

School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts

**The Aesthetics of Nature and the Cinematic Sublime:
A Creative Investigation into an Organic
Transcendental Film Style**

Danny Roy Jennings

**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

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Abstract

The natural sublime, in a neo-romantic sense, describes the aesthetic affect caused when certain qualities of natural phenomena overwhelm the subject perceptually and imaginatively. As the human perceiver is consumed by, for example, the power, vastness, darkness, or silence of the desert, the forest, mountains, the ocean or foreboding skies, they can potentially experience a disclosure of the structure of perceiving nature and its totalities. Moreover, this structure is an integrated nexus between transcendental aspects of, firstly, the biophysical world, secondly, our limited visual/auditory systems, thirdly, our perceptions in consciousness and, fourthly, the workings of reason. Therefore, theories of the sublime are linked to the self-transcending tendencies of reality, that is, the tendency of natural phenomena to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time, and human perception. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the emergence of a cinematic sublime. The thesis achieves this aim through practice-based research that involves both original experimental film production and critical analysis of theoretical and artistic texts. Both the thesis' creative and exegetical components seek to answer a single research question, namely, how cinematic representations of nature may evoke an aesthetic of the sublime. These distinct yet related research components are both informed by diverse philosophical concepts and methodologies. These include the romantic, modern and post-modern sublime; transcendence; hierophany; the metaphysical imagination; critical realism (as a philosophy of nature and perception); phenomenology; emergence; and transcendental film style theories. Both the exegetical and cinematic components investigate an organic transcendental film style and are informed by landscape painting and the films of Werner Herzog and Andrei Tarkovsky. The thesis' exegetical component includes two theoretical and two analytical chapters. The thesis' creative component includes footage shot in a number of biodiverse wilderness and world heritage areas in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, and Japan. The creative work has employed research-led and practice-led methodologies and is presented through a website.

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General Introduction

One cloudless day in the winter of 2014, I was filming in a wilderness area on the South Island of New Zealand. As I focused my eyes and camera lens at the thriving green forests, I noticed something unusual. The sun was shining, and the plants, trees, rocks and moss were so saturated with water from the previous day's rainfall that they all appeared to glisten with the colours of the rainbow. All the diverse biophysical elements of the lush environment that flooded my visual field were reflecting and refracting light in a very peculiar way. It seemed as though all I could see of biophysical reality was light as it reflected and refracted through unseen matter, space and time. I knew that scientific and philosophical theories attempt to explain this mode of visual perception from a range of perspectives. However, the awareness within my experience seemed to extend from the perceptually given. This thesis thus begins from this mode of subjective awareness of nature and uses the term 'self-transcending' to describe these tendencies of the natural world to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception. The aesthetic encounter in New Zealand is just one of many subjective experiences where nature appeared to me to have self-transcending tendencies. Other aesthetic encounters occurred while filming in a number of biodiverse wilderness and world heritage areas in Western Australia and Japan. The question I began to ask, while capturing digital footage of nature, was: how can film style function to bring an awareness of these apparent transcendental aspects of nature and perception? The films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Werner Herzog, for example, seem to have the unique ability both to represent and present these tendencies of the natural world. In fact, according to Joseph Kickasola (2000), cinema can, like nature, function to emulate, synchronise with and bring an awareness of the transcendental aspects of human perception. As Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (2017) has shown, Tarkovsky was possibly the first to describe this

organic ability of film when in 1986 he likened cinema to a drop of water reflecting the world. More than just a metaphor, Tarkovsky's idea implies that cinema, firstly, shares an epistemological role with our direct perceptions in producing an embodied comprehension of reality and, secondly, functions not only through representation but also through its own inherent and fluid formal structure. Dylan Trigg (2012) also identifies cinema's epistemological role in facilitating a subjective experience of the blossoming of nature. He applies Merleau Ponty's (1964) phenomenology of perception, particularly the latter's notion of 'flesh', to cinematic representations of nature in Herzog's films. Trigg proposes that the flesh of the forest can intertwine in a symbiotic relationship with the flesh of the cinema.

Following Botz-Bornstein's (2017) notion of 'organic cinema' and Thomas William Smith's (2000) description of Tarkovsky's films as 'transcendental organic cinema', this thesis theorises a specific kind of film style: an organic transcendental film style.¹ This approach to film form predominately uses representations of nature as mise-en-scene in conjunction with organic cinematography, editing and sound not only to represent and present nature's self-transcending tendencies but also to solicit transcendental spheres of experience from the viewer. These spheres include mental processes akin to dreaming, as well as what Roland Hepburn refers to as the metaphysical imagination. For Hepburn, the metaphysical imagination is a form of aesthetic appreciation of nature, where 'the landscape may seem peculiarly revealing about the nature of reality as a whole' (Hepburn, 1996, p. 195). In so far as the concept

¹ I formulated the term 'organic transcendental film style' within my research after reading an online article in which Botz-Bornstein (2016) summarised a book he was in the process of writing. I obtained access to this book only in the very last stages of writing my thesis in May 2017. Botz-Bornstein's book, *Organic Cinema: Film, Architecture, and the Work of Béla Tarr*, 'is about the philosophy of the organic and how it interacts with the aesthetics of cinema' (2017, p. 1). Also, towards the end of writing this thesis, I came across an article by Thomas W. Smith's (2000), in which he uses the term 'transcendental organic cinema'. These concepts will be discussed further in the main chapters of this exegesis.

of the metaphysical imagination articulates an aesthetic appreciation of nature that is similar to my personal lived experiences of nature, this thesis speculates on how film style functions to solicit the metaphysical imagination.

Discourses of the romantic, the modern and the post-modern sublime, as well as theories of a transcendental film style, are the starting point of the theoretical inquiry of this thesis because of their preoccupation with, and critique of, the concept of transcendence. In fact, the chapters that follow will show that a theoretical trajectory runs from the discourse of the romantic natural sublime through to transcendental film style theories, a trajectory that oscillates between concepts of immanence and transcendence. However, defining the aesthetic concept of the sublime can be problematic and meanings can vary depending on their context. For the sublime, this difficulty is partially revealed by the fact that, in the words of Thomas Weiskel, it ‘comes to be associated both with the failure of clear thought and with matters beyond determinate perception’ (1976, p. 17). Also, some questions are rarely discussed in sufficient detail, for example, as Henry Day points out, ‘what the sublime actually is and how it works – its sources, logic and effects’ (2012, p. 18). The Tate art gallery in Britain has recently attempted to fill this absence with its three-year major research project *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art, Language* (Llewelyn and Riding, 2013). As part of this project, Julian Bell (2013) discusses the inadequacies of the common contemporary use of the sublime as a blanket description for diverse forms of art and argues for the need of ‘the critical border police [...] to find superior means of discrimination’ (p. 1). Therefore, a specific methodology to address the difficult ontological and epistemological issues within theories of the sublime and cinematic experience is required to answer the main research questions of this creative production research. Furthermore, a philosophical definition of nature’s self-transcending

tendencies is crucial for the research to address these issues. This necessity also presents itself, firstly, because concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘transcendence’ can have a variety of differing, ambiguous meanings and, secondly, because theories about the power and workings of cinematic experience and the relationship between cinematic representation and reality are equally complex and paradoxical. Several established phenomenological inquiries of film do well to identify the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience. However, other theoretical perspectives can also contribute to deepen an understanding of this relationship: the science of visual perception, critical realism (as a philosophy of nature and perception), phenomenological realist inquiries into the lived experience of the natural world, and the concept of emergence. The application of these theories achieves this aim by offering contemporary relevant ways of understanding nature’s self-transcending tendencies and how they can be represented and experienced within cinema through an organic transcendental film style.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the emergence of a cinematic sublime. The thesis achieves this aim through practice-based research that involves both original experimental film production and critical analysis of theoretical and artistic texts. On account of its multi-disciplinary character, the thesis adopts the research question model outlined by Barbara H. Milech and Ann Schilo (2004), according to which both the creative component and the written component attempt to answer, in their own ways, the same central research question(s). In view of this model, both this thesis’ creative and exegetical components seek to answer a single research question, namely, how cinematic representations of nature may evoke an aesthetic of the sublime. These distinct, yet related research components are both informed by diverse philosophical concepts and methodologies. These include the romantic, modern and post-modern

sublime, transcendence, hierophany, the metaphysical imagination, critical realism (as a philosophy of nature and perception), phenomenology, emergence and transcendental film style theories. Both the exegetical and cinematic components are also informed by landscape painting and the films of Werner Herzog and Andrei Tarkovsky as they investigate an organic transcendental film style.

The thesis' exegetical component consists of four chapters. The first two chapters outline a conceptual and methodological framework for analysing an organic transcendental film. The last two chapters test these conceptual tools by performing analysis of the films of Werner Herzog and Andrei Tarkovsky. Chapter 1 identifies that a common factor of natural sublime stimuli within these theories is their self-transcending tendencies through a critical analysis of the writings of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant as well as through the more recent reconstruction of the Kantian sublime found in Paul Crowther and Roland Hepburn's concept of the metaphysical imagination. Furthermore, Chapter 1 argues that there is an affinity between romantic landscape painting, the modernist abstract movement, and experimental film practice and identifies how the focus within the discourse of the sublime shifted from the formal qualities of nature to the formal qualities of painting and through to the formal qualities of cinema. This Chapter also discusses transcendental film style theories, developing a new understanding of how film style components can function to represent an immanent transcendence and further bring an awareness of both the immanent and transcendent qualities of cinematic experience itself.

Chapter 2 presents a methodology of analysis of an organic transcendental film style via a combination of phenomenological, critical realist, and cognitive approaches. It argues that the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience informs how an organic transcendental film style can both

represent and present nature's self-transcending tendencies as well as solicit transcendental spheres of human experience. To begin, Chapter 2 critically analyses both Joseph G. Kickasola's and Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological approaches to investigating a transcendental film style. It also analyses Julien Guillemet's (2011) discussion of Jean-Luc Marion's (2002) concept of 'saturated phenomena' in view of a 'phenomenology of cinema' (Guillemet, 2011, p. 111). Additionally, Chapter 2 discusses how the science and philosophy of perception, critical realism, phenomenological realism and the concept of emergence contribute to a contemporary understanding of the cinematic presentation, representation, and experience of nature's self-transcending tendencies. This Chapter also examines how cinema can represent, emulate and solicit dreamlike states of mind. It clarifies the similarities and differences between dreaming consciousness, waking consciousness and states of mind within cinematic experience by analysing the nature of dreaming and the ability of film style to emulate dream-tense from a phenomenological, neurocognitive and critical realist perspective. Finally, Chapter 2 further defines an 'organic transcendental film style'.

The last two chapters test these conceptual tools by performing analysis of the films of Werner Herzog and Andrei Tarkovsky. Chapter 3 discusses an organic transcendental film style in Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), *Heart of Glass* (1976) and *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974). The chapter argues that in producing embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies, filmic representations of nature in his films solicit the metaphysical imagination. Chapter 4 discusses an organic transcendental film style in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), *Stalker*, (1979) and *Solaris* (1972). This chapter analyses how representations of nature within Tarkovsky's films through the flow and rhythm of nature as mise-en-scene and through the fluid

structure of cinema itself solicit within the spectator transcendental states akin to the experience of dreaming.

The creative component of this thesis is an experimental film project presented through a website. Through experimental film, the creative production component investigates an organic transcendental film style. The digital video footage was captured within a number of biodiverse wilderness and world heritage areas in Western Australia, New Zealand and Japan. An appendix at the end of this exegesis outlines the practice-based, research-led, practice-led, and transdisciplinary nature of this PhD research and, therefore, how the written exegesis and creative production component relate in a cyclical and iterative way. The appendix also provides the link to the website that presents the creative production component of this research.

Chapter 1

The romantic natural sublime and a transcendental film style: From nature to film

Introduction

In tracing the progression from the romantic natural sublime to the post-modernist technological sublime, David E. Nye (1994) acknowledges that the sublime is a ‘historicised object of inquiry’ and not a philosophical absolute. For this reason, as noted by Richard White (1997), some philosophers and critics have been skeptical of the possibility of an ‘actual experience of the sublime’ (p. 125). Also, Luke White (2007) discusses that within the rich history of this aesthetic concept there is not a single tradition, mechanism or experience of the sublime. However, on the other hand, Nye insists that the sublime experience has a ‘universality of effect’ (p. 4) caused by a common fundamental structure ‘regardless of the object that inspires it or the interpretation that is given to the experience’ (p. 9). Informed by critical realism this chapter maintains that the various descriptions of the sublime experience are discursive, that is, historically and socially constructed. However, following Nye, this chapter also posits that there is a common ontological structure that determines these descriptions.

This chapter argues that a theoretical trajectory runs from the discourse of the romantic natural sublime through to transcendental film style theories, a trajectory that oscillates between the concepts of immanence and transcendence. It does not attempt to undertake an exhaustive history but will aim to identify common generative mechanisms of the discourse of the sublime and transcendental film style theories. The first section of this chapter discusses aesthetic concepts of the romantic natural sublime through a critical analysis of the writings of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant as well as through the more recent reconstruction of the Kantian sublime found in Paul Crowther and Roland Hepburn’s

concept of the metaphysical imagination. The first section also discusses the notion that a common factor of natural sublime stimuli within these theories is their self-transcending tendencies, that is, the tendency of natural phenomena to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception. The second section of this chapter argues that there is an affinity between romantic landscape painting, the modernist abstract movement, and experimental film practice. In doing so, it identifies how the focus within the discourse of the sublime shifted from theories of the formal qualities of nature to theories of the formal qualities of painting and through to theories of the formal qualities of cinema. The third section of this chapter discusses that transcendental film style theories have developed a new understanding of how film style components can function not only to represent an immanent transcendence but also bring an awareness of both the immanent and transcendent qualities of cinematic experience itself.

1.1 The romantic natural sublime and nature's self-transcending tendencies

The sublime for Longinus was a state of mind produced by rhetoric, for Edmund Burke it was a psychological condition of terror, and for Immanuel Kant, it was an aesthetic that brought an awareness of the transcendental properties of reason and morality.² However, a general definition of the sublime that encompasses these three main historical theories is that the sublime is evoked by diverse stimuli that overwhelm the subject ‘perceptually, imaginatively or emotionally’ (Holmqvist and Pluciennik, 2008, p. 13). Emily Brady points out that the majority of post-modernist and post-structuralist theories about the sublime have focused on stimuli from within various cultural domains such as art and technology

² In the first century AD, Longinus' concept of the sublime was restricted to literature and likened the sublime experience to a thunderbolt which ruptures the surface of form, order and beauty; the ordered wholeness of the Greek cosmos. This seemed to be the start of the crucial aesthetic distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. This distinction filtered down through Burke and Kant to the post-modern sublime where, according to John Milbank (2004), who disagrees with this distinction, ‘beauty becomes a purely banal, ideological, or even impossible instance, leaving the aesthetic field free for an art entirely reduced to the effecting of sublime shock and rupture’ (p. 211-212).

(Crowther, 1989; Lyotard, 1994; Nye, 1996). Furthermore, Brady argues that in Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1759), Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime* (1790) and, Friedrich Schlegel's theories of the romantic sublime, our first-hand sensory bodily encounter with the natural world seems to be the original and primary source of the sublime (Stone, 2011). For Kant, it is 'crude nature' that provides the catalyst for the sublime. Richmond m. Eustis Jr (2012) concludes that Kant had wilderness in mind when he used this term. This natural sublime describes an aesthetic affect caused by, for example, mountain landscapes, the desert, the ocean, a forest and the night sky (Berleant, 1993). The human perceiver experiences the sublime as they are consumed by the vastness, magnitude, infinity, obscurity, darkness, solitude, alterity or silence of these environments (Burke, 2008). The natural sublime can be associated, firstly, with the immensity of space and, secondly, with the natural phenomena that seem to approach that immensity (Weiskel, 1976). This aesthetic appreciation of nature was subsequently expressed by artists of the Romantic period, for example, in Casper David Friedrich's landscape paintings [fig 1].



Figure 1. *Two men by the sea*, 1817, Caspar David Friedrich, oil on canvas, 51 x 66 cm, National Galerie, Berlin.

This chapter will now critically discuss philosophical concepts of the sublime that developed between 1757 and 1805. The purpose of this discussion is to deploy a particular neo-romantic definition of the sublime experience that is to be used later in this thesis.³ In *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (2008), Burke argues that the source of the sublime experience resides within the terrifying qualities of natural objects; the awe and terror of being confronted with the unseen, the unknown and the unfathomable.⁴ Burke puts the emphasis on the idea that the physical properties of the natural objects themselves are sublime.⁵ Furthermore, darkness, obscurity and therefore the dread of the night usually make a ‘thing’ horrifying enough to arouse the terror and astonishment associated with the sublime. According to Burke, clearness of imagery helps little with the sublime as definite form leaves no room for the imagination.⁶ Also, for Burke a capital source of the sublime is privation, that is, space emptied of matter, light, sound or other humans, resulting in vacuity, darkness, silence or solitude. In this sense, Burke was describing space itself as a source of the sublime.

While ‘darkness is more productive to sublime ideas than light’ (Burke, 1757, p. 80), there are circumstances where ‘light by its very excess is converted into a species of darkness’ (p. 80), for example, when the blinding direct sunshine obscures our visual field. Burke describes night as more sublime than day, dark and gloomy mountains as more sublime than a mountain covered by bright green vegetation, and a cloudy sky as more

³ Defining the aesthetic concept of the sublime can be problematic and meanings can vary depending on their context. For the sublime this difficulty is partially revealed by the fact that, in the words of Thomas Weiskel (1976), it ‘comes to be associated both with the failure of clear thought and with matters beyond determinate perception’ (p. 17).

⁴ But Ian Greig (2003) argues that this incomprehensibility ‘must be tempered with an acknowledgement of transcendence’ (Grieg, 2003, p. 368) and, therefore, the sublime should not be a complete negation of knowledge or comprehensibility.

⁵ The title of the 2007-2010 major research project *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art, Language* at the Tate art gallery in Britain reflects this Burkean interpretation. The project marked the anniversary of Burke’s publication on the sublime.

⁶ While this is the case in many examples, there are some clear rational ideas that can affect the imagination and therefore produce a sublime aesthetic; see, for example, Ian Greig’s *Aesthetic’s of the Sublime in Twentieth Century Physics* (2002).

sublime than blue sky. In this prescriptive way, Burke concentrates on describing the various physical, empirical, and phenomenal properties of nature that are considered productive of the sublime. In Chapter 3 I will analyse Werner Herzog's 1979 film *Nosferatu*, which expresses the Burkean natural sublime aesthetic [fig 2].

On the other hand, in his *Critique of Pure Judgement* (1790), Immanuel Kant suggests that the source of the sublime aesthetic encounter with nature resides not within the natural objects but within an awareness of the ability of human reason to operate beyond the empirical or sensible given. The conceptual contrast between Burke's empirical version of the sublime and Kant's transcendental version is imperative to any serious discussion of the sublime (White, 1997).⁷ While Burke's account of the sublime emphasised the ability of the overpowering qualities of nature to produce terror, the sublime's final result for Kant was the empowering of the individual through the conscious awareness of the transcendental nature of reason.



Figure 2. Still from the film *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, 1979, Werner Herzog.

Two categories of the transcendental sublime that are discussed by Kant (2007) are the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime. This section now focuses specifically on the mathematical sublime as the analysis of the cinematic sublime in Chapters 2, 3 and 4

⁷ The term 'transcendental' is used in this passage in the Kantian sense, that is, to describe the ability of human reason to engage in thought that transcends the empirical or perceptually given.

will be mainly concerned with components of this category.

Kant's (2007) mathematical sublime is associated with overwhelming spatio-temporal magnitude and the natural objects that approach that immensity. For Kant, even though a natural object may have overwhelming properties, for example, properties that imply infinite space, it was the possibility of having the idea of infinity within our reason and not the physical object that is sublime. Kant's mathematical sublime emphasises the distinction between apprehension and comprehension. We can apprehend the idea of infinity, but we cannot comprehend the totality of infinity as an absolute whole or express it in a single representation. Kant describes this ability as a super-sensible faculty being awakened within us as the imagination tries and fails to comprehend the infinite progression of space suggested by the natural phenomena. Kant states: 'Nature, therefore, is sublime in such of its phenomena as in their intuition convey the idea of their infinity' (p. 256). Kant argues that it is impossible to grasp actual infinity and absolute totality within perceptual experience and impossible to arrive at actual infinity and absolute totality within the imagination through a process of endless progression (numerical or spatial). However, the concept of nature as a whole and the concept of infinity implied by certain natural phenomena can be held within reason and therefore moves 'beyond every standard of sense' to a 'supersensible substrate' (p. 257). Kant argues that this super sensible substrate underlies both nature and our faculty of thought. Through this argument, Kant concludes that it is not the physical object but the movement of the mind in appreciating nature as a whole that we estimate as sublime.

A common example of sublime stimuli used by Kant is a series of mountains peaks. Paul Crowther (1989), in his reconstruction of the Kantian sublime, eloquently describes Kant's point; in Crowther's words: 'our attention is engrossed by the perceptual rhythm of the series – its seeming to flow beyond the horizon towards infinity' (p.80).⁸ An example of

⁸ Phillip Shaw (2007) argues that actual infinity 'cannot be grasped in sensible intuition' (p. 81).

this mountain sublime is expressed in Caspar David Friedrich painting *The Riesengebirge*, 1830-35 [fig 3]. To return to Kant (2007) the natural phenomena ‘provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super added thought of its totality’ (p. 244).⁹ According to Phillip Shaw (2007), Kant posits that the formlessness or unboundedness of natural objects ruptures



Figure 3. *The Riesengebirge*, 1830-35, Caspar David Friedrich, oil on canvas, 40.16 x 28.35 inch, National Galerie, Berlin.

or outrages our powers of perception by pushing them to their limit. However, then reason triumphs as it adds to the experience the thought of the object’s totality. Again, for Kant, this ability of the human mind, in turn, reveals humans’ vocation as being sublimely above nature’ (Kant, 2007, p. 264). This vocation is summarised by Crowther thus: ‘we are beings with capacities that transcend the limitations of our finite phenomenal existence’ (Crowther, 1989, p. 99-100). Shaw also describes this vocation: ‘Sublimity, therefore, resides in the human capacity to think beyond the bounds of the given’ (Shaw, 2006, p. 83). According to Crowther (1989), this human capacity should be known not as a useful tool or as a property or quality of human beings but as ‘a dynamic and extraordinary mode of transcendence towards the world. The finality of the sublime experience is for Kant “in” the judging

⁹ The emphasis is in the source.

subject' (p. 83) and exists independently of the external world. Ian Greig (2002) in discussing the Kantian sublime describes this 'ungraspable and undefinable inner domain' (p. 372) of reason as 'the metaphysical infinitude of our own rationality' (p. 372).

Thomas McEviney (2001) might well be right in stating that 'Kant seems to have softened or tamed the sublime – to have diminished it' (p. 68) because the terror element is eliminated from the experience except for the 'brief instant of the first stage' (p. 67). However, even though the Kantian sublime seems to conclude with the elevation of reason and not its rupture, the terror can remain. Within the Kantian sublime a rupture does occur, but it can be described as a rupture of phenomenal nature and visual perception, rather than as a dissolution of the self or reality. In this way, the Kantian rupture does not result in total annihilation but in, according to Crowther (1989), a 'primordial disclosure of spatio-temporal reality' (p.171). While still acting as the catalyst, phenomenal nature becomes transparent as our transcendental cognitive faculties resonate with the transcendental substrate of nature/reality. The terror in the Kantian sublime could surface in this later stage, that is, from the resonance or affinity that the metaphysical infinitude of our rationality can have with the spatio-temporal infinity of physical reality. The metaphysical infinitude of our rationality refers to the ability of reason to resist the constraints of time and space.

The Burkean sublime, on the other hand, does tend to threaten towards annihilation. The overwhelming natural phenomena bring with it a trauma caused by a cognitive failure and therefore the need to overcome these restrictions even to the point of death. This need describes the melancholic romantic drive for the dissolution of the finite self into the abyss of formlessness or infinity. However, for John Milbank (2004) the nihilistic nature of this total dissolution into formlessness and nothingness is not helpful because the power of the sublime is the gesture that 'is necessarily on the brink of the abyss without completely succumbing to it' (p. 208). For Milbank, the sublime should be saved from being reduced to

the complete negation of form, ‘sheer unknowability or its quality of non-representability’ (p. 208).¹⁰ The annihilation of form stems from how both Burke and Kant ‘built their aesthetic theories on the dualism of the beautiful and the sublime’ (Holmqvist and Pluciennik, 2008, p. 3). For Kant beauty is associated with form and quality, while the sublime with formlessness and quantity. The finality of form within beauty aesthetically isolates the object from its broader context. In contrast, the concept of the sublime ‘gives, on the whole no indication of anything final in nature itself’ (Kant, 2007, p. 65).¹¹

For the early Romantics, such as the late 18th century German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, the paradoxical exercise of the imagination within the experience of the Kantian sublime produced a melancholic longing (Frank, 2004). The viewer’s experience of the vast reality that exists apart from them goes ‘beyond the capacity of the imagination to fully grasp and beyond the limits of language to express’ (Tansman, 2012, p. 2). The romantic quest, both philosophical and artistic, was sparked by this struggle of the mind as it ‘feels but cannot capture its capacity for transcendence’ (Shaw, 2006, p. 90). The early German Romantics strove to account for Kant’s elevation of the mind ‘without resulting in a reductive account that fails to make sense of experience’ (Nassar, 2013, p. 259). This Romantic account posited the sublime experience as an integrated nexus between mind and nature that did not elevate the mind over nature or sensory experience over human reason.

Crowther eloquently attempts to reconcile the immanent and transcendental aspects of the experience of the sublime as described by Kant by expressing it as ‘a full and complete primordial experience of spatio-temporality’ (1989, p. 171). He firstly describes the role of rational comprehension in guiding ordinary perception, that is, directing ‘the flow of phenomenal experience by enabling us to grasp wholes and totalities, without always

¹⁰ Richard White (1997) explains that even with the contrast between Burke’s empirical sublime and Kant’s transcendental sublime, they both have within their experience an encounter with otherness.

¹¹ John Milbank (2004) argues that ‘the modern and post-modern sundering of the sublime from the beautiful’ (p. ix) was not genuinely critical (Milbank, J. 2004).

having successively to apprehend their parts' (p. 171). In everyday life this role of reason, as it helps us to make sense of the spatio-temporal complexities of the phenomenal world, is taken for granted. Sublime stimuli reveal or lay bare this integrated structure of reason, perception and reality allowing the 'primordial disclosure' of spatio-temporality. Crowther defines this disclosure as transcendental because it reveals our ability to direct and even circumscribe the flow of phenomenal experience. However, he also portrays it as immanent because the source of the disclosure is grounded in ultimate structures that exist (yet are concealed) within 'the immediate vicissitudes of everyday life' (p. 172). This disclosure within the Kantian sublime is in line with Vijay Mishra's definition of this concept, which refers to sublime experience simply as an act of perceiving oneself perceiving the world (Mishra, 1994).¹² The *ruckenfigur* technique used by Casper David Friedrich in his landscape paintings, as well as filmmakers such as Werner Herzog (figure 2), also express this aspect of the sublime [fig1-2]. This technique presents a figure looking out over a landscape with their backs to the viewer.¹³ In summary, Crowther's reconstruction of the Kantian sublime reveals an immanent transcendence, whereby a primordial disclosure of spatio-temporal reality extends from the perceptually given.

Elements within the romantic natural sublime that focus on the human mind's capacity to apprehend nature's totalities are also understood through Roland Hepburn's (1996) concept of 'metaphysical imagination'.¹⁴ Hepburn applies this term to various reflective thought components within an aesthetic appreciation of nature, where 'the landscape may seem peculiarly revealing about the nature of reality as a whole' (p. 195).

¹² This description of the sublime experience is closely related to phenomenology, whereby, according to Don Ihde (1977), the transcendence of objects and an experience of their genuine otherness' is constituted *within* experience, experience carefully analysed' (p. 63). Phenomenology will be discussed in Chapter 2.

¹³ The filmic *ruckenfigur* technique will be identified and analysed within a number of Werner Herzog's films, particularly *Heart of Glass* (1976), in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ According to Hepburn, the sublime experience has been 'explained in many different ways, many of which involved an essentially metaphysical-imaginative component' (p. 201).

