In Search of a Transcendental Film Style: The Cinematic Art Form and the Mormon Motion Picture

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In Search of a Transcendental Film Style:
The Cinematic Art Form and the Mormon Motion Picture

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Theatre and Film
Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Thomas J. Lefler
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This thesis by Thomas J. Leffler is accepted in its present form by the Department of Theatre and Film of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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With appreciation to my wife, Laura, whose resoluteness gave me no choice,

to Sharon Swenson, whose passion for serious ideas would not allow anything less,

and to Sterling VanWagenen, for many transcendent moments.
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Abstract
"...a new subject demands a new form."

Andre Bazin

PROLOGUE

What is the relationship between visual art forms and religious expression in the LDS faith? More particularly, what is the relationship between the motion picture medium and the representation of Mormon theology? Is it possible to consider the motion picture as a religious art form, and if so, how can its mechanistic approach to visual expression possibly represent "transcendent" dimensions of religious belief and expression? These are complicated issues, broad and perhaps too ephemeral, but I will attempt here to raise some preliminary issues about the viability of using the cinematic art form for expressing religious faith.

In presenting this study of LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint) filmmaking as it relates to the idea of a "transcendental" film style, it is my intention to be more probing than conclusive. There are many unanswered questions as to the relationship of artistic expression and religious belief with Mormonism. It is puzzling that


2"Transcendental" in this sense refers to that beyond the physical, emotional world perceived in nature, to the Holy in contrast to the human which may also be present within the physical world.

3Primary here is the definition between what is considered transcendent or spiritual and what is realistic. For example, in Mormon theology what distinguishes the immanent from the transcendent? The Doctrine and Covenants tell us that all things are spiritual to
art, the historical "handmaiden" to religion, has not found a more comfortable place within the LDS faith. And if the traditional arts have not stimulated serious discussion about the role of artistic expression in general, little or nothing has been written about LDS theology's relationship to the moving image. In fact, it has only been recently that the moving image has even been included as an art form in Church literature.

Considering all that has been said by LDS authorities concerning the potential uplifting and/or corrupting power of artistic efforts--especially the contemporary motion picture and television media--it would seem that a clear understanding of an LDS cinematic aesthetic and its viability for "revealing" the restored gospel to the world at large would be of supreme importance.

God (see Doctrine & Covenants 19) and that it is emanations from the Holy that sustain life on earth (see Doctrine & Covenants 88). And if you consider that Mormon theology essentially argues that earth is a copy of a higher transcendent form of reality (see Doctrine & Covenants 59), then earth is a representation--a copy of heaven--and to take a moving picture of earth is to take a copy of a copy. Or to spin the argument another direction, if photographic film uses light to make and activate the impression of an image, then film is capturing and freezing elements of the transcendent every time its shutter opens and closes.

See Thomas R. Martland's excellent study Religion as Art: An Interpretation which traces the historical relationship between religious belief and artistic expression.

Statements by John Taylor and other prophets propagate the idea that "you will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters" (see John Taylor, as reprinted in The Messenger, July 1953). But at the same time, Elder Boyd K. Packer's "The Arts and the Spirit of the Lord" in BYU Studies reveals a tension between artistic expression and the purposes of the institutional Church. Artists are expected to circumscribe their creative interests within the purposes of priesthood authority, while the artists often find this too restrictive. This has had the tendency to alienate or at least create a sense of distrust between artists and the church.

Elder M. Russell Ballard's July 1996 Ensign article "Filling the World with Goodness and Truth" does address for the first time the potential of the merging film, television, and digital worlds, and the need for artists in all disciplines to step forward and make a difference. But Richard G. Oman's recent BYU Studies article "Ye Shall See the Heavens Open": Portrayal of the Divine and the Angelic in Latter-day Saint Art" discusses the various representations of divinity in Mormon art and never even mentions divine portrayals in Mormon motion pictures such as "The First Vision." There appears to be confusion over whether the moving image is anything than entertainment.

It is easy to find far more disparaging references by LDS General Authorities to the wiles of the motion picture and television than positive ones--and perhaps for good reason. What is usually not addressed is the question of what the LDS Church is doing to improve the situation rather than preaching avoidance of any association.
The LDS Church has had a checkered relationship with moving images. On the one hand it has used media in a limited way for promotional and instructional purposes. It has championed the media as a means of communicating its message to the world; but it has also been highly critical of the film and television industries as major purveyors of smut and violence. It has been very active in acquiring radio and television stations (and increasingly using the telephone/fiber optic wire), but has been highly critical of the media’s content. Perhaps this is because of media’s enormous social power and the prurience of its product. Obviously there are issues within the LDS Church about artistic temperament and institutional lines of authority.

But can the Church ignore the media? There can be no question that the institutional church must consider artistic efforts—and in particular the film and television media—as valuable tools for church educational and proselytizing efforts. The question is, have we looked deep and hard enough at its potential? What are the cinematic art form’s advantages and limitations as means of religious expression? Does the moving image have the ability to represent and shape a spiritual or transcendental reality? What kind of symbiotic relationship between cinema and religious expression can Mormonism foster? Can film reveal transcendent truths or are the two antithetical? What is film’s relationship to traditional religious expression? Does it replace religious feeling, or function as a means to lead someone to the place where transcendental experience can begin?

It would appear at first glance that although Mormon authorities, artists, and lay members talk much about the film and television industries, there is no clear perspective about why the moving image has such social and cultural power and how it can so easily shape secular, as well as spiritual attitudes, ideas, and values. All agree on the fact that it is socially and politically powerful, but what can be done to eliminate or take advantage of its virtues while eliminating its vices? One thing is clear: institutional Mormonism sees the
media as powerful communication devices but has not explicitly dealt with their deeper representational potentials:

Art properly manifests its goodness and its truth, not as moral judgment or wisdom but through the perfection of its forms, whether they are the line, shapes, and colors . . . harmony, melody, and rhythm . . . or image and sound.\(^8\)

Without a deeper understanding of representational traits, the Church will continue to be victimized by misunderstandings and misapprehensions about how Mormons ought to make use of these tools.

The moving image functions very differently from other traditional art forms. It is highly visual and sensuous. It has the ability to get beneath the skin of reality, to reshape how spectators see the world and its relationship to the spiritual. It has the ability to shape both profane and sacred realities. If society does not see the world the same way it did fifty years ago, it is partly because the moving image has had a significant role in shaping how "reality" is seen now and how it will be perceived in the future.

One hope of this thesis is laying groundwork for development of criteria from which LDS filmmakers may look more seriously at the medium--not just as a communication device, but as a serious religious art form that can represent spiritual values and hopefully reveal transcendent realities. Filmmaking is challenging and tenuous, but as no other art form before it, film has the power to shape both the revealed and the unrevealed, the immanent and the ineffable. As the LDS Church attempts to share its particular spiritual "reality," the cinematic medium should be at its side. The Church's relationship with the cinematic form ought to be more aggressive and less suspicious.

This discussion may at times seem critical of LDS filmmaking efforts, but this is not my intention. My purpose is to raise questions, suggest parameters, and propose

\(^8\)Jacques Maritain, cited in Austin’s “Art: Contemplation or Commodity,” \textit{New Oxford Review} (January-February, 1992) 16. Maritain further points out that in “art we seek a rationality that can open our eyes, liberate our senses, and free us from prevailing prejudices” (15).
options for further discussion. In what follows, I will explore LDS filmmaking in relationship to "classic" Hollywood models, to film language, and to what has been described as “the transcendental film style.”

In this study I will argue that to date most LDS filmmaking has been too imitative of the Hollywood classic film, and by implication the Hollywood religious epic; but, I will also argue that LDS filmmakers need to look beyond Hollywood and perhaps even beyond the few “transcendental film directors.” One cannot put "new wine into old bottles," or embody new theology in old conventions. Art works at deeper structural levels. It is film’s underlying form that reveals its power. Mormon filmmakers must be more aggressive in exploring which cinematic structures and styles can best communicate our specific theology, themes, and ideas. I will attempt to identify some elements of what might be considered a LDS cinematic aesthetic and how those elements might lead to forms more compatible with Mormon theology.

I will examine what I see as rather passive and imitative efforts by LDS filmmakers to harness the moving picture medium for higher purposes by a close reading of a single film. I contend that LDS films and filmmakers are not consciously aware of the underlying structures of cinematic form, seeing it only as a mechanistic device rather than a powerful apparatus for visually capturing and revealing reality in a way that can disclose the spiritual. As filmmakers both within and without the Church’s official filmmaking structure, we can do better at understanding the media's underlying powers. We have a responsibility as filmmakers and scholars to challenge not only the world’s perspectives but our own naivete.

If we claim there is no compatibility, we have not looked hard and long enough. A few facts are clear. The cinematic form is historically still in its infancy. The digital revolution will soon provide visual imaging tools within computers for distribution on the internet. This will empower anyone to create almost any reality. The technical tools once
reserved for highly financed producers will soon be in the hands of the average artist. The internet will also provide an enormous and easily available distribution vehicle. The cinematic form was born in the same century as the Mormon restoration. It is a medium that can not be ignored; it must be taken advantage of. The Church and every one of its members must become more aggressive in re-presenting, collectively and individually, the new theology.

If Andre Bazin is correct that "a new subject"--and in this case a new theology--"deserves a new form," then Latter-day Saint theology deserves a new film form as well. The moving image is far more than a tool for information sharing; it is more than a means of religious instruction. It is the art form that may best represent spiritual realities. There may in fact be no single definitive answer about what may or may not be considered an LDS "transcendental cinematic art," only a few guiding principles to consider and pitfalls to avoid. But it is clear that religion and the movies are two great "illusionary" forces that need to find a compatible and nurturing relationship. This thesis, then, is an effort to begin a conversation among LDS filmmakers, as well as other artists and believers, that will broaden and deepen our awareness about the film medium's potential and dangers.
To see the work as it is one must be able to shift one’s attitudes in passing from part to part, from one aspect to another, and to enrich the whole progressively in successive perceptions.

Meyer Schapiro9

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Film historians are in agreement that the history of the motion picture, from 1895 to the present, includes four key dimensions, including film as art, as business, as technology, and socio-cultural document. This study rests on an assumption that film is an art form with powerful tools for representing and shaping reality, both physical and metaphysical realities. It suggests that film can not only represent reality, that is, capture and re-present what reality was like in a certain time and place, but it can also reveal the transcendent within reality or capture and manipulate images in constructing new, perhaps even transcendent “realities.”

The goal of this study is to clarify the relationship between film and spirituality, especially the idea of cinematic transcendence. In particular, the goal is to develop a model which may be useful for assessing and producing “Mormon films,” irrespective of whether they are institutionally sponsored by the Church or conceived and produced by individuals. Digital technologies have made it possible for almost anyone to produce and distribute their own movies. As the letter and book were once the means of communicating, now the film can be an expression of faith and spiritual conviction.

This project is an effort to establish a paradigm for reading and tracing elements of transcendence in film art and film propaganda. It addresses the intersection of aesthetic and spiritual planes within film. There is a long and complex tradition of art and worship which has been studied at length by art and religious historians. This has been a springboard for a few studies in the cinematic area.

In this study I narrow the focus to a single film and compare it to other films that have been identified as having certain transcendent characteristics. The film I have selected is Legacy. It will be a microcosm of larger issues of cinematic representation and spirituality, in particular how the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) makes itself manifest in cinematic representations. The goal is to clarify the relationship between film and spirituality, especially transcendence, as reflected stylistically in film. This is not a study to identify thematic ideas or allusions in film but rather stylistic elements and how stylistic choices represent a religious world-view.

The context in which this study occurs is academic; but it is also spiritual, in the sense that my graduate work at BYU has integrated spiritual and intellectual study; and it is also creative and technical, in the sense that I have worked as a filmmaker and teacher myself and am thus aware of the difficulties in translating the theological abstract into the actual concrete reality of a finished film.

The methodology of this study interweaves strands from classical film theory (Andre Bazin and Erwin Panofsky), film semiotics (the idea of a global film language

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10Propaganda as used here has no negative connotation. The subject of this study, the film Legacy, is an “institutional film,” and by definition implies that it was created for specific institutional purposes and thus has overt propagandistic intentions and purposes. It was produced for both member and non-member audiences.

11The depth of the textual analysis and complexity of the paradigm and its background mandates a single film as case study.

12Legacy, dir. Kieth Merrill, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1993. 70mm, 53 min.
established by classical Hollywood cinema), cinematic neo-formalism (concern with both an individual film text, and the social worlds where it is created and viewed), and philosophy (particularly phenomenology). Only a single book-length study in the many pages of film theory and history published during the last four decades overtly takes “transcendence” and film as its subject. That work, Paul Schrader’s The Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer, is central to this analysis. Schrader’s analysis employs some elements of semiotics and structuralism as he identifies cross-cultural elements of form, some relationship with auteurism as he examines the work of three directors, and some concern with film’s capacity for representation as he explores the relationship between the physical world of filmic representation and the metaphysical worlds of Buddhism, Catholicism, and Lutheranism.

Realizing that the work of a thesis requires a narrow focus, several delimitations may be made explicitly. First, the parameters of this study are narrowly focused on transcendence and film; they do not encompass popular film nor the general body of “art film.” The religious epics of the silent film in Italy and the United States and classic Hollywood religious films, like Ben-Hur, The Ten Commandments, and The Robe are not included. (Although passing references will be made to them.)

Second, the purpose of the project is to enter into a discussion of art and religion that cannot possibly be comprehensively covered. Neither “art” nor “religion” (in particular Mormon theology and practice) can be accommodated fully within a work of this length. Issues about representation and reality in film theory itself are complex. The intent is to

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13 Paul Schrader, The Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer (New York: De Capo Press, 1972). Schrader uses “transcendental” in a particular sense. It describes a “style which has been used by various artists in diverse cultures to express the Holy” (1). This has no direct connection to the American transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau.
touch on key issues, with the hope that the ideas may be a springboard for further progress in art, film and “life.”

The study is organized with this chapter as an introduction to the essential issues and my approach. Chapter II provides an argument for film as an art form and its cultural relationship to spirituality and spiritual themes. Chapter III deals with the essentials, strengths, and weaknesses of Paul Schrader’s “transcendental style.” Chapter IV examines the characteristics of the “transcendental style” present in the Mormon produced film, Legacy. Chapter V summarizes my conclusions and identifies topics for further research.
Man cannot get over regretting that he has not been given the infinite, and he has more than one way of fabricating, with the finite, an equivalent of the infinite for himself—which is perhaps the definition of art.

Simone Weil

CHAPTER II: FILM, ART, AND RELIGION

Why has the cinematic image assumed an unprecedented position as the art form of the twentieth century? Many question whether film is in fact an art form or simply a technical device, like the printing press, that has extended communication but has little serious artistic purpose. Could it possibly be something more, a magical apparatus for reshaping perspective and undermining or enlivening values? What is clear is that it has inordinate power to represent and re-shape reality and possibly reveal elements of the transcendent. What are the reasons for its prominence?

Philosopher and child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim\textsuperscript{15} contends that the film medium\textsuperscript{16} has not only usurped power from the other art forms; it has consumed them. In a discussion of myth and motion pictures, he observed that,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16}The terms cinema, film, and moving image are for the most part used interchangeably throughout this thesis. I make no distinction between film-generated images versus video images or film versus electronic forms of distribution, although some film enthusiasts might contend that film’s light-activated medium is more organic and thus more natural to the eye than an electronically generated form.
\end{itemize}
The art of the moving image is the only art truly of our time, whether it is in the form of the film or television. . . [It is] our universal art, which comprises all others, literature and acting, stage design and music, dance and the beauty of nature, and most of all, the use of light and color (80).

Of course not all would agree with this position, but even the most hostile critic would be hard pressed to challenge film and television's unprecedented positions as influential media. Virtually all art forms have been influenced by or are a response to the cinematic influence.17 Today and in the future, no one will be able to "see" the world independently of the images and stories that cinematic expression has given to artistic creation.

Central to this issue is the fact that the cinematic medium has a different genealogy from other art forms. Art historian and early film theoretician Erwin Panofsky, in "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures,"18 points out that "it was not an artistic urge that gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new [film] technique; it was a technical invention that gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new art" (93). He gives two reasons for its differing genealogy. The first is that

the primordial basis of the enjoyment of moving picture was not an objective interest in a specific subject matter, much less an aesthetic interest in the formal presentation of subjects, but the sheer delight in the fact that things seemed to move (93).

It is the moving image's power in replicating life itself that secured its prominent artistic position. It is the delight in seeing reality re-presented as a higher reality that captured the imagination, stretching time and penetrating space. In ways that made reality more than real. As Panofsky points out, the moving picture is the only art "entirely alive." It is the

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17 No one can argue from "what might have been." It is impossible to "see" the world the way it was seen before the moving image first flickered into three-dimensional reality. Media's influence may contain questionable elements. Its technological means of capturing and then projecting the image required little or no artistic skill. And what of its gross commerciality?

"dynamization of space and the spatialization of time" (96) that lies at the heart of its power. Although the spectator occupies a fixed seat, s/he is aesthetically in motion:

[The spectator's] eye identifies with the camera... not only bodies move but space itself does, approaching, receding, turning, dissolving and recrystallizing as it appears through the controlled locomotion and focusing of the camera and through the cutting and editing of the various shots. (96-98)

At the heart of this difference between the moving image and other art forms is the fact that film does not begin with shapeless or abstract matter; it is not a neutral medium. It takes an existing image of the world with inherent shape and forms and then manipulates it exponentially, enhancing and reshaping it by means of composition, color, lighting, and the rhythm and pacing of its editing. It may become "fantastic or pretervoluntarily [sic] symbolic, not so much by an interpretation in the artist's mind as by the actual manipulation of physical objects and recording machinery" (Panofsky 120, 122). It takes reality and pushes it into another level of meaning, or as Panofsky puts it, "The medium of the movies is physical reality" (122). Thus we have the first art form that uses the physicality (materiality) of reality to make and reshape reality itself. Art forms for centuries attempted to imitate reality. Film made this immediately possible, and more so, argues Panofsky, because it "gave an image that was deeper than reality." It can with very little effort reveal something beneath and beyond the surface of reality.19

This is where the cinematic form raised the stakes. All the other art forms can to one degree or another contract or expand time or re-contextualize space. What they cannot do is accomplish it within "reality" itself, within the materiality of existing space and time. They are imitations, but the moving image is something more: it is the only "true" imitation

19If there is a tremendous up side to the medium's powers of representation, there is a down side as well. Max Frankel captures this when he says, "The camera corruptions not because it lies but because it magnifies images and issues a million-fold until they are hopelessly--and often willfully--distorted" (in "World and Image: Art of Focus," New York Times Magazine, November 5, 1995: 26.)
and perhaps an entry point into something deeper than the immanent, into something transcendent. As Panofsky said it makes reality more than real.

Panofsky offers a second reason for cinematic form's unique potential. He contends that the motion picture is the "product of genuine folk art," available to all people irrespective of background and education. It is accessible to almost everyone. Other art forms are idealistic and,

operate from top to bottom, so to speak, and not from bottom to top; they start with an idea to be projected into shapeless matter and not with the objects that constitute the physical world. . . . It is the movies. . . . that do justice to the materialistic interpretation of the universe (120).

The moving image is the first art form for the common man. All members of society can participate immediately at whatever level of inherent visual sophistication they bring to the experience. Rich or poor, educated or uneducated, everyone finds it accessible on a basic level. On the one hand it requires very little formal education to be understood at a simplistic story-telling level.20 It is an art form that did not grow out of political and religious purposes, but rather the political, social, and religious become grist for the motion picture machine. For the first time, we have an art form that speaks at a surface level immediately and collectively to all, whatever their social, cultural, or religious perspectives.

If Panofsky's justification of film as the preeminent art form were not challenging enough to its critics, Bettelheim takes the argument one step further. For him the storytelling power of film has all but replaced religion as a place of ritual and worship. He argues that the cinematic experience provides opportunity, not only to represent and shape

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20 Yet at a deeper semiotic levels the visual image is layered with other social, political, and religious meanings. So while on the one hand everyone can understand the story line, they are also being offered a "world-view" perspective; thus, a way of seeing the world is "written" into the film's form. This is the criticism that third-world countries have against Hollywood movies which on a commercial level present such opulence that it creates social and political pressures. The same holds true with religious films. On the surface they tell a simple story yet beneath can project theological doctrines that shape conceptual frameworks.
new realities, but also to create a communal place for worship. It provides the storytelling means for creating "consensual myths" for what has become an alienated world:

Everyone can understand it [film] as everyone once understood religious art in church. And as people used to go to church on Sundays (and still do), so the majority today go to the movies on weekends. But while in the past most went to church only on some days, now everybody watches moving images every day. (80)

Bettelheim contends that as traditional cultural and religious systems have broken down, the moving image has increasingly provided "the visions that bind us together in common experiences that make life worth living" (81). Historically, art was the handmaiden of religion. It provided a visual and aural glimpse of the heavenly for the soul on its path back to God. For Bettelheim the motion picture is doing a better job at providing those myths. But the cinematic art form has gone beyond this. More than a handmaid, it has quickly become not a means to a spiritual end but an end in itself. If one extends the metaphor, it has vied for the role of the Bridegroom.

No one would seriously question the persuasiveness of the cinematic image nor its influence on contemporary cultures and lifestyles. No one could deny that its storytelling powers have done much to displace religion as the focal point of much individual life experience. But Bettelheim's easy dismissal of contemporary religious experience is one of the issues at stake in this thesis. The response should not be to challenge Bettelheim's perspective but to ask what Mormonism is doing to take advantage of cinematic powers.

If used properly the cinematic forms can present more easily and to a broader audience the stories that shape cultural norms and attitudes. They may be able to present theological truths better than all other art forms. But has Mormonism acquired or developed specific cinematic structures, modes, or stylistic elements that can make the medium our own, that can reflect our unique perspective on both earthly and transcendent ideas?
I will argue that the cinematic must be returned to its role as handmaiden to religion, and that Mormon cinematic artists need to be far more aggressive at understanding the medium's aesthetic and phenomenological framework. With this comes challenges. Film was conceived with a coupling of technological invention and commerce and essentially began its public life in peep shows. Its genealogy may be tainted; its three-dimensional moving image can create the most graven of images, diverting us from the true worship of the Bridegroom. But if the LDS faith's purpose is to communicate, persuade, and convert the world to revealed truths and transcendental realities, then the moving image must not be ignored.

My methodology in this study is a balance between neo-formalist close textual readings and a hermeneutical-phenomenological approach. There have been essentially two broad approaches to film criticism over the last three decades: (1) approaches concerned with close textual readings (e.g. new criticism, structuralism, and neo-formalism, etc.), and (2) more historically based approaches which step back from the text for broader, contextual and historical readings.

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21 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson are considered the premiere film neo-formalists. Their book, *Film Art: An Introduction*, lays out this approach in a clear, forthright way.

22 For a broad overview of this approach, see Samuel B. Twiss and Walter H. Conser's *Experience of the Sacred*, especially the introductory section on the existential-hermeneutical phenomenology of religion. The hermeneutic draws on a long tradition of Biblical study and interpretation. The phenomenological focuses on the process which occurs when phenomenon are experienced by the interpreter. In film, Dudley Andrews has described phenomenology as "the neglected tradition." A good overview of the need for this dualistic approach is Andrew's *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984), especially his chapters on narration and figuration.

23 Although there is a potential for relevant discussion of this topic through the frameworks constructed within contemporary film theory by merging of Marxist/feminist/psychoanalytic approaches, I have elected others. Since the focus on a dominant ideology and/or gender and/or the imaginary-symbolic stages of these other theories is grounded in materialism, economics, politics, and psychoanalysis, I have opted for a theory I feel is more compatible to metaphysical themes.
Most contemporary film theory is obsessed with fixed, constructed systems of discourse. The semiotic obsession with the structure of language has been at the expense of metaphorical allusion, the figural, and meanings that imply an interest in "realities" outside of the text (or film) and the system. There is little interest in readings that allow for more openness in historical reception or even treating the film as a phenomenon that must be approached with no preconceptions. The challenge is to look closely at the elements without imposing your meaning. Film documentarian Robert Flaherty wrote:

If you preconceive you are lost, off to a false start before you begin. What you have to do is to let go, let go of every thought of your own, wipe your mind clean, fresh, innocent, newborn, sensitive as unexposed film to take up the impressions around you, and let what will come in. This is the pregnant void, the fertile slate of no-mind. This is non-preconception, the beginning of discovery.24

To accept even the concept of a transcendent reality, one has to assume that some meaning lies beyond the boundaries of the film's sequenced elements and be willing to surrender to the experience of the light flickering on the screen. If these conditions are not met, the analysis treats the film only as an object and never allows the spectator access to more metaphoric and figural qualities. To attempt an analysis of religious filmmaking requires that I accept the possibility of metaphysical allusions and be willing to put myself in a position to have my personal impulses challenged. Therefore, I will rove back and forth between the micro and the macro levels, from a close examination of visual elements, sequencing, and pacing of a shot or scenes to the broader cultural and religious backdrop.25 This mixture of approaches is crucial to see a film's stylistic elements up close


25With the same caution that one needs to approach the transcendent, one needs to approach the visual text. C.S. Lewis provides an analogy for this approach in his essay "Meditations in the Tool Shed." Standing in the darkness of the tool shed, Lewis saw a shaft of light. He had the choice of either looking objectively "at" the shaft of light as a physical phenomenon or stepping into the light in order to participate with it and seek out its origin beyond the shed. He had to do both. This illustrates the challenge of any critical study. One must be able to look at the details of a film objectively to see the stylistic elements at work and also immerse oneself phenomenologically within it.
(without assuming a structuralist interest in fixed meanings) before stepping back to "flesh out the hints of the text as it confronts us in our era and in our place" (Andrews 95), while getting beyond my own prejudices.

In this study, I focus my attention on how specific cinematic structures and stylistic elements are used to shape the visible into a way of seeing the invisible. This raises questions, challenges perspectives, and hopefully expands the discussion about how LDS filmmakers can make use of the medium. More specifically, I will ask:

1. What is implied by the idea of transcendent reality? Is it possible to conceive of a transcendental film style?
2. What are the stylistic preferences of the classic Hollywood narrative model, particularly as manifested in the religious epic, and how do they compare with "art" or foreign films which have sought a deeper religious aesthetic?
3. How do the cinematic forms and techniques used by LDS filmmakers match up with Hollywood and transcendental film styles?
4. Is it possible to identify specific structures, traits, and characteristics that would be compatible with an LDS filmmaking aesthetic?

And perhaps the most critical question,

I begin this analysis by introducing and comparing what Paul Schrader has identified as the transcendental film style with the classic Hollywood narrative film. It is Schrader's contention that there are only a handful of filmmakers in film's one-hundred-year history who have used the cinematic medium to represent religious themes in a transcendent way. These artists are not found in Hollywood. According to Schrader, we have to look to Catholic filmmakers, Luis Bunuel or Federico Fellini; Buddhist directors, Kurosawa or Mizoguchi; or Lutheran directors, Ingmar Bergman or Carl Theodor Dreyer to see the highest forms of religious filmmaking. Schrader rejects outright the Hollywood style of religious epic. Although most Mormons have been raised on DeMillian types of religious epic, with spectacular emotional efforts to set the spiritual in film, Schrader argues
these works use spiritual drama as an escapist metaphor for the human drama (Style 63-64).

Since space does not permit close reading of more than one LDS film, Legacy, released in a large-screen format by the LDS Church in 1994, will be used primarily as a paradigm by which other works may be studied. By clarifying and then comparing the forms and stylistic elements of the transcendental style with a contemporary LDS film, I conclude that, although there are some similarities in stylistic approach, the theological framework of Mormonism sets it at odds with both the Hollywood religious epic and the transcendental film style described and advocated by Schrader. Mormonism's unique perspective of deity shapes a distinctly different concept of reality which must be represented in a unique way.

Irrespective of these major theological and aesthetic variations, this comparison will be extremely valuable because the specific differences and similarities provide a framework from which to study LDS filmmaking. I will argue that analysis of Legacy's form reveals structural and stylistic elements, inconsistent in many ways, which suggest possible elements of an LDS transcendental mode. On the surface, the film imitates the Hollywood religious epic; but beneath this conventional mode, it seems to be searching for or being influenced by structural forms more integral to LDS theology.

I challenge the idea that there is no inherent virtue in the cinematic form itself, that it simply is a neutral communications device. I am convinced that a deeper understanding of cinematic structures and stylistic elements will provide LDS filmmakers with better tools to reflect a unique world-view (and theology). This will help eliminate the tendency to imitate other, more secular styles and forms.

I will argue that film's ability to re-present includes the capacity to embody Mormon theology. Although this capacity is not clearly explored or formulated, the integration of
analysis, faith, and technical skill can shed greater light on the power of the motion picture to move us spiritually.
Art or religion are the two roads by which men escape from circumstance to ecstasy. Art and religion are means to similar states of mind.

Clive Bell

CHAPTER III: SCHRADER’S TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

Although there has been some interest by film critics and theorists in exploring the moving image's ability to present religious themes and ideas, the only serious, critical study is Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, written in 1972 as a doctoral dissertation. Schrader's work is important to this study because he is the only contemporary critic and filmmaker to address the more serious issues of cinematic art and religion. The work was written during his university days, and he has since shown less interest in traditional religious themes and has pushed at least his screenwriting into

26 Although there are various studies, such as *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film*, by Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr., none seriously explore the deeper implications of cinematic style. Even when the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* dedicates an entire issue to the “Catholic Imagination in Popular Film and Television,” the articles focus on thematic versus stylistic approaches. None seriously consider the formalistic elements of film to reveal underlying meaning. Few explore the structure and stylistic elements where Schrader contends spiritual parallels are revealed.

27 No one to date has really challenged Schrader’s thesis. In a footnote in “Discovering Form, Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit,” *Film Quarterly, 47*: 3 (Spring 1994), film critic Bill Nichols alludes to “a cinema of austerity” in describing Iranian filmmaking and points out that David Bordwell's “parametric” form is similar to Schrader’s transcendental style. But he makes no association to any religious forms. In addition, Schrader is very critical of the traditional Hollywood narrative while enshrining foreign filmmakers, whose work is somewhat ascetic and not financially successful.
more existential themes.\textsuperscript{28} He now considers himself an "intellectual stylist" (Brady 256), yet there is some evidence of his continued need to address deeper issues of spirituality.\textsuperscript{29}

Schrader's thesis is that a very few filmmakers have been able to move beyond personality and cultural prescriptions to formulate a cinematic style that specifically addresses the spiritual, that "reach[es] toward the other-worldly" (Style 3-13). This is especially true of how American cinema is driven by commercialism with little or no regard for artistic and/or spiritual expression. For Schrader the most significant "religious" films are ignored by the major film critics and theorists. Their overtly religious themes and styles are so different and incomprehensible that they are misunderstood and unappreciated.

Schrader argues that he has identified, by looking closely at three filmmakers, a transcendental style--a cinematic "consensus," as he calls it, of distinct structural and stylistic traits which each director developed independent of the others and which takes them beyond personal and cultural influences. Within the work of Yasujiro Ozu from Japan, Robert Bresson from Italy, and Carl Dreyer from Denmark, Schrader found an over-arching cinematic aesthetic that reveals the moving image as the preeminent religious art form.

All three of these filmmakers ground their aesthetic in three distinct religious perspectives: Ozu, Zen art; Bresson, Byzantine iconography; and Dreyer, Gothic

\textsuperscript{28}In an interview with John Brady for The Craft of the Screenwriter: Interviews with Six Celebrated Screenwriters (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), Schrader said that "you start to realize that there isn't much to teach the world that it hasn't already heard, and that immortality and true art aren't what they're cracked up to be" (254).

\textsuperscript{29}Schrader is an interesting figure. He was born and raised in the Dutch Calvinist community of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since his post-graduate university days at UCLA where he wrote The Transcendental Style, he has gone on to become a successful screenwriter and director in mainstream Hollywood. Some of his more successful writing efforts range from Taxi Driver to Raging Bull and American Gigolo--not what one might consider serious spiritual films. He has been described as the "internationally known stylist of isolation, alienation, and savagery" (Kasendorf 19). Yet despite the fact that his traditional religiosity quickly wore thin in Hollywood, he still speaks at least existentially in religious ways: "So my violence was part of a commercial instinct . . . it remains tied to the whole notion of blood and redemption" (in Brady 278).
architecture. Although none of the three is familiar to most contemporary American film viewers, they are internationally recognized film directors. Each sought to push the boundaries of the new cinematic art form toward the ultimate purpose of all art forms—the representation of spiritual themes and ideas.

My purpose in this chapter is to examine Schrader’s study of these filmmakers and illustrate the structural and stylistic traits of a (but perhaps not the) transcendental style. Later I will compare these traits to a specific instance of LDS filmmaking to determine whether or not they can accommodate LDS theological perspectives and are appropriate for an LDS filmmaking aesthetic. Hopefully, Schrader’s transcendental style will provide, if not a cinematic model, at least a starting point for laying out the issues that need consideration in deepening our sensibilities about the cinematic medium’s relationship to religious filmmaking. I admit at the outset that there are clear theological differences between Schrader’s theory and LDS theology. Despite this, what is important is that Schrader challenges the Hollywood mentality while examining the work of three filmmakers who sought a deeper awareness through cinematic art form.

I will organize Schrader’s argument in three sections: (1) an introduction to Schrader’s three-tiered theological and aesthetic framework, (2) a presentation of the transcendental cinematic style as gleaned from the films of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer--Dreyer is problematic for Schrader but valuable, as we will see later to LDS filmmakers, and (3) Schrader’s assessment of the classic Hollywood religious epic.

**Schrader’s Three-tiered Theology**

Schrader begins his argument by grounding his discussion in classic religious art history and criticism. Borrowing from Eliade, Wolfflin and others, he contends that there are such things as hierophanies—spiritual or other-worldly manifestations that erupt within earthly time and space. He further contends that filmmakers have desired, as have all
artists, to capture facets of these hierophanies, to see a "glimmer" of spiritually "expressive" moments in reality. This has always been art's purpose and is the mission of the transcendent cinematic style. The transcendent style is a "way of liberation from the terrestrial to the other world" (Transcendental Style 53).

It is clear from the outset that although the transcendent film may be thematically religious, it does not represent "a personal vision nor an official catechism" (Transcendental Style 4). Schrader is not interested in traditional or formal religious expression nor its representation. He is looking for traits that lie beyond simple thematic religious allusions or allegory. He focuses his efforts on identifying how religious art—architecture, iconography, etc.—has stylistically penetrated beyond immediate religious experience and ritual and put the viewer into contact with a more profound impression of the Transcendent or Wholly-Other.

The objective is the "Transcendent," but for Schrader, it lies "beyond normal sense experience, and that which it transcends is, by definition, the immanent" (Transcendental Style 5). This is not an experience with something that lies beyond reality but a deeper awareness, an internalizing of the expression of the Divine within the viewer.

Schrader explains that terms like Transcendent or transcendent are catchall terms and can mean anything to anyone. The first step is to define terminology. He lays out the various levels of religious experience and/or expression:

1. The "Transcendent," the Holy or Ideal itself,
2. The "transcendental," human art or artifacts which express something of the Transcendent, and
3. The "transcendence," the human religious experience motivated by a deep psychological need for or by the external "Other."

To these three levels of spiritual experience, Schrader matches up three levels or varieties of sacred art:
1. Works that "come directly from the Transcendent" such as untampered nature and holy scripture,

2. Works which "express the Transcendent in human reflection, man-made, man-organized, man-selected." such as icons or Zen gardens, (here we begin to recognize Ozu's Zen garden and Bresson's iconography), or

3. Works which "relate the human experience of the transcendence, which express not the Transcendent but the human who experiences the Transcendent."

Schrader eliminates out of hand the first category, citing Jung’s comment that "when God or Tao is named as a stirring, or a condition of the soul, something has been said about the knowable only, but nothing about the unknowable. Of the latter, nothing can be determined" (Transcendental Style 6). To even attempt to see the Holy would eliminate any need for artistic effort or expression. Contact with the Transcendent itself is beyond human capability. To attempt to reach for a higher transcendent experience is self-destructive.

Even though the objective is to capture "glimpses" of the Transcendent, one can not ultimately "see" the Transcendent, one can only experience an "expression" of the unknowable: "art, even the highest, is only a means to an end,. . .is only a manner of 'seeing through a glass darkly,' and although this is far better than not to see at all, the utility of iconography must come to an end when the vision is 'face to face'" (Transcendental Style 7). Thus, the transcendental style can "strive for the ineffable and invisible but is neither" (Transcendental Style 4). Even attempting to describe the Wholly-Other one can only communicate within the "language" of the known; thus, it is only the immanent, not the ineffable, that has been revealed.

After rejecting the impossibility of "seeing" the ineffable because by definition it is unknowable, Schrader turns against the immanent, physical world as a means of revealing the Transcendent. Schrader dismantles human experience as a viable means of discovering expressions of the Wholly-Other. Quoting Gerardus van der Leeuw, Schrader argues that "absolute religion is mysticism; it is without shape and without sound. Absolute art can
neither be seen or heard" (Transcendental Style 7). If one cannot see the "face" of the ineffable, then any artistic representation also "eschews all conventional interpretations of reality... [and] seeks to maximize the mystery of existence" (Transcendental Style 10). There is no possibility of seeing the divine in the physical world, either. The world is too accessible to reveal anything of the ineffable. To see the Transcendent, the physical world must be turned against itself, be abstracted, made mysterious and strange.

The transcendental filmmaker must not only cease to hope for a "vision" of the ineffable but must eliminate all temporal (visual) "constructs" that assist the viewer in coming to an understanding of the ineffable. They are "screens," to use Bresson's term, that intercede between the viewer and the Transcendent. The purpose of the cinematic devices is not to make sense of a super-reality or reality itself but to make the known strange and unknowable so that the ineffable can "appear." The "transcendent style stylizes reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality of their relevance and power" (Transcendental Style 11). For Schrader, "human works... cannot inform one about the Transcendent, they can only be expressive of the Transcendent" (Transcendental Style 6). This is a critical distinction for Schrader. No manifestation of the ineffable can make its appearance within human experience; thus all that can be hoped for is a "device" representative of Wholly-Other. It is a stylistic device, a device that can stimulate a "state of mind" (Transcendental Style 7). This is not the appearance of the Divine nor the witness of another about the Divine; this is a representational device or effect that is expressive of the Divine.

Thus, Schrader believes that the transcendental style can only emerge out of the second category, that is, works which "express" the transcendent, man-made or man-organized works of art. The transcendental style must emerge from within that space between the ineffable and the immanent, a paradoxical place which forms between the
unknown and the rejection of the known, between the hope of "seeing" and the dismantling of all immanent conventions that are dependent on human experience. Thus, the transcendent style "is only necessarily a style" (Transcendental Style 4). It is a style that turns cinematic devices against the cinematic medium itself. It is a paradoxical use of a highly sensuous image, the cinematic frame set in motion, that must be stripped of its sensuousness; this disparity leads the viewer into a place where contact with an impression of the divine is possible. The transcendent style, like the mass, transforms experience into a repeatable ritual which can be repeatedly transcended" (Transcendental Style 11).

To quickly summarize Schrader's argument to this point:

1. There are earthly manifestations of the Ineffable or Wholly-Other.
2. To attempt to see the Wholly-Other is artistically self-destructive; it lies beyond human verbal or visual representation.
3. No one can hope to "see" the divine, within reality, within the immanent; there are no temporal constructs that can reveal the Transcendent.
4. Artistic efforts then cannot "inform" one of the Transcendent; they can only be "expressive" of the Transcendent.
5. Cinematically there are specific stylistic elements that lie beyond any particular personality, culture, or religious tenets that are expressive of the ineffable.

Thus it is not the "seeing" of the Transcendent (which by definition is impossible) nor the viewing of a human contact with the transcendent that is the objective, but the artistic creation of a series of structural and stylistic events that are "expressive" of the Transcendent.

In terms of the cinematic art form, this stylistic expression of the Transcendent can be distinguished by detailing cinematic characteristics, "precise temporal means--camera angles, dialogue, editing--for predetermined transcendental ends" (Transcendental Style 3). Schrader believes that he has isolated specific stylistic elements that if imitated are "expressive" of the Transcendent, no matter the cultural or religious setting. Schrader's purpose is to "analyze the scenes and frames, hoping to extract the universal [cinematic form] from the particulars" of Ozu's, Bresson's, and Dreyer's representative forms. To
demonstrate this model, Schrader reviews how the transcendental style finds fulfillment in the films of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer. 30

The Transcendental Style

It is Schrader's contention that the transcendental style, as seen in the work of Ozu, Bresson, and to a degree Dreyer, is an attempt by historical influences to meet the challenge of a new and formidable opponent, the motion picture medium. Schrader contends that "the 'new,' sensual, individualist art of cinema . . . has tried to squash the spiritual qualities out of art" (Transcendental Style 106). The immediacy of the film image, its ability to re-produce reality, puts it at odds with the aesthetics of traditional art forms. The cinema "plunged the desire to duplicate internal reality into a deeper, more complex level. . . . It canonized the human, sensual and profane: it celebrated the realistic" (Transcendental Style 158). Traditional art forms were able to distort or reshape the realistic image in order to give the impression of seeing beyond reality to a deeper reality. The motion picture had to work with the imprint of reality; the moving picture is reality as it "is." The "magic" of the moving image, if it attempts to be an artistic expression, must somehow "see" the ineffable within the image of reality itself. The question is, how can one get beyond the immediacy of film's sensuous image? Schrader argues that it is in the disruption or distortion of filmed reality that one hopes to see beyond it. To seek deeper contact with the divine through the new sensual medium of film was the goal of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer.

The transcendental filmmaker must accept the sensuousness of the image and then crush its three-dimensionality, or as Bresson wrote, "you must take a steam iron to your images" (Transcendental Style 63). Frontality, non-expressive faces, symmetric compositions, and two-dimensionality were the answers. This is a clear rejection of the

30Note that the transcendental style is not representative of every film produced by the three filmmakers, but the form is clearly manifest across their entire work.
classic Hollywood film which exalts the immediacy of the realistic image. In Ozu’s and Bresson’s mature styles, one can see clear representation of the transcendental style. According to Schrader, Ozu represents the transcendental style in the East and Bresson in the West. Both were attempting to take the moving image beyond realistic Hollywood representation to a deeper experience. They desired a cinematic style that would function as traditional art forms do, a stylistic representation that seeks to see beyond reality to a super-reality or as Bresson believed: “The subject of a film is only a pretext. Form much more than content touches a viewer and elevates him” (Transcendental Style 61). But it is Dreyer who provides the most interesting example in terms of this study. He seems to have wanted to create a transcendental style as did Ozu and Bresson but was unable or refused to execute the style completely. Dreyer accepted the challenge but resolved it differently, an important point which I will return to later.

Through his analysis, Schrader isolated a three-part “movement” or structure common to all three filmmakers. Each movement is a step in stripping away the immediacy, the sensual nature of the cinematic image. The triad structure is clearly seen in the films of Ozu and Bresson, but less so in Dreyer. It is impossible in this thesis to illustrate all Schrader’s evidence in the cases of Ozu and Bresson, but some examples will prove helpful. Ozu and Bresson took up the challenge directly.

Schrader’s Three Part Movement

The terms by which Schrader identifies the three-part transcendent movement are the "everyday," "disparity," and "stasis." They are a cinematic path (structure) to seeking an expression of the divine.

The "everyday" is the "meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living . . . This ‘le quotidien’ is not reality; it is the monotone, the silence, the stillness” (Transcendental Style 39). The “everyday” cuts against film’s sensuousness.
The transcendental filmmaker's stylization of the everyday draws attention to itself, which "annuls the viewer's natural desire to participate vicariously in the action on screen" (Transcendental Style 69). This is "not a case of making a viewer see life in a certain way, but rather preventing him from seeing it as he is accustomed" (Transcendental Style 69). The filmmaker must undercut the moving image's power to present sensuous reality.

For example, Bresson is in "opposition to the contrived dramatic events that pass for real life in movies" nor is he interested in capturing the "documentary 'truth' of an event, only the surface" of reality (Transcendental Style 63). To capture a glimpse of the ineffable, the filmmaker must reject all "conventional interpretations of reality" (Transcendental Style 10). The representing of reality as "everyday" strips reality of its living presence and "blocks the [viewer's] emotional and intellectual exits" from confronting the unseen so that they are prepared to "face the Unknown" (Transcendental Style 70). It is "a prelude to the moment of redemption," that is, to that moment when the viewer can transcend reality to a higher expression of the Wholly Other (Transcendental Style 39-40).

"Disparity" is the second movement in the three-tiered structure. It is the repetition of the bland and dull found in the "everyday." It functions to compound the "everyday" in order to create within the viewer a sense that "there are deep, untapped feelings just below the surface" of reality (Transcendental Style 44). Disparity is "the paradox of the spiritual existing within the physical, a spiritual reality that is attempting to rupture out into physical reality" (Transcendental Style 82). This "deep ground of compassion and awareness" is the Transcendent (Transcendental Style 48) lying beneath the surface of reality: "This growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality becomes an open rupture, and finally, in the moment of decisive action, there is an outburst of spiritual emotion totally inexplicable with the everyday" (Transcendental Style 43).
Schrader contends that beneath all reality lies a spiritual reality, but our obsession with surface detail distracts our attention. To "see" that deeper reality we must pound away at the immediacy of reality. This means discarding the viewing patterns inherent in Hollywood filmmaking. When a viewer is confronted with the transcendental style, s/he may be disturbed and confused:

Movie-goers love emotional constructs, they enjoy emotional involvement with artificial screens...[but] he has mistaken the everyday for transcendental style, and has only seen a fraction of the film...The viewer's emotions have been superficially rejected, but they have been simultaneously tantalized by the disparity (Transcendental Style 70).

The transcendental filmmaker taunts the viewer into an "emotionally irresolvable dilemma" which requires an aesthetic solution: "Emotions are vehicles through which the artist must act; he teases and strains the emotions until they are transformed into an expression 'distinctively aesthetic'" (Transcendental Style 85). In fact, the transcendental style is only that, a style, that strips the viewer of an emotional connection with reality...[it] prevents a runoff of superficial emotions (through everyday) and simultaneously sustains those same emotions (through disparity)...The trigger to the emotional release occurs during the final stage of disparity, decisive action, and it serves to freeze the emotion into expression, the disparity into stasis (Transcendental Style 78).

"Stasis" is the final "movement" or phase of the transcendental style which "serves to freeze the emotional into expression, the disparity into stasis" (Transcendental Style 78). It usually is a static shot that banishes the last sense of reality. An illustration is when Ozu cuts away from the interior of the family drama at the height of its disparity to a static, tranquil shot of nature or when Bresson freezes on an image of a smoldering cross in The Trial of Joan of Arc. It is an icon:

This static view represents the "new" world in which the spiritual and the physical can coexist, still in tension and unresolved, but as part of a larger scheme in which all phenomena are more or less expressive of a larger reality--the Transcendent (Transcendental Style 83).
What Ozu seeks is the reaffirmation of nature: "He doesn't so much eliminate the conflict between man and nature as transcend it" (Transcendental Style 37). This is accomplished by “a blast of music, an overt symbol, and an open call for emotion. . . . The act demands commitment by the viewer. . . . and without commitment there can be no stasis” (Transcendental Style 79). It freezes the empathy that has been created in the viewer. It establishes an image of a second reality which can stand beside the ordinary reality; this second image is a expression of the Wholly-Other. This is a "frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it” (Transcendental Style 49). Stasis "transforms empathy into aesthetic appreciation, experience into expression, emotion into form,” (Transcendental Style 51) and expresses something deeper than itself: the inner unity of all things.

Thus the transcendental style takes the most realistic art form, the moving image, and attempts to dismantle all that entertains and tantalizes. The transcendental style must dismantle its visual enticement, if it is to strip the dramatic experience from off the screen "out there" and center that spiritual transformation within the viewer. Most entertainment attempts to create a reciprocal relationship between the viewer and the experience on the screen, one that draws a comparison between the character on-screen and viewer in the audience. A transcendental experience rejects the reciprocal relationship and creates an expression of the transcendental within the viewer. Rather than creating a dramatic narrative with a beginning, middle, and end--one that entertains a viewer through a representation that is "out-there" on the screen--the transcendental style attempts to undercut that emotional connection. It attempts to strip whatever is "real" of its reality in order to unnerves and disturb the viewer in order to stylistically create a moment of spiritual transformation within.

For Schrader, when the viewer is confronted with the transcendental style, he must do one of two things:

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he can reject his feelings and refuse to take the film seriously, or he can accommodate his thinking to his feelings. If he chooses the latter, he will, having been given no emotional constructs by the director, have constructed his own screen (Transcendental Style 81).

S/he will have constructed her/his own transcendental moment, not out there on the screen but deep within her/his own spiritual being. Bresson calls this the moment of transformation: "There must be a moment of transformation; if not, there is no art"--but distinct from the traditional dramatic structure, this transformation does not "resolve disparity, it accepts it" (Transcendental Style 82). The viewer is forced into a confrontation with the Wholly Other he would normally avoid. He is faced with an explicable spiritual act... an act which now requests his participation and approval... It is a 'miracle' which must be accepted (Transcendental Style 82).

The Stylistic Elements

Since the transcendental is simply a "style," what stylistic devices are employed by the transcendental filmmaker? The dramatic events which pass for real life in traditional Hollywood films are sustained by "emotional constructs--plot, acting, camera work, editing, music." They are screens which "interpose themselves," preventing the viewer from seeing through the surface of reality to the supernatural" (Transcendental Style 63-64). In the transcendental style, however, every stylistic tool is used to postpone emotional involvement. In a classic Hollywood narrative these elements reinforce the realism of the story; in a transcendental film they undercut it. While it is impossible in this study to illustrate these stylistic elements in detail, they are in general:

1. Plot: The rejection of the traditional, classic plot line of a beginning, middle and end. The transcendental style is cyclical in structure, taking on "a rhythmic pacing of ritual" (Transcendental Style 22). It is the rejection of the traditional plot line. Bresson, for example, looks only for a succession of events which "rise and fall, tension and relaxation, however slight" (Transcendental Style 65).
2. Acting: The elimination of expressiveness in the acting. Character acting is modified into "relatively simple, demonstrable characteristics" (Transcendental Style 65). Bazin said of Bresson that he "is concerned not with the psychology but with the physiology of existence" (cited by Transcendental Style 66). The character attempts no expressiveness, rather s/he undercuts it: the "dialogue gives meaning to the silence, the action to the still life" (Transcendental Style 29). The static, well-composed environment acts as a frame for the action: a character enters the frame, performs an action, and exits (Transcendental Style 67). All psychological interest in character dilemma is irrelevant.

3. Camera Work: The use of flat, two-dimensional framing. The camera work is stripped of its "editorial" powers. There is no interest in leading the viewer's point of view. It refuses to shape or lead the viewer's connection with a realistic, three-dimensional world. Rather it attempts to flatten the frame, to undercut the connection with an immanent, realistic setting and force the viewer through the frame into a connection with something beyond. Ozu's camera is static and always positioned three feet above the ground. Bresson limits his camera to "one angle, one base composition" (Transcendental Style 67).

4. Editing: A rejection of continuity editing. Since there is no dramatic structure nor three-dimensional characters, the editing is governed by "regular, unostentatious cuts in which each shot, each event, leads to the next" (Transcendental Style 68). There is no attempt to edit for impact or the juxtaposing of scenes. Ozu rejects "the juxtaposing cut . . . but [accepts] the pacing cut which denotes a steady rhythmic secession of events" (Transcendental Style 22). This is a "construction that puts a sharp break on emotional involvement" (Transcendental Style 69). Likewise, Bresson's editing makes no attempt to manipulate the material image: "Scenes are cut short, set end to end without obvious emphasis" (Transcendental Style 68).

5. Sound Track: Elimination of all sound elements beyond natural documentary sounds if those are present at all. This reinforces a concern for the "minutiae of life . . . the cold
reality" (Transcendental Style 69). Sound is all but eliminated as the film moves to its coded ending, the still frame. For Bresson, sound is limited to "common, ‘documentary' sounds" (Transcendental Style 69). Ozu directs "silences and voids...structured between action and emptiness" (28), the “sound gives form to the silence” (Transcendental Style 27).

Music is used only at the point of the "decisive action": "decisive moments are characterized by a blast of music" (Transcendental Style 79). It acts to "transport us into a region that is no longer simply terrestrial, but rather cosmic," or as Bresson would say, "the divine" (Transcendental Style 82).

Dreyer's Transcendental Style

If Ozu’s and Bresson's cinematic styles are clear illustrations of what Schrader considers the most complete and full form of the transcendental style, Dreyer creates a problem for Schrader. Although Dreyer's films reflect some elements of the transcendental style, especially his early films, which rely "on flat empty sets, inexpressive dialogue, natural sound tracks and long takes," Schrader sees a consistent thread of ambiguity in Dryer's work (Transcendental Style 119). It relates, Schrader believes, to Dreyer's interest in the Gothic which is a confusing, multi-faceted, dualistic, conglomeration of elements that has no clear focus. Schrader believes that Dreyer is unable to commit himself to a pure transcendental style because he is unclear about "whether art would express the transcendent or the person who experiences the Transcendent; whether the Transcendent is an outer reality or an inner reality" (Transcendental Style 97). Dreyer is simply unable or unwilling to carry the transcendental style on through to the movement of stasis.

Ozu grounded his work in Zen, and Bresson in the icon of scholasticism. Dreyer coupled the Kammerspiel, a German dramatic form that "emphasized the everyday, with expressionistic elements. This form relied on simplicity of scenery, a refusal to use
declamatory effects, a systematic realism, rigorous action, and measured symbolism" (Transcendental Style 114). This allowed Dreyer to get "outside of the naturalism of the medium, to be not merely visual, but spiritual...a chance...of replacing reality with his own subjective interpretations" (Transcendental Style 118). Dreyer was trying for the same effect as Schrader's transcendental style by using expressionism to undercut reality. But this was not enough for Schrader because it did not crush the immanent to effect an expression of the ineffable; it made reality more of a presence. Or as Schrader complained, it did not "eliminate the barriers which stand between the spectator and the Holy. It exaggerates them and makes them a value in themselves" (Transcendental Style 119).

For Schrader, it is Dreyer's inability to arrive at stasis that undermines the final movement of the transcendental style. Dreyer did not shed the immanent sufficiently enough to create an expression of the spiritual. Rather than using a "frozen image" as does Ozu and Bresson, "freezing the commitment which comes after the decisive action...", Dreyer--and this is the decisive issue--freezes "the disparity itself, creating an endless syndrome of earthly struggle" (Transcendental Style 121). He seems unable to leave off from a material reality. As Schrader puts it, Dreyer creates the surface of reality similar to Ozu and Bresson, but then "seemingly becomes enamored with the surface itself, mistaking the means for the end" (Transcendental Style 119).

Dreyer was unable to break himself away from the "sensual disparity" in the Gothic (Transcendental Style 97) because, according to Schrader, he relies on a carefully "constructed phenomenology of faith" (Transcendental Style 119). This will become an important element later in the discussion of Legacy.

A Summary

Schrader's argument makes it clear that the challenge of the religious filmmaker, at least as he sees it, is to free cinema from its grounding in the realistic and the immanent. It
is Schrader's contention, quoting Bazin, that "the spiritual quality in art suffered its decline at the expense of 'realism,' the duplication of either external or internal reality" (Transcendental Style 157). While classic art forms were born in religious practice, the Hollywood motion picture, as an offspring of capitalism and technology, had no interest in religious representation per se. It was grounded in the material world of sensuous imagery. The cinema duplicated "internal reality into a deeper, more complex level...It canonized the human, sensual and profane: it celebrated the realistic" (Transcendental Style 158):

Before the advent of cinema, certain religious artists attempted to first create the illusion of the immanent, then break that illusion, thereby revealing the Transcendent. ...Because the transcendentally-minded filmmaker already has the illusion at his disposal, he can go immediately to the next stage, attempting to break the illusion (Transcendental Style 160).

For Schrader, this is the "miracle" of sacred art. It occurs when the viewer has moved past the point where "temporal means" are of any avail,

as if moving down the aisle of a Byzantine church. When the image stops, the viewer keeps going, moving deeper and deeper, one might say, into the image. This is the 'miracle' of sacred art. If it occurs, the viewer has moved past the point where any 'temporal means'...are of any avail. He has moved beyond the province of art" (Transcendental Style 161).

The challenge of the transcendental artist is to hold the viewer's attention by means of a sensuous image, while simultaneously undercutting those same realistic properties, stripping the image of any resemblance to the here and now. This means rejecting all common narrative and stylistic elements, crushing the realism out of the structures to prepare the viewer for an impression of something deeper.

Schrader's three-part transcendental movement is a clear rejection of the "concept" of personal expression, "the delusion...that I am the doer" (Transcendental Style 25). Its purpose is to envelope the viewer's personality "within a form that is not experience at all, but an expression...of the transcendent itself" (Transcendental Style 26). It must not attempt to reproduce an experience of the transcendent, but rather imitate it.
The transcendental style is in effect a complete reversal or negative image of traditional dramatic three-act structure. Where the dramatic structure relies on realistic presentation, enhanced tension and a certain psychological dimension, the transcendent style crushes these elements. Where the traditional dramatic structure is character driven, the transcendent is stylistically driven. Where the traditional structure starts with a rupture of the commonplace, Schrader's "everyday" is a compounding of the commonplace. Instead of heightening emotional tension, the everyday smothers it in the commonplace. Where the traditional structure creates rising action, the transcendent reveals disparity. Where there is resolution in the traditional structure, there is only the static, frozen image that initiates transcendent stasis.

In making his case for the transcendental style, Schrader does not attempt to rule out filmmakers who have been interested in representing a simpler form of spiritual reality. Pasolini, Mizoguichi, Bunuel, and others have all incorporated elements of the transcendental style. But Schrader's point is that they have not formalized a "devotional attitude" to the degree of Ozu and Bresson. Schrader admits that there are many ways to represent the sacred, and many others more suited to represent the profane, but "none more suited to express the Holy than the transcendental style" where the "primitive techniques of two-dimensionality, frontality, the abstract line, and archetypal character reign in presenting sacred art" (Transcendental Style 152).

One might argue that because the transcendental style is simply the reversal of the classic dramatic structure and style, it is just another, contrived representation, a "screen," (Transcendental Style 71-71) as Bresson uses the term. Rather than using stylistic devices to enhance reality, the transcendental style might be just one more aesthetic or structural device, like the classic Hollywood dramatic structure, that "screens" the viewer from making contact with something beyond the cinematic apparatus.
But Schrader argues that the transcendental style resolves this criticism by "doubling-up" on itself, by creating layers upon layers of the everyday that continually undercut any attempt at creating an artificial screen.\(^{31}\) Even though the filmmaker appears to be interested in "reality," this layering of mundane images, the "obsession with detail" and the repetition of narrative information, forces the viewer to sense that there is something deeper than the image stripped of its visual sensuousness--the Wholly-Other (Transcendental Style 72).

In conclusion, I think it is fairly obvious that what distinguishes Schrader transcendental style from an LDS perspective is less his three-tiered structure or stylistic elements than Schrader’s concept of the Divine. Schrader’s concept of the Transcendent—which he grounds in classical art theory—is based on a theology which perceives spiritual reality as immaterial. It stands in stark contrast to the anthropomorphic concept of the LDS Godhead. It may be that the very conceptual underpinnings of Schrader’s aesthetic (and his theology) are so different in terms of LDS theology that his concept is of little value. The conception of divinity in Mormonism—either as it is revealed in the bodied reality of the Father and Son or as it is manifested through the Holy Spirit—is antithetical to Schrader’s definition of the Transcendent.

For example, how does the concept of an anthropomorphic divinity affect Schrader’s transcendental three-tiered movement and stylistic elements?\(^{32}\) If the divine has revealed itself within an LDS theology then what is the purpose of a transcendental cinematic style for the LDS faith? If the ineffable is present, somehow, within the immanent, does the sensuousness of the cinematic image have to be denied or sought for at

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\(^{31}\)In some instances this is created by Bresson actually repeating a scene: “his narration does not give the viewer any new information or feelings, but only reiterates what he already knows” (Transcendental Style 72).

a deeper visual level? And if not denied, then what does it seek to visually represent or create? An abstract expression of stasis is not the ultimate objective of an LDS cinematic style.

It needs to be pointed out that at times even Schrader seems puzzled. What is most curious is this statement by Schrader:

If the transcendental style really is a hierophany, if there really is a Transcendent, then the critic can never fully comprehend how it operates in art . . . the actual "why" of that realization is a mystery (Transcendental Style 85).

It is as though Schrader attempts to create a stylistic approach "whose ultimate secret is not only beyond the viewer, but . . . [the artist] himself" (Transcendental Style 85). Or as Bresson wrote: "The audience must feel that I go toward the unknown, that I do not know what will happen when I arrive" (cited in Transcendental Style 86). All is mystery and strangeness for Schrader's transcendental filmmakers.

This raises serious questions about the fit of an LDS film aesthetic with Schrader's transcendental style. If the objective of a transcendental style is to seek the Divine (the Transcendent, as Schrader describes it) and if the Divine is present within the immanent in LDS theology, then there is no need to stylistically create its impression. The Divine is present within and throughout immanent reality. A more serious question is, how can one reject the physical reality of the Transcendent and then somehow imitate the expression of it? Is there something inherent in Schrader's conception of deity that undermines this paradoxical position of understanding how to express the Transcendent but not knowing how to experience it?

Although Schrader's attempt is determined, in the end it remains convoluted from an LDS perspective. Although his argument concerning the sensuousness of the cinematic medium seem sensible--that the moving image holds us too close to the physical nature of reality--it fails to convince that the final objective of a transcendent experience is an intangible expression of an ineffable divinity. Our theology tells us that we must have
more, that the Transcendent is an embodied reality. If the Divine is a reality, then our objective is to understand his nature, and then the choice of how we choose to represent divinity as either immanent or transcendent is critical.

A comparison of Schrader's transcendental style to the Mormon motion picture will help us understand our cinematic heritage and how we might formulate an LDS cinematic aesthetic.
It is hard to be an artist. It is even harder to be a developed moral person (a saint). To be both is not twice as hard, but twice squared.

Jacques Maritain

CHAPTER IV: "LEGACY" AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL STYLE

This chapter will compare and contrast the structural and stylistic elements of a representative LDS film with those of classical Hollywood narrative and then Schrader’s transcendental style. My purpose here is to explore what stylistic similarities and differences there are between these cinematic forms and those in a Mormon motion picture. As we have seen looking at Schrader’s transcendental style, it is clear that there are theological differences, but there may be some elements that are compatible with our own aesthetic.

The LDS film I have selected for comparison is Legacy. I am treating Legacy as a case study, a representative illustration of LDS narrative filmmaking. It is impractical in this study to consider more than one film, and Legacy is the Church’s most recent long-form, narrative motion picture. It is most compatible with Schrader’s long-form illustrations from the films of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer.

34There are other narrative, documentary, and expositional films that could provide additional insights, such as How Rare a Possession and Man’s Search for Happiness. In fact, non-narrative forms may be more compatible with LDS cinematic interests. For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to examine the more traditional narrative forms.
First I will compare Legacy's structure to the classic Hollywood narrative structure to illustrate that despite obvious attempts to imitate it, Legacy is something of an anomaly. Then I will compare Legacy to Schrader's transcendental style to determine whether LDS films--and by implication other cinematic forms used in Church films--share in the structure or stylistic elements of transcendental style, or whether Mormon filmmaking is developing its own film aesthetic.

Legacy was produced under the direction of the LDS Church's Office of the First Presidency. Legacy is a religious, historical drama covering early LDS Church history from its 1830's foundation in upstate New York to the laying of the Salt Lake Temple capstone in Utah in 1896. The film's production crew was comprised of prominent LDS filmmakers.35

The film's running time is fifty-three minutes and it premiered in 1994 in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building theatre in Salt Lake City, Utah. It has multiple screenings each day in a specially constructed, 70 millimeter, surround-sound theatre that is part of the LDS Church's Salt Lake Temple Square exhibits. Members and non-members alike can view the film hourly.

Legacy is a story within a story. The plot is relatively simple. The film begins in 1893 at the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple. An old woman, the Elderly Eliza,36 is

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35 Those most responsible for film's aesthetic were: Kieth Merrill, producer/director; Reed Smoot, cinematographer; and Dick Jamison, art director. In terms of the film's script and storyline much direction was received from the Church's Office of First Presidency. There are many others who could be credited for contributions on the film. Kieth Merrill has worked in the Hollywood and the independent film industries. Most importantly for this study is that he and the other principal crew members have produced a number of large format IMAX films for visitor destination sites such as the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone Park.

36 I make a distinction in this study between the "two" Eliza's: the Young Eliza, who exists with the film's real-time, and the Elderly Eliza, who provides the frame for the story and exists only in the Utah time frame. Although three different actresses portray Eliza at three ages, the experience of the child and mature woman are bound within the Young Eliza's time frame.
relating to her grandson the story of her "legacy of faith." Her story sets up and frames the action in a historical and spiritual context. The action then flashes back to the 1830s to a young girl, who becomes a woman, the Young Eliza, and then follows her personal story forward in time, as her family joins the Mormon church and shares its persecutions and westward migration. Most of the film's on-screen time is spent in the Nauvoo period where the faith's spiritual objective, the Nauvoo Temple, is under construction. Eliza finds some happiness in Nauvoo. She sees the temple rise and marries a young English convert, David. But the Prophet Joseph is assassinated and the saints are driven out, this time to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. The film ends in Utah with the Elderly Eliza's challenge to her grandson to hold on to the legacy of faith that has been passed down to him.

At first glance Legacy appears to be patterned after the traditional Hollywood religious epic. On the surface, it has a classic three-part narrative structure driven by what appears to be a single protagonist. It does not feature a dominant religious figure, such as Joseph Smith or Brigham Young, but employs a non-historical, female lead, Eliza Morley. Its overall presentational form, structure, and stylistics are patterned after bigger-than-life Hollywood features like The Ten Commandments or Ben Hur. It clearly attempts a plot-driven, cause-and-effect narrative, working through a central, dramatic figure. Perhaps the most distinctive classic characteristic is the visual and aural opulence of the 70mm surround-sound presentation in a specialized theatre.

Despite these traditional elements Legacy at a deeper level employs other, documentary elements that seem, if not to undercut the dramatic narrative form in a way

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37 Temple construction is presented as a visible symbol of the ultimate objective of the Mormon experience, a Zion community with a temple at its center. From an LDS perspective, it is within the temple that the Transcendent will be found.

38 There is clearly an effort here to have a female lead, which plays against the conventional male lead as the center of the story.
similar to Schrader’s transcendental style, at least transform it into something quite different. Whether by conscious design or not Legacy is an odd mixture of documentary and narrative elements. In addition, Legacy shares several elements of Schrader’s transcendental style. Although it attempts to present a classic narrative form, it oddly employs stylistic elements of the transcendental style.

This portion of my study is formalistic in approach, focusing on the particulars of Legacy’s visual text. Film form is essentially constructed of two elements: the formal structural design—that is, whether or not it is primarily a narrative or a non-narrative form—and the stylistic elements that are employed, such as cinematography, editing, sound, music, etc. Analysis of form can be accomplished by (1) determining a film’s organizational structure, its narrative or non-narrative formal system; ascertaining if it has a classically organized plot from which the story is constructed; (2) identifying the film’s salient techniques; what aspects of color, lighting, framing, editing, or sound does the film rely on heavily? (3) tracing out patterns of techniques within the entire film and then asking how they reinforce the narrative or non-narrative organization; (4) proposing the functions of the salient techniques and the patterns they form.

What in Legacy’s structure and stylistic elements is similar to classic Hollywood narrative or to Schrader’s transcendental style? Can these elements contribute to a LDS filmmaking aesthetic?

Legacy and Classic Hollywood Structure

Before comparing Legacy’s structure and stylistics to the Schrader’s transcendental style, it is important to understand its relationship to classic Hollywood form. Early narrative cinema was fairly simplistic with little complexity in characterization or plot.

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39 This methodology follows that developed by David Bordwell in a simple way in his co-authored (with Kristin Thompson) Film Art: An Introduction.
Characters were subordinated to narrative action and were often little more than stereotypes. During the 1930s and 1940s narrative conventions began to formalize into what became the traditional Hollywood dramatic narrative, or what Noel Burch has called the Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR). Conventions such as mise-en-scene, framing (point of view), continuity editing, and the shot/reverse shot were used to create a coherent and credible fictional space where often complex characters interact as though in real time and space. IMR characteristics include: (1) linearity of story through cause and effect to create an enigma-resolution (a fictional event disrupts a pre-existing equilibrium in the fictional world and the task of the story is to resolve the enigma by bringing it to a new equilibrium; (2) a high degree of narrative closure (the story has a clear beginning, middle, and end in which every question raised is answered); (3) a realistic, fictional world governed by spatial and temporal verisimilitude, a real place and time; and (4) psychologically rounded characters (a “hero”) whose actions bring about narrative resolution.

On one level, *Legacy* attempts the traditional, character driven story line, working through the character of Eliza Morley, but Eliza's story actually drifts in and out of the film, leaving it without a clear linear flow and a solid resolution. There is an attempt at a fictional world, but there are no psychologically rounded characters. What is clear after closer scrutiny is that *Legacy*’s structure is more non-narrative and episodic; that is, its plot line rises and falls in a rhythmic cause and effect pattern that has little to do with Eliza's life and, as far as Eliza is concerned, never resolves itself conclusively. Eliza almost disappears as the central character during parts of the film. If she were not the voice-over narrator as well, she would be almost a negligible element, long before the film ends. It is

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not Eliza’s enigma that controls the story. Rather, it is the film’s episodic structure—the rise and fall pattern of the Mormons’ westward movement—that generates the film’s structure. The story is driven by the enigma of whether the saints will ever find a place to worship in peace, but even after the characters arrive at the Great Salt Lake valley there is no classic denouement, no clear cut conclusion.\(^{41}\) It is the larger backdrop of the saints, seen in the background of every sequence, that provides the film’s narrative strength. This is a critical point in terms of an LDS aesthetic.

This mixture of episodic and non-narrative elements is woven together by three structural elements: (1) a backdrop of actual historical events, representing Mormon history, which creates a rhythmic rise-and-fall structure that never resolves itself in a classical dramatic way; (2) a character-driven, narrative element in the person of the young girl, Eliza Morley, who converts to Mormonism and grows to maturity within the film; and (3) a voice-over, frame element in the person of the Elderly Eliza, who essentially stands outside of the film, and provides both historical and ecclesiastical perspectives.

In a traditional Hollywood narrative film, the featured central character, the hero, controls the narrative progression of the film. It is his actions in resolving a crisis that provide the frame for the three-act structure. In *Legacy*, this is not the case despite Eliza Morley’s character. It is the historical events that frame the film which forms the basis of its episodic structure. I do not believe that the film’s episodic structure was formally planned as a narrative element. I believe that it gradually took possession of the film’s narrative and in the final edited version imposed its own structure on the film.\(^{42}\) This rise-

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\(^{41}\)Perhaps the rise and fall is never to be completed until present time and space is ruptured permanently at the end of time by the return of the incarnate Transcendent. See Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane* for a description of the centering force of a religion’s sacred space.

\(^{42}\)Legacy’s finished length was much shorter than Merrill intended it. Without having seen the earlier versions, it is impossible to determine what was edited out. I would contend that the last third of the film took on a more significant presence as the film was shortened.
and-fall episodic structure functions in opposition to the traditional narrative structure in a mode similar to a documentary form. Although there are no specific documentary elements, such as historical photographs or diary excerpts, that connect the fictional elements to actual historical events, it is clear that the film is intended to be viewed as a historical document, with the historical events being more important than Eliza's personal drama.\footnote{The single exception is the concluding shot, which is set in front of the actual Salt Lake Temple. All of the other historical settings are re-creations. While there are many settings that obviously have no historical reality, there are scenes (for example, the Haun's Mill episode and the Nauvoo Temple cornerstone laying) that are based on and are meant to reflect historical fact.}

Legacy's episodic structure, the rising and falling of event after event, has the clearest connection to the "everyday" of the transcendental style. And it is this repetitive form which builds what Schrader might argue is a form of "disparity," the dull, compounding of the everyday. Over and over again, the saints are forced from one settlement to the next. These events are used as transitional scenes. We see here the clearest similarity to Ozu and Dreyer. Rather than reinforcing a dramatic narrative structure with its inciting element and rising action that resolves in a denouement, the structure of Legacy rises and falls, rises and falls across a series of historical events. Oddly enough, by the time the film enters its final third the Young Eliza has all but disappeared from the story line. This backdrop of actual historical settings and events overtakes any attempt at a conventional three-part dramatic structure.

Although the Young and Elderly Eliza characters confront and resolve certain issues, holding the story line together, it is clear that the individual life takes a backstage position when compared with the larger movement of the Church. It is clear that Eliza is at best only a representation of every other saint's story. This is a complete reversal of the traditional, classic hero/heroine. It may be that to do anything else would exalt the
individual above the body of believers at large, violating Mormon belief in the worth of all as equal members in a community of believers.

The second and third narrative elements, that is, the roles of the two Eliza’s, are interrelated. Even though they represent what appears to be the same character in the film, they function very differently. The Young Eliza embodies a classic Hollywood-type character, self-interested, struggling against seemingly insurmountable odds. Although represented as the Young Eliza grown old, the Elderly Eliza, on the other hand, is very far removed from the Young Eliza character. The Elderly Eliza provides a frame element for not only Eliza but for the film as a whole. She is the reflective element, the Young Eliza grown old and wise. Her on-camera presence starts the film and her commentary (via her voice over) is interspersed throughout the film. The Elderly Eliza essentially represents three attitudes: a wise, reflective believer; the collective voice of the film's otherwise voiceless saints; and the expository voice of the Church. At the close of the film, her once individual interests, as seen in the Young Eliza, have been "swallowed up" in the larger body of the faithful.

Although the framed elements at the film's beginning and end are relatively short, they may be the most powerful influence over the film's narrative meaning, especially the opening scene where the Elderly Eliza's voice over provides the film's context. Her language and delivery are the most stately elements in the film. The framed structure seems to control the film, at least on the surface, but it is the underlying episodic structure that defines the film's purpose.

In summary, then, Legacy is non-narrative or documentary in structure. It has attempted to impose a classic narrative through the Young Eliza element, but it is the Elderly Eliza who functions as the film's official voice, re-shaping and providing context. The episodic structure, along with the Elderly Eliza's voice over, is in conflict with the Young Eliza's dramatic role. The episodic structure is purposeful and plodding,
undercutting the Young Eliza's attempts at immediacy and resolution. One might argue that the episodic structure strips any dramatic value from the Young Eliza role.

If we turn to the stylistic elements or patterns of techniques Legacy employs to reinforce the narrative structure, we find no pattern wholly consistent with classic Hollywood narrative. The scope of the art direction, camera, editing, and sound all appear on the surface to be imitative of Hollywood, yet underneath something else is happening.

First we cannot ignore the enormous scope of the 70mm image. Visually the 70mm opulence and the film's musical score are always before the viewer. Whether it is the settings of Independence, Haun's Mill, or Nauvoo, the scenes are large, authentic and carefully art directed. The scale of the film's presentational form puts the art direction in control of almost all aspects of the film's stylistic approach. The 70mm form and the visual backdrop for the action overpowers all other elements.

Wardrobe, set construction, and props are woven together in a solemn tapestry. Because of their continued presence as a visual backdrop, they become almost more real and authentic than the featured characters. Resourceful and determined, the saints are ever in pursuit of the divine. There is no sense of a Romantic resolution. There is only hardship and toil.

The camera compositions never overtly accommodate a featured character's dramatic purpose. The camera is almost always static without any attempt to create an artificially coherent fictional space. All of the scenes are treated as master shots and very seldom does the camera move in for close-ups. There is no visual intimacy in presenting personality or inter-personal relationships. Characters simply enter and exit the frame,

44 In the classic Hollywood narrative, camera framing determines the coherence of fictional space. The director manipulates the camera to create a three-dimensional world which seems to extend beyond the bounds of the film frame. By using camera elements, such as eye-line match, shot/reverse shot, and cutting on action, he/she can extend the visual elements beyond the edge of the frame.
making only slight movements within it. In most cases it is the large historical backdrop that determines the frame, and the characters are fixed within it. All is shot with the apparent intention of keeping the action within the "frame" of the static camera.

There were potentially many opportunities for camera movement which might have assisted in the dramatic development of the story. A good illustration of this is the scene when Eliza’s brother, Johnny, returns and reconciles with the family. Young Eliza runs to greet him by exiting one shot and entering another. Her movement out of one frame to the next endows the scene with an emotional element not seen elsewhere, but this creation of a fictional space seldom happens elsewhere in the film. Another example, the only instance of a pure close shot (not even an extreme close-up), takes place in a British chapel where David tells the vicar of his conversion to Mormonism. The camera closes to an over-shoulder shot and the viewer senses something personal, intimate and, in this case, spiritual. But there are few scenes where camera movement or framing create dramatic energy. Consequently there is no sense that this is a classical Hollywood approach.

Often the film’s lighting appears dark and brooding to match the saints’ persecution and western flight. Clearly we could relate this to Schrader’s use of the "everyday," the never-ending plodding aspect of the westward trek. But then we will view a bright, happy scene that reflects more a romantic notion than any consistent lighting approach across the length of the film. This may have been partially the result of being dependent on natural setting across several seasons. An example of this is David and Eliza’s farewell on the trek as he leaves for the Mormon Battalion. There is almost a cheerful moment with the characters, who are set off in a beautifully wooded scene of luminous spring greens.

One might argue that this limitation of camera movement is influenced more by Merrill’s choice of the 70mm format than a conscious structural choice, but the visual effect is the same.
On the contrary, great care is given to lighting the interior scenes. For example, in Young Eliza's opening scene in the barn and later in the house when she first meets the Prophet Joseph, the lighting is controlled for dramatic effect. Shafts of light and careful back-lighting present both Eliza and the Prophet Joseph in a hallowed setting. This clearly establishes them as central characters, but it is in contrast with most of the dark exterior scenes which match the tone of the saints' fateful trek. Occasionally there will be a scene that cuts against this, but to be fair it is obviously easier to light a room than a landscape with available light.

Editing is also used minimally when compared to classic Hollywood structure.\textsuperscript{46} There are very few editing effects other than the direct linking of one scene to the next. Each scene is usually treated as one camera take without any attempt to cut to close-ups. The actors work in groups of two or three, facing the camera in more theatrical framing. For example, in potentially one of the most religiously moving sequences of the film, Young Eliza's healing at Council Bluffs, the camera shot is framed in a wide establishing shot at one end of Eliza's tent with, Eliza, her sister-in-law Betsy, and Eliza's little sister in the foreground. Eliza has cholera. Her friend, Jacob, enters in the background with the Prophet Joseph, recently released from prison. With little dramatic set-up, Jacob and the Prophet place their hands on her head, and she is healed. The entire sequence is shot from a wide angle with only two quick reaction shots of Betsy and Eliza's little sister. Little care is taken to construct a visual progression of images and build the dramatic moment. Even though this scene has the potential in a classic Hollywood presentation of becoming highly charged as a transcendent moment, it is never edited to take advantage of the moment. The

\textsuperscript{46}The continuity editing of classic film style effaces the moment of transition from one shot to the other--for example, point of view shots, using the eyeline match of one character to the eyeline of another. In addition the "match [cut] on action" allows juxtaposition of shots which reinforce viewer perception that he/she is in a real world and unaware of the cinematic artifice. All this bears on drawing the spectator "into" the fictional world.
scene is played as though it were two-dimensional, stylized portraiture in the style of Bresson. It is clear that the director wants a classical dramatic performance, but stylistically he treats some scenes much like the transcendental filmmaker.

In its use of sound, especially the music score, Legacy clearly imitates the Hollywood religious epic. There is no thematic score, but Merrill has employed a symphonic score for each scene and sequence. There is a selection of Mormon hymns sung by the Tabernacle Choir, as well as classical pieces. Here Merrill imitates the Hollywood tradition, since his music is used "wall-to-wall," specifically for shaping the viewer's perception of the scenes. Here is cinematic sensuousness at its height. There is no attempt to suppress it for Schrader's transcendental effect. Thus, what one finds in Legacy is a mixture of structural and stylistic elements that attempts a classic Hollywood fictional but is continually undermined by other elements. The Young Eliza is continually set upon by family difficulties and spiritual crises--her brother's desertion, her mother's death, the saints expulsion, etc. But her personal drama is continually undercut by the episodic structure of the historical events.

The film's structure is more cyclical in effect: hope, industry, and expulsion, over and over again. There is no clear fictional event or enigma that is initiated and resolved in a classic Hollywood way. The rise and fall within each setting provides no room or impetus for over-arching dramatic development. For example when Eliza's mother dies, the viewer never sees a clear cause-and-effect relationship. The family stands at her grave site with the wagon train moving off in the distance. It is the voice-over of the Elderly Eliza that provides perspective here. We are witnesses to the violence at Haun's Mill where Johnnie, Eliza's brother, is shot, but his actual death is never shown. All of these events are stitched together selectively, but there is no sense that we are seeing a fictional story. This is history being selectively told. And it is the Elderly Eliza's voice-over that draws conclusions and provides perspective. There is never a sense of traditional dramatic

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completion to Young Eliza's personal story. The end is known from the beginning, in dramatic terms.

Even when there is the possibility for developing strong, well-rounded characters in a realistic setting, as in the romantic scenes of David's and Jacob's courting of Eliza, it is not the woman's personal drama that controls narrative development. Eliza, Jacob, and David are rarely seen in the same scene or shot together. Whenever Eliza is on screen, she is either alone or with only one of the two men. There is no dramatic tension. The romantic scenes are very short, almost implied. In fact Jacob never gets an opportunity to voice his affections to Eliza on screen.

Therefore, despite the film's evident interest in presenting Young Eliza as the controlling element, the viewer's attention is continually re-directed to the film's episodic backdrop. It is these episodic, historical settings, coupled with the Elderly Eliza's voice-over, that eventually give shape to the narrative structure. One never senses that the "dramatic" Young Eliza and the others are real characters. They are only figures set against the backdrop of the church's Westward movement. The characters become almost stereotypical, somehow representing not themselves in a fictional world but as stand-ins for all the faithful. It is the Church's divine mission that becomes the film's focus. Although characters fall along the way, for example Eliza's brother and mother, the Church will move on without them.

Even Eliza's final decision to marry David, which should be a central dramatic moment in Eliza's story, is played in front of a temple construction backdrop. It is the saints' devotion to the temple's completion that the viewer is continually brought back to. The characters' individual lives become almost irrelevant, their dramatic purposes submerged within the larger body of saints. If no one individual is of sufficient importance, there can never be a dramatic structure where the protagonist's dilemma is of sufficient importance to take precedence over the Church's eternal forward movement. The
only dramatic tension occurs when the character bends his/her will to the Church's forward movement. *Legacy's* most significant character is not the Young Eliza, nor even the Elderly Eliza. The most significant character is the collective saints, revealed in their committed to a higher cause than individual personal interests.

One additional element related to the film's episodic design needs amplification. Towards the end of the film, *Legacy's* structure shifts completely away from any sense of a Hollywood narrative, or for that matter even a documentary construction. Specific historical events no longer control the film's structure. The film's realistic time-line shifts into a timeless montage of wagon train images. All the scenes are shot in wide angle, but a rhythm builