

DE LOCIS SANCTIS: INTIMATIONS OF EMOTION
AND EXPERIENCE IN THE NARRATIVE,
LANDSCAPE, AND IMAGES OF SACRED SPACES
PRESENTED IN SEVEN FILMS

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THESIS: DE LOCIS SANCTIS: INTIMATIONS OF EMOTION
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ABSTRACT

In the academic world, there are opposing theories of how to define the word "sacred." The oldest idea is that the sacred exists inviolate, apart from human endeavor. This view is championed by historian Mircea Eliade, who coined the term "hierophany" for the sacred projecting itself into ordinary reality.

The other primary theory is that the sacred is a created cultural reality. One manifestation of this view is when places of desecration or disaster, such as battlefields, are set apart from ordinary use. The primary proponents of the cultural perspective include religious scholars David Chidester and Edward Linenthal. Religious scholar Jonathan Smith also holds this perspective.

This paper examines films which illuminate diverging views of the sacred and concludes that all sacred spaces are colored by human emotion and engagement. It is argued through this thesis that symbolic landscape can transcend its essences onto film, ultimately affecting the viewing audience.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF SACRED SPACE

Concepts of territory and possession have been intertwined throughout the course of human history. Countless battles have been based on territorial ownership. This thesis compares and contrasts two theories of sacred space in iconic territory to determine if symbolic landscapes transcend their essence onto film, thus affecting the viewing audience. For this purpose, I will analyze seven films: *A River Runs Through It* (1992), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *My Neighbor Totoro* (2005), *Mindwalk* (1990), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *Signs* (2002), and *Everything is Illuminated* (2005).

This study of sacred space begins by looking at the word "sacred," derived from the Latin word *sacrum*, which refers to the gods and their power, and to *sacer*, priest, and *sanctum*, set apart. Sacred is often thought of in terms of space, such as the area surrounding a temple. However, Stewart Guthrie considers the term "vague" (124), an "instrument of oppression" (124), and notes widespread confusion that "the notion of the sacred is obscure, question begging, or culture bound" (125). The word has been applied to traditional spaces like churches, and to non traditional areas such as cultural institutions. Through overuse the word may have lost meaning.

The oldest view of "sacred space" is that the "sacred" exists inviolate apart from human influence. This perspective holds that parts of the world naturally resonate uniquely, singularly, and that "some parts of space are qualitatively different than others" (Lane 20), even if they are unrecognized. This theory holds that if a person failed to

perceive the sacred, it would still exist. One goal of those who hold this view is to recognize the sacred, preserve it, and thus benefit from what already exists as a natural part of the universe. Native American religions generally fall into this category, as do older earth-based religions and Shintoism. In his book The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, Mercia Eliade states that the sacred is a part of the universe which may reveal itself to man. He coined the term "hierophany" (11) to refer to the sacred projecting itself into ordinary reality.

Lane argues that humanity does not create what is sacred, that it exists on its own, that nowhere can "the presence of the divine...be guaranteed" (248), and that no human institution guarantees an encounter with the sacred. Moreover, how one views space influences every aspect of life, including what society considers right and wrong. Since "sacred" is deemed to originate beyond human influence, a primary path to goodness may be to uncover the sacred and to align oneself with it. For example, being in the presence of, and interacting with the burning bush, as much as one is able, constitutes the height of virtue. Another example is the Native American vision quest in which a person leaves the tribe and enters the world of nature, hoping for a transformative experience outside human knowledge.

An alternate theory holds that the "sacred" is a created reality, formed by human culture, history, and intellectual processes. Beldan Lane writes that David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, two proponents of this view, feel "every human attribution of sacrality is always a social construction of reality," and that places are void of intrinsic meaning, "open to unlimited claims and counter-claims on their significance" (43). In this

perspective, the sacred is created and kept untainted by people. Rowland Sherrill asserts that “the designation of a spot in the landscape or culturescape as ‘sacred’ results from human decision making” (313). Naming a place “sacred” is important, and determines its reality.

One result of this view is that battlefields, places of disaster and desecration are often designated sacred. Sherrill writes that “the sacralization of the battlefields – and of parallel cases of powerful historic moment – arrives not from the illusive natural vistas so much as from human recognitions that significant human actions and events, replete with religious meanings, have occurred on them” (332). This can also happen where taboos have been violated. Hiroshima and Dachau are examples of places of desecration that are now deemed holy ground, memorialized and set apart from ordinary human culture.

Human actions create, enhance, support and propagate the “sacred.” Infrastructures and institutions become part of the sacred. Attacks upon human institutions become attacks on the sacred. Shopping malls, office buildings, town halls can become sacred. Even the home may be considered sacred.

Proponents of this cultural perspective include religious scholars David Chidester and Edward Linenthal, contrasting Eliade's views with those who locate “the sacred at the nexus of human practices and social projects” (Chidester 5). Religious scholar Jonathan Smith also opposes Eliade and feels “society constructs the category of the sacred and of the profane in order to segregate, organize, and validate social boundaries and hierarchies” (Cave 157). In this manner, the “sacred” is frequently a way to oppress the

poor, the uneducated, and the undesirable. Designating a site as sacred can elevate those who have means and social standing to perform required rituals.

Native American disputes over land illustrate perspectives that are pitted against each other. A Native American tribe that believes land is essentially sacred may go to court to defend ownership of a site. Another group may argue that although Native Americans believe a site sacred, they are not utilizing and maintaining it. These two theories can cause conflict.

Works of art have conveyed each theory. Artists use emotion and experience to communicate to the viewers a particular outlook. Understanding this potential conflict aids in the study of sacred space in connection with works of art, and modern media. Neal Oxenhandler writes that “emotion and a sense of presence” (17) can be communicated by film, and Edward Sankowski asserts that emotion can be transferred to the viewer by “direct embodiment” (60) rather than intellectual formation. This paper explores emotions created through narrative, visual symbols, and landscape which bestow an experience of space, linked to memory and tradition.

CHAPTER 2

HIEROPHANY: INVIOLATE SPACE

The first film to illuminate the older theory of sacred space is A River Runs Through It, directed by Robert Redford. It narrates the story of Norman and Paul Maclean, played respectively by Craig Sheffer and Brad Pitt, as two brothers coming of age in rural Montana. The film begins with cinematography of the mountains, and the Blackfoot River. The audience is taken through Norman and Paul's childhood as minister's sons. They attend church and learn to fly fish from their practical, Scottish father Rev. Maclean, played by Tom Skerritt. Home schooled every morning by their father, in the afternoons they are free to fish on the Blackfoot. Norman, who narrates the movie, explains that it is on the river that they are free to learn the "natural side of God's order."

As teenagers, the brothers sneak out with friends, steal a boat and run the rapids of the Blackfoot River. Their friends refuse such a dangerous act. The boys' triumph is short lived as they return home to angry parents. They must repay the cost of the boat. As a result of the conflict, the boys fight with each other.

Norman gets accepted into an out-of-state college. Paul attends a Montana college and after graduation works as a local newspaper reporter. Norman returns home and it is clear that the brothers have developed different lives. Paul is a popular journalist, gambler, drinker and womanizer. He dates an Indian woman named Mabel, played by Nicole Burdette, who possesses exuberance and spontaneity. Norman is a little

dull, but respectable. He meets a girl named Jessie Burns, played by Emily Lloyd, and falls in love.

Norman, Paul, and the Rev. Maclean reunite and go fly fishing. Norman has not maintained his skill, but Paul is now a master fly fisherman with his own style. Norman proclaims Paul an artist. On another fishing trip, the two accompany Jessie's brother Neal Burns, played by Stephen Shellen. On this particular trip Neal is badly sunburned after a night of drunkenness. Jessie is angry when her brother returns home.

However, Norman and Jessie decide to marry and relocate so Norman can accept a teaching job. Shortly after, Paul is killed in a fight connected with his gambling. The artistic son is dead and the dull son will marry and become a teacher. The final scene shows Norman as an old man fishing on the Blackfoot River. All those he loved are gone. The viewer feels sorry for the loss of youth, artistry, family and friends.

Philippe Rousselot's Academy Award winning cinematography enables the audience to become part of the characters' experience. The film opens with shots of the river. Images of nature dominate the film, which emphasizes the natural landscape of Montana and the importance of the land. The camera pans out to views of mountains, rivers, rocks, and trees and then back in to the human perceptive. The film lingers on the clouds, the river and the natural world, suggesting the importance of the trees and water. Viewers may feel the landscape is sacred because it is emphasized in the film.

The Blackfoot River is a character pictured in many ways: night and day shots, cloudy and sunny, close up and far away, misty and clear. The river is dangerous when the boys shoot the rapids, and calm when Norman is old and fishing alone. The river

symbolizes life, and possesses patterns, seasons, and variations. Eliade writes “waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are *fons et origo*, ‘spring and origin,’ the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence.” (130). No consciousness is suggested in this river and the Blackfoot never becomes aware individuals interact with it. Through cinematography, one is presented with nature devoid of consciousness or volition.

The filmmaker uses dialogue and metaphor to convey that the natural world is sacred. He may be trying to provoke a direct experience by translating the experience of nature into images. The filmmaker presents the viewer with a facsimile of original experience in the natural world.

The dialogue overtly suggests what is considered sacred. The characters discuss the Blackfoot River, as well as nature in general. The film opens with comments about the Blackfoot River. Norman, who narrates as an old man, says in the river “beneath the rocks are the words of God. Listen...and if Paul and I listened very carefully all our lives, we might hear those words.” The audience is directed to watch for something notable in the river, under the rocks. The viewer can then see the natural world as sacred, containing the “words of God.”

Fishing is represented as being comparable to a religion. The Rev. Maclean is a minister and a fly fisherman, melding the two occupations. Norman asserts “in my family, there was no clear division between religion and fly fishing.” Fishing was a ritual for the two boys and their father. The boys were schooled in it, what to wear, and the proper methodology. To the Reverend, catching a fish was a sign of God’s favor.

Fishing is a symbol of artistry. Paul begins to excel at fly fishing and Norman is amazed at his artistry and skill. Norman remarks, “For the first time Paul broke free from our father’s instruction into a rhythm all his own.” Paul had attained the “spirituality of abandonment, even of excess” (Lane 117) and had reached an artistic state that was apparent in fly fishing. Later, when the two brothers take Neal fly fishing, Norman remarks Neal “doesn’t like fly fishing, doesn’t like Montana, and sure as hell doesn’t like me.” Dismissal of fly fishing is tantamount to a dismissal of divine grace. Fishing is a Zen art at this point, a method of focusing the mind. Skill in fishing is equated with goodness, and improving skill is shown as a means to improve Neal’s personal qualities. The crux of this glorified perspective of fly fishing comes as Paul remarks “thank you oh merciful professor of poetry and trout.” It is recognized that both disciplines, the study of literature and fishing, are methods of attaining artistry and grace.

There are characteristics that help the audience understand the river as a representation of the divine. Veikko Anttonen, a professor of religion in Helsinki, asserts it is possible to list characteristics of the sacred and writes “the attributes by which sacredness as an emotion is conventionally determined are e.g. detachment from everyday reasoning, quietness, devotion, beauty, purity, unity, atemporality, infinity, non-corporality” (37).

The first quality in the Blackfoot is its power. In the Latin, “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” refers to a frightening and fascinating mystery. This is one way people refer to the sacred. The river is untamed and deadly as the boys run the rapids. The Blackfoot is frightening in its power to destroy. To successfully move from rapids

to calmer water is a notable accomplishment. Correspondingly, in many religions the destructive power of the deity is one aspect of the divine. Elohim, the Hebrew God of strength; Shiva, the Hindu Goddess of Annihilation; or even Mahakala, a frightful Buddha depicted with a crown of skulls, point to the fearsome aspect of the sacred.

Another quality in the river is its beauty. The cinematography and the words of the characters point to this. Norman claimed his father taught that “only by picking up God's rhythms were we able to regain power and beauty.” This beauty of the Blackfoot exemplifies the natural world, wild, primal, splendid, and unspoiled, and corresponds to the concept of beauty as one of the qualities of the divine, or the sacred.

A further quality of the river is its ability to produce food. Fly fishing represents the abstract concept of divine gifts. Fishing is the means to connect with the river and is a symbol of harmony. Norman says “My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him, all good things—trout as well as eternal salvation—come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy.” By working in harmony with the river, it is possible to get subsistence from it. Fly fishing is a difficult process involving certain clothing, rituals, skills, practices, and luck. Food is the reward of perseverance and being in the right place at the right time. It represents the accomplishment of art and final realizations that come with years of work. The audience can share this experience and can feel that they could attain a modicum of the sacred.

The next film, Dances with Wolves, is directed by Kevin Costner. It conveys the perspective of an older point of view regarding space, one traditionally held by Native Americans. The work narrates the story of a Civil War soldier who wants to see the

frontier. The film shows two different cultures in conflict, and is a sensitive portrayal of Native American culture. This account falls within the guidelines set forth by Lorne Dawson, a sociology professor. He suggests “in representing other living traditions we should seek to write texts that are more reflexive, dialogical or even polyvocal” (84) in order to gain a full understanding of the topic. The film begins as the main character, Lieutenant John Dunbar, played by Kevin Costner, makes a suicide gallop across a battlefield because his leg is gravely injured. Instead of dying, he becomes a hero and is given a post of his choice. He chooses the edge of the known world and travels to Fort Sedgwick to find his post abandoned. Determined to be successful, he cleans his camp, rations his food, and writes in his journal.

He is surprised by a Sioux visitor and decides to visit their village, wearing his uniform to honor the occasion. Images of the Sioux village are romantic and idealized with horses running, the moon over still water, and peaceful inhabitants. Then he finds a woman attempting to commit suicide. He returns her to her Sioux home, receives no thanks, and returns to the fort. The Sioux send a formal delegation and Dunbar meets with Kicking Bird, the tribe’s holy man, played by Graham Greene. They become friends. Dunbar gradually begins to appreciate the Indian life and perception of nature. He befriends a wolf he names Two Socks and is seen playing with the animal. He is given the name Dances with Wolves and attains a Native American identity.

The Lieutenant begins to learn the Sioux language. The woman he saved is named Stands with a Fist, played by Mary McDonnell. She is a white woman whose parents were killed by another tribe. She was raised by the Sioux but knows some

English. Dunbar and Stands with a Fist become romantically involved. He proves himself worthy of being a member of the tribe by returning the suicidal woman, spotting buffalo for the tribe, entertaining when called upon, and learning the ways of the tribe. He eventually gives up the vestiges of white culture, marries Stands with a Fist, and abandons Fort Sedgwick.

As the tribe leaves for their winter camp, Dunbar realizes he forgot his journal at the Fort. He fears it will point to him and cause trouble for the tribe. Dunbar goes to retrieve it to find the fort fully occupied. The soldiers shoot at him, mistaking him for a Sioux. He is beaten and tells them he was also a soldier and this was his post. After more abuse, he refuses to speak to them in anything but Sioux, saying they are not worth talking to. He is considered a traitor and is to be hanged for treason.

He is rescued by the Sioux en route to his execution. Dunbar returns with the Sioux but decides to leave so the tribe will not be in danger. The people are upset when he announces this, especially Kicking Bird, who has become a close friend. The last scene shows Dances with Wolves and Stands with a Fist on horseback, ascending a canyon.

This narrative shows the conflict between two cultures. It focuses on contested lands, a pivotal element in the topic of sacred space. This conflict can be viewed as the result of ideological differences over sacred space. Robert Michaelson writes that “beneath these conflicts is a fundamental clash of worlds epitomized in sharply different views of dirt, soil, land and of property rights” (49). In this conflict, the filmmaker sides implicitly with the Native American perspective.

Cinematographer Dean Semler received an award for his work as he defines sacred space by depictions of the landscape. A few notable shots convey the essence of wide open prairie. As the Lieutenant travels to his new post, there are views of the frontier, open, spacious, and inviting. As Dunbar arrives at Fort Sedgwick there is endless grass and sky, rolling hills, and wind in the grass. The implication is that there is specialness about this prairie.

In contrast, the film begins in a battlefield, with fire and dry grass. Lieutenant Dunbar chooses the open prairie over this. The representation of the horror of war contrasted with beautiful fields assists the viewer to feel the unwholesomeness of the charred landscapes. When the Lieutenant first arrives at Fort Sedgwick, he discovers the previous inhabitants have not taken care of the land. There is trash strewn all over, and a large dead animal in the marsh. The previous inhabitants treated the land as a dump. Images of the spoiled land are symbolic of a culture that does not consider the land to be special. Cleaning the camp represents uncovering the sacred that is already there.

The land is described as unique and notable. Dunbar remarks, “this country is everything I dreamed it would be – there can be no place like it on earth.” The dialogue also refers to the Native American conceptions of white inferiority and non-native values. The Native American perceives the white race as lacking respect, towards the land and each other. These parts of the narrative represent a different outlook on how a human being is to live in the natural world.

There are symbols that convey the Native American perspective. The wolf denotes an aspect of the universe outside of the human realm because it does not live in

the village. Its special nature is noted in the process used to tame it. The Lieutenant was going to shoot this wolf, but hesitated. The wolf is difficult to tame, but Dunbar is patient, slowly offering the wolf meat, and letting it come closer. He befriends it and eventually names it. It is one concrete representation of the wild prairie that he is able to communicate with, and have a relationship with. The wolf, in turn, shows devotion towards him, playing with the Lieutenant. It is when their interaction is observed that Dunbar receives his Indian name. This is a great honor for someone who comes from outside the Sioux culture.

Towards the end of the movie, as the Lieutenant is driven via caravan to his execution, the wolf follows, attempting to stay close to Dunbar. The soldiers shoot at the wolf and kill him for sport. It does not occur to these soldiers that there is relationship, history, and a bond of some kind, which are all elements of the “sacred.” Lane writes “one begins to suspect that the contemplation of any ordinary thing, made extraordinary by attention and love, can become an occasion for glimpsing the profound” (69). Because of this history, the wolf is no longer ordinary. The viewer feels pity for the dead wolf and for Dunbar’s loss.

The buffalo is another symbol used to convey the Native American view. These animals are part of the prairie, and of the natural world. They are a source of life in that they provide food, and material for clothing and ceremonial objects. The Lieutenant remarks that people in the white culture “take without asking.” That is not done in the Sioux way of life. Although the buffalo provide useful sustenance, and hides, there is always an attitude of respect and thankfulness. To hunt Buffalo or Totanka, the Sioux

wait for the Buffalo to appear. When the buffalo finally do come, the swath in the land is unmistakable. The entire tribe travels to find the buffalo herd and commence their hunt.

What the Sioux find is horrifying, even for a modern audience desensitized to violence. Hundreds of buffalo have been killed, stripped of their hides, and left to rot, with their offspring standing around their fallen parents, bellowing. The filmmaker lingers over this scene, resulting in an emotional experience for some. Dunbar's voice gives words to the scene, "who would do such a thing? The field was proof enough that it was a people without heart and without soul." The fallen buffalo show what is wrong with a purely utilitarian approach to the natural world, and no awareness of the sacred, a world torn up for profit, by people who do not appreciate the totality of what they have taken.

Both civilizations killed the buffalo, but with different motives and methods. The white hunters took only the valuable hides. The Native Americans hunted to survive and used all parts of the buffalo. After the hunt, there was ceremony. Ritual is an aspect of the sacred that Eliade says "religious man reactualizes the cosmogony" (81). In the film, the leading warriors have Dunbar take a bite from one of the fresh raw organs and there is feasting, storytelling, and dancing. Viewers witness the destruction of the natural world, and celebration when the land is valued.

The next film is by director Hayao Miyazaki, who has created several works of animation. In the United States, the more popular Spirited Away and Princess Mononoke brought recognition, yet the animated My Neighbor Totoro is relevant to this

examination. Totoro was originally produced in Japanese in 1988, but was produced in English in 2005.

My Neighbor Totoro narrates the story of a sacred Camphor tree, the nature spirit that personifies it, and a family that interacts with the tree. This tree is part of a Shinto shrine, and the tree itself has a decorative element designating it as sacred. Totoro conveys information regarding the traditional Shinto idea of sacred space. This idea of sacred space resonates with Eliade's idea of the divine projecting itself into human consciousness.

The story is set in rural Japan, and begins as Professor Tatsuo Kusakabe, played by Tim Daly, and his two daughters, Satsuki and Mei Kusakabe, played by Dakota and Elle Fanning, travel in a truck packed with household items. They arrive at their new house and begin to unload their belongings. Small black fuzzy spirits are encountered as the two young girls unpack. This is the first of several interactions with the magical and invisible aspect of reality. Eliade notes that when people experience the sacred, this communication "makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being to another" (63) as seen with the two sisters.

The audience is introduced to Nana, played by Pat Carroll, an elderly female who helps the Kusakabe family move in. Nana helps clean, and prepares a lunch basket. The professor and his daughters visit the girls' mother, Yasuko Kusakabe, played by Lea Salonga, in the hospital. The narrative reveals their mother will be coming home soon. The next day, the older Satsuki goes to school, the father sits in his study at home, and young Mei wanders off to pick flowers. Mei encounters a gigantic nature spirit called a

Totoro, played by Frank Welker. She ends up falling asleep on his belly. Satsuki returns from school, and she and the professor look for Mei.

After they find Mei, the three go to the large Camphor tree which dominates the countryside. There is a decorative rope around the tree and a Shinto shrine at its base. The family says its prayers and departs. Soon, the Totoro appears to both girls and gives them a bundle of seeds, which they plant. Weeks later, the girls participate with the Totoro in ritualized dancelike movements in the garden and fly to the treetops with the Totoro. The next morning the seedlings begin to grow.

The two receive a telegram and learn their mother is sick and will not be coming home as soon as they thought. Mei runs away and all of the villagers search for her. Satsuki prays to the Totoro to help her find Mei. Her wish is granted and the two sisters are magically taken to the hospital to see their mother, who is fine. The narrative ends with the two sisters sitting in a tree overlooking the hospital, laughing and happy.

The cinematography by Mark Henley suggests the loveliness of the landscape within the limitation of animation. The opening scenes show fields and farms, denoting a blissful Eden-like existence. Views of the land could accompany Thomas Gray's Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, a poem celebrating pastoral life. One scene involves Totoro and Mei sleeping by the camphor tree. The camera lifts away, and reveals butterflies everywhere. The viewer is then shown an extreme close-up of a snail slowly making its way up the stem of a flower. These images suggest a peaceful and magical aspect to nature.