Hepburn uses the term metaphysical in a general sense to describe ‘the most abstract and general ways in which humans apprehend the world’ (p. 192). These contemplative thought components are in distinction to an aesthetic appreciation of nature that either solely ‘incorporates scientific knowledge, e.g., geological or ecological’ or is ‘limited to sensuous enjoyment of sights and sounds’ (p. 1). Metaphysical interpretations and contemplations of nature ask three questions: What is nature? What is reality? Moreover, how do we know? For Hepburn, even though the significance read into the formal features of a natural scene ‘is potentially a thoroughly abstract metaphysical notion’ (p. 199), there are components within the metaphysical imagination that emerge from or are ‘anchored in the concrete, perceptually given’ (p. 199). Therefore, Hepburn’s concept of metaphysical imagination includes both sense and thought component stages. While there is an element of interpretation that “connects with, looks to the ‘spelled out’ systematic metaphysical theorising which is its support and ultimate justification”, this element is ‘fused with the sensory components’ (p. 192).¹⁵ Hepburn’s division of stages is important as it emphasises the paradox that metaphysical imagination can arise from phenomenological inquiry.¹⁶ The term ‘metaphysical’ in this thesis is informed by Hepburn’s definition.¹⁷

This chapter will now identify a common factor of sublime natural stimuli. The identification of a common factor, that is, an underlying generative mechanism behind the natural sublime, will contribute to the analysis of the cinematic sublime in the remaining chapters of this thesis. After establishing that the iterative process, described by concepts of the romantic sublime, begins with natural phenomena that disrupt ordinary perception, the question that arises is: what are the common qualities of sublime natural phenomena that

¹⁵ The emphasis is in the source

¹⁶ This combination of two seemingly antithetical philosophical approaches will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

¹⁷ This thesis therefore does not use the term metaphysics to define a science of what is beyond the physical. This thesis uses it in its general sense to describe ontological and epistemological inquiry.

disrupt visual perception and cause the sublime terror described by Burke? Alternatively, according to a Kantian definition, what is the common factor of natural phenomena that stimulates a metaphysical, imaginative appreciation of nature and mind? This common factor seems to be their self-transcending tendencies, that is, the tendency of natural phenomena to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception.

Many natural phenomena imply transcendental spheres of existence that are still part of the empirical natural world. Cornelius Du Toit (2011) argues that humans are biologically wired for transcendence,¹⁸ because they are confined by frontiers set by their biological limits, including frontiers of empirical reality, frontiers of visual perception and ‘inbuilt frontiers in the brain’ (Du Toit, 2011, p. 2). These frontiers emerge from the reality of human consciousness and its perception of space and time. Confrontation with these physical, perceptual and mental limits is inherent within definitions of the sublime. As mentioned earlier, the Latin root of ‘sublime’ precisely means: ‘door threshold’, ‘boundary’, or ‘limit’ (Morley, 2010, p. 14).

All visual systems, by their nature, have frontiers, horizons or boundaries. Moreover, this limitation means that the totalities of the physical world will always escape our limited perceptions.¹⁹ The spatial limit of our visual field, as proposed by Euclid, is shaped like a broad cone ‘with its apex at the eye and enclosing all that could be seen at one moment’ (Wade, Swansen, 1991, p. 18). As pointed out by Don Ihde (1986), the shape of this cone cannot be expanded or extended beyond its spatial limits. Thus, it retains the same configuration regardless of the spatial coordinates of the body and the direction the body

¹⁸ Du Toit (2011) argues that this type of transcendence, a this-worldly transcendence or horizontal transcendence, is an accepted reality in philosophy and science even if the frontiers are constantly shifting. Alistair McGrath also notes that the concept of transcendence has survived its dismissal, which occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. This judgement, which once labelled the concept redundant and outmoded, is now ‘widely seen as somewhat premature, resting on unreliable foundations’ (McGrath, 2013, p. 161).

¹⁹ A critical realist analysis would reveal that a tree exists in a different form than its perceptions and representations and it is this elusive dynamic reality of the tree that determines the representations that emerge in various visual systems and subsequent artistic representations. Critical realism will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

faces. Also, the edges or horizons of this field are indistinct and ‘phenomena appearing at the edges of the field are usually vague and barely noticeable [...] and fade off into the indistinct horizon of the field’ (Ihde, 1986, p. 59). No matter where we move or turn, these limits remain.

There are also physical frontiers that imply physical realms beyond. These realms have been progressively explored, conquered, exploited and mapped with the aid of the Cartesian grid since the 17th century. Examples of these physical boundaries include a mountain range, the ocean’s horizon and surface, the edge of a forest, and the edge of our planet’s atmosphere. These horizons block our vision to other physical spaces on Earth and within the larger universe. What is beyond that mountain range? What is beyond and below that ocean? What dwells deep in that dark forest? What exists beyond our solar system, our galaxy, and our universe? There are also atmospheric frontiers. Mist can obscure the definite form of physical objects like trees and mountains. Haze and clouds also blur the ocean’s horizon. In these atmospheric phenomena, the definite edges of matter transcend our visual perception. Darkness also produces frontiers of visual perception. These common examples of sublime nature present horizons and suggest other physical realms beyond the perceptually given.

While the frontiers of human perception remain constant, particular aesthetic encounters of natural phenomena can more effectively bring an awareness of these frontiers than others. The natural sublime can, therefore, describe an aesthetic encounter where the subject becomes particularly aware of not only physical frontiers of nature but physical frontiers of the visual field. In this way, sublime natural stimuli can be described as having self-transcending tendencies because they present frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception.

However, describing nature as having self-transcending tendencies can be

paradoxical. Therefore, this chapter will now briefly clarify the distinction between the different and sometimes contradictory types of transcendence discussed within the discourse of the romantic sublime. This clarification will be important for this exegesis' definition of an organic transcendental film style in Chapter 2.

The concept of 'transcendence' can be used to describe transcendental aspects of: physical nature; phenomenal nature within consciousness; reason; and the idea of the universe or nature as a whole. Firstly, physical natural realms exist beyond or outside our perception but at the same time are accessible to physical exploration and scientific analysis. While we can map these realms through exploration, extend the limits of the visual field through technology (for example, the telescope), and probe and conceptually map the unseen laws of nature through reason, these realms still transcend unaided bodily visual perception. Secondly, philosophies of visual perception reveal that phenomenal perceptions reside within consciousness and therefore transcend the physical. Phenomenology also reveals that perception can be described as an ongoing mode of transcendence towards the world. Third, as discussed within the Kantian theory of the sublime, a further transcendental layer within the experience of the sublime are ideas within reason and imagination, which exists beyond 'the limitations of our finite phenomenal existence' (Crowther, 1989, pp. 99-100). In other words, perception transcends the physical world 'in itself' in distinction to the way reason transcends the phenomenally given.²⁰ Fourth, according to Kant and such Romantic thinkers as Schlegel, there is the idea (and possible, inaccessible, and corresponding reality) of the cosmos as a whole; the totality of nature within which all other smaller natural totalities exist. Romantic philosophers used the term *das Absolute* to define this totality, which, according to Stone's definition (2011), 'encompasses all things of the world and all the causal relations between those things' (p. 1). In discussing the early

²⁰ This paradox will be discussed in further detail within Chapter 2.

German Romantic philosophers' struggle to reconcile Kant's dualism of mind and nature through the concept of *das Absolute*, Dalia Nassar (2013) defends the contemporary relevance of their quest by describing it as a formidable and rigorous attempt to resolve metaphysical and epistemological problems that are still present today.²¹ Thus, the latter type of transcendence must by its definition encompass all the other forms, including human reason.²²

In the consideration of these definitions of transcendence, it is pertinent to describe the natural sublime's aesthetic encounter as a disclosure of the structure of seeing nature. Moreover, this structure that is an integrated nexus between transcendental aspects of the physical world, our limited visual/auditory systems, our perceptions in consciousness, and the workings of reason.²³ I propose the term 'organic transcendence' to encompass these paradoxical types of transcendence discussed within the discourse of the natural sublime using the terms 'nature's self-transcending tendencies' and 'organic transcendence' interchangeably.²⁴ Hence, the category of organic transcendence will describe, firstly, transcendental aspects of the natural world that are still open to empirical analysis; secondly, transcendental aspects of human's embodied biological visual systems; and, thirdly, transcendental aspects of brain-based spheres of embodied human experience. The terms 'brain-based' and 'embodied' position reason and phenomenal perceptions firmly in the realm of the biological workings of the brain.

However, according to Shaw (2006), post-modern ideas of the sublime, as found in

²¹ Roy Bhasker's (2012) philosophy of metaReality, which emerges out of his critical realism, can be described as an attempt to formulate a contemporary relevant version of the romantic absolute. Critical realism will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

²² In Chapter 2, I will further this discussion by presenting a renewed contemporary scientific and philosophical interest in the concept of an immanent transcendence in relation to the natural world and perception. There, I will argue that this renewal of interest positions the Romantic natural sublime as a relevant and potent concept for contemporary visual culture and film studies.

²³ The attempt to conceptualise the holistic nature of the experience with both these two considerations in mind becomes paradoxical. Therefore, philosophies of perception usually approach an inquiry from either an ontological perspective or an epistemological perspective.

²⁴ This definition will be further clarified and expanded upon in Chapter 2.

the theories of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, are sceptical of the concept of transcendence within the Romantic sublime. This scepticism is directed at an overemphasis on the transcendental aspects of reason and the Romantic Absolute and how this overemphasis downgrades the role of phenomenal perception. Roland Hepburn (1993), however, argues against any dichotomy between the transcendental aspects of reason and the immanent aspects of phenomenal perception, adding that a serious rather than trivial aesthetic perception is achieved when the subject has a balanced proportion of each. Hepburn points out, firstly, that an aesthetic approach to nature that would ‘downgrade phenomenal nature’ (p. 70) can be problematic. However, he also argues that a theoretical overemphasis on perception transcending thought components within an aesthetic appreciation of nature has led many aestheticians to focus solely on ‘the immediately given perceptually qualities, the sensuous surface’ (p. 72).²⁵ Ashley Woodward (2011) points out that, while being one of those aestheticians who does focus on sense experience, Lyotard’s later work presents the sublime as offering an iterative affirmation of both the elevation of reason and sense experience. Thus, Woodward goes on to argue that Lyotard’s later work presents the sublime as a possible

response to nihilism, which accepts its premises but demonstrates the possibility of a different conclusion: that the negation of the sensible by the intelligible and transcendental is not necessarily accompanied by a loss of the sensuous feeling of life, but rather may be attendant to its intensification. (p. 66)²⁶

²⁵ While Hepburn here is talking about an aesthetic appreciation of nature, many post-modern theories of the sublime focus on stimuli from within various cultural domains, such as art (for example, Lyotard, [1994]) and technology (for example, David E. Nye, [1996])

²⁶ Woodward (2011) defines two types of nihilism: religious nihilism and radical nihilism. In his words: ‘religious nihilism is to confer a negative judgement on life itself, finding it inadequate because of the existence of suffering. The religious nihilist compensates for the lack of value of this world by supposing that there is a better world elsewhere, in a transcendent realm we might attain in the afterlife. The “immanent world” of our earthly existence is then only supposed to have value as a bridge to the “transcendent world.” Moreover, aspects of life in this world – such as sensuous pleasure or strong emotion – are believed to prevent us from achieving the transcendent source of value, and so are shunned (Nietzsche calls this “the ascetic ideal”). Described in Platonic terms, religious nihilism makes a distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, elevating the intelligible and associating it with transcendence, while denigrating the sensible and restricting it to the immanent realm’ (2011, p. 52). Woodward describes radical nihilism as the ‘complete collapse of any and all’ worldviews that give meaning and value to human life (p. 52).

F.W.J von Schelling advises that the romantic sublime's struggle needs to move beyond the realms of philosophy and into the realms of poetry and art. According to Schelling, it is the task of romantic art and poetry to harmonise the seemingly 'disparate realms of idea and reality, mind and world' (Shaw, 2007, p. 92). In fact, as pointed out by Rosenblum (1961), one of the major historical, artistic expressions of the romantic natural sublime is landscape painting, as seen, for example, in the work of Casper David Friedrich. Friedrich's paintings sought to elicit his personal experiences of the transcendental aspects of nature by 'distilling natural phenomena to so primal a condition' (Rosenblum, 1961, p. 24).²⁷ Indeed, Friedrich's romantic landscape paintings express a personal aesthetic encounter with nature's self-transcending tendencies. For example, Rosenblum states that Friedrich's paintings make explicit 'a mood of intense communion with the most impalpable of nature's phenomena – light, colour, atmosphere' (p. 21). Because this thesis seeks to analyse the cinematic sublime, this chapter will now move on to demonstrate how the theoretical focus within the discourse of the sublime historically shifted from nature to painting to film.

²⁷ Friedrich's work seems to express that the world view of panentheism is the best possible explanation for the immanent transcendental aspects of nature. See Davies and Gregersen (2010, p. 329), for a contemporary analysis of the worldview of panentheism. Panentheism is in distinction to pantheism. The discourse of the sublime and the concept of transcendence have an extensive theological history which needs to be acknowledged. However, this thesis largely avoids theological terminology. The aim of this direction is not necessarily to deny a theistic interpretation of 'organic transcendence' but to offer contemporary, relevant philosophical ways of understanding nature's self-transcending tendencies and how they can be represented and experienced within cinema through an organic transcendental film style. I would argue that a certain form of panentheism (in distinction to many traditional forms of theism and pantheism) may provide the most coherent and philosophically rigorous explanation for the transcendental aspects of reality, perception and cinematic experience that this thesis has investigated. This version of panentheism draws upon Roy Bhasker's (2012) concept of metaReality, Arthur Peacocke's (2001) 'emergentist monism' and Phillip Clayton's (2006) 'emergent holism'. Other scholars may argue that either a purely materialistic, atheistic, pantheistic or a more traditional theistic worldview is the best possible explanation. On the other hand, agnostic scholars would argue that the discussion is pointless because we cannot know. However, such discussion does not fall within the scope of this thesis.

1.2 The trajectory of the cinematic sublime: From painting to film

As pointed out by Martin Lefebvre (2006), ‘one of the first wonders the cinema offered its viewers was that of images of the natural world in movement’ (p. xi). Furthermore, as the art form of cinema progressed filmmakers drew inspiration from the landscape paintings of the Romantic period. Friedrich’s paintings have influenced numerous depictions of nature in some films that differ dramatically in form and content. For example, both Walt Disney, when producing the animated forests in *Bambi* (1942), and Werner Herzog, when producing a sequence of sublime mountains and forests in *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979), were heavily influenced by Friedrich’s paintings.²⁸ However, within 20th century modernist art theory and practice, Romantic representations of nature were critiqued as outmoded, and the question of whether a second-hand account of nature could produce a pure sublime aesthetic response was debated. This critique is ongoing. Timothy Gilmore (2013), for example, states that ‘a landscape painting abstracts away from the lived depth of the infolded situation of being amongst the vitality of materiality’ (p. 136).²⁹ Although this critique of Romantic representations of nature and of representation itself will be addressed further in Chapter 2, this chapter will now briefly discuss the affinity that the modernist abstract movement had with romantic landscape painting. This discussion is done in order to identify how the 20th century’s discourse of the sublime shifted its theoretical focus from representations of natural objects to the formal qualities of painting and, in extension, film. While having similar motivations to Romanticism, the modernist abstract painting movement of the 20th century began to isolate itself from the wilderness aesthetic of the romantics by removing

²⁸ Both these films pictorially express sublime nature, but facilitate very different aesthetic appreciations of nature. While the romantic landscapes in *Bambi* express an idealistic view of nature as enchanted and magical, Herzog’s romantic landscapes, according to Gandy (1996), express ‘existentialist portrayals of nature as a hostile other’ (p. 1).

²⁹ For a dispute about whether Kant dismisses artistic sublimity, see Abaci (2008) and Clewis (2010).

representational content and expressing the sublime through form. Art critic Robert Rosenblum highlights these shared motivations in an article titled ‘The Abstract Sublime’. According to Rosenblum, both the romantic landscape painters and the modernist abstract painters shared the desire to place the subject on ‘the threshold of those shapeless infinities



Figure 4. *Monk by the Sea*, 1809, Caspar David Friedrich, oil on canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm, National Galerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

discussed by the aestheticians of the Sublime’ (1961, p. 39). In his article, Rosenblum compares Friedrich’s *Monk by the Sea* (1809) [fig 4] with Mark Rothko’s *Light Earth over Blue*, 1954 [fig 5]. However, as Rosenblum points out, *Light Earth over Blue* does not use representations of nature and the human figure like *Monk by the Sea*. Abstract fields of paint replaced the role of the representations of sky, water, and land. The viewer of Rothko’s paintings became the monk before the sea, ‘standing silently and contemplatively before these huge and soundless pictures’ (p. 39). In *Monk by the Sea*, the three separate natural phenomena, sky, water and land, ‘appear to emanate from one unseen source’ (p. 39), presenting the unseen and unpresentable totality of space. Likewise, Rosenblum describes Rothko’s abstract ‘horizontal tiers of veiled light’ and ‘infinite glowing voids’ (p. 39) as

concealing ‘a total, remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp’ (p. 39). According to Rosenblum, within Rothko’s paintings, the sublime experience is facilitated not by representing a sublime natural object but through the formal qualities of painting. The paint on the surface does not represent nature; it is nature in the present moment of viewing. The sublime space is not an illusion of perspective or a window into another world, but a surface of affectual paint on canvas that presently filled the subject’s visual field. This



Figure 5. *Light Earth over Blue*, 1954, Mark Rothko, Oil on canvas, 6' 3 "x 6". Collection Lady D'Avigdor Goldsmid, London.

abstract sublime, according to Rosenblum, blurs the problematic nature/culture divide and shifts the theoretical focus within the discourse of the sublime from representations of natural objects to the formal qualities of art.³⁰

Joseph G. Kickasola (2000) has noted that numerous famous abstract filmmakers,

³⁰ While the modernist art movement changed its focus, it still shared the general goal of Romantic landscape painting, which was to develop new aesthetic experiences that express nature’s self-transcending tendencies, albeit an art freed from representation and, according to American abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman (1984), free from the ‘impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend, and myth that have been the devices of Western European painting’ (p. 553).

many of whom were experienced painters, experimented with film in a similar way to the modernist abstract painters (p. 8).³¹ Furthermore, Kickasola notes that they not only experimented with ‘pure shape, line, colour and form’ (p. 8) but also with formal qualities especially suited to cinema, such as light, film stock, editing (both frame by frame and shot by shot), time, and space. These filmmakers have been defined by many as structuralist filmmakers in the way they focus on the artistic abilities of the structure of the film medium itself rather than its capacity to represent (Kickasola, 2000). Some experimental filmmakers, for example, American film artist Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) in some of his latter works, eliminated representation completely by not using a camera at all and painted and scratched abstract images onto the film stock frame by frame. Daniel Barnett (2008) describes this experimental film movement as a recognition of the movie screen as a material surface in contrast to the metaphor of the screen as a window into another world. Barnett argues that ‘the illusion of the window of cinema is so strong that we normally pass right through the medium to the message’ (p. 16). This illusion is much stronger in film than painting because of film’s ability to express motion as well as its indexical photographic qualities. Barnett argues that the qualities of the surface, for example, ‘abstract photographic values like brightness, contrast, colour saturation, colour balance and the general modulation of light across the frame’ (p. 16), are not foregrounded in traditional narrative film. Rather, Barnett continues, ‘[t]he landscapes of the narrative cinema, as Eisenstein and Bazin suggest, are latent expressionistic theaters, confronting or echoing the minds of the human figures within them’ (p. 125). However, even though Barnett seems to be interested in the differences between the surface and the window of cinema, he does acknowledge that they are ‘soul mates and occupy two lobes of a very powerful and moving dialectic’ (p. 17). The attempt by experimental filmmakers to reveal and foreground the formal structure of film in this way

³¹ Kickasola lists Walter Ruttmann, Viking Eggeling, and Ken Jacobs.

mirrors and has an affinity with, firstly, the disclosure of the structure and limits of visual perception discussed within the theory of the natural sublime. Secondly, it has the affinity with the modernist attempt to produce a sublime aesthetic through the surface of the painting and the affective qualities of the paint.

While the modernist abstract painting movement separated representation and form, it is plausible to argue that cinematic representations of sublime nature can work together with other formal cinematographic, editing and sound techniques to express an aesthetic of nature's self-transcending tendencies and, therefore, an aesthetic of the natural sublime. The



Figure 6. Still from the film *Dog Star Man*, 1961, Stan Brakhage.



Figure 7. Still from the film *Dog Star Man*, 1961, Stan Brakhage.

window of cinema (representations of nature) and the surface of cinema (film form) can both work together towards the same goal. For example, both representations and abstractions of nature were important elements of Brakhage's filmmaking practice [fig 6-7]. Interestingly, one particular sequence in *Dogstar Man* (1961) represents both a solar flare and a camera lens flare [fig 7]. Brakhage himself acknowledges this role of nature in his work. In his words: 'I'm paying homage to and re-presenting nature as one aspect of my work' (Brakhage, Johnson, and Shedden, 2001).

P. Adams Sitney (1993) states that 'the primary achievement of the avant-garde cinema in this area has been to force a contemplation of the natural world in different mediations by the cinematic apparatus' (p. 125). According to Sitney, Brakhage's fresh

encounters with sublime landscapes ‘brings to cinema a rich Romantic heritage, mediated by poetry and his long study of Frederick Church and other landscape painters’ (1993, p. 121). In *Dog Star Man*, Brakhage uses representations of natural phenomena, for example, forests, clouds, the moon, the sun, solar flares, light, ice, trees, branches, flowing water, fire, and misty mountains, albeit abstracted in varying degrees. However, he also uses a number of cinematographic techniques: shaky camerawork, over/under exposure, soft focus, natural filters, light leaks, lens flares, super imposition, image warp, time-lapse, distorted reflections and rapid editing techniques. In Sitney’s words: ‘He argued that cinema was the first and only art that could render the temporality of vision: the shift of focus, reactions to peripheral vision, superimposed memory scenes, and eye movements’ (1993, p. 120). These other cinematographic techniques emulate and foreground the structure and limits of perception discussed within the discourse of the natural sublime. By using film as both a window and a surface, Brakhage produced an aesthetic of both the romantic natural sublime and the modernist sublime together within one film.

In summary, this section has shown that the focus shifted within the discourse and practice of the sublime from representations of natural objects to the abstract formal qualities of art and specifically the film form. Film has the unique ability to encompass both abstraction and representation, and both the Romantic and the Modernist sublime, by functioning simultaneously as both a window and a surface.³² However, other theories have emerged in film studies that can also be described as extensions of the discourse of the sublime because they reflect the paradoxical struggle in theory and practice to express an immanent transcendence. Such theories use Mircea Eliade’s concept of hierophany to define a transcendental film style. These include Paul Schrader’s theory of a transcendental style in

³² Abaci (2010) argues that art can only represent the Kantian sublime experience if the artwork is removed from the broader context of nature as a whole. In this respect, a landscape painting hung in a white walled gallery is therefore hindered.

film, Richard Leonard's theory of the mystical gaze, Michael Bird's theory of film as hierophany, Joseph Kickasola's theory of the resonant image, and Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology of film experience.

1.3 Transcendental film style theories

Following Joseph Kickasola (2000), this thesis does not classify a transcendental film style as simply a group style. A group style according to Kickasola is 'the consistent set of techniques across the work of several filmmakers' (p. 327). More accurately, a transcendental film style is defined here as a film form that functions to express not a transcendental absolute but the self-transcending tendencies of the immanent, that is, a film style that works toward the expression of what may be referred to, despite the inherent paradox, as an 'immanent transcendence'. Whether narrative, non-narrative or experimental, films can use different stylistic techniques as well as different combinations of these to express the immanent biophysical world and their self-transcending tendencies.³³ In this context, Eliade's concept of hierophany is a crucial one. For this reason, it does not come as a surprise that it would end up used by film theorists, such as Schrader, Leonard, Bird, and Sobchack, who were interested in describing the immanent in transcendence as a way of arriving at a definition of a transcendental film style.

Richard Leonard (2009) calls Eliade's influential anthropological study of comparative religion, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957), a phenomenological enquiry 'into archaic forms of religious manifestations' (p. 46). Eliade starts his reflection considering Rudolf Otto's (1923) paradoxical attempt to rationally discuss sacred or religious experiences that are categorised as irrational or inexpressible. In order to contextualise the development of Eliade's concept of hierophany, this section firstly considers Otto's theory of

³³ Leonard (2009) also argues that expressions of the transcendent within film and culture are not limited to the style techniques discussed by Paul Schrader.

the numinous. In *The Idea of the Holy* (1923), Otto uses the term ‘the numinous’ to define the ‘Wholly Other,’ or that which is ‘beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible and the familiar’ (Otto, 1923, p. 26). For Otto, this experience can be compared to the ensnaring attraction, mystery, awe, and uncanniness of a ghost story. It can also be linked to the Burkean sublime because, as Burke notes, historically many religious ceremonies take place within the depths of the darkest forests ‘under the shade of the oldest and most spreading oaks’ (Burke, p. 59). Furthermore, in discussing the means of expression of the numinous, Otto states that there exists ‘a hidden kinship between the numinous and the sublime which is something more than just mere analogy’ (1923, p. 65). Additionally, he claims that “[i]n the arts nearly everywhere the most effective means of representing the numinous is the ‘sublime’” (p. 65). In particular, Otto notes the ability of the Burkean privations of darkness, silence and empty distances, namely, the void, to represent the numinous in art. He also describes the expression of the numinous in art as a purified and ennobled form of a magical aesthetic. For Otto, a magical aesthetic is one usually associated with magical practices, magical representations using ornamental and decorative art, symbols, ‘emblems, formularies and contrivances’ (1923, p. 69), for example, the art of Tibetan Buddhism [fig 8]. However, Otto also argues that there is an impression of ‘magic’ that transcends any specific practice, emblem or symbol (p. 69). Moreover, it is this magical aesthetic that he calls numinous. In this sense, according to Otto, art expresses beautiful magic through finality of form and expresses sublime magic through formlessness. For Otto, Chinese landscape painting and its use of empty space is the greatest expression of the numinous in art [fig 9]. Ian Grieg also discusses how Indigenous Australian art introduces a 'new sublimity into contemporary art' (p. 374).³⁴ Owen Ware (1995) in his reappraisal of Otto's

³⁴ Sublime Chinese and Japanese landscape painting (900 - present) is a testament to Matthew Gandy's (1996) observation that the sublime as an idea ‘transcends any particular historical tradition, and the experience of sublimity is known across all human cultures’ (p. 4). Founding exponent of Australian post-colonial theory,

‘Wholly other’ argues that the numinous as a form of otherness or alterity can avoid common criticisms when understood in non-theistic terms, such as Jean-Luc Marion’s (2002) notion of ‘saturated phenomena’. This concept stems from a phenomenological realism that, as Julien Guillemet (2011) describes, is part of a new wave in French phenomenology. Marion’s notion of saturated phenomena investigates phenomena ‘that do not manifest themselves in the mode of objects and yet still do manifest themselves’

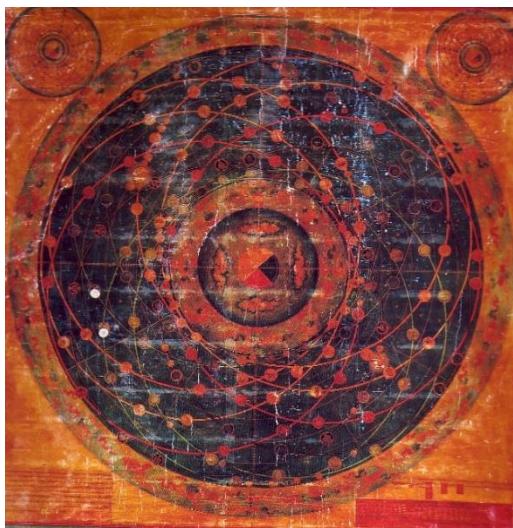


Figure 8. *Tibetan Astronomical Thangka*, painted 1684, (11th rab byung, year shing-byi).



Figure 9. *Dancing and Singing Peasants Returning from Work*, Ma Yuan, (1160 – 1225).

(Marion, 2008, p. 122).³⁵ Chapter 2 will address Marion concept of saturated phenomena and discuss how cinematic representations of natural phenomena and other components of a transcendental film style can themselves become saturated phenomena.

Eliade (1957), however, adopts a slightly different perspective to Otto’s by using the

Bill Ashcroft suggests that, even though their many cultural differences, the Aboriginal and the settler’s relation to place both have similar elements of the sublime. Carmel Byrne (2010) also suggests that there are philosophical similarities between the development of early western abstract painting, for example, Wassily Kandinsky, and the Australian desert painters, for example, Emily Kngwarreye. Ian Grieg (2002) compares the desire of Kngwarreye to represent, in her words, ‘the whole lot’ with the romantic desire to represent the totality of the natural world. However, Grieg suggests that Aboriginal art is not so much focused on the breakdown of representation, like western abstract art, but upon a visualisation of the limits of representation and that, therefore, it ‘constitutes an intersection of the transcendental and the empirical’ (p. 374). In other words, one could say that Aboriginal art would attempt to ground transcendence in the land.

³⁵ Julien Guillemet (2011) describes how this new phenomenology of Marion can ‘provide innovative grounds for a phenomenology of cinema’ (p. 111).

term ‘hierophany.’ Hierophany, for Eliade, describes the act of perception by which something sacred or numinous reveals itself to us. While this is still a mysterious ‘manifestation of something of a wholly different order’ (p. 11), the term hierophany implies that this manifestation happens within objects that are an integral part of our natural world, that is, of the ‘everyday raw material of existence’ (Bird, 1982, p. 3). While arguing for the reality of hierophany even in a non-religious world, Eliade also makes clear that no matter the degree to which the world has been desacralized, no human, however secular, is completely hardened to the charms, mystery and haunting terrors of nature.³⁶

It is essential, therefore, to now discuss how the concept of hierophany has been used as a basis for a number of transcendental film style theories. Beginning with Paul Schrader, the remainder of this section retraces the theoretical trajectory that runs through the discourse of the romantic natural sublime to transcendental film style theories, a trajectory that continuously oscillates between the concepts of immanence and transcendence. Paul Schrader (1979) was the first to use Eliade’s concept of hierophany to argue that narrative cinema can become a site for expressions of the immanent’s self-transcending tendencies. Schrader analyses the films of Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu and Carl Theodor Dreyer to argue that while these filmmakers come from very different cultures, they have developed a similar style that can be called transcendental. According to Schrader, through this style these film directors are not so much concerned with subject matter as with form; and, as a result, film elements, such as camera angle, sound, and editing, are used to express transcendence.³⁷ Thus, Schrader argues that while it may seem futile to attempt to inform

³⁶ According to Alistair McGrath, numinous and hierophanic human transcendental experiences (which aren’t necessarily associated with religion) continue to attract wide contemporary interest despite the secularisation of the western world (McGrath, 2008, p. 27).

³⁷ While Schrader (1979) defines the transcendent as that which is beyond normal sense experience, he acknowledges that there can be confusion over its different meanings. Furthermore, Schrader defines transcendence in terms of three perspectives: firstly, “as the Holy (The Hebrew word for holy is ‘qadosh’ and means that which is set apart), or what Otto calls the ‘Wholly Other’” (1979, p. 6). Secondly, as ‘transcendental objects or human acts that express the Transcendent (this is Eliade’s hierophany)’ (1979, p.

someone about transcendental phenomena through art, art has the potential to be expressive of transcendence, that is, art can become a hierophany. Through this expression the spectator can see and ‘describe the immanent and the manner in which it is transcended’ (p. 8). Ultimately, what Schrader identifies is that, regardless of narrative and subject matter, film style components can express transcendental aspects of reality and transcendental spheres of human experience.

Extending from Eliade and Schrader, Leonard (2009) draws on established theories of the gaze, for example Jean-Louis Baudry (1992), Jacques Lacan (1986), Julia Ching (1983), Christian Metz (1974), Laura Mulvey (1975) and Richard Allen (1993) to define a ‘mystical gaze’. Using this term, Leonard’s seeks to articulate a new understanding of “what film critics and writers mean when they use terms like ‘mystical’, ‘metaphysical’, ‘magical’, ‘meditative’, ‘spiritual’, ‘mysterious’, ‘occult’, ‘religious’, ‘dreamlike’ and ‘supernatural’” (2009, p. 2) to describe films such as those of Peter Weir. Leonard argues that ‘one of the elements that can be operative in a spectator’s view, whether a film has a religious theme or not, is openness to an encounter with otherness’ (Leonard, 2019 p. 40). Leonard argues that in Peter Weir’s 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the spectator ‘is invited to identify with the gaze of the camera with the mystification of the Rock’ (2009, p. 162). Leonard notes that as nature in the movie becomes the silent other that the spectator has an opportunity to have an encounter with otherness. The other in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, according to Leonard, is ‘the omnivorous force of nature’ (p. 162).³⁸

Furthermore, Michael Bird (1982) argues that for film to be understood as a potential site of hierophany, it is essential to formulate a film theory flowing from cinematic realism

6). Schrader defines the third category as human religious experience and acknowledges that this third experience can “be explained by either a deep psychological need or neurosis (Freud), or by an external, ‘Other’ force” (p. 6).

³⁸ The notion of ‘otherness’ will be of importance for in Chapter 3’s analysis of Werner Herzog’s cinematic wilderness aesthetics.

because of film's ontogenetic relationship with reality. Filmmakers who are aware of this relationship and are 'sensitive to the paradoxical character of reality [...] can heighten our perception of things pointing beyond themselves' (1982, p. 16). Bird then compares a 'belief-ful realism' or spiritual realism with a phenomenological 'sensuous realism' as well as with Andre Bazin's and Amedee Ayfre's theories of cinematic realism (Bird, 1982, pp. 13-21). Indeed, Bird compares Paul Tillich's notion of 'belief-ful realism' and philosopher Mikel Dufrenne's theory of 'sensuous realism' as they both search for a transcendental dimension of nature/reality through a realist analysis and, by doing so, oppose idealism and supernaturalism (Bird, 1982, p. 9). Both idealism and supernaturalism 'lead away from everyday real' (Bird, 1982, p. 9). Bird also emphasises that Tillich's 'belief-ful realism' distinguishes itself from both "a 'technological realism,' that recognises only the immediately visible world", and "a 'mystical realism,' that eliminates the material world as an obstacle to the ascending mind" (Bird, 1982, p. 6). Bird proposes this fusion of phenomenological, cinematic, and spiritual realism to develop a new understanding of how the theory of film as hierophany can be worked out through cinema's formal qualities. For Bird, film style can direct the viewer to see reality with an 'eye of self-transcending realism' (1982, p. 6).

Additionally, in his discussion of Polish filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski, Kickasola (2004) contends that a transcendental film style aims to express and provoke 'metaphysical considerations' within the audience.³⁹ Kickasola argues that the power of Kieslowski's cinematic images is the result of their capacity to rupture the 'everyday tempo-material attitude in favour of an expanded metaphysical view' (Kickasola, 2004, p.

³⁹ This thesis maintains that 'expanded metaphysical views' do not need to be disconnected from either the biophysicality of the human embodied brain or the biophysicality of the natural world. This paradox will be addressed in Chapter 2. However, Kickasola (2004) mainly uses the term 'metaphysical' in a traditional sense to describe the supra-temporal and the non-material.

45). Kickasola argues that the power of abstraction within a transcendental film style, as a visual cinematic strategy, lies in its capacity to draw upon the immediate qualities of the image “to counteract ‘the everyday’ denotations and connotations” that are attached to representation (Kickasola, 2000, p. v). Abstracted cinematic images ‘lend themselves to the enactment of a process, much like Husserl’s phenomenological epoché’ (Kickasola, 2004, p. 60). Kickasola argues that film can produce abstract images that ‘emulate and synchronise with human perception’ (2004, p. 60). However, Kickasola argues that the abstract image ‘should not be limited to non-representational images, but any image that emphasises form to a greater degree than representation, through strategies of manipulation of time, space, motion, or any constituent elements of the image’ (Kickasola, 2000, p. 2). Moreover, Kickasola argues that the cinematographic process (lens/film) is well suited to expressing transcendental aspects of perception because of its ontogenetic relationship with the human visual system (eye/brain). As the image is abstracted through cinematographic techniques, for example, depth of field (focus), lens flares, light spill, close up, time lapse, and under/over exposure it emulates and synchronises with human perception. However, Kickasola insists that a transcendental film style must interact with a metaphysical narrative context, within ‘which the abstract imagery can function as a conduit’ (2000, p. 8). Kickasola’s analysis of abstraction as a component of a transcendental film style emphasises that abstract images can express transcendental and not just immanent concerns.

While Kickasola mentions briefly the connection between the discourse of the sublime and a transcendental style (2000, p. 117), Sobchack (2008) uses the term ‘the cinematic sublime’ to describe what can also be considered a transcendental film style. Although a more thorough discussion of Sobchack’s phenomenology of cinema is discussed in Chapter 2, her reference to the sublime in her article ‘Embodying

Transcendence: On the Literal, the Material, and the Cinematic sublime' (2008), is important to the current discussion of otherness. Sobchack applies a phenomenology of embodiment to an analysis of films with spiritual or religious subject matter and themes, demonstrating that numerous cinematic strategies can be used to express differing beliefs about the relation 'between immanence and transcendence, the material and the immaterial' (2008, p. 1). Moreover, she argues that such films as Robert Bresson's *The Diary of a Country Priest* 1951 and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* 1988 employ cinematic strategies that are 'meant not only to *represent* but to *present* and *solicit* transcendent or spiritual states of being from the viewer' (Sobchack, 2008, p. 195, emphasis in source). Sobchack uses the terms 'represent', 'present' and 'solicit' in this passage, to distinguish between: firstly, literal visible representations of transcendence in a supernatural sense, for example, a glowing vision of Mary in Henry King's *The Song of Bernadette* 1943; secondly, the presentation of immanent transcendence (hierophany) described by transcendental film style theories; and, thirdly, states of being solicited from the spectator within the cinematic experience. Sobchack's use of the verb 'solicit' is effective as it implies not linguistic persuasion or cinematic manipulation but a sensuous enticement. Sobchack argues that the immanent transcendence revealed through phenomenology (particularly Merleau-Ponty's) can be used to describe cinematic experience itself. Sobchack's phenomenology of embodiment allows for an analysis that acknowledges the interconnected perceptual, sensuous and cognitive aspects of the cinematic experience, where the embodied subject and the cinematic object share in a flowing and dynamic 'field of meaning, affect and experience' (2008, p. 196). This field has both transcendental and immanent qualities.⁴⁰ While Sobchack notes that all cinematic

⁴⁰ Sobchack's (2004) uses Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) *The Searchers* (1956) as an example of how cinematic experience involves both immanent embodied carnal existence and transcendental conscious thought.

experience relies on this ‘embodied and dynamic phenomenological structure’ (2008, p. 198), film style can foreground this oscillating structure and, therefore, move beyond literal representation, while encouraging an awareness of the viewer’s own embodied transcendence.

Sobchack’s notion of embodied transcendence, firstly, describes the imaginative, intellectual and phenomenal relocation of the cinematic subject “‘beyond’ the presentness of our flesh” (2008, p. 197) as they immerse themselves in the on-screen world. Secondly, it describes that this transcendental cinematic experience is grounded in the body’s sense perception of the cinematic object. Sobchack uses the word transcendence in this article mainly to describe the field of phenomenal perception within consciousness as they work with reason to constitute meaning and uses the word immanence to describe how this transcendent field intimately connects to and is reliant on the body and all its interwoven senses. However, while Sobchack uses the term transcendence to discuss the subjective spectator’s experience, she also uses transcendence to identify something that emerges from the material onscreen forms. The visceral qualities of the film’s representational content “act as an *opening* to the invisible, the unheard, the transcendent, the ‘more’ of all existence usually foreclosed by the egological and anthropocentric” (2008, p. 201). Likewise, when discussing Krzysztof Kieslowski’s films, Sobchack argues that transcendence in the form of ‘otherness’ can break into the cinematic experience. Using Norman Bryson’s and Keiji Nishitani’s terminology, Sobchack discusses that the ‘dark and opaque’ ‘otherness’, that is, the ‘universal surround’ that ‘envelops sight on all sides,’ can enter the cinematic visual field (2004, p. 106). Sobchack’s use of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of immanence and transcendence clearly links her phenomenology of cinema to concepts of the sublime, yet curiously her 2008 article only refers to the sublime in the title.⁴¹

⁴¹ The discourse of the sublime is also curiously absent from Sobchack’s other works apart from sporadic use of the term.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a theoretical trajectory runs from the discourse of the romantic natural sublime through to transcendental film style theories, a trajectory that oscillates between the concepts of immanence and transcendence. A natural sublime aesthetic encounter is a disclosure of the structure of seeing nature, a structure that is an integrated nexus between transcendental aspects of the physical world, our limited visual/auditory systems, our perceptions in consciousness and the workings of reason. This chapter proposes the terms ‘organic transcendence’ and ‘nature’s self-transcending tendencies’ to encompass these immanent and transcendental aspects of the sublime. Through an analysis of experimental film and transcendental film style theories, this chapter has argued that, by utilising both representation and abstraction, film style can express an organic transcendence.

The term ‘organic transcendental film style’ will be used in the proceeding chapters to describe a specific transcendental film style that predominately uses representations of nature in a series of films’ mise-en-scene in conjunction with cinematographic, editing and sound elements. An organic transcendental film style would function not only to represent and present nature’s self-transcending tendencies but also to solicit brain and body based transcendental spheres of experience from the viewer. In summary, an organic transcendental film style works toward representing, presenting and soliciting organic transcendence.

Chapter 2

The cinematic sublime and an organic transcendental film style

Introduction

Defining an organic transcendental film style that not only represents and presents nature's self-transcending tendencies but also solicits transcendental spheres of human experience can be problematic. Firstly, ideas concerning 'nature' and 'transcendence' can have a variety of differing, ambiguous meanings. Secondly, theories about cinematic experience and the relationship between cinematic representation and reality are equally complex and often paradoxical. How are we to navigate this dense system of theories and meaning? This chapter will begin this inquiry by articulating a methodology of film analysis apt to the task of identifying an organic transcendental film style by considering affinities among a series of relevant phenomenological, critical realist, and cognitive concepts. The chapter will argue that it is the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience that informs how an organic transcendental film style can both represent and present nature's self-transcending tendencies as well as solicit transcendental spheres of human experience. As discussed in Chapter 1, the use of the terms 'represent', 'present' and 'solicit' in this exegesis follows Vivian Sobchack's (2008) distinction in her analysis of transcendental film style in films with religious subject matter. For Sobchack, representation refers to literal, visible representations of religious experience; presentation refers to immanent transcendence (hierophanies) described by transcendental film style theories, and solicitation refers to the provocation of states of being from the spectator within the cinematic experience. Sobchack's use of the verb 'solicit' is effective as it implies not linguistic persuasion or cinematic manipulation but a sensuous enticement. In this chapter, I will use these terms in Sobchack's sense to describe how film style can

represent the natural sublime experience, for example, through organic mise-en-scene and the *ruckenfigur* technique and present nature's self-transcending tendencies within the cinematic experience, for example, by producing a heightened experience of time and space.⁴² I will use the term solicit to describe the potential of these cinematic representations and presentations to provoke an awareness of transcendental spheres of human experience.

The first section of this chapter critically analyses Joseph G. Kickasola's (2000, 2004) and Sobchack's (2004, 2008) respective phenomenological approaches to transcendental film style, as well as Jean-Luc Marion's (2002) concept of 'saturated phenomena. The section also engages with Julien Guillemet's (2010) application of Marion philosophical concepts to film analysis and Christina M. Gschwandtner (2014) suggestion that natural phenomenon could be approached as saturated. In conclusion, I propose that cinematic representations of nature can appear as saturated phenomenon. The second section discusses that the science of perception, critical realism, phenomenological realism and the concept of emergence can expand a contemporary understanding of the cinematic presentation, representation, and experience of nature's self-transcending tendencies. This discussion further clarifies the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience and representation contributing to the chapters aim which is to the articulation of a methodology of analysis of an organic transcendental film style. The final section of this chapter defines precisely an organic transcendental film style for the purpose of the film analysis.

⁴² In this sense, while Sobchack uses these terms in the analysis of films that have religious experience as the subject matter, I will mainly concentrate on films that have the natural sublime as the subject matter.

2.1 Phenomenology and transcendental film style: Joseph Kickasola, Vivian Sobchack, Jean-Luc Marion

This section critically analyses Joseph G. Kickasola's (2000, 2004) and Vivian Sobchack's (2004, 2008) respective phenomenological approaches to transcendental film style, as well as Jean-Luc Marion's (2002) concept of 'saturated phenomena'. Kickasola (2000) draws on a diversity of theories to develop a particular methodology for understanding cinema as a phenomenon and can be broadly summarised as a phenomenological and cognitive approach. In fact, Kickasola's applies the phenomenology of Husserl to his analysis of cinema, which he conceives as a phenomenon that is encountered by a negotiating and constructive mind' (2000, p. 4).⁴³ Furthermore, Kickasola articulates a close connection between Husserlian/philosophical phenomenology and George Romanos's analysis of the nature of immediacy in art. Kickasola defines immediacy as 'the capacity of an artwork to communicate directly, preceding linguistic categories and render expressive and emotionally powerful impact' (Kickasola, 2000, p. 21). Thus, Kickasola's adaptation/application of Husserl's phenomenology to film analysis draws upon the notion of immediacy to understand the workings of cinematic experience and, in particular, a transcendental film style.

While acknowledging the accepted distinction between phenomenology and structuralism as seemingly antithetical cinematic epistemologies, Kickasola argues that these positions need not be mutually exclusive (2000, pp. 52-53).⁴⁴ In line with Dudley Andrew (1978), Kickasola argues that two cinematic stages or zones should be focused on for analysing a transcendental film style. Firstly, a pre-formulation stage can be identified where the immediacy of a cinematic image, according to Andrew, 'yields a deep impact

⁴³ Kickasola avoids common criticisms directed at Husserl's idealistic 'transcendental phenomenology' by tempering his own definition with Meleau-Ponty's and Mikel Dufrenne's phenomenologies.

⁴⁴ Kickasola's methodology, therefore, proposes a post-phenomenological and post-structuralist approach to the study of the cinematic experience.

before any significant symbolic processing takes place' (Andrew, 1978, p. 53). Secondly, there is a post-formulation or hermeneutic zone of the cinematic experience that, as Andrew argues, is a stage where the 'psyche must come to terms with the surplus value unaccounted for by recourse to a science of signification' (Kickasola, 2000, p. 628).

Kickasola also relies on Carl Plantinga's (1994) heuristic model, which locates immediacy within visceral experience. For Plantinga, visceral experience, as an experience of the sensuous qualities of the cinematic sights and sounds, is just one of a number of overlapping sources of spectator pleasure. A cognitive approach is then utilised by Kickasola to account for how the visceral experience is processed by the viewer of cinema and to acknowledge that the pre-formulation zone should not be isolated from the post-formulation zone where the viewer constructs meaning beyond the text (2000, p. 53).

Kickasola's cognitive approach also acknowledges the relationship between these zones as iterative and organic rather than linear or static. He argues that while the visceral and immediate stage of a cinematic experience can resist linguistic understanding and semiotic interpretation, it can still be posited as visual thinking. This visual thinking, Kickasola goes on, when placed in the context of a metaphysical narrative, can express transcendence in relation to the immanent (2000, p. 56).⁴⁵ The analysis of films in Chapter's 3 and 4 follow Kickasola's holistic approach. His methodology is particularly useful when trying to overcome the presence of, in the words of Guillemet (2011), the 'complex and contradictory delimitations of phenomenology in cinema,' which stems 'from the problematic relations of phenomenology and semiology' (p. 94).

While in *The Address of the Eye* (1992), Sobchack also acknowledges that cinema as

⁴⁵ Kickasola defines metaphysical narrative as themes which deal with transcendental spheres of human experience, such as death, love, dreams and spirituality. His use of the term metaphysical differs from Ronald Hepburn's (1996) use of the term 'metaphysical imagination'. Hepburn uses the latter in a philosophical (ontological and epistemological) sense. Presently, Kickasola has questioned his own use of the term 'visual thinking' to describe the process.

a phenomenon is encountered by a negotiating and constructive mind, she primarily focuses on cinema as a phenomenon that is encountered by a mind that is embodied. Sobchack's notion of embodied knowledge links Kickasola's visual thinking to the other senses to identify a bodily thinking that resists linguistic understanding and signification. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Sobchack utilises a phenomenological theory of embodiment to articulate how cinema can represent, present and solicit transcendental spheres of human experience. According to Sobchack, cinematic experience vacillates between a transcendental mind engaging with a transcendental fictional world on screen and an immanent sensuous body engaging and responding to haptic and visceral sights and sounds, which are immanently present within the cinema (2008, p. 197). The film analysis chapters of this exegesis will particularly draw upon Sobchack's phenomenology of embodiment as influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, particularly his notion of 'flesh', which involves real senses engaging with real sights and sounds.

Marion's (2002) concept of 'saturated phenomena' was briefly addressed in Chapter 1 as a contemporary, relevant concept with which to understand the notion of otherness and hierophany found within the work of Otto and Eliade. Therefore, transcendental film style theories can function to articulate new understandings of how cinema can become a 'saturated phenomena'. Guillemet (2010) argues that Marion's concept of 'saturated phenomena', when applied to cinema, can 'provide innovative grounds for a phenomenology of cinema' (p. 111). With this notion of saturated phenomena, Marion seeks to investigate phenomena 'that do not manifest themselves in the mode of objects and yet still do manifest themselves' (Marion, 2008, p. 122). According to Marion, saturated phenomena are phenomena saturated with content and meaning that exceed any

predefined concept we could assign them.⁴⁶ Marion distinguishes ‘saturated phenomena’ from poor phenomena. Poor phenomena are experienced when empirical sensory information is constituted by existing understandings of the object and the world within consciousness. Saturated phenomena, on the other hand, overwhelm with their excess and resist our usual categories of experience and therefore resist being comprehended as a reductive object. The phenomena become so saturated with content and meaning that it surpasses any pre-existing concept of understanding. As stated by Christina M. Gschwandtner (2014), Marion posits five ways in which saturated phenomena can overwhelm consciousness; these are excess quantity, quality, relation, modality and ‘paradox of paradoxa,’ which combines all of them together (Gschwandtner, 2014, p. 84). Gschwandtner succinctly summarises the first three phenomenal categories that are of the highest importance for a phenomenology of film. In Gschwandtner’s words:

First, phenomena can saturate our sense of quantity by giving too much information, by overwhelming us with data, by providing an event of such richness and complexity that it cannot possibly be contained. [...] Second, phenomena can bedazzle us with quality and blind us in their overwhelming visibility. [...] Third, phenomena can be overwhelming in *relation* inasmuch as they can appear as so immediate that no relation or analogy can be established with them. (2014, p. 84)

Saturated phenomena impose themselves upon the subject rather than the subject imposing their vision onto the phenomena. Marion does admit to an element of interpretation, but Gschwandtner points out that this interpretation is ‘a hermeneutic that comes after the event, an interpretation of what has already taken place’ (Gschwandtner, 2014, p. 86).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Regina Schwartz (2004) discusses how an immanent transcendence can be found in this notion of “givenness, where the transcendent breaks in upon us through ‘saturated phenomena’” (p. 1).

⁴⁷ Gschwandtner’s acknowledgement of both sensory and thought components is similar to Hepburn’s (1996) concept of the metaphysical imagination, through which he argues that the reflective metaphysical thought components about nature as a whole can potentially emerge after the sensory experience of the landscape. The order of sensory and thought components is very important: as saturated phenomena appear to the viewer, the sensory excess, while resisting reductive categories, can end up soliciting the metaphysical imagination.

While this interpretation can attempt to contain meaning, it does not exhaust it.

While Marion (2008) holds that all phenomena are saturated phenomena, he gives examples of phenomena that appear more saturated than others, such as works of art (especially painting), erotic phenomena, religious icons and major historical events. In addition to Marion's examples, Gschwandtner further argues that elements of nature can also appear to us as saturated phenomena. Gschwandtner suggests that approaching nature as a saturated phenomenon opens up 'Marion's account to an important dimension lacking in his phenomenological analysis' (Gschwandtner, 2014, p. 101). Although, Gschwandtner posits that while sometimes nature can appear as saturated 'at other times we require hermeneutic preparation [...] in order to experience phenomena as saturated' (2014, p. 94). Can film style offer the hermeneutic preparation needed for cinematic representations of nature to become saturated? If it can, in an ironic double intensity, cinematic representations of saturated natural phenomena may themselves become saturated phenomena. If so, cinema could not just represent but also present nature's self-transcending tendencies.

It is important to note that Marion's phenomenology is radical as it focuses on an excess that is beyond the sensible given. Marion locates the essence of phenomenality 'in an appearing that exceeds and exhausts the realm of the visible through saturation' (Marion, 2008, p. 100). In this sense, he has been criticised for moving beyond the realms of phenomenology. For example, Guillemet presents Marion as "practising a 'blind' phenomenology by locating the essence of experience outside of the limits of the visible world" (2010, p. 100). However, he further argues that Marion's concept could address the phenomenological nature of cinematic forms that present 'over-visible qualities' (p. 100). According to Guillemet, this saturation does not rise from the spectator's imagination but from the cinematic form; 'the phenomena gives itself' and could therefore 'come closer to

a phenomenology of cinema removed of an excessive semiotic weight' (p. 100). Realism is present in Marion's phenomenology, and it is not just a realism of the senses but an epistemological realism. Because of this element of realism, and following Michael Bird's (1982) insistence that transcendental film style theories must be informed by some type of realist theory of cinematic representation, I will now briefly discuss the main tenet of cinematic realism.

In line with Allen Casebier's (1991) phenomenological realist theory of representation, it is important to distinguish a realist theory of cinematic representation from a stylistic realism of cinema. According to Casebier, a realist theory of cinematic representation is an epistemology of realism. Like Casebier, Kickasola (2000) also distinguishes an epistemological realism, arguing that the main tenet of cinematic realist theories, such as those of Roger Scuton, Andre Bazin, Jean Mitry and Stanley Cavell, is that cinematic images 'hold an epistemological category all their own' (Kickasola, 2000, p. 24). In other words, they are not to be considered 'solely in linguistic or semiotic terms' (Kickasola, 2000, p. 24).⁴⁸ Casebier's (1988, 1991) analysis of cinematic representation focuses on the neglected role of physical reality in post-modern film theory. Casebier's presents a realist theory of cinematic representation that, according to Kickasola, views 'spectatorship as a phenomenological encounter with a narrative world' (Kickasola, 2000, p. 32). Furthermore, Kickasola argues that Casebier's idea 'juxtaposes the traditional structuralist theory that the experience is created in the mind after the initial experience with light on the projected screen' (2000, p. 32).⁴⁹ For Casebier, constructivism alone

⁴⁸ The emphasis is in the source

⁴⁹ It should be noted that Casebier's (1998) theory of cinematic representation applies phenomenology differently to Kickasola. Kickasola (2000) argues that the power of abstraction as a cinematic strategy stems from its ability to 'counteract the everyday denotations and connotations' that are attached to representation and is therefore enacting a process similar to Husserl's phenomenological *epoché*. In this way, Kickasola's phenomenology of cinema has close parallels to the notion of saturated phenomena. Casebier, on the other hand, uses phenomenology to articulate a theory of representation, in particular, the importance of

cannot explain how meaning is attributed to cinematic representations of real world entities. While acknowledging the mediated and constructive nature of the spectator's cinematic experience, Casebier states that contemporary film theory (before 1993) ignores the importance of independently existing referents that consciousness can grasp within cinematic experience. In this sense, Casebier postulates that spectators discover as well as construct meaning. Furthermore, Casebier does not just stress the importance of recognising 'the independence of the object represented by the motion picture from the activities of the knowing mind' (1991, p. 157) but also argues for 'the existence of universals indwelling in the object represented' (p. 157). This latter assertion by Casebier is contestable and for many extremely problematic because of its idealistic tendencies. Whether universals exist in the cinematic object or not, the important point that Casebier makes is that spectatorship can be seen as a phenomenological encounter with a narrative world. The human capacity to know real objects in everyday life is very similar to the capacity to know objects represented on screen. One can know reality, albeit in a mediated and constructed way by both our perceptions of real objects and our perceptions of representations of real objects. This epistemological affinity exists because access to the real is always mediated (through our sensuous body), both in direct perception and in cinematic experience. Arguably, a critical realist approach, as I will discuss in section two of this chapter, can overcome the difficulties of a naïve cinematic realism by acknowledging both the epistemological and ontological components of cinematic representation.

Sobchack's phenomenology of cinema may be seen to move toward balancing the transcendental components of cinematic experience with the immanent by emphasising the

independently existing referents that consciousness is able to grasp. Kickasola argues for the ability of abstraction to counteract this ability to grasp independently existing referents.

role of the body. According to Sobchack (2008), cinematic experience is a real immanent engagement with what is on screen because our bodies have a real sensuous engagement with the audio and visual (p. 196). This emphasis on embodied viewing grounds the transcendental mind as it engages with transcendental worlds onscreen. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack questions any fundamental division between the physical and mental as well as the privileging of either side of this distinction. Sobchack's use of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology allows for an emergent field of meaning that arises from 'the synthesis of the experience's *subjective* and *objective* aspects' (Sobchack, 2004, p. 2).

Sobchack's realism seems to be a realism of the senses in that the spectator does not have a mediated experience but a direct embodied experience. The spectator can have a direct sensuous experience as well as a sensuous experience describable as if it were real through representation. It can be argued that while Sobchack brings the physical body back into theories of cinematic experience, Casebier restores physical reality back into theories of cinematic representation. Ian Aitken (2006) also identifies the role and importance of realist film theories 'to reconstitute the necessary [...] relationship that exists between representation, perceptual experience and external reality' and also 'to allow nature [...] back into the field of representation overly occupied with human matters' (p. 119).⁵⁰

So far, this chapter has discussed a number of established phenomenologies of cinema and realist theories of cinematic representation. Through this critical analysis, the chapter has begun to identify the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience. The next section discusses how the science of visual perception, critical realism, phenomenological realist inquiries into the lived experience of the natural world, and the concept of emergence can deepen an understanding of this

⁵⁰ It is important to note here that the intuitionist theorists Aitken discusses, that is, Andre Bazin, John Grierson, Siegfried Kracauer and Georg Lukacs, were 'opposed to rationalist, or empiricist approach to cinematic signification and spectatorship' (Aitken, 2006, p. 105).

relationship.⁵¹ This inquiry is achieved by offering contemporary, relevant ways of understanding nature's self-transcending tendencies and how they can be represented and experienced within cinema.

2.2 Organic transcendence: the science and philosophy of nature's self-transcending tendencies and cinematic experience

In Chapter 1 I argued that a common factor of sublime natural stimuli is their self-transcending tendencies, that is, the tendency of natural phenomena to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception. The first chapter also claimed that a natural sublime aesthetic encounter is a primordial disclosure of the structure of perceiving nature, a structure that is an integrated nexus between transcendental phenomenal perceptions in consciousness, transcendental aspects of the physical world, our limited sensory systems and transcendental aspects of reason. Throughout this exegesis so far, the terms 'organic transcendence' and 'nature's self-transcending tendencies' have been used to encompass all these varying yet interconnected modes of transcendence and immanence.⁵² However, further clarification of an organic transcendence and its relation to cinematic experience is needed. In fact, as discussed earlier, the historical discourse of the sublime can be seen as grappling with the difficult dichotomies of subjectivity/objectivity and immanence/transcendence that arise when trying to account for aesthetic encounters of the

⁵¹ The concepts are all situated in separate theoretical domains. While this chapter is investigating their complex interrelationships, the next section will briefly discuss each theory from within their own disciplines. The complexity of each of these theories warrants this separation. The critical inquiry of each theory will be followed by an examination of how the theory can further contribute to identify and clarify the relationship between the immanent and transcendent aspects of cinematic experience and representation.

⁵² Paul Crowther (1987) describes this aspect of the sublime experience in the following terms: 'We experience ourselves as simultaneously immanent and transcendent in terms of spatio-temporal flux. We sense ourselves to be, as it were, *of* it, *in* it and *astride* it. It is this primordial structure of spatio-temporal immanence and transcendence which is shaped but concealed by the everyday world of our practical and theoretical projects' (p. 172).

lived experience of both nature and artistic representation.⁵³

Firstly, the science of visual optics reveals the structure and limits of human perception.⁵⁴ Within our daily interaction with nature, we often take for granted the act of seeing. For most the time, seeing remains an unconscious act, and natural objects appear concrete and immediate. Yet visual perception is multi-layered in complex ways. Consider the example of perceiving a green leaf. The light from the sun hits a leaf and interacts with the chlorophyll molecules in the leaf. The geometry of the chlorophyll molecule allows it to act as an antenna. This antenna absorbs all the spectrum of colours within the light other than green to gain energy to produce food. It then reflects only the green component back into the environment. This physical event happens even without an eye to see it. When an eye opens towards the direction of the leaf some of this green light enters the eye, flows through the lens and an image is produced on the back of the retina. Visual optics deals with the objective qualities of this process. What enters our eyes, therefore, is not an object or a representation of the object but light after it interacts with an object. Therefore, from a scientific perspective, the physical object in itself transcends what is seen. Alternatively, in other words, we never see physical matter or physical objects at all. All we see is light.⁵⁵ Cinema is effective at representing and emulating this aspect of perception, for example, through light blooms, light leaks, lens flares and depth of field. These artefacts of the film camera can emulate and synchronise with the visual perceptual process and its physical limits. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Stan Brakhage experimented with these and other

⁵³ Within the discourse of the post-modern sublime, the Burkean approach of empirical analysis has been largely abandoned in favour of the more subjective elements of the sublime.

⁵⁴ I have isolated visual perception for the sake of analytic simplicity but, obviously, the other senses also have phenomenal properties.

⁵⁵ We see light and its interaction with matter as it reflects off or flows through the physical world. While I use visual perception as an example this principle can also be applied to the other senses. For example, Sobchack's notion of cinematic synaesthesia and the cineasthetic subject acknowledges all the bodily senses.

cinematographic techniques with the goal of foregrounding the structure and limits of perception. These effects are also used, and overused, purely for visual spectacle or to heighten photorealism in contemporary narrative cinema.⁵⁶

According to Wade and Swanston (2013), the next stage within visual perception is where the empirical study of visual optics stops because objectivity starts to break down and subjectivity comes into play.⁵⁷ This next stage is also where the direct physical action of the light from the sun stops. This phase of the perceptual process is investigated by the discipline of visual neurophysiology, which examines the modification of this light into electrical nerve impulses as they are sent through pathways to the brain to be analysed (Wade and Swanston, 2013). Philosophy and psychology are then needed to analyse the next stage as the phenomenal green leaf emerges within consciousness itself. According to McGrath (2008), this component of visual perception is where looking becomes seeing as the incoming sensory information is linked to ‘existing understandings of the world, an understanding that has been shaped by the agenda of the viewer, situated as he or she is at a particular vantage point’ (p. 115).

William Fish (2010) discusses how a philosophical perspective of visual perception takes into account two considerations that are not a primary concern for scientific investigation of visual perception. According to Fish, a philosophical perspective is better equipped, firstly, for explaining perceptual experience as a conscious experience, that is, the experience ultimately resides in the structure and workings of consciousness itself and secondly, for helping to understand that perception is, in Fish’s words, ‘*the primary source of our knowledge of the world in which we live*’ (p. 2).⁵⁸ Fish’s two considerations reveal

⁵⁶ However, I propose that as these effects function in this way they are subservient to demands contrary to provoking ontological and epistemological (metaphysical) insights.

⁵⁷ Scientific knowledge of visual optics exceeds that of visual perception within consciousness because of its objective nature.

⁵⁸ Emphasis is in the source.

transcendental aspects of the physical world and the transcendental aspects of phenomena within consciousness. Physical nature transcends phenomenal nature because of its ontological status beyond the phenomenal. However, also, phenomenal nature transcends physical nature because it resides within and relies upon the workings of consciousness. One function of an organic transcendental film style is to bring an awareness of these transcendental aspects of nature and perception.⁵⁹ Fish acknowledges the difficulty of developing a philosophical theory that encompasses both these ontological and epistemological aspects of perception at the same time. The attempt to conceptualise the holistic nature of experience with both these two considerations in mind becomes paradoxical.⁶⁰ Critical realism is a philosophy of perception and a philosophy of nature that attempts to overcome these ontological and epistemological difficulties outlined by Fish. The application of critical realism in this exegesis' film analysis contributes, firstly, to clarify ways of understanding nature's and perception's complex self-transcending tendencies. Secondly, it will inform the articulation of what can be termed as a critical realist theory of cinematic representation.

Roy Bhaskar's (1979) critical realism, as a philosophy of nature and perception, recognises a stratification of reality and therefore articulating an ontology of depth (p. 47). In this theory, Bhaskar argues that reality can be understood as comprising of a multi-tiered transcendental stratum. Furthermore, these deeper levels exist 'apart from our knowledge of that strata' (Bhaskar, 1979, p. 14). Bhaskar's critical realism opposes a post-modernist anti-realism by outlining an alternative form of transcendental realism. According to McGrath (2003), Bhaskar's critical realism acknowledges both the limits of a naïve realism

⁵⁹ As it will be discussed later, Merleau-Ponty's (1964, 1968) phenomenology questions any division between the physical and mental as well as the privileging of either side of this division. Perception for Merleau-Ponty is irreducible to either consciousness or objective reality but emerges as 'the flesh'.

⁶⁰ Nature cannot be contained, categorised or assigned as an object, the idea of nature exceeds our ability to grasp cognitively.

and the presence of social construction in our perceptions and representations of nature and reality as a whole. While acknowledging social construction, Bhaskar insists that ontology determines epistemology, that is, what exists determines what we know. Bhaskar's critical realism allows for the ontology of deeper levels or strata of reality that do not depend on our observation for their existence. For Bhaskar these concealed dimensions exist beyond, behind or beneath the world as it is experienced by limited human perception. These deeper strata of reality have been progressively mapped within the physical and social sciences. Thus, critical realism affirms both the elusive nature and the ontological status of elements within the natural world that exist beyond our sensory limits. The physical properties of the natural world that determine our perceptions will always transcend the perceptually given. The physical natural world will also always escape our isolated, reduced scientific and artistic representations. However, while critical realism acknowledges social construction, it also affirms that our perceptions are not illusory but sustained, grounded and interpenetrated by deeper transcendental strata.⁶¹ Critical realism also affirms that we can have a deeper engagement with this elusive reality through our accumulated perceptions and representations. McGrath (2008) proposes that 'Bhaskar's critical realism opened up important questions concerning the nature of reality, and the manner in which human reflective agents can represent and interpret what is observed' (p. 51). In addition, McGrath (2008) argues that Bhaskar's critical realism, in opposition to the removal, denial, and marginalisation of the concept of transcendence and the subsequent dis-enchantment of nature, affirms 'that reality *is* enchanted' (McGrath, 2008, p. 52), even

⁶¹ In discussing the aesthetics of the sublime in contemporary physics and the 'deepening crisis of representation in contemporary thought that has been emerging in philosophy, the arts, and the sciences since the mid-nineteenth century', Ian Greig (2002) points out that quantum physics has revealed that these deeper levels of reality (in a physical sense) are not determinate stable structures but are a world of flux and indeterminacy (p. 7).

in the presence of scientific explanation and geographical discovery.⁶² In this respect, I would like to argue that the primordial disclosure discussed within the discourse of the sublime is an awareness of this enchantment: a discernment of nature's self-transcending tendencies. Therefore, Bhaskar's critical realism, as a theory of transcendental realism, can bring clarification and relevancy to the paradoxical term 'nature's self-transcending tendencies' by providing contemporary relevant ways of understanding the concept of transcendence in relation to the natural world by avoiding a naïve realism, idealism, supernaturalism or strict subjectivism and constructivism.

Critical realism informs the methodology of film analysis in this exegesis in several ways. Firstly, critical realism provides a theoretical framework for discussing how organic mise-en-scene elements can represent nature's self-transcending tendencies; how cinematic representations of nature can produce an aesthetic that expresses an ontology of depth. I use the term ontology of depth to describe the transcendental realist aspects of critical realism. Secondly, critical realism can also inform a realist theory of cinematic representation. From a critical realist perspective, cinematic representation as a cinematic object while not ontologically equivalent to the objects it represents, shares an epistemological role within our direct perceptions in providing a deeper engagement with the elusive reality that escapes but determines them both.⁶³ This elusive reality is arguably

⁶² In critical realist terms, within a lived aesthetic experience of nature, surface (phenomenal) layers of reality can become saturated with deeper, transcendent (yet empirical) layers. Therefore, one way in which the self-transcending tendencies of nature can be understood is: as the tendency of transcendent physical layers of nature to break through the phenomenal surface. However, within Marion's notion of saturated phenomena the phenomena can also be saturated with meaning that resists linguistic understanding and signification which prevents the phenomena from being objectified through any reduced scientific concepts. In fact, the first stage of the Kantian sublime occurs when finite phenomena are saturated with excess space that approaches infinity.

⁶³ Critical realism informs this version of realist theory of cinematic realism. The cinematic image has an epistemological affinity with our perceptions within consciousness because they both transcend the physical world. Critical realism affirms this description of the cinematic image by acknowledging social construction in both our perceptions and our representations but, on the other hand, acknowledging that a world that is independent from the human mind still determines them.

what Sobchack (2004) has in mind when she refers to ‘the enveloping transcendence of the world’, ‘the universal surround’ and ‘the expanded field’ of ‘radical impermanence,’ that is, ‘the otherness of the rest of the universe’ (p. 102).⁶⁴ Sobchack, drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological realism, analyses how Krystof Kieslowski’s cinema makes an optic cut from this expanded dynamic field.⁶⁵ In discussing Kieslowski’s use of the cinematic apparatus of framing, abstract and isolated close-ups as well as off-screen sounds to express an immanent transcendence, Sobchack quotes Bryson: ‘What can be seen is supported and interpenetrated by what is outside of sight [...] the other enveloping sight on all sides’ (Sobchack, 2004, p. 102). Sobchack is adamant that while these elements of film style express transcendence, it is an immanent transcendence, that is, the ‘enveloping transcendence’ of the physical world (p. 103).

The philosophy of emergence can also offer contemporary, relevant ways of discussing, understanding and identifying nature’s self-transcending tendencies and how they can be expressed in cinema. Emergence is a scientific and philosophical paradigm that is often presented as antithetical to scientific reductionism. However, according to Philip Clayton (2006) and Paul Davies, emergence theories acknowledge the value of reductionism but deny the possibility of the ‘once-popular project of complete explanatory reduction-- that is, explaining all phenomena in the natural world in terms of objects and laws of physics’ (p. 1). Emergence investigates the irreducibility of natural phenomena; while natural phenomena emerge as whole systems due to the relation of the parts, the

⁶⁴ Sobchack (2004) borrows these terms from Bryson’s ‘The Gaze in the Expanded Field’ (p. 102).

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) phenomenological realism is closely related to critical realism. Indeed, John Budd (2012) discusses the similarities between phenomenology and critical realism and presents a new framework which melds both phenomenology and critical realism. He argues that phenomenological critical realism (PCR) could be used as a methodology specifically within the discipline of library and information science to enhance understanding by urging the researcher/perceiver to examine and analyse both the lived experience of the thing as it exists (in a trans- human sense) as well as how it exists ‘within the nature, structure and working of consciousness itself’ (Budd, 2012, p. 80).

whole is more than its parts.⁶⁶ Emergence affirms that physical forms within the natural world can have self-transcending tendencies. For example, there are forms, patterns or entities in nature that transcend both matter, space and time; they are not fully possessed solely by matter, by space, or by time but are constituted or emerge within the space-time-matter relation.⁶⁷ An example of emergence is the fluid dynamics of a flowing stream of water (Davies, 2004). According to Davies, as gravity causes the water to flow through space over time, spatial patterns like vortices and twirls emerge spontaneously as the stream reaches a certain velocity (p. 72). The patterns are not solely a property of gravity, water, space or time but emerge in their relation. While the total physical system consists of gravity, water, space and time, the swirling forms transcend any isolated part. In this sense, fluid dynamics investigates an event where the unseen properties of time, space and gravity are seen through the forms that emerge from the flowing water. However, how could Davies's descriptions relate to cinematic representations of flowing water? While cinema does not literally present physical water molecules, time and space are present within cinema. Andrei Tarkovsky, in his book *Sculpting in Time* (1986), is adamant that cinema is an artform whose medium is time. By the same token, we can add that the flow of the representation on screen can literally present the unseen properties of time and space in a similar way that the actual flowing water can. Thus, the philosophy of emergence, as part of a new paradigm that views nature as a relation of dynamic emergent processes rather than a collection of objects in empty space, provides a contemporary, relevant

⁶⁶ Emergent theories usually assume a monist ontology. For example, biochemist Arthur Peacocke (2001) argues for a new view of the natural world not as a collection of separate physical objects but as a hierarchy of interlocking complex systems, where the whole of a system influences its parts through a flow of information (pattern-forming influence). In this worldview, the whole and its parts are intimately interlocked regarding their properties. Emergent properties within one total system emerge in the relation of other lower-level systems but these properties are irreducible to the lower-level phenomena. According to Davies and Gregerson (2010), this view of the world can be defined by the term 'emergentist monism'.

⁶⁷ Phillip Clayton (2006) argues for a notion of 'emergent holism'.

theoretical framework for understanding nature's self-transcending tendencies and how they can be expressed.⁶⁸ Indeed, cinematic depictions of natural phenomena that express emergent properties do not only represent but literally present nature's self-transcending tendencies. In this way, an organic transcendental film style can combine both representation and presentation.

Furthermore, the concept of emergence also has significance for understanding the workings of the cinematic experience as it is experienced by a negotiating and constructive mind. Sobchack (2004) commonly uses terminology derived from the philosophy of emergence in her theories of cinematic experience. For example, in discussing the meaning-making process within cinematic experience (through both sense and sense-making, embodied knowledge and conscious thought components), she states 'meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectators' bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction' (p. 67). Cinematic experience of nature is not the sole property of the artefactual cinematic object, the physical natural world, the body or a negotiating and constructive mind but emerges in their relation. Cinematic experience emerges in the relation between reality (matter, light, space and time), the camera, the projected cinematic sound-image and an embodied, negotiating and constructive mind. The last stage of this cinematic experience emerges in the relation between the bodily senses and the mind; between sensuous immanent engagement with the audio and visuals and transcendental reflective thought components. The meaning and significance is not a sole property of either the audio-visuals, the bodily senses or the mind but emerges in their relation.⁶⁹ Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology champions the

⁶⁸ David Morris (2007) also likens the emergent properties of physical form to the emergent properties of phenomena within consciousness.

⁶⁹ This division of stages is helpful when trying to articulate the nature of cinematic experience. The stages when experienced by the viewer are intertwined, emergent, iterative and holistic in nature.

emergent and irreducible properties of perception. Moreover, it is applications of his phenomenology to which I will now turn. In line with critical realism and the concept of emergence, applications of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology will provide a relevant and potent theoretical framework for understanding and defining nature's self-transcending tendencies and, in consequence, how they can be expressed in cinema.

Phenomenological realist accounts of the lived experience of nature reveal the self-transcending tendencies of both the physical natural world and the transcendental aspects of phenomenal nature within consciousness in a similar way to critical realism. Andre Maintenay (2011) establishes the notion of immanent transcendence, in relation to the natural world, by combining the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty with a transcendental realism.⁷⁰ Maintenay argues for what he terms a 'this-worldly transcendence' or 'immanent transcendence' by exploring 'a phenomenological account of the *lived experience* of nature, including an acknowledgement of the *otherness* of nature' (2011, p. 1).⁷¹ Maintenay, drawing upon theories of a transcendental realism, argues that 'there is a truly living world, beyond and transcendent of human interpretation and well-being, that must be respected in a genuine and concrete way' (2011, p. 287). In doing so, he avoids the inadequate extreme constructivist model that posits nature as a mere human construction that has no ontologically independent existence. Furthermore, Maintenay proposes that as we perceive nature, we disclose it as well as (or rather than) construct it.⁷²

⁷⁰ Maintenay considers the feasibility of the notion of 'immanent transcendence' within environmental philosophy. His main aim in this consideration is to 'develop stimulate and encourage new ways of interacting with our natural environment to halt a self-defeating cycle of apathy and destruction' (2011, p. 1). It is not the scope of this exegesis to discuss how these understandings can encourage environmentally responsible ways of interacting with nature. However, it could prove a fruitful area of inquiry.

⁷¹ Emphasis is in the source.

⁷² Through this phenomenological perspective, his notion of immanent transcendence also avoids, firstly, the limited Enlightenment naturalistic model which conceives nature as static, objective, mechanical, and able to be dissected, measured, broken down and controlled and, secondly, a dualistic model of nature that separates between pristine wilderness and human beings. While Merleau-Ponty emphasized the primacy of perception within epistemology, a critical, phenomenological realism assert both the primacy of ontology over epistemology and the primacy of perception within epistemology.

Cinema can share this role in disclosing nature. In a similar way, Simon James (2007) argues for a trans-human dimension of reality, namely, ‘that there is some aspect of reality that transcends the human’ (p. 514), as well as the trans-human nature of perception. He proposes that not only are the mountains, trees and ocean trans-human but that the event by which ‘these things disclose themselves as the things they are’ (p. 516) is also trans-human. David Abrams (1996) discusses that this aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology positions transcendence not as a property of the abstract intellect (in the Kantian sense) but as a property of perception. In Abrams’s words: ‘perception *is* this ongoing transcendence’ (1996, p. 84).⁷³ This notion of a trans-human perceptual event emerges from Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh and Heidegger’s notion of *physis*. This flesh is an intertwining of subject and world where ‘the world remains dependent on the subject even though the subject is also dependent on the world’ (Brook, 2005, p. 356). David Cooper (2005) explains that Heidegger’s conception of nature as *physis* (a pre-Socratic notion) is a “process of arising”, as a ‘self-blossoming emergence’ or ‘up surging presence’ for us of the natural world’ (p. 342).⁷⁴ Heidegger’s notion of *physis* and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the flesh are not the natural world in itself but an outcome of when human beings perceive nature. In other words, the presence of a human perceiver is needed for the blossoming of *physis* to occur.⁷⁵

Cinema can share an epistemological role in facilitating the blossoming of nature. This process of organic arising occurs, firstly, as the image emerges on the film stock or

⁷³ ‘For Merleau-Ponty, it is vital that the philosopher accept the opacity of the world and abandon any desires to eliminate it’ (Cobb, 2007).

⁷⁴ Here we see the philosophy of emergence used as a way of understanding the workings of human perception and the transcendental aspects of the flesh. The emphasis is in the source.

⁷⁵ Following this phenomenological realism, Morris (1997) argues that perception and the subject-object relation to the world arise within body-world movement (p. 571). He explores ‘the role of bodily movement in spatial perception’ (p. 569) and how this notion could challenge certain ‘presuppositions deeply embedded in the usual treatment of science and mind’ (p. 569). Morris further argues that the perceptual images of lived experience are not ‘ultimately explained by something already determined beyond, or in advance of, our interaction with the world that we perceptually access’ (p. 573). As we move through space over time the experience of perception is not fully possessed by the object or by the mind.

sensor within the camera; secondly, as the audio visual emerges on screen; and, thirdly, as the phenomenal properties of the projected light and sound emerge within the spectator's consciousness. Dylan Trigg (2012) applies Merleau Ponty's phenomenology, particularly his notion of the flesh, to cinematic representations of nature. He proposes that the 'flesh of the forest' can intertwine in a symbiotic relationship with the flesh of the cinema. Trigg's analysis will be of particular importance for the analysis of Werner Herzog's cinematic wilderness within Chapter 3.

In discussing a phenomenological realism, David Morris (2007) also challenges subjective/objective dualisms in our perceptions of nature. On the one hand, he acknowledges that '[i]t is not as if perception's task is to escape subjective appearance to get to the real, naked properties beyond, to an object itself devoid of its involvement in perceptual life' (Morris, 2007, p. 574). On the other hand, he also recognises that 'the realm of perceptions is not a subjective veil screening off the objective; it is a realm in which we can constitute the appearance of things as they are' (Morris, 2007, p. 574). However, this is not to say that our perceptions are not engaged with a world out there but that the world is not static or already determined but in dynamic flux, full of phenomenal possibilities. This expanded field of the natural world awaits both perceptual and cinematic cuts. This phenomenological realism can also challenge subjective/objective dualisms within film theory. In fact, cinematic experience is not purely constructed within the mind of the viewer with no involvement of objective biophysical reality. On the contrary, cinema is a realm where reality can blossom and flourish with its organic and emergent possibilities.

By discussing both the transcendental aspects of the physical natural world and transcendental aspects of perception, Maintenay's, James's and Morris's phenomenological realist notions of immanent transcendence provide a relevant theoretical framework for

understanding nature's self-transcending tendencies and how they can be expressed within cinema. Phenomenology not only emphasises the transcendental aspects and the primacy of perception but, as Regina Schwartz (2004) discusses, phenomenology has renewed interest in the notion of transcendence, whereby, for example, 'transcendence means the irreducibility of the other '(p. 1).⁷⁶ Cinematic representations of nature can be described as saturated phenomena that, as discussed earlier, refers to the transcendence of the expanded field, as it interpenetrates through the phenomenal.

In summary, this section has shown that the science of visual optics, the philosophies of critical realism, the concept of emergence and phenomenological inquiries into the lived experience of nature can provide a relevant and potent theoretical framework for understanding and defining nature's self-transcending tendencies and, in consequence, how they can be represented in cinema. I have discussed the biological structure and limits of human perception, a critical realist view of nature as stratified (as an ontology of depth), and the view of nature as a relation of dynamic emergent processes rather than empty space filled with a collection of solid objects. Additionally, I have analysed the interconnected trans-human aspects of both nature and perception. These philosophies, firstly, lend support to the claim that there are frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception that remain mysterious even in this current age of geographical and scientific discovery and explanation. Secondly, they also reveal cinema's epistemological role in providing a deeper engagement with these organic, stratified and dynamic biophysical processes. By informing an analysis about the nature and workings of cinematic representation and cinematic experience itself, this section has shown that cinema can express, that is, both

⁷⁶ A phenomenological critical realism could correct an overemphasis on the subjective elements of the post-modern concept of the sublime as well as on human capacities. As David Nye (1994) points out, from Kant to the present the natural world has been moved to the peripheries of definitions of the sublime as the 'observer became central in defining the emotion as the mind projects its interior state onto the world' (p. 8).

represent and present nature's self-transcending tendencies.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 discuss further how embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies within cinematic experience can solicit transcendental spheres of human experience, in particular, the metaphysical imagination and mental processes akin to dreaming in relation to Werner Herzog and Andre Tarkovsky's films. But before moving on to film analysis and to lay the theoretical groundwork for the application of dreams to film, the next section of this chapter begins the discussion of ways in which cinema can represent, emulate and solicit dreamlike states of mind.

2.3 The Phenomenology of dreams and cinema

To clarify the similarities and differences between dreaming consciousness, waking consciousness and transcendental states of mind within cinematic experience, this section briefly discusses the nature of dreaming from a phenomenological perspective, particularly in terms of a neurocognitive and critical realist approach. Yuval Nir and Giulio Tononi (2010) define dreams as 'vivid, sensorimotor hallucinatory experiences that follow a narrative structure' experienced by an individual who while asleep is highly conscious (p. 1). They argue that dreams have remarkable phenomenological similarities to waking consciousness because 'experiences in typical dreams have a clear sensory character (i.e. they are seen, heard and felt). Thus, from a critical realist and phenomenological perspective phenomena produced, firstly, through waking consciousness, secondly, through dreaming consciousness and, thirdly, within cinematic experience are similar in the way they emerge within consciousness, transcending the underlying generative mechanisms of the physical world. As mentioned earlier, critical realism affirms that the physical properties of the natural world that determine our perceptions will always transcend the phenomenally given. However, phenomena derived from waking consciousness differ from

those derived from dreams and cinema in the way that they are not hallucinatory or illusory but are presently sustained, grounded and interpenetrated by the underlying transcendental strata of reality, which is described by critical realism. In waking consciousness, the underlying generative mechanisms of reality presently ‘generate the phenomenal flux of the world’ (Hartwig, 2012, p. xiv). Thus, dreams and cinema share the quality of being disconnected from their ontological referents. Film, by emulating the phenomenal structure of dreaming can solicit an awareness of these transcendental aspects of reality, both the phenomenal flux of the world and the physical depths generating this flux. This awareness is not so much an imposed or solicited way of seeing that the individual beforehand did not possess but a primordial disclosure that all perception at all times is dreamlike in its mode of transcendence.

Furthermore, clarification is also needed to distinguish two ways in which cinema can represent, emulate and solicit dreamlike states of mind. All dreams do not share the same structure (Nir and Tononi, 2010). Firstly, a common form of dreaming is called ‘single track’ dreaming consciousness and, secondly, a rare form of dreaming is called lucid dreaming. Nir and Tononi describe common dream consciousness as ‘a single track’ and as ‘singlemindedness’ where there ‘is a strong tendency for a distinct narrative of thoughts and images to persist without disruption’ (2010, p. 89).⁷⁷ Film, like dreams, can emulate and produce this single-minded consciousness (albeit not as intense as dreams), as the spectator is swept away into the on-screen filmic world of images and sound through both embodied engagement and interpretative and imaginative thought. It could be argued that all films to a greater or lesser degree emulate dreams in this way. Another form of dreaming consciousness is lucid dreaming. This rare type of dreaming occurs when the individual becomes conscious that they are dreaming. The experience of lucid dreaming is

⁷⁷ The individual (typically) is not aware that she is dreaming and she does not question spatio-temporal discontinuity, sudden transformations and impossible events or objects within the dreams.

related to the Kantian sublime as the individual becomes aware of their ability to transcend the phenomenal dream world.⁷⁸ Within the cinematic experience, a similar awareness can also occur. I am not describing here the viewer's sudden awareness that they are watching a film but, as mentioned above, their awareness that all perceptions and representations (phenomenal perceptions, dream images and cinematic images) are 'dreamlike' in their mode of transcendence.⁷⁹ This awareness need not have conscious, rational or linguistic correlatives but is produced through the visceral qualities of film style. To bring the cinematic experience back down to earth, so to speak, the organic film style of, for example, Tarkovsky, as it will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4, solicit this awareness 'not in order to enter non-reality but in order to find reality more real than before' (Botz-Bornstien, 2001, p. 98). In other words, the organic quality of Tarkovsky's film style, for example, representations of nature, representations of characters physically and contemplatively embracing nature, long takes and slow motion functions to ground transcendence in the earth aesthetically. In a similar way, Bhaskar's philosophy of critical realism and metaReality grounds transcendence linguistically. In this regard, Mervyn Hartwig (2011) presents how Bhaskar's philosophy demonstrates that transcendence, while 'hidden and largely unnoticed' (p. xiii), is an integral part of reality everywhere and at all times. Furthermore, Hartwig describes the concept of transcendence as 'not as that which renders relative reality as illusory, but as its ultimate ingredient and sustaining ground' (p. xiii). This implies a pulsing ingredient that is not static but can be described as 'the deepest dynamically unfolding and differentiating processes (spatio-temporalizing structures) of nature' (Hartwig, 2011, p. xiii). In this way, critical realism articulates an ontology of

⁷⁸ But within lucid dreaming (in contrast to a natural sublime encounter) the individual is completely disconnected from the actual physical environment where their bodies are situated (because they are asleep). They are also disconnected from their bodies, that is, bodily movement in dreams does not have physical correlatives within the sleeping body because of sleep paralysis.

⁷⁹ Cinematic realism here becomes not a question about whether the physical object needs to be present but whether the underlying structures that generate the phenomenal flux of the world are present.

transcendental, organic, flow and growth. As mentioned earlier, images and audio projected within the cinematic space are, like dreams, disconnected from the physical objects they represent. However, there are some invisible aspects of the physical world, or transcendental underlying generative mechanisms, which continue to sustain and interpenetrate, that is, to be physically present within, the cinematic experience. These invisible aspects of the physical world are three, namely, the unseen properties of time and space, and the vibrational audio waves flowing through the cinematic time and space. While the physical objects represented on screen, for example, a tree, the wind or a bird, are not present within the cinema, space, time and physical audio waves are. In this way, (as stated earlier) cinema shares an epistemological role with our direct perceptions in providing a deeper engagement with nature. The deepest dynamically unfolding spatio-temporalizing structures of nature. As discussed in Chapter 4, Tarkovsky's cinema, in particular, provides a deeper engagement with the transcendental aspects of phenomenal and physical reality as whole. However, in the final section of this chapter, I define and illustrate an organic transcendental film style.

2.4 An organic transcendental film style

In Chapter 1 I proposed the term organic transcendental film style to identify a specific transcendental film style that predominately uses representations of nature as mise-en-scene in conjunction with organic cinematographic, editing and sound techniques to express an organic transcendence. An organic transcendental film style functions, firstly, to represent and present nature's self-transcending tendencies and, secondly, to solicit brain based transcendental spheres of experience from the viewer.⁸⁰ Therefore, an organic

⁸⁰As mentioned in Chapter 1, both nature's self-transcending tendencies and brain and body based transcendental spheres of human experience, while differing modes of transcendence, can be defined under an organic transcendence. These transcendental spheres of experience can be defined in part by Paul

transcendental film style uses organic stylistic elements to represent, present and solicit organic transcendence. Describing film style as organic in this exegesis follows Thorsten Botz-Bornstein's (2017) notion of organic cinema and Thomas William Smith's (2000) description of Tarkovsky's films as 'Transcendental Organic Cinema'. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explain and illustrate what I mean by 'organic transcendental film style'.

Mise-en-scene used within an organic transcendental film style includes representations of sublime wilderness traditionally used in indigenous, romantic, and colonial landscape paintings from China, Japan Australia, Europe, and America. Furthermore, because film has the added ability of representing motion within the frame, nature's self-transcending tendencies can be expressed in original ways that surpass still media by representing the dynamic flow and growth of natural phenomena through space over time. An example is cinema's unique ability to express the dynamic flow of light and the wind in the trees.⁸¹ P. Adams Sitney (2007) argues that while dramatic sublime natural stimuli have been used extensively for many purposes in film:

it is the depiction of gentler meteorological phenomena that cinema has developed a unique capability: the movement of clouds, changes in the intensity of light, the indication of breezes in the vibrations and swayings of flora and the gradations of rain are natural events which cinema can render with nuances previously the exclusive domain of poetry. (p. 113)

An underlying generative mechanism of both sublime stimuli and these other gentler natural stimuli is their self-transcending tendencies. However, as Sitney points out the filmmaker must rely on other stylistic means, for example, cinematography, editing and

Crowther's notion of the sublime experience; a primordial disclosure of the transcendent yet immanent structure (cognitive and perceptual structure) of human aesthetic experience.

⁸¹ Cinematography means 'writing in movement' and photography means 'writing in light' (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, p.193).

sound, and narrative context if they want the representations to resist an objectivity beyond the realm of poetry.

Cinematographic elements used within an organic transcendental film style include light, colour, shape and composition strategies derived from, for example, the romantic landscape tradition and its parallels in modernist abstract painting and experimental film. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, light blooms, light leaks and lens flares can emulate and synchronise with the limits of visual perception. Film also has the added formal quality of time, so another important cinematographic technique is the long take. For example, Tiago de Luca (2011) argues that filmmaker Gus Van Sant uses long takes in combination with distant framing of characters to create autonomous sublime landscapes. According to Tiago de Luca, the long takes ‘produce images evacuated of narrative information and meaning, which enhance, in return, the purely material presence of landscapes’ (p. 47). Moreover, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein discusses that contemplative or slow cinema, such as the work of Bela Tarr, uses the long take to express organic space; where these ‘long takes are organic because they convey the natural continuity of time’ (Botz-Bornstien, 2016).⁸² Deep focus and no camera movement also function to intensify the way the viewer looks at certain natural mise-en-scene elements, that is, they put more emphasis on mise-en-scene than on artistic expression. On the other hand, rapid editing techniques could also be utilised, as in Brakhage’s *Dog Star*, to emulate the structure and limits of visual perception. Furthermore, editing can be used to represent as well as solicit transcendental spheres of experience such as dreams within the viewer. For example, in discussing the Japanese anime filmmaker Satoshi Kon, Alexander Kirst (2008) argues that Satoshi’s editing style represents reality as malleable in the same way that dreams are malleable. Also, a sound

⁸² Examples of editing approaches used within an organic transcendental film style include, codas, and the long take. The long take can be defined as an editing technique as well as a cinematographic technique in the sense that it is the absence of editing.

technique used within an organic transcendental film style is harmonic dissonance. Unlike a consonant chord which is a collection of notes that is considered stable and pleasing when played together a dissonant chord is associated with the transition between notes and solicits a desire within the listener for music move towards consonance. As I will show in Chapter 3, harmonic dissonance in film can work together with representations of nature to express an organic transcendence. In summary, an organic transcendental film style combines organic elements of film style that share the goal of expressing and soliciting an organic transcendence.

Conclusion

This chapter has articulated a methodology of analysis of an organic transcendental film style via a combination of phenomenological, critical realist, and cognitive approaches. It has argued that the relationship between the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience informs how an organic transcendental film style both represents and presents nature's self-transcending tendencies and solicits transcendental spheres of human experience. To demonstrate this proposition, firstly, this chapter has shown that phenomenology, critical realism, and the concept of emergence offer contemporary, relevant ways of discussing, understanding and identifying nature's self-transcending tendencies. Secondly, the chapter has shown that the application of these methodologies of philosophical enquiry to the analysis of cinema provides an appropriate theoretical framework for the interrogation of cinematic representations of nature as they are encountered by an embodied, negotiating and constructive mind. In other words, it provides an appropriate yet at times paradoxical phenomenology of cinema. Likewise, the chapter has revealed that cinematic representations of nature's self-transcending tendencies, as saturated phenomena, can produce embodied knowledge that resists

linguistic understanding and signification. The chapter has gone on to establish that the analysis of this pre-formulative stage of the cinematic natural sublime can be informed by a convergence of the phenomenological models of Joseph Kickasola's, Vivian Sobchack's and Jean-Luc Marion's as well as a phenomenological critical realist theory of cinematic representation.

The final section of this chapter has defined precisely an organic transcendental film style. This definition will contribute to the identification and analysis of the films of Werner Herzog and Andrei Tarkovsky. These chapters focus on how Herzog's and Tarkovsky's cinematic representations of nature, by producing embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies, can solicit transcendental spheres of human experience, such as the metaphysical imagination and dreamlike states of being.

Chapter 3

Nature's self-transcending tendencies and the metaphysical imagination in the films of Werner Herzog.

Introduction

Cinematic representations of sublime natural phenomena have been used to great effect throughout the history of film, from early cinematic travel films through to contemporary nature documentaries, science fiction and horror films (Martin Lefebvre, 2006). However, in many cases, these filmic representations of nature are subservient to demands contrary to an element of the sublime as articulated by Roland Hepburn's concept of the metaphysical imagination. These demands can include the following: to facilitate an aesthetic appreciation limited to the sensuous enjoyment of the spectacle; to facilitate an aesthetic appreciation of nature that solely incorporates scientific knowledge and explanation; and to provide a dramatic setting within which characters move, act and events take place. This chapter argues that in producing embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies, filmic representations of nature in Werner Herzog's films solicit the metaphysical imagination. Through the demonstration of this argument, an organic transcendental film style is identified.

The first section of this chapter draws upon the theories of cinematic experience presented in Chapter 2 to distinguish the relation between the sensuous components and the contemplative thought components of the cinematic wilderness experience within Herzog's films. It presents a bottom up emergence of aesthetic where metaphysical imaginings arise from embodied comprehension of cinematic wilderness. The viewing of Herzog's cinematic wilderness is of course not identical to direct engagement with nature. However, this section shows that cinematic experience shares an epistemological role with

our direct perceptions in an providing embodied knowledge of nature's otherness and, therefore, facilitating a deeper engagement with the elusive and expanded field of the natural world that escapes but determines them both.⁸³ The second section of this chapter analyses Herzog's ability to create sublime mise-en-scene in *Nosferatu's* (1979), in particular, a dark misty-mountain aesthetic. The third section of this chapter discusses the capacity of Herzog's cinematic depictions of wilderness to be intensified by his haunting use of sound. This section shows that music functions together with Herzog's mise-en-scene of wilderness to express transcendence and in turn, contribute to the solicitation of the metaphysical imagination. The fourth section of this chapter discusses Herzog's use of the *ruckenfigur* technique as it functions to represent and solicit the metaphysical imagination. In particular, this section analyses the opening and closing sequences of Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976) to demonstrate that the *ruckenfigur* not only represents the sublime but reflexively includes the viewer. The fifth section of this chapter analyses the ability of the autonomous landscape within Herzog's films to represent nature's self-transcending tendencies and solicit the metaphysical imagination. Section six discusses how film style constructs a meaning of nature as the viewer 'vacillates' (Sobchack, 2008) between embodied engagement with cinematic wilderness and transcendental reflective thought, which seeks to formulate meaning within a narrative context. Section seven concludes the chapter by discussing the danger of over-valuing the metaphysical imagination within cinematic experience.

⁸³ As mentioned in Chapter 2, Sobchack (2008) uses Norman Bryson's term 'the expanded field' to refer to the otherness of the world in relation to what is captured within the frame (p. 102).

3.1 Cinematic wilderness, nature's self-transcending tendencies, alterity and the metaphysical imagination

Matthew Gandy (1996) posits that many of Herzog's films engage with the Kantian wilderness sublime and its association with spatio-temporal transcendence.⁸⁴ Other scholars, for example, Noel Carroll (1998) and Brad Prager (2010), while acknowledging Herzog's use of romantic sublime natural phenomenon, concentrate on the sensuous and immediate qualities of his cinematic landscapes and their ability to resist linguistic understanding. Prager notes that Herzog invites the viewer to engage with his cinematic landscapes (and the world itself) sensually and not 'through the lens of our rational tendencies' (2010, p. 92). However, Herzog's filmic landscapes have also been described as conveying and stimulating reflective, philosophical thought.⁸⁵ Roland Hepburn's (1996) concept of the metaphysical imagination and the phenomenology of cinema, as outlined in Chapter 2, informs this chapter's discussion of both the sensuous and cognitive components that emerge from the experience of Herzog's cinematic wilderness. Firstly, within the pre-formulation zone of the cinematic experience embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies is produced through the visceral and haptic qualities of the natural images and sound.⁸⁶ Furthermore, in following Dudley Andrew's (1978) division of cinematic zones, a post-formulation zone involves contemplative thought components as the viewer 'must come to terms with the surplus value unaccounted for by recourse to a science of signification' (Andrew, 1978, p. 628). Embodied knowledge produced in the pre-formulation zone can solicit a metaphysical, imaginative aesthetic

⁸⁴ Prager (2010) argues that Herzog's cinematic landscapes, as they 'import art historical baggage' (p. 93), can 'risk becoming clichés' (p. 93). However, he does acknowledge the possible virtue of those of Herzog's cinematic images which 'call to mind the weighty philosophical suggestion of sublimity' (p. 93).

⁸⁵ As discussed by Prager (2010), Herzog did not want his landscapes to resemble nature documentaries, for example, those on Discovery Channel.

⁸⁶ Sarah French and Zoe Shacklock's (2014) recent article discusses how Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) and Terrance Mallick's *The Tree of Life* (2011) engage with the sublime aesthetic both through representations of sublime nature and sublime affect.

appreciation of nature. While this zone requires reflective thinking, the experience can vacillate between immanent embodied engagement with the visceral cinematic wilderness on screen, and transcendent reflective thinking as the viewer begins to construct the meaning of that embodied knowledge. I borrow the term ‘vacillate’ from Sobchack (2008), who posits the immanent and transcendental aspects of cinematic experience as an ‘irreducible ensemble’ (p. 4). Dylan Trigg (2012) also discusses this dual aspect of Herzog’s cinematic forest aesthetics. In Trigg’s words: ‘the forests sensual qualities amplifies its ontological value: through it we discover a nexus of different meanings that are united in their plea to summon the body into a heightened mode of activity’ (p. 143). While narrative context is important and is discussed below, this chapter is mainly concerned with what Sobchack (2004) defines as ‘a bottom-up emergence of aesthetic’ (p. 3) where metaphysical imaginings and insights arise from embodied comprehension of cinematic wilderness.⁸⁷

While metaphysics and phenomenology could be viewed as antithetical methodologies, both Hepburn (1993) and Crowther (1989) propose that phenomenological inquiries of the natural world can lead to metaphysical imaginative thought and insights within an aesthetic appreciation of nature. For Hepburn, the ‘fusion’ of the thought components and the sensuous components should be described as one of close ‘interaction’ (1993, p. 67) rather than an aesthetic encounter where the thought components are ‘extraneously or externally juxtaposed to the perception of the natural object or scene’ (p. 67). He goes on to state that ‘there may be no verbalising or self-conscious complexity in the experience’ (1993, p. 67), as this perception and reflection event can be either trivial or serious. The perception component can be ‘attentive or inattentive, lively or lazy [...] the

⁸⁷ This is in distinction to a top down aesthetic where philosophies of nature are imposed by the filmmaker, spectator or critic. This notion will be discussed in section six. Sobchack (2004) describes a bottom up emergence of aesthetic in distinction to ‘a top down and idealist imposition on them’ (p. 3).

doors of perception can need cleansing, the conventions and the simplifications of perception resisting' (Hepburn, 1993, p. 68). According to Hepburn, the aesthetic encounter is 'trivial' if the subject focuses only on the sensuous components and 'lazy' if too much emphasis is placed on the metaphysical imagination. Hepburn further states that 'an aesthetic experience of nature free of metaphysics would be grossly self-impoverishing' (1993, p. 194). Crowther (1989) also proposes that the sublime, albeit a reconstructed one, while having a phenomenological centre can 'lead to metaphysical insights' (p. 174). The claim that metaphysics and phenomenology are antithetical inquiries requires both a reductive and limited phenomenology and an idealistic and detached metaphysics.⁸⁸ Following on from Hepburn and Crowther, this exegesis is articulated on the assumption that an aesthetic experience of cinematic nature totally free of metaphysics is equally lacking and self-impoverishing.

Trigg (2012) argues that the sublime forest and mountain aesthetics within Herzog's *Aguirre the Wrath of God* (1992) illuminates the alterity or otherness of nature by fulfilling the epistemological role of the flesh of the forest. The relation between the natural sublime and otherness is pointed out by Richard White (1997). White presents the discourse of the natural sublime as articulating an experience of the otherness of nature, an experience where humans can relate to nature as something that 'is not just an extension of

⁸⁸ A. D. Smith (2007) discusses how Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can be seen in opposition to 'intellectualism' but also clarifies that the intellectualism Merleau-Ponty was positing an antidote for was the idealistic separation of mental from the physical. According to Don Ihde (1986), phenomenological inquiry begins with the question 'What 'appears' to be the case?' not 'What 'really' is the case? But it paradoxically ends with a deeper understanding of what really is the case. This is because the distinction between appearance and reality while helpful for directing the first step in phenomenological breaks down as we progress in the analysis. Dermot Moran (2000) discusses that the founding figures of phenomenology emphasised the need 'for a renewal of philosophy as radical inquiry not bound to any historical tradition' (p. 5) and not disconnected from our living contact with reality, which much of 19th century philosophy seemed to be. Explanations and categories that could be brought to the object included *a priori* metaphysical assumptions in the form of a worldview. Contemplation, speculation or conclusions regarding worldviews or causal theories could possibly be an end product of phenomenological inquiry but these speculations had to be removed as much as possible in the beginning stage.

ourselves' (p. 140). The metaphysical imagination can operate to account for this illumination of nature's otherness within the cinematic experience. Chapter 2 discussed the transcendence of otherness as revealed by phenomenological and critical realist inquiries into the natural world. This otherness refers not only to the trans-human world of mountains, trees and mist but also the transcendental aspects of perception. According to Simon P. James (2007), these aspects of perception are the 'trans-human event by which these things disclose themselves as the things they are' (p. 516).⁸⁹ As cinematic wilderness functions to produce an experience of nature's otherness, the illumination can solicit a metaphysical imaginative aesthetic appreciation of nature. This experience involves transcendental reflective thought engaging with transcendental aspects of nature and perception.⁹⁰

Hepburn's (1996) concept of the metaphysical imagination describes an aesthetic appreciation of nature. However, Gandy (1996) points out that '[w]hat we find in the cinema of Herzog is the attempt to reconstruct the experience of sublimity through a reworking of the romanticist representation of nature in which the audience is invited to respond as if it were actually experiencing the images first hand' (p. 4). Trigg (2012) also presupposes that the wilderness aesthetics within Herzog's films are an 'invitation to experience the sublime and not only a depiction of the sublime in the landscape' (p. 142). Trigg proposes that the forest speaks to us, albeit in 'an undecipherable voice' (p. 146), both through the concrete world and through Herzog's films. Does Herzog's cinematic wilderness have the ability to provide a direct experience of the otherness of nature? Trigg applies Merleau Ponty's phenomenology, particularly his notion of 'the flesh', to Herzog's films. Trigg argues that Herzog's forest and mountain aesthetic within *Aguirre Wrath of*

⁸⁹ James (2007) uses the term 'trans-human' to refer to nature's otherness.

⁹⁰ For Hepburn, as 'the union, or fusion' of the thought components and the sensuous components are very close, 'there may be no verbalising or self-conscious complexity in the experience' (year, p. 67).

God solicits an engagement with the ‘flesh of the forest’ (Trigg, 2012, p.144) through the flesh of the cinema (as discussed in Chapter 2). The emergent cinematic experience is embodied as the flesh of the forest intertwines in a symbiotic relationship with the flesh of the cinema. I argue that through the lens of a phenomenological, critical realist theory of cinematic representation the flesh of the wilderness and the flesh of the cinematic wilderness share an epistemological role in providing a deeper engagement with the elusive and expanded field of the natural world that escapes but determines them both. James (2007) describes this expanded field of the biophysical world as an inexhaustible and ungraspable depth, as a ‘resolutely silent other’ (p. 332), and notes that this trans-human aspect of reality, while irreconcilably other, is sometimes evident in perception itself. Furthermore, and as already mentioned in Chapter 2, Marion (2002) describes these appearances of otherness within perception as a ‘saturated phenomenon,’ where transcendence in the form of excess breaks in through the phenomenally given. As discussed in Chapter 1, otherness cannot only be represented but can break into the cinematic experience. The ‘dark and opaque’ (Sobchack, 2004, p. 103) otherness, that ‘envelops sight on all sides’ (p. 102), can enter the cinematic visual field. James (2007) notes that natural things within direct perception yield up their alterity more easily than human-made things. He then mentions Merleau -Ponty’s advice that those who want to encounter alterity ‘would be well advised to take to the woods’ (James, 2007, p. 509). Cinematic wilderness within Herzog’s films fulfils this function by producing embodied comprehension of the otherness of nature. The viewing of cinematic wilderness in Herzog’s films, while not identical to direct engagement with nature, also allows for sensuous embodied comprehension of nature’s otherness. In the next section, I analyse Herzog’s 1979 film *Nosferatu*, in which Jonathon, one of the film’s protagonists, enters the wilderness and crosses a sublime mountain pass to a place where, according to the Gypsy

characters within the film, ‘the light suddenly divides [...] and the land rises upwards towards heaven and falls to no one knows where’, into a void of space and an abyss of time.

3.2 The representation of nature’s self-transcending tendencies and the metaphysical imagination in Herzog’s *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (1979)

Herzog’s *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, a 1979 remake of F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922), uses cinematic representations of the natural world to create a specifically German romantic aesthetic. This aesthetic, as David Huckvale (2010) observes, is very similar to the sublime landscapes of 17th century painter Casper David Friedrich.⁹¹ Herzog’s appeal to this romantic aesthetic is emphasised by the fact that the film’s narrative was specifically set in Friedrich’s era.⁹² Friedrich’s paintings depict darkness, mist, imposing mountains, ocean landscapes and solitary human figures engulfed by the immensity of these surroundings to evoke infinity and eternity (Huckvale, 2010). The sequence of Herzog’s film that is of the greatest interest to this chapter presents Jonathon’s journey to the vampire’s castle, slowly following him as he walks through a sublime mountain pass. The wilderness scenery of mountains, rivers flowing through tunnelled ravines and dark forests covered in mist produce a romantic sublime aesthetic. Film style elements used within this sequence include: wilderness mise-en-scene, Wagner’s 17th century romantic nature music, time-lapse editing, long takes and the *ruckenfigur* technique. In what follows, this chapter considers how the wilderness mise-en-scene in

⁹¹ See also Lotte Eisner’s (1952) *The Haunted Screen* and Angela Dalle Vacche’s (1996) *Cinema and Painting: how art is used in film* for analyses of the influence of German Romantic painting, in particular Casper David Friedrich, on F. W Murnau’s *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (1922). Brad Prager (2010) discusses the influence of Friedrich on Werner Herzog’s films.

⁹² It is important to note here that *Nosferatu the Vampyre* and a number of other films directed by Herzog’s can be described as Romantic inversions or at least having themes that oscillate between the Romantic natural sublime and existential nihilism. Herzog frequently uses a Romantic sublime aesthetic to critique a naïve, sentimental, idealistic and romantic view of nature.

Nosferatu the Vampyre produces embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies, illuminates the otherness of nature and solicits the metaphysical imagination. Section's three, four and five of this chapter discuss how other aspects of the film's style function.

Of particular significance to this chapter's main argument, is a scene where Jonathon walks along the path that leads from the village and into the wilderness mountain pass [fig 10]. The edge of the forest and the immensity of the mountain range act as barriers blocking the camera's view and in turn the spectator's view of what is beyond, thus invoking the Kantian mathematical sublime and its association with transcendence. These



Figure 10. Still from *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Werner Herzog, 1979.

physical frontiers of distance and obstruction emerge both from the immensity of the actual natural phenomena (the emergent totality of the mountain and space it fills) and from the limits of the camera as it emulates human perception. The representation of mist also evokes the Burkean sublime in that it obscures the form of the mountain revealing another frontier of visual perception. When discussing the use of mist in his paintings, Friedrich wrote: 'When a region cloaks itself in mist, it appears larger and more sublime, elevating the imagination' (Friedrich, cited in Hoffmann, 2000, p. 272). Within *Nosferatu the*

Vampyre the mist allows the form of the mountain to give way seamlessly to the immensity of space, further contributing to evoking the infinity of the Kantian sublime.

This scene also contains a sequence of closer long takes of the dark misty mountains. As the mist fills the entire frame and obscures any definite form, the aesthetic solicits an interpretation that incorporates the idea of the forest as a whole, the surface and totality of which is impenetrable, escaping the cameras limited gaze, as well as our imaginative grasp [fig 11]. Silke Panse (2006) highlights how the romantic theorist August



Figure 11. Still from *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Werner Herzog, 1979.

Wilhelm Schlegel “hailed the outline as a pictorial method that came closest to the allusive manner of poetry, since its sketch-like quality ‘incited the imagination to complete’ the details of the scene” (p. 11). Although Panse applies this aesthetic to the silhouetted human form of the *ruckenfigur* technique (discussed in more detail later), this concept can also be applied to the outline of the forest and mountains as found in Herzog’s scene as described above. As noted by Alison Stone (2011), Schlegel uses the term ‘infinite’ to describe intangible, diffuse, atmospheric and frameless natural phenomena that have indefinite boundaries (p. 511). While both the partial totality of the forest and also the Kantian super-whole, (the totality of the biophysical universe), are beyond its individual

physical parts and beyond the perceptually given they are also paradoxically embodied within its parts. According to the romantics: ‘we intuit the whole *within*, not only beyond, its parts’ (Stone, 2011).⁹³ Furthermore, Herzog implements a formal cinematic quality that assists the image to move beyond the limits and stillness of landscape painting regarding its effectiveness in producing embodied comprehension of nature’s self-transcending tendencies. Moreover, this formal quality is motion, that is, the flow of form over time. The mist swirls across the frame eventually obscuring the forest completely. At each frame of the shot, the form of the mist changes revealing the ephemeral, transient and emergent qualities of the natural event.

Ironically, while the sequence uses representations of ‘frameless’ natural phenomena (phenomena with indefinite boundaries), it is the cinematic frame that amplifies rather than weakens the aesthetic experience. The framing of the shot disallows any contained finality of form within the frame, and it is this resistance that encourages the viewer to contemplate the off-screen space and time. Jean-Luc Marion’s concept of ‘saturated phenomenon’ is useful in explaining how the cinematic frame itself ‘through its own limits’ can intensify the viewer’s cinematic experience of the immensity of the forest and the mountain range. Alain Bonfand (2007) and Julien Guillemet (2010) apply of the concept of saturated phenomenon to the immense landscapes in John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956). Guillemet argues that Ford’s framing techniques allow ‘the off-screen space to enter the cinematic frame [...] for the frame to hold and keep what exceeds it: to reveal an out of frame phenomenon too big to be contained, to reveal a saturated phenomenon’ (Guillemet, 2010, p. 103). The frame intensifies rather than weakens the immensity of the forest and the

⁹³ According to Alison Stone (2011) a central concept for the early German Romantics was *das Absolute*; ‘an infinite whole encompassing all things of the world and all the causal relations between these things’ (p. 497). Roy Bhasker’s notion of metaReality, which is related to his concept of the stratification of reality, provides a contemporary relevant theoretical framework that embraces ‘the totality of things, going beyond what is accessible to normal scientific analysis’ (McGrath, 2013, p. 160).

mountain range through its own limits. The frame caused by the physical address of the camera not only emulates the limits of human perception but intensifies and concentrates the viewer's cinematic gaze. The cinematic representations of saturated natural phenomena can themselves become saturated. The frame functions in the same way as the mountain range and mist by obstructing and, thereby, intensifying vision. A double sublime where the limits of the frame complement the sublime natural phenomena represented on screen.⁹⁴ What is seen within the frame is grounded and saturated by what is outside the frame, that is, the totality of the biophysical universe. Moreover, this totality is both beyond and within the phenomenal. Nature's depths of space and time that saturate the real forest and mountain range can also saturate the cinematic wilderness. In analysing Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), Trigg (2012) argues that the immersion into the cinematic forest is an immersion into a 'void in space' and 'an abyss in time' (p. 146). While the physical organic matter of the mist, forest and mountain range are only *represented* within the cinema, the abyss of time and the void of space through long takes and time-lapse are literally made palpable; they are *presented*.

In summary, this sequence of *Nosferatu the Vampyre* implies a beyond beneath the mist, under the forest canopy, off-screen (beyond the frame), as well as representing emergent biophysical events determining the forms within the frame that are simultaneously beyond any form within the frame. This aesthetic fulfils in a number of ways and in quite a literal and physical sense the definition of the sublime which states that it is that within representation that nevertheless exceeds representation. Within the pre-formulative stage of the cinematic experience, the immediate and visceral quality of the cinematic wilderness produce embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies that resists linguistic understanding and signification. However, long takes

⁹⁴ See Roger Cook (2012) for a discussion on how Herzog represents mountains within his mountain climbing films.

function to facilitate a post-formulative stage as the spectator engages imaginatively with the narrative context of the film that posits the existence of eternity through the presence of Herzog's immortal vampire character, who lives beyond the forest, beyond the mountain pass, beyond the mist and beyond death. In fact, 'Transylvania', which is where the vampire dwells, literally means 'beyond the forest' (Huckvale, 2010). The misty mountains are not presented as a metaphor of the fictional eternity, or infinite time and space, within which the vampire character lives. However, in a Kantian sense, the idea of eternity and transcendence organically extends from embodied knowledge of space and time, an ontology of depth and flow, made palpable by the cinematic visuals. The idea of infinity, and by extension eternity, becomes a natural, organic and philosophically necessary concept after embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies is produced.⁹⁵

The cinematic sublime aesthetic of Herzog's film can be informed by Sobchack's (2008) description of cinematic experience as 'transcendence in immanence' (p. 197). Certainly, the transcendence that Sobchack refers to is not the physical realm beyond the mountains, but the transcendence of conscious thought as the spectator is relocated beyond 'the *presentness* of our flesh to dwell in the on-screen world' (p. 197) both imaginatively, intellectually and 'spiritually'. Furthermore, Sobchack's concept of immanence describes the embodied knowledge produced for example by the visceral and tactile qualities of cinematic images and sound and in the case of Herzog's films, the cinematic wilderness. Within the cinematic experience, the spectator vacillates between this transcendence and immanence. This feedback loop intensifies and amplifies both our ability to transcend the

⁹⁵ In this sense, the romantic sublime aesthetic in a Kantian sense is used by Herzog to present a supposedly supernatural being as thoroughly naturalistic, that is, within the film the vampire's supernatural qualities (living beyond death) are more reasonable because they extend from and are grounded within the sensible natural world. The privations of the Burkean sublime, that is, darkness, solitude, and silence are also used within the sequence. Prager argues that 'Herzog's urge to make man irreducibly small and ultimately cloak the mountains beneath curtains of fog is a part of the director's courtship of annihilation' (p. 101). But arguably this imagining could have varied metaphysical (theoretical) correlatives, that is, nihilistic, naturalistic, atheistic or theistic.

bounds of the given and the sensuality of our bodily existence. The *Nosferatu the Vampyre* 1979 sequence as Jonathan journey's through the mountain pass invites the viewer to engage with the idea of infinite space and time in relation to the natural world through metaphysical imagination. Simultaneously the visceral and immediate qualities of the cinematic wilderness solicit an embodied viewing.

However, affective embodied knowledge produced solely from visceral, pictorial wilderness aesthetics cannot alone account for the power of Herzog's cinematic images as they work on a negotiating and constructive mind. The chapter's next section discusses how sound functions together with wilderness mise-en-scene to express transcendence and in turn, contribute to the solicitation of the metaphysical imagination.

3.4 Haunting transcendental style music

The haunting quality of Herzog's pictorial nature aesthetics is intensified by his use of sound. Stuart Heaney (2013) states that within *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, the 'landscape and soundscape are interchangeable' (p. 57). Phillip Hayward (2009) also notes that horror films use sound in combination with a natural and Gothic sublime aesthetic to create haunting metaphysical contexts and establish foreboding moods. Throughout the sublime mountain pass sequence in *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Herzog employs the opening moments of Richard Wagner's music composition *Das Rheingold* (1869). While the sublime aesthetic of the misty mountains could potentially evoke an aesthetic appreciation limited to the sensuous enjoyment of the spectacle or a scientific appreciation of nature, it is Herzog's use of Wagner's E flat and E flat major drone that functions to solicit an ominous foreboding and a deeper metaphysical or existential interpretation. The foreboding effect of the combination of mise-en-scene and sound (sublime mountains and haunting music)

filters through and haunts the rest of the film.⁹⁶

Jacob-Ivan Eidt (2012) discusses how music functions in Herzog's 1992 film *Lessons of Darkness* to solicit a sublime internalisation. According to Eidt,

music as Herzog uses it in *Lessons of Darkness*, helps concentrate our emotional responses to the images inward onto a process of critical reflection and not outward onto an external spectacle, staged by a director's intent. The music that Herzog uses serves an internalisation process, triggering reflection on the part of the viewer in the Kantian sense (p. 1).

For Eidt the music channels 'the reflective questioning engendered by the sublime image.' (p. 1).⁹⁷ Similarly, the music in *Nosferatu the Vampyre* intensifies the metaphysical imaginings engendered by the sublime misty mountain aesthetic. The opening scene of Herzog's (1972) film *Aguirre, Wrath of God* that presents diminished human figures descending a mountain slope covered in mist is another example where music and mise-en-scene function together to solicit the metaphysical imagination [fig 12].

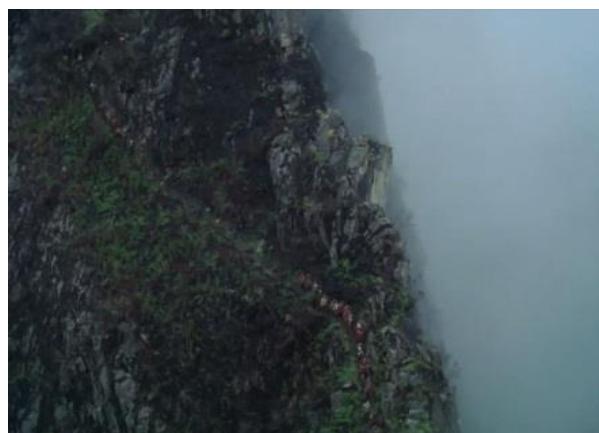


Figure 12. Still from *Aguirre the Wrath of God*, Werner Herzog, 1972.

⁹⁶ For example, according to Haywood (2005), in the opening scene of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) 'music is employed to project climates of primarily psychological horror and to embody the omnipresent but unseen malevolence of the alien other' (p. 137). Kubrick's film's music score by Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind was based on *Dies Irae* from Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* and is accompanied by tracking shots of the Rocky Mountains, which produce an aesthetic of the sublime by expressing the immensity of space and the mountains that fill it. The *Dies Irae* was a traditional funeral chant from the Latin mass of the dead (Hayward, 2009).

⁹⁷ Eidt (2012) points out that 'almost all of the seven musical selections have something to do with death, evoking Kant's notion of the sublime as a reminder of life's limitations' (p. 1).

Stuart Heaney (2013) proposes that Popol Vuh's unearthly, eerie and haunting music functions to elevate *Aguirre Wrath of God* 'to the realm of the mythic' (p. 56) by creating a sonic texture of dissonant polyphonic intervals.⁹⁸ According to Heaney, this dissonance was produced by Popol Vuh through a combination of looped recordings of chanting human voices and shifting time signatures (p. 56). Furthermore, Heaney notes that subtle dissonant chords have often been associated with religious, spiritual or mystical music (p. 57). Even though dissonant chords do not automatically produce mystical, religious or spiritual feelings, Bear McCreary, Meghen Miles and Kevin R. Grazier (2013) argue that dissonant chords have an inherent and empirical tension that film composers can take advantage of to manipulate audiences. McCreary, Miles and Grazier describe a consonant chord as 'one that is considered stable, or pleasing when played together' and a dissonant chord as 'associated with transition' and creating 'within the listener the desire for music to drive towards consonance' (McCreary, 2013, p. 80). The unresolved tension produced by harmonic dissonance can express an immanent transcendence, which parallels Phillip Shaw's description of the melancholic romantic drive as a subject 'feels but cannot capture its capacity for transcendence' (Shaw, 2006, p. 90).⁹⁹ As nature emerges as a cosmically ominous realm through the combination of sublime wilderness aesthetics and dissonant music, it solicits serious metaphysical imaginings. Moreover, these metaphysical and existential imaginings can evoke terror.

⁹⁸ Popol Vuh were an experimental German rock band of the late 20th century

⁹⁹ Brad Prager (2003) discusses how Herzog's films question the nature of this transcendence. The horror presented is a horror that stems from the acceptance of the notion of transcendence but believing that nothing is beyond, just an empty void, 'horror vacui' the fear of emptiness (p. 23-35).

3.5 The *ruckenfigur* technique and the metaphysical imagination in Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976)

Herzog also uses the *ruckenfigur* technique in many of his films, especially in *Heart of Glass* (1976). This technique is implemented by Casper David Friedrich in a large number of his paintings. The technique presents figures looking out over a landscape with their backs to the viewer. Friedrich's painting *Monk by the Sea* (1809) is one of his most discussed and powerful images [fig 13]. The *ruckenfigur* technique stresses the importance of the human perceiver within Vijay Mishra's (1994) definition of the sublime. Mishra's definition describes the sublime as 'the heightened consciousness of beholding oneself beholding the world' (Mishra, 1994, p. 35). This perceiving oneself perceiving is also articulated by Paul Crowther's (1989) reconstruction of the Kantian sublime as a primordial disclosure, a disclosure that, according to Crowther, while having a phenomenological centre, can 'lead to metaphysical insights' (p. 174). The *ruckenfigur* technique within *Heart of Glass* (1976) encourages contemplation of the natural world which includes the human subject as a perceiver in distinction to a scientific appreciation of nature in which a detached observer (or a detached camera) categorises an objectified world. Trigg (2012) contests that both in Herzog's films and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology a similar philosophy of nature emerges; a philosophy that 'challenges the dichotomy between the autonomous self-encountering and an objective realm of wilderness' (p. 141).¹⁰⁰ While the *ruckenfigur* technique is in effect a representation, a second-hand account of a sublime experience, this does not necessarily weaken the experience but reiterates and intensifies it. This intensification occurs because the

¹⁰⁰ Trigg (2012) argues that *Aguirre* expresses 'a loss of ontological boundaries' between the characters and the forest, and states that 'any such division between forest and non-forest is overruled by the flesh binding them' (p. 146). On the other hand, he argues that Herzog's forest 'assumes the appearance of having an autonomous agency' (p. 146).

technique reflexively includes the viewer's gaze, the 'cinesthetic subject' (Sobchack, 2004) who is situated in the cinematic space, into this loop of perceiving.¹⁰¹

The opening and closing segments of *Heart of Glass* use both representations of sublime natural phenomena as well as the *ruckenfigur* as a prominent technique [fig 14-15]. At the beginning of the film, the main character Hias (Josef Bierbicher) narrates a vision he sees as he is looking out 'into the distance to the end of the world'. Time-lapse



Figure 13. *Monk by the Sea*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1809.

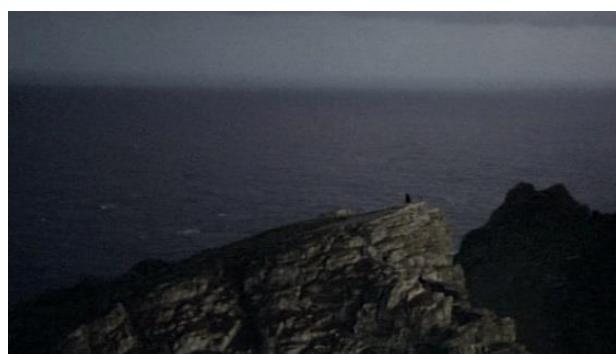


Figure 14. Still from *Heart of Glass*, Werner Herzog, 1976.

cinematography presents mist flowing over the mountains like a river. These provocative images are followed by a shot that uses the *ruckenfigur* technique. Hias is alone on a mountain looking out over a mist filled valley. His arm is stretched out as if he were trying to touch the edge of infinite space [fig 15]. Comparably, the end sequence of *Heart of Glass* (1976) presents Hias recounting a vision that he sees as he sits around a fire. The vision is of a small group of people who live on a small island on the far edge of the civilised world. The voice-over narration states that the island's inhabitants have not heard that the earth is round and believe 'that the ocean far beyond ends in a yawning abyss'. The imagery accompanying the narration combines both mountain and ocean scenery as it represents a sublime vision. The island, an immense pinnacle thrusting out of the sea,

¹⁰¹ Silke Panse in his analysis of the Alexander Sokurov's video installation *Elegy of a voyage* (2001) discusses the effectiveness of the *ruckenfigur* technique in combination with a subjective voice over to create a reflexive aesthetic. Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976) inspired Sokurov's *Elegy of a voyage* (2001).

evokes the Kantian sublime and a human figure stands on a peak looking out over the ocean (figure 14). The voice-over reveals that the man has been looking out over the sea in the same place for years. The man begins to doubt, and he and some others decide to row in a small boat to find out whether there is an abyss at the end of the world. The last shot is



Figure 15. Still from *Heart of Glass*, Werner Herzog, 1976.

a long take of birds flying over the ocean. Their fate is not revealed, but the following quote is presented as text on screen: ‘It may have seemed like a sign of hope that the birds followed them out into the vastness of the sea...’. The film’s closing music, played by the remaining people on the island (the actual musicians Popul Vuh), create an ‘eerie, dissonant grandiose to the movie final moments’ (Fell, 1979, p.55). This story of the vision in *Heart of Glass* (1976) literally represents the human experience of the natural sublime and the metaphysical imagination, first, pictorially, and, secondly, through the subjective voice of Hias as he recounts the vision.¹⁰² The viewer is prompted to interpret cinematic nature and nature as a whole via the metaphysical imagination. This experience involves

¹⁰² On the other hand, the ending of this sequence seems to critique a naïve and idealistic natural sublime. However, Herzog seems to be critiquing not the natural sublime experience or the use of the metaphysical imagination but certain interpretations of the sublime experience and conclusions drawn from the metaphysical imagination. Roland Hepburn also warns of the overuse of the metaphysical imagination.

both a cognitive engagement with the fictional natural world onscreen as well as a heightened sense of embodiment as the viewer is invited to engage with visceral properties of both the cinematic sublime nature and the haunting dissonant music. However, another technique is used within this sequence of the film. The voice over, rather than providing additional information, explains what is already happening in the frame. Paul Schrader (1972) identifies this repetition technique as part of Robert Bresson's transcendental film style. Instead of using interior narration in the customary way to expand the viewer's 'knowledge or feelings about an event' (p. 71), Bresson uses interior narration to double the action onscreen creating an 'overemphasis on the everyday,' which in the end leads the viewer to 'cast suspicion on the everyday reality' (p. 71). The everyday events presented on screen through continuity editing become the surface of transcendental meaning. However, this meaning is absent in its presence. The absence of this meaning functions in the same way as dissonant music in that it produces tension and a desire to move towards consonance. Bresson's films and this sequence of Herzog's film *Heart of Glass* (1976) encourage the viewer to construct meaning that is absent, yet alluded to, on screen.

In summary, Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976) uses the *ruckenfigur* technique, misty mountain and ocean mise-en-scene, editing, sound and haunting dissonant music to represent and solicit the metaphysical imagination. These film techniques function to solicit contemplative ways of apprehending the world/nature as a whole that can encompass both transcendental aspects of nature and transcendental spheres of human experience.

3.6 Haunting autonomous landscapes in *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974)

According to Martin Lefebvre (2011), a cinematic spectator has the freedom, depending on their aesthetic sensibilities, to direct their attention to any filmic landscape within a narrative film regardless of whether the filmmaker has intentionally set up space for it. Lefebvre (2011) identifies these landscapes as ‘impure landscapes’, as when viewing them, the spectator is not led to “attribute any ‘obvious’ landscaping intention to the filmmaker” (p. 66). Lefebvre also identifies ‘autonomous landscapes’, which have a clear separation from the characters’ actions and the narrative flow.¹⁰³ Indeed, viewers of Herzog’s films are regularly haunted by both modes of experiencing the landscape. According to Lefebvre, both types of landscapes, impure and autonomous, can appear and disappear in a ghostly fashion, ‘existing in a regime dominated by the ebb and flow of spectatorial consciousness, wherein narrative and pictorial qualities may both vie for attention’ (p. 66).

Paul Schrader’s (1972) theory of a transcendental film style uses the term ‘coda’ to describe how the placement, intensity and duration of autonomous landscapes can produce a transcendental perspective in contrast to an everyday perspective (p. 29). Schrader’s formulation of a transcendental film style proposes Yasujiro Ozu’s style as transcendental because it reflects the nature of Japanese Zen culture (p. 29). For example, Schrader discusses how the Zen concept of *mu* (emptiness) is expressed in Ozu’s codas, which are still-life depictions of outdoor life, for example, a distant mountain or lake. However, the codas within Ozu’s films are contrasted with plot driven scenes that include action and dialogue taking place indoors. This technique is in distinction to the standard establishing

¹⁰³ According to Martin Lefebvre (2006), the autonomous landscape emerged as a pictorial concept within the visual arts in the form of landscape painting, particularly romantic landscape painting. Over many centuries landscape rather than humans and events could become the true subject matter of paintings. Stella Hockenhull (2014) argues that ‘[t]hrough Lefebvre’s work, a system or method is presented for the application of an otherwise neglected mode of scrutiny. By selecting this process, it is possible to isolate specific sequences for analysis [...] The advantage of Lefebvre’s work lies in the fact that he has isolated an area which is not covered by narrative analysis’ (p. 14).

shot of classical narrative cinema, whose sole purpose is to represent the location where the film narrative is to take place. Thus, whereby establishing shots serve the purpose of plot progression in classical narrative cinema, in Ozu's films the dialogue and action help both the silence and still life to express transcendence. In turn, Ozu's codas inject this transcendental perspective back onto the ordinary events of the lives of the characters within the rest of the film. Ozu's film technique, the coda or autonomous landscape, is also found, and used in many different ways, in Herzog's films.

Noel Carroll (1998) applies the notion of presence to his description of the long takes of sublime, autonomous natural vistas within Herzog's films.¹⁰⁴ Carroll divides the experience of presence into the inexplicability of the film images, on the one hand, and the immediacy of the images, on the other (p. 285). According to Carroll, the aura of inexplicability around these images is present because their placement, intensity and duration seem to serve no purpose for the story progression. Furthermore, the immediacy of the image could be described as 'an uncanny impression of uniqueness or singularity' because the images are not 'referable to ingrained habits of seeing' (p. 286). Moreover, Carroll states that the images 'loom before us with an irresistible and undeniable force' (p. 285) as the viewers 'conscious experience of looking becomes more intense' (p. 295). This 'coming forward' of the landscape, according to Bordwell (2010), happens when it transcends its narrative function (p. 331).¹⁰⁵ It is this inapplicability of the landscape (to the flow of the story) that heightens its immediacy. Nevertheless, for the 'coming forward' to be effective there still does need to be something to come forward from. Bordwell explains

¹⁰⁴ Carroll also describes these images as sublime as they usually 'suggest infinite expanse, eternity, and the giganticism of nature' (p. 295) through for example the use of low horizon lines and depicting mist and clouds.

¹⁰⁵ Autonomous cinematic images should not to be limited to representations of nature that are completely disconnected from narrative and setting, but to any landscapes that encourage the viewer to search for and construct meaning from within the landscape for its own sake rather than search for and construct the meaning of the landscape from other aspects of the film.

that we ‘still need a sense of the film’s narrative organisation in order to show how and when that (coming forward) happens’ (p. 331).

An autonomous landscape is situated at the beginning of Herzog’s 1974 film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, a film that Derek Malcolm (1999) describes as striving for ‘a haunting metaphysical quality’ (p. 1). The film starts with text on the screen, that plainly describes the story of a man, Kaspar Hauser (Bruno Schleinstein) who was forcibly



Figure 16. Still from *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, Werner Herzog, 1974.

isolated from the rest of the world within a cellar for the first seventeen years of his life. The film later follows his release and progresses as Kaspar Hauser adjusts to the outside world, for example, as he learns to speak, read and write.¹⁰⁶ The next shot after the introductory text is a visceral, static long take of the wind in the field, overlaid with the classical music of Orlando di Lasso [fig 16]. The long take and the absence of camera movement allow the natural phenomena to flow and move within the frame, lessening the subjectivity of the filmmaker and allowing for a cinematic realism where nature (not the film) is foregrounded as the object of contemplation. An emergent aesthetic is produced as the invisible wind, as seen through the flow of the field, makes palpable the invisible

¹⁰⁶ According to Malcolm (1999) the themes of the film include “German romanticism, with its respect for the incalculable mysteries of life and its deep suspicion of the ‘civilised world’” (p.1) and ways of seeing the world that are outside or transcend normal logic and language.

qualities of space and time. This emergent aesthetic produces embodied knowledge of the natural events' self-transcending tendencies as the flesh of the field intertwines with the flesh of the cinema. The viewer is also presented with ambiguous text onscreen: 'But can you not hear the dreadful screaming all around that people usually call silence'. This ambiguous text solicits reflective thought components as the viewer constructs its meaning. While the landscape that is visible on the screen is autonomous from the film's plot, it is still thematically situated within the film's narrative's concern with spheres of human experience and thinking that transcends normal logic and language. Within the cinematic experience that Herzog's film encourages, the viewer may vacillate between the sensuous and visceral engagement with the cinematic wind in the field and the transcendental reflective engagement with the ambiguous themes.

A coda of the wind in the trees within *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974) reveals how editing can work together with the film's mise-en-scene to express transcendence [fig 17]. Herzog comments: 'I like this shot, again it doesn't belong there....it doesn't belong in the narrative part of the story and yet it is very disturbing and strange' (Herzog, 2004).¹⁰⁷



Figure 17. Still from *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, 1974, Werner Herzog.

Herzog presents a long take of the wind in the trees edited between two plot driven shots. The contrast between shots is very effective. The conventional mode of viewing a classical

¹⁰⁷ This quote was taken from the director's commentary version of *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* in The Werner Herzog collection (2004).

narrative film, as directed by continuity editing, is ruptured in Herzog's film as there is no direct relation of the shot to the plot or setting. The contrast between the shots functions to solicit, even if momentarily, a transcendental perspective towards the events unfolding in the narrative. Through this transcendental editing style, the viewer is invited to share the main character's way of seeing the world that transcends normal logic and language.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the metaphysical imagination is solicited as the viewer strives to account for the significance of, firstly, the rupture of the cinematic viewing produced through the contrasting editing style and, secondly, the embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies produced through the sensorial experience of the cinematic wind in the trees.¹⁰⁹ A double intensity of transcendence is therefore expressed through these film techniques. As sublime mise-en-scene and sublime editing work together in unison, they constitute an organic transcendental film style.

Shots of the wind in the trees, the flow of mist over the forest, the flow of a waterfall, and the turbulence of a river feature prominently in the autonomous landscapes of Herzog's films. All these shots employ similar elements of style. For example, they use long takes with no camera movement that allows natural phenomena to flow within and through the frame, thus producing an aesthetic of emergence. While all physical events in the natural world have emergent qualities, the dynamic flux of form presented by these

¹⁰⁸ There is a very similar shot of the wind in the trees in Peter Hutton's *Landscape (for Manon)* (1987). One particular shot in Hutton's film is nearly identical to Herzog's shot (mise-en-scene and cinematography elements). In this sense, both Herzog's and Hutton's shots force contemplation on the natural event which pictorially express nature's self-transcending tendencies through the long take. However, Hutton's shot is placed between other long takes of similar style. Hutton's editing style within this film is one of affinity and there is no plot to transcend. While Hutton's shots are still effective they have nothing to contrast against and therefore, as mentioned in chapter 2, Hutton's whole film can be described as autonomous.

¹⁰⁹ Herzog reflexively comments on the autonomous landscape within his 2005 film *Grizzly Man*. Treadwell films himself dramatically walking into and out of the scrub. Herzog comments on how certain unplanned images become autonomous (while not using the term) within the voice-over of the film: 'In his action movie mode, Treadwell did not probably realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange and secret beauty. Sometimes images themselves develop their own life, their own mysterious stardom' (Herzog, 2005).

examples is more effective at disclosing nature's emergent and self-transcending tendencies. Within these film sequences the emerging and ever-transforming organic forms present, I argue, what Michael S. Carolan (2005) calls 'deep strata nature' (p. 406). The elusive deep strata of nature are presented through the cinematic event, thus expressing an ontology of depth. These cinematic representations of nature share an epistemological role in providing a deeper engagement with both the surface and depths of reality. Carolan's critical realist approach describes deep strata nature as existing 'in a state of permanence-with-flux' (p. 406). Furthermore, the emergent aesthetic of these autonomous landscapes also reveals that embodied knowledge of these deep structures of nature both through direct perception and through cinema is also 'forever contingent, limited and changing' (Carolan, p. 407).

Emphasising the trans-human aspects of nature within Herzog's cinematic wilderness seems antithetical to his own opinions of his cinematic landscapes. It seems as though Herzog anthropomorphises cinematic nature as landscapes of the mind, as he states: 'For me a true landscape is not just a representation of a desert or a forest. It shows an inner state of mind, literally inner landscapes, and it is the human soul that is visible through the landscapes presented in my films' (cited in Prager, 2010, p. 93). Laurie Ruth Johnson (2016) also discusses how the mountain, forest and volcano settings within Herzog's films can be interpreted as 'psychotopographies, in which aspects of a protagonist's or the director's inner life are made visible in nature [and] where the filmic landscape could symbolically externalize psychic interiority' (p. 511). A phenomenological approach can avoid the problematic dichotomy between raw matter and landscape and, following Sobchack (2004), seek to analyse 'the meaning and value that emerges in the *synthesis* of the experience's *subjective* and *objective* aspects' (p. 7). A critical realist approach also brings the trans-human biophysical components back into the discourse and experience of

cinema, which at present over-emphasises the role of the human. The next section discusses in more detail the post-formulative stage of the cinematic experience, where Herzog's films invite the viewer to come to terms with the undefined significance of the cinematic wilderness experience.

