus recognise that they are effectively constantly scouting the emotional effervescence "market" for "profitable" interactions. This emotional effervescence is the "common denominator in terms of which choices are made among alternative courses of action and disparate arenas of behaviour" (Collins, 2004:145). The chains of interaction rituals thus deliver a model indicating, "how individuals will be motivated" and also "how cultural symbols are passed along in chains, sometimes acquiring greater emotional resonance, sometimes losing it" (Collins, 2004:142). However, such "market scouting" by individuals is not a conscious process since it is rather the "market" that orientates them toward optimal interactions (Collins, 2004:144). Value is thus determined by emotional effervescence. Different opportunities are created by the patterns of interaction relative to the individual's position at the network level. Within this level, symbols are circulated due to the effort of individuals to "match cultural capital" (Summers-Effler, 2006:142)³ to aid interaction ritual chains and generate the required emotional effervescence. Goffman described the outcome of the commitment to such shared expectations as "order" (Goffman, 2002), while Collins theorised that emotional effervescence and energy "generated by experience of group solidarity is the primary good in social interaction" (Collins, 2004:145). We thus come to recognise how the interaction ritual energy market can "provide the crucial social components of material markets" since, by extension, it also affords "the motivation to work and invest, and the so-called

³ See 'Social interaction rituals and cultural capital' thesis discussion.

“human capital” of relationships and trust within which material markets are embedded” (Collins, 2004:143).

Considering this microsociological view allows us to see these interactions while taking a larger view assists us in identifying linking chains and broader networks of interactions. Since rituals have cycles with beginnings, peaks and ends, and can reach a point where people lose focus and enthusiasm, we can also identify cycles of focused ritual interaction when viewing interaction-created networks over time. Consider, in this regard, the tragic example of Marilyn Monroe's well-documented interaction ritual networks (Collins, 2019: online). The release of a successful film such as *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954) and the subsequent public exposure, fan adoration and focused attention created by media reportage and the studio arranged film premiere ritual would generate high levels of emotional effervescence. For various reasons, members of the public would become fanatic followers of Monroe as a symbol to gain social membership, solidarity, and subsequent emotional effervescence, and they would choose to follow her and become her fans. Such Monroe fans also invested in material markets related to her, thereby sustaining a high degree of interest, and generating public pressure on the studio to release her next film (*The Seven Year Itch*, 1955) – the public support indicated the promise of further financial return on investment. Media exposure and the subsequent public awareness, interest, and focused adoration on Monroe as totem or symbol of “collective emotional energy” (Collins, 2004:279) would wane in the weeks that followed a film release. Some members of the public would then turn to other symbols of focus and attention to generate social effervescence and subsequent social solidarity. Monroe would turn to her celebrity network of renowned personalities once neither her film industry nor psychiatric network generated her personal emotional effervescence sufficiently. Acceptance within this exclusive network of celebrities symbolically confirmed her membership of high-ranking status, creating feelings of social solidarity and emotional effervescence beyond what acceptance by fans could generate. Such association and confirmation further enhanced her public exposure and popularity in the media and increased her fan base and, in turn, her leverage within film industry networks. This supported the release of her next film (*Bus Stop*, 1956) and its chain of further media rituals, public exposure and adoration, and emotional effervescence. Sadly, in Monroe's case, her networks worked against one another, pushing her personal life into a predictable cycle of constantly seeking emotional effervescence and being drained of emotional effervescence, a destructive cycle that played a role in her premature demise. Ironically, her untimely death set off further chains of media exposure, adoration, emotional effervescence, etc. and thus, the collective mourning that followed brought another layer of social solidarity.

Ritual and its role in facilitating cultural change

Rituals and their attendant symbols of membership and social solidarity are continually updated and, in turn, continually update the social structure, affecting individuals' daily lives. The social structure's patterned arrangements emerge from individuals' actions and determine the actions of individuals by way of the constant creation of cultural and social symbols and their retention or diminishment (Collins, 2004:31-32). This creates a continual creative discursive loop affecting day-to-day activities and accordingly also our perception of how the world works. While ritual keeps this continuous cycle of adaptation updated, there is a cultural lag between the cycles of affirmation and updating of values, often creating a sense of social strife and tension between individuals and the social world. We thus come to recognise that although adhering to simple social rituals such as simply apologising (and accepting apologies) affirms and positively affects social solidarity, different social rituals and values play out

differently due to diverse cultures and their habitus⁴, and to different classes of people having different cultural capital, in addition to the cultural lag.

Consider how marriage and wedding rituals have changed and how those changes fed into the wider cultural sphere of experience and values. Marriage was initially more of an alliance between families and households that powerfully affected social integration and cohesion as "choices for symmetrical and asymmetrical exchanges" (Collins, 2004:27) were put in motion. Marriage, at least in Western culture, then became increasingly centred around the notion of romantic love between consenting adults. Such changes in marriage and kinship forms have "structural consequences" (Collins, 2004:27), thus greatly affecting and changing the social structure and social patterns as affiliations and power structures between families and ruling dynasties changed (Collins, 2004:289-292). Lévi-Strauss (1969) considered marriage not only a rule-based structure, but also a system of communication since new symbols and thoughts are circulated between newly connected groups. Recent legal-institutional recognition of gay marriage showcases how changes in social rituals eventually also lead to changes in the overall larger social structure as society has become more accepting of different sexual orientations by way of the legitimization of such relationships through the socially sanctioned ritual of marriage. There have also been numerous changes to the rituals of a wedding, such as the addition of witnesses, wedding rings, and the association of white wedding dresses in some cultures. Marriage ritual ceremonies have also become more personalised through themes, and even here, film shows its ritual power with couples having Shrek, Harry Potter, or Matrix themed weddings (Plate, 2008:80-81).

This brings us to the next prominent theme: How ritual assists humanity to make sense of larger, often unknowable phenomena such as death and the chaos of existence.

2.2 Ritual and myth thesis

Another basic point of departure for this study is the commonly held view that ritual is essentially inseparable from myth – what, for simplicity's sake, I call the 'ritual and myth thesis'. The social importance of myth has famously been explored by theorists such as Karen Armstrong, Joseph Campbell, and Carl Jung. Myths are a society's fundamental, well-known ancient traditional stories and allegorical narratives attempting to explain humanity's early history and other social phenomena without a historical factual basis or natural explanation (Armstrong, 2004). In an attempt to make sense of the world, different cultures in different parts of the world create their own myths befitting that particular context, often with underlying connections as myths are constructed from a stock of structural categories within a specific cultural locus or social environment (Butler, 2005). Consider, for example, the divergent creation myths, from the African Fon tribe's mother-creator Mawu, "who created everything from the back of the rainbow serpent Aido Hwedo" to the ancient Egyptian myth that life flowed forth from Atum's divine semen (Leeming, 2010:3-4). While the stories differ drastically, they are joined in their effort to make sense of the world. Myth thus attempts to go beyond the limits of human life as it "speaks of another plane that exists alongside our own world" (Armstrong, 2004:6) and provide a narrative or 'manual' for right actions and moral life. Myths attempt to make sense of the chaos of the world and attempt to provide a template

⁴ See discussion of habitus in the 'Liminality in ritual thesis' section.

of how the world should be and thus play an active role in creating the social structure and legitimising norms and values.

Myth does so by way of ritual (Armstrong, 2004:9) and its transformational abilities, which relies on world-making.⁵ While myth attempts to make sense of the chaos of the world and to provide a blueprint for living, ritual gives form to myth's content, usually making myth inseparable from ritual (Armstrong, 2004: 5-7). Ritual frames a particular aspect of society, which it symbolically breaks down into smaller composite parts for consideration before reconstituting it in a new way. Ritual and myth participate in the larger real-world process of world-making by framing and excluding specific elements of the known world for consideration, thus giving "explicit shape and form to a reality that people sensed intuitively" (Armstrong, 2004:6). Consider the many mutations of the transformative myth of the hero's journey as showcased by its evolution through Homer's *Odyssey*, Mallory's *The Death of Arthur*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, to the updated mix of myths in the *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Matrix* (1999) franchises. While greater awareness of diversity in representation led to justified critiques (in terms of the god complex, male domination, and white saviour context in *The Matrix*, for example), myths of the hero, however, are not merely providing heroic icons to blindly worship; they are a call to personal transformation by way of consideration, imitation, and participation (Armstrong, 2004:79). This also serves as a reminder that the contents of myths are updated as well as our means of mythologising as we have progressed from oral traditions to visual art to the printed word and the machinery of the industrial and digital revolutions. Such updated techniques and myths help humanity make sense of the world and define that world in graspable terms and ways; let us briefly consider the role ritual must play in this.

Myth and the transformation of social structures

Myth mirrors religion in that both present, contrast, and attempts to unite the real, every day, social, profane, "common sense" world with the ideal, mystical, sacred, imagined, and strived-for world. Indeed, there is "considerable slippage between the two" as they are constructed of similar or at least relatable elements (Lyden, 2003:62). Cultural phenomena, including religion and myth, are to be considered through language as a model, according to anthropologist and ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. He considered all manifestations of culture and society to be underscored by the fundamental grammar that is mythical thought (Norris, 1995:482), and ritual is its nonverbal partner that gives form to the content of myth. According to Lévi-Strauss, myth divides human existence into parts by way of "distinction, contrasts, and oppositions". At the same time, ritual then attempts to reintegrate these parts into a new model of human experience (Lévi-Strauss, 1981:679). For Lévi-Strauss and like-minded theorists', ritual consequently "transforms and renews the conceptual and social structures lying beneath community life" (Scheinder, 2008). Myth thus breaks reality down into constituent parts while ritual reassembles and presents these parts in a new way. While theorists like Lévi-Straus consider bridging the gap between reality as it is and reality as it should be, an unattainable goal (Lyden, 2003:70, 103), religion and myth at least attempt to make the difference clear and show possibilities continually worth striving for. Myth is indeed meant to be transcendent and transformative and, considered in a "liturgical context that set it apart from everyday life" (Armstrong, 2004:85), it is then able to inspire us to see the world from a different perspective beyond mere self-interest. This is powerfully enacted when an individual surrenders his/her identity to partake in particular (set of) ritual(s) that give expression to specific myths.

⁵I discuss the world-making functions of ritual under the 'Ritual as world-maker thesis' section.

Myths in context

In his discussions of myth in relation to film, John C Lyden works with a functional definition of religion shaped primarily by the work of Clifford Geertz. Religion can simplistically be described as a way to deal with suffering and chaos (Lyden, 2003:43), but Lyden goes further, saying that religion contains a "'myth' or story that conveys a worldview; a set of values that idealise how the world should be; and a ritual expression that unites the two" (Lyden, 2003:3-4). The modernisation of the Western world saw the veneration of the more logical and pragmatic *logos* with *mythos* coming to be considered false and outdated (Armstrong, 2004:71-72). Yet myth is still needed to allow humans to make sense of the chaos and give structure and meaning to life.

Consider, for example, how the lack of mythology to explain people's unconscious fears contributed to the collective fantasy such as the "Witch Craze" that saw many innocent people being burned for witchcraft (Armstrong, 2004:75), or the modern anxiety stemming from amongst other things the unresolved horror of death due to a lack of "rites and myths that helped people to face the unspeakable" (Armstrong, 2004: 78). Myths not only allow humanity to cope with our precarious position by momentarily stepping beyond the chaos of random events to "glimpse the core of reality" (Armstrong, 2004:7), it also allows humanity to entertain "what if?" scenarios to reveal "regions of the human mind that would otherwise have remained inaccessible" (Armstrong, 2004:8-9). Consequently, as our understanding, circumstances and needs change, so do our myths and ways of telling them. Thus, there is no singular orthodox version of a myth, only the ever-adapting interpretations constantly updated by ritual (Armstrong, 2004:9).

2.3 Ritual as world-maker thesis

Much like film, ritual effectively frames a certain aspect of reality and holds it up for inspection. In essence, ritual is a focused interaction within a world created by symbols centred around a core concept, sacred object, or totem. Formal rituals are set at a special time and apart from normal activities. This creates a time and space where participants can set aside their normal way of thinking and usual world order and simply experience being together but without the usual social boundaries and restrictions.⁶ This sense of community is experienced as a positive feeling of *communitas* and from which develops the positive and inspiring feeling of collective effervescence generated by the ensuing unfolding actions of the ritual. Within this in-between liminal space, participants create a new synthesis of understanding from the opposing symbols around them and so come to '(re)new(ed)' insights and conclusions within that specific context. Rituals affect such transformation through world-making. Through its symbols, it creates a model of the world as it is, the structure, and a symbolic model of the world as it should be, the anti-structure.⁷ The tension and dynamics of these symbols and structures generate the ritual's driving power and allow it much flexibility in terms of construction, meaning, and outcome. Some participants of ritual respond so strongly to the worlds of ritual, their sense of "how things ought to be" versus how chaotic things are in the real world, that they extend their participation in the transformational effect beyond the boundaries and context of the ritual and into the mundane world.

Ritual, especially as an expression of myth, thus assists humanity's defining of society, the social order, and the subsequent delineation of reality. This occurs by symbolic world-making. Once the ritual threshold

⁶ See 'Liminality in Ritual thesis'.

⁷ See 'Ritual as creative anti-structure thesis' discussion.

is crossed, participants enter a specifically framed symbolic ritual world that reflects the real world 'outside' the ritual context, thus allowing the two worlds to interact and effect necessary changes in one another.

The world-making abilities of ritual that attempt to define reality have been explored by theorists such as Lyden and S Brent Plate. They consider ritual as a symbolic modelling of the social order and the "ideal relations and structures of values" serving as its basic "efficacy" (Bell, 1992:175). The world-creating function of rituals thus creates and juxtaposes a realistic world and societal order as it is, the *nomos*, and an idealised world or model of the world and metaphysical universal order as it should be, the *cosmos*, by way of symbols imbued with authority, and which then inspires followers through ritual to synchronise these two worlds and thus augment the mundane everyday world (Geertz, 1993).

Critics of the world-maker thesis focus on such related rituals' attempts at defining reality and point out that not all spheres of society adhere to such particular rituals and mechanisms that greatly nullify its influence and exclude some groups. This model supports theorists like Clifford Geertz, Terence Turner, Mary Douglas and Stephen Lukes. They seek to "find in ritual a single central mechanism for the communication of culture, the internalisation of values, and the individual's cognitive perception of a universe that generally fits with these values" (Bell, 1992:176). These theorists, however, only reductively address how ritual defines social norms but not how it controls them. Yet, since the world-maker thesis represents only one aspect of ritual, it need not be considered as merely reductive in such a manner.

Ritual and symbolic models of the world

Geertz's reflections on symbolism in religious practice provide a helpful frame of reference for the ritual as a world-maker thesis. Rituals are highly patterned events filled with symbols and symbolic acts. Symbols are fixed perceptible forms of abstraction gleaned from experience. They present tangible structures of notions, attitudes, longings, and beliefs and can thus perceptibly reveal a model *of* and model *for* the world. In this way, Geertz emphasises, symbols can formulate a correspondence between a specific style of life and its metaphysical equivalent, sustaining each with the borrowed authority of the other (Geertz, 1993:91-93).

In religious belief and practice, a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life (Geertz, 1993:89-90).

The representative symbols must thus harmonise with the ideals of the one world and actualities of the other world they strive to represent to create a correlation and relationship between the two worlds. This set of symbols (model *of* and model *for* reality) have an intrinsic double aspect as it gives social and psychological reality meaning by shaping them to it and shaping it to them. These cultural and religious models or patterns thus provide a program of sorts for the organisation of social and psychological processes that eventually sculpt public behaviour (Geertz, 1993:94). The model *of* reality expresses this structure in a synoptic form to make it apprehensible and manipulates this symbolic structure, bringing it into parallel with the pre-established nonsymbolic system (the everyday world) (Geertz, 1993:92-93). The model *for* reality guides and organises physical relationships as it manipulates nonsymbolic systems in

terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic (the ideal). In this way, the ethos is informed by the worldview but also shapes the worldview.

The working relationship of the two models of reality is brought about by ritual (Geertz, 1993:112). The everyday, the profane, the worldview, the model *of*, and then the ideal, the sacred, the ethos, the model *for*, is amalgamated and merged under the agency of a single set of symbols, thus revealing the two worlds actually to be the same world (Geertz, 1993:118). This distortion, disintegration, and reconstitution of one's sense of reality is the idiosyncratic transformation produced by ritual where we find "the commonplace world disappears into a cloud of curious ideas or of a primitive pragmatism in which religion disintegrates into a collection of useful fictions" (Geertz, 1993:121). Within ritual performance, religious conceptions define a framework of meaning that creates an image of cosmic order (worldview). By means of the same single set of symbols, also induce a set of moods and motivations (ethos). This performance makes them mere transpositions or reflections of one another and upon leaving, participants find themselves and their worldview changed by this symbolic fusion of worldview and ethos (Geertz, 1993:118). This change within the established world of bare facts is important as individuals take it back to the world waiting outside the ritual context.

Transformation through symbolic world fusion

Rituals, therefore, employ symbolism to create relatively autonomous sub-worlds of their own that symbolically reflect and interact with the broader world as participants journey through it. Let us briefly consider Kapferer's observations (2013:25-6) on the Suniyama ritual of Sinhala Buddhists that reflects on time and consciousness and its relation to the social structure and individual's ability to move within it successfully. The ritual is night-long, starting at midnight, stretching to midday. The progress from night to day and darkness to light symbolises the transition from the unknown dark unconscious to enlightened and conscious awareness. The ritual inspires participants to reflect on their life path and activities in relation to others and how to possibly remove obstacles and blockages that may cause disruption, framed as ridding participants of the effects of sorcery. The ritual revolves around a specially constructed central building that forms the key apparatus or 'machine' of the rite. The building represents the forces of the cosmos at the centre of which a mandala is hidden (the mandala as visual representation of the organisation of these cosmic forces). This central building is shown to be inhabited by the personification of the destroyer and poisoner of this cosmic order; an entity referred to as Vasavarti Maraya by this leg of Buddhism, a concept analogous to the devil in Christian mythology, or Kal in the Sant Mat philosophy. Once a participant reaches this central "womb space" (Kapferer, 2013:26), after crawling toward it for hours from the outside while continually reflecting on their life path, they turn around to face their taken path, symbolically releasing them from their past and actions and behaviours. After the completion of the sacrificial acts by the participant, the building is ruined by the destroyer of cosmic order, Vasavarti Maraya, thus signifying itself as the cause of its own destruction. The ritual participant rises from the debris symbolically reborn and freed from their negative life paths and the "effects of sorcery." This ritual thus creates a symbolic representation of the cosmic order and proceeds to enact the loss and return of that order symbolically and relates it to the real world so that participants can face and renew the order of that world and their place in it. Ritual participants thus undergo a transformation by journeying through such symbolic ritual worlds.

2.4 Ritual as journey thesis

Rituals create symbolic worlds within which participants become pilgrims – literal pilgrims, often, but always pilgrims in the figurative sense – to be transformed from one state to another.⁸ All rituals espouse an underlying principle that can be considered as a metaphorical journey. In this sense, rituals essentially involve journeys of transformation through the three near universal ritual stages of separation, liminality and re-integration.⁹ Consider the Roman Catholic Church's Holy Communion ritual where a metaphorical journey is taken within the church to receive the body and blood of Christ to become part of the metaphorical body of Christ and the church (Richards, 1997), or the similar Hindu Upanayana ritual of initiation that also allows participants to be accepted into the religious community. In such instances, 'undertaking the journey' is metaphorical as participants experience a change in emotional and or mental states by 'moving through' the symbolic world established by the ritual. Ritual participants may even be regarded as pilgrims of sort as they are 'visiting' symbols of significance in search of meaning, orientations, and authenticity, or by wanting to express worship, adoration, or commemoration.

Naturally, the spiritual 'journeys' undertaken by rituals often also register as a literal pilgrimage, a physical journey to places of symbolic meaning and significance. In these instances, travellers give up the comforts of their life at home, moving to a given pilgrimage site. As such, the physical journey itself may be considered a liminal space as they become devoid of their usual social and professional roles on their way to new perspectives. Participants thus enter an in-between liminal space as they travel stripped of identities to orientating places of symbolic meaning and power. In this way, the actual pilgrimage site, as a physical place of journey and transition, remains charged with metaphorical meaning since it marks the place where a 'journey' of transformation finds its culmination or consummation. Consider the Muslim ritual pilgrimage of Hajj to Makkah with specific clothes such as the Ihram garment, structured actions such as the Niyah and Tawaf Al-Qudum, and prescribed orientating prayers such as the Dhuhr (Richards, 1997: 158-175). Similarly, the Christian pilgrimage of the Camino de Santiago (to the shrine of the Apostle Saint James in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain) is meant to inspire reflection, abstinence from vices, penitence for sins, and an increase in virtue; while the Hindu pilgrimage to Kumbh Mela ends with pilgrims bathing in a sacred river to cleanse them from their sins (Richards, 1997:39). We thus see a combination of the metaphorical and practical aspects of a pilgrim's journey with their own distinct and peculiar symbols designed to lead participants along their journey of discovery and transformation by way of the three ritual stages of separation liminality and re-integration.¹⁰

Pilgrimage sites as places of negotiated meaning

Victor Turner considered strictly defined religious pilgrimages (and by extension the more secular and highly influential and popular tourist and media pilgrimages) as constructed and commercialised and not truly liminal, but merely liminoid or liminal-like experiences (Turner 1974; Turner & Turner, 1978). Turner eventually set aside his objection to the distinction and concluded that media events could be liminal and socially transformative (Turner, 1985).

⁸ Ritual journeys and pilgrimage have been explored by such theorists as Victor Turner, S. Brent Plate, John Eade, Michael Sallnow and Anthony Giddens.

⁹ See 'Liminality in Ritual thesis' below.

¹⁰ See 'Liminality in Ritual thesis' below.

If we consider John Eade and Michael Sallnow's anthropological argument that pilgrimage sites are "almost a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meaning and practices" (Eade & Sallnow, 1991), then we can instead consider these sites less as places that affirm traditional shared values, but as places where contested and different values can be worked out. Eade and Sallnow argue that multiple conflicting discourses will be present at any given religious or media pilgrimage site (Eade & Sallnow, 1991), such as Marilyn Monroe's crypt, which fans may visit for different reasons – from celebrating her life to mourning the destructive side of the film industry. Pilgrimage locations then serve as liminal spaces and visiting such sites of multiple conflicting discourses allow the opportunity for "pilgrims" to exchange ideas and cultural capital¹¹. Thus, such places become places where contested and different values can be worked out, releasing social tension and ultimately assisting social solidarity, integration, and cohesion. According to sociologist Anthony Giddens, such places of social significance are places where dispersed members of society can re-connect, allowing the "disembedded" nature of contemporary communities to be "re-embedded" (Giddens, 1991).

Exchanging cultural capital on the ritual journey

Within this symbolic ritual landscape, pilgrims create and exchange symbols, symbols of membership, and gain and spend cultural capital. This potentially assists them in exercising social mobility within the social structure whilst simultaneously constantly influencing, updating and redefining this very structure and their personal and social identities and their relationships, creating meaning and defining and redefining reality as symbols are created, redefined or recombined. Different situations, scenarios and individuals will generate distinct levels of solidarity and the accompanying emotional energy, which animate them all with varying respect for symbols which in turn "formulate social values, and through which humans think" (Collins, 2004:45). Visiting such symbolically significant places, including the cinema itself, legitimises or invalidates them and their associated meaning and value. As such, they serve as places where members of society can come together and negotiate meaning and the concept of consensual reality. Such a journey within a symbolic landscape allows participants, and ultimately society at large, the opportunity for transformation.

2.5 Liminality in ritual thesis

The 'liminality in ritual' thesis, as I adapt it for my purposes in this study, emphasises the 'liminal' spaces inevitably created by rituals. These liminal spaces are spaces of 'in-betweenness' and ambiguity, within which participants find themselves as soon as they cross the ritual threshold of separation to 'enter' the world of the ritual. Within this in-between state, separated from society's norms and their own identities, ritual participants have the opportunity to undergo a renewal or transformation of experience, perception, or identity. Building on the ritual as journey thesis, the liminality thesis highlights a fundamental sequence within most if not all ritual 'journeys'. The ritual process is essentially stepping *away from* the ordinary every day *into* a fluid and uncertain liminal phase, ending once participants *leave* the ritual via yet another threshold, when the old and new get to be reconciled with one another. This near archetypal progression, with the liminal phase at its core, has been most notably studied and formulated by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner.

¹¹ See 'Cultural capital thesis'.

Van Gennep and Turner on Rites of Passage and Liminality

Arnold van Gennep's 1909 ritual study positioned ritual within cultural anthropology as a social rite and ceremony that marks the movement in an individual's social position or stage of life (such as birth, puberty, marriage, death) and explicates the expectations and responsibilities of the new phase of life (Van Gennep, 2004). Important as Van Gennep's work has been, it poses the continuing danger of reducing ritual to rites of passage; although all rites of passage are rituals, not all rituals are rites of passage. Yet, he does distil characteristics that are key to this study. According to Van Gennep (2004:11), formal rituals display a commonality of three phases of (a) *separation*, where participants cross the ritual threshold and are removed from the rest of the community; (b) *transition*, an in-between stage of uncertainty and liminality where participants are stripped of their identity and exist in an ambiguous state; and (c) *re-aggregation*, where the new identity and its roles and obligations, have been assumed and thus the ritual subject has consummated the passage.

Therefore, it would be a serious misstep to consider the liminality in ritual thesis only in terms of tribalism and affirming traditional power structures since this would minimise the *transformative* aspects of ritual. Following on the work of Van Gennep, Turner (1990:10) identifies the three stages of separation, liminality, and re-integration as universal to all rituals through which ritual participants travel to have a transformative journey. These stages can be sculpted and expressed in various ways to suit a given ritual, its purpose, as well as its cultural and historical context. During the separation stage, participants are sequestered from society and its usual norms and values, thus leading to a perception of equalisation between participants and feelings of solidarity known as *communitas* (from which then springs the earlier positive feeling of collective effervescence), which is channelled throughout the ritual. The next stage is a unique and uncertain in-between liminal stage unbound by society's rules, often filled with ambiguous and confusing symbols that challenge normative perceptions and values, such as the phase of uninhabited dancing during Haiti Vodou rituals. The final stage of re-integration allows participants closure as they recognise that seemingly opposing symbols come from the same source (the mundane everyday world), which allows a new creative re-integration and application of symbols and renewed perspectives bringing the journey to a transformative close (Turner, 1990:9).

Liminality and transformation of the everyday

The liminal space is the in-between phase of ritual filled with inverted identity and social status, uncertainty and ambiguous symbols that ritual participants enter once they have been removed from general society to consider the world and their role and position in it from a new perspective as a result affecting their everyday habitus (considered as the way people perceive their everyday life, world and how they react to it). This liminal space of rituals can thus take as many forms as there are rituals, but all serve the purpose of providing an isolated space where the mundane world can proverbially be turned upside down for consideration from a different perspective (Babcock, 1978), while the various rituals each provide their own particular different frames for actions and orientations (Seligman, et al., 2008). Consider Christian churches as liminal spaces in society situated as a representative between the earthly and heavenly or spiritual realms. These are usually quiet places with an air of reverence where the literal and figurative noise of the outside world can be left behind and, in a sense turning the world upside down as order reigns and chaos is left outside; they are filled with religious symbols such as the crucifixion inspiring reflection on one's negative actions and redemption from such behaviour; churches are only accessible at certain times on Sundays for services when the community come together to worship; the raised pulpit creates a strong focus of attention for attendees; members are anonymous and stripped of social identity,

distinctions and hierarchies in the sense that they are all considered imperfect and addressed as the body of Christ; finally people also dress up more formally and especially for the service. All these elements serve to create a time and space set apart from the mundane life where one can reflect on life from an alternate perspective and ideally be moved and stimulated to new insights and actions. Within these physical liminal spaces, rituals are performed with metaphorical liminal spaces of their own, such as Catholic Mass consisting of the introductory rites, the liturgy of the word, Holy Communion (the liminal phase of this ritual), and finally concluding rites.

The characteristic *distance* that ritual establishes from ordinary reality creates a space that undermines reality's normal functions and effects, thus levelling these influential structures and casting them in a new light. This is why the liminal space is so important to Victor Turner and crucial to ritual's transformative power and adds much to the effective force of its dynamics (Turner, 1990:12). The liminal space is also the space that ultimately allows for the updating and adaptation of the overall social structure by way of its influence on the *habitus*.

2.6 Ritual as creative anti-structure thesis

The creative anti-structure thesis of ritual extends this idea by holding that ritual enacts anti-structures – i.e., alternative structures that challenge the everyday reality that creates an engine room for social change by presenting and fuelling alternative perspectives on the ordinary world of ritual participants.

The anti-structure thesis is directly related to the liminality thesis, which on its part is deeply indebted to the insights of Victor Turner. As already noted, Turner studied various rituals such as rites of passage, seasonal rituals, rituals of affliction and even divinatory and initiation rituals in order to determine the more universal characteristics and mechanics of ritual. As we have seen, Turner deems the 'in-between' liminal phase the most important ritual aspect. It is a phase of obscurity and uncertainty, which enables the experience of communal spirit that binds the community together regardless of apparent differences and from which emotionally charged vantage point, they may consider their world and values anew (Turner, 1990:12). Social hierarchies and personal identities are dissolved within this ritual space, creating a liminal in-between space with a sense of *communitas* or community between participants. For Turner, sequences of symbolically rich activities comprising ritual essentially culminate in the establishment of an anti-structure to the normative structure of the everyday world (Turner, 1969). Since both structure and anti-structure in rituals are presented by way of the same set of symbols, they can be integrated, causing a change in perception of the world as the multiple meanings of symbols (*significata*) are unified, condensed, or polarised depending on the ritual and its participants. Following Turner, this thesis construes ritual as a creative anti-structure that may redefine static power structures and not simply legitimise and confirm them.

2.7 Ritual as channelling of conflict thesis

The channelling of conflict thesis considers ritual capable of returning social equilibrium by releasing tension generated by social conflict. Various annual festivals, carnivals and ceremonies contain passages of ridicule, threat, and conflict not usually socially acceptable such as the Roman festival of Saturnalia, where social norms and roles are temporarily overturned, for example, when slaves are served at a banquet by their masters, the temporary role reversal and overturning of the usual social order and

structure thus alleviating social tension (Dirks, 1988: 857). The channelling of conflict thesis finds strong endorsement in the work of social anthropologist Max Gluckman, who states that “ritual is effective because it exhibits all the tensions and strife inherent in social life itself” (Gluckman, 1965:265), a view which is reminiscent of Turner’s account of cultural reflexivity in ritual.¹²

It is worth acknowledging that the thesis does have its avowed critics. Such critics point out that the channelling of conflict perspective privileges functionalist social dynamics over personal development, thus overlooking possible relations of domination that result in repression and sublimation of the individual psyche (Bell, 1992:172). Political scientist Murray Edelman (1971:21-22) goes as far as to suggest that ritual is capable of escalating and orchestrating conflict. From this critical viewpoint, the supposed conflict resolution functions of ritual result in preserving strained social relations. We can, of course, acknowledge the negative and ideologically dubious consequences to such a manner of channelling social conflict, but that does not dismiss the fact that in some instances, it can and does nevertheless channel conflict.

