

THE ALTAR AND THE SCREEN:
FILMMAKING AND WORLDMAKING¹

S. Brent Plate
Hamilton College

All invention and creation consist primarily of a new relationship between known parts.²
-Maya Deren

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

“In a world, where passion is forbidden...”

“In a world, where you must fight to be free...”

“In a world, where your best friend is a dog...”

Films create worlds. They do not passively mimic or directly display what is “out there,” but actively reshape elements of the lived world and twist them in new ways that are projected on screen and given over to an audience. The attraction and promise of cinema is the way films offer glimpses into other worlds, even if only for ninety minutes at a time. We watch, hoping to escape the world we live in, to find utopian projections for improving our world, or to heed prophetic warnings for what our world might look like if

¹ This essay has been excerpted from the introduction to S. Brent Plate, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, July 2008).

² Maya Deren, “Cinematography: The Creative Uses of Reality,” in *The Avant-Garde Film*, P. Adams Sitney, ed. (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1987), 69.

we don't change our ways and get it right. In the theater we live in one world while viewing another, catching a glimpse of "what if?"

Yet, in the practice of film viewing, these two worlds begin to collide, leaking ideas and images across the semi-permeable boundaries between the world-on-screen and the world-on-the-streets. Such world-colliding activity is entertainingly exemplified in Woody Allen's 1985 film *Purple Rose of Cairo*. Here, the fluidity between the worlds is enacted when the actor named Tom Baxter (played by Jeff Daniels) steps down off the screen and enters the "real world" in which Cecilia (Mia Farrow) sits, seeking relief from her otherwise troubled life. In Allen's film, two worlds cross and both characters are altered because of their shared desires that transcend the boundaries of the screen. Nonetheless, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* does not let go of the fact that there *is* a screen in place between Tom and Cecilia. The screen is a border that is crossable, yet there are distinctions between the two sides, for example when Tom enters Cecilia's world and takes her out for a night on the town and tries to pay for dinner with the fake prop money he has in his pocket. They eventually come to realize they live in two worlds and a permanent connection is impossible. Of course, all this takes place *on* screen, and not in the real world *per se*.

Woody Allen's film, while delightfully self-referential about the experience of cinema, also tells us much about the experience of religion. As I argue throughout my forthcoming book, *Religion and Film: Cinema and the Re-Creation of the World*, religions function like films, and vice versa. Among the myths, rituals, symbols, doctrines, sacred times and places, and ethical components of religions, the faithful are presented with alternate worlds, prescriptions for a better life, and imaginative tools for

re-viewing the world as it is. Religions provide promises, warnings, and compelling narratives for behaving in particular (and often peculiar) ways. In each, there is an initial world lived in, and then a secondary, projected, idealized world. In the midst of this, communities of religious adherents work out their lives betwixt and between the two worlds. Powerful stories in the form of myths keep religious imaginations inspired, while aesthetic performances in the form of rituals keep human bodies moving to a rhythm. Even so, when the story is over, when the chanter has finished, when the feast has been eaten, we return to our everyday world. The two worlds seem to remain in a state of separation, yet there are many avenues for connection between them.

Religions and films each create alternate worlds utilizing the raw, abstract material of space and time, bending them each in new ways and forcing them to fit particular standards and desires. Film does this through camera angles and movements, framing devices, lighting, costuming, acting, editing, and other aspects of production. Religions achieve this through setting apart particular objects and periods of time and deeming them “sacred,” through attention to specially charged objects (symbols), through the telling of stories (myths), and by gathering people together to focus on some particular event (ritual). The result of both religion and film is a re-created world: a world of recreation, a world of fantasy, a world of ideology, a world we may long to live in or a world we wish to avoid at all costs. The world presented at the altar and on the screen connects a projected world to the world of the everyday. Religion and film are akin. This is not to say they are equated; rather to say there are analogies that can be drawn between them.

My approach then is about the connection of the world “out there,” and the re-created world on screen and at the altar, and how these worlds mutually impact one another. The impact, furthermore, is often so great that participants do not see differences in the worlds but rather view them as a seamless whole. Religious worlds are so encompassing that devotees cannot understand their personal worlds any other way; filmic worlds are so influential that personal relationships can only be seen through what has been seen on screen. My hypothesis is that by paying attention to the ways films are constructed, we can shed light on the ways religions are constructed, and vice versa. Film production borrows millennia-old aesthetic tactics from religions—at the dawn of the twentieth century filmmakers were more self-conscious about this than they are at the start of the twenty-first century—but contemporary religious practices are likewise modified by the pervasive influence film has had on modern society.

To create this relationship, I play the role of editor, or perhaps of *bricoleur*, juxtaposing film theory and religious theory in order to highlight the ways both religion and film are engaged in the practice of *worldmaking*. As intimated by avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren in the epigraph above, invention and creation do not operate by bringing something into being “out of nothing” (a troubling myth of creativity perpetuated by Christian theology and a romantic view of the modern artist alike), but of taking what is already known and creating a new relationship. There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new relationships between old substances. Along these lines, I adopt the language of the great Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who once wrote of the social value of “intellectual montage,” in which new and revolutionary ideas might spring from the juxtaposition of previously separate images. And to be interdisciplinary

about it, I juxtapose Eisenstein with the words of religionist Wendy Doniger who suggests of the comparative study of religion: “The comparatist, like the surrealist, selects pieces of *objets trouvés*; the comparatist is not a painter but a collagist, indeed a bricolagist (or a *bricoleur*), just like the mythmakers themselves.”³ Worlds, religious and filmic, are made up of borrowed fragments and pasted together in ever-new ways; myths are updated and transmediated, rituals reinvented, symbols morphed. By lighting up religious studies and film studies side by side, I hope to re-create the understanding of the relation between religion and film.

In the remainder of this essay I briefly examine the concept of worldmaking and re-creation more fully from a religious studies standpoint. Then I introduce the ways films participate in worldmaking activities through filmmaking techniques. Along the way, I suggest that both activities can be seen in light of the other.

I. Religious Worldmaking and Re-creation

In the background of my argument are the world-building and world-maintaining processes of religion brought out in Peter Berger’s now-canonic work, *The Sacred Canopy*. We humans, the sociologist of religion suggests, collectively create ordered worlds around us to provide us with a sense of stability and security, “in the never completed enterprise of building a humanly meaningful world.”⁴ Reality, like religion and like cinema, is socially constructed, allowing its members to engage with it on deeply felt, personal levels. Cultural products such as film offer conduits of significance between the individual and the cosmic order of the universe. And if culture staves off

³ Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 77.

⁴ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 27.

meaninglessness at the societal level, religion does so at a cosmic level by constructing a “sacred canopy” that keeps the threatening forces of chaos at bay.

Ever important is the grounding of human laws and regulations in cosmic structures. The *nomos* must be in synch with the *cosmos*. There is a dialectical, on-going process between the human and divine realms, and it is religion that supplies the link: “Religion implies the farthest reach of man’s self-externalization, of his infusion of reality with his own meanings. Religion implies that human order is projected into the totality of being. Put differently, religion is the audacious attempt to conceive of the entire universe as being humanly significant.”⁵

Indeed, Berger himself states that while most of history has seen religion as key to creating such a meaningful totality, in modern times “there have been thoroughly secular attempts at cosmization.”⁶ Science has most importantly made the attempt, but here I am suggesting that we think about cinema as another audacious attempt. Cinema may be part of the symbol creating apparatus of culture, yet it can also aspire to more, to world-encompassing visions of the *nomos* and *cosmos*.