3.7 The emergent field of meaning and affect within the cinematic wilderness experience

According to David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson (2010), as a subject views a film their mind seeks and probes the work 'for significance at many levels seeking referential meanings, explicit meanings, implicit meanings and symptomatic meanings' (p. 49). As components of an organic transcendental film style, for example, the autonomous landscape, function to render the explicit meaning of the landscape ambiguous as the viewer begins to seek and construct meaning derived solely from embodied knowledge of the cinematic wilderness. A viewer may rely on referential meanings of nature derived, for example, from the real natural world that is already invested with significance, yet the referential meaning of nature utilised by each viewer can vary greatly. This is because the term 'nature' is an indeterminate and, according to Carolan (2005), 'terribly imprecise' concept (p. 399). For example, Alistair McGrath outlines different ways of 'seeing' nature that are prevalent within contemporary culture.¹¹⁰ In many of his documentaries, Herzog attempts to resist these cultural ways of seeing nature. For example, as pointed out by Johnson (2016), within *Dark Glow of the Mountains* (1985) Herzog states in a voice-over

¹¹⁰ McGrath draws on Michael E. Soule (1995). According to McGrath, these different meanings of nature include: 'Nature as a mindless force, causing inconvenience to humanity, and demanding to be tamed; Nature as an open air gymnasium, offering leisure and sports facilities to affluent individuals who want to demonstrate their sporting prowess; Nature as a wild kingdom, encouraging scuba diving, hiking, and hunting; Nature as a supply depot, an aging and increasingly reluctant provider which produces (although with growing difficulty) minerals, water, food, and other services for humanity' (2008, p. 9). McGrath interestingly notes that these 'definitions of nature may well tell us more about those who define it than what it is in itself' (p. 10).

that he is not interested in making a film about mountain climbing but about what goes on inside mountain climbers. This verbal direction diverts the viewer away from interpreting nature as a recreational sphere for humans to conquer. Furthermore, in discussing the stratification of the natural world as proposed by Bhaskar's (1989) critical realism, McGrath (2008) discusses that the ambiguity of the term nature is even more complicated. He states: “‘nature’ is not merely open to many conflicting interpretations; it is a stratified notion, possessing a number of interconnected levels, each of which plays a role in determining how it is to be interpreted” (p. 126). Therefore, because referential meanings of nature are stratified, varied, multiple, ambiguous and indeterminate, the concept of nature within a film can become so complex in its possible connotations that it resists linguistic understanding, prior categories and signification. Noel Carroll (1998) describes Herzog’s films as presenting images with ‘properties, qualities, feeling-tones and powers’ (p. 284), which escape any current language or conceptual schematization (scientific, psychological, etc.) and are not ‘referable to ingrained habits of seeing’ (p. 286). Rather, they encourage new habits of seeing nature that transcend routine and ingrained forms of seeing. As film style functions to bypass explicit meaning and standard referential meanings of nature the viewer is left to engage in the most primal and metaphysically imaginative ways of seeing nature. These ways of seeing arise from embodied comprehension of nature’s self-transcending tendencies as a bottom up emergent aesthetic. Furthermore, it is important to identify both the sensuous and reflective thought components of this cinematic experience. Sobchack (2008) uses emergent terminology to articulate how the intelligibility and meaningfulness of the cinema emerges from the ‘cinesthetic subject’ (the embodied film viewer), whereby the senses co-constitute and synthesise ‘a field of meaning, affect and experience’ (p. 196). Sobchack highlights that this field of significant meaning can be described as irreducible as it cannot be located

solely within either embodied knowledge (produced by the senses) or reflective (cognitive) engagement (p. 196). Herzog's film style functions to produce this irreducible field.

However, the question remains: is the quest for metaphysical meaning in relation to nature valid even in a seemingly post-metaphysical age. As mentioned earlier, Herzog's films convey and stimulate reflective, philosophical thought on nature. Bettina Reiber (2009) argues that the Kantian sublime, as an awareness of human reason's extraordinary mode of transcendence towards the world, offers relief in a post-modern world marked by the loss of valid meaning. While acknowledging that the modernist and post-modernist removal of meaning has been the price of rationality and reason, Reiber asserts that the Kantian awareness of reason brought about by aesthetic experience does not posit reason as a useful tool to explain away meaning. Furthermore, she argues that the Kantian sublime offers a 'rational grounding for the quest for meaning' p. 89) by claiming a subjective validity (a validity identified by Kant in his judgement of the sublime).¹¹¹ Within aesthetic experience and in particular the cinematic experience of Herzog's films this quest has no need to articulate the answer. That is, objective meaning is not so important. However, subjective meaning can emerge that is not solely constructed by the viewer but is also informed and saturated by the trans-human. The trans-human, that is, the expanded field of the natural world as an inexhaustible and ungraspable depth, saturates subjective fluid meaning within the Herzogian cinematic wilderness experience. Undefinable, inexhaustible, and non-signifying meaning of nature can emerge within the cinematic experience as the primal, organic images solicit the metaphysical imagination.

While Herzog's nature aesthetics and film style as a bottom up aesthetic solicits the metaphysical imagination, this chapter also briefly alludes to how his films' themes and

¹¹¹ Rieber criticises the post-modern condition and its 'narrow definition of meaning, whereby it is presupposed that meaning can be only that which can be shown to be objectively true' (p. 88).

narratives also function to shape the way the viewer interprets nature. Lefebvre (2011) notes this conundrum in his discussion of the autonomous landscape: ‘If narrative is that which can serve to conceal the film landscape, that which renders it fragile, it may also be, in the final analysis, that which confers to it its specificity and its true depth.’ (p. 76). According to Lefebvre, while the autonomous landscape resists the demands of the film’s plot or narrative setting, the themes of the narrative, however minimal, can confer to the landscape a significance beyond reductionist empirical and psychological categories. Matthew Gandy (1996) notes that Herzog’s nature aesthetics, within their narrative context, display a tension between romantic conceptions of ‘nature as a source of spiritual unity and existential portrayals of nature as a hostile other’ (p. 1). Gandy regards this worldview as a ‘juxtaposition of nineteenth-century romanticism with twentieth century existentialism’ (p. 2).¹¹² An example of this top-down aesthetic can be found in the on-screen text that overlays the autonomous landscape in *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), as discussed earlier in this chapter. Prager (2010) argues that this text ‘either bespeaks the knowledge that there is a language of nature that we are prevented from interpreting, or that nature simply has nothing to say’ (p. 99). Ironically, Herzog’s themes within a number of his films centre on his interpretations of nature’s otherness. According to Gandy (1996), Herzog views nature as ‘imbued with a moral vacuity, a mocking hostility towards human endeavour’ (p. 8). Prager (2010) also identifies that the crucial theme of many of Herzog’s work is the ‘vast indifference of the universe’ (p. 100).¹¹³ In

¹¹² While both these seemingly antithetical interpretations of the irreconcilable otherness of nature can be epistemologically justified neither can be epistemologically proven.

¹¹³ Pat Brereton (2001) analyses aesthetic expressions of differing appreciations of nature in documentary and fiction film. She identifies within mainstream blockbuster Hollywood cinema (at the turn of the century) a renewed use of romantic and utopic film closures that use representations of nature. However, Brereton argues that endings are not necessarily ‘an ideological and aesthetic cop-out, but instead signal a form of affirmation of the duality of human and inanimate nature and their striving for ecological/utopian harmony’ (2001, p. 46). However, more recently, in reaction to and critique of these Hollywood romantic and utopic expressions of nature, Lars Von Trier produced *Melancholia* (2011) and *AntiChrist* (2011). One could argue

Grizzly Man (2005) through voice-over narration, Herzog imposes his fatalistic ideas of nature which emphasise nature's unconcern for any value and deconstructs Timothy Treadwell's romantic vision of nature that he criticises as naïve and idealistic.¹¹⁴ John W. White (2008) argues that Herzog views of nature are extreme and that he could have developed a more balanced view within his documentary.¹¹⁵ The tension between these views infiltrates the whole film.

Both Herzog's and Treadwell's views of nature fall into a danger that Roland Hepburn (1996) warns against. This danger is the '*over-valuing of the metaphysical imagination, the exaggeration of its authority*' (p. 195). Hepburn is adamant that if a metaphysical imagining is given any authority should it not then require sound metaphysical theory and argument? Interpretations of nature that negate meaning and value and interpretations of nature that affirm meaning and value can both be expressed and facilitated by the power of cinema regardless of whether these interpretations can be supported by philosophical theory. Such is the power of cinema to manipulate. This manipulative ability of cinema reveals both the crucial and problematic role that the metaphysical imagination can play within cinematic appreciation of nature.

The cinematic exploration of paradox may avoid both a naïve romanticism and a strict fatalist or materialist view of nature. Furthermore, it move towards what Gandy (1996) proposes, in relation to Herzog's films,: 'the development of greater social and

that these films use representations of sublime nature and the affective sublime to express a strong existential nihilistic or fatalistic appreciation of nature. Romantic narrative closures are absent from these films.

¹¹⁴ Both extreme romantic and extreme nihilistic/fatalistic filmic expressions of nature, even though are seemingly opposed, are both expressions of metaphysical views of nature and therefore are metaphysically imaginative. Nihilistic, fatalistic, materialistic, naturalistic, pantheistic, theistic or panentheistic visions of nature all have their metaphysical imaginative correlatives. Ronald Hepburn discusses how an aesthetic appreciation of nature free from metaphysics would 'be grossly self-impoverishing' (p. 914) and calls for 'a recognition of its endless variety' (p. 194).

¹¹⁵ According to Gilmore (2013), 'Herzog is anti-romantic and darkly realist in his understanding of nature. In fact, his rejection of harmony is a rejection of the romantic fetishization of nature as healing ground and thus a rejection of nature in favour of a view approximating and appreciative of wildness' (p. 132).

historical sensitivity' to 'avoid a descent into Herzog's dismal cosmos' (p. 16). Hepburn (1996) also states that the co-presence of opposites within an aesthetic appreciation of nature, for example, life and stillness, vitality and death, 'constitutes a fundamental, and too little recognised, key concept for aesthetic theory' (p. 199). Can film express nature's overall vitality that is both, to use Hepburn's (1996) words '*creative* and *destructive* in indissoluble unity' (p. 72)? Can film express an ominous infinity and the infinity of vital and harmonious abundance simultaneously?¹¹⁶ Furthermore, in doing so, can film style encourage, within an aesthetic appreciation of cinematic nature, a 'contemplative equilibrium that is neither unqualified by melancholy nor disillusioned and repelled' (p. 72) or, I may add, an appreciation of nature where meaning and value can emerge.¹¹⁷

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the power and workings of an organic transcendental film style by which organic mise-en-scene works together with organic, sound, editing and cinematographic techniques to produce embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies and in turn solicit the metaphysical imagination. This cinematic experience involves immanent embodied engagement with the visceral cinematic wilderness on screen as well as transcendental reflective thought. Sublime wilderness regularly haunts the cinematic experience of Werner Herzog's films. The viewer's experience of Herzog's cinematic wilderness, while not identical to direct engagement with nature, shares with it an epistemological role of providing embodied comprehension of nature's otherness and

¹¹⁶ The 2012 Academy Award nominated documentary *The Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom*, directed by Lucy Walker, may provoke such a balanced aesthetic appreciation of nature.

¹¹⁷ Hepburn (1996), identifies the nightmare infinite (a metaphysical imaginative aesthetic appreciation of nature) as the 'mockingly unfulfillable task' and 'the never-completable' and 'the uncountable over abundance' of things (p. 203). Hepburn describes two poles of aesthetic response to infinity. Firstly, the benign infinites of nature's vitality and abundance and second the nightmare infinites of nature's suffocating and absurd over-abundance (p. 203).

therefore facilitates a deeper engagement with the elusive and expanded field of the natural world that escapes but determines them both. However, the expanded field of the natural world as an inexhaustible and ungraspable depth saturates subjective fluid meaning within the cinematic wilderness experience. Additionally, within the narrative context of Herzog's films, the landscapes attain an elusive significance irreducible to either raw matter, representation or social construction. This field of meaning and affect organically emerges from the deep strata nature, the cinematic wilderness, and the cinesthetic subject relation. Undefinable, inexhaustible and non-signifying, meaning of nature can emerge within the cinematic experience as the primal, organic images solicit the metaphysical imagination.

Chapter 4

Nature's self-transcending tendencies and transcendental spheres of human experience in the films of Andrei Tarkovsky

Introduction

Representations of the wind in the trees, dust, smoke and mist floating in the air, the flow of weed in rivers and falling rain all feature prominently within Andrei Tarkovsky's films. A common quality of these cinematic representations is their ability to stimulate an awareness of nature's self-transcending tendencies. The main characters in Tarkovsky's films are also frequently represented as experiencing transcendental states of being, such as dreams, memories, contemplative thought and other trance-like states of mind. This chapter argues that, by producing embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies, representations of nature in Tarkovsky's films potentially solicit within the spectator transcendental states akin to the experience of dreaming.

The first section of this chapter expands the discussion in Chapter 2 about how a phenomenological inquiry of the human experience of dreaming, particularly a neurocognitive and critical realist approach, can clarify the similarities and differences between dreaming consciousness, waking consciousness, and transcendental states of mind within cinematic experience. Section two discusses how Tarkovsky can be seen to employ an organic transcendental film style that produces affect that resists linguistic understanding and signification. The third part of this chapter analyses the specific ways in which an organic transcendental film style is at work within Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979), and *Solaris* (1972).

4.1 The phenomenology of dreams and film

This chapter's discussion of dream theory in relation to theories of cinematic experience contrasts with Christian Metz's (1982) theorisation of cinema as a dream which uses a semiotic and psychoanalytic approach. Instead, I draw upon Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (2007), who explores the 'intrinsic affinity that films have with dreams' in a way that moves beyond 'a typical psychoanalytical interest' (p. 11). Botz-Bornstein's application of dreams to film is an affinity of form or structure. Botz-Bornstein uses the term 'dreamtense' to describe the structure of dreams and argues that the main importance of dreams in relation to film is not so much their content but the phenomenal structure 'through which they deploy their being' (Botz-Bornstein, 2017, p. 1). Film style can represent and emulate the structure or dreamtense of dreams. The transcendental mental processes which are stimulated by film techniques that emulate dreamtense, while not equivalent, have intrinsic similarities with the mental processes that occur when dreaming. Roland Hepburn (1993) articulates another distinct yet related aesthetic appreciation of landscape (which I argue can also be expressed through film) where an element of the dreamlike brings with it a quality of dreams. This quality he describes as 'enigmatically meaningful' (p. 75), whereby a striking landscape can become a 'half-perceived, half-dreamed visionary' (p. 75) scene which for some unknown reason deeply matters to us.¹¹⁸ In this sense, perceiving nature is not so much objectively measuring nature as it is 'dreamt' within consciousness, such that nature that is dreamt can, therefore, have profound subjective significance and meaning. I use the phrase 'nature that is dreamt' here, not to refer to the experience of dreaming about nature while sleeping, but instead the affinity between phenomenal nature and dreaming. As

¹¹⁸ Hepburn (1993), in using the phrase 'half perceived, half dreamed' (p. 75), acknowledges both the objective and subjective aspects of perception and is therefore following a critical realist stance.

discussed in Chapter 2, through a critical realist, emergent and phenomenological inquiry into the lived experience of nature and cinematic experience, both phenomenal nature and dreaming share the quality of being transcendentally brain-based. Thorsten Botz-Bornstein (2007) poetically describes the act of perceiving landscape or space as ‘dreamt space’ and an ‘aesthetic dream’ in contrast to ‘measured space’ (p. 19). However, to avoid idealism, he states that this aesthetic dream must still be determined by an objective world out there (p. 21). According to Botz-Bornstein, “‘Dreamlike desires’ do not really help the poet since his aim is not simply to ‘dream’ a world that is the world of his desires. What he wants is to see the ‘real’ world in a dreamlike way” (p. 19, the emphasis is in the source). In discussing Tarkovsky’s films, Botz-Bornstein argues that the notion of the landscape as an aesthetic dream has a ‘character that is more spiritual than positive’ (p. 21) because it is a dream world where neither idealism nor scientific measures can subsist’ (p. 21). Tarkovsky’s cinema is a space where the filmmaker expresses, and the spectator can engage in seeing the real world in a dreamlike way. Petric (1989) also describes the cinematic experience of Tarkovsky’s films as ‘the actual experiencing of the oneiric mood generated by particular cinematic devices’ (p. 29). Petric notes that Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* and *Mirror*:

contain many features characteristic of dream process, such as the bizarreness of the situation, strong physical motion, obfuscated peripheral vision (elimination of the image’s borders, the flickering effect (light pulsation), an unexpected change in chromatic tonality, spatial-temporal discontinuity, pictorial distortion of objects, decelerated motion, a fluctuating focus (blurring). (p. 29)

The examples listed by Petric include mise-en-scene, cinematographic and editing techniques. Petric uses an example from *Stalker* to describe how a strange sequence of flying birds and dust floating through the air ‘not only mirrors the mood of the protagonists but also provokes a hallucinogenic-like experience within the viewer’ (p.

31).¹¹⁹ Also, according to Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie (1994), the oneiric atmosphere of Tarkovsky's films 'seeps into and pervades what would otherwise be waking reality' (p. 238) and this atmosphere 'can eventually throw a dreamlike aura over virtually the whole film' (p. 241). What are these scholars referring to when they use the terms 'oneiric atmosphere', 'dreamlike aura', 'the aesthetic dream' and 'hallucinogenic-like' to describe cinematic experience? Chapter 2 clarified the similarities and differences between dreaming consciousness, waking consciousness and transcendental states of mind within cinematic experience concluding that film, by emulating dream tense, can produce embodied comprehension of transcendental aspects of reality, both the phenomenal flux of the world and the physical world generating this flux.

4.2 Andrei Tarkovsky's organic transcendental film style

Thomas Redwood (2010) argues that Tarkovsky as a filmmaker and artist insisted "on the reality of human experience beyond 'everyday' material conditions and suggests that art's function is to stimulate the spectator's awareness of these 'transcendental' spheres of experience"(p. 9).¹²⁰ According to Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie (1994), Tarkovsky insisted that his work should not be interpreted or deciphered as if it were a symbol or collection of symbols (Johnson, 1994).¹²¹ Instead, Tarkovsky attributed to the film image two central qualities: firstly, that of a specific, unique, actual event; and, secondly, the quality of a revelation, that is experienced by the audience rather than consciously understood or deciphered (Johnson and Petrie), 1994). For example,

¹¹⁹ It is important to note that Vlada Petric (1989) uses the term 'hallucinogenic-like'. Film can produce experiences that are dream-like and hallucinogenic-like not actual sleeping dream states or hallucinations.

¹²⁰ Tarkovsky states that 'indeed it is the especial virtue of cinema' (1986, p. 23) to convey transcendental spheres of human experience, such as memories. He goes further to say that 'there are some aspects of human life that can only be faithfully represented through poetry' (1986, p. 30).

¹²¹ See also Tarkovsky (2004).

Tarkovsky did not want the dogs that appear in some of his films to be seen as symbols. Instead, he hoped that the experience of the dog's appearance produced an 'authentic quality of strangeness and mystery that, rightly defies attempts at specific explanation' (Johnson and Petrie, 1994, p. 38).¹²² Because of this quality, Johnson and Petrie (1994) likens the dogs to what formalist critics often refer to as 'affectual signs' (p. 39). Vlada Petric (1989) also argues that the kinesthetic impact of Tarkovsky's representations of nature, which Petric calls 'dream imagery' (p. 1), resists linguistic understanding and signification. Some examples he cites are: 'the unexpected materialization of smoke, fog, rain, fire, wind, floating feathers' (p. 33).¹²³ A spectator willing to engage with the visceral qualities of the representations of nature may transform into what Sobchack describes as the 'cinesthetic subject'. Martine Beugnet (2007) succinctly summarises a cinema of sensation as 'the cinematic exploration of a sensory, embodied comprehension of reality' (p. 32), which has the significant 'ability to reach a spectator's mind through the intelligence of the affective' (p. 178). Paradoxically, Tarkovsky's cinema provides sensory embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies.

Thomas W. Smith (2000) applies Schrader's transcendental film style to the analysis of Tarkovsky's cinema using the term 'Transcendental Organic Cinema' to describe 'the emotional, sensory, and oneiric (dreamlike) textures of his work' (p. 1).¹²⁴

¹²² Stuart Millis (2008) identifies that in spite of Tarkovsky's insistence that 'his films do not contain symbols and metaphors' (p. 241), 'three of the most widely known books on the director, Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie's *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, Mark LeFanu's *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, and Maya Turovskaya's *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*' are all 'exegesis of symbolic meaning' (p. 242).

¹²³ Petric argues that these representations are 'experienced on screen as a cinematic phenomenon rather than perceived as a *natural power*' (1989, p. 34, emphasis in the source). But, as it has been argued in Chapter 2, a dualistic approach that posits natural phenomena and cinematic phenomena as not dependent upon each other is inadequate. McGrath (2002) explains that Bhasker's critical realism challenges 'both reductionist approaches which collapse reality into a single observable stratum, and pluralist theories which affirm the existence of different strata, but decline to see them as dependent upon each other' (McGrath, 2002, p. 226).

¹²⁴ Tarkovsky (1986) himself uses the word 'organic' many times to describe different elements of cinema.

Smith uses the term ‘organic’ to describe two layers of Tarkovsky’s films. Firstly, on a surface level the visual and sonic imagery of the natural world are organic and, secondly, the films are organic on a structural level ‘by virtue of fluid, long takes, sound bridges, and a rhythm based on the inherent qualities of the shot footage (rather than manipulative editing)’ (p. 1).¹²⁵ Angela Dalle Vacche (1996) points out that Tarkovsky thinks of the cinematic medium itself ‘as something consubstantial with the four natural elements’ (p. 136). For example, the fluid, ever-changing and time-manifesting nature of water is not only represented as mise-en-scene but mirrored (or emulated) by editing, sound, and cinematographic techniques.

As Dalle Vacche echoes Tarkovsky’s thoughts on cinema, she is applying the notion of nature’s self-transcending tendencies to the structure of cinema. Furthermore, Dalle Vacche (1996) argues that for Tarkovsky ‘the image is cinematic when it becomes a vessel of transformations, not only from water to fire, from fire to air, or from water to earth, but also from life to death and from death to life’ (p. 137). According to Dalle Vacche, these images are not symbols, but instead ‘primal images, so natural and therefore so inexhaustible in their signifying power that they are capable of reorienting our imagination away from a rational, technocratic worldview toward something infinite and unspeakable, endless and mysterious’ (p. 137). The combination of organic mise-en-scene, editing, cinematography, and sound within Tarkovsky’s films, which renders them as vessels of transformations and primal images, solicits an awareness of nature’s

¹²⁵ Tarkovsky, like Romantic philosophers and artists, was inspired by the idea of infinity in relation to man and, strangely, plants. In *Time within Time*, he writes: ‘What an inspired idea is the notion of infinity in juxtaposition with the brief span of human life. The very concept is infinite. Not that I am convinced so far that man is the yardstick of this whole construction. What about plants? [...] At least on Earth, man has realised that he is standing face to face with infinity’ (2004, p. 12). Also, in discussing the cinematic image, Tarkovsky states that ‘[t]he image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness, bound as the latter is by Euclidean space. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality’ (1986, p. 107).

self-transcending tendencies. Tarkovsky himself describes water's self-transcending tendencies: "it is a very cinematic element. And through it, I have tried to express the idea of passing time. Water conveys depth, a sense of transformation and reflection" (cited in Dalle Vacche, 1996, p. 136). Dalle Vacche also eloquently describes the self-transcending tendencies of Tarkovsky's cinema: 'Tarkovsky handles the filmic image in such a way that it looks as if it were constantly accreting onto its outside surface the shaping rhythms of internal forces' (1996, p.138). The unseen properties of space and time are made visible through organic mise-en-scene in combination with organic cinematographic, editing and sound techniques.¹²⁶ While many of the recurring representations of nature in Tarkovsky's films do not depict natural stimuli as dramatically sublime, the cinematic apparatus of time allows subtle natural phenomena to achieve a sublime affect.¹²⁷ What unites immense mountains and less dramatic natural phenomena, for example, flowing river weed, is their self-transcending tendencies, that is, their ability to reveal frontiers of matter, space, time and human perception. Thus, Tarkovsky's cinematic style can be described as 'organic transcendental', firstly, in the way, his approach to film style produces embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies and, secondly, in how this affect can stimulate an awareness of transcendental spheres of human experience.

The next section analyses how specific sequences within three of Tarkovsky's films

¹²⁶ Tarkovsky theories on the objective and subjective aspects of film, especially in *Sculpting in Time* (1986), can appear contradictory and paradoxical. For example, on the one hand, he states that 'Naturalistically recorded facts are in themselves utterly inadequate to the creation of the cinematic image. The image in cinema is based on the ability to present as an observation one's own perception of the object' (p. 107). On the other hand, he notes that, in distinction to literature as a system of signs, 'cinema is an art that operates with reality' (p. 177). He elaborates: 'It does not signify life or symbolize it, but embodies it, expressing its uniqueness' (p. 111) and it does not have to use words: it manifests to us directly' (p. 60).

¹²⁷ According to Tarkovsky (1986): 'A cinematic work is above all a work that could not be possible in any other art form. In other words, it can be created by means of cinema, and cinema alone' (p. 67). Time was for Tarkovsky (1986) 'the very foundation of cinema as sound is for music, colour in painting, character in drama' (p. 119) and, furthermore, the most powerful film technique to express time was for him the long shot and not editing.

employ an organic transcendental film style where representations of nature, in the form of organic mise-en-scene, function together with editing, cinematography, and sound to produce embodied comprehension of an organic transcendence. Furthermore, this section will analyse how this embodied comprehension solicits and has an affinity with transcendental states of mind akin to the process of dreaming.

4.3 Organic flow through space and time: Nature's self-transcending tendencies and dreaming in *Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979) and *Solaris* (1972)

In *Mirror* (1975), Tarkovsky visually and aurally captures the wind in the trees and the fields to great effect; his poetic representations render the natural event mysterious and strange. As noted by Redwood (2010), the powerful aesthetic effect of the wind in a buckwheat field had such a dramatic impact on Tarkovsky as a child that he sowed a field months before shooting the beginning scene in *Mirror*. Within this scene a 'seemingly miraculous gust of wind ripples toward the camera' (Redwood, p. 77) [fig 18].¹²⁸ In recounting the childhood and cinematic event, Tarkovsky (1986) discussed how the success of the cinematic buckwheat field revealed the transcendent quality of memory: 'It seemed to tell us something about the special quality of our memory – about its capacity for penetrating beyond the veils drawn by time, and this was exactly what the film had to be about' (p. 132).

Redwood (2010) argues that while the wind, as a recurring motif within *Mirror*, 'appears particularly ripe with conceptual significance' (p. 75), the spectator need not 'endow the wind with a precise symbolic interpretation' (p. 75).¹²⁹ This is

¹²⁸ The farmers of the field insisted that it would not yield buckwheat but for Tarkovsky it did (Redwood, p. 77)

¹²⁹ For example, Redwood lists Natasha Synessios and Johnson and Petrie as attaching a precise symbolic Judeo-Christian meaning to the wind. Redwood notes how 'In the New Testament's original Greek text, the word for wind (*pneuma*) also means spirit' (p. 75).



Figure 18. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.

because Redwood posits that such recurring motifs as the wind within *Mirror* should be recognised as a narrative function within the composition of the film as a whole in the way it unifies the seemingly disconnected segments of the film (p. 75). Moreover, according to the Redwood, the unity expressed through recurring motifs direct the spectator to ‘consider the conceptual implications of this unity’ (p. 75). However, this chapter will focus rather on the immediate and visceral qualities of Tarkovsky’s cinematic wind in the trees as they provide sensory, embodied comprehension of the transcendental aspects of biophysical reality and perception and in turn stimulate an awareness of brain-based transcendental spheres of human experience.¹³⁰

Within Alexei’s (Filipp Yankovsky) boyhood dream scene at the beginning of *Mirror*, Tarkovsky also includes in the edit a shot that visualises pictorially nature’s self-transcending tendencies through a representation of the wind in the trees [fig 19-21]. The immediate visceral affect resists signification and linguistic understanding. The wind that caused the movement of the trees cannot be seen within the frame, but the

¹³⁰ Within the dialogue of the opening sequence of *Mirror*, Tarkovsky reveals the alterity, otherness or transhuman aspects of the trees. In this scene, the man says to the woman: ‘did you ever wonder about plants...feeling, being aware... even perceiving. The trees, this beechnut... they’re in no hurry... while we rush around in platitudes’.

invisible qualities of the wind are revealed by the moving branches and leaves. While the implied transcendental physical reality of the wind exists beyond human sight and the camera's limited visual systems, and beyond the cinematic space, the image becomes saturated with its visibility. The wind in the trees, as a natural non-cinematic event, possesses emergent qualities and resists being categorised as a reductive object or collection of objects within empty space and time. Furthermore, the flowing cinematic form of the trees is not solely a property of the moving air, the trees, space, time, the camera, the screen or the spectator. The cinematic phenomena emerge in their relation.



Figure 19. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.



Figure 20. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.



Figure 21. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.

While the physical wind is not present within the cinematic experience, space and time are. The unseen properties of space and time in *Mirror* are made palpable through the visceral motion of the trees within the frame, such that space and time are not only represented but also presented within the cinematic moment; their invisibility is made visible. As a pictorial cinematic event, the wind in the trees, not only produces embodied comprehension of the organic, transcendental aspects of the biophysical natural event but also brings with it the primordial disclosure that all perceptions are dream-like in their mode of transcendence. However, the power of this scene cannot be reduced solely to the organic elements of its mise-en-scene.