Channelling of repression

As I formulate it here, the channelling of conflict thesis also makes room for the associated theme of repression. Repression (of aggression, violent urges) plays a part not only in the generation of conflict but also plays a role in the channelling of society’s conflict. The repression variant of the thesis allows for the ritual substitution of a sacrificial killing meant to displace humanity’s drive toward primal violence, aggression, and chaos. The repression thesis thus postulates ritual’s regulation of the individual’s affective state and inner conflict as a significant precondition to the channelling of interpersonal social conflict. Theorists such as René Girard and Walter Burkert developed the related notion of ritual as social control, drawing the general conclusion that rituals serve culture to control nature and our natural violent impulses in as much as they assist with the “controlled displacement of chaotic and aggressive impulses” (Bell, 1992:173). For a critic such as JC Heesterman (1985), however, such processes of ‘social control’ are similarly repressive since they do not channel violence so much as completely deny it. Regardless of the origin of repression, ritual offers opportunities to release this sense of repression and the conflict that stems from it.

2.8 Ritual as cultural reflexivity thesis

According to the cultural reflexivity thesis of ritual, following theorists such as Turner and Schechner, ritual addresses social dramas and conflict as a “cultural-aesthetic mirror” that enables public reflexivity at various levels of society. Public reflexivity occurs when groups collectively consider and assess their situation and experience, social connections and symbols, the success and efficiency of social controls, etc.

Rituals that engender public reflexivity may differ from place to place, culture to culture, and in degrees of social influence, but according to Turner (1990:8-9), they all tend to be connected to social dramas, e.g., war, pandemic or intra-communal conflict, or a form of natural disaster. In Turner’s (1990:8-9) account, rituals – specifically rituals of redress, e.g., the highly patterned and liminal space of courts of law and its many performative aspects and rituals from British wigs to a repetitive and specific language to object - are integral to the redressive action required to overcome the initial breach and crisis phases

¹² See ‘Cultural reflexivity through ritual thesis’.

of a social drama¹³ to reach the final phase of restoration. These rituals of the redressive or reflexive phase aimed at restoring the social structure after conflict and crisis characteristically comprise phases of separation, liminality, and re-integration¹⁴ (Turner, 1990: 8-9). As noted earlier, the liminal or threshold phase offers a unique experience deliberately removed from general society filled with symbols, ambiguous concepts and sublime suggestions, in a sense placing participants 'in-between' society's structural past and future. On this threshold of the new, social status and structures have been broken down, and participants experience a communal state of well-being and social arousal, or collective effervescence (Turner, 1969: 94-130). Within this gestation period of fecund chaos, ritual participants work through these symbolic constructs, conflicts and disharmonies toward the third, redressive phase "where the content of group experiences are replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful" (Turner, 1990:13), and the subsequent phase of reaggregation, which is a new point of integration and consummation of symbols and ideas.

For Turner (1990:16), there exists a "dynamic system of interdependence" between social dramas and/or conflicts and the reflexive cultural performances exemplified by rituals of redress. The manifest social drama influences the form and content of a reflexive cultural ritual that delivers meta-commentary on the initiating social dramas and feeds its messages and rhetoric back into the very structure of the social drama or conflict. The social drama and the ritual performance thus creatively mirror one another in a dynamic circulatory process of mutual modification. This is not a stable or endlessly repetitive cycle, but a responsive spiralling one that thus allows society to constantly respond to innovations and changes in the social structure (nomos) as it restabilises and actively creates order (cosmos) (Turner, 1990:17-18).

Significant in the context of this study is Turner's observation (1990:9) that in contemporary society, the institutions of media and the arts have come to adopt the same ritual function of restorative action. These contemporary sites of public reflexivity likewise remain "concerned with liminal or threshold phenomena and explore the boundaries of potentiality and actuality" (Schneider, 2008:6), where considering the codes of such "performances" allows society an opportunity for "cutting out a piece of itself from itself for inspection" thus creating a frame through which "images and symbols can be scrutinized, assessed, remodelled, and reorganized". (Stoeltje, 1978). Public reflexivity, and subsequent cultural maturity and assessment of cultural capital, can therefore be developed or enhanced by reflexive ritual activities such as telling stories, going to the cinema, attending theatre, watching television, media criticism and analysis, public forums or even playing games.

2.9 Ritual as cultural capital thesis

The journey aspect of ritual discussed registers in the *social mobility*, movement, and influence within social structures, enabled by social interaction rituals. Of decisive importance to the possibility of social mobility, the possibility of accruing social power and status is what Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1996, 2018) famously coined 'cultural capital'. Hence as per the cultural capital thesis of ritual, which I adapt from Bourdieu: ritual is intertwined – necessarily and inextricably – with the production, distribution, and

¹³ According to Victor Turner, the social dramas of life consists of four stages. The first stage, Breach, whereby social rules are transgressed in a public setting; the second stage, Crisis, where conflict follows the original breach that becomes a threat to group unity and its continuity thereby demanding redressive action; the third stage, Redressive action, is often ritualised action focused on repairing the social breach; the final and fourth stage, Reintegration or Re-aggregation, entails either the restoration of order or social recognition of the irreparable or irreversible nature of the breach.

¹⁴ See 'Liminality in Ritual thesis'.

exchange of cultural capital, which once more brings to the fore the role that ritual assumes within societal power dynamics.

Defining cultural capital

Bourdieu considers it “impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory” (Bourdieu, 1986:47). Bourdieu thus proposes a concept of capital within the symbolic cultural sphere, in other words, symbolic capital, or cultural capital consisting of symbolic elements such as one's clothing, posture, vocabulary, belongings, skills, and education (Bourdieu, 1986:47). Essentially comprising people's social assets, cultural capital is an exchangeable, non-monetary symbolic form that supports social mobility within the social structure.

To briefly elaborate, Bourdieu (1986:48-50) suggests that cultural capital can be divided into three broad categories: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. *Embodied cultural capital* manifests as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” and refers to aspects like one's accent; *objectified cultural capital* manifests as cultural goods and includes one's art or film collection; while *institutionalised cultural capital* involves a “form of objectification” (Bourdieu, 1986:47) and includes one's education level, all of which are indicators of one's cultural aptitude and power, and available symbolically for exchange within the social structure to assist movement.

Wearing certain fashionable clothing items or visual symbols such as branding may elicit positive attitudes and social evaluations and lead to social acceptance and connections. At the same time, countersignalling with no obvious or popular brands and logos may be interpreted as confidence and strength within such a culture. The value of any particular cultural capital is thus very much relative. Consider, for example, the contrast between Wall Street with its power suits and expensive Italian shoes, and technologically innovative Silicone Valley where such clothes are rejected in favour of casual wear and sneakers – an alternative expression of symbolic capital in its own right indicating a differently orientated habitus and cultural capital leanings. The statistical distribution of economic and cultural capital are the two differentiating principles that determine people's dispersal across social spaces and stratifications (Bourdieu, 1996:13). The retranslation of such a position's basic and interactive characteristics into a unitary set of people, goods, and practices, happen according to unifying and reproductive principles that Bourdieu famously called the “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1996: 15, 91, 96, 292), or their particular way of perceiving and responding to their surroundings and the social world. The habitus may be considered as the various lived-in social spaces within which diverse life routines reproduce the constitutional design of everyday life and reality. These very goods, representations, and exercises have become the defining and constitutive forces shaping the ever-present and unfolding creative essence of everyday reality. Essentially people shape spaces to live in, and then these spaces come to shape people. It is the procedures of ritual that allow us to systematically reflect on the habitus, for some regular maintenance, refashioning or strengthening of the foundational dynamic structures of reality (Kapferer, 2004:46), and thus allow for constant interactive updating of the social structure by reconsidering perspectives from a position of inverted identities and social positions. Such influence is why Hollywood is often critiqued for its perceived role in maintaining the status quo of the social structure.

Bourdieu's theory establishes cultural capital and its various forms as the foundation of society, and it determines one's position and movement within the social structure. More capital in any form equals more power and possible movement or social mobility within the social structure. He considered the best

measure of cultural capital to be “the amount of time devoted to acquiring it” (Bourdieu, 1986:54). Those with similar cultural capital form groups with a sense of collective identity, but with some forms of cultural capital being valued over others, which can thus assist or encumber an individual's social mobility and promote social stratification.

Ritual generating cultural capital

Cultural capital, therefore, come down to the various social ‘assets’ that people possess, which assist their social mobility but possibly also reinforce existing power, influence and status, within the social structure (Bourdieu, 1986). However, how exactly does cultural capital fit into the picture of ritual sketched thus far in Chapter 1? Ritual marks perhaps the most fundamental site where the production, perpetuation, and exchange of cultural capital occur. This is seen in the symbolic exchanges of even the most ordinary of ritual social interactions. Members of society invest in social relations by symbolically exchanging all these different types of cultural capital, embodied, objectified, institutionalised, during ritual, social interactions where they can expect returns on their symbolic investments (Bourdieu, 1986:49). Such cultural capital “exists as symbolically, and materially active, effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon and a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production” (Bourdieu, 1986:50). Rituals and places of symbolic importance can be loaded with such exchanging symbols of significance and act as “banks” where they can be traded and altered.

Such symbols and other symbolic capital are created and exchanged as people move within the social structure in search of ritual interaction patterns and networks with the greatest ultimate emotional energy pay-out (Summers-Effler, 2006:135-137). Ritual is instrumental in constantly updating and renewing these symbols and consequently further renovating and revitalising the social structure and affecting the definition of consensual reality, which springs from these shared structures. The cultural capital of shared symbols may thus also limit the potential for interaction rituals, as the symbols do not match.

The different habitus of cultures and subsequent social rituals and cultural capital values may be fundamentally significant and worthy of careful consideration when being engaged within different contexts. Social connections and knowing the same people, however, can generally assist with moving in and between social spheres and adhering to the etiquette and rules of polite behaviour of a specific culture can lead to integration and acceptance while membership to elite institutions (e.g., Mensa or a degree from a prestigious university such as Harvard) may provide cultural capital and enhanced social status within more specific and elite groups. All these examples of cultural capital allow one the ability to move and influence culture and subcultures as cultural capital is symbolically exchanged in and between these cultures and throughout the overall social structure. Such cultural capital also greatly affects and determines how ritual participants will unlock and respond to the symbolically coded worlds of rituals since the value of different types of cultural capital and its use can be culturally relevant as well as the habitus of individuals and thus their perception and response to the social world and their environment.

Social structures, values and moralities vary so widely (morals considered as the enforcement by the group of group membership symbols) since it depends on the constitution and organisation of the group, and since “ritual participation sets the boundaries of groups, and hence the boundaries of moral obligation”, changes in ritual thus lead to widespread transformation as it modifies and effects symbols, groups, group interactions, and the social structure (Collins, 2004:12). The complex modern world allows many such new opportunities for exchanges and more “occasions for trade-offs” (Collins, 2004:156) and exchanges across

ritual boundaries leading to a greater distribution of symbolic resources and stock of symbols (Collins, 2004:157). Interaction rituals specifically, and ritual generally, thus allow for various kinds of rituals, and rituals partners, and are the mechanics that allow the circulation of symbols to different powerful ends as well as the ability to transform those symbols, the groups that use them, and the ends towards which they are used allowing minor or major transformation, whether employed in day-to-day interaction, entertainment, or religious services. Such profound influences confirm the central role in society that ritual maintains and how its variable dynamics play out in very influential spheres, from social interactions and values to entertainment and economics.

2.10 Media as ritual thesis

Media¹⁵ has become integral to the recognisable patterning and ordering of our lives and social spaces, thus affecting subsequent social integration (Couldry, 2003:1-2; 19-20). While rituals themselves function *as* media in various ways, they also inevitably transpire *around* media, especially mass media. As such, media can play a part in establishing social solidarity or channelling social conflict. The 'media as ritual' thesis, which I base on the work of Nick Couldry, thus holds that the highly patterned activities of media production, distribution and consumption should be considered as 'media rituals' in their own right (Couldry, 2003:3-20). As Couldry defines them, media rituals are "formalised actions organised around key *media*-related categories or patterns" (ibid.:25). Electronic media technologies present new opportunities for social integration and space for ritual to flourish, although media rituals entail more mechanical solidarity than organic solidarity. Society constantly updates its rituals, rites of passage, and myths, which is most apparent in media rituals.

Significantly Couldry's account foregrounds the power dynamics of media rituals. Contemporary societies can mainly act in unison through some (social) media, and thus our reality becomes enmeshed in these media power structures. Media rituals create boundaries between people who create such media and media consumers as well as between various hubs of media creation and various (public and private) sites of consumption (ibid.:81-83). The collective field of interactive media rituals may be considered the media ritual landscape (ibid.:12-14; 29-30). These centralised places of production become places of symbolic power in possession of symbolic resources, as are the people associated with them, including producers, directors, and celebrities (ibid.:83). This privileged position within society allows conveying to consumers the perceived norms and values of that society and consequently play an important role in the legitimisation or invalidation of social norms and values, and subsequently the creation of personal and social identity (ibid.:37-46).

Much as there are obvious socio-ideological dangers in the media ritual landscape, it simultaneously brings together and galvanizes the many edifying, emancipatory functions of ritual discussed in this chapter. Thanks to the media ritual landscape, films and film-going can give society reflexive opportunities to examine itself and determine values and norms and what it considers sacred or profane. The 'cinematic ceremony', as I call it, has the capacity to create within its audience a feeling of communal well-being and shared values particular to that point in time and space. Film appropriates the power of ritual and ritual transformation. It adopts the impact of myth and its stories and narratives, thus making it a powerful vehicle for transformation, especially when considering its position within the strategically placed and globally influential media landscape. This transformation is brought about by the same world-making

¹⁵ Media in this context considered as different forms of channels of communication through which we disseminate data.

capabilities of ritual as when occurring within a religious context. The media ritual landscape thus positions film as a powerful, transformative social ritual and culturally reflexive activity that assists creation and a space for the understanding of and movement within the ever-shifting social structure of our modern, diverse, and complex society.

3. Ritual theses in conclusion

As the various theses outlined in this chapter make clear, ritual can operate in a host of ways (from a simple handshake to elaborate church services), and to a host of ends (from confirming educational degrees to celebrating the change of season), while remaining a journey towards the transformation of participants and their situations. Within diverse scholarly contexts – ranging from religious studies and anthropology to media studies, sociology, and others – ritual can be considered from various perspectives and levels of intricacy, from merely repeated actions to complex, highly patterned sequences of symbolically charged events with a transcendent referent. Our understanding of ritual has come a long way since Arnold van Gennep's seminal 1909 study of ritual as rites of passage through the social structure. Ritual theory has moved beyond functionalist assumptions of ritual to affirm normative structures and developed to ritual being acknowledged as being able to revise these power structures, and interestingly, toward recognising ritual as a transformation mechanism and establishing it as a maker of meaning. Ritual is thus rightfully regarded as playing a significant role in the development of humanity and can be seen to function effectively in different fields of experience. Sociologically, we now recognise its role in creating thought, identity, and the individual self, the creation and updating of values and the social structure, and movement within that social structure.

In this chapter, I have distinguished in the form of basic theses ten key perspectives. Each perspective discloses a significant dimension of film as ritual, not only for ceremonial cinema but also beyond the ceremonial cinema, which I will investigate thoroughly in the following chapters. Ritual effectively frames a certain aspect of reality and holds it up for inspection. In essence, ritual is a focused interaction within a world created by symbols centred around a totem or core concept. Formal rituals are set at a special time and apart from normal activities. This creates a liminal time and space where participants can set aside their normal way of thinking and usual world order and experience being together without the usual social boundaries and restrictions. This sense of community is experienced as a positive feeling of *communitas* with further action generating social excitement and arousal – collective or emotional effervescence. Within this in-between liminal space, participants create a new synthesis of understanding from the opposing symbols around them and so come to new insights and conclusions within that specific context. Rituals affect such transformation through world-making. Through its symbols, it creates a model of the world as it is, the structure, and a symbolic model of the world as it should be, the anti-structure. The tension and dynamics of these symbols and structures generate the driving power of the ritual and allow it much flexibility in terms of meaning and outcome.

In terms of modern media, ritual structures and patterns media's production, distribution and consumption while also affording society a new means for ritual reflexivity and mythological expression across the complex and diverse global social fabric of modernity. Film as ritual investigates this multifaceted power to distinctly frame particular aspects of society for inspection to gain fresh perspectives and transform these aspects as necessary.

CHAPTER 2

BEFORE THE SCREENING: THE PRODUCTION OF RITUALS AND THE RITUALS OF FILM PRODUCTION

1. Introduction: Rituals before the screening

Having formulated and analysed a range of perspectives on ritual in Chapter 1, we now turn to the field of film production to consider how these perspectives help disclose the ritual nature of film. As noted in the Introduction, my two main questions are:

- What is the ritual nature of film production and spectatorship, specifically *outside* and *beyond* the cinema and/or *after* the event of film-going? To put another way, how does film as ritual's power extend beyond the cinema as physical site and cinema-going as a face-to-face event?
- How do these insights about the nature of ritual help us better account for the so-called 'power' of films, in this case specifically understood in terms of film's capacity for broader socio-cultural transformation and world-building?

In Chapter 2, I consider these questions from the vantage point of 'before the screening', i.e., rituals that precede the film screening. The three sections of this chapter drive home three main points. Firstly, that film now fulfils ritual and mythic functions that have long preceded the development of film, and that film does so in its own powerfully distinctive ways. Secondly, our ritual experience of film worlds rests upon prior production rituals, i.e., the carefully crafted and sequenced patterns of production that create these film worlds. And thirdly, that film genre and genre cycles represent not only a specific and deep-running instance of rituals of production in the context of film, but a deeply socially transformative one too.

2. The production of rituals and the social function of film as ritual

Like religion and myth, film as a cultural phenomenon quintessentially strives to create order, and, like religion and myth, it does so through the world-making aspect of ritual. I rely on the insights of John Lyden and Clifford Geertz in particular. Lyden's assertion that a powerful correspondence exists between film and religion mostly sprouts from Geertz's definition of religion in his 1966 essay, "Religion as a Cultural System". According to Geertz, religion functions by way of a set of symbols that provide a model *of* reality and a model *for* reality that induce powerful moods and motivations through formalised conceptions of the general order of reality that have such a quality of factuality that it makes these moods and motivations seem potently realistic (Geertz, 1966:90). Film also functions in much the same way as it creates models *for* reality related to models *of* reality with accompanying powerful moods and motivations by way of formalised orders of reality that its moods and motivations have potent realism and impact. The models of reality created by film, like the world models created by religion, also attempt to point to the same "notion of how things could be with a pragmatic understanding of how they are" (Lyden, 2003:64) and to "help people deal with life's problems and provide hope for a better day" (Lyden, 2003:64).

2.1 Dialectic and dialogical models of social order

Films present various intricate model worlds layered with reference and intermingling meaning to its audience for consideration, and this starts from the first “pitch” of a film concept or screenplay. Lyden considers film from a more religious perspective, and Peter Berger works from a sociological standpoint, referring to world-making. He suggests that humans socially construct various ordered worlds to evoke a sense of order, stability, and meaning to their reality in “the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world” (Berger, 1967:27). Since such world models are socially constructed, they may well be felt and experienced personally, but they are engaged with through cultural products, such as film. This allows a dialectic relationship between models that constantly reflects, adjusts, breaks down, or reinforces the world model structure. It seeks to coordinate the reassuring societal order (nomos) and the perceived metaphysical universal order (cosmos). Religion often shapes our notion of the cosmos, the outermost externalised understanding of reality, and then legitimates our social institutions, thus giving them valid ontological status by placing them within that framework of understanding and creating a relationship between them. Two worlds are thus posited and then dialectically related to one another, where participating in one is considered participating in the other. Like Lyden, Plate also suggests that in much the same way as religion, cinema posits a model world of order while its transcendent viewpoint allows the viewer new insights, connections and viewpoints that may be incorporated into the increasingly complex everyday world and their conception of its model (Plate, 2008: 4-5; 10-11).

Films, therefore, create various simulated and ordered models for the world as it ideally should or could be that can be related to the viewer’s concept or model of the real world as it realistically is. In a world where, according to Jean Baudrillard (1994), a clear sense of reality may not even exist anymore due to postmodern society’s immersion in popular culture’s hyperreality and the struggle of consciousness to differentiate reality from simulation (Lyden, 2003: 50-51), it might then be comforting to know that there is more than one channel to conceive of the world as it realistically could be, as it ideally should be, and ways to deal with the difference, if not attempting to bring it to pass. Religion and film are also connected because they have both developed through exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist phases to come to the point of being considered with less cultural prejudice through reductive and relativist tendencies (Lyden 2003:127). Both have come to be accepted as providing us with “archetypal forms of humanity and instruct us in the basic values and myths of society” (Lyden, 2003:12) since they provide models of human types and behaviours and impart society’s most important structures and practices. This enables them to present various differing but relevant worldviews, subject to relevant criticism and capable of complementing one another, thereby creating much expansive and enlightening dialogue.

2.2 The liminal space of film creates communitas and reflexive models of order

Lyden (2003:105) leads us to recognise that film functions much like religion in that it has its own symbols and expounds modern myths reflective of its emergent culture and society, creating a model by which to cope with its chaos and indiscrepancies (Lyden, 2003:43-44) through the ritualistic nature of its form and content, thus functioning much like Geertz’s conception of religion. Rituals can be viewed as enacted or dramatised myths (Lyden, 2003:79) that, in doing so, attempts to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be. The cinema offers a liminal space away from the everyday where viewers of film can then vicariously engage in the characters’ conflicts and ritual rites of passage as viewers face the struggle of characters and release their repressed unconscious and their own tensions through identification and

projected sacrifice and atonement on their journey through a film world and model of reality. When crossing the threshold into this other model world, viewers enter phases of liminality that allow them to periodically and temporarily challenge society's status quo (Lyden, 2003:95) and experience a sense of sharing and *communitas* with the rest of the audience that further allow a release of social tension. This reminds them of "their essential unity and the need for all to exercise power justly and benevolently toward everyone" (Lyden, 2003:96) as they remember their shared humanity and thus act with greater sympathy when leaving this liminal space and the model world of film. Such times of *communitas* is particularly important to Victor Turner as it allows society times of social integration and cohesion regardless of the context or type of ritual being performed. Film and cinema provide a liminal and "social backstage"¹⁶ space between the real world and the model world of film where audiences step outside of their usual personal and social roles and anonymously come together and experience a sense of social solidarity and connection and where they can experiment with different "faces" and identities. From this liminal position, they can then journey, experience and consider the world of film presented as an ideal model and anti-structure against the usual structure and model of the mundane world outside the film experience.

Films, their narratives, their characters, and their circumstances exist in alternative model worlds of anti-structure¹⁷ to that of the model structure of the real world that the audience can safely journey through and reflexively explore in liminal spaces¹⁸, and in doing so, consider a whole range of complex issues and surrounding topics. Films explore a whole intricate range of issues and topics and anything from social mobility such as in *City of God* (2002) or *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) to challenging issues such as mental health in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) or *Cake* (2014), or something as ordinary and mundane as family dynamics in films such as *Cat on A Hot Tin Roof* (1958) or *The Family Stone* (2005). Films create various diverse alternative worlds by which audiences can explore the multitude of shared issues, joys, and challenges that humanity faces, which can then be related to the real world in an attempt to make sense and meaning of it and their experiences.

Film explores an endless array of topics and issues, from zombies and leprechauns to the ecological crisis and global dystopia. The audience brings their own *habitus* and way of perceiving and responding to the social world to the viewing experience, which can now stand in a reflexive and dialogical relationship with the model film world, its raised issues, and their associated symbols. Upon leaving the screening, the audience members are still abuzz with the emotional effervescence generated by the audience and have the opportunity to reshape their *habitus* as they imitate and mimic behaviours from a greater storeroom of symbols that were exchanged and created during and after the viewing experience. Such changes may be transposed in various ways to the wider world and social structure as the attendant symbols are further circulated in an assortment of cultural capital exchanges and other social interaction ritual networks.¹⁹

¹⁶ See "backstage" concept in 'Goffman on social ritual system of communication' section in Chapter 1.

¹⁷ See 'Ritual as world-maker thesis' and 'Ritual as creative anti-structure thesis' in Chapter 1.

¹⁸ See 'Cultural reflexivity through ritual thesis' and 'Liminality in ritual thesis' in Chapter 1.

¹⁹ Discussed further in Chapter 3, 'The Film and Media Ritual Context of Pilgrimage'.

Case study: Model film worlds in Star Wars affecting the social structure

The *Star Wars* world model's characters, themes, issues, struggles, and values gave young fan Katie Goldman the opportunity to reflect on the real world with its various issues and challenges. They inspired this particular member of the audience to various degrees of change and transformation in her personal life, and which then extended further into her surrounding social world as she exchanged her gained cultural capital in terms of skill and education within the social interaction ritual market through personal interaction as well as media such as her book. The model world of the *Star Wars* franchise expounds a philosophy of virtue, decency and honour, doing the right thing at a personal cost and against overwhelming odds, as well as a personal connection to a universal living force and a larger social network of positive-focused activity against the forces of darkness and chaos as a small band of rebels band together to bring down the reign of the Empire and its violently oppressive system of governance. Such notions and their relation to everyday life became all too real for Katie. As reported by CNN in 2010, she was bullied at school for being a *Star Wars* fan and thereby not conforming to supposed gender roles for girls since the bullies considered the film only suitable for boys (Gumbrecht, 2010: online). Katie experienced connection and positivity herself when a concerned fan realised her distress and rallied around her. With such backing and support, she turned to the model world of *Star Wars* for guidance and inspiration. So, she mimicked her heroes in *Star Wars* and proceeded to build her confidence and stand on her own, as well as changing the way of the world around her as she continued to follow the path of positive action like her *Star Wars* heroes and write a book on bullying, as well as starting an anti-bullying summit. In doing so, she also defied the way of the world around her as she challenged gender norms and repression of the individual psyche by social demands of conformity, further indicating alternative solutions than violence to conflict resolution, showing the repressed and victimised that there are ways to speak out, while also driving participation in charity toy runs, and inspiring her school to host a day for children to celebrate their individuality and particular interests.

2.3 Lyden on ritual and the social theory of social solidarity

The definition of religion as explicated by Geertz led Lyden to propose that film can function the same in society as religion and does so mainly by way of ritual and its world-making function and opposition of world models in terms of structure and anti-structure within a liminal space removed from general society. Within the various liminal ritual spaces available to society, such as religious gatherings or film screenings, a variety of different ideal models of the world can be presented and juxtapositioned against the conceptual model of the real world. These various world models allow us to reflect on our conception and model of the real world and our very definition of reality that sprouts from this model structure of our world and society and widen our understanding thereof. It allows us to consider the social world and hold it up for inspection, how it comes about and fits together or does not, and how that comes about and how we can come to terms with or change it.

Case study: Film, the ritual social theory of solidarity, and Frank Sinatra

Ritual can also assist with social integration and the promotion of social solidarity. Consider the films of Frank Sinatra and their interactions with various social, religious and media rituals attached to Sinatra, which impacted their surrounding contextual culture. These Sinatra films and their reflexive models of reality and worlds of tension and inclusion highlighted similar issues in the real world for its audience to consider and thereby come to conceive of a wider world beyond their limited personal scope. Historically, the clash between Protestants and Catholics have been a violent and bloody one. For many during the previous century, the main difference between culturally dominant Protestants, and supposedly ethnic outsider Catholics, was the importance of the individual's wants over the needs of the community (Janosik, 1999:67). Social tension between these two groups thrived, and Catholics experienced bias and discrimination. As a Catholic actor, Sinatra exposed the audience masses to the rites and rituals of Catholicism while simultaneously engaging with the rituals of the neighbourhood and street and striving for the middle-class respectability more often associated with the Protestant working class. In this way, the matter of his persona was mobilised and used within the broader cultural landscape to concurrently build a bridge between the ethnic Catholic outsider and the community, as well as exposing the dissonance between working-class entrapments and expectations in society (Janosik, 1999:67-68), promoting social integration and cohesion while also addressing and releasing social tension.

The simulated worlds of Frank Sinatra's films hold the social world up for inspection in various ways. While within the socially diverse and highly contested space of a public setting filled with military ranks and different religions, the characters portrayed by Sinatra participate in the social opportunity of rising to the occasion to defend and preserve the family honour, establishing the idea of a wider community for the characters as well as the audience. His characters typically partake happily in this community as a contributor and not just for personal gain. Sinatra's characters also establish this same principle of a broader community in some of his other films but in varying ways (Janosik, 1999:68-70). We find him extending such understanding between diverse cultures by engaging in simple neighbourhood social rituals such as visiting the local bar (*From Here to Eternity*, 1953) or partaking in middle-class rituals as part of a couple dreamily strolling down the main street (*Man With the Golden Arm*, 1955). These entwined rituals allowed the characters and, by extension, the audience, to transcend various culturally entrenched ideas of the time, such as class distinctions, ethnic divides, and economic disparities, to join a wider community. This is encapsulated in the double wedding in *Guys and Dolls* (1955), as the ceremonial ritual symbolically connects various societal classes and ideologies (Janosik, 1999:79-83). Through such narratives and mise-en-scène, the worlds of film allow opportunities to establish several different points of view by exploring and considering assorted social constructs, issues, and implications of the meaning of the social sphere within the real world of the audience.

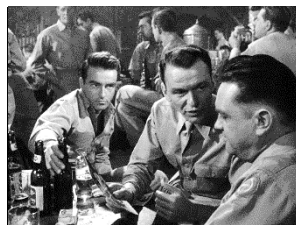


Figure 45: *From Here to Eternity* (1953)



Figures 46-49: *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955)



Figures 50-53: *Guys and Dolls* (1955)

By way of its framework of organising categories that are constantly considered, selected, organised and reorganised, the rituals of film employ highly ritualistic patterned sequences and units of symbolic meaning typical of traditional ritual to create unique versions of the world as model worlds of “what-ifs” that stand in tension to one another and can be compared to the real world for a reflexive experience. Catholic Frank Sinatra’s portrayal of characters partaking in shared neighbourhood rituals such as visiting a bar or barber (Figures 45-46, 50-51) or striving for middle-class respectability (Figures 47-48), publicly bridge the divide between the Catholic outsider and the community. This is encapsulated by the wedding ritual (Figure 52) in *Guys and Dolls* (1955) that thereby symbolically link various classes of society and ideologies and creates a sense of social cohesion and solidarity (Figure 53).