There is a similar shot in the film Merlin, when the title character, played by Sam Neill, pauses to let a snail cross the road. The camera is focused on this one unimportant creature and its slow pace. These images suggest that the smallest part of the natural world has meaning and importance, even if it is not valued by human culture. Bron Taylor mentions that the poet Gary Snyder said he “had a very moving, profound perception a few times that everything was alive (the basic perception of animism) and that on one level there is no hierarchy of qualities in life –that the life of a stone or a weed is as completely beautiful and authentic, wise and valuable as the life of, say, an Einstein” (112). Anne Bancroft also notes this holistic perspective, that “the feeling for the earth as penetrated by divine forces, and the intermingling expressed in every leaf and stone, was still as vivid for the Celts as for earlier people. An intense sense of oneness was also present” (107). The images of the sleeping Mei convey this experience of oneness.

Dialogue points to the notable nature of the tree. Satsuki exclaims early in the film “Daddy, the camphor tree, what a beautiful tree!” He agrees, “what a beautiful tree it is, this tree’s been here, well, since before what anyone can remember.” The Professor explains further “you know a long time ago, man and trees were the best of friends. It’s actually because of this tree that I decided to buy our house in the first place and you can be sure Mommy will like it when she sees it.”

This dialogue suggests an animistic perspective in which the natural world has both intelligence and personality. In animism, nature has being as well as defined characteristics of individuality. It is this focus on “being” that Charles Winquist, a noted

scholar, writes was the most “criticized and even censored privileging and identification of terms” (170) found in the debate over what is sacred.

Further dialogue continues the theme of animism as Satsuki and Mei fly with Totoro. Totoro is invisible to people as they fly over, but the effects are not. As the Totoro flies with the two girls, he creates a wind over the grass and fields. Satsuki shouts “now we know what causes the wind!” as if some parts of the natural processes are made clear. A spiritual being is responsible for the wind, not a random chance of accidental physical forces.

The camphor tree and its Shinto shrine are symbols in this film. The object of worship in Shintoism is a spirit or Kami. Spirits are found in the sun, mountains, rivers, trees, rocks, and animals. In Totoro, the object of worship is a large camphor tree. A Shinto Shimenawa, a special braided rope, designates the tree as a sacred site with sacred properties. Veikko Anttonen recognizes that marking something off as sacred is practiced this way and writes “the motive of growth as a condition for marking something off as sacred is manifested especially in topography and natural processes” (51). These symbols denote the specialness of the tree by connecting idyllic happenings to a sense of sacredness.

The vegetables that Nana grows are a symbol, much like the fish in A River Runs Through It. These fruits of the garden point to an attunement with the sacred. The characters pick them, wash them in the stream, and eat them. These vegetables are the fruit of Nana’s hard work in the garden, and Nana says that if Satsuki’s mother ate her vegetables they would “fatten her up in no time.” This dialogue suggests these

vegetables possess healing properties of some kind. Accordingly, Mei hears her mother will not be coming home and wants to take one of Nana's ears of corn to her. The film ends with the ear of corn successfully delivered to Yasuko in the hospital. The corn and vegetables denote the concept of vitality on a practical level.

CHAPTER 3

THE HOME, CHURCH, AND CULTURE: CREATED SPACE

The next film is Mindwalk, directed by Bernt Amadeus Capra, based on the book The Turning Point, by his brother Fritjof Capra. This work spotlights a sacred space created through human effort and culture. Mindwalk tells the story of physicist Sonia Hoffman, played by Liv Ullman; politician Jack Edwards, played by Sam Waterston; and poet Thomas Harriman, played by John Heard. The three spend the day in conversation as they explore Mont Saint Michel, a medieval island in Normandy, France. The film has no drama, and is not a blockbuster. Intellectual in nature, the conversation touches on René Descartes, subatomic physics, and philosophical questions of what makes a thing alive.

The film has been dismissed by most critics as lacking in plot, who say its best feature is the scenery. Yet, the film illuminates the argument between those who view the universe as filled with divine rhythm, and those who simply see a mechanistic, lifeless quirk of chance, who believe the “cosmos has become opaque, inert, mute” (Eliade 178). This film focuses on the “fragile relationship between technology and humanistic values” (Linenthal 228), relating to the core discussion of sacred space in the scholarly world.

The narrative begins as Jack decides to take a vacation after his failed run for the American presidency. He calls his longtime friend Thomas and is invited to stay with him in France. Sonia lives on the Mont. Her daughter Kit Hoffman, played by Ione

Skye, discusses what they will do that day. Kit has come to stay with her mother for the summer and feels her mother is not fully participating in life. Kit is bored by her mother's life on the Mont, accusing her of "staying cooped up on a medieval island."

Dialogue, walking from place to place on the island, and the rhythm of the tides are the only action. Conversation begins as the three wait to enter the building for the tour. They talk as they explore the rooms together. Rather than dividing the film into separate actions, it can be divided into aspects of the conversation and its locations.

The medieval prison produces conversation regarding men vs. women and seeing the world in a less violent and forceful way. Sitting on a bench produces a dialogue on subatomic particles and the nature of nothingness in physics. In the clock room, a spirited discussion of mechanical time vs. non-mechanical time takes place. Sonia asserts, "time was season to season, dawn to dusk, Sabbath to saints day, and everything led to judgment day...time was sacred...they'd ring a bell in the morning, they'd ring a bell in the evening and those moments would change a little but basically the rhythm of their era was so different than ours that I don't think we can even imagine."

Sonia states "people got the idea that nature was just a giant clock. Not a living organism, but a machine." The difference between the quantitative and the qualitative are discussed, which help explain the different views of the sacred. This dialogue assists the viewer to understand why those two perceptions of the world can clash.

Mindwalk ends as the three stand at the edge of the Mont surrounded by the tide. The conversation rests without a firm conclusion except that a new paradigm is needed to understand the world. Sonia is invited to spend time with Jack as part of his staff. The

viewer sees shots of the island accompanied by music of minimalist composer Phillip Glass.

Mont St. Michel creates a notable space for this film. Lane writes "the heritage of Romanticism since the late eighteenth century has conditioned us to expect the holy place to be marked by excessive beauty and grandeur, or at least by idiosyncratic fascination" (26). This location is extraordinary by most standards. The history of Mont St. Michel is part of both high and low culture. It is featured in a panel in the Bayeux Tapestry by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, in the scene which Harold accompanies William and the Norman soldiers as they set off to fight Duke Conan of Brittany. It has also been featured in several other films, and has been the inspiration for music.

Before anything was constructed, the island was used as an army stronghold. Construction of the monastery began in the year 708. Legend has it that Aubert, the Bishop of Avranches, was visited by the archangel Michael, tasking him with building on the island. Anne Bancroft mentions the location in her list of sacred spaces dedicated to Michael, "Mont St. Michel, St. Michael's Mount, the church of Michael de Rube in Dartmoor, and the chapel of St. Michael at Le Puy en Velay" (171). The Mont has been used as a monastery, a citadel, and a prison.

Cinematographer Karl Kases films a variety of shots of this medieval construction. The film opens with a remote view of the edifice. The edge of the Mont has sheep grazing in areas which becomes flooded twice daily. Half of the day the Mont is an island as the tides rise and it is surrounded by water, and half the day it is connected

to outlying lands surrounded by grazing fields. The entire Mont is beautiful and the film worth viewing for the location alone.

Close-ups of different rooms, views of the outside of the Mont, all serve as a backdrop to the film. The gothic architecture is shown in its variety. The final shot displays the Mont at a distance. Mont St. Michel is an embodiment of the philosophical discussion taking place, and reflects many points of view.

The dialogue suggests Mont St. Michel is more than a nice location. Early in the film, Jack Edwards remarks “this place is like a fairy tale.” Thomas replies “I thought you might like to come here to discover that precious quality that the world so lacks.” The location is personified by Sonia who asks; “Can’t you feel the place watching you?” and states “the place took hold of me, I kept coming back.” She sums up this perspective by remarking that “every day I walk across the island trying to understand its other language” The island is characterized by her as otherworldly, capable of attention, and even grabbing others’ attention. It is portrayed as alive and personifies the organic way of viewing life’s processes that Sonia tries to summarize.

One relevant symbol is the great clock in the abbey which represents the Cartesian view of the universe. Sonia believes it denotes a mechanistic view of nature as opposed to a more rhythmic and organic view. To her it represents the philosophy of reductionism, and its founder, 17th century philosopher, René Descartes. In the Cartesian perspective, nature can be taken apart into separate parts and reassembled, just like a machine.

Although a large mechanical clock has now been displaced in favor of a small quartz watch crystal, Sonia feels the world still thinks mechanistically. She explains how systems are interconnected but people still see separate parts. She goes on to explain how national debts are incurred by third world countries that let their children starve, and cut down their rainforests in order to pay national debt. Forty thousand children in Brazil die each day and the country loses "one football field of rainforest every second." She claims this happens because there is a "crisis of perception" and people cannot see that things are interconnected. The clock symbolizes this crisis of perception.

The natural tides represent the organic way of viewing the world, and harkens back to an older rhythm of life before mechanistic time. Instead of a minute and hour hand, people's days were regulated by bells, the pattern of the sun, the tides, and at night, the moon and stars. The tides are one of the natural cycles of the world. The film ends with a recitation by Thomas Harriman, who quotes the symbolist poet Pablo Neruda, and speaks of the absurdities of attempting to quantify the world into a single system. It ends with more questions than answers.

The next film further examines the theory of sacred space as created by human beings. Field of Dreams is directed by Kevin Costner, and tells the story of a farmer who replaces a profitable corn crop with an unprofitable baseball field. This film has garnered criticism for its sentimentality and unbelievability. However, for the purposes of this study, it is a valuable film in the way it touches on the field of sacred space.

This film narrates the story of Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner, his wife Annie Kinsella, played by Amy Madigan, and daughter Karin Kinsella, played by Gaby

Hoffmann. Field of Dreams opens with images of family history, including Ray's father, John Kinsella, played by Dwier Brown, in a baseball uniform. Ray narrates and finishes the introduction with him and his family in Iowa. He is an ordinary man who has done nothing unusual in life. The opening scene shows Ray walking through the corn field and a voice says "if you build it, he will come." His day is otherwise typical and he sits down to a family dinner. Ray hears the voice again later that night.

After hearing the voice again, and seeing a vision of a baseball field, Ray decides to build the field. Once completed, long deceased Shoeless Joe Jackson, played by Ray Liotta, begins to practice on the field. Then, the voice returns and says "ease his pain." Ray determines it refers to the 1960's writer Terence Mann, played by James Earl Jones. Ray drives to Chicago to find him. He finds Terence's apartment, is rebuffed, and then convinces Mr. Mann to attend a baseball game with him. At the game both hear the voice say "go the distance" and see images of a young baseball player named Archibald "Moonlight" Graham, played by Frank Whaley.

They travel to Minnesota to find Mr. Graham but discover he is deceased. He had been the small town doctor in Chisholm and had been a benevolent influence, helping children in town. That night, Ray walks with the ghost of the older Mr. Graham, played by Burt Lancaster. After, Ray learns foreclosure on his home is imminent and decides to return. Terence decides to go home with him and on the drive; they pick up a young hitchhiker named Archibald Graham.

Ray arrives home in time to save his farm. Young Archibald plays a few games of baseball, then his medical services are needed and he reverts to the older Dr. Graham.

When Karin chokes and falls off the bleachers, the older Dr. Graham gives her the Heimlich maneuver. Once he steps off the field to help Karin, and becomes the older doctor, he cannot change back. At that point, Ray's brother-in-law Mark, played by Timothy Busfield, finally sees the baseball players. He had not seen the supernatural characters, and as a "nonreligious man refuses transcendence" (Eliade 202). The film ends with Terence Mann being invited to "go out" with the team, and he disappears in the cornfield.

The cinematography focuses on images of the human world. John Lindley, who was later nominated for awards in his work on Pleasantville, directs the cinematography. The film lacks notable nature shots such as found in A River Runs Through It and Dances with Wolves. Mundane locations include a dining room, a gym, a feed store, an apartment, a hotel room, and a baseball stadium. The focus is on the created world of civilization. The extraordinary is juxtaposed over ordinary things like a field of corn, a small town walk, a baseball game in Fenway Park, or picking up a hitchhiker.

Most of the film is standard, with medium range shots and far off shots to capture the general scenery. There are a few scenes that create the feel of the sacred in the midst of the ordinary. Bancroft notes this mixed perspective when she writes "the true arena is the everyday secular world, the world of light and shadow which is permeated with the numinous and spiritual and always was" (188). The technique used to show deceased baseball players who appear out of the corn and disappear into it at the end of their game is noteworthy. There are many available editing techniques to show a supernatural spirit such as animation, lighting around the subject, fast or slow motion, or even sudden

disappearance. This film shows characters appear and disappear in a naturalistic way suggesting that the supernatural is part of the natural world.

Dr. Graham and Ray's nighttime walk through Chisolm conveys a supernatural experience in an ordinary scene. Ray goes out alone for a brief walk around town. The air is cold and no one else is around. Details of the town suggest the time years ago when the doctor was alive. A distinguished elderly gentleman appears and Ray catches up to him and asks him if he is Moonlight Graham. He is, so they take a brief walk. There are no supernatural effects; simply dialogue and historical signs that suggest time has been transcended.

The final shot is one long scene in which the camera rises to show cars driving to field. This final camera angle overlooks the scene realistically from above. This natural depiction shows cars and their headlights driving through the dark to get to the baseball field. The thoughts of Karin Kinsella prove true, as she felt people will drive from all over to see the field. This scene combines vision with ordinary reality.

The suggestion is made that in the mundane world of civilization one can find dreams, magic, even heaven, and that "the distinctions between this world and the next had already begun to collapse" (Lane 168). One of this film's famous lines comes from one of the ballplayers as he appears out of the cornfield. He asks "is this heaven?" The answer is that no, he is in "Iowa," but the line between the supernatural and natural has nonetheless been blurred.

In other dialogue, Dr. Graham and Ray are walking in Chisolm. The older doctor says the one thing he would still like to do is to play baseball with major league players.

He does not regret becoming a physician and being able to serve people that way, but recounts how when he was young “I thought, well, there'll be other days. I didn't realize that that was the only day.” He asks Ray, “is there enough magic out there in the moonlight to make this dream come true?” The answer comes later in the film when the younger Graham is picked up as a hitchhiker by Ray and Terrence. He does get to play ball with some of the great ballplayers and does have this particular wish come true.

Baseball is the primary metaphor in Field of Dreams. The title field is built so that baseball games can be played. The ultimate goal is to bring dreams to concrete fruition. Baseball signifies a practical achievement of one's inner goals. Through this symbol, there is a dichotomy revealed between the practical and impractical, realistic and the imaginative, the material and the illusory, and most importantly, between acquiring money and fulfilling a vision. Baseball signifies that which is worthy of effort without monetary reward. Mr. Mann suggests this point in a monologue about baseball near the end of the film; “it reminds us of all that once was good and it could be again.”

The corn field is metaphor for bounty, and the fruition of hard work. Corn is similar to the vegetables in My Neighbor Totoro and fish in A River Runs Through It, and signifies sustenance. Corn represents abundance on the Thanksgiving table, and is widely supposed to be the final image of the ancient Greek Eleusinian mysteries, representing fertility. The corn fields are not simply an end in itself but produce valuable commodities to sustain individuals and the community. It is while walking in the cornfield that Ray Kinsella hears the voice for the first time. Yet unlike the previous films in this examination, fruits of labor are sacrificed in order to create a space for the

sacred. The infrastructure of the crop is partially removed to give room to more intellectual and religious pursuits. The result is a supernatural phenomenon in the midst of the ordinary world.

The next film Signs is by writer and director M. Night Shyamalan, who is almost universally criticized for being too explicit in his ideology. He works in the realm of the supernatural thriller, and this film falls within that genre. Signs suggests the value this culture places on a home, and the memories contained in them. David Cave agrees that there are times “when the domicile takes on an explicitly sacred significance” (168). Another example of the value of the home is when Lane looks at Shaker spirituality and comments “the Shakers saw their homes as the nearest thing to heaven on earth” (172).

The film opens with frighteningly intense music. In the first scene, the father, Rev. Graham Hess, played by Mel Gibson, hears his child scream and discovers crop circles in his corn field. The police arrive and he reports the incident. The viewer is introduced to his children, daughter Bo Hess, played by Abigail Breslin, and son Morgan Hess, played by Rory Culkin. Both have idiosyncrasies. Bo has a strange insistence on fresh water, so there are half filled cups all over the furniture. Morgan has asthma. Graham’s brother Merrill Hess, played by Joaquin Phoenix, also lives in the house with them. The police woman, Officer Paski, played by Cherry Jones, reports that animals have been acting strangely. She says they “are on edge, on alert.”

As the day ends, the wind blows menacingly, and the scary music begins again. Both Graham and Merrill sense an intruder. They try to scare the intruder away but see someone leap to the top of the barn and escape. They report the incident to the police.

As Officer Paski takes another report, she suggests the family has “been through a lot” and need to get their mind on “ordinary things.” The family drives to town to have pizza.

The children go to the bookstore and find a book on aliens. Merrill goes to the army recruiting office and talks with SFC Cunningham, played by Ted Sutton. The narrative reveals that Merrill was once a great batter in the minor leagues. Cunningham discusses his own theory about the happenings around town. He believes there are aliens and they are “probing,” a military move, “not to engage, but to evaluate.” As the family eats pizza, they spy the veterinarian, Ray Reddy, played by M. Night Shyamalan. Morgan asks “is that him?” Ray slinks away, and the family is shown looking troubled. There is no answer as to what is wrong.

The family arrives home and pick up non-human sounds on the baby monitor Morgan is playing with. Graham goes out to the cornfield, sensing something there. While investigating, he drops his flashlight, it goes out, but he hits it a few times and it starts working suddenly. The light shines on an obviously non-human skinny green leg going into the row of corn. Graham is frightened now, and returns to his house. He has his family turn on the television and there are aliens being reported worldwide.

Graham then dreams about the death of his wife Colleen Hess, played by Patricia Kalember. The sequence begins as Graham comes upon the car crash, but he wakes suddenly. He gets a phone call that sounds like it is from Ray Reddy and goes to his house. He finds Ray, who tells him there is an alien in the pantry and leaves. Graham does find the alien, determines it is hostile, and leaves it in the pantry. Back home he tells his family they must choose to stay and defend their home, or leave and hope for the

best. He points out some people say bodies of water might afford some sort of protection.

The majority vote to stay so Graham and Merrill begin boarding up the house. That night, the aliens break through the attic and the family flees to the basement. In the basement, the aliens attack Morgan, who has an asthma attack. His medicine is upstairs so Graham must talk Morgan through the attack until morning. The aliens appear to be gone so Graham and Merrill go upstairs to get the medicine. A hostile alien is still there and grabs Morgan. Merrill takes his baseball bat off the wall.

The last words of Colleen are recalled as she died six months before: “swing away.” Merrill swings his bat, knocks over the water glasses Bo had left all over, which disables the alien. Morgan is alive because the alien’s poison had not been able to penetrate his lungs, due to the asthma attack. At the end of the narrative, although there has been a great loss to humanity, the aliens are gone, the Hess family has successfully defended their home, and all the pieces that had not made sense suddenly do. Faith in the goodness and purpose of life has been restored.

The cinematography of Signs is by Tak Fujimoto who won awards for his work in Silence of the Lambs and Devil in a Blue Dress. One of the most noticeable aspects of the filming is that there are high shots that distance the viewer from the action. An extreme high shot of the crop circle gives the film reality. Although a supernatural thriller, the image of the crop circles is produced with a distant view of the scene from above. This also happens as the family is driving into town to eat pizza. The camera

pans out and up, and slowly follows the car from the height of a small plane. This not only distances the viewer, but gives overall credibility to the story.

There is the filming of the house, and its contents. The viewer sees the house from many angles. From outside, the house looks ordinary, but from the inside the camera pans onto pictures and photos on the wall, mementos, furniture, and the glasses of water. The items are special because the Hess family has memories, and lived here for years with Colleen.

The dialogue also points to the importance of this building in the life of this family. Cave affirms that “rituals of place-identity, then, often start with the home” (161). When the Hess family must decide whether to flee, Morgan wants to stay and defend their home. He says, “I don’t want to leave home. This is where we lived with mom.” His father counters “that has nothing to do with it.” This shows the conflict between the two perspectives on space. Morgan feels the house has special qualities as a result of its history, Graham says it does not matter.

Colleen’s last words are relevant. She says “see,” and then Graham says “her eyes glazed over a little,” and then she said “swing away.” This comment is eventually tied to an artifact in the house, Merrill’s old baseball bat; the very one he uses to vanquish the invading alien. The cryptic dying words of Colleen become intertwined with the object, displayed in the home. That bat is used to eliminate the threat to the structure that houses the remembrance of this woman.

The bat becomes a symbolic object. This object is not like the Holy Grail, used by divinity for a religious purpose, since baseball is a secular pastime. However, it was

displayed as a sacred object might be, in a place of honor in the home. It represented not only Merrill's success at batting, but his stalwart belief that he must try at all costs, saying "it felt wrong not to swing." It is transformed by use into an instrument to defend the household. The bat gets a second life, much as oak trees are used after they die by Northwest Coastal Natives to carve intricate totem poles.

Ultimately, the home is represented as the sacred space. It is defended from attack because of memories, the objects displayed in it, and because of the history of the family. Moving from this house would be to lose what remained of their mother, and her love and influence. In this film, the message is that it is preferable to defend one's home even if it is damaged, than to abandon it.

CHAPTER 4

WAR AND DISASTER: SPACE AS A RESULT OF TRAGEDY

Everything is Illuminated narrates the story of an entire Jewish village killed by the Nazis in World War II. Directed by Liev Schreiber, the story's premise is informed by Linenthal who writes that survivors "worried about the preservation of Holocaust memory after their passing, particularly given the threat they perceived from Holocaust deniers. Victimized by the Holocaust, survivors believed they faced a second victimization: the murder of their memories" (226). The work is based on a novel of the same name by Jonathan Safran Foer.

The film tells the story of a young American Jew, Jonathan Safran Foer, played by Elijah Wood, who travels to Russia to fill in a gap of knowledge regarding his family's history. The film is stark, and nothing is covered up; prejudice, heartbreak, and human loss are interwoven with notable images, and understated acting. The story is narrated by the young man Alex, played by Eugene Hutz, who with his grandfather, played by Boris Leskin, acts as tour guide in Russia.

Everything is Illuminated opens with images of family photos pinned to a map of Russia, symbolizing the origins of the family. Narration begins with an account of Jonathan, otherwise known as "the collector." Jonathan has photographs of each of his grandparents on his bedroom wall. He collects items related to each, and puts them in a baggie, and attaches it to the wall with a tack. Dentures from a deceased grandmother, pictures, and personal mementos are all displayed. Three of the photos have a lot of

memorabilia. Next to the fourth photograph of his grandfather Safran from Russia, played by Stephen Samudovsky, there is only a photograph and an amber necklace.

In Russia, Jonathan has come to search for the town of Trachimbrod, where his grandfather lived. The name of the town, the necklace, and a photograph are his only clues. He carries plastic bags with him to keep mementos of his journey. His enthusiasm is met with masked prejudice from the Russian grandfather and tour guide. This grandfather, Alex, Jonathan, and a dog set out in an old taxicab to find Trachimbrod. Jonathan and Alex talk on the way. They drive all day, throughout fields and countryside and then stop for the night. No one seems to have heard of Trachimbrod.

It is a dark film, with stark photography. One of the few humorous scenes takes place at the bare bones hotel. Jonathan asks the husky waitress for a vegetarian meal. He is ridiculed and finally settles for one plain potato. It falls on the floor and the grandfather picks it up and cuts it into four pieces. The dog and each person get a piece of the potato. The grandfather says “welcome to the Ukraine” and Jonathan saves his in a bag rather than eat it.

The grandfather begins to feel sympathy for Jonathan’s search and tells his grandson Alex “he seems like a good person, we should try to help him, we should try to find her, Augustina.” On their second day they begin the search again, asking passing people about Trachimbrod. Still no one has heard of it, and no one seems to care. After asking some field workers where it is, Alex and his grandfather fight and then ride in silence. At night, images of the full moon and dreamlike images from World War II are shown. The trio run out of gas and have to spend the night outside in hilly countryside.

The next morning the grandfather finds gas so they can continue. They drive through picturesque countryside. There are sunflowers out the side window and the grandfather decides to ask about Trachimbrod. Alex gets out of the car and walks up to the house. There is a woman hanging clothes named Lista, played by Laryssa Lauret. Alex shows her the pictures and asks her where Trachimbrod is. Lista is Augustina's sister, in Safran's picture. She says "you are here, I am it."

Augustina was the first bride of Jonathan's grandfather, Safran. They go in Lista's house and discover that she is the repository of information regarding Trachimbrod. Lista has collected a wall full of boxes from the people of Trachimbrod. She gives Jonathan a ring that had belonged to her sister and agrees to take the group to the river, where Trachimbrod was located.

Lista refuses to ride in a car, so she walks alongside the taxi. They find the location by the Brod River. There is a plaque there, a monument surrounded by stones. She tells how everyone in the town was shot by the Nazis in 1942. Jonathan's grandfather had gone to America just a week before, intending for his pregnant wife Augustina to follow him. Lista tells how the Nazis made everyone spit on the Torah on pain of death. Everyone did except for Augustina's father. He could not spit on the Torah, even though guns were pointed at his daughter's pregnant stomach. Alex's grandfather was also there, and escaped somehow. All the Trachimbrodians were shot. Jonathan put some soil from this location in a baggy to save.

That night Alex's grandfather commits suicide in his bathtub. He had known of these events from 1942, although the film never states his role. Jonathan takes off his

gold Star of David and gives it to Alex. Jonathan arrives back in the United States and does not say much, even as people smile and talk to him. The audience is informed of the events that took place and history of Jonathan's ancestors. Jonathan places some of the soil from Trachimbrod on his grandfather Safran's grave and Alex buries his grandfather by the river, near the sign that marks Trachimbrod.

Matthew Libatique is the cinematographer, and provides footage which presents a complex conception of space. One notable scene is upon the arrival at Augustine's sister Lista's house, where there is a large field of sunflowers. It is the only time the bright vividness of a flower field is filmed. It is significant that this scene is at Lista's, the keeper of the memory of Trachimbrod. The town no longer exists but for her memories, her boxes, and the bountiful sunflowers. They seem intertwined, as if the filmmaker is suggesting a connection between memories and bright flowers.

As Jonathan is disembarking from the airplane, the camera follows him at the airport, interacting with people. Jonathan's eyes are expressive, but he does not say much. He is followed by the camera in close up shots as people smile at him and speak to him. The emotion and understanding resulting from his experience inform his journey home. There is no overt narrative and the film captures life flowing on as normal. Jonathan is illuminated as to his past as he walks through the modern airport terminal. The viewer has followed the narrative and can share in the emotional experience.

The dialogue points to ideas concerning the concept of the sacred. The narrative opens with a statement "past is past" and should remain buried. This leads to a question, what is the significance of the past? If the past is sacred, should it still remain buried,

below the surface? As the three look for Trachimbrod, they stop and ask directions from a little boy. The boy asks “what is Trachimbrod?” The grandfather says, “nothing, it’s just a place we are trying to find.” The boy answers, “if there is nothing there, why are you trying to find it?” Thus the standard focus on what is considered important and useful. The three are trying to find something that is just a memory, which does not physically exist.

The countryside is picturesque as the three approach Lista’s house. The grandfather remarks, “before, this was the most beautiful place in the world.” The implication it is not, in spite of the nice woodlands and meadows out the window. It is touched by the memory of what happened. Lane asserts “the power of memory may be even more important than the continuing physical reality of the site itself” (218). When they find Lista she remarks, “the ground by the river is still filled with precious things: rings, money, pictures, Jewish things.” It is the buried things and the memories associated with them which are valuable and give meaning to the landscape.

Several items are of symbolic value and convey information to the viewer regarding the concepts of the sacred. The first object is the amber necklace. Besides a photograph, the only piece of history Jonathan possesses about his grandfather is a necklace made of amber with a cricket inside. In the photo he has of his grandfather, Safran’s wife Augustina is wearing the necklace. When Jonathan arrives at Lista’s, he returns it to her saying it belonged to her sister. The necklace has meaning because of who owned it, and because of its history.

Another object of symbolic value is the Star of David necklace that Jonathan received from his grandmother on her deathbed. He wears it in on his journey, seemingly unaware that for many of his people, this mark was a mark of enslavement and even death. Jonathan gives it to Alex after his grandfather's suicide. A symbol for the Jewish people, it was also a symbol of his own personal journey, beginning with those who came before him and intertwining his life with other survivors.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This paper compares and contrasts two theories of sacred space in the field of iconic territory and examines films from both perspectives. The first and older view of sacred space purports that the “sacred” exists inviolate apart from human influence. By examining three films the reader is able to see how this concept is defined and interpreted in the modern world.

The first film, A River Runs Through It, conveys the perspective of sacred space as untouched landscape, mountains and rivers. It tells the story of two brothers and how they take different paths. One stays home with the wilderness and learns to be as much a part of it as he can. The other goes to a city, and loses touch with the feel of nature. The film suggests if one comes close to following those natural patterns, symbolically represented by fly fishing, one comes closer to the sacred and becomes “an artist.”

In Dances with Wolves, the natural world is also considered sacred, and the story originates from that perspective. In this film, the clash of perspectives has dire results. The Native American understanding of space and ownership is diametrically opposed to the non-Native viewpoint. The film looks at what happens when a person or people see land as lacking specialness unless they find something useful to their purposes in it. Generally, Native Americans feel the land is special apart from their uses and needs. The viewer is made to feel the wrongness of a more utilitarian oriented view during the scene in which buffalo are slaughtered only for the hides, and now litter the landscape.

The last of this set of films is My Neighbor Totoro. It is influenced by Shintoism and tells the story of a Sacred Tree and the Kami or Totoro that is part of it. This film conveys the older naturalistic point of view and is animistic in perspective. Spirits and supernatural forces often interact with the natural forces we can see and measure. The wind, new growth of plants, and coincidental circumstance are influenced by a conscious non-physical aspects of nature. There are moments of the film when a viewer might be transported back to an idyllic part of childhood, experiencing a harmony with the natural world.

The second and more contemporary view of sacred space focuses on manmade sacred space like churches, institutions, or homes. Examining three films helps explain how this concept is defined and interpreted in the modern world. The first film in this category is Mindwalk. This work looks at a set of buildings in France that was purportedly built in the middle ages after an angelic vision. To many, the setting is the most interesting character of the work. There is no action, but the character of Mont St. Michel imbues the entire film with presence. The viewer should be affected by the unique and singular character of this location.

The next location in this category is a baseball field in Field of Dreams. Set in the 20th century, the film tells the story of a farmer who decides to build a baseball field over valuable cornfield property. The narrative follows him and his family as they discover what happens when he follows this voice. They experience some unexplainable phenomena but it also leads them to the brink of bankruptcy. In the end, the viewer is

encouraged to feel that there are some things more valuable than purely utilitarian concerns.

Another film that looks at created space is Signs which examines the emotional and historical value of home. The choice in the film is whether there is enough value left in memories to fight for them. The film concludes it was worth it and those objects and the home itself retain a special quality, loosely defined as memory, attachment, and a way to connect with those who are gone. It suggests that mundane objects such as a baseball bat can take on symbolic and even iconic importance.

Lastly, are those locations created out of death, destruction, and war. In Everything is Illuminated, the sacred space is where the village of Trachimbrod existed before it and its inhabitants were destroyed by the Nazis of World War II. The movie is understated, and builds towards the end knowledge of this town, its inhabitants, how they died, and how they are related to the protagonist. The emotion is subtle, quiet, but overwhelming.

Each film contains scenes that are moving and lean toward a particular view. The works have aspects which capture the emotions of the viewers and express the viewpoint of the filmmaker. In A River Runs Through It, Paul's death midway through the film shocks the viewer. His character was more daring, intelligent, and artistic than his brother, qualities prized by the American audience. His loss is a real disappointment, and real emotions will be felt. In Dances with Wolves, the scene of buffalo killed for their hides is lingered upon, and can make people feel the wrongness of a purely utilitarian viewpoint. In My Neighbor Totoro, the idyllic scene where Mei falls asleep on the

Totoro, and the camera pans out and shows butterflies, touches on any moment of transcendence a person may have experienced with nature.

The second set of films can also generate emotion. Mindwalk, although an intellectual film, can arouse feelings in the dungeon scene during the discussion of male domination. Field of Dreams has emotional characters and situations, a verbal fight at the PTA, and a physical fight between John and Terry when they first meet. Moving moments occur when John plays catch with his father near the end, and the moment of revelation when John's brother-in-law sees the truth of the baseball players in front of him. The audience can feel the importance of recognizing dreams over more practical concerns.

In Signs, the death of Colleen is hinted at throughout the movie, but the viewer does not see this entire scene until near the end. Her death conveys emotions, and suggests the importance of the house, and the articles in it. Finally, in Everything is Illuminated, the movie ends with knowledge of the tragic history of Trachimbrod and how it relates to the protagonist. That full knowledge informs an otherwise uneventful trip through an airport after a flight. It is the inward knowledge and experience that makes the scene so poignant, and the viewer can experience it along with Jonathan.

In all of these films, the symbolic landscape can transcend its essences onto film, affecting the viewing audience. Landscape is communicated to viewers and likely experienced by them. The experiences of standing by a river in Montana, touching prairie grass, or praying at a Shinto shrine have been effectively expressed enough to make an impact on conscious emotion, thought, and perspective. The use of

cinematography, dialogue, and symbol enhance what the filmmaker is able to communicate.

Although there are distinct views of sacred space in these works, both views are not entirely separate. The older theory explains the natural world as filled with being, but that includes a human response. Creating and placing a Shimenawa, a special braided rope around a tree, or performing a specific ritual to celebrate the buffalo are examples of human response to a sacred occurrence.

On the opposite spectrum, spaces created by human culture often have origins in a heirophany. A baseball field created by a farmer was instigated by an otherworldly voice. Mont St. Michel is a building based in history and culture but legend has it, begun at the behest of an angel. There is no absolute division between human and otherworldly endeavors. Each particular experience is unique and a mix of opposites.

Perspectives in these films encourage sensitivity, attunement with natural processes, and listening to what is important. Both views of the sacred emphasize a reconsideration of what is important. Although there may be heirophany, as well as culture, focus is on familial relations, friends, gardening, hobbies, faith, and individual values.

A more centrist view sees sacred space as a fluid partnership between the sacred and human, not a dichotomy. In this perspective, the divine is in partnership with humanity. The angel who commands humans to start building Mont St. Michel, the voice that tells the farmer to build a baseball diamond, and the child Morgan, who feel such a bond with his mother he refuses to leave the house they shared illustrate this point. Even

in cases of destruction, the endeavor to remember victims creates a sacred space because to let that memory die is to let the attackers win. In all of this, the divine spirit and the human spirit can work in unison.

The difference between the two extreme views can be seen in amount of emphasis, rather than firm division of quality. It is not only a braided rope around a tree and a small shrine, or a large edifice taking up an entire island. In each case, it is a union between something outside the human realm and human effort. There are two extremes in the study of sacred space, but most examples fall more towards the middle. Adding culture and history to a location, does not necessarily detract from the original inspiration.

Finally, this study concludes by looking beyond sacred space. The suggestion by all these filmmakers is to prize the best of human society and the loftiest of human ideals. If people learn to see value in opposing perspectives, it is harder to wipe out towns, civilizations, and ideas. In the film Silence of the Lambs, after the senator's daughter Catherine, played by Brooke Smith, is kidnapped, her mother goes on television and pleads for her daughter's safe return. She repeats her name, Catherine. Clarice's roommate, played by Kasi Lemmons, remarks "Boy, that's smart. Jesus, that's really smart." A male agent agrees, "she keeps repeating the name." Clarice, played by Jodi Foster, also agrees and concludes "if he sees Catherine as a person and not just an object, it's harder to tear her up."

A similar thought is voiced by Natalie Goldberg in her book Writing Down the Bones. She advises writers that:

Our lives are at once ordinary and mythical. We live and die, age beautifully or full of wrinkles. We wake in the morning, buy yellow cheese, and hope we have enough money to pay for it. At the same instant we have these magnificent hearts that pump through all sorrow and all winters we are alive on the earth. We are important and our lives are important, magnificent really, and their details are worthy to be recorded. This is how writers must think, this is how we must sit down with pen in hand. We were here; we are human beings; this how we lived. Let it be known, the earth passed before us. Our details are important. Otherwise, if they are not, we can drop a bomb and it doesn't matter. (47)

The hope is that all people will see the details of the world, and the importance of all people and villages, so individuals are more likely to be valued and preserved. In the end, although these films do convey the field of sacred space and its conflict, each film also encourages the artists, writers, and musicians of the world to focus on ideas that matter and the enduring precious elements of human life.

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