Tarkovsky also uses the cinematic structure of the sequence to produce an embodied comprehension of transcendence by emulating dream tense. Editing, audio, and cinematographic techniques are used to present a flow of images and sound that

transcend everyday time and space strengthening the dreamlike quality of the scene.¹³¹

Redwood identifies non-linear editing techniques as ‘decoupage constructs’ (p. 105) that function to complicate spatial and temporal relationships to negate ‘straightforward spatial and temporal logic’ (p. 105). Redwood goes on to describe this editing style as ‘the antithesis of classical continuity convention’ (p.105), whereby the presentation of non-logical and nonlinear space and time emulates the phenomenal structure of dreaming and produces kinesthetic impact. To engage with the complex ‘filmic reality’ that emulates dream tense, Redwood believes that the viewer must attentively undertake a mental process that is akin to dreaming consciousness (p. 105). An example of these editing devices is present in the dream scene mentioned above. The long shot after the wind in the trees presents the boy lying down asleep rather than returning to the previous scene of the boy sitting up in bed [fig 19-21]. This non-linear editing technique creates a spatio-temporal discontinuity and emulates dream tense. In summary, the representation of the boy sleeping and presumably dreaming, the representation of the wind in the trees, and the editing style, which presents non-logical and nonlinear space and time, all work together to represent and present and solicit an organic transcendence.

Furthermore, the sound and music within the sequence also complement the potency of the mise-en-scene and editing techniques in creating spatio-temporal discontinuity and expressing organic transcendence. Firstly, the audio uses atonal and dissonant music to express transcendence. Elizabeth Fairweather (2012) notes that composer Eduard Artemyev ‘seamlessly introduces music from a wordless choir, very

¹³¹ I use the term ‘dreamlike’ not to describe the ability of the scene to represent a dream but the ability of the scene to solicit a conscious awareness of the presence of dream-like states within the cinematic experience. As stated above while not equivalent to the process of dreaming when sleeping the transcendental mental processes that can potentially occur within cinematic experience have an intrinsic affinity with dreams.

low in the mix, and at first atonal' (p. 42) to give the scene 'a mysterious, sinister quality' (p. 42). However, 'ominous' may be a better description than 'sinister'.¹³² Secondly, the use of sound in Alexi's dream scene expresses an organic transcendence because it both represents and produces an awareness of the transcendental nature of phenomenal sonic perception. The boy sits up in bed and while his lips do not move a voice can be heard whispering 'Papa'. The audio represents the sound in the boy's mind, not the physical sound that would occur if the boy used his physical voice. Simultaneously as this sound is heard, that is, the sound of air breathing out to form the word 'Papa', there comes the cut to the shot of the wind in the trees. However, the sound of the wind is absent. There is silence interspersed with a cat's mewing and a rattling noise. In discussing the sonic style of Tarkovsky's cinema, Fairweather (2012) argues that the off-screen sounds within this scene function as a means of transcending the reality represented by his visual imagery. The disconnection of the images and sound within this sequence can heighten the spectator's awareness of the sound (mewing and rattling) inside their heads within the cinematic moment. These sounds are not connected to anything visually within the frame, and this disconnection can stimulate an awareness of the phenomenal properties of the sounds as they emerge and resonate within consciousness. Regardless of whether this is a conscious or subconscious awareness of the transcendental nature of phenomenal sonic perception, the sounds can become dreamlike in their mode of transcendence. Fairweather describes the ability of the sounds to "get 'inside our heads'" (2012, p. 38) within the cinematic experience. It is this ability of Tarkovsky's films that stimulates an awareness of immanently transcendental states of mind.

¹³² See Chapter 3 for an argument of how atonal or dissonant audio can function to express transcendence. Tobias Pontara (2011) describes how within *Stalker* an audio technique, that is, 'the regular return of the compound sound image consisting of classical music and the sound of running trains', expresses or enacts 'a central tenet of the utopian aesthetics of early Romanticism: the idea of transcendence' (p. 315).

Petric (1989) notes that numerous sequences within Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), which are saturated with a dreamlike mood, mirror the protagonist's state of mind (p. 31). One scene of the film also uses the flow of natural phenomena to create a visceral cinematic moment. In this scene, a long take manifests the unseen properties of space and time as seen through three types of matter in motion, namely, the swirling dust, the slushing mud surface of the lake, and the flowing grass reeds [fig 22]. The following close up presents the main character, Stalker (Aleksandr Kaidanovsky), in a conscious dreamlike trance lying in the dirt [fig 23]. The embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies produced within the spectator by the natural event in the first shot has an affinity with the unseen transcendental state of mind of the character represented in the proceeding shot. However, the state of mind is not only represented through the character's trance-like stare, but the cinematic experience can also stimulate an awareness of the presence of these spheres within the viewer. At the start of this static long shot, the only sound heard is the sonic echo of water dripping. Again, this audio does not match the accompanying visuals. The organic sound, heightened by a



Figure 22. Still from *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979.



Figure 23. Still from *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979.

distorted echo, represents the state of mind of Stalker as it seems to come from within the protagonist's mind. Furthermore, the disconnection of the sound from the image

stimulates an awareness that the phenomenal sound literally emerges inside spectator's consciousness within the cinematic experience.

Yet the visceral, organic quality of the images and sound is bound to be sensed by the spectator's organic body within the physical space of the cinema, grounding the notion of transcendence in both the body and the physical material of the brain. The proceeding shot pans above Stalker's head and comes to rest on an ambiguous image of a small island of dirt with water slushing around it [fig 24]. While the image resembles and could, therefore, signify a brain, the embodied knowledge produced by the visceral quality of the earth resonates with the organically transcendental state of mind represented and solicited within the previous shots. The characters' act of placing their heads literally on the wet earth reiterates this affinity and resonance.



Figure 24. Still from *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979.

Tarkovsky also frequently uses the *ruckenfigur* technique in his films to evoke a strange sense of isolation. By denying access to the face, Tarkovsky encourages the viewer to consider the figure's relation to the larger environment; both on-screen and off-screen space and time (Redwood, 2010). One particular scene within *Stalker* uses the wind in the trees together with the *ruckenfigur* technique [fig 25]. The combination of mise-en-scene encourages, with greater intensity, the viewer's attention by including them in the loop of perception. The *ruckenfigur* technique in this scene of *Stalker* not

only represents characters contemplating a world but also invites the spectator to look at, reflect upon and make sense of the visceral qualities of the cinematic image both as embodied spectators and conscious beings. Sobchack explains this dual aspect to cinematic experience: “The ‘matter that means’ and the ‘meaning that matters’ emerge in a reciprocal and reversible structure that is the lived body having sense in the world and making sense of the world” (Sobchack, 2000, p.75).



Figure 25. Still from *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979.

In *Solaris* (1972), instead of the flow of trees in the wind, Tarkovsky uses the hypnotic flow of weed in a river [fig 26]. The scene follows the film’s protagonist, Chris (Donatas Banionis), as he walks in the natural setting of his father’s property a few days before he travels to space. The slow pace of the scene, the consistent use of long takes and the *ruckenfigur* technique encourage intensified contemplation on the natural world. The camera slowly zooms in on a section of a river where the river weed is flowing gracefully underwater. The organic mise-en-scene produces embodied comprehension of the unseen properties of space and time as seen through the flow of the weed in the water [fig 26]. The long take allows organic space and time to unfold and manifest. In this immanent way, invisible space and time manifest literally within the cinematic experience. Embodied comprehension of nature’s self-transcending tendencies, that is, embodied knowledge of deep strata nature, is produced not only from the representation of the flowing river weed but also because unseen space and time are made palpable

(presented) to the viewer within the cinema. In *Sculpting in Time* (1986), Tarkovsky describes the epistemological role of the long take as it functions to produce embodied comprehension of time and space. In his words:

Rhythm in cinema is conceived by the life of the object visibly recorded in the frame. Just as from the quivering of a reed you can tell what sort of current, what sort of pressure there is in a river, in the same way we know the movement of time from the flow of life process reproduced in the shot. (p. 120)

Later in *Solaris*, Chris is sent into space to investigate incidents on a space station. Crew members have been supposedly hallucinating while gazing at the planet Solaris's swirling oceans and clouds. The themes of *Solaris* include the visceral affect of aesthetic engagements with natural phenomena, in other words, the natural sublime.



Figure 26. Still from *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972.

Other themes include the ontology of transcendental spheres of human experience, for example, memories, dreams, and hallucinations, in relation to the empirical, rational and physical natural world. The character Burten was the first astronaut to visit the planet Solaris. At the start of the film, Burten's hallucinations are critiqued by a group of scientists. They speculate that his hallucinations were induced by a combination of 'atmospheric influences of the planet' and 'the excitation of' certain parts of the brain. Once on the space station, Chris gazes into the vast oceans, swirling fog and clouds of the strange planet Solaris. Soon after, pieces of his memories are extracted, seemingly

by the sentient planet, and become physical reality. Replicas of his dead wife appear physically on the space station. Within this scene, a manifestation occurs after Chris gazes at the self-transcending tendencies of the planet's ocean [fig 27-29]. The flowing form of the ocean represents emergent properties; the ocean's flowing form is not a sole property of the water, space or time but emerges in their relation [fig 28]. In this way, the oceans physical form can be described as self-transcending. Furthermore, the sublime ocean horizon as it blurs with the immensity of the sky also represents nature's self-transcending tendencies by expressing limitlessness [fig 29]. Botz-Bornstein (2007) discusses similarities between Tarkovsky's cinema and Casper David Friedrich's Romantic sublime pictorial landscapes. Friedrich's landscapes, Botz-Bornstein claims, work 'towards a mystification effect, which makes nature more real ... because it is stranger' (p. 28). In fact, both artists use space to create a dreamlike strangeness.¹³³ Within the narrative of this sequence, memory, an unseen transcendental sphere of human experience is triggered into sensible reality through sublime affect. This part of the film's narrative illustrates the resonant relationship, inherent within concepts of the sublime, between nature's self-transcending tendencies and certain transcendental spheres of human existence. However, the sublime affect is not just represented and discussed within the dialogue. The viewer is presented with images that solicit transcendental states of mind within the cinematic experience, for example, the sublime shots of the ocean planet [fig 28-29]. The organic mise-en-scene functions together with editing, sound, and cinematography to express an organic transcendence. Tarkovsky's imagery and sound do not symbolise an organic transcendence but produce embodied

¹³³ In discussing the cinematic image, Tarkovsky (1986) argues: 'The image is indivisible and elusive, dependent upon our consciousness and on the real world which it seeks to embody. If the world is inscrutable, then the image will be so too. It is a kind of equation, signifying the correlation between truth and the human consciousness, bound as the latter is by Euclidean space. We cannot comprehend the totality of the universe, but the poetic image is able to express that totality' (p. 107).

comprehension of transcendence as a quality of the biophysical world and a quality of brain-based spheres of human experience both represented on the screen and present in the cinematic moment.



Figure 27. Still from *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972.



Figure 28. Still from *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972.



Figure 29. Still from *Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972.

For the viewer, the film visible on the screen may become like the planet visible to the characters in the film whereby the space of the cinema fulfils the role of the spaceship where memories and dream-like phenomena manifest; and whereby the film frame is analogous to the ship's window. In other words, the film on screen could be likened to the fictional planet Solaris, that is, as a sentient object that extracts and manifests transcendental spheres of human experience within the space of the cinema as the viewer looks through the window-screen. This thesis has not discussed the role memories within cinematic experience. However, even though memories and dreams

are ontologically and epistemologically different, memories share an affinity with dreams because they both reside within consciousness; memories are also ‘dreamlike’ in their mode of transcendence.

A scene towards the end of *Mirror* also produces embodied comprehension of nature’s self-transcending tendencies. It does so through cinematic depictions of bird flight, the exhalation of breath, the sound of crickets, and the edge of a forest. This segment of the film presents the death bed of the main character Alexei (Innokenty Smoktunovsky). After a roughly 30-second static long shot that focuses on the side of Alexei bed, the camera pans in slow motion upwards [fig 30-31]. Alexei’s face is not shown at all within the slow motion shot as he picks up a small seemingly sick bird that lies upside down as if dead on his bed [fig 30]. At the end of the shot, the camera follows his hand upwards as he throws the bird up in the air [fig 31]. The bird floats and then flaps its wings in smooth motion. The flapping propels the bird upwards matching the velocity of the throw. There is a smooth transition between the upwards motion of the bird as it is propelled by the force of the throw to the upwards motion as the bird takes flight. As gravity is about to take effect on the bird, the bird matches the velocity of the throw through flight. The bird then reaches the end of the frame and the film cuts to a scene of the edge of a forest and pans slowly across [fig 32]. Firstly, this shot represents an event where gravity is transcended through organic flight. The way the bird floats upward reveals its ability to transcend the power gravity in relation to the earth. Physically the bird doesn’t escape gravity’s power absolutely but transcends the limits of the human being’s and its own inert relation to gravity. The representation of bird flight produces embodied comprehension of nature’s self-transcending tendencies. Gravity as deep strata nature is always present within the cinema, but the slow

movement of the bird on screen and the slow movement of the camera upwards brings a bodily awareness of gravity's presence in relation to time. Slavoj Zizek (1999) also argues that Tarkovsky's film techniques, for example, the static long shot, slow motion and slowing panning and tracking shots, can work together in a harmonious relationship with the content.



Figure 30. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.



Figure 31. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.



Figure 32. Still from *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975.

In the scene described above, the bird's flight may be interpreted as a symbol for transcendental spheres of human experience. For example, Johnson and Petrie argue that Tarkovsky's human and bird flight aesthetics throughout his films are a reminder of 'of human beings perennial attempts to achieve physical as well as spiritual transcendence over this earth' (1999, p. 219). Zizek (1999) also claims, although in a differing interpretation to Johnson and Petrie's, that Tarkovsky's film style works to signal 'the longed-for spiritual reconciliation found not in elevation from the gravitational force of the Earth but in a full surrender to its inertia' (Zizek, 1999, p. 224). However, as Redwood notes: 'the spectator is called upon by Tarkovsky to restrain her interpretive desires and simply pay attention to what, in fact, she is being shown' (p. 36). This is reflected in Tarkovsky's own discussion of the difference between literature and cinema, where he states that cinema 'manifests itself directly' (1986, p. 176).

Furthermore, the editing and audio within this sequence of *Mirror* also contribute to producing embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies. Although the

audio used in the scene is minimal, there is some narration from Alexei: ‘What will happen to your mother if you die’ and ‘everything will be alright … everything will be’. He then takes a deep breath in and out. The spectator is denied visual access to Alexei’s face; just his arm is in the frame. The sound of a cricket begins as Alexi breaths out. The camera pans up, the cricket sound stops, and there is silence as he throws the bird upwards (which is shown in slow motion). It then cuts in silence to a slow panning shot of the sun setting over the edge of a forest. The sunlight creates a light bloom over the frame emulating and synchronising with the frontiers of human perception. Two seconds into the pan the cricket starts again. The sound of the breath functions to express an organic transcendence in a similar way to the wind in the trees; the organic sound of breath is basically wind blowing in and out through a mouth. The continuity of the silence over the cut to the landscape and the prelude of the cricket sound also express the transcendental nature of phenomenal sound. The cricket sound functions to bring an awareness that the sound resonates within the consciousness rather than staying connected to the represented content because both the sound’s onscreen and ontological referent remain ambiguous. The cinematic landscape at the end of this scene becomes enigmatically meaningful as the flowing and self-transcending structure of cinema work harmoniously together with representations of nature in the production of an embodied comprehension of organic transcendence.

This chapter has concentrated on the pre-formulative stage of the cinematic image. However, it must be acknowledged, as noted by Redwood, that organic film sequences and motifs that produce visceral cinematic moments are ‘devices that function within the system of a narrative’ (2010, p. 135) and, therefore, the spectator must comprehend the whole system of sequences together. This post-formulative stage in the cinematic experience, provoked by the spiritual and existential themes of

Tarkovsky's films, can involve reflective thought components. The metaphysical imagination is provoked as the viewer struggles to contemplate an ontology of nature and existence that can encompass both the organically transcendental aspects of the physical natural world and the organically brain based transcendental spheres of human experience

Conclusion

An organic transcendental film style has been identified at work within Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979) and *Solaris* (1972). In these films embodied knowledge of nature's self-transcending tendencies is produced through an organic film style. The unseen properties of time and space (deep strata nature) are made palpable both through the flow and rhythm of nature as mise-en-scene and through the fluid structure of cinema itself. Furthermore, this embodied knowledge can solicit dream-like states of mind within the cinematic experience. Tarkovsky's imagery and sound do not symbolise transcendence but produce embodied knowledge of transcendence as a quality of the physical world and as a quality of brain-based spheres of human experience both represented on screen and present within the cinematic moment. This awareness is not so much an imposed way of seeing or state of mind that the individual beforehand did not possess, but it is a primordial disclosure that all bodily perception at all times, within dreaming, waking consciousness and cinematic consciousness, is dreamlike in its mode of transcendence.

Appendix

Through both representation and its own inherent fluid structure cinema can produce embodied comprehension of the immanent and transcendental aspects of biophysical reality and human perception and in doing so provides a deeper engagement with both the surface and depths of reality. Through a critical realist perspective, deep strata nature that exists in a state of permanence-with-flux, can saturate the cinematic event attaining an elusive significance irreducible to either raw matter, representation or social construction. A field of non-signifying meaning and affect organically emerges from deep strata nature, cinematic wilderness, and cinesthetic-subject relations, as the primal images and sound express an organic transcendence.

This thesis has investigated a film style which functions to produce this cinematic sublime: an organic transcendental film style. A critical analysis of the discourse of the sublime and transcendental film style theories have provided the basis of this inquiry. Further, the science of visual perception, critical realism, phenomenological realist inquiries into the lived experience of the natural world, and the concept of emergence have offered contemporary, relevant ways of understanding nature's self-transcending tendencies and how they can be represented and experienced within cinema. This inquiry concluded that a viewer's experience of cinematic nature, while not identical to direct engagement with nature, shares with it an epistemological role in providing embodied comprehension of the elusive and expanded field of the natural world that escapes but determines them both.

The critical analysis of Werner Herzog's and Andrei Tarkovsky's cinemas has also provided a new understanding of how film style can solicit the metaphysical imagination and dream-like modes of consciousness by producing embodied comprehension of nature's self-transcending tendencies. Through this film analysis an

organic transcendental film style has been identified. This film style predominately uses representations of nature as mise-en-scene in conjunction with organic cinematographic, editing and sound techniques to express an organic transcendence. Mise-en-scene elements that have been identified include, firstly, representations of sublime wilderness traditionally used in Indigenous, Romantic, and colonial landscape paintings from China, Japan Australia, Europe, and America. Secondly, because of cinema's ability to present motion other mise-en-scene include representations of the dynamic flow of natural phenomena through space over time. Examples from both Herzog's and Tarkovsky's films include the dynamic flow of light, the wind in the trees, the flow of mist over the forest, the flow of a waterfall and the graceful flow of weed in a river. The combination of these mise-en-scene elements with other elements, for example, no camera movement, the long take and discontinuity editing techniques function to produce autonomous landscapes. Ironically, while these filmic landscapes use representations of 'frameless' natural phenomena (phenomena with indefinite boundaries), it is the cinematic frame that amplifies rather than weakens the aesthetic experience. Jean-Luc Marion's concept of 'saturated phenomenon' has been useful in explaining how the limits of the cinematic frame itself can intensify the viewer's cinematic experience of the immensity of the expanded field of nature. Sound elements have also been identified. These include the combination of sublime wilderness aesthetics and dissonant music, and the ability of certain sounds to solicit awareness of the transcendental nature of phenomenal sonic perception. The *ruckenfigur* technique has also been analysed. While this technique is in effect a representation, a second-hand account of a sublime experience, it does not necessarily weaken the experience but reiterates and intensifies it. This intensification occurs because the *ruckenfigur* technique reflexively includes the viewer's gaze as a cinesthetic subject, to borrow

Sobchack's neologism. While all the stylistic elements that have been identified within Chapters 3 and 4 could be further analysed individually, this thesis has concentrated on investigating how they function together as an organic transcendental film style to solicit the metaphysical imagination and dream-like modes of consciousness.

This thesis has extended the contemporary investigation of the concept and cultural practice of the sublime by analysing, through practice-led research and research-led practice, whether the sublime remains a relevant and potent concept for contemporary visual culture. In addition, the thesis' analysis of the cinematic sublime through the lens of critical realism, phenomenology and emergence has addressed a pervasive post-modernist scepticism towards the idealistic nature of this notion's various transcendental dimensions. However, this interdisciplinary journey has been arduous and at times limited by the difficulty of discussing cinematic experience from both an ontological and epistemological perspective. More work is needed concisely to articulate the complex interrelationships between these concepts.

Thus, a multitude of potential areas for future research arises from this thesis and these cross over into a number of different disciplines. For example, the following research questions could be further explored: what new conceptual modes of inquiry could emerge from the critical analysis of an experimental practice-led process that investigates an organic transcendental film style? How can the medium of an artist-researcher constitute a mode of thinking? How can critical realism and the concept of metaReality bring the biophysical back into contemporary film theory? How can cinematic, biophysical metaviews (2d and 3d computer generated animations of nature) produce an aesthetic of the sublime? And how can cinematic wilderness solicit the metaphysical imagination in science fiction, fantasy and horror films? Additionally, there is great potential for critical comparative reflection regarding the links of this

research with Indigenous philosophy and visual and cinematic art, and, by the same token, for inquiry into the notion of the Indigenous sublime. Ultimately, further investigation of unexplored boundary lines between cinematic experience and the biophysical realm could open up exciting areas of research, for new knowledge to blossom and flourish with organic emergent possibilities.

Appendix 1

The creative component of this thesis is an experimental cinematic work presented online at <https://danjennings75.wixsite.com/primordial>



Practice-based, research-led, practice-led, and transdisciplinary doctoral research

This appendix discusses the practice-based, research-led, practice-led, and transdisciplinary nature of this PhD research. It explains how the written exegesis and the creative component relate in a cyclical and iterative way. While the articulation of this relationship has not been the focus of this thesis, it could be a fruitful area of future research. By outlining the research question model and the creative production methods, this appendix clarifies that through both visual and linguistic thinking, the thesis created new knowledge through both critical analysis of existing film works and the production of an original cinematic artefact.

Established within Australian universities since the 1980s, practice-based PhDs have brought with them ‘dynamic new ways of thinking about research and new methodologies for conducting it, a raised awareness of the different kinds of knowledge that creative practice can convey and an illuminating body of information about the creative process’ (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 1). As a practice-based PhD, this thesis adopts the research question model outlined by Barbara H. Milech and Ann Schilo (2004). In this model both

the creative component and the written component both attempt to answer, in their own ways, the same research question(s). Through experimental film, the thesis' creative component has investigated an organic transcendental film style.

The first creative production phase involved documenting, with digital video, a search for sublime natural stimuli specifically within the South-West of WA near my home studio. This immersion within nature and the investigation of its sublime self-transcending tendencies allowed for a transformative engagement that took on philosophical as well as personal spiritual significance. The process and documentation of wandering in wilderness areas was inspired by internationally successful contemporary artist Richard Long 'who walked as a means of creating' (Vaughan, 2012, p. 147). Richard Long's art explores landscape and man's interaction with nature by undertaking long solitary walks and poetically documenting the journey. Walking is a research method that can encompass 'what it means to be *in* the thing that we are investigating' (Vaughan, 2012, p. 147). Over the course of this doctoral research, I also extended this creative process to a number of biodiverse wilderness and world heritage areas in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Japan. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands upon which the footage was captured: the Nyungar-boodja region of south-west Western Australia, Piopiotahi in New Zealand and Yakushima Island in Japan. The fourth production process analysed and tested whether the emerging cinematic representations of nature can be edited together with sound poetically using transcendental style techniques to solicit the metaphysical imagination and dream-like modes of cinematic viewing.

Throughout the process, I experimented with a variety of different cameras, camera lenses, tripods, camera movement (or lack of), camera rigs, compositing techniques, editing techniques, computer-generated techniques, colour correction, both acquired and recorded sounds as well as different ways of exhibiting the final films. An area of future

research could investigate new conceptual modes of inquiry that emerge from these processes of making and articulate how an artist-researcher can think using their medium.

The website is not a final work for public exhibition but a research prototype for what will become a post-doctoral multi-screen gallery installation. The website provided a platform where I could experiment with a number ways of presenting the research images and sound. For example, the tiled film on the front page of the website uses multiple cinematic frames to present a montage in space, whereas the four individual films on the ‘research images’ page edits shots in a linear fashion to present a montage in time.

In the thesis’ creative component I used practice-led research methods throughout its whole production. However, my own analysis of these methods and their outcomes is not included in the written component of this thesis. As mentioned above, the basis of this thesis’ contribution to knowledge is the critical assembly of an original creative film component and a theoretical exegesis. The latter includes a critical analysis of scholarly and visual texts by others in the relevant fields rather than an analysis of my own practice-led research methods and resulting creative artefact. As already stated, and according to Milech and Schilo’s (2004) single central question research model, both my thesis’ creative and exegetical components attempt, independently and in their own right, to answer one central research question: how do cinematic representations of the natural world evoke an aesthetic of the sublime? A further definition of practice-based research, research-led practice, and practice-led research can help to clarify this distinction.

Linda Candy (2006) states that while the two terms ‘practice-based’ and ‘practice-led’ are often used interchangeably, there is a distinct difference in meaning. Research is practice-based if an original creative artefact, for example within this thesis an experimental film, is the basis of the thesis’ contribution to knowledge (Candy, 2006). The research is practice-led if it produces a contribution to knowledge ‘in the form of new

understandings about the nature of practice' (Candy, 2006, p. 1). Candy makes this distinction clearer by stating that the end results of practice-led research within a doctoral thesis can be entirely text based. Therefore, according to Candy practice-led research distinguishes itself from practice-based research even though a creative production thesis could have elements of both. Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (2009) argue that even though the distinction made by Candy is helpful, the terms are mostly used more loosely and broadly. This thesis will include, as the basis for the contribution to knowledge, both the final creative work and the critical theoretical inquiry.

Practice-led research methods can create new conceptual modes of inquiry that emerge from the process of making; the artist-researcher can think using their medium and so can utilise visual thinking instead of verbal thinking (Sullivan, 2009). This thesis undertakes practice-led and research-led practice. Research-led practice emphasises that the scholarly critical analysis of texts can lead to the production of the creative work. For this thesis, the texts that have been analysed within the written component have been taken from a number of different disciplines and include both theoretical texts as well as cultural representations of nature. The theoretical texts include discourse associated with the aesthetics of the sublime, film theory, art theory as well as philosophies of nature and science. The artistic works (texts) include representations of nature within landscape painting and films. Practice-led research and research-led practice have both taken place in this research. Throughout this research project, as an artist-researcher, I have been aware of the complex and interconnected relationship between them by using Smith and Dean's iterative cyclic web model which 'combines the cycle (alternations between practice and research), the web (numerous points of entry, exit, cross-referencing and cross transit within the practice research cycle), and iteration (many sub-cycles in which creative practice or research processes are repeated with variation)' (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 8).

The flexibility of this iterative and cyclical process allows prior knowledge to be challenged by new insights and possibilities that arise from the processes of creative production and theoretical research. However, due to the time and space limitations the exegesis has not attempted to articulate how this iterative and cyclical creative process has operated. This could be an area of future research.

Furthermore, this thesis has had a complex interdisciplinary nature, and therefore some explanation is vital to avoid ambiguity and ensure clarity. This thesis has conducted interdisciplinary research that acknowledges the value of distinct disciplines. But, firstly, it has not viewed them as definitive and, secondly, following Barry White (2011), it has viewed them necessary only when the simplification produces more advantages compared to the benefits of investigating complex interrelationships between disciplines. According to White (2011), there is ‘not a shared understanding to what interdisciplinarity entails or a common approach to enable its development’ (p. 38). White, therefore, argues that it is useful to describe two subcategories: multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Multidisciplinarity can be seen as additive where the different disciplinary perspectives are juxtaposed or contrasted with no attempt being made to alter each individual perspective or integrate or synthesise them (White, 2011). Transdisciplinarity describes the process of not just juxtaposing but fully applying the theories, concepts or methods of one discipline to another. Thus, in view of its transdisciplinary vocation, this thesis has applied to theories and practices of cinematic representation and experience the following converging methodologies: the science of visual optics and perception, critical realism, phenomenological realist inquiries into the lived experience of the natural world, and the philosophical concept of emergence.

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