The worlds of film and their representation of diverse people, assorted challenges, and multiple realities have the capacity to inspire change and transformation with real-world consequences for the audience and their social world and beyond. Sinatra's general movie persona challenges to societal norms and invitation to "participate in the communal sacrament of life in the street" (Janosik, 1999: 89) challenged prejudice and promoted social integration, but also proceeded to cause a shift in wider media rituals as studios' perception and presentation of ethnic families changed. For the first time, films not only engaged with such stories and allowed the presentation of such minorities, but representation also moved beyond biased and insipid stereotypes of certain ethnicities, such as Italians as mobsters or criminals, or the Irish as lazy drunk fighters. It started to connect with their more unique and diversified personal lives and such family rituals as family meals and celebrations. The power of film to influence and bring about change did not stop there, though. The horrible demise of Sinatra's

Angelo character in *From Here to Eternity* (1953) also seemed to serve as a sacrifice in a “resurrection ritual” of sorts for Sinatra's own career problems and bad public image, as audiences now seemed to forgive him for all his previous public transgressions and his career once again surged forward (Janosik, 1999:75). Previously, actors shied away from such controversial characters, studios showed little interest in such contentious social issues or working-class ethics, and audiences avoided films hitting too close to their mundane lives. Therefore, these shifts in such attitudes underscore the power of film to affect social and political change.

This progressive trend in film continued with films such as *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971) and its depictions of intergenerational links, negotiating tradition, and the challenges of diaspora religion, that in doing so “initiated a new awareness of ways in which Jewish preoccupations were also universal concerns” (Grimes, 2006:52). Meanwhile, other films such as *Bambi* (1942) garnered anti-hunting sentiments, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967) broke down racial stereotypes and widened acceptance of interracial relationships, and *Philadelphia* (1993) went a long way to destigmatise AIDS in the 1990s. By way of world creation and reflexivity, films such as *Idiocracy* (2006) or *Don’t Look Up* (2021) and its representation of warped democracy, consumption, and materialism can ritualistically create a world of alternative values that reframe and allow a powerful opportunity for ritual reflexivity and reconsideration of similar values within the real world of its audience.

2.4 Lyden on ritual and the social theory of repression

The various rituals of film allow diverse worlds to be created and presented that stand in contrast to the realities of the real world. This allows individuals and society alike to consider social issues such as social integration and solidarity, and conflict and repression. These ideal models have to present ideal behavioural paradigms and archetypes and can be enlightening counter-narratives. Repression of the individual psyche and dark urges remain a reality and necessity in social life. We attempt always to present polite and acceptable faces as required in various social situations and as prepared in our various “backstage” spaces from bedrooms to boardrooms.²⁰ Film screenings can present a safe backstage space where we are removed from the world and can imaginatively experiment with our psyches and identities and what we want to present to the world, but also where we can contemplate and release the behaviour not so acceptable to general society or ourselves. Film, thus, not only presents world models of order, acceptability and stability but can also present world models with characters and situations of chaos and dysfunction for the audience to contemplate and experience conflicting and repressed behaviour and urges while the normal social rules are temporarily and safely dismissed within the liminal backstage spaces of film screenings.

²⁰ Discussed in Chapter 1, ‘Social solidarity (and emotional effervescence) thesis’ section above.

Case study: Dark Play through film

Within the context of the channelling of conflict and repression thesis, film can allow the temporary suspension of social norms and consequences to indulge in behaviour not normally engaged with or tolerated. Forms of play like theatre and film serve an important function in society. It allows for a temporary transcendence of one's immediate needs and environment while ascribing a very specific meaning to the actions of play (Schechner, 1993:38). These actions are signalled to be "not real" allowing participants freedom to explore. Dark play consists of an alternate created reality engaged with by anonymous players that allow them to act and engage with the world in ways they would never normally do (Egging, 2007:57-58). This makes it a suitable technique for film to allow its anonymous audience sitting in the dark to transcend their everyday perception and ways of acting, often constrained by social norms and values. By way of transference and identification with characters, the audience anonymously engage in behaviour they would not normally engage with, and without fear of social repercussions, during such films as *Very Bad Things* (1998) with wild parties filled with morally questionable and illegal activities leading to criminal behaviour, or *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) and its various pansexual and anonymous sexual encounters, exploration, and challenges to social norms and values. Exploration of these ritual film worlds allows the audience to identify with these characters, situations, and imaginative participation and role-play in these worlds. This allows the audience some release to their sense of repression as they vicariously engage in this normally socially unsanctioned behaviour; thus, returning to "normal" society "healed" and without any further immediate need to engage in such activities (Egging, 2007:58-59). Engagement with such substitution rituals as watching digressive films to release repression and tension indicates a desire for a liminal ritual, often considered missing in secular societies. Liminal rituals allow the opportunity for the individual to relate to a larger transcendent order and thereby establish an expanded orientation in and of their world (Egging, 2007:59). This suspension of a sense of self and engaging with a greater sense of reality is ideally reflected in the cinema experience.



Figure 54: *Very Bad Things* (1998)



Figure 55: *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999)

The wild parties and escapades in films such as *Very Bad Things* (1998) (Figure 54) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) (Figure 55) allow viewers to safely explore and partake in actions not normally sanctioned by society as a form of dark play within the liminal worlds of film removed from the everyday world. That in doing so, ritualistically release a sense of repression of the individual psyche by social boundaries, norms and demands.

2.5 Lyden on ritual and the social theory of channelling conflict

As discussed, the theory of repression and the world models of film do not necessarily have to present worlds of order and stability. Still, it can create worlds of warning and places and behaviours we do not necessarily want to contemplate or engage with in reality. These dark worlds offer not only opportunities to release the repressed psyche of the viewers but also occasions during which to consider and express society's various conflicts and our own. We may not always be in the position to make sense of conflict or necessarily feel that social order and cohesion have been restored after social conflict and chaos, such as after the destruction of the Twin Towers, but the worlds of film allow instances, such as the Marvel franchise and other worlds of superheroes that flourished after the fall of the towers, where we can contemplate such issues and experience a sense of channelled and released conflict and the restoration of social cohesion.

According to Durkheim, public punishment assists with the confirmation of the society's belief system (Durkheim, 1982:106-107). According to Adam Smith, reflecting on punishment rituals allows for the expansion of human compassion in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1822). Durkheim theorises that by punishing the offending common enemy, the community is again morally integrated while also paving the way for future morality as current values, norms and laws are adjusted. The demise of public punishment necessitated its migration to media depictions to fulfil some kind of moral ritual and restore social cohesion (Oleson, 2015:608). In this scenario, the critical viewer must now discern right, wrong, and crafted delusion for themselves as they work out their own moral attitude "on dimensions of moral callousness, personal audacity and faith in collective enterprises" (Oleson, 2015: 613). In this regard, let us also consider Erik Erickson, who states, "each positive identity is also defined by negative images" (Erickson, 1966:154). We thus come to understand that negative role models are also important in identity creation as they present characters and characteristics that we wish to disassociate ourselves from, such as presented by the various 'baddies' we often encounter in films, and which we now luckily do not have to embody or encounter in real life to learn from the negative behaviour.

Case study: Channelling conflict with Quentin Tarantino

Whereas the ritual of dark play can allow the clandestine acting out of the repressed unconscious, and rituals of disquiet and rebellion allow for the challenging of ill-suited social norms and mores, ritual public punishment meanwhile permits the correcting of transgressive behaviour. From the perspective of the channelling of conflict thesis, a phenomenon such as the abolition of public punishment means that institutions like film must step in and allow the chance to channel social conflict, such as seen in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) when revenge in the model film world allow the audience to experience a sense of justice and closure that allows the conflict, frustration and tension of audiences to be channelled away from antisocial behaviour and public expressions of violence into the reflexive opportunities allowed by the creative capacities afforded by the liminal space of film worlds.

Depicted rituals of violence in film may inspire personal and even political change by creating emotional responses in viewers. Film can do so in various ways. Quentin Tarantino has often been accused of depicting gratuitous violence merely for its visual splendour, but with *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012) and *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* (2019), he created a trilogy of worlds that through their dark play provide a sense of cosmic justice in contrast with the experiences of social discord, violence and injustice often encountered in the real world.

They thereby allow the audience to release their repressed frustrations and channel their aggression in their need to restore a sense of social equilibrium. *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) attempts to turn our responses around by depicting the supposedly empowering revenge of the victims as pleasurable and entertaining, thus allowing viewers a catharsis (Simblis, 2010:40), while *Django Unchained* (2012) allows a sense of racial justice against the horrors of slavery, and *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* (2019) rewrites history as the would-be killers of the highly pregnant murder victim Sharon Tate now becomes the victims of violence, and she satisfyingly survives and is allowed her life journey. Such presentation of crime and punishment in film allows the audience to consider such social digression and complex challenges from various perspectives. It enables the restoration of a sense of social order and equilibrium, release repressed violent impulses, and call for revenge, further violence and social disharmony.



Figures 56-58: *Inglourious Basterds* (2009)



Django Unchained (2012)



Once Upon A Time in Hollywood (2019)

Films such as *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) (Figure 56), *Django Unchained* (2012) (Figure 57 and *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* (2019) (Figure 58) create alternative worlds of 'what ifs' that provide a sense of justice, retribution and order, sometimes denied in the real world, and thereby allowing an important ritual channelling of social conflict and a sense of order restored.

The function of play with regards to the various presentations in film of violence, crime, and punishment, allow the audience reflexive experiences by way of which to release and consider social repression and tension. Susan Sontag, however, warns against the equalisation of images by way of its levelling through mechanical production in her *Regarding The Pain of Others* (2003) that reduces all content to mere images then perceived to be of equal value. Such levelling causes various structures of meaning to fall flat since all are then established as equal. Thus, the impetus to mobilise for activism and change cannot spring from the resulting tension and catharsis. If film engages with ritual violence in a superficial or merely spectacular way due to its setting within the culture industry, it is simply reduced to the category of presentation, thus numbing the audience to the power and consequences of violence (Simblis, 2010:22). The body is often the vehicle for power within a construct of violence, and so with the representational properties of film, we are thus dealt a secondary set of power relations to deal with, as a result complicating the viewer's ritualistic process of transference, identification, emotional reaction and, ideally some kind of insight and transformation (Simblis, 2010:21). This does not completely negate the possibility of violent film inspiring a positive changing effect in its audience but does highlight the intricacies and difficulties of meaning-making and audiences' reception within an often commercial setting.

3. The world-making rituals of film production: Structural similarities between film making techniques and ritual

I now turn to a second way in which film rituals can precede the viewer's encounter with film. Like religion, films create dialogical model worlds of alternative realities that stand in reflexive contrast to the model of the real world and allow us to break our world and reality into pieces and critically consider these pieces and expand our conception of it and its structures. The film-making techniques that create these model film worlds have strong structural similarities with the techniques of ritual and its creation of model worlds. Both deconstruct the world and its patterns into smaller parts and then reconstruct them into new patterns and sequences. The world is thus 'remixed', and we come to see it in a new light as symbols and concepts are contrasted in new ways and novel sequences. Dücker (2007) considers rituals as action sequences. Such sequencing is a "constitutive characteristic of ritual" and a characteristic of narrativity (Nünning & Nünning, 2014). In film, cinematography and editing allow such remixing and resequencing of the world as it plays with space and time in such a way that it constructs a brand-new world with rules of its own, but which remains relatable to that or ours. Rituals traditionally frame a very specific aspect of reality through its symbols and sequences to bring that particular aspect of reality into focus for inspection, analysis, and reconstruction. Such reconsideration and "remixing of reality" in film happen within a very specific visual frame and set of events to focus the issues at hand and the attention of viewers, and the reflexive reconstruction of their reality and world by way of the model film world.

In this section I therefore continue with my investigation into the rituals of film that precede the screening by referring to the works of Plate, Paden, and Goodman, and with reference to specific film techniques, but shifting my focus away from how film rituals relate to traditional rituals and traditional ritual functions of society. I now focus more on film-specific production rituals and the similarities and the structural commonalities between these film-making techniques and basic ritual structures, and their world-making capabilities that distinguish concepts and ideas by succinctly framing them for inspection and restructuring. I consider the creation and juxtaposition of world models in terms of structured film world-making production rituals such as cinematography and editing, montage, and the specific ritual framing of a film that focus viewer attention through techniques such as *mise-en-scène*.

3.1 The ritual building blocks of film world-making

Unique model worlds of deconstruction and reconstruction

The stories of film are brought to life by shaping a realistic and tangible world of experience that functions as an ideal model *for* reality through various precise and meaningful rituals of film production. This world-making ability of film functions the same as religion. Much like Lyden and Plate, William Paden also considers religion in terms of world-creation, although Paden's work precedes the work of Lyden and Plate – and does not deal with film as such. Paden states "religions create, maintain and oppose worlds" (Paden, 1994:53). In its simplest binary form, these worlds are the concepts of heaven and hell or a world we want and a world we do not want. It represents clashing worldviews, drives, and ideologies. Paden went on to suggest that religious systems "do not all inhabit the same world, but actually posit structure and dwell within a universe that is their own" (Paden, 1994:51). Every religion develops a specific sense of the world for its devotees to want and strive for, and a sense of the world to want to avoid and want to leave behind while uniquely positioning the relationship between these worlds and the position of that particular

religion within that relationship. He considers every religious system as not just a disembodied examination of its works and actions, but that these systems actually construct a unique version of the world through its framework of organising categories consisting of symbols, language, activities, members, and communities. This defining framework is in a constant state of creative reconstruction as its constituting parts are actively considered, selected, organised and re-organised.

Unlike Plate's religious point of view, or Peter Berger and his sociological standpoint (Berger, 1966), philosopher Nelson Goodman considered world-making from an epistemological angle yet also recognise its social and cultural construction. He describes how concepts are taken apart during world-making into composite parts, and their relationships and distinctions analysed and how it is then reconstituted to make a new world or conception of the world.

Much but by no means all world-making consists of taking apart and putting together, often conjointly: on the one hand, of dividing wholes into parts and partitioning kinds into subspecies, analysing 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 (Goodman, 1978:7).

For Plate, this process of religious ritual and world-making is akin to that of the production rituals of film world-making. Each film shapes a unique world with its specific location, timeframe, characters, events, and own diegetic (onscreen) and non-diegetic (off-screen) ideas and suggestions. Opposing various such cultural, social and religious worlds, in diverse states of order and disorder with one another in an assortment of repetitious, sequenced, varying, and oppositional ways, is an effective narrative device allowing for many worlds of film to be presented and considered, subsequently also adding to the overall understanding and shaping of our world (Plate, 2008:5-6; 44). Humanity, hence, makes sense of the world, establishes meaning, and creates a sense of reality by constantly deconstructing and reconstructing the smallest components of specifically chosen aspects of the reality construct from language and biological systems to architecture and social institutions to cultural dispositions and ideologies. Plate refers to William Paden and Mary Douglas to show how ritual and myth participate in the greater process of world-making by framing and excluding specific elements of the known world. This creates a focal point within which organisation and re-presentation of the chosen elements can take place. Douglas states "ritual provides a frame. The marked-off time of place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated "Once upon a time" create a mood receptive to fantastic tales" (Douglas, 1992:78).

In contrast, Paden believes 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 behaviour gains its basic effectiveness by virtue of such undivided, intensified concentration and by bracketing off distraction and interference" (Paden, 1994:95-6).

Film worlds explore different problematic constructs of the real world and are created by using repeatable and recognisable patterns or rituals of production of symbolic significance that create meaning and allow the film's narrative to unfold. Plate considers rituals as "patterned and often rhythmic" (Plate, 2008: 41) and recognises the unfolding world of films as functioning much the same as ritual since they too are structured in such patterned and rhythmic ways to allow the audience an understandable experience and journey through space and time, also much like "rituals take place, in time, helping to construct the larger worlds of which they are a part" (Plate, 2008:41). Films, like rituals, are therefore constructed from specifically sequenced units of meaning. The images, scenes, sequences, and genres of films are all

different, highly patterned, and specifically sequenced units of meaning that position the viewer and give a perceivable structure for a first reading of the film text which for Plate is reminiscent of the highly patterned and sequenced events of rituals to the extent that he states that “by thinking about filmic structures we might learn about ritual structures and vice versa” (Plate, 2008:42). Plate’s argument by analogy positions the techniques of film-making as structures in common with ritual and thus positions film not only very similar to ritual but actually able to function as ritual.

Like ritual and its patterned sequences that allow repeatability, recognition, and understanding, film also relies on such patterned sequences and units of meaning. For example, the opening sequence of establishing shots orientate context and meaning as well as the further expectations of viewers of their journey through the ritual film world; whereas the crossover between sequences is clearly designated by transition markers such as fades, wipes, and cuts while closing shots or comments at the end or the start of sequences serve to update and constantly reorientate viewers (Hayward, 2000:324-325). An image within a sequence is thus constructed of various elements of intermingling meaning. It can be interpreted in many ways, but in film the meaning of an image is mostly determined by the type of shot used to capture it and the relationships it creates within the frame of the image. The denotative first interpretation of meaning within the image is signified by the size and volume of objects within the frame and their evocative relation. The camera angle then continues to determine the meaning and preferred reading of this denotative first-order reading, while a connotative second-order reading is produced by the particularly chosen iconography or visual style and motifs of the film and its images. Although the meaning inscribed in an image is predominantly determined by the kind of shot used to capture the image as the smallest unit of meaning, it is also determined by the codes and conventions of the film’s genre²¹, which is the largest unit of meaning (Hayward, 2000:83-84).

Like the patterns and sequences of ritual, the patterned images, scenes, sequences, and genres of film, are units of meaning that are further filled with interrelated signifiers of meaning ranging from the film’s mise-en-scène elements such as setting, costumes, and dress codes, to the character types, gestures, and props. Such interrelated established meaning is further underscored by the influential use of lighting to create dramatic and realistic effects. Without drawing attention to itself, these lights are used to create dramatic and realistic effects in high-key scenes (brightly lit) such as in comedies or musicals, or low-key scenes (dark and shadowy) such as in thrillers, psychodramas, and film-noir (Hayward, 2000:207-212). The addition of sound to the created worlds of film allows for establishing a greater realistic and genuine social and psychological authenticity while also signifying and creating different orders of audience identification. In doing so, they can convincingly simulate a reality such as the twanging lasers or humming whooshes of lightsabers in *Star Wars* (1977), add or create elements of a scene that are not actually there, such as the eerie and unsettling sounds of movement, footsteps, or creaking doors in the supernatural horror *The Woman in Black* (2012), as well as to create powerful moods and emotions from elation such as the opening song of *The Sound of Music* (1965) to psychotic tension such as the strings in *Psycho* (1960). It can move the narrative along at a quicker and more concise pace while also permitting greater narrative options such as voice-overs that can further augment or obscure elements of the plot such as the narrator from beyond the grave in *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), the misleadingly female sounding voice later revealed to be that of a transvestite in *The Crying Game* (1992) (Hayward, 2000:332-335) or the famously unreliable narrator from *The Usual Suspects* (1995). The various levels of sound in film, from dialogue and music soundtrack to natural ambient sound and created Foley sounds alongside lighting and the interrelated

²¹ See ‘Film genres as social rituals of transformation’ below.

significations of the meaning of the setting, costumes, dress code, characters, gestures, and props of the film, are contained within the film's patterned and sequenced units of meaning such as shots, scenes, sequences, and genres, that seamlessly function together to convincingly simulate a world that audiences journey through and serve as an ideal reflexive model of reality.

In pictures: The expression of meaning by ritual film techniques



Figure 59: *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954)



Figure 60: *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

The technological apparatus and techniques of film can remain hidden to create the illusion that the text unfolds and makes sense of itself. By not drawing attention to itself, ritual film techniques of production can give non-verbal expression to unspoken aspects of the narrative, as when lighting is employed to create upbeat brightly lit high-key scenes with dramatic and realistic effect in comedies or musicals (Figure 59), or foreboding dark and shadowy low-key scenes in thrillers, psychodramas and film-noir (Figure 60).

Case study: The ritual units of meaning and sequences in the created film world of The Darjeeling Limited

The Darjeeling Limited (2007) is a quirky road film about three brothers, Peter (Adrian Brody), Jack (Jason Schwartzman), and Francis (Owen Wilson), suffering from depression and meet up in India to reconnect with one another and to experience a spiritual journey one year after their father's funeral that their mother chose not to attend. This road movie creates a liminal space for the audience between worlds for exploration, metamorphosis and cultural encounters with the foreign other that allows one to reconsider one's notions on a particular nation's identity and consequently one's own national and personal identity, sense of belonging, measurement of norms, and life purpose. It is a journey of spiritual pilgrimage that ideally allows enlightenment from past problems and perfectly illustrates the opposition and joining of worlds within a film and the transformational power of the journey (Duarte, 2015:79-82). In what follows, let us briefly consider how these ideas are shaped and presented on screen in terms of the above discussed film-making techniques and world-making rituals.

In terms of patterned sequencing and units of meaning, the film consists of 12 main sequences filled with different modes of transportation, travel, and various rituals that demonstrate the brothers' spiritual journey and their attempts to reconnect with themselves, one another, and a larger purpose. The opening sequence of the film determines context and meaning and immediately frames the principle of the journey and establishes the film as a road film since a western character is frantically transported through the foreign streets of India to the train station where he rushes to catch his leaving train, thereby orientating the viewer and instituting the juxtaposition of two worlds within the film,

namely the unknown world of the foreign country contrasted with the familiar world usually inhabited by the foreigner. In a close-up shot, the travelling westerner in a foreign land is overtaken by Peter, who makes it onto the train with his (father's) huge number of suitcases (signifying emotional baggage) while the man is left behind. This neatly establishes themes of movement and displacement that dovetails with the principle of "how mobility continues to play an important role in constructing one's identity" (Duarte, 2015:80) and thereby the film's connection to journey and identity construction. The metonymic device of the luggage as psychological baggage and the train as a metaphor for a changing psychological state only becomes clear at the end of the film. Yet, this reading is symbolically supported throughout the film. Several such juxtapositions and inversions illustrate the changing psychological state and transformation of the brothers. The train as an older mode of transport indicates a necessary return to the past for the brothers on their quest to a new emotional state. Their attachment to their past is differently symbolised for each brother. Peter is wearing their deceased father's prescription glasses, and Jack denies his writing is based on them and real events. Francis is heavily bandaged due to a failed suicide attempt and is almost literally still wrapped up in the past, while their father's luggage symbolises their collective emotional baggage.

Along the way, they repeatedly attempt to perform various rituals at different spiritual sites, including a feather releasing ritual meant to relieve them of their past, but this ritual is considered a failure as each absent-mindedly does their own thing, signifying their emotional distance from one another while the wide-angle shots indicate the brothers feeling lost in their environment. In a scene depicting the heap of luggage towering over the brothers who stand abandoned to the side of the frame, the typical, distinctive and often symmetrical character framing *mise-en-scène* and straight on frontal shots of director Wes Anderson is thus abandoned, underscoring and symbolically reinforcing the brother's emotional burden and feeling of disconnection from themselves and one another. Ultimately, their new emotional state is indicated by their boarding of a different train toward the end of the film. Their transformative journey from one world to another is also indicated by their movement from being oblivious to the foreign landscape and culture around them to becoming integrated into this world as they become intimately involved in the community by way of the death of a child and attending his funeral in a rural village within public as well as more personal "backstage" spaces.²²

This funeral also marks their coming to terms with their father's death. They experience a flashback to his funeral where the sombre colours and repressive emotional atmosphere are juxtapositioned with the bright colours and emotionally expressive atmosphere of the Indian funeral. Such associated use of colour (and music) within sequences allows the juxtaposition of patterned sequences to create meaning, such as the sombre repressive funeral or the colourful and expressive funeral. After this event, they have a ritual cleansing experience in the river and perform redemptive actions before getting on a bike together (symbolising their new closer relationship) and travelling to see their mother. Here they experience closure as the family finally comes together again after their father's death, this death marking the end of their family structure and relationships as they know it, and they "communicate in silence." Upon leaving, they each now consciously and acceptably perform the feather releasing ritual in their own unique way, signifying their emotional release and embracing their own and each other's identities. Their complete transformation is signified in the end when they dump their luggage and board a different train while Peter removes his father's glasses, Jack now writes of their personal experiences, and Francis unwraps his bandages.

²² See "backstage" concept in 'Goffman on social ritual system of communication' section in Chapter 1.



Figures 61-64



Figure 65-67

Film as ritual is structured like traditional ritual as it consists of repeatable patterns and precisely juxtapositioned sequences and units of meaning. The smallest unit of meaning in film is the image of a scene (Figure 61), while various scenes (Figures 61-64, Figures 65-67) create sequences of meaning (Figures 61-67). The opening shot images orient the viewer, for example, with a confused westerner in a foreign land (Figures 61-64), while larger sequences of images and scenes create the narrative, for example, with three related men on a journey (Figures 61-67).



Figures 68-70

Films employ repeatable patterned rituals of production where the relationships between objects within the frame of the film create particular associations, connections and meaning that is recognisable and readable to the audience. For example, the over towering and heavy luggage suggests the character's overwhelming burden of emotional baggage (Figures 68-70), and throwing away the luggage denote their emotional release (Figure 70).



Figures 71-73



Figure 74

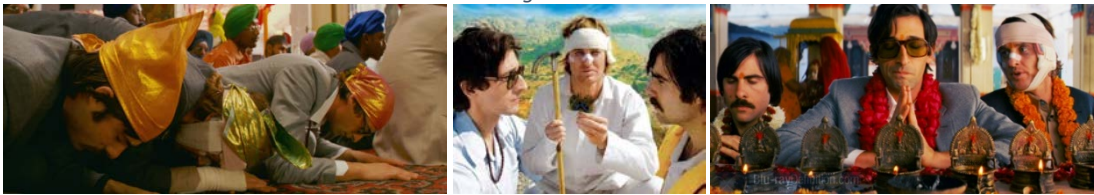


Figure 75-77

The largest unit of meaning in film is genre and influences the iconography employed in a particular film. The images within the sequences of the meaning of *The Darjeeling Limited* (Figures 71-73) signify the film as a road movie (Figure 74) and within that context frame the characters as on a journey in search of spiritual significance and orientation (Figures 75-77).

3.2 Manipulating space and time with cinematography and editing techniques

The differentiation and combination of world components

When considered within the context of film-making, Goodman's discussion²³ on notions of world-making and taking a world apart into pieces for analysis and reconstruction reveals cinematography and editing as some of the prime techniques and structures by which film world models are put together. Plate (2008:39) identifies ritual as one of the most crucial aspects of religion and proceeds to connect it with "two of the most crucial aspects of filmmaking, namely cinematography and editing" but focuses more on the spatial re-creation of the world in terms of verticality and composition and camera movement, and the temporal re-creation of the world in terms of montage. For Plate (2008:43, 42), "rituals and films both operate in and through the worldly dimensions of space and time, morphing and massaging, re-creating and re-establishing an alternative world" and recognises such manipulation of space and time in the cinematography and editing of a film and its particular world, finding it "uncannily similar". We thus come to recognise the process of world-making as easily recognisable in filmmaking where cinematographers and editors create worlds by framing only a certain aspect and area of the world as well as splicing time in a variety of ways, by way of a variety and juxtaposition of cuts, and then finally representing it on the screen.

By much the same underlying processes of ritual's social and cultural world-making (assembly, deconstruction, and reassembly), a new world is accordingly presented by filmmakers for consideration by audiences (Plate, 2008:5). In what follows, I proceed to discuss cinematography and editing as film

²³ See 'Unique model worlds of deconstruction and reconstruction' above.

techniques and structures of world-making in common with ritual as suggested by Plate. I will also elaborate further on the already touched on *mise-en-scène* as another such crucial technique and structure of film-making.

Cinematography as world-making technique for the spatial re-creation of the world

The images of film worlds are conscientiously composed and captured by cinematographers and then fastidiously spliced together in meaningful ways by editors. The cinematographer composes a shot in detail with meaningful relations in terms of distance from and relational size of characters, objects, and the environment, in order to establish different relationships and levels of importance that prompt specific connections, interpretations, and emotional responses, as a result guiding audience experiences and expectations. Space is exactly arranged for the relative and relational size and volume of objects and characters to reveal readable relationships. The framing of characters and spatial positioning also add meaning, such as zooming in, which can isolate elements and enhance their importance or zooming out, establishing a wider context.

Reflecting on such numerous available options for filmmakers, Plate states that these choices “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” (Plate, 2008:43). The shots capture light and motion through camera placement and movement and are precisely coded and inscribed with particular meaning for audiences to read the signs. This principle can be applied to the extent that “camera movements replicate or challenge existing cosmological structures” (Plate, 2008:42), such as in the opening sequence of *Star Wars* (1977), where order and chaos are juxtapositioned spatially by camera movement. It positions the ordered cosmos above and the chaos below, thereby bringing the cosmos into the viewer’s current space and time (Plate, 2008:39), but also demarcating “two distinct worlds through their spatial orientation” (Plate, 2008:46).

Therefore, specific meaning is consciously and purposefully suggested by the kind of shot used to capture the image, the distance between the camera and the object, and the camera angles in relation to the object. The distance between camera and object determines the kind of shot that is used and its readability. A greater distance reveals more of the relations between a character and their environment and is thus a more complex and subjective shot with more to decode, while a shot with a closer distance has a more suggested reading and is, therefore, more objective. Different shots thus have various levels of importance that reveal different relations between objects and establish different audience connections and interpretations (Hayward, 2000:328-329). Visual and spatial logic is established and maintained by obedience to specific guiding rules such as the 180-degree rule that maintains spatial and directional consistency coherence, the 30-degree rule that allows undisturbed continuity, eyeline matching that follows the logic of the look and so produces order and meaning in a scene, or the shot/counter-shot convention that takes the position of a person listening or looking and so also determines viewer position and identification. In these numerous ways, the world-making rituals of production of film re-create space “for narrative, mythical and ideological purposes, just as it (more simply) helps to create a character’s identity and relationships with her/his world” (Plate, 2008:42). Careful consideration is thus paid to the spatial and temporal logic of a film world to produce a world with a particular structure and logic that positions the characters in a specific way presented cogently and comprehensibly to the audience.

Case study: Ritual architecture of the image and camera movement in Chocolat

The camera movements and architectural structure of the mise-en-scène of a scene can establish conflicting worlds by way of their association with oppositional formal qualities such as verticality and horizontality, while their reconciliation suggests transformation. Such is the case in the film *Chocolat* (2000), where a supposedly beguiling chocolate shop is opened in a small conservative town just before Lent with its rituals, including abstinence. In the film, two contrasting worlds are established by creating two distinct spaces: the church and the chocolate shop (Plate, 2008:45). The film's opening shot positions the church at the highest point in the centre of the town, establishing it as a central and dominating force in people's lives. When the coming chocolate shop is first shown, the wide-angle camera necessarily has to tilt upward and point higher to fit in the towering church building. Shots within the church highlight a "dramatic verticality" and associated power positions by employing low angle camera positions for the congregation's point of view and high angle camera positions when showing the point of view of the pulpit (Plate, 2008:45). Conversely, when depicting the chocolate shop across the street from the church, we find a sharp contrast as it is portrayed as a more inviting place by way of straight-on medium shots that situates Vianne, the owner behind the counter, and patrons on stools in front of the counter sampling the goods and positioning them on the same level. This reading is symbolically reinforced as camera angles within the shop strengthen this horizontal association and its opposition with the church and the religious and community leader Comte Reynaud (actor Alfred Molina). Comte's transformation is signified by his horizontal sleeping position in the shadow of the church in the shop window after eventually succumbing to the temptation of devouring its sweets. Vianne (Juliette Binoche) also experiences a transformation as she drops her nomad mother's ashes and realises not always to run away from life's challenges, and so "the two worlds are more or less reconciled" (Plate, 2008:46). Through such deliberate camera use and spatial manipulation, conflicting worlds can be established, contrasted, and reconciled, generating a sense of transformation.



Figure 78



Figures 79-80



Figure 81



Figure 82-83

The repeatable production rituals of film create relationships between objects in the frame and the camera as well as its movements that guide audience experiences and expectations as it prompts specific connections, interpretations, and emotional responses. The cinematography in *Chocolat* (2000) creates tension between the literally over-towering church as dominating force in the town (Figure 78) and the new chocolate shop where equal relationships reign (Figure 81). A relationship is visually established between verticality, hierarchy, the church, and its representative Comte (Figures 78-80), while a more horizontal relationship is visually established to represent the chocolate shop, equality, and its owner Vianne (Figures 81-83). The tension between them can thus be creatively applied and amplified by way of carefully crafted visual horizontal and vertical references.

Editing as world-making technique for the temporal re-creation of the world

Once the precisely composed shots of the cinematographer have been meaningfully framed and captured, the editor logically places them together as scenes and sequences in particular ways that suggest and create relations and meaning within and between the scenes and sequences. Time proceeds to unfold logically and concurrently alongside space in (mostly) chronological order as demanded by the narrative's order/disorder/order ritual structure.

The chronological logic of space and time is respected and adhered to and only disrupted for narrative reasons by such techniques as flashbacks or flashforwards, unmatched cuts, jump cuts, etc. Editors indicate changes between and within scenes and sequences through techniques known as transition markers such as cuts, fades, dissolves, and wipes, that each signify particular meaning and serve to consistently orientate and reorientate viewers on their journey through the film world and to "produce a vision of the world that draws connections between places, times and traditions" (Plate, 2008:53). To create meaning from the images within scenes and sequences, editors employ collision editing or montage that entail the considered juxtaposition of two particular images, thus provoking a creative response from viewers who create a third meaning from the colliding images (Eisenstein, 1923). Such creative oppositions function as orientation points, and the clashing and colliding images, concepts, characters, things, and places of editing allows "creating something larger and more powerful than its parts" (Plate, 2008:51) and creating elements of tension much like ritual often establish and organise concepts of the sacred and profane during the liminal phase by categorising and juxtapositioning opposing concepts in similar relationship structures.

There are four categories of techniques as distinguished by Hayward that can establish meaning and relationships between images, scenes, and sequences through the categories of chronological editing, cross-cutting or parallel editing, deep focus, and montage. Chronological editing remains true to the logical, sequential, and natural unfolding of narrative events one after the other, while cross-cutting or parallel editing links two connecting events in various places occurring at the same time, thus creating suspense while also allowing narrative economy. Deep focus avoids cuts within sequences, thus giving less guidance and allowing the audience more freedom to make sense of the text. Montage editing relies on the creation of meaning by way of the conflict and collision between images. These various techniques and categories of editing, or rituals of production, make the creation of meaning possible beyond the obvious signification of images as associations, connections are suggested and made. Relations can be established between and within scenes and sequences, between the settings, characters and objects within scenes and sequences, or even between different timelines (Hayward, 2000:94-97). It also allows filmmakers to establish and then narratively utilise connections between seemingly unrelated elements of the film and narrative by way of contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and leitmotifs. By way of cutting and presenting a sharp contrast between scenes, the viewer is compelled to compare the scenes and then make meaningful and significant connections as first suggested by Sergei Eisenstein (Eisenstein, 1949:72-83) and further expounded upon by Eisenstein contemporary and filmmaker Vsevolod Pudovkin (1958). Parallelism enables the connection of various locations and timelines by linking and associating them visually with one another by way of matching elements. Creative editing cuts can suggestively link seemingly disparate scenes and establish symbolic meaning, while cross-cutting between settings and events can determine the simultaneity of events. Although leitmotifs refer to short recurring musical compositions associated with a particular character, the principle can also be applied to certain cinematography visuals and their association with a particular character or a symbolic theme (Pudovkin, 1958:54-79).

In pictures: Meaning creating cinematography and editing rituals of production in In Her Shoes



Figure 84



Figures 85-86



Figures 87-88



Figures 88-89



Figure 90

The film production rituals of editing, cuts, and presents contrasts between images, compelling the viewer to compare them and make meaningful and significant connections. The repetitive rituals of editing logically position scenes and sequences in specific ways to suggest and create particular associations, connections and relations in and between scenes and sequences and thus create ritually symbolic meaning beyond the obvious signification of images. Within a film such as *In Her Shoes* (2005), a confrontation can be cinematographically established between characters (Figure 84), while editorially film can communicate a deteriorating relationship (Figures 85-86) and sisters drifting apart during a fight as perspectives shift (Figures 87-88) and the characters become removed from each other's frame of reference as well as symbolically from the visual frame (Figures 88-89). Alternatively, their reconnection and reunion can be suggested as they are joined in the composition of the image (Figure 90) again.

In considering further kinds of filmic relations than cinematography and editing, we recognise that every object or item present within the focusing frame of film is motivated and there to signify meaning and contribute to the expression of the narrative and film content. Therefore, the roles of metaphor and metonymy are essential. In metaphor, a name or descriptive term is applied to an object to which it is not literally applicable, whereas, in metonymy, the name or attribute of a thing is substituted as the name and meaning of the complete thing.

Metaphors function paradigmatically²⁴ within the totality of the frame of reference of the film as they function by way of stand-ins to explicate and clarify the unknown by way of what is known and visible to the audience. In terms of film, a shot acts metaphorically when it functions comparatively to the previous shot, such as when the lovers' embrace is suggestively followed by a train entering a tunnel as humorously illustrated in *The Naked Gun 2 ½: The Smell of Fear* (1991) montage, followed by its sequence of a

²⁴ Syntagmatic and paradigmatic distinction set according to Susan Hayward (2000).

blooming flower, the erection of an Egyptian obelisk, a rocket blasting off into space, making hotdogs, the aforementioned train in a tunnel sequence and so forth, running for almost a minute and a half.

Metonyms, however, function syntagmatically as only a part of the whole because they function to represent that which is absent, and as a piece of the whole seek to represent the totality of that to which they refer. Film metaphors openly express the arrangements of signification to which the obscure metonyms only hint at. Thus, the metonyms and their implied meaning can be discerned only when the whole story has been told. In terms of film, an object present in the frame may thus represent “another object or subject to which it is related but which is absent,” such as the childhood sleigh named Rosebud in *Citizen Kane* (1941) that metonymically functions to represent the whole mystery that surrounds Kane (Hayward, 2000:228). Metaphors, metonyms, and other figures are often used ambiguously within films to rather suggest than declare affirmed meaning (Hayward, 2000:228-230). In a mainstream narrative film, such ambiguity is avoided to clearly and succinctly orientate the viewer in the film world and its narrative by way of its generic codes and conventions, while some other films prefer such vagueness and signs that rather allow a double-meaning and less encoded and varied interpretations of its viewers (Hayward, 2000:64-68). The various interlinked signifiers of film can thus establish meaning explicitly and succinctly by way of its clearly motivated composition of framed shots and their position within the discernibly designed and ritually patterned film units of sequenced meaning, but alternatively also their subtle and elusive employment in metaphoric, metonymic, and ambiguous ways that can create meaning beyond the obvious material expression of the rituals of film.

In pictures: The role of metaphor and metonymy in world-making and meaning-making



Figures 91-93: The Naked Gun 2 ½: The Smell of Fear (1991)



Figure 94: Citizen Kane (1941)



Figures 95-97



Figure 98

Within the precisely captured and ritualistically structured images of the film world, metaphors function paradigmatically within the totality of a film's frame of reference and iconography where they operate within a particular framed image as stand-ins for the meaning of things that elucidate and clarify that which is unknown by way of what is actually known and visible to the viewer, such as the many visual sexual metaphors (Figures 91-93) in *The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear* (1991). On the other hand, Metonyms function syntagmatically as part of a whole that strives to represent that which is absent, yet as part of the whole, seek to represent the totality of that to which it refers (Figures 95-98). While film metaphors blatantly express its arrangements of signification, the more hidden metonyms merely hint at their meaning. Only once the complete story has unfolded can the metonyms and their implied meaning be understood, such as in *Citizen Kane* (1941), where the Rosebud sled (Figure 94) represents childhood innocence and comfort (Figures 95-97), and the loss thereof (Figure 98).

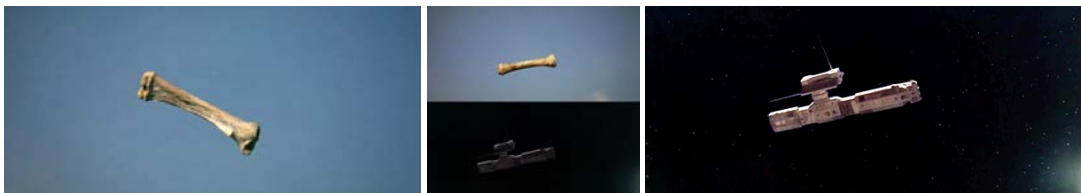
The techniques and procedures of cinematographers and editors create meaning that can then be read by the film audience, or as Plate (2008:42) put it, "camera movements and angles help create a world that transcends the technological apparatus, that points toward another world," and where the evocatively composed shots and rhythmic use of editing allow the viewer entrance into that other world created by the highly structured and repetitive world-making techniques and rituals of the production of film. Cinematographers encode the meaningfully captured shots of meticulously crafted and composed images, while the editing techniques conscientiously collide images to create further meaning and establish relations that signify connections and associations that allow the narrative to unfold, thus guiding the viewer on their journey through the world of film by way of these rituals of production.

Editing filmmaking techniques become more than the sum of their parts as they transcend the technological apparatus and, through their alchemy, create a world for the audience through which to journey. Editing not only allows the filmmakers to tinker with time but also meaning. By colliding and juxtapositioning particular images, such editing techniques and their combinations of images allow their expansion of meaning as they are combined in different ways to different ends. Such visual metaphors practically progress the narrative and mental cogitation and provide psychological guidance and lead the emotional response of viewers. Therefore, everything does not necessarily have to be explicitly stated but can also be subtly suggested. Vsevolod Pudovkin identified five such editing techniques that filmmakers

can creatively apply (Pudovkin, 1958; Richards, 2013: online), namely contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and leitmotif.²⁵

Case study: The ritual patterning of editing techniques to create meaning

By cutting between sharply contrasting scenes, the viewer is compelled to compare and connect them in a meaningful way. The graphic match between the bone and spaceship at the start of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) inspires the audience to consider the evolution of humanity and how far we have come. By showing the simple bone as a tool that ancient man used and then contrasting it with the similarly shaped space station, the viewer comes to compare the layout of the images and the implication of their meaning, concluding how profoundly human development has shifted. In a similar manner, locations and even different timelines can be connected through parallelism by associatively linking scenes visually through matching elements. In *Hugo* (2011), a crossover between scenes melts the gears of a clock with the landscape and building of Paris. By blurring these images into one another, they come into association with one another by the viewer, and so the mechanics and gears of clocks are linked to the mechanics and manipulations of 1930 Paris. The same principle can be applied in terms of time. In *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), the viewer links different timelines when they are shown a hat placed on the downward turned head of a young Indiana Jones before jump-cutting to the hat on the rising head of the adult Indiana Jones. In this manner, the viewer realises the progression of time within the life of the same character. By way of such creative editing cuts, the symbolic meaning of a particular scene can be established that suggestively link seemingly disparate scenes. For instance, in *Psycho* (1960), a shot of the murder victim's blood running down the bathtub drain is quickly followed by a rotating spiral that turns into the victim's eye, thus suggesting the life of the victim quite literally going down the drain. Films can have complicated concurrent events and, therefore intricate and confusing timelines. Such simultaneity of events can be established by cross-cutting between the settings and events, such as in *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), where quick cross-cuts show several friends simultaneously performing coordinated actions in five different casinos to steal from in one night. Although leitmotifs are short recurring musical compositions associated with a particular person, such as the ominous Emperor's march theme in *Star Wars* (1977) or jaunty call to adventure in the theme of Indiana Jones, this principle can also be applied to the visuals of cinematography. Similarly, a symbolic theme is established in *High Noon* (1952) as the often-shown clocks suggest that time is running out for the town Marshall (Richards, 2013: online).



Figures 99-101: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)



Figures 102-104: *Hugo* (2011)

²⁵ For many of examples and insights here, I am indebted to Evan Richards.



Figure 105: *Hugo* (2011)



Figures 106-109: *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989)

The patterning of cinematographic and editing techniques enable world-creation and the creation of particular meaning. A graphic match between images such as a bone and spaceship at the start of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) inspires the viewer to make connections that compare not only the construction of the image but also the implication of its meaning, in this case, considering the development of humanity from cave to cosmic exploration (Figures 99-101). Similarly, various locations or timelines can become connected through parallelism by associatively linking scenes visually through matching elements (Figures 102-104) and symbolic reinforcement (Figure 105) such as in *Hugo* (2011) that links Paris and mechanical systematic manipulations, or *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), where different timelines between a young and older Indiana Jones are linked (Figures 106-109).



Figures 110-112: *Ocean's Eleven* (2001)





Figures 113-118: *High Noon* (1952)

Quick cross-cuts between timelines, settings, and events can establish the simultaneity of events, such as in *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), where several robberies occur simultaneously (Figures 110-112). Leitmotifs similar to that of music can be visually employed to link a character and objects to establish a symbolic theme, such as in *High Noon* (1952), where various depicted clocks symbolise time running out for the town Marshall (Figures 113-118).

3.3 The focusing frame of the film world: Mise-en-scène

Films create various worlds within which they tell their stories through its rituals of production, such as its repetitive sequences of units of meaning, cinematography and editing techniques that deconstruct and reconstruct worldly elements, and the focusing frame of the film world. Recalling Seligman's et al. (2008:5) definition of ritual as different frames for actions and orientations, these film worlds serve as different ritual frames for our world and become reflexive models of an ideal reality with which to compare everyday reality, enabling us to consider diverse aspects of its various structures and functions critically. Thus, these worlds of film can inspire change within the real world. In this way, film-as-ritual functions like myth and religion by co-constructing the social framework and maintaining humanity's effort at world-making and ordering chaos. Framing within the context of film world-making entails excluding particular aspects of reality and creating an outline within which to focus the film text and audience attention by means of its narrative themes and visual presentation. In addition to the previously discussed cinematography and editing, mise-en-scène and genre are further contributors to framing a film world and narrative. The mise-en-scène is the staging and setup of a scene in terms of determining the boundaries or blocking the image (the smallest unit of meaning) within the visual frame of the cinematographic shot as well as movement within the space of the set and image (Hayward, 2000:231). The codes and conventions of a film's particular genre (the film's largest unit of meaning) also establish the film's setting and backdrop within a larger frame and social context, as further discussed below.²⁶

Turning to mise-en-scène, the motivated and purposeful arrangement of the objects in the film frame is one of the production rituals or conventions of mainstream cinema aimed at producing a unified sense of reality. There are several kinds of motivation for the inclusion of elements within the focus of the film frame (Bordwell et al., 1985:19). *Generic motivation* indicates all the codes and conventions of a film's genre to which it should adhere within its own particular nature and peculiarities. A character flying clear across the sky after being kicked may seem unrealistic in most films, but within a kung fu action film and the distinct character of this genre and world, it seems legitimate and justified, such as in the climactic battle between Sing, the Beast, and the Axe Gang in *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004), or the infamous House of Blue Leaves fighting scene in *Kill Bill* (2003). *Intertextual motivation* dovetails with generic motivation in that it concerns the justification of the narrative in relation to other texts. If the star of a film is also a singer, some songs are then justified, for example, Madonna performing some cabaret songs in *Vision Quest* (1985), *Bloodhounds of Broadway* (1989), as well as *Dick Tracy* (1990). Finally, *artistic motivation* shows

²⁶ See 'Film genres as social rituals of transformation' in the next section.

up when a film puts focus on its own aesthetics, technical mastery and film-making practices such as in the studio spectacular and films like *Transformers* (2007) with its morphing sequences or *6 Underground* (2019) and its extravagant car chases (Hayward, 2000: 242-243). Such well-motivated signifying mise-en-scène elements (including setting, character types and their dress codes, gestures, props, etc.) collectively create the frame that focuses viewer attention and creates meaning within the contextual film world. The generically motivated details of the setting add context that shapes the world of the location and creates a mood that supports the action. The chaos and darkness in *Blade Runner* (1982) create an overwhelming dystopian future world one wants to escape, much as the characters want to escape the suffocating limitations of their lives. The characters are usually the focal point on the screen while their costumes can suggest the temporal placement of the world, story elements, and the personality aspects of the character, whereas the costume colours can suggest psychological states of characters as well as having to match the production design. The dark helter-skelter shambolic costumes of *Blade Runner* support the dim futuristic landscape and underscore the haphazard lives of the characters in this capricious future world. Together with such elements of mise-en-scène frame can bring into focus the particular world of a film and its atmosphere and actions.

Case study: Mise-en-scène as ritual framing device for focusing attention: Wes Anderson and Parasite

The distinctive mise-en-scène director Wes Anderson often employs a strong symmetrical arrangement with straight camera angles that focus attention through symmetry. These often humorous but clearly synthetically constructed points of view create a sense of fakeness and an almost dollhouse type simulation of reality where actors appear like absurd puppets with no control over their lives or emotions that can also detach and alienate the audience with its sense of hyperrealism. Yet, it can also powerfully highlight the interior meaning of characters (Larrosa, 2021: online). In his films such as *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), or the previously discussed *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007)²⁷, characters give emotionless performances that, in combination, create an atmosphere of lonely melancholy. These characters seem almost removed from real life, just as they feel removed from their families in the film where they experience their family as devoid of emotion and as a mere social institution. This feeling is further reinforced by supporting characters that show more emotion with their performances. Yet this very devoid of feeling impression highlights actual moments of emotion and makes them much more powerful, allowing their interior meaning to come through regardless of such “fake” and stylised framing. The films embrace these odd characters, so the audience participates and experiences a feeling of emotional attachment and sympathy. Such framing devices as the symmetrical constructions, in addition to the actor performances, thus give Wes Anderson films a unique and distinctive visual presence and counter-intuitively works quite well to create emotion and compassion for the characters in the films.

²⁷ See ‘Case study: The ritual units of meaning and sequences in the created film world of *The Darjeeling Limited*’ above



Figures 119-121



Figures 122-124



Figures 125-127

(Figures 119, 120, 121: *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012); Figures 122, 123, 124: *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004); 125, 126, 127: *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007))

Ritual frames a particular aspect of reality for inspection, and similarly, the rituals of film production precisely frame images and scenes. The precise distribution of visual elements within the film frame is the *mise-en-scène* of film that ritualistically frames a scene to create particular meaningful relationships within that frame that, while focusing viewer attention, can also create emotion. Wes Anderson's humorously symmetrical yet clearly synthetically constructed points of view (Figures 119-121) alongside often emotionless performances (Figures 122-124) create a lonely and melancholic atmosphere that ultimately highlights the interior meaning of characters and also the emotional moments that in doing so make them much more powerful (Figures 125-127).

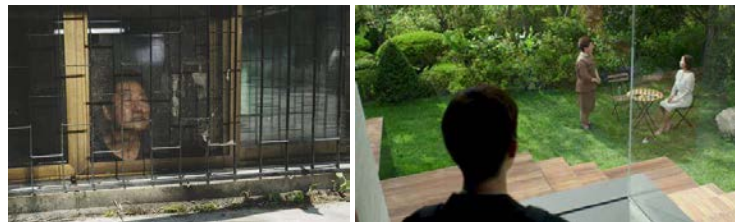
Parasite (2019) employs various framing techniques to progress its narrative, establish character relations and themes, and convey meaning. The most pivotal of these is its use of vertical space in such a way that it positions the upper-class Park family in a higher position and "on top" of the class structure and the Kim family as part of the lower class. It does so by framing and depicting roads leading up to the Park home and characters taking stairs up to their house. Meanwhile, the framing of the low-class Kim family shows roads leading downhill to their home and the family having to take further stairs down to their basement dwelling. When we see the Kim family in their neighbourhood, the streets lead upward and away from them, suggesting there is always something on top and above them. Meanwhile, the Park family are often depicted within sunny and light environments, positioning them closer to the sun and higher up in society. Another powerful framing technique of this film is its placement of prominent windows of similar size within the family homes that link them. The poor Kim family's window looks out and up to the street level, while the rich Park family's window looks down into their manicured garden. Furthermore, shots of the Kim window and Park window are intercut to suggest they face one another in a way similar to how characters in conversation are shown in films. This framing further juxtaposes the families and their different points of view and affirms their different social positions (Flight, 2020: online). By creating relationships between vertical positions and social positions, and associating these positions with characters, creative juxtapositions of characters' spaces in this world and their associations can thus focus viewer attention in particular ways and lead them to connect and dramatically compare the upwardly mobile lives of the affluent and the downtrodden lives of the disadvantaged poor.



Figures 128-129



Figures 130-131



Figures 132-133



Figures 134-135

Ritually established relationships within the film frame create readable symbolic relationships and significations to the viewer. In *Parasite* (2019), stairs leading down to the Kim home (Figure 128) and roads leading up to the Park home (Figure 129) positions the Park and Kim families in a socially hierarchic relationship. Roads leading down to the Kim home place something always on top of them (Figure 130), while the Park family is depicted closer to the sun and thus higher up in society (Figure 131), as affirmed by the Kim window looking up into the chaotic street (Figure 132) and the Park window looking down into their manicured garden (Figure 133). These prominent windows, similar to the film's aspect ratio, create a link to the viewer's screen as a window into these families' lives and are often positioned to seemingly face one another as if in conversation (Figures 134-135).

4. Film genres as social rituals of transformation

Film-as-ritual's meaning-making and world-making potential extend beyond individual films and their created worlds and beyond specific directors. Individual films belong to a group of similar films referred to as genres that essentially pre-packag film worlds and make them part of the long history of rearticulating, remixing, and reframing society's myths. Film genres are essentially a social ritual where a familiar structure of interrelated narrative and cinematic elements recurrently examines fundamental social and cultural problems through these familiar genre codes and conventions. The cinema then represents a cultural home where the social ritual of film genre allows the audience to address familiar

and recurring threats to social order and their own issues related to these (Schatz, 2009:564-565). Audiences who attend these films recognise and address common problems and issues, which viewers can mostly relate to, such as death, parenthood, or relationships.

Film genres are familiar in their storylines as well as their character and setting depictions, and so we find that the film worlds presented to us precede many of the particularities that we find in any specific individual film due to such generic packaging. They revel in our shared sensibilities and present a plethora of approaches to address our collective social and cultural tensions and concerns and, as such, demonstrate the pertinence of film in terms of the genre to function in terms of the social theories of ritual such as channelling conflict, repression, social solidarity, or integrating society. The depicted issues of genres are common yet presented excitingly enough to warrant our repeated return to the cinema. These cultural themes are repetitive, and although they do reach narrative resolutions in different ways, their conclusions too are familiarly patterned. Genres are thus not only a way of organising film by type, but also determine audience expectation and hypothesis while referring to its position in a wider cultural framework and “the role of specific institutional discourses that feed into and form generic structures” that makes it “part of a tripartite process of production, marketing (including distribution and exhibition) and consumption” (Hayward, 2000:166). This repetition of film structures and the ability of genre to fulfil ritual functions such as addressing conflict establish it as another ritual of filmmaking that also precedes the local encounter of filmgoers and film. The ritual that is genre “thus describes a kind of social contract, one that allows us to see a film as part of both a historical evolution and cultural community” and proceeds to “identify group, social, or community activity”, providing a framework within which to reflect on (Corrigan & White, 2012:321).

4.1 Genre codes and conventions and audience expectations

Both in production and reception, the repeatable and coded structures of genres mean they function ritualistically. Genre creation was greatly assisted by the “material economy” of studios, which necessitated “narrative economy” by filmmakers (Schatz, 2009:568). This led to developing a credo of (typical ethically orientated) story tropes, as conventions and expectations came together. These generic codes and conventions enabled “a range of expressions” for films and “a range of experiences” for viewers and thus a recognisable overall “field of reference” (Schatz, 2009:568). The composite narrative elements carry special significance in genre, as they are the key to its pre-established premise and subject matter and its meaning and interpretation so that the manner in which we understand a film is greatly created by our expectations of it within a particular genre. Film genre thus “exists as a sort of tacit ‘contract’ between filmmakers and audience” (Schatz, 2009:564).

In pictures: The ritualistic guiding codes and conventions of genre



Figures 136-137: *The Ring* (2002)



Figure 138: *Deadpool* (2016); Figure 139: *Spider-Man 2* (2004)



Figure 140: *Broken Arrow* (1950); Figure 141: *Man of the West* (1958)

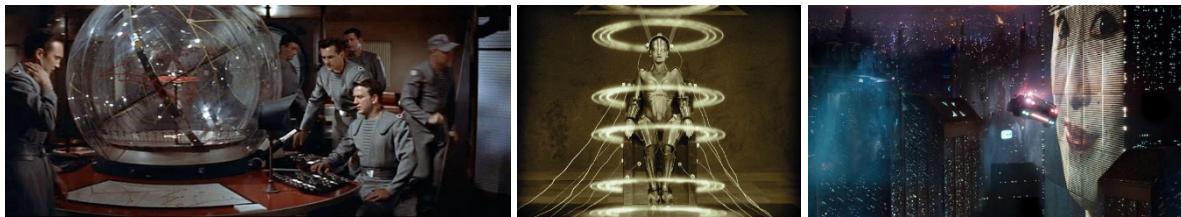


Figure 142: *Forbidden Planet* (1956)

Figure 143: *Metropolis* (1927)

Figure 144: *Blade Runner* (1982)

Film genres function as social rituals of transformation where the repeatable and coded ritual structures of each of these film groupings establish its own particular codes and conventions that guide viewer expectations and experiences by way of such genre tropes as the typical jump-scare in horror movies (Figures 136-137), the well-established superhero action posture (Figures 138-139), or clashing cultures and taming the wilderness in Westerns (Figures 140-141). A film is thus clearly recognisable and understandable to the audience by way of such narrative guidance and repeatable ritual signification of codes and conventions of the science fiction genre as typical futuristic props (Figure 142), technologically constituted or enhanced characters (Figure 143), and technologically advanced settings (Figure 144), as a science fiction film dealing with the fear of unfamiliar worlds and new technological advancement.

As a result, the stories and narratives of film have come to consist of successful construction of several interacting configurations of structure, content and meaning and various generic codes and conventions. In the world of mainstream narrative film, as represented by Hollywood films, the protagonists, and antagonists are often broad archetypes and stock characters rather than truly unique and rounded individuals, which make them more easily recognisable, while their motivation serves to progress the plot. The narrative, meanwhile, is the strategies, codes and conventions utilised to arrange and present the story. Narrative alongside ritual displays “an ordering and structuring function, which shapes chaotic events into certain action sequences and, in doing so, arranges and structures both individually and social

life” (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:65). Both narrative and ritual are also “products of culture as well as forms and factors of presentation of mediation of their structure” (Dücker, 2007:3) that “mark the interface between the individual and the collective or the individual history and the collective history” (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:69) thereby taking on “a bridging function between the individual, the collective, and the cultural” (Dücker, 2007:185). As we have repeatedly seen, narrative and ritual are central to film, and we find various such interfaces between them, as explained by Nünning & Nünning. Both narrative and ritual are subject to a specific cultural time and place (their “situatedness”), both create worlds capable of affecting change, both contain particular sequencing, and both have specific “perspectivity” and thus consider things from a certain point of view, etc. (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:54-58). The narrative of films is usually structured and sequenced according to the triad of repetition/variation/opposition. Furthermore, the narrative also unfolds according to the disruption and resolution triad of order/disorder/order, or order/enigma/resolution. Therefore, during the unfolding of a film narrative, visual and explanatory components are recognisably used and repeated, then altered. The variations are presented and finally expressed in a completely different and oppositional way. In *Thelma & Louise* (1991), there are several car sequences. In the first car sequence, the characters escape the boredom and toil of their daily lives, the final car chase sequence functions differently and “represents an exhilarating assertion of their right to an alternative resolution to their predicament than that of a life sentence in prison” (Hayward, 2000:257-258). In order for the story to serve as a map to reality and effectively unfold, it thus relies greatly on these conventions and sequences, stock characters and frameworks of the meaning of repetitions, variations, and oppositions, within the narrative structure of order, disorder, and order restored.

In pictures: The ritual variation and opposition of patterned sequences in Thelma & Louise



Figures 145-147: The disruption and resolution triad of order/disorder/new order



Figures 148-149: The variation and opposition of sequences

One of the repetitive production rituals of film is the narrative patterned sequence of the repetition/variation/opposition triad, and the disruption and resolution triad of order/disorder/order, which allows recognisable explanatory components to be used and repeated with meaningful variations in different and oppositional ways within any genre. The order of suburbia (Figure 145) in *Thelma & Louise* (1991) is thus quickly replaced by chaos (Figure 146) before returning to a new alternative order as they take control of their lives and drive off a cliff (Figure 147). While the initial car sequences convey a sense of desperate escape from their lives (Figure 148), the final car sequence expresses an exhilarating desire for freedom (Figure 149) and demonstrates ritual sequences' variation and opposition.

Particular genres may be identified by investigating the deep structure associated with their purpose, conventions and components, or their dynamic surface structure and smaller composite parts such as

characters and settings.²⁸ The varying perspectives that group genres together can consequently cause multiple genre variations to be constructed, and so different interacting genres come to create hybrid genres, for example, musical horrors or romantic comedies, or alternatively more specific versions of a genre referred to as subgenres and defined by adjectives such as the western epic, the spaghetti western, or the existential western (Corrigan & White, 2012:325, 350). There are also more specifically located and culturally local genres such as Austrian *heimat* or Japanese *jidai-geki* films, which do not necessarily translate well outside their cultural homes (Corrigan & White 2012:347).

In pictures: Genre variations blend key ritual perspectives



Figure 150: *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) Figure 151: *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986)



Figure 152: *El Dorado* (1966)

Figure 153: *Blazing Saddles* (1974)

Figure 154: *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1966)

Genre types each have their respective key perspectives that when combined, construct genre variations and hybrids with novel points of view such as the well-known romantic comedy (Figure 150) *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), or musical horrors (Figure 151) like *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), and also more particular genre subgenres such as the western epic (Figure 152) *El Dorado* (1966), spaghetti westerns (Figure 153) like *Blazing Saddles* (1974), or the existential western (Figure 154) *Ride in the Whirlwind* (1966).

As viewers become more familiar with such genre tropes like the isolated buildings of horrors or the social chaos of comedies, they view these films and their genres less by their individual structures than by their deep structure and ruling conventions. Genre conventions and narrative formulas create generic expectations with audiences that influence their interpretation and experience of a film and orientate them toward reading a film and its subsequent narrative cues as a comedy or a horror underscoring “the important role of viewers in determining a genre and how that role connects genres to a specific social, cultural, or national environment” (Corrigan & White, 2012:323). Genres refer to one another and become interlocked and are thus inter-referential and intertextual and historically inscribed since the latest film’s generic structure refers to previous ones. In this manner, we find that genres conventions can develop to a point where the “conventions and iconographies can sometimes acquire larger meanings and connotations that align them with other social and cultural archetypes – that is, spiritual, psychological, or cultural models expressing certain virtues, values, or timeless realities”, even to a point where genre’s

²⁸ See ‘Generic context and conflict resolution’ section below.

narrative formulas come to be associated with societal myths²⁹ considered as “spiritual and cultural stories that describe a defining action or event for a group of people or an entire community” which serve to “help secure a cultural identity” (Corrigan & White, 2012:323). Film genres thus provide a powerful opportunity for cultural reflexivity³⁰ and its narratives alongside rituals serve a “cultural-memory-function” and “important media of cultural remembrance” including “the construction and modification of cultural memory” (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:67) that serve to articulate and re-articulate society’s various guiding myths. Social needs motivate the creation and changes in genres; thus, genres cannot remain static reflectors of society but change with the movements of history (Hayward, 2000:171). As static and established as the genre structure may seem, it is constantly subject to modification due to changing audience preferences, social norms and socio-historical realities, financial pressures, or powerfully influential new films. As a result, genre “serves as a barometer of the social and cultural concerns of cinema-going audiences” (Hayward, 2000:168).

4.2 Generic context and conflict resolution strategies

Genres also present certain constants, in particular how they are characterised by dramatic conflicts of various orders: conflicts between characters, worlds, and values. Each type of film genre uniquely establishes a defining and specific cultural context, and the specific locale may simply provide the backdrop for the coming conflict arising from character dynamics. Consequently, genre is defined not by its physical setting but by the generic character types and the clashes it engenders. In turn, the characters are identified by their function within the community since they are generic types and “psychologically static” (Schatz, 2009:569). These relatively static characters proceed to define the wider community and provoke its issues. Consequently, because of the standard response of typical characters established by a particularly given genre, the clashes within each genre take on a unique status and emphasis requiring corresponding resolution. Different dramatic conflicts thus remain the defining features of genre, seeing that the issues of one world are not the issues of another (Schatz, 2009:568-569). For example, the quick-moving action genre is centred around the huge stakes involved in the clash between good and evil with a clearly defined villain and a clearly defined hero such as the James Bond movies, science fiction films wrestle with technological progress and our humanity such as found in *Ex Machina* (2014). Romantic dramas such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) ponder traditional values and personal fulfilment, and westerns such as *Unforgiven* (1992) examine civilisation versus the wilderness and how the pieces of society fit together.

²⁹ See ‘Ritual and myth thesis’ section in Chapter 1.

³⁰ See ‘Cultural reflexivity through ritual thesis’ section in Chapter 1.

In pictures: Genres ritually address particular cultural issues and social challenges



Figure 155: *Dr. No* (1962)

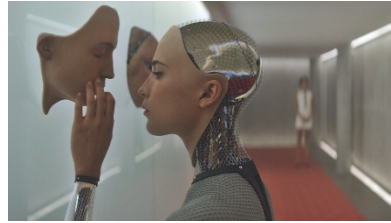


Figure 156: *Ex Machina* (2014)



Figure 157: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012)



Figure 158: *Unforgiven* (1992)

Genre types ritually address cultural issues, and each uniquely establishes a defining and specific cultural context that can come to develop greater meanings and connotations and associations with other social and cultural archetypes, thus functioning as cultural models that articulate particular values and enduring realities as they further become associated with societal myths and serve to construct and modify cultural memory. We thus find the high stakes action genre with a battle between good and evil in films such as *James Bond* (Figure 155), science fiction films wrestling with humanity and our technological advancements such as *Ex Machina* (2014) (Figure 156) considering traditional values versus personal fulfilment in romantic dramas films such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) (Figure 157), and reflections on civilisation versus nature and the values and structure of society in westerns (Figure 158) such as *Unforgiven* (1992). Such groupings with their own expectations and social challenges within a specific context allow guiding codes and conventions for the narratives and accompanying viewer expectations and interpretations that provide diverse worldviews and life strategies.

To put it in a different way, at the core of every genre is a specific social problem constructed by way of opposing ideologies that it seeks to address through its own unique combination of standard archetypal settings and characters. Different genres, therefore, have different codes and conventions that guide the experiences and expectations of a film. Despite its persistently shifting conventions and expression, genre still continues to consistently and effectively follow the key plot points in their structure of establishment, crisis or animation and intensification, and finally, resolution, packaged within the typical three-act structure of setup, confrontation, and resolution, or order, disorder, order restored.³¹ It does so to successfully achieve its main goal of resolving conflict that threatens social stability and community wellbeing. This success greatly pivots on the mass appeal of its presented conflicts and its flexibility toward changing public attitudes and industry attitudes and demands. Despite such changes to genre conventions, there remains a central core of dispute that it attempts to address. It is this "static nucleus" that "manifests its thematic oppositions or recurring cultural conflicts" of genre's "problem-solving strategy" (Schatz, 2009:573). In this context, the static core may be considered "the problem" and the deep structure, while the "variety of solutions" represents the dynamic surface structure of genre (Schatz, 2009:573).

³¹ See 'In pictures: The ritual variation and opposition of patterned sequences in *Thelma & Louise*' section.

Within the social ritual of genre, the recurring plot structure of a film is pushed into the background in favour of character and setting by way of film genres and our complicit pre-existing knowledge of their set conventions. Since the initially unknown character dynamics and ensuing conflict is now the exciting focus, the viewer pays attention to them and filters them through more personal and actual social experiences as opposed to film conventions, thus creating a space for the viewer and the film worlds to become more synchronised and presenting a reflexive opportunity to ponder these problematic issues. The tension and opposing value systems initiated by the now more personalised characters receive much more attention than the run of the mill plots that fades into the background, as set up by the ritual genre mechanics. The oppositional narrative strategy of clashing ideologies within the film world then comes to dominate and define the linear development of the plot structure that allows the audience a reflexive opportunity to consider these relatable social issues. These opposing ideological systems are ultimately reconciled by the hero or some group effort, thus eradicating one of them. The social ritual of the film genre is consequently successful as it resolves issues negatively affecting cultural and social consistency and wellness (Schatz, 2009:568-569) that channels social conflict. In such a manner, the social problems and conflicts of a particular genre are framed and focused upon by way of its own peculiar clashing ideologies, settings, and characters. Genres are thus not simply groupings of characteristics, considered as social rituals. Horrors are therefore not merely scary adrenaline rides filled with gore and monsters as previously stated, but they also “dramatize our personal and social terrors in their different forms, in effect allowing us to admit them and attempt to deal with them in an imaginary way and as part of a communal experience” and so make “terror visible and, potentially, manageable”; the science fiction films of the 1950s tangibly perform and present the era’s fears regarding military and ideological invasion (Corrigan & White, 2012:336); the deviancy in crime films “becomes a barometer of the state of society” (Corrigan & White, 2012:338); while comedies “celebrate the harmony and resiliency of social life” but on a more fundamental level is “about social reconciliation and the triumph of the physical over the intellectual” (Corrigan & White, 2012:326). In addition to film being the latest ritual incarnation in the chain of the production of rituals and the myriad rituals of production of filmmaking, movie genres may be considered social and cultural rituals. They are forms of collective expression. They supply a tangible form to cultural oppositions, influences, and powers, which at present overpower and intimidate not only individuals but also their country or nation. Genres do so by way of characters who battle these very same forces. Therefore, the determining feature of genre is to present the audience a common and shared problem and eventually a possible solution, consequently relieving a collective worry and channelling social conflict by way of this reflexive opportunity and world of anti-structure. By way of this resolution, genre's ritualistic function is recognised and manifested, and so it performs a global communication purpose (Pope, 2012:127).

Case study: The genre rituals of the western genre

The films of the western genre are filled with action and violence and reflect on the “taming” of the American wild and upholding of social order and values of society while thereby essentially providing a reflexive opportunity for considering and deconstructing the structure of society within this film model world of anti-structure. Traditionally, within the more classic western genre the rugged hero (or heroes) upholds or restores the norms and values of the civilised pioneering society and keeps the untamed elements in the wild before disappearing into the sunset. It developed as a kind of travelogue from accounts of that bygone era. It was initially not a much respected genre within film. Like all genres, it has also experienced various changes to its conventions as it reflects the culture and society within which it is created.³² The western genre’s narratives often feature some or other variation of a quest (and therefore dovetails with the hero’s journey or monomyth) and, in terms of style, usually places “emphasis on open, natural spaces and settings” (Corrigan & White, 2012:329). *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) is a simple yet effective (albeit short) example of a classic western genre film that reflects on the freedoms and restrictions of individuals and society (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008:241). In the film, violent bandits conspire to stop a steam train for a supposed water refill. When the train is halted, they steal the contents of a box of valuables, and they frisk and rob the passengers before fleeing with a disconnected locomotive into a valley where their horses await. This establishes two conflicting ideologies in this film world as these self-interested and brutal individuals clash with the social and legal institutions of refined society and their associated social responsibilities. When the locals in a dancehall hear of the robbery, a group of heroes form a posse and pursue the criminals who challenge their social structure and the coherence of their society. Once the criminals are found, a violent shootout ensues, and the perpetrators are killed. The loot is recovered and returned, allowing the audience to experience a sense of a restoration of the social order and an opportunity to channel conflict and tension. The film thus adheres strongly to western genre conventions as the challengers of the social status quo come from the wild and sow discord before order is restored by the hero(es). Such a violent and chaotic world model presents society with a contrast to their world whereby they reflexively consider the value of their own beliefs.

4.3 Infrastructure for social and cultural reflexivity

Films and their genres create reflexive spaces within which to consider various socio-cultural issues. Although they do not actually permanently solve these complex issues, they function by creating a space to reflect on these conflicting perspectives, values and ideologies. Film genres are thus structured as social problem-solving strategies that explain why they remain in constant production (due to their abiding popularity) even when (or perhaps precisely because) they are predictable.

Film genre's "basic cultural oppositions or inherent dramatic conflict" is its defining feature yet also indicates the fundamentally unsolvable disposition of those opposites (Schatz, 2009:573-574). Film genres can thus only offer a temporary solution, or compromise, as resolution during the usual dramatic closure framed within "a sort of cultural and historical timelessness" and so at best present opportunities for cultural reflexivity and considering various strategies to manage such recurrent challenges (Schatz, 2009: 573-574). Therefore, the threat within a contested setting of opposing ideologies will meet a violent end, while the point of contention within an uncontested setting will be curbed by a regulating other. Either way, within genre, the contention and conflict are transmuted into "emotional terms" and suitably

³² See 'Genre transformation and cycles of change' section below.

resolved. Upon closer inspection, we thus see that the core underlying cultural conflict has not been solved but only reframed as an emotional issue with an easy answer, thereby effectively causing a "narrative rupture" (Schatz, 2009:573-574). Genres are hermeneutically determined, so there will always be closure and resolution (Hayward, 2000:194), but the resolution in film genres always comes about by the process of reduction, not solution. The opposing ideological structure is therefore either eradicated or integrated. Within the contested space, the structure will be violently obliterated by the hero before he disappears into the sunset. In *John Wick* (2014), the hero destroys all his enemies before taking to the open road. Within uncontested space, the integration usually takes the form of the doubled-up main characters' union, thus confirming and ritualising community values such as in *Who's That Girl* (1987), which is a generic variation of the screwball comedy *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), and where in the end the respectable and high-strung uptown lawyer falls in love with the happy-go-lucky criminal just released from jail. A happy ending is consequently still delivered during the emotional climax of the story, yet such an ending does, however, conceal the lack of solution and masks the compromises and losses the characters suffered to reach this point of reconstituted conflict. However, the audience does experience a sense of closure but ultimately knows better than to think what happened with these characters and their relationships beyond this point (Schatz, 2009:573-575).

Thomas Schatz argues that the genre's ritualistic function ceased with the demise of the studio system since, at that time, there was a break in the feedback loop between studios and audiences (Schatz, 2009). John G Cawelti and Will Wright also question whether genre ever really solved these conflicts as genres' persistent existence and popularity attest (Pope, 2012:27). Thus, by engaging with these conflicts, we simply go through the motions of solving the particular problem, which is then recuperated back into the status quo only to pop up another day in the next summer blockbuster (Pope, 2012:115). In such a manner, genres also "act metonymically as enunciators of dominant ideology and social myths" (Hayward, 2000:108) as they silently announce reigning mores and values through their visual signals of metaphors and hidden metonyms.³³ For example, the femme fatale in film noir may seem powerful and in control and contrary to the usual mainstream narrative film's representation of passive woman, but she pays for it at the end of the film when she dies or submits to the standard gender roles of the patriarchal system (Hayward, 2000:130). The ideologies of the patriarchy remain quietly intact and are once again naturalised.

However, Pope (2012:128) proposes that genre still functions successfully as ritual if we are prepared to accept that this function does not necessarily equate resolution and that genres function as sites of multiple conflicting discourses and "almost a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meaning and practices" (Eade & Sallnow, 1991:15). Film genres may not then actually solve with finality the complex issues that face society and cultures, but it does give a reflexive social opportunity to reflect on such challenging issues and gain perspective on them while developing various possible coping strategies. The genre ritual structure only requires consideration, which still allows the audience to gain some insight into these addressed antagonisms. Genres as social rituals strive to create a sense of the idyllic society within some everlasting historical milieu as a backdrop for these dramatic conflicts; in other words, it creates another world as an ideal model *for* our world. The conflicting ideological positions and value systems are not merely representative of positive and negative cultural values. Such presented opposing structures and issues are both of substantial consequence to society (Schatz, 2009:575). Engaging with such fundamentally unsolvable complexities allows audiences insight and a sense of closure

³³ See 'Editing as world-making technique for the temporal re-creation of the world' above.

while considering various life strategies and points of view and thus opportunities for cultural reflexivity by way of film's world-making abilities, mythic themes, and ritual frameworks. The need for such simulations and assimilations are made clear by the sustained popularity of the social ritual that is film genre.

Case study: The changing relationships in buddy movies as reflection of changing social relationships

Genre films allow insight and coping strategies more than outright solutions since these issues are complex and culturally and historically relative. Due to the changing nature of society and its problems, genres change, new genres develop as diverse stratagems to manage these issues, and genres influence one another and mix, creating hybrid genres. The genre of the buddy movie that is traditionally focused on the friendship of two heterosexual male protagonists saw a resurgence in popularity in America in the 1960s and 1970s, as in *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Brian's Song* (1971), during a time of great social upheaval and particularly possibly due to the Vietnam War's dehumanising effect. At the time, the release of *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) presented a challenge to genre and social norms of the time with its presentation of male prostitution, contesting the traditional ideal of masculinity with its homosexual subtexts, and confronting audiences with a hybrid genre by playing with western genre conventions. These variations made social and industry waves and established the film as influential to this day. The 1980s and 1990s brought a more conservative leadership to America and England and a "return to family values." Consequently, the buddy movies of that time sometimes included a father figure in the relationship "signifying a restoration of family values or at least of the value of the father", such as presented by Paul Newman in *The Colour of Money* (1986) or Jack Palance in *City Slickers* (1991) (Hayward, 2000:53). As society and its values changed and became more inclusive, the traditional structure of the buddy movie reflected the changes, and its heterosexual male protagonists came to be subverted in such films as *Thelma & Louise* (1991), where two females took the lead, or *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994) focusing on the friendship of a group of homosexual and gender-fluid men. Greater awareness and counteraction of gender stereotypes and presentation of females in the passive role is also increasingly recognised in action genres by films such as *Jack Reacher: Never Go Back* (2016), where the female lead, Turner (Cobie Smulders), questions the validity of her having to take the backseat in terms of decision making and executing dangerous plans.



Figure 159: *Easy Rider* (1969)



Figure 160: *Midnight Cowboy* (1969)

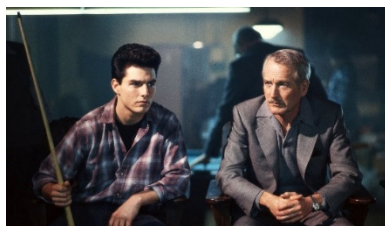
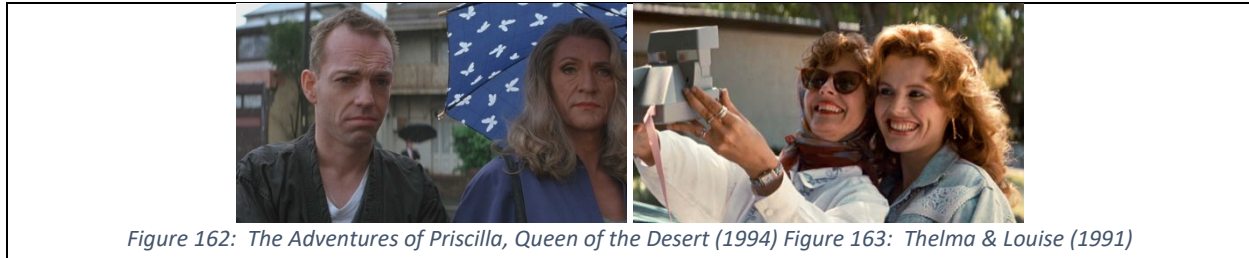


Figure 161: *The Color of Money* (1986)



The social transformation rituals of genres are forms of collective expression that present shared social problems and possible solutions to life's fundamentally unsolvable complexities, thus enabling the relief of collective worry and a sense of closure. Such opportunities for cultural reflexivity, therefore, enable the consideration of multiple life strategies and diverse perspectives such as reflected by the distinct films within the buddy movie genre that reflects societal changes by way of their disparate relationships from heterosexual (*Easy Rider*) (Figure 159) to debatable sexuality (*Midnight Cowboy*) (Figure 160), paternalistic (*The Color of Money*) (Figure 161), to gender-fluid relationships (*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*) (Figure 162) and female-led relationships (*Thelma & Louise*) (Figure 163).

4.4 Genre transformation and cycles of change

As we have seen, like culture and its dynamic values, genres and their codes and conventions do not remain static but constantly change and evolve due to "economic, technological and consumption reasons" (Hayward, 2000:166). Due to society's structures of collective cultural producers, consumers and critics, a genre's boundaries and qualities are incessantly in the process of being redefined and reiterated, just as society's values and mores are always in the process of being redefined and reiterated. Genres thus function reflexively. This ongoing need to be reflexive is the main factor that contributes to the transformative effect of genres. Consequently, the questions and challenges of their conflicts are continually reassessed and reframed as befitting that particular time and cultural context. Genres thus contradictorily function concurrently as conservative and innovative, as they rely on formulas that work, yet also utilise technological industry innovations that update and alter these generic conventions while adhering to audience expectations that fluctuate as they seek to change and innovation.

In the world of film, we expect genre transformation as these formulas go through cycles of change and play between conservation and innovation. Films can thus adhere to the codes and conventions of genres and adhere to the codes *while* subverting them. Accordingly, in terms of viewing a genre, we can identify a *classical genre* tradition that "place[s] a film in relation to a paradigm that remains the same over time" (Corrigan & White, 2012:344) which tends to follow prescribed genre values from an assumed pre-existing model and expects a more objective viewer; as well as a *revisionist genre* tradition that "sees a film as a function of changing historical and cultural contexts that modify the conventions and formulas of that genre" (Corrigan & White, 2012:345), tends to follow descriptive genres values recognised from older films but altered, and expects a more subjective viewer that contributes to the determination of a genre. Within the revisionist perspective, a viewer may thus come to consider genre as "a product of historical and cultural flux, continually changing as part of a dialogue with films of the same genre" (Corrigan & White, 2012:345). Within this tradition, two other perspectives developed. Within the *generic displacement perspective*, films genres are recognised as changes in response to "different cultural and historical communities", while within the *generic reflexivity perspective*, film genres are "unusually self-conscious about their generic identity and clearly and visibly comment on the generic paradigms" (Corrigan & White,

2012:345). Genres can thus constantly modify, broaden, and remodel the norms that codify them and society.

The changes in genre go through a specific cycle of change (Cawelti, 1978). At first, genres are classic in their presentation, as depicted in *The Covered Wagon* (1923). The first cycle of change involves ridiculous exaggeration and self-parody with reference to the classics and traditional conventions, as seen in *Blazing Saddles* (1976). Next in the cycle, genres either evoke nostalgia for the genre's convention but feature updated story elements as done by *Back to the Future Part III* (1990), or proceed to deny and contest they are part of such an outdated genre. The following cycle of generic convention changes is considered demythologising. It turns to criticising the genre itself by exposing its conventions to reality in a way that reveals them as lacking and even harmful, as reflected in *Unforgiven* (1992). In the final stage of change, there is the reaffirmation of myth that subverts genre conventions that also proceed to re-affirm this myth not as something real but as something, we need to believe (Hayward, 2000:168 & Cawelti, 1978). These changes manifest in the dynamic structure of symbolic sets of oppositions within genre and reflect changing social modifications and shifting audience expectations. With these cycles of change within the production rituals of the social transformation ritual of genres, we witness their unique response to changing social, economic, technological and consumption demands that lead to their particular expression of repeated patterns and the retelling and rearticulating of myths and worlds.

In pictures: The changing ritual boundaries and qualities of genres reflect social change



Figure 164: *The Covered Wagon* (1923)



Figure 165: *Blazing Saddles* (1976)



Figure 166: *Back to the Future Part III* (1990)



Figure 167: *Unforgiven* (1992)

The ritual codes and conventions of genres as well as their boundaries and qualities, change and become redefined and reiterated due to various social, economic, technological and consumption influences that reflect the surrounding cultures and their dynamic values. Genres such as the western, at first, appear classic in their representation of the social structure and its equilibrium (Figure 164), such as in *The Covered Wagon* (1923), followed by a cyclic change that exaggerates and parodies its traditional conventions (Figure 165) as in *Blazing Saddles* (1976). This is followed by a time of nostalgia for these conventions but with updated story elements (Figure 166), such as found in *Back to the Future Part III* (1990), while the final demythologising phase subjects these conventions to reality to reveal their lack and even harmful covenants (Figure 167) as reflected in *Unforgiven* (1992).

This continual redefining of genre rituals is not always an organic process between consumer and producer however and there have been times when audience preferences and sensibilities did not direct industry decisions, and audiences had to suffer studio contrivances. This happened with the capping of

horror production in the 1980s due to a studio perceived market saturation, denying the public the tension release the horror genre would have afforded it during those tense times of the unpopular economic reforms of Reaganomics and Thatcherism (Hutchinson, 2008). Such instances increased the attention paid to the idea of "production of culture", which Stephen Neale (2000:228) refers to as "the interorganizational network of production companies, distributors, mass media gatekeepers, and retailers". The machinery and apparatus of cinema, including genre, come to affect the economies of desire in that it systematically regulates desire, memory, and expectation of its audience (Neale 1980: 55). Genre does so as it functions within various textual classifications from westerns and romances to science fiction and war movies, and thereby determines the number of available texts. In this manner, it can control industry demand and production to "regulating desire over a determined number of genre texts" while also regulating memory and expectation as its codes and conventions signify a preferred reading (Hayward, 2000:170). Such resources and capacity enable the industry to manage and regulate "the effects that its products produce" (Neale, 1980:55). The standardised codes and conventions of genre allow its narrative and visual images as well as symbols to activate desire, memory and expectation within the audience, but then also to regulate it through performance strategies since the audience remembers the genre and have resultant expectations that are subsequently gratified (Hayward, 2000:171).

We thus come to recognise that "genres also function as *cultural rituals*, the repetition of formulas that help coordinate our needs and desires" – that genres are predictably made as they anticipate and deliver materials in response to collective desires (Corrigan & White, 2012:316-317). A case can consequently be made however, since this "interorganizational network" is ultimately dependent on their audience, that studio decisions and machinations are indeed consumer-orientated, although for the audience's benefit or to empty their pockets, is indeed a thorny issue. These anxieties crystallise around the issue of social, cultural, and fiscal forces that undermine the individual's social mobility and attempts to demarcate their individuality confidently. In recognition of the Marxist claim that capital is now the defining drive of our society, the likes of Slavoj Žižek (Žižek, 1992:152) has argued that capital has tarnished the symbolic order that is important to film and its ritualistic creation of a sense of reality (Pope, 2012:131). This undermines the audience's identification with this reality and the possibilities of identity creation and transformation. Such criticism may raise legitimate concerns, but it does not invalidate the film genre's potential to create reflexive anti-structural model worlds that address social concerns and lead to potential socio-cultural transformation.

Case study: Changing genre conventions and the revisionist Western genre

Genre structures and conventions reflect the surrounding culture and society since they develop and change as society and cultures change. Initially, in the western genre, the norms and values of society are upheld and valued by society's hero, but the genre then develops to come to question and challenge these very values; whereas westerns initially value socialisation and civilisation and the hero upheld the values and order of civil society and kept the villains functioning in the wilderness outside of that order before the hero then rode off into the sunset, within later westerns the hero is no longer the upholder of law and order, and these are no longer only experienced as merely uncomfortable and vaguely questioned, but civilisation has come to be outright depicted as inadequate and corrupt, placing the villain inside society and the hero in the wilderness.

The Searchers (1956) is considered a classic western genre film filled with codes and conventions. Yet, it already reflects some major changes to these conventions compared to a classic western such as the previously discussed³⁴ *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) or *The Covered Wagon* (1923). On its surface, the film adheres to classic western genre conventions as a state of equilibrium is encountered at the outset and the hero Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) returns to his family from the wilderness. The state of equilibrium is disrupted as Comanche Indians massacre the family. Ethan and his adopted cousin Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) vow to repair this disruption by rescuing kidnapped family member Debbie (Natalie Wood). The disruption is finally repaired when they rescue Debbie from her Indian kidnappers and kill their chief and her husband, Scar (Henry Brandon). A major variation on the classic tradition occurs however when the sidekick Pawley becomes the actual hero in the end as he comes to save Debbie from not only the Indians, but also the racist Ethan, the supposed hero who does not want to save her but kill her since she is married to an Indian (Lacey, 2000:118-120). During the post heyday of westerns, even more changes occur within the genre, as evident in films such as *Unforgiven* (1992). The cowboy hero in this film is now a killer of women and children. In his old age, he is a changed man due to the influence of his deceased wife and haunted by these killings yet still prepared to kill for money and be an assassin, even if reluctantly so. He cannot aim anymore, and he can barely get on his horse. His partners are old and myopic. He even avoids the town and civilisation where the sheriff that rules (and should bring order) is a violent, despotic braggart. It thereby questions such issues as its codes and convention's normalisation of the binary opposition of good and bad, or positioning the white man as civilised and the Indian as natural (Hayward, 2000:9-10). Such critical cycles are part of generic changes that keep genres, social issues, and resolutions relevant and in step with socio-cultural shifts as these genres and their film world models of order seek to perform their potentially productive reflexive and transformative function continually and successfully as social rituals of transformation.

³⁴ See 'Case study: The genre rituals of film within the western genre' section above.

CHAPTER 3

AFTER THE SCREENING

1. Introduction: The film and media ritual context of pilgrimage

Having considered the ways in which film as ritual manifests *before* any local encounter with film, we now turn to the impact of film *after* the screening and its footprints into the real world. In the following sections, I consider how film extends beyond the physical site of the cinema into local face-to-face experiences of daily life and how to account for the transformative power of film beyond the screening event. I begin with how audience members as pilgrims can extend their participation in the film world beyond the cinema to related symbolic sites of significance as they search for and negotiate meaning and orientation in this ritual media landscape. The second section shows how extended viewer participation leads to collective intelligence, making sense of these extended worlds and how participants contribute to the further creation and extension of such worlds. The final section highlights the socio-cultural transformative power of film related to civic imagination and makes participating viewers more politically active beyond the confines of the cinema or the film world.

1.1 Pilgrimage as life orientating journeys

The birth of cinema during the turn of the 20th-century drastically altered society as it changed the media landscape and people's relationship with it and allowed new social interaction opportunities. This also caused changes in the spatial and secular structure of social life as personal and public social spaces were introduced to new forms of action and interaction (Thompson, 1995). Although cinema drew mostly working-class audiences to its initial fairground screenings while the upper-class audiences enjoyed private projections, soon both groups were mingling at the newly built movie theatres (Montebello, 2003; Marx, 2014:89). Different classes could now mix at the new cinemas while also ritualistically creating and disseminating new symbols of group membership and content that affected identities and the social structure as it circulated within the global culture and social life. During the first decades of cinema, audiences did not only for the first time see the real or imagined landscapes of Russia or Mars in films such as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *The War of the Worlds* (1953), but also encountered troubled teenagers in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) and the struggles of modern industrial society in *Modern Times* (1936) that challenged their perception of social order, and witnessed how different social groups and cultures live in *The Rules of the Game* (1939) or *Tokyo Story* (1953) thereby broadening their social knowledge and conception of the other. Cinema also powerfully influenced how the public interacted with old and new media forms and associated ritualised media use, from newspapers and magazines to radio and the internet, as fans clamoured to access new media formats that granted more contact with the worlds of their favourite films. Various new avenues of newfangled modern media use allowed innovative ways to explore and influence the world. It especially allowed film fans to be able to extend their engagement with the world of a film beyond the local encounter of film viewing at the cinema. With new developments in and around film, fans could now read reviews in newspapers or interviews in magazines. With the rise of video, they could engage in repeated home viewing, and today they can engage with fellow fans on social media and web fora. Such media tourism and pilgrimages are akin to

more traditional religious pilgrimages in that it is not actually only a physical journey but “also a symbolic journey towards certain central values of society” (Reijnders, 2011:58) as fans or pilgrims retreat from their everyday lives and identities and concretely through their actions and movement “acknowledge the value and authenticity of specific locations” and their associated values (Reijnders, 2011:59). The journey of pilgrimage is furthermore intimately tied in with the creation of identity. Modern life can also be considered in terms of pilgrimage through which we journey during our time and make sense along the way. Through our wandering, we bring meaning into the world, and this “‘bringing in’ of meaning has been called identity-building” (Bauman, 1996:22).

In pictures: Media changing perspectives



Figure 168-169: *Annie Hall* (1977)

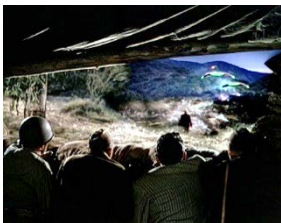


Figure 170: *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) Figure 171: *The War of the Worlds* (1953)



Figure 172: *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)

Figure 173: *Modern Times* (1936)



Figure 174: *The Rules of the Game* (1939)

Figure 175: *Tokyo Story* (1953)

At the newly established cinema theatres (Figure 168), diverse groups of society intermingled (Figure 169) as they ritualistically created and disseminated symbols and cultural capital that through modern media further circulated within global culture throughout society, affecting personal and social identities as well as the social structure as audiences became exposed to unfamiliar and far-off cultures and worlds seen in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) (Figure 170) and *The War of the Worlds* (1953) (Figure 171), challenging social phenomena and changes in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) (Figure 172) and *Modern Times* (1936) (Figure 173), as well as diverse cultural perspectives as witnessed in *The Rules of the Game* (1939) (Figure 174) or *Tokyo Story* (1953) (Figure 175).

1.2 Media tourism and participation in the extended film world

The expanding media landscape allowed many more opportunities to explore film worlds. Films fans visit sites related to the world of film in search of meaning and life orientation. These sites have become socially symbolic sites of significance where visitors can reflect on and negotiate the impact and consequence of these sites. What else but the movies could make audiences take such journeys, for example, travelling from Winnipeg, Canada, to Philipsburg in St Maarten, visiting a stranger who works with puppets, and paying to have dinner with him? Such is the dedication of a certain Star Wars fan that they travelled 5 000 km to talk to special effects and make-up artist Nick Maley, who worked on the Yoda puppet in *Star Wars*, and now runs a small speciality museum with film exhibits and artefacts from the various films he worked on. Fans even pay extra to have dinner with him and talk some more about their shared interests.³⁵

Within the extended media ritual landscape, fans travel around the world to

- tour Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire in England where films from James Bond to Harry Potter were shot;
 - visit the George Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles that houses a cinema archive and thousands of film-related objects;
 - relax in Frodo's lush shire of *Lord of the Rings* in New Zealand;
 - go in search of Pokémon and friends at the Pokémon Centre in Tokyo;
 - view the publicity stunt location in New York where the subway vent blew into Marilyn Monroe's skirt in front of thousands of adoring fans and her furious soon to be ex-husband;
 - pay their respects at the highway junction where James Dean fatally crashed his Porsche 550 Spyder on the way to a racing event in Salinas;
 - stay at the Chateau Marmont in Hollywood's West Sunset Boulevard, infamous for its Hollywood parties and scandals;
 - attend an auction of movie memorabilia such as one of the many pairs of ruby red slippers from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or the abovementioned Monroe dress;
 - capture a glimpse of *Blade Runner's* (1982) dystopian future at its Hollyhock House location in California;
 - dress up as a superhero for the annual San Diego Comic-Con convention and partake in discussions regarding the future of the Star Trek franchise with its producers and stars at a panel discussion;
 - see a double feature shown on 35mm film at Quentin Tarantino's New Beverly Cinema in Los Angeles;
 - gape at the simulated blood of Bruce Willis on his white tank top from *Die Hard* (1988) on the shelves of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington;
 - crawl on the sidewalk looking for the handprints of countless stars from silent movie star and producer Mary Pickford to director Christopher Nolan at the Grauman's Chinese Theatre;
 - visit the Universal Studios theme park in Singapore and go on a Jurassic Park inspired river rapids ride;
- or

³⁵ https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g147347-d2299951-r159644115-Yoda_Guy_Movie_Exhibit-Philipsburg_Sint_Maarten_St_Martin_St_Maarten.html

- explore the Tabernas Desert in Spain from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966), Doune Castle in Scotland from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) or Curracloe Beach in Ireland from *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

In pictures: Extending engagement with the world of film beyond the viewing experience



Figure 176: Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles, USA



Figure 177: Tabernas Desert, Andalusia, Spain

An assortment of film-related sites within the expanding and interconnected media ritual landscape allow multiple opportunities for film fans to extend their engagements with the worlds of film in a variety of diverse ways, from visiting the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles (Figure 176) to the Tabernas Desert in Spain from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966) (Figure 177).

In doing so, these fans extend their participation in the rituals of film from the onscreen world to the everyday world, inspiring us to recall Geertz's (1993:90) religious definition of ritual as "clothing conceptions with an aura of factuality". Plate likewise suggests that these viewers respond to that film's created world and its idealistic sense of how things ought to be versus how chaotic things are in the real world. Some fans go so far as to align their belief systems with film philosophies as they fashion and follow ritual and belief systems based on that of the film effectively challenging "traditional central sacred texts and figures" (Plate, 2008:86, 89), as many a *Star Trek* fan will attest through their communal sacralisation of *Star Trek* and regular practices around its canon (Jindra, 1994) such as learning the fictional Klingon language (Okrand, 1992), or also by followers of Jediism from *Star Wars*, (Possamai, 2003), and followers of Dudeism from *The Big Lebowski* (1998) (Cardozo, 2018). These fans are extending not just their participation but also the transformational effect of the film (franchise) by taking it out of the cinema and into the real world, thus also creating new opportunities for further exchanging symbols and cultural capital during subsequent social ritual interactions. This occurrence is reflected by Jonathan Z Smith

(1982:63) when he states: "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 ritualised perfection is recalled in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things".

When viewers become pilgrims in this way, they thus extend their level of participation further, potentially even to the realm of "secular filmic cult audiences" since they can "construct ritual and belief systems through their viewing experiences" (Kinkade, 1992:194) in that way extending the world-making ability of film into the daily lives and face-to-face experiences of audiences as well as spreading its influence in the real world. Such new, repeated, and frequently near-religious interactions with different and often interconnected media forms have led to many new media rituals in terms of creation and consumption thereby becoming ubiquitous in people's lives, and powerfully permeating and influencing modern daily life. The different forms of media now pervading the globe thus allow the global audience platforms to connect and exchange ideas and cultural capital; as a result, powerfully affecting and transforming daily life and the wider world and its social structure. Since the creation of media is often centralised, it can also be mapped onto physical space. These centralised places of production become places of symbolic power in possession of symbolic resources; just think of Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood, or Disneyland. It is thus not only the carefully framed sequenced production rituals of film or its stars and their cultural capital that focus viewer attention and frame social issues but also associated places and people related to films that for fans have become charged with an energy of excitement and reverence that elevate such places to an almost augmented reality as different rituals are practiced by different people to different ends.

1.3 Places of social significance as physical points of reference

Fans do not only journey physically to sites of significance (places such as a film refer to, sites where scenes were shot, sites related to a film, or related theme parks, etc.), but they ritualistically explore the symbolic position of these sites in the broader media ritual landscape. Visitors to the Philadelphia Museum of Art are asked regularly by strangers to take pictures of them in a victorious heroic pose or are overtaken by people running up the stairs, not to visit the art but to emulate Sylvester Stallone who scaled those very stairs in the *Rocky* movies. In doing so, fans attempt to come closer to him since, for some, it seems "to participate in those narratives is to become the people who inhabit these roles" (Steeves, 2006: 169). Because of the film, these seemingly random stairs have come to symbolise the overcoming of struggle. Hence, people visit them to be in the same world as their (anti-) hero and feel victorious and empowered because they are associated with the narratives and worlds of film, and so these sites' significance (whether from *Rocky* or *Joker*, 2019) become elevated. They also become keepers of memory in a secular, multicultural world according to Reijnders' take on Pierre Nora's notions on the constructed nature of memory (Nora, 1989), since alongside the "loosening of traditional social bonds, individuals and social groups were desperately in search of the roots of a shared identity", and "the general need to identify certain places as holy, and to use these places as physical points of reference for phenomenon whose existence is non-physical" (Reijnders, 2011:13-14). As Couldry (2003:42) claims, media tourists find such places of resonance fascinating and persuasive since we are compelled by the perception that the media has a privileged position in society to convey its core values and behaviours, and by a belief that not only does society actually have a universal core of norms and values but also that the media is in a unique position to convey these values. However, to reiterate, this is just a perception. This belief proceeds to configure our orientation towards different forms of media as a social nucleus that creates a

concentration of symbolic power accepted as legitimate through social endorsement, and which positions media rituals as key mechanisms to steer this "power of constructing reality", as Bourdieu (1991:166) would refer to such legitimising endorsement.

A key element to the success of any ritual is willing participants who agree to go along with any given ritual and its possible effects. It is thus not particularly effective as a form of social regulation if it is not flexible and "amenable to some degree of individual appropriation" (Bell, 1992:222). It will then be subject to strategies of resistance and possible rejection. This flexible evolution of rituals thus allows them to be appropriated in many ways and to different ends, and not just with the aim to affirm boundaries and reproduce power. Media-based fandom is an example of such reinvention of ritual (Couldry, 2003:53). As we have seen, the privilege that some places receive creates the uneven symbolic landscape of power because of unevenly distributed narratives of significance. This landscape is mapped onto actual space when we consider where media is created and distributed as well as its associated sites, as film fans have shown. Pilgrimage journeys to such places of symbolic power and significance attract people due to their diverse personal and social significance. Couldry's invocation of the work of Anthony Giddens leads us to consider such places of social significance as places where dispersed members of society can re-connect, allowing the "disembedded" nature of contemporary communities to be "re-embedded" (Giddens, 1991) and hence powerfully acting as potential mechanisms for social integration and cohesion by way of the channelling of conflict (as per the social theses we explored in Chapter 1). These journeys of pilgrimage are thus not only a physical journey in space but also exemplify movement in the symbolic landscape between the everyday world and the privileged media world and involve a great distribution and exchange of symbolic and cultural capital. However, descriptions of such varied media pilgrimages only truly make sense when considered in a broader framework of cultural and ritual space as well as the media ritual landscape.³⁶

In pictures: Ritually negotiating film places of social significance and memory

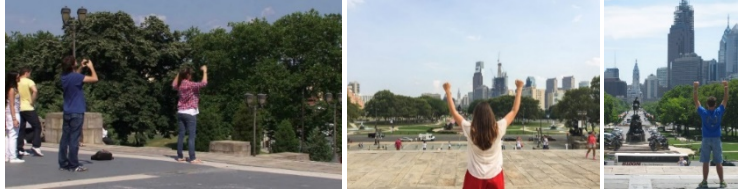


Figure 178: The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA



Figures 179-180: Rocky (1976)

³⁶ See 'Case study: Pilgrim journeys and rites of passage in the world of James Bond' section below.



Figures 181-183: Tourist pictures, Rocky Steps, Philadelphia, USA



Figures 184-185: *In Her Shoes* (2005)



Figures 186-187: *Van Wilder* (2002)



Figure 188: *Rocky* (1976), Philadelphia, USA Figure 189: *Joker* (2019), New York, USA



Figures 190-192: Tourist pictures, Joker Stairs, New York, USA

The film-related locations ritually visited by film fans may seem like any other site, but they have become places of symbolic meaning and social significance and, since they are visited by such diverse people for a variety of different reasons, have become keepers of memory filled with multiple conflicting discourses. The Philadelphia Museum of Art stairs (Figure 178), as featured in *Rocky* (Figures 179-180), have become a symbol of overcoming difficulty and is regularly visited by people imitating the victorious Rocky pose as they seek to embody a similar spirit of heroics (Figures 181-183), also referenced in other films (Figures 184-187). *Joker* (2019) meanwhile inverted the Rocky symbolism (Figure 188) as a downward trajectory (Figure 189) and being overcome by difficulty but have become similarly celebrated (Figures 190-192). Such disputes contribute to the exchanges at these places of memory of what is considered sacred and of value, thereby mediating differences and deconstructing boundaries, in doing so, relieving social tension and actually contributing to social cohesion.

1.4 Pilgrims in a symbolic landscape: Disneyland

Disneyland is a prime example of a particular place with such a special and privileged position in these networks of symbolic production and serves as a "capital of symbolism" (Zukin, 1991:232). Visitors to such sites as Disneyland can therefore not only be considered tourists or even media tourists but actually

pilgrims in search of meaning and orientation in a landscape of symbolic significance. This notion is confirmed by the traditional pilgrimage and ritual elements at stake when people go on a family vacation to Disneyland to have a special experience outside of their normal routines.

At Disneyland, once patrons leave their cars at the parking lot and cross the boundary of the entrance, they leave the mundane world behind and find themselves in another reality, a liminal space between worlds where the world is clearly constructed and time and perspective are manipulated as rides control the waiting time to seem longer but feel shorter, while the levels of buildings are perspectively resized (Steeves, 2006: 150-153). Within the anti-structure of this new world with rules of its own, visitors are thus now free from the usual norms and can behave differently than usual as they now atypically socially mix with strangers and constantly take pictures as commemoratives while they wait hours to go on film-related rides where they have no control and actually seem life-threateningly dangerous, they talk to six-foot mice as though they are not people dressed in costumes (Steeves, 2006:160-164), mechanised and perfect audio-animatronic animals replace the unpredictable dangers of nature, while flowers never wilt and olive trees do not bear fruit where it can make a mess (Steeves, 2006:158-159). In this world, visitors consume various Disney products and encounter multiple narratives that allow them to “enter the Disney lifeworld from a ‘variety’ of perspectives”, thereby making them part of this world that potently and effectively change their state of mind to feel like a child again (Steeves, 2006: 167-168). Despite the dark, consumerist ideological underpinnings of Disney World, in such an altered state of experience, it still allows a space of anti-structure and reflexivity from which to have a unique perspective on this world, as well as that of their own world waiting outside of the Disney gate.

In pictures: Media pilgrimage and the search for meaning and orientation in a symbolic landscape of social significance



Figure 193: Disneyland, California, USA



Figures 194-195



Figure 196



Figure 197-202

Visiting diverse film-related sites of symbolic meaning within a landscape of social significance establish visitors as pilgrims in search of meaning and orientation. Disneyland is a prime example of such pilgrimage that relates to traditional ritual structures as visitors cross the Disney gate threshold into a liminal space of anti-structure removed from the everyday world (Figure 193). Here spatial and temporal aspects of reality are altered when buildings are resized to alter perspective (Figure 194) and expected waiting times at cues are manipulated (Figure 195). Meanwhile, visitor identities blend as strangers interact and become a community (Figure 196) exposed to various worlds and perspectives (Figures 197-202).

1.5 Forging values and ideas of the sacred

Michael Billig argues, however, that references to such journeys or pilgrimages are often veiled in common or clichéd language (e.g., “we are going on a family vacation to Disneyland”), and as a result, the journey is consequently thus easily dismissed as an everyday event (Billig, 1995; 1997). This can leave visitors oblivious to the reflexive and potentially transformative nature of the experience. Moreover, it quietly reinforces these veiled and unrecognised patterns of thought related to boundaries and categories that affirm the greater significance of some places in the media and society. Furthermore, it also potentially re-embeds the abstract character of the media production system and its landscape of uneven power structures. Lévi-Strauss (1981:672-675) calls such significant labelling of different ritual spaces “parcelling out”, and, alongside the process of differentiation, is what confirms the category differences upon which the ritual is built.

For Couldry (2003:89), such media tourism or pilgrimage acts as a “rite of institution” since it “confirms the legitimacy of the divisions that underlie the ritual”, seeing that the places they are centred around carry a representative significance in that it claims to have a higher significance by virtue of its inclusion in the media rituals of the world and its participation in the media's overall representational power. This representative feature is transferable. Various media sites and pilgrimages can therefore represent this

centre and can ideally connect a pilgrim to the values and behaviours associated with the perceived social centre. Yet, it is because this core is *constructed* that various sites can stand in as representative. Therefore, we find media pilgrimage sites so fascinating – they not only reveal people's attempt at negotiating values and identities at such diverse sites but also reveal and hide much about the system of production, distribution, and consumption of media that they represent. Within this highly structured symbolic landscape, media pilgrimages entrench the importance and magnitude of some places in the media and society and re-embed the overall abstract nature of the media production system. There is more to such journeys than mere movement between boundaries, categories and power structures, however. Alan Morinis (1992:22) argues that we must grasp "the (general) code of pilgrimage that underlies the concept and practice of pilgrimage within a culture". According to Glenn Bowman, this means we must explore the many varying sites where ideas of the sacred and our urge to engage with it are forged. At these sites, visitors and pilgrims affirm the value of such a site and its associated symbolic significance, thus verifying the related categories, boundaries and symbols of group membership that further suggest the values of society and the ideas of what we hold sacred and of importance.

1.6 Imagination and reality

A case can be made, according to Couldry, that the media derives its elevated position in society and power from the division between what is in the media and what is not, as well as between the places and people in media versus those outside, thus creating distinctions, boundaries, categories, hierarchies, and power positions. Journeys to and between these positions of power and places of significance can be considered as ways to negotiate their importance and consequence. Reijnders, however, expands on this position when he refers to the work of John Caughey (1984) to further show that "the phenomenon of media tourism derives its power and popularity from the symbolic contrast between imagination and reality" (Reijnders, 2011:15-17). According to this theory, people live in two distinct worlds that at times temporarily coincide – the "real" world, which is "an empirically measurable reality, defined by time and place", and the "world of imagination", which is "an interconnected complex of fantasies, daydreams and stories" (Reijnders, 2011:15). Imagination in this context is considered as "a mental conception of an object, person, or event that at a certain time and in a certain place is not actually present" (Reijnders, 2011:14). For Reijnders (2011:19), there is an inherent bond between imagination and reality in that imagination springs forth from the sensory experience of reality and so makes "a creative adaptation of what is known", while "conversely the power of the imagination is necessary to assemble all the sensory stimulants into a coherent experience of 'the' reality".

Thus, for Reijnders (2011:19), the journeys to special locations are pilgrimages to places of significance that are "material reference points that have a connection with certain stories", which people visit "in search of material references to (re)confirm their notions of imagination and reality". When the "real world" and "the world of imagination" are considered as "two emic concepts" of social research within a single culture, we recognise them as part of how people endeavour to categorise their interwoven everyday life, world, and reality, which they continuously attempt to unravel and understand (Reijnders, 2011:15-16). These symbolic places of significance are thus not physical points of reference "to an existing, factual opposition between 'imagination' and 'reality'" but are rather considered as "locations where the symbolic difference between these two concepts is being (re-)constructed by those involved, based on what is considered 'factual' evidence" (Reijnders, 2011:16). Again, and much like within the landscape of the media ritual framework, we recognise a movement between places of symbolic significance as a

constant ritual negotiation strategy for their relevance and importance as indications of social norms and values, while the accompanying negotiation of tension and conflict serve as important and necessary steps toward social integration and cohesion.

1.7 Media pilgrimage and ritual negotiation

We thus recognise in these ritual processes at these film-related sites of significance and memory a negotiating of values as well as the negotiation of the sense of reality. Stjepan Mestrovic argues in Eade & Sallnow that people actually do experience real emotion at such media pilgrimage sites and not simply escapism, albeit a kind of preprogrammed emotion as believed is expected from such places (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Eade & Sallnow (1991:15) further substantiate the negotiating character of pilgrimages with their argument that pilgrimage sites are "almost a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meaning and practices", as mentioned in the genre discussion.

We can thus consider these sites less as places that simply affirm shared values and, more interestingly rather as places where contested and different values can be worked out. They ultimately assist social integration and cohesion as social tension is released when social conflict is addressed. We once again witness the social ritual theories of Chapter 1 play out and the creative adaptation of ritual. Some people may go to the media capital of New York to visit the often-depicted Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom and liberty, while others may view it as a symbol of western capitalism and oppression. Some might visit the Fox Corporation in awe as the original home of *The Simpsons*, while others go to the same place to protest their news presentation. Some people climb the stairs from the movie *Rocky* (1976) and ponder their symbolism of overcoming difficulty and the hero's rise, while others climb down the stairs as depicted by the Joker in *Joker* (2019) and ponder its symbolism of being overcome by difficulty and descent into infamy. Like the Rocky and Joker pilgrimages, these journeys may seem quite different and yet they similarly reflect on values, identities, and social integration; thereby, one can join the pilgrims on these journeys in a communal sense of humanity that could foster cohesion beyond partisan divides.³⁷ Eade & Sallnow argued that multiple conflicting discourses would be present at any given media or religious pilgrimage site and so we profoundly recognise that such variances and disputes actually contribute to the exchanges taking place there (Eade & Sallnow, 1991). If we adhere to the claim that ritual actions essentially identify that which society holds sacred, we vividly see how it functions as such in this context of negotiating wildly divergent values in that the media rituals at these places of pilgrimage are "mediating difference and parsing boundaries, rather than seeking to overcome and absolutize them" to "teach us how to live within and between different boundaries" (Seligman, 2008:7). Media pilgrimages are consequently not mere visits to a celebrity home, places where a favourite movie scene takes place, or places related to where a film was shot, it is a movement within the media ritual landscape and a landscape of symbolic social significance. Visiting such symbolically significant places legitimises or invalidates them and their associated meaning and value, and as such serve as places of memory and as points of reference where members of society can come together and negotiate meaning and reality as they exchange affirmative or nullifying symbolic and cultural capital. Here we can see the progressive effects of the constant creative re-invention of ritual that does not simply relegate it to one mode of

³⁷ See 'In pictures: Ritually negotiating film places of social significance and memory' section below.

operation or effect such as affirming traditional power structures, but can now also transform and create meaning, acting "as a site where identities and social realities are constructed" (Murru, et al., 2016:408).

The negotiations that surround these media pilgrimage sites can also be considered in terms of meaning-making. Since meaning-making is "understood as a site where identities and social realities are constructed", we consequently come to understand that media reception also has political consequences (Murru, et al., 2016:408) since so much meaning is created from media. Media and citizenship intersect since they share a systemic interdependence and share some basic cultural dynamics. They have the power to focus collective attention and thus produce, and are contingent on, social entities (Dayan, 2005), while both also depend on processes of imagination for their very existence. This focused attention is a fundamental dimension of social experience, which then create "personae fictae", "a variety of attentive, reactive and responsive bodies, collective or not, that emerge in the role of enacting attention, and that we are used to identifying as publics, meaning-making audiences or consumer audiences" (Murru, et al., 2016:404). These social entities may differ in their lifestyles and actions, experiences, self-awareness, and reflexivity, but they are joined in their collective attention through various media rituals as an audience, whether reading the news, taking part in online debates, or watching films. We have previously seen that ritual "creates a subjunctive, an "as if" or "could be", universe", a model world, and now we furthermore come to recognise that participants enjoying these "as if" model worlds of film, by this very act of creating a shared subjunctive or conjunctive mood, actually also "recognises the inherent ambiguity built into social life and its relationships", and that ritual and its accompanying ritualistic behaviour "are not so much events as ways of negotiating our very existence in the world" (Seligman, 2008:7). Participants in the ritual worlds of film and surrounding media rituals can tangibly come to recognise and experience ritual in terms of channelling conflict and assisting social integration and cohesion as through these worlds they come to acknowledge the tensions of social life, and that between personal and social identity, and how they constantly require negotiation and conflict resolution, as it happens in their film experiences and various participation and discussion opportunities across media platforms. Ritual not only explicates "the relational aspects of role, and of self and other", it also recognises the deep need of humans and society for boundaries. Very importantly, ritual also recognises its own negotiability. As such, the flexible nature of ritual allows us to create numerous "as if" worlds, a "social imaginary", of anti-structure and temporary order that allow contrast with the real-world and reflexive opportunities, the recognition and renegotiation of our boundaries, as well as movement between them as it recognises the simultaneously separating and uniting role of boundaries (Seligman, 2008:12). The rituals of film, like ritual in media and ritual in general, is a cultural resource of reflexivity that assist society to "deal with ambiguity, ambivalences, and the gentle play of boundaries that require both their existences and their transcendence" (Seligman, 2008:10).

1.8 Media and meaning-making

The narratives and rituals of film attempt to make sense and create order out of the chaos of the world, and in the process also comes to define our sense of reality. Film as ritual placed within the media landscape powerfully positions film as highly influential within society, including its extension and relation to sites of significance and media pilgrimages to these sites. On these journeys into the extended, film world pilgrims search for meaning and orientation at film-related places and their associated values. By way of its world-making capabilities, film transforms personal and social identities as well as the overall social structure along with its norm and values by way of its influence on the media ritual landscape, social

transformation rituals of film genre, and its reach into the social ritual interaction market and subsequent exchanges of cultural capital.

Case study: Pilgrim journeys and rites of passage in the world of James Bond

Some James Bond fans travel the world in search of sites of significance related to the films. These actions establish them as media tourists and pilgrims of a kind as they search for meaning and orientation in their lives at these sites. Many Bond films involve travel that further stimulates such impulses for media pilgrimages (Reijnders, 2011:56). This movement and pilgrimage in the vast media landscape of Bond can include a visit to the casino in Monaco's Monte Carlo as featured in *GoldenEye* (1995) and *Never Say Never Again* (1983), the Swiss Alps restaurant Piz Gloria from *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), or multiple sites across India as explored in *Octopussy* (1983).

On such journeys into the world of Bond, fans pass through the traditional three consecutive ritual phases. As pilgrims, these fans first withdraw from society and their usual social roles and responsibilities as they plan their trip and take leave from work to enter and explore the world of Bond. Next on their journey, they enter the liminal anti-structure phase as they visit genuine and tangible sites and locations of the Bond films and so find themselves truly inside the world of Bond. Finally, during the post-liminal phase, they return to their usual life world where they "recall and sometimes commemorate their journeys" (Reijnders, 2011:62). While Couldry would consider such a journey more in terms of media ritual terms such as "rites of institution" that reinforces the symbolic authority and social status of the media (Couldry, 2003:28) based on the dichotomy and consequent boundary crossing between the "ordinary world" and the special symbolically empowered "media world", Reijnders however attempts to avoid such reductionism by referring to the "cultural embeddedness" of these journeys and how such a journey refers more to the contrast between reality and imagination³⁸, although both perspectives from Couldry and Reijnders ultimately acknowledge the aforementioned "value and authenticity of specific locations" (Reijnders, 2011:59). Reijnders considers pilgrimages to places of significance as "material reference points" that people visit "in search of material references to (re)confirm their notions of imagination and reality" (Reijnders, 2011:19). The complex and dynamic connection between products of the imagination and real-world experiences is thus simplified and made accessible by Bond fans on their pilgrimage as the distinction between the film world of Bond and the real world illuminates not only the actual distinction and separation of those two worlds but furthermore also "a symbolic distinction between two existing mental categories: 'imagination' and 'reality'" and thus so too "the mental and the symbolic are made tangible" (Reijnders, 2011:66). In terms of the social ritual theories, the world of Bond can thus also help with a viewer's definition of reality and additionally develop more conscious awareness and comprehension of that definition.

Pilgrimages can also play a role in identity building. This is true for the wandering Bond pilgrim and their identity as the "overt presence of sexual ideology in the Bond texts suggests that the theme of gender is part and parcel of the media pilgrimages into the world of Bond" that "perhaps influence the gender identity of the people concerned" (Reijnders, 2011:60). Individualistic people follow Bond into his world as they recognise him as a "prototype of a sort of individualistic hero, who wages war against evil on his own" (Reijnders, 2011:57-58), but he is also recognised as "a paragon of manliness" (Reijnders, 2011:59) and so in terms of media pilgrimage within the Bond world "one can speak of the Bond

³⁸ See 'Imagination and reality' section above

locations as material-symbolic sources of masculinity, where the individual's sexual identity can be rediscovered, delineated and reinforced" (Reijnders, 2011:71). Bond is immersed in a world of technology and rational thinking often defined as masculine domains and so fan activities, such as the interest in film technology and the identifying and tracking of locations, can be seen as opportunities "to indulge in a pursuit and to display certain masculine traits" (Reijnders, 2011:67). Performing acts of mimicry at these locations (such as being photographed in the pose of Bond holding a gun, etc.) not only records the presence of the fan in the world of Bond but also allows fans to "perform and thereby reconstruct a specific masculinity", albeit more imagined masculinity than that of lived reality (Reijnders, 2011:71). Since there are different media pilgrimages available to choose from, I would argue that the media does not construct identities in an authoritarian manner but rather allows various avenues of anti-structure and reflexivity by which individuals can explore their various chosen identities.