The philosopher Nelson Goodman similarly understands the culturally/socially constructed nature of the world, particularly as found in his book, *Ways of Worldmaking*. Approaching the topic from an epistemological standpoint rather than Berger’s sociological one, Goodman draws an analogy between philosophy and the arts to understand how we humans go about creating worlds around us. Goodman suggests, “Much but by no means all worldmaking consists of taking apart and putting together, often conjointly: on the one hand, of dividing wholes into parts and partitioning kinds

⁵ Ibid., 27-8.

⁶ Ibid., 27.

into subspecies, analyzing complexes into component features, drawing distinctions; on the other hand, of composing wholes and kinds out of parts and members and subclasses, combining features into complexes, and making connections.”⁷ The activity of world creation is a process of taking things apart and putting them back together, of reassembling the raw materials available, of dissection and analysis, and of mending fragments. Such philosophical/religious activity is easily translatable in terms of filmmaking, through the framing of space through cinematography and reprojecting it on screen, or with its partitioning of time through cuts and recombination done in the editing room.

I borrow the language of worldmaking from Berger and Goodman, but in the background is the work of Immanuel Kant, Émile Durkheim, and others. Meanwhile, scholar of comparative religion, William Paden, has synthesized many of these studies, offering evocative and accessible ways to approach both religion and film. On Paden’s view, religions posit and construct their own version of “the” world through various organizing categories made up of the activities, behaviors, beliefs, language, and symbol usages of persons and communities. By looking at religious systems as “worlds,” as opposed to the relatively disembodied examination of texts and doctrines, the student of religion can come to understand the broader environmental constructions of religious practices and traditions within particular places and times.

Paden says, “Religions do not all inhabit the same world, but actually posit, structure, and dwell within a universe that is their own. . . . [A]ll living things select and

⁷ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 7.

sense ‘the way things are’ through their own organs and modes of activity.’⁸ “Any world,” Paden states elsewhere, “is an open-ended, interactive process, filled with various and complex sensory and cognitive domains, encompassing both representation and practice, both imaginal objects and bodies-in-performance.”⁹ Central here are the processes of selection and organization, of an active, performative, ongoing creation of the world. Such language runs uncannily parallel to the language of film production, as each film (and, indeed, the film industry as a whole) offers specific geographies, times, languages, and personas; and is filled with many sensory details (though, unlike religion, must remain limited to sight and sound, and arguably, touch), intellectual suggestions, imaginary and “real” objects, and performing bodies.

Worldmaking is an active engagement with the raw materials that make up what is in the strictest sense called the “earth,” and with the universe. Religions and films, as varieties of worldmaking enterprises, both achieve this. On the broadest and most abstract level, worldmaking makes use of the spaces and times that are available in the physical world, significantly incorporating common elements such as earth, air, fire, metal, wood, and water. Worldmaking is a performative drama in which humans are the costume designers and liturgists, scriptwriters and sermon givers, saints and cinematographers, priests and projectionists. All the world’s a stage, and all worlds are stages. The dramatic activity is what humans partake in when we attempt to make meaning of the spaces, times, and people that make up our lives. And it is what filmmakers, artists, and religious figures offer to this human drama.

⁸ William Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion*, 2d ed. (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 51-2.

⁹ William Paden, “World,” *Guide to the Study of Religion*, Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds. (London: Cassell, 2000), 336.

When we get to analytical descriptions of mythic and ritualistic operations, we begin to see the dramatic nature of worldmaking unfold. Myths and rituals assist in the creation of worlds through activities that frame, exclude, focus, organize, and re-present elements of the known world. Anthropologist Mary Douglas speaks to the function of rituals, indirectly noting the power of mythic story: “A ritual provides a frame. The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated ‘Once upon a time’ creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales.... Framing and boxing limit experience, shut in desired themes or shut out intruding ones.”¹⁰ Meanwhile, Paden offers this definition for the function of ritual: “The basic feature of ritual is its power of focus.... In ritual, what is out of focus is brought into focus. What is implicit is made explicit. All ritual behavior gains its basic effectiveness by virtue of such undivided, intensified concentration and by bracketing off distraction and interference.”¹¹

Similarly, for myth, Paden claims that it is “a definitive voice that names the ultimate powers that create, maintain, and re-create one’s life,” and that it works by “organizing and presenting reality in a way that makes humans not just conceivers but respondents and partakers.”¹² I am not suggesting these brief examples are comprehensive definitions of these terms, rather introducing the ways myth and ritual participate in the larger process of worldmaking. As should be somewhat apparent, myths and rituals operate like films: they utilize techniques of framing, thus including some themes, objects, and events while excluding others; and they serve to focus the participants’ attention in ways that invite humans into its world to become participants.

¹⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 78.

¹¹ Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 95-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 73-4.

Worlds are not merely created once and for all, they must be kept going, maintained. From time to time people will see through the constructed nature of the world and ask questions, poking holes in the sacred canopy. So, socio-cultural systems like religion have to continually legitimate the world that has been created. Worldmaking, in other words, is deeply bound to what Berger calls “world-maintenance.” Because there is a dialectical process between the projected societal views of the cosmos and individual inquiry and creativity, the world must be maintained on a perpetual basis. I transpose world-maintenance as “re-creation,” in order to get at the dynamic dialectics that Berger, Goodman, and Paden highlight. The world is not simply built, but is constantly being maintained through rebuilding, reconstruction, recombining.

The hyphen is injected into re-creation to remind us how to pronounce this word in a way that resonates with its deeper meaning. Modern English has transformed the term into “recreation”—as in “recreational vehicle,” or departments of “parks and recreation”—it is something we do to *get away from* the world. Yet at the heart of the idea, even if we forget it, is the activity of creation. Recreation is a way to re-create the world, which often means taking a step back from the world to see how it is put together, if only to figure out how it can be rearranged. On those days of re-creation, the world looks different. We see what we should have seen all along. We remember what is truly important.

That recreation, including movie-going, occurs on the weekends in the modern world is not accidental. These two days coincide with the Jewish and Christian holy days, when the good folk of the world attend religious services, participate in their “true” communities, and take time to be in touch with their Creator. At least, that’s the idea. As

the Western world has grown restless with its religiosity, new forms of re-creation have emerged, one of which is of course the world of cinema. Indeed, what preacher's sermon can compete with multi-million dollar special effects? What Sabbath meal can steer us away from the possibilities that such beautiful people as Julia Roberts and Richard Gere might fall in love? Indeed, many priests and pastors are now incorporating film clips into their very sermons, creating a multi-mediated spectacle of the Sunday morning worship service.

The Jewish tradition of the Sabbath is particularly insightful as a way to approach the re-creation of the world as it relates to film. "On the seventh day, God rested," we are told in the mythical language at the beginning of Genesis. But in the next chapter we read that the Creator was not so passive at this time. If religions, in contemporary religious studies language, are centered around that which is "sacred," then the Jewish and Christian traditions would be first and foremost centered around the Sabbath day, for that is the first thing that God blesses and makes holy (Heb. *kadosh*) according to the scriptures: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen 2.3).

As Abraham Heschel puts it in his classic little book on the Sabbath, "It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world."¹³ Contrary to public opinion, the idea of the Sabbath is not one hollowed out by a list of rules and regulations leaving a community in a state of passivity, but rather is an active, vital time. Judaism has a strong tradition of understanding the Sabbath as the *completion* of creation; on the seventh day God did not refrain from creating as much as

¹³ Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1951), 10.

God created the Sabbath. The Sabbath, on this view, is the “real world,” the rest of the week a necessary other world. “The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath.”¹⁴

If the Sabbath is the day we turn “to the mystery of creation” and “from the world of creation to the creation of the world,” then film mimics this very process. Film makes us wonder about the world again, makes us say “Wow!” offers images that allow us to see things in a new way. This is not to say all film accomplishes this, for there seems to be somewhat of an inverse relation between the spectacular images of film and the capacity for the viewer’s imagination—the more dazzling the image, the more depressed the imagination—but then again, the challah bread, the candles, the recitation of prayers, are not fool-proof ways to stir our minds and bodies either. At its best, the Sabbath puts people in touch with their Creator, with their family, and with the created world. Bobby Alexander defines the aims of religious rituals in general, “Traditional religious rituals open up ordinary life to ultimate reality or some transcendent being or force in order to tap its transformative power.”¹⁵ At its best, film puts people in touch with the world again in new ways. In both of these, one is connected with their world only by experiencing another world.

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

¹⁴ Ibid., 14. Heschel is paraphrasing the Zohar here.

¹⁵ Bobby Alexander, “Ritual and Current Studies of Ritual,” in *Anthropology of Religion*, Stephen D. Glazier, ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 139.

II. Filmic Worldmaking and Re-Creation

The re-creation of the world is perhaps so obvious in the cinema that we tend to overlook it. In the beginning, every film begins with the production studio's logo. Many of these self-consciously demonstrate the ways in which the world is not simply being reflected on screen, but the way the world is being actively reimagined, and the way cinema functions to relate the *nomos* and *cosmos*. These moving logos continually portray a predominant theme through their scenarios: the heavens and earth are connected through the productions of cinema. The logo for Universal Studios depicts a spinning earth, with a thousand points of light appearing across the continents (presumably movie theaters) as the view zooms out to show the whole globe, and the name "Universal" spins into place as a belt spanning the planet. Dreamworks' logo begins with an image of still water, into which a fishing line is dropped, then the camera moves up to find a boy cradled in the curve of the "D" of "Dreamworks" as the name hangs, suspended in mid-air and surrounded by clouds, evoking a lunar look on the world below. Elsewhere, Warner Brothers displays the "WB" shield floating amongst the clouds; the now-defunct Orion showed its eponymous star sign; and Paramount and Columbia both set their icons so high up on a pedestal that only the clouds and a few other mountain peaks can join them in their pantheon of world imagining.

Through such examples it is clear that film production companies are fully cognizant of the other worlds and ethereal perspectives they provide for their viewers, and gleefully promote these perspectives as they reaffirm a cosmology that evokes a "looking up" to where the wondrous things are. In this way cinema offers a glimpse of

the heavens, of other worlds above and beyond earthly existence, even as these other worlds must be relatable to the visible worlds on earth.

Such posturing is not far from the need for religious worlds to legitimate their worldmaking activity. As Berger suggests, “Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference.” Further, “Probably the most ancient form of this legitimation is the conception of the relationship between society and cosmos as one between microcosm and macrocosm. Everything ‘here below’ has its analogue ‘up above.’ By participating in the institutional order men, *ipso facto*, participate in the divine cosmos.”¹⁶ Likewise, cinema “projects” a particular human order onto a screen, promoting its productions as a link between the “here below” and “up above”—on mountain tops, in the clouds, encircling the earth. At the same time, the screen is literally created to be *larger than life*. Transcendent of this-worldly concerns, rules, or behaviors, the cinema enables a god’s-eye view of things, even if we have long ago given up the “heaven above/earth below” cosmic separation.

Filmmakers and theorists, alongside production companies, realize the re-creative activity of film production as well, and they tend to understand worldmaking in terms of *space* and *time*. Siegfried Kracauer, in his *Theory of Film*, suggests the spatial significance of the larger than life images and the ways in which worlds are remade when projected on screen: “Any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters. Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it

¹⁶ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 33-4.

literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before.”¹⁷ And editor Paul Hirsch connects worldmaking to the temporal dimensions of filmmaking when he claims, “Film is truth, but it’s all an illusion. It’s fake. Film is deceptive truth! ... Editing is very interesting and absorbing work because of the illusions you can create. You can span thirty years within an hour and a half. You can stretch a moment in slow motion. You can play with time in extraordinary ways.”¹⁸

Through the very technology of film, a new world is assembled—through the camera lens and in the editing room—and then projected on screen. Viewers see the world, but see it in entirely new ways because everyday perceptions of space and time are altered. Such time and space travel are not foreign to the procedures of religious worldmaking. In fact, if one were to substitute the word “myth” for “film” in Hirsch’s comment, we would come across a popular definition of myth: “Telling lies to tell the truth.” And through the re-creation of time and space, we have a world, created anew.