Figure 203: *GoldenEye* (1995), Monaco, Monte Carlo; Figure 204: *Never Say Never Again* (1983), Monaco, Monte Carlo



Figures 205-206: *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), Piz Gloria, Switzerland



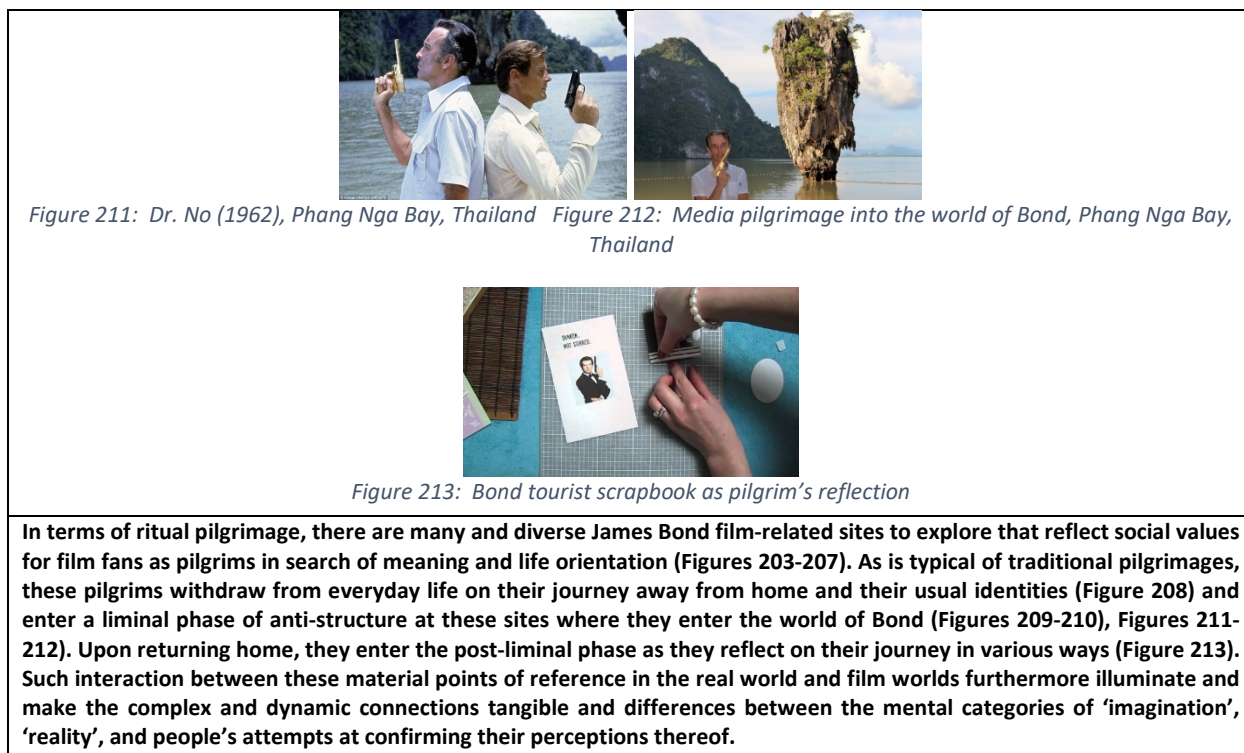
Figure 207: *Dr. No* (1962), Phang Nga Bay, Thailand



Figure 208: *Traditional pilgrimage depicted in The Way* (2010)



Figure 209: *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), Piz Gloria, Switzerland Figure 210: *Media pilgrimage into the world of Bond*, Piz Gloria, Switzerland



2. Ritualistic world-building and multi-platform world exploration

Since the dawn of the medium, cinema quickly became a prominent social agent that influenced social rituals, social relations, and communication as it brought people together (cf Hjarvard, 2013) and allowed them a collective opportunity to make sense of themselves, their changing worlds, as well as their social relations (Huggett, 2002). It presented new cultural capital exposure and exchange opportunities as they employed aspects of the new popular culture and its "cultural vocabulary to broker relations across different political groups" (Jenkins et al., 2020:8). Cinema and film viewing served to represent not only a "ritualistic transition" from work time of leisure but also to create a greater sense of "togetherness and stronger integration of people" (Pusnik, 2015:66); as a result, playing an important part in the "ritual creation of community" (Jontes, 2009:816). As further social, industrial, economic, and technological changes swept the world and the film industry, these changes progressively allowed film fans to start taking their enjoyment of film beyond the confines of the highly ritualistic liminal backstage space of the cinema and further into the real world thereby engaging with diverse cultures and creating a broader sense of community as well as various knowledge communities along the way ³⁹. The transformative potential of film is further increased when the audience engages in reflection and sharing their experiences after the screening of the film. This dialogue ideally moves beyond typical film jargon and

³⁹ My discussion of fan practices, multi-platforms and world-building below naturally presupposes – as is often the case in this study, especially also in the following section where I address digital media rituals – the ongoing digital expansion and, hence, 'post-cinematic' condition of film. Bear in mind, however, that my reflections here and elsewhere are mainly focussed on how ancient ritual structures and traditions can be seen to persist within contemporary transmedia fan practices, world-building, and digital media practices – not on the nature of film in its digital expanded post-cinematic condition as such. For a landmark set of essays on post-cinema, see Denson and Leyda (2016). For a selection of reflections on film within digital culture, including the post-pandemic future of film, see Trinh T. Minh-ha (2005); Tryon (2013); Curtin, Holt, and Sanson (2014); Sarah Atkinson (2014); Hornaday (2020); Berkowitz (2020); and Arditi (2021).

concepts toward challenging social issues and their context within the broader cultural framework. Mircea Eliade (1974:96) considers such reflective dialogue beyond the confines of the cinema as "true dialogues" that "deal with the central values in the cultures of participation" and that significantly contribute to the process of personal and social transformation.

2.1 Extending participation in the worlds of film

Various frames and options ranging in states of complexity and participation are available for extending participation into the worlds of film alongside other fans. Fans can repeatedly watch a film alone or as part of clubs, use film vernacular, dress up and attend sing-along screenings of cult classics, create their own related short stories or films, participate in cosplay, or even incorporate film text as life-orientating philosophies. Beyond the cinema, Madame Tussauds occasionally centres their wax exhibitions around movie themes or particular films such as *King Kong* (1933) or *Ghostbusters* (1984), where fans can then mingle with characters from some of their favourite films. Legoland also has events that celebrate particular movies, such as *Star Wars* (1977). Some organisers, such as Secret Cinema, even experiment with "live cinema" where they construct experiences that combine film screenings with costumes, interactive performances, and purpose-built sets, while Disney World created an extended immersive *Star Wars* world (Pett, 2016).

Such narrative experiences across multiple media platforms are referred to as transmedial storytelling. It offers immersive experiences across multiple media platforms like live cinema and theme parks but is executed on a much grander scale with added narratively connected immersive spaces to be explored beyond mere screening and accompanying enacted moments. These particular experiences are heightened by actors dressed in character that progressively blur the line between reality and the fantasy film world but becomes even more engaging and meaningful as fans discuss and share the experience before and after the event (Biggin, 2015:160), such as during the after-film coffee ritual and its musings, or the various online media interactions rituals available for reflection and sharing.

Shared liminal experiences of creating meaning are especially important in a world where our daily lives are overwhelmed with information. Therefore, we must specifically and concertedly set aside time to consider who we think we are, our values and their worth, and for a time to ritualistically leave our regular world behind and become pilgrims in search of meaning and life orientation. Traditionally, the pilgrim wandered into the desert to suspend habit and convention as they step away from their everyday lives, identities, and responsibilities in order to contemplate who they are and what values they hold dear (Bauman, 1996:20-23). The pilgrim journeys away from home to special places of personal or social significance where the nature of such values are highlighted, contrasted with similar issues, and can then be considered in a new light. Much like media, pilgrimage relies on the same principle of underlying contrast and opposition between everyday lives, times, and places, with "special" times and places removed from the mundane, isolation from the everyday being a noticeable characteristic of ritual. All these social, industrial, economic, and technological changes come to serve as enabling conditions for broader cultural immersion beyond the local made possible by increasing possibilities of transmedia storytelling, which, in turn, is enabled by a convergence culture of colliding old and new media disseminated across various interconnecting junctures of media, industries and audiences.

In pictures: Extending ritual journeys and participation in the worlds of film



Figures 214-216



Figures 217-219



Figure 220

The ritual journey and participation in the world of film are extended beyond the cinema and initial viewing experience in various ways into the media ritual landscape and social ritual interaction market. Fans can view films as part of social viewing clubs (Figure 214), dress up as characters and attend a sing-along cult screening (Figure 215), participate in cosplay (Figure 216), interact with film figures at the latest special film-related Madame Tussauds exhibitions (Figure 217), celebrate a particular film theme at Legoland (Figure 218), attend and participate in a Secret Cinema event (Figure 219), or immerse themselves in the extended Star Wars worlds created at Disneyland (Figure 220). These different experiences allow viewers to further participate in the worlds of film beyond the viewing experience.

2.2 Collective world-building

Extended film worlds are not merely a given for fans to participate in but are frequently, if not mostly, actively built and expanded by fans. Ritual participation and pilgrimage in the worlds of film can be extended into various transmedial realms of the ritual media landscape by filmmakers and fans. Traditionally “story is a narrative work in which world-building generally does not occur beyond that which is needed to advance the story” (Wolf, 2012:30), but as we increasingly come to recognise, world-making principles can be extended to wide-ranging worlds existing across multiple media platforms each with their varying degrees of invention, completion, and consistency (Wolf, 2012:33-48). This allows for a whole spectrum of world-creation ranging from a simple story within a remote secondary world, to a complete and complex alternative world where we find “multiverses or parallel universes that contain or are somehow connected to our own; entire galaxies that are separate from our own but still in the same universe” (Wolf, 2012:26).

The Matrix films is one of the first *standout* exercises in updated mythmaking and transmedial storytelling as its interconnected narratives were spread across multiple platforms that offer numerous points of entry

to its world such as pre-release advertisements and teaser websites, various animated short films by multiple creators, documentaries, online and multiplayer games, as well as a series of comics, also including subtle intertextual references and hints of points of entry to *other* worlds such as the children's classic *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Japanese anime such as *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), books such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, and classic Greek mythology. Such transmedia storytelling is hardly new. For example, the story of Jesus has been encountered for centuries at multiple levels of culture, from the written word to stained-glass windows and tapestries, to hymns, sermons, and theatrical performances (White, 2011:635). Within the modern extended transmedial landscape, the artist and storyteller can now become a "cultural geographer, cramming every shot with evocative details" as they create "compelling environments that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium" and where the world "is bigger than the film, bigger even than the franchise" (White, 2011:632-633). Here the narrative universe and macro-story remain self-contained with a coherent internal logic while being surrounded and filled by the micro-stories of plot points or character expansion and back stories, parallel stories, spin-offs, and user-generated content or fan fiction that play out on transmedia platforms of different mediums and all with different forms of expression and audiences, while collectively creating a complex semiotic tapestry of intertexts and references that bring a broader world to life.

In pictures: Extended transmedial storytelling on multiple media platforms in the media ritual landscape



Figures 221-223: The Matrix film world is accessible as an animation, comic, and games



Figures 224-225: The Matrix referencing Alice Through the Looking Glass



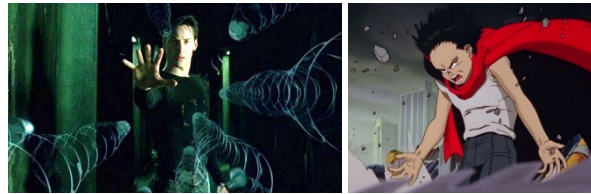
Figures 226-227: *The Matrix* referencing *Alice in Wonderland*



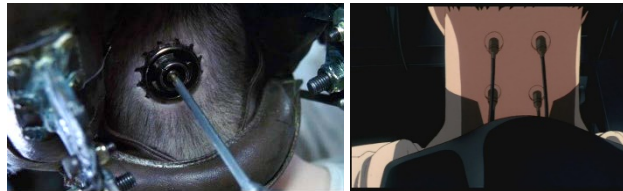
Figures 228-229: *The Matrix* referencing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*



Figures 230-231: *The Matrix* referencing *Simulacra and Simulation*



Figures 232-233: *The Matrix* referencing *Akira* (1988)



Figures 234-235: *The Matrix* referencing *Ghost in the Shell* (1995)

The narrative of a film world can be extended and spread across multiple media platforms. Such transmedial storytelling and updated mythmaking in *The Matrix* allow multiple entries to that world through animated short films (Figure 221), comics (Figure 222), various games (Figure 223), etc., while also referencing other cultural works (Figures 224-235) such as the *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (Figures 224-225) and *Alice in Wonderland* (Figures 226-227) books, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Figure 228-229) and *Simulacra and Simulation* (Figures 230-231) books, Japanese anime films such as *Akira* (1988) (Figures 232-233) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) (Figures 234-235). Such different platforms with different audiences create an intricate semiotic collage consisting of various intertexts, paratexts, and references that bring a wide world alive for audiences to explore and participate in.

Multi-platform and transmedial storytelling also allow members of the audience to become co-authors as they can explore and combine various narrative possibilities within but also beyond the official world that create unique experiences and thereby a sense of “collective ‘world-building’” (White, 2011:620). By way of fan fiction, fan edits, blogs, etc., the ritual of world-building and ritual as world-building becomes a more communal effort. There is thus a blending of the “distinction between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creator and interpreters” (White, 2011:622) that places the artwork as a “cultural attractor” that creates shared experiences and common ground that pulls diverse communities

together (White, 2011:622). Spreading the narrative over various platforms and onto many layers does run the risk of a smaller market as the gaps and excesses may alienate and confuse some audiences as it becomes so difficult and complex to unlock and comprehend without the required symbolic and cultural capital. It also requires a larger investment of time from the audience, thus, possibly urging a more sequential or chronological narrative expression that is easier to comprehend while also necessitating “building a relationship with the world rather than trying to put it all out there at once” (White, 2011:639). The complex transmedia network of products such as games, colouring books, novels, comics, television and mobile episodes, websites, etc., bring new contexts and fresh perspectives to the main narrative and world, as well as providing film with many more entry points to, and for, its audience. It allows creators of film to add information that creates a fuller world, which is more nuanced and sophisticated. As a result, it becomes more convincing, more intelligible, and more immersive for its audience.

As storytelling and world-making become increasingly complicated and spread across various media platforms, the audience often has to pool their resources and combine their skills to harbour their “collective intelligence” (Pierre Lévy, 1997) to understand and make sense of it. This “collective intelligence” and beehive of knowledge community activity within the global digital culture of “remix and remixability” (Manovich, 2005) powerfully influence and shape the distribution and flow of media content as their user-generated content “exists both within and outside commercial contexts”, and we find that “every story, image, sound, brand, and relationship play itself out across the widest possible array of media platforms” (Jenkins, 2008:7). Audiences that extend their participation, exploration, and immersion within film worlds, become ritual participants that temporarily leave personal identities behind and enter a communal world where the line between the created fantasy world and reality can become increasingly ambiguous – and make the “imaginary audience” beyond the immediate present and physical environment much more extensive. Such particular audiences and consumers actively “seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (Jenkins, 2006:3), while the film and narrative may serve as “cultural activator, setting into motion their decipherment, speculation and elaboration” (White, 2011:622). These audience members and particular fandoms that focus their attention and exchanges on a specific film or genre thus now continue to connect through their various means, thereby creating social networks within the social interaction ritual marketplace alongside their own symbols of membership and exchange. This happens because different fan groups share similar pilgrimage and travel experiences on a variety of platforms “they are able to demonstrate their status as connoisseur in a society of like-minded fans, thus creating ‘fan cultural capital’” (Reijnders, 2011:72). These diverse networks allow people from varied backgrounds more opportunities to tell their stories but also to listen to other stories, to present arguments and also listen to arguments, consequently sharing more information and learning about the world “from a multitude of other perspectives” that enables them to “pool knowledge, debate interpretations and organize through the production of meaning” (Jenkins, 2008:6). Around various popular narratives and spaces, communities form that employ this kind of shared cultural vocabulary outside of partisan frameworks to discuss real-world issues not possible elsewhere, described as the “public sphere of the imagination” by Saler (2012). Such interactions and creation of knowledge communities create a media landscape of “plenitude” (McCracken, 1998) through its “proliferation of meaningful and marketable cultural differences” (Jenkins, 2008:7).

2.3 The democratisation of media and participating in the creation of emerging culture

Consumers of film cannot only extend their participation in the worlds of film beyond the confines of the cinema but also even further in terms of participation in the broader media ritual landscape, ultimately influencing subsequent emerging culture. Such participation results in a “‘democratization’ of media”

since such a drastically altered flow of media content thwarts the previously exclusive control of media corporations (Jenkins, 2008:6) and now allow such film audiences and media users to become part of these collaborative networks of the multi-media and transmedial creative industries (Jenkins, 2008: 8-9). Such participation of consumers and their circulation of user-generated content in an “array of community and alternative media” allows them to “assert their own control over cultural flows” as they destabilise media industries and corporations’ “consolidation, standardization, and rationalization” (Jenkins, 2008:9) that reductively result in an increasingly homogeneous culture of uniformity (Jenkins, 2008:5). The collective intelligence of such participatory culture ultimately allows members of the audience a greater ability to participate in subsequently emerging culture as they seek to extend their ritual participation and immersion in the worlds of film through various liminal ritual experiences and platforms, from communal viewing experiences and online chatting, to dressing up in character and ludic immersion in world extensions such as offered by games, live cinema or theme parks, but more importantly the social consideration and collective effort of dissecting its meaning and cultural implications.

The worlds of film we journey through offer ritualistic anti-structural opportunities for reflexivity *beyond* the cinema or a particular film and its fans, as surrounding conversations and debate are ignited and through ensuing conflict and debated consensus, we find social integration is negotiated and reached as per the social ritual theories of Chapter 1. This participatory culture across multiple media platforms and their collective intelligence offers a valuable framework within which to expand comprehension as data is selected and recombined while various complex perspectives are critically analysed and compared, allowing subjective learning and personalised meaning-making. In such an information society, the audience continually exchanges and play with information. Such “expanding participation necessarily sparks further change” (Jenkins, 2006:23) since new ideas are fed back into the conversation (White, 2011:640) and ideally go beyond entertainment platforms as crowdsourcing of multiple perspectives and increased knowledge lead participants to develop socially responsible ethics and possibly to greater civic engagement.⁴⁰

2.4 Cultural capital in the extended transmedial ritual space of the film world

For many attendees of events and rituals that extend the film world, it remains “the communal aspect of immersion and shared performance that formed the defining feature” of their experience (Biggin, 2015: 162-163). However, the participation of pre-existing fandom within such an event has an advantage over casual participants in that they had more and greater matching cultural capital and a “ready-made sense of communality that outlived the duration of the evening's entertainment” (Biggin, 2015:164). We should recall from Chapter 1 the importance of cultural capital that point toward the fact that it allows people to access and contribute, but it may also come to exclude some people. Issues of cultural capital do not only influence the experience in terms of “belonging” and fitting into the group, but it also influences the unlocking of the traditional text and narrative of a film, and this becomes even more complex when taking extended and transmedial worlds, paratexts and participatory culture into account. Transmedial spaces, co-authorship, and audience participation have vastly expanded the options available to story and the world of film. Collective intelligence and “the emergence of knowledge cultures made it possible for the community as a whole to dig deeper into this bottomless text” (White, 2011:640), but it may leave those without the required cultural capital and know-how out in the cold. At live cinema events, for example,

⁴⁰ See ‘Popular culture and the civic imagination’ section.

only specific knowledge of the film will allow attendees to unlock further ancillary spaces, limiting the experience for those without the required film-specific popular culture knowledge or cultural capital such as media literacy and technical skills like working interactive mobile phone apps, if they even have a phone or the means to attend such events. With ritual events ranging from Legoland to live cinema, we witness how brand loyalty for fans can be extended across transmedial spaces (Biggin, 2015:162), but also how issues of sub-cultural capital as currency play out on the broader media ritual space with some “feeling inadequate and others empowered” (White, 2011:621).

Lack of cultural capital in terms of access and technical skills may ultimately further prohibit one from participating in creating meaning and emerging culture. The possibilities of participation to effect real change may alternatively inspire one to develop the necessary particular skills to partake in the rituals of this participatory culture and its collective intelligence in search of new information and insights, to select and access knowledge, to compile and critically assess, to recombine, to share and contribute. Within these global social interaction ritual networks, the constant circulation of cultural capital and the creation, re-creation and distribution of symbols of membership and meaning powerfully influence personal and social identities and further participation in conversations and actions that shape emerging culture.

Case study: Negotiation of extended Harry Potter fan participation into a transmedial ritual landscape

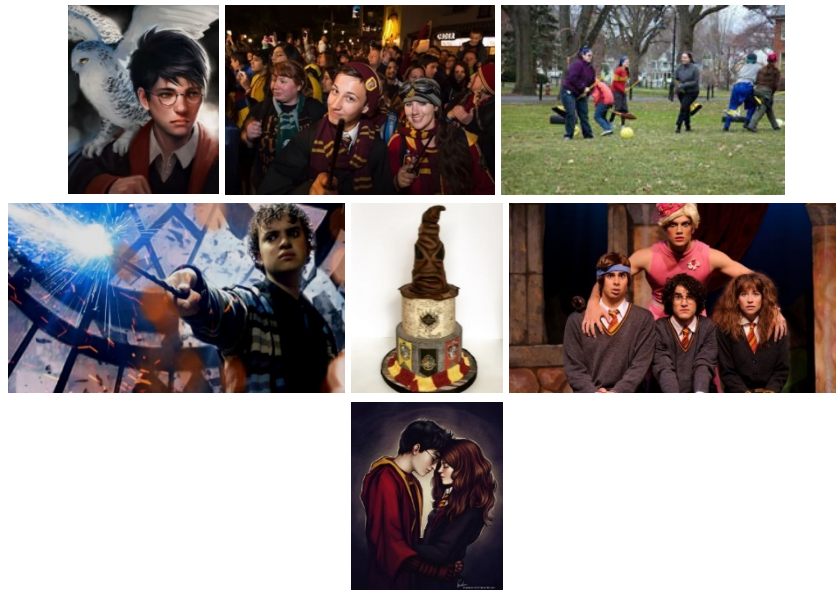
The world of *Harry Potter* has transformed beyond its initial manifestation as first a narrative world based on the work of J.K. Rowling, and then a film world, into a multi-platform transmedial world where fans can extend their participation in this now extensive world in the form of film, plays, books, board games, role-playing video games, fansites, online discussion boards, theme parks, clothing, merchandise, etc. Fans do not only passively experience this world since they can also contribute and participate in various ways that take the fan deeper into the world of *Potter* and also make the world of *Potter* come alive in the everyday world in a very real and tangible sense, as the films and books act as cultural content aggregator inspiring more related content and discussions. Beyond the official website of Pottermore, fans share their collective intelligence to explore the wizarding world further and write their own fan fiction, create fan art, organise fan conventions, write and stage their own *Potter* plays, attempt real Quidditch games, make animated short stories and skits, dress up in characters and participate in related cosplay, bake *Potter* cakes, compose musicals and songs based on the film and characters, write alternate endings and variations on the stories, and various other such activities beyond the scope of the official film franchise. Through this, fans ritualistically explore identities and values as they keep the world of *Harry Potter* alive and, by employing this kind of shared vocabulary, create a cultural home and sense of belonging that fosters social cohesion as they share ideas and negotiate conflict during interactions (while also synergistically expanding the brand). The official release of a play, more films, and other such franchise developments may “demonstrate a willingness on the part of *Potter* creatives to depart from dominant narratives and iconographies”, while the official Pottermore website within this particular corner of the media ritual landscape stands as a “reflection of the history of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and the changing industrial context in which it operates” (Brummitt, 2016:113).

With that said, the official site of Pottermore “disturbs traditional channels and relationships between media providers” as author J.K. Rowling’s retention of digital rights allows “authorial retention of control over the entire supply chain” (Brummitt, 2016:118). This also demonstrates Rowling’s “formidable influence as an author, brand, and her willingness to develop her brand further and retain control over the expansion” (Brummitt, 2016:118). As such, the site is “knitted tightly to Rowling as a means to retain authenticity and prestige” (Brummitt, 2016:113) and “through direct connection with Rowling herself, could present itself as a viable extension to the books and an alternative text to the movies” thereby establishing that “Rowling’s ‘thoughts’ were the virtual currency” (Brummitt, 2016:116) that so “enables Pottermore to draw on the cultural capital of the *Harry Potter* books and of Rowling herself” (Brummitt, 2016:128). In the more traditional ritual sense, this establishes Rowling as the totem of attention for the site, yet contradictorily with the site simultaneously declaring the centrality of the fan in helping to create the site by their contributions. The site may well have a “preoccupation with constructing an online community” but placing Rowling at the centre “consequently narrows opportunities for fan participation” (Brummitt, 2016:124). Even as the “franchise begins to recognize and recruit other creatives and commercial contributors for its expansions”, these “other creatives and commercial contributors” were still closely associated with Rowling to maintain its sense of authenticity and associated clout. The changing industry and media ritual demands of continued fiscal generation and cultural relevance led to the site’s eventual “overt restructuring as a media company” (Brummitt, 2016:122) and embracing “transmedia franchising strategy” (Brummitt, 2016:123).

The demands of the related new marketing strategies and Rowling’s central authoritative position may well have crippled the participation of fans further, yet the creative and adaptive nature of ritual to divergently frame action within the media and cultural landscape, as well as the diverse contribution options the internet provides, still allow fans many other avenues of participation, creativity, and expression, beyond the necessitated stymied nature of the official site and its controlling machinations, since the franchise is surrounded by diverse paracontent (Bhaskar, 2011: 25-36) and other sources of ‘drillable media’ and associated skills (Jenkins, 2009:105-106) that allow fans to further dig into related concepts on various platforms beyond the official site and its limitations. The paracontent and diverse related media content spread across digital content-based platforms enabled by web platforms that embed its social and interactive aspects, is therefore quite “useful for understanding how the website blurs the lines between an immersive, social platform and a marketing exercise that is subservient to its central texts: the Potter books” (Brummitt, 2016:117).

Fans are consequently not relegated and restricted only to official channels for their exploration of film worlds and the expression of their ideas. *Potter* fans thus do not necessarily have to engage with only the official Pottermore site and its embroilment with transphobic issues or problematic depictions of Native American culture (Brummitt, 2016:129), as they have multifarious options available for exploration of related platforms where the world of *Potter*, and associated problematic issues as these mentioned, can be collectively and creatively discussed and explored without censure or some or other supposed official stamp of approval from an imaginary authority figure. The “drillable” and surrounding texts on surrounding platforms that paratexts and paracontent offer allow exploration and creative interaction beyond the control of the official canon of a transmedial franchise and thus reflexive opportunities to consider new ideas within these spaces of anti-structure. Various liminal spaces in the media ritual landscape and on the internet allow fans reflexive opportunities and also to extensively participate in the extended world of their favourite film as they use their collective intelligence to unlock and debate texts and their meaning, as well as to expansively contribute ideas to the building of

this world, thereby becoming co-authors of such an extensive multi-platform world, and also their own experiences. While engaging with fellow fans and debating one another's diverse points of view, fans create spaces of anti-structure as they propose their own theories regarding this extensive world, such as whether Harry imagined everything as an abused child in search of escapism, or that the wizarding world remains hidden because the non-magic Muggles won a war against them during the Middle Ages, or even that Harry may be King Arthur. These theories are not endorsed officially but allow fans to imagine worlds of "what-ifs" furthermore and delve into related materials to prove or disprove a point. According to the examples just mentioned, fans may also investigate King Arthur legends and maybe proceed to the nature of mythology, research world history and the religious struggles of the Middle Ages or look up signs of child abuse to assist those in need (Williams, 2016: online). The possibilities provided for engagement and transformation by these film worlds and surrounding media are almost endless. We come to recognise that fans are pilgrims not only ritualistically journeying through the world of film, but also when they participate in the related surrounding media ritual landscape with its various symbolically referential and significant places where they constantly ritualistically navigate between multiple conflicting discourses and negotiate consensus and meaning while trading cultural capital with one another, brands, and brand creators.



Figures 236-242

The worlds and influence of film extend well beyond the cinema and initial viewing through a variety of avenues that enable viewers to contribute by way of an assortment of practices as they add multiple perspectives during their exploration of that world and in their collective attempts to make sense of the text and surrounding paratexts. The *Harry Potter* franchise has seen fans contribute to that world in a variety of ways beyond the official film franchise and canon as they create fan art (Figure 236), organise fan conventions and participate in cosplay (Figure 237), attempt real Quidditch games (Figure 238), make their own short films (Figure 239), bake Potter themed cakes (Figure 240), compose musicals and songs based on the film and characters (Figure 241), and even create alternative endings and their own variations on the story (Figure 242). Such contributions establish fans as more than pilgrims and co-authors of their experience as they navigate between multiple conflicting discourses and negotiate consensus while also trading cultural capital with one another, brands, and brand creators, thus influencing emerging culture in a variety of ways.

3. Citizenry, the generation of community, and the promotion of social cohesion

The many post-viewing experiences and post-viewing rituals flowing from the cinema enable possibilities of social cohesion. By way of such content, connected media platforms, and the social network of its audience, we find the continual circulation of symbols of meaning and cultural capital on a global scale. This has implications for community formation, identity formation, and even a global community formation and the possibilities of constructive and productive social cohesion and social transformation because of the position of film as ritual.

Media and audience studies have, however, often tended to focus on the concern that media may hamper "the interpretive autonomy and the responsible awareness of citizens in society" (Murru, et al., 2016:403). This particular point of view stemmed mostly from influences of theories of mass society and of the strategic fascist use of broadcasting (Scannell, 2007). With the arrival of the internet, the debate has shifted and progressed towards the greater potential for participation. However, it can now worryingly be indicated that much of civic agency and its public work across the partisan divide to address common challenges that seem to rely on media culture where civic cultures are now "codified and transmitted within and through frames that are both symbolic and material, and which involve both a technological platform and a textual representation" (Mascheroni, 2014:38). We thus come to recognise that one's cultural capital becomes critical in order to access, understand, participate, and influence the world. Consequently, apart from access, one needs some operation competencies, such as skill literacy as well as information literacy, to partake online where much of professional and audience media production takes place. Such challenges aside, post-viewing rituals allow not only for participation and world-building as mere fans but also for alternative forms of active citizenship and political action.

3.1 Digital media rituals and citizenship

The ritual participation of fans in the extended worlds of film and the consequent influence on emerging culture have led to an intersection between lifestyle politics and digital media culture that further fosters civic orientated participation. Scholars have come to settle on the digital revolution as a "normalised revolution" whereby it is understood that the deeply significant changes that such participation and mobilisation opportunities present do not threaten existing institutions and practices as they are still greatly dialectically influenced and moulded by them (Wright, 2012). The current digital environment with its numerous participatory opportunities does, however, still offer the revolutionary possibility for latency to become an agency in that the "mediated dormant citizenship may transform into mediated, engaged, or even interventionist, citizenship" and where by "virtue of being a member of the media audience, the individual is a politically inscribed citizen everywhere" (Schrøder, 2013:190). The intersection between lifestyle politics and digital media culture can thus foster various novel ways of civic orientated participation that modifies and repositions the duties and expectations of the dutiful citizen as more channels of information, and different avenues of action and expression, become available. Film fans can attest to their online political participation and its powerful effect as online protests against non-diverse casting choices, and lack of presentation (and thus the normalisation of dominant ideologies) have negatively affected box office receipts (*Ghost in the Shell* (2017)) and even led to recasting and reshaping characters by media corporation giants (Samual L. Jackson as Nick Fury in *The Avengers* series and various others). Civic education thus needs to adjust to such changes by "favouring interactive, networked

activities to be communicated with participatory media production" (Murru, et al., 2016:413), such as advocated by Bennet et al., (2009).

The diffusion of digital media has profoundly changed not only the media landscape but also the space of political action, as it allows audiences to become political citizens, and media users to become media creators, thereby affecting the influence of media. It allows for the development and distribution of counter-discourses and "counter-narratives" (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:67), allowing those voices seldom heard to make their way into the popular consciousness without being contingent on the support of the mainstream media (Simone, 2006:345-364). Such an opportunity allows the possibility for alternative opinions to influence and alter current social discourses and cultural codes (Atkinson, 2008; Harcup, 2011). Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi (2011:179-196) have, however, argued that such individuation of political acts may well be freeing to users but may also simply be self-centred participation that undermines political change and collective action. It is difficult not to recognise the role that the emotional or affective component plays in citizenship and how it is influenced by, and influences, the narrative as well as reflexive and representational possibilities that media offers lately (Murru, et al., 2016:411). Nico Carpentier (2011) proceeds to suggest that we distinguish between mere access and interaction, as opposed to *participation*, since participation suggests a more active role in decision-making processes. Carpentier finds support in Peter Dahlgren, who states "participation has a clear material and actionist dimension and cannot be reduced to how we think or feel about participation. To put it into simple grammatical terms, to participate is a verb" (Dahlgren, 2011:8 quoted in Jenkins et al., 2013:275). The worlds of film as well as the media ritual landscape provide the forums for much food for thought and room for such action.

In pictures: Intersecting lifestyle politics and digital media culture

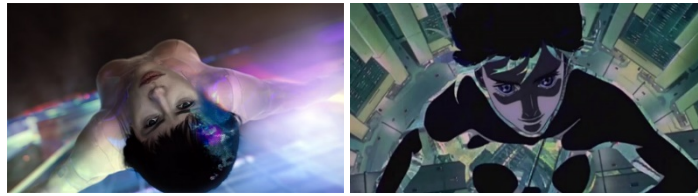


Figure 243: *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) Figure 244: *Ghost in the Shell* (1995)



Figures 245-246: Nick Fury, in comics



Figure 247: Nick Fury, in *The Avengers* (2012)

The extended worlds of film allow assorted opportunities for ritual participation by fans that create an interchange between lifestyle politics and digital media culture and facilitate civic orientated participation in society. This is demonstrated by the fans' online protests against non-diverse casting choices and lack of presentation as a stance against the normalisation of dominant ideologies that negatively affected box office receipts of films like *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) (Figure 243) as opposed to the positive reception of the original *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) (Figure 244) and lent further credence to the notion of reshaping characters such as Nick Fury (Figures 245-246) to the wishes of audiences by media corporation giants in other films such as *The Avengers* (2012) (Figure 247).

3.2 Popular culture and the civic imagination

The worlds of film offer a ritualistically reflexive opportunity by way of an alternative model of the world that seems to offer a better world, but its inability to actually deliver this world at the moment essentially leaves us unsatisfied. This dissatisfaction is, in fact, a good thing. Such dissatisfaction may inspire the audience to reconsider the nature of their own world, but more importantly, it can furthermore drive the audience to activism, according to Stephen Duncombe (2012). The value of ritualistic "anti-structures" is its ability to generate action; hence, the various "what ifs" generated by the alternative worlds of film allows the audience to not only imagine but also to criticise, and by both imagining and criticising, in turn, they can elude "the binary politics of impotent critique on the one hand and closed imagination on the other" (Duncombe, 2012:xlvi). Such use of the imagination allows us to disconnect from our habitual reality momentarily and to "think of certain objects in the world in a new way, as signifying something

else”, according to Jenkins et al. (2020:12-13). Seeing and imagining their own world in a new way may thus inspire members of the audience to share their insights and effect change beyond the viewing experience, and we witness that “imagination gains civic power when it is no longer personal or private but rather can be translated into a form that can be shared intersubjectively” (Jenkins, 2020:13)—manifesting the imagination as civic power requires “the desire to expand and diversify the contents of the imaginations as a means of resisting and ultimately overturning any systems of power that curtail or criminalise the rights of all people to imagine and work toward a world that allows them to thrive in happiness, security, and humanity” (Jenkins et al., 2020:21). We cannot change the world without imagining a better one (such as presented by the various model worlds of film), and this capacity to imagine alternative worlds to our current one is referred to as our “civic imagination” (Jenkins et al., 2020:5) that highlights the political potential of Geertz’s take on religion and ritual, as well as world-making through ritual. This civic imagination (further discussed in the *Black Panther* case study) is required to further fuel our sense of activism triggered by our frustration and dissatisfaction with the presentation of model worlds of film and “requires and is realized through the ability to imagine the process of change, to see oneself as a civic agent capable of making change, to feel solidarity with others whose perspectives and experiences are different than one’s own to join a larger collective with shared interests, and to bring imaginative dimensions to real-world spaces and places” (Jenkins et al., 2020:5).

The concept of the civic imagination assists with the ritual social theory of solidarity and integration as it “supports community connections toward shared goals” (Jenkins et al., 2020:7) and carries “the implication of engagement in public life – a cornerstone of democracy” (Jenkins et al., 2020:6). Audiences who engage in public life and with the public sphere of the imagination as communities formed around popular narratives such as the *Black Panther* film have to be mindful that civic engagements with “popular culture involve complex negotiations between oppositional world views with fraught relationships with commercial institutions” (Jenkins et al., 2020:7). Yet, it remains useful for changemakers as a “cultural vocabulary to broker relations across different political groups” (Jenkins et al., 2020:8). At this social level of active citizenry, the ritual social theories of negotiating conflict and social cohesion are functioning dynamically through the sequencing and remixing production rituals of film, genre rituals of social transformation, and the various reception rituals and extended participatory rituals within the media landscape. This allows surrounding conversations to move beyond an individual film or franchise, or a particular media company or culture, to become part of larger social conversations and subsequent emerging culture and, ideally part of civil imagination to actively participate in larger issues and changing the world. As Dahlgren reminds us, participation is a verb, and it requires us *to act*.

Such practices that initially evolve around popular culture and media but then develop toward more explicitly political purposes are referred to as “creative insurgency” (Jenkins et al., 2020:10), while artists creating work along such lines are doing “culture work” as they employ everyday forms to expose the broader public to alternative perspectives (Jenkins et al., 2020:3) and so provide culturally reflexive opportunities. Such creative insurgency is witnessed with the appropriated Guy Fawkes mask that activist V wears in *V for Vendetta* (2005), which after the film’s release was further quickly appropriated by other political activists fighting similar issues as in the film, and so drawing on the film’s cultural capital and symbolic association with activism and overthrowing repressive regimes. Today the mask is also associated with the actions of Occupy Wall Street in New York, demonstrators of the Arab Spring, and the Anonymous Collective. Similarly, the infamous line “I am Spartacus” from the anti-slavery themed film *Spartacus* (1960) have been employed to insinuate fellowship, comradery and sympathy between diverse

people suffering oppression since the oppression and infringement of the rights of one is the oppression and infringement of rights of all. The meeting of popular culture with civic engagements may thus well “involve complex negotiations between oppositional world views fraught with relationships with commercial institutions” (Jenkins et al., 2020:7), but it is this profoundly mythic arena of myth sorting “where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences who do not get the message but to ourselves for the first time” (Hall, 1993:113).

In pictures: The civic imagination as manifested in the actual spaces and places of the real world



Figure 248: *V for Vendetta* (2005)



Figure 249: Occupy Wall Street



Figure 250: Arab Spring



Figure 251: The Anonymous Collective

Our frustration and dissatisfaction with the discrepancies of model worlds of film can trigger the civic imagination that enables us to imagine a better world and see ourselves as agents for that change capable of solidarity with those with different perspectives and as part of a larger collective with shared interests, but also to manifest these imaginative components in the places and spaces of the real world. The creative insurgency and subsequent practices that develop around popular culture and media have been displayed by the appropriation of the mask from the activist film *V for Vendetta* (2005) (Figure 248) by diverse activist groups to different ends such as Occupy Wall Street (Figure 249), the Arab Spring (Figure 250), and The Anonymous Collective (Figure 251), all drawing on its cultural capital and reference, adding to the complexities of the popular culture arena wherein society can create, sort and remix its myths.

3.3 A shared vocabulary of meaningful experiences

The rituals of film within the world of popular culture and media rituals allow audiences a shared world to explore and offer a shared vocabulary by way of which to consider personal and social challenges as well as personal, cultural, and social identities. Critics point out that this shared vocabulary is *not* actually shared by everyone and its messages may be “trivialized and dismissed” by those who actually could affect required change, or the message may also be oversimplified to fit the form, or may simply be too complex to express at all in such a range, while this mechanism itself could also be considered “too gradual to address urgent problems” (Jenkins et al., 2020:15). Critics of such popular culture state that it does not speak for the whole of society and that everyone does not necessarily feel at ease in such worlds, in fact, some are repelled by its toxic elements. Moreover, not everyone has access to its means of production and distribution. Stuart Hall saw popular culture as a space that can foster social change and described its

creative and reflexive tides as “a battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost” (Hall, 1981:76).

Within such a contentious yet creative environment, Jenkins provides direction and clarity when he states, “popular culture might be better understood in terms of how everyday symbols are assigned meanings within particular contexts” (Jenkins et al., 2020:9) as provided by different ritual frames. He proceeds to describe “why popular culture matters for social movements: because it is ordinary, because it can be appropriated and transformed so freely, because it constitutes the realm where we might imagine alternatives, because it fosters shared desires that may fuel struggles for social justice, because it addresses feelings that might not be expressed in any other way, and because it may bridge cultural divides” (Jenkins et al., 2020:14-185). The book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe may not officially have started the American Civil War and brought about the end of slavery, but it certainly fostered many surrounding conversations regarding freedom and the social structure that changed the minds of many Americans at the time. Similarly, the worlds of film can be invoked within a given situation to bring the issues of that imaginary world in relation to issues of the real world and highlight it by cashing in on the associated cultural capital and social clout of a film. Such was the case when land occupation protesters paint themselves blue like the Na’vi from *Avatar* (2009) to bring their struggle for freedom in relation to the struggle for freedom in the film. Although, the fictional world and the real political situation both have ecological issues in common, reference to the film world of *Avatar* elicit a powerful response since people could relate to the issues in the film more easily than to the same issues in the politically charged real world (Mitchell, 2011). Similarly, we have seen the line “I am Spartacus” quoted to invoke the spirit of the film *Spartacus* (1960) and its themes and associations with anti-slavery and oppression. Popular culture, and particularly the varied worlds of film, provide a rich field of symbolism and markers of cultural significance that can be explored, shared, and remixed by way of the various available rituals that frame action in different ways thus allowing reflexive opportunities by way of which to consider the world and its social boundaries in order to be able to negotiate and move them as required by the people and their particular contexts.

The wider participation of film fans afforded by access to the many media platforms and their subsequent fan activism points to how effectively film’s ritual activities of world-making give us the inventories, the characters, and the aesthetics for sparking the civic imagination, to inspire participation, to protest, and for changing the world. The rituals of film allow a space of anti-structure, which, as we have seen before, is the engine room for social change and transformation, and as we have also found, this engine room of change is heavily populated with the various creative counter-discourses and counter-narratives of film. As the civic imagination makes clear, ritual in this context of film and the media landscape is not only about establishing orders and borders or affirming the status quo, but is also about providing the opportunity for these “counter-narratives” to be heard and to hopefully foster communication between disparate points of view as media and film pilgrims connect to different communities and knowledge cultures, and proceed to debate the value of different sites and their meaning as well as negotiate the tension generated by these differences and their subsequent hampering of social integration and cohesion.

From this perspective, we see how popular media experiences are not just entertaining but become meaningful in that they present viewers with opportunities to take stock of their lives as well as enter public conversations about individual and shared standards and values, as they cut out a piece of society

to inspect and critique (Hermes, 2005; Van Zoonen, 2005). Such a cultural perspective stems from recognising the "intimate role that media play in the daily lives of citizens" (Jones, 2006:370) and recognising the role that ritual plays in media consumption. Acknowledging the role of ritual allows us to appreciate the ways in which "acts of communication facilitate a sense of identification, community/sociability, security/control, expression, pleasure/entertainment, distraction, and even possession" but also, as we have seen "how popular media play a special role in the ritual aspect of being a citizen" (Murru, et al., 2016:410-412). It also brings us back to the central argument of cultural citizenship that people "do not just enter public discourses to solve immediate, grand social issues but to also search for the core values that define the political system" (Murru, et al., 2016: 411-412).

Case study: Black Panther and the activation of the civic imagination in audiences

The model "as if" worlds of film allow us a reflexive opportunity by way of which to consider particular aspects of society, but furthermore the possibility to activate our civic imagination in order to imagine alternative worlds to that of our own and all its problems and challenges, and thus ultimately also to actively engage and participate in this world and its emerging culture to create a better version thereof. The film *Black Panther* (2018) illustrates the functions of civic imagination very well. Let us first consider how the notion of a different and better world is posited and how the film imagines such a better world. By contrasting different worlds and worldviews, a film's audience can be awakened to similar issues in their own world, and *Black Panther* quickly establishes an impactful disparity between an impoverished and despondent Oakland in the opening scenes and the prosperous futurist Wakanda. By establishing these contrasting worlds, the audience is invited into a liminal world of "as ifs" where various functioning realities can be imagined and contrasted with one another, and then with the everyday world of the audience and its similar and dissimilar issues, characters and social functions (Jenkins, 2020:22). Next, the civic imagination is employed to really imagine the process of change required to manifest the actual desired changes instigated by the contrasting of divergent worlds and our accompanying dissatisfaction with it. Imagining such a process of change is presented in the film by the villain Killmonger and the hero T'Challa's similar goals but different violent means. These two competing visions in the film spark action in one another and debate in audience members as they ponder the validity and limitations of these different views and the processes of social change. Since viewers can relate the world of film to the world of their own, they can now also transpose the issues of Wakanda to the real world and so reflect on them in different ways and how they may go about responding to actual social needs (Jenkins et al., 2020: 22-23). To actualise the imagined process of change and bring about the envisioned better world, the audience members now have to start imagining themselves as more than just inert and docile audience members or citizens, but as civic agents capable of working collaboratively across partisan divides. In the film, T'Challa, the Black Panther, transforms from indolent young prince to ruling king along the passage of the hero's journey, and it is in the acceptance of his social responsibilities that he becomes a role model for activists to similarly actively manifest the process of change they seek in themselves and the world at large to bring about the different world they imagine and desire (Jenkins et al., 2020:23).



Figure 252



Figure 252



Figures 254-255



Figure 256

Black Panther ritually contrast different worlds and worldviews by establishing an impactful disparity between an impoverished Oakland where a discarded crate must function as a basketball hoop (Figures 252) and a prosperous futurist Wakanda (Figure 253), inviting the viewer into a liminal world of 'what-ifs'. The audience is further inspired to imagine change in the real world by the villain Killmonger and the hero T'Challa's violent clash brought about by their different means to reach similar goals (Figures 254-255), as it stirs debate on the validity and limitations of their different views and activities. As the audience transpose the issues of Wakanda to the real world and as T'Challa, the Black Panther, transforms from languid young prince to ruling king (Figure 256), viewers not only imagine a better real world but also start to imagine themselves as active civic agents capable of manifesting change and working collaboratively across partisan divides.

Once the civic imagination has been activated and transformed an audience member from latency to an agency of active change, their social position and connections within the larger community come to be reconsidered in order to assess how they fit into the larger world, as well as their options to connect and work together toward required change. The community of Wakanda present a plethora of different power conceptions that function together since their success also pivots on collective action rather than that of the individual only. The audience thus witnesses a complex society of diverse individuals that can clash but also still work together in a variety of ways and can now start imagining similar options in the real world (Jenkins et al., 2020:23-24). Next, in the unfolding of the civic imagination, we must consider how social solidarity can be forged between these diverse individuals with different experiences. In the film, the Black Panther first establishes a stronger community in Wakanda from its disparate members and only then join the Avengers and its more disparate group where each member

has to defend his/her own community, yet are prepared to join forces for a greater cause. In no uncertain terms, the film declares to its audience that we are not all the same and we do not have to be, yet we do have shared visions and goals, and we can negotiate how to work together toward them (Jenkins et al., 2020:24).



Figures 257-258

As the audience witness the complex society of Wakanda and its clashing diverse individuals working together toward a shared goal created by their similar interests (Figure 257), viewers come to consider their own social positions and community connections as well as how they fit together and can be employed toward a required change of the world. Once a stronger community is established in Wakanda, the Black Panther then joins the disparate group of the Avengers (Figure 258) who, despite their own individual goals, also join toward a greater cause and so audiences too come to consider how diverse individuals can forge social solidarity despite their difference.

Imagining a better world by way of another world model of “as ifs” and “what ifs” still leaves us with having to bring these imaginative dimensions to the places and spaces of our real world. Film-related theme parks, etc., may offer a taste of another better-imagined world, but if we want real change in the real world, it demands “a reconfiguration of social relations animated by the shared vision of a better life” (Jenkins et al., 2020:24). *Black Panther* provides a shared myth that speaks to feelings of separation and reconnection to Africa for black communities, while its world rich with “what ifs” inspire a dream of freedom beyond their immediate tribulations. As the film’s iconography fuse with people’s personal and social identities, it inspires various forms of fan participation and participatory culture that further distributes the themes, symbols and conversations of the film in society by way of “practices of world-building and transmedia storytelling to create a vision of their future that could be shared intersubjectively both within and beyond their community” (Jenkins et al., 2020:24-26). In this way, the rituals of the film world of *Black Panther* present an anti-structure to the usual structure of the world that do not simply set and confirm boundaries and conventions but offer alternatives that potentially inspire its audience to activate their civic imaginations and become politically active citizens to tangibly manifest desired social change. Such change is not a mere blind hope but can tangibly manifest for better or worse. In extremis, these blurred lines between identity, popular culture, and religion and meaning-making, have led to the weaponising of identity and identity politics (A 2018 study by Morten Bay, analyses the strategic and organised politicisation of popular culture and found Russian “bots” and “sockpuppets” were responsible for creating and propagating much of the fan dispute that surrounded the release of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) with the simple aim of increasing the media coverage of the dispute with the main objective of further promoting the narrative of supposed extensive conflict and dysfunction in American society (Bay, 2018)). At the positive end of the spectrum these relationships can be employed toward positive change and social cohesion, as was the case with *Black Panther* when activists traded in on the film’s cultural capital and organised voter registration drives around screenings of the film by the Electoral Justice Project, or when employed to inspire other difficult but needed political conversations such as when study guides are designed around the film in order “to foster discussions about refugees, immigrants, and borders” (Jenkins et al., 2020:22). It once again reminds us of Geertz’s definition of religion and its notion that ritual do not present things as they are, but as they should be, and that ritual can thus act as a powerfully influential framing device for our complex and diverse society’s actions by way of which to cut out sections for inspection, action, and transformation.



Figure 259



Figure 260



Figure 261



Figure 262: Film fan activism at <https://www.storybasedstrategy.org/fanactivistcon>

The 'as ifs' and 'what ifs' of *Black Panther's* model film world ritually offer an anti-structure to the usual structure of the world (Figures 259-260). It offers alternatives to the real world as well as provides a shared myth that addresses mutual anxieties of separation and connection beyond current particular and immediate challenges (Figure 261). Fusion of the film's iconography with personal and social identities potentially inspire varieties of fan participation within a participatory culture (Figure 262) and assists to ritually actualise these dimensions of the imagination to the spaces and places of the real world to tangibly create a better world of tolerance, creative difference, and solidarity.

3.4 Media consumption and meaning-making methods

The relationship between media and audiences seems to be a much more serious matter than mere entertainment, or even politics and citizenry, since it plays a prominent role in the creation of identity, social cohesion, determining norms and values, and even the creation of meaning and the subsequent definition of reality. This complexity makes clear that their relationship cannot be understood simply in terms of broadcasting and reception. Dahlgren (2006:274) makes the case that "publics should be conceptualized as something more than merely media audiences" and public spheres should be seen as "larger communication and cultural chains that include how the media output is received, made sense of, and utilized by citizens". We recognise that audiences are not merely receptors of messages, and what is of importance is how media consumption practices, as well as the associated meaning-making methods, are fed into the construction of identities, how it ties to available public spaces, as well as how it connects and feeds into trust and relationships between people.

Media ideally provides the suitable ritual environment – in this context considered as the unique frame for actions and orientations (Seligman et al., 2008:5) in the form of an "action space" (Kotilainen & Rantala 2009:662) where identities and practices can be developed such as the cinema and the worlds of film, as well as an "action forum" (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2009:663) for expression and debate as offered by the extended surrounding transmedial world of films and other media platforms. Within such an active forum and public environment, people can have their say and then expect some feedback from the audience, which can be considered as more than just communication, but as *civic action* as a debate is stirred while norms, values and identities are considered and adjusted (Kotilainen & Rantala, 2009:674). Communication media should ideally fulfil five functions within a democratic society communication. Those functions are: "a surveillance function, by informing citizens reliably about what is happening in the political sphere; an educational function, by illustrating the meaning and the significance of facts; a discursive function, by providing a platform where synergies between dissent and consensus can make their ways; a publicity function at the service of governmental and political institutions; finally, an advocacy function, by providing parties and movements with an outlet for the articulation of their public instances" (McNair cited in Murru, et al., 2016:403-404). With such media practices and rituals available that offer various discourses and counter-narratives as creative anti-structure to the often calcified structure of society, social cohesion becomes possible not because of manipulative or authoritarian systems of control but due to community creation, communication, and conflict resolution by way of ritual negotiation. Social cohesion becomes a reality on the basis of dispute and arguing (not in spite of) while struggling for consensus within these communities.

3.5 Mass communication and the full potential of electronic media technology

Media rituals collectively work to construct a sense of a social centre. This constructed social centre however remains a *myth* of a social centre as these rituals are tied up in power issues as well as economic and political pressures, and also because no single myth, ideology, group, or way of thinking can claim such a central and dominant position as natural within a diverse, complex, and modern society consisting of wildly divergent individuals and cultures. This does not void the fact that we share values or that media events can become media rituals that can, and do, foster social togetherness. The challenge in media is not "a psychological or semantic one of purifying the media" but is one of communication that "becomes a political problem of access and opportunity" (Peters in Couldry, 2003:137). The ideal media landscape would be non-hierarchical, where producers and audiences have a choice of if and when to engage within different contexts for differing purposes. In this scenario, there will be various relative centres within a decentralised network with no entrenched monopoly preventing the further formation of "centres". The current reality remains that different economic principles work against such a possibility as they continue to create categories and power structures while hoarding society's symbolic resources and power, although the internet and social media are starting to provide a glimpse of such alternative possibilities (Couldry, 2003:66, 138).

Various such possibilities of dispersed production and distribution that may lead to a more democratic and equal concept of the mediated public sphere have been debated since the arrival of the internet (Bolin, 2016). While Henry Jenkins and others are considering the idea of fan production (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Hills, 2003; Jenkins, 1992), concepts such as "radical media" (Downing, 2000), "alternative media" (Atton, 2001) and "citizens media" (Rodríguez, 2014) are explored by others to counter this centralisation of society's symbolic resources. Regardless of whether there will emerge a vision that can connect all

these visions as a challenge to the current centralised conception of media, it seems the internet and related aspects will remain pivotal to such a paradigm shift, according to Couldry (2003: 139-140). At the very least, we can say that the internet has provided a boundless and mostly unregulated space that has transformed fandom (Baym, 1999; Pullen, 2006) and, thus, the relationship between producer and consumer. If triumphant, it may serve as a more successful representative democracy and maybe one day present us with the opportunity to witness how "social integration of the highest order is...achieved via mass communication", thus also revealing "the full potential of electronic media technology" (Dayan & Katz, 1992:19).

CONCLUSION

The presence of ritual theory in diverse fields as Anthropology and Religious Studies to Sociology and Media Studies indicate the transformative but also the adaptive ability of ritual not only in terms of its particular “content” but also its own nature as it has been proven to be highly accommodative and malleable in such varied contexts to different ends. It also allows us to establish film as part of the long tradition of story, narrative and mythologising by way of which humanity and society attempt to make sense of itself and its world, and also reflexively of these very structures by way of which it sees and presents a sense of order of this world. The power of film is thus, at least in part, due to its ritualistic underpinning. The story worlds of film change the real world by creatively combining and opposing narratives within a suggestive ritual framework that initiates us into other worlds and a new, much larger reality that makes us reconsider our own world from new perspectives. Such transformative ritual power comes to include film as part of a much older tradition of life orientating storytelling that almost stretches back to the dawn of humanity.

Humanity defines and shapes its world through stories and narratives. As Jenkins (2006), Elsaesser (2015), Nünning (2014) and others would remind us, stories make sense of our shared experiences and play a central role in the construction of identity, while also sharing a strong connection with ritual as both employ the creation and use of differences to establish the concepts and structures we utilise to describe, classify, and arrange our world, our identities, and their interaction. Stories create symbolic worlds through which we journey and compare to our own reality using these opposing structures and the conjoining symbolic arrangements of the two worlds as a reflexive mirror for change and transformation. Once upon a time, we sat around the fire telling stories that would sublimely orientate us in terms of our sense of self, our culture, the world of nature, and our place in it. These archetypal story structures eventually crystallised into life orientating ritual rites of passage that shape personal and social identities as they mark the “passing from one age-related social role to another” (Grimes, 2000:91). We may no longer sit around the fire every night telling our stories or generally have those initiating rites of social passage, but we do have the stories of film and its flickering light to guide our way as we construct our personal and social narrative mythologies by way of which we define the way we perceive reality, and consequently construct the social structure.

In pictures: Film as ritual create reflexive models of world orders



Figures 263-265: Contagion (2011)



Figure 266: *Contagion* (2011)



Figures 267-268: *Contagion* (2011)

The worlds of film show us many worlds of possibilities beyond that of our own. The world in *Contagion* (2011) was created with the help of various scientific experts to show a world overtaken by a global pandemic (Figures 263-265) as well as the effects of chaos and misinformation (Figure 266) in a world of suspended services (Figure 267) and limited resources (Figure 268). When similar circumstances visited our world, many turned to view the film in an attempt to make sense of this new chaotic state of the world as the film served to highlight the value of scientific facts and communication, the importance of human social contact for emotional regulation and mental health, as well as the resilience and essential need for the social experience of film viewing even beyond the cinematic experience.

Film and the cinema exert a powerful influence on society through immersive technology and participatory culture that allows the audience to journey through its carefully created and symbolically rich worlds. By way of its content, connected media platforms, and the social networks of its audience, it continually circulates symbols of meaning and cultural capital on a global scale. Much like during the rites of passage of yore, these symbols are absorbed and exchanged in the social interaction ritual market and proceed to influence our understanding of ourselves, the world, our norms and values, the social structure, and their interactions, as we carry them with us in terms of structures of behaviour and knowledge, and from encounter to encounter. The digital revolution changed the previously hierarchical, exclusive relationship between media producers and the audience as mere consumers to a more egalitarian, participatory one as audiences are now also producers of content and give direction to the media and its market. This creates more of a dialogical relationship between producers and consumers as co-authors, as well as with their surrounding emerging culture and social structure, and in turn, its influence on the relationship between personal and social identities. Through audience participation, identification, and play in its symbolically rich worlds, the film and cinematic journey is an initiator of transformation within our modern complex society that can ease social tension as it lubricates social coherence while addressing personal and social identities and conflicts.

In pictures: Film as ritual



Figure 269: *The Neverending Story* (1984)

Considering film within ritual framework positions it as the latest incarnation of the ancient art of storytelling (Figure 269) and mythologising by way of which humanity ritually creates order in the world and influence how we define the way we perceive reality, and consequently how we construct the social structure and subsequent social identities. Since the cave paintings before recorded history, the creation of meaningful narratives and the ritual of story have persisted in the forms of myths, fairy tales, legends, folklore, and now film, to shape and transform the world.

My first visit to the cinema and engagement with *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) was not merely frivolous entertainment, as it portrayed psychosocial tension and struggles beyond the obvious narrative – it acted as a rite of passage from the protective bubble of my naïve childhood into a more complex social world. Within that cinematic liminal space demarcated from the mundane every day, I witnessed and came to know places, people, and experiences completely foreign to me and the world as I know it. I was confronted with a world where families broke apart and had compositions completely different from my own. I witnessed diverse groups not getting along but still working and functioning successfully together toward shared goals. I visited a place different from the world as I know it even filled with visitors from other planets. My visit to the cinema enlarged and transformed my worldview and enriched my imagination. The tension and difference between these experienced worlds sparked in me the recognition that not only the world, but also how we see the world, is constantly transforming and that we, the audience play a part in such transformations of our world.

Such is the case when film functions as ritual to provide reflexive models of the world that not only reflect our ideas of the world but also shape our ideas of the world, and thus allow us to change our ideas of the world, providing transformative reflexive opportunities and strategies in the complex real world. Cinema provides society with a backstage space⁴¹ to explore and practise identities, while the ritual nature of film allows extending this beyond the cinema as a physical site and enables spectators to expand their engagement with the worlds of film, as well as ritual's transformative power, in many ways within the media ritual landscape. A major difference but also advantage within this context is, whereas culturally dominant rituals and their narratives prioritise “the self-presentation of the prevailing order and the establishment, visualization and preservation of community – and consensus – creating value orientations”, film as ritual can “to a greater degree, be innovative and function as a revisionist counter-discourse or a culture-critical meta-discourse” (Nünning & Nünning, 2014:59). On our journey within ritual

⁴¹ See again the “backstage” concept in ‘Goffman on social ritual system of communication’ section in Chapter 1.

model film worlds, we are thus free (or freer) to explore various diverse ideas and issues related to our world but within a safe liminal ritual space without the usual social limitations and constraints.

Cinema and ritual may both be considered "pragmatic technology" (Kapferer, 2013:35) as they conjoin in their consideration of shared social problems. More profoundly, both seek by their own unique means to illuminate some of the more profound philosophical questions facing humanity. Ritual and cinema both establish the decentering of human perception and the human being. With this deconstruction of the dynamics of the real comes the potential to investigate, re-assess, and re-apply these structures of human reality constitution within the habitus and the actual space within which they constitute their reality. This allows for the possibility of learning what underlies these "creative, generative capacities" (Kapferer, 2013:24). Audiences' consideration and participation in this process of world-making, and the creation and exchange of symbols and meanings, result in unique opportunities for reflexivity and positive transformation on a personal and social level.

Within this scope, we recognise ritual as not simply the legitimiser of traditional power structures, but also as capable of re-defining that power and structure. Most profoundly, ritual has come to be understood as capable of transformation and as pivotal to the creation of meaning, which is "understood as a site where identities and social realities are constructed" (Murru, et al., 2016:408). This situates ritual as capable of influencing our understanding and naming of reality at its most fundamental levels. Ritual, like film, effects such transformational changes by using its capabilities as symbolic world-maker. Within the framework of film as ritual and as part of the much older tradition of ritual, meaning-making narratives, and world ordering mythologising, this study productively assimilates the key perspectives of film's reflexive and transformative world-making capabilities similar to that of religious world-making of different models of order. This is similarly explicated by Plate, but this study places greater emphasis on society's continuous mythmaking and reinvention of world orders. The study also incorporates the interconnected intricacies of the media ritual landscape as suggested by Couldry while concentrating more on pilgrimage and the search for meaning and orientation within such a symbolic landscape of significance, as well as the activation of the civic imagination geared toward social transformation by way of popular culture as explored by Jenkins while spotlighting the extension of the film world into hybrid media spaces and by this means participating in the larger social conversation to negotiate order. This reveals ritual as their underlying source of influence and connection that, in doing so, furthermore illuminates the powerfully transformative capability of film on society as well as divulging the ritual techniques and practices by way of which it does so beyond the purely cinematic scope. By applying the theory of ritual to film studies, this study has hopefully enhanced our understanding of the power and influence of film as well as adding to our understanding of film as something existent beyond the cinema.

By investigating and illustrating the world-making capabilities of film and how audiences' journey into these extended myth creating worlds within various liminal spaces removed from society that offer reflexive anti-structural opportunities for transformation within the media ritual landscape, this study has illustrated the widespread role of ritual in film. Recognising the extensive role of ritual in film allows us to identify how film transforms audiences and how it allows film to function as a transformative ritual *beyond* the confines of the physical site of cinema. This emphasises the power of film to transform our world outside and beyond a local viewing experience as it potentially activates the audience's civic imagination to bring this sense of transformation to the actual places and spaces of the real world outside the world of film.

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