III. Crossing Religion and Film

In the 1950s, the aesthetician-*cum*-film theorist Etienne Souriau made a scientific stab at distinguishing several layers of “reality” when dealing with film, and

¹⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 48. Relatedly, see Walter Benjamin’s suggestions in *Selected Writings III*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 117; and my own comments on the subject in *Walter Benjamin, Religion, and Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 105-112.

¹⁸ Paul Hirsch, “Percussive Editing,” in *First Cut: Conversations with Film Editors*, Gabriella Oldham, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 188-9. The philosopher Stanley Cavell was way ahead of some of this argument as he turned to the projections of film as a way of understanding the world. His book *The World Viewed* (enlarged edition; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) argues that the world as it is holds a distinct relation to the “world viewed” on screen, and that the two are not entirely distinguishable, even if the screened world goes out of existence when the film is over. Yet, just below the surface of Cavell’s writings is a suggestion that cinema is ultimately a private, anonymous experience.

inadvertently offers some suggestions to religious studies scholars interested in film. His levels are:

1. afilmic reality (the reality that exists independently of filmic reality)
2. profilmic reality (the reality photographed by the camera)
3. filmographic reality (the film as physical object, structured by techniques such as editing)
4. screenic (or filmophanic) reality (the film as projected on a screen)
5. diegetic reality (the fictional story world created by the film; the type of reality “supposed” by the signification of film.)
6. spectatorial reality (the spectator’s perception and comprehension of a film)
7. creational reality (the filmmaker’s intentions)¹⁹

I note these here to further evidence the multiple layers of reality that one must engage when dealing with film. It is not enough to encapsulate the narrative arc, and suggest some religious implications from a literary perspective; rather, the edited, cinematographic, and projected layers of film’s re-creation of the world must be taken into account.

And while these seven layers are each of individual interest, the full implications complicate the more general analogous relations I am attempting here. One could, I suppose, discuss each of these layers in ways that relate to Clifford Geertz’s extensive definition of religion, defined as: “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”²⁰

Souriau’s level 2 could relate to Geertz’s point 3, Souriau’s level 4 could relate to

¹⁹ These levels are quoted from Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47. See Etienne Souriau, *L’Univers filmique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1953). Souriau’s work has not been translated into English, but good overviews include chapter 3 of Edward Lowry’s *The Filmology Movement and Film Study in France* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985).

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

Geertz's point 4, Souriau's level 6 could relate to Geertz's point 5, and so forth. The key point I take from Souriau is the general distinction between the profilmic and afilmic realities, the world "on screen," and the world "out there," but also of their mutual implication.

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

Terry Gilliam filmed his newest movie, *Tideland*, in Saskatchewan last fall, racing to complete the location shots before winter set in. The Mitch Cullin novel on which the film is based is mostly set in West Texas, but Mr. Gilliam had substituted the Canadian prairie instead. The evening after he wrapped, it started to snow, and the cast, crew and director all saw this as an omen....

Most of *Tideland* takes place inside a long-abandoned farmhouse, and the set was a miracle of grunginess and dilapidation in which cobwebs had been applied, brand new walls had been distressed to look old and water-stained, and ancient household implements had been knocked around until they looked even older. But as the camera tracked around and the crew moved props in and out, they accidentally created little pathways of relative orderliness, and Mr. Gilliam several times called for more dust.²¹

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

²¹ Charles McGrath, "Terry Gilliam's Feel-Good Endings," *New York Times*, 14 August 2005. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/14/movies/14mcgr.html?ex=1124769600&en=b8eac6b20a90d575&ei=5070&emc=eta1> (accessed 15 August 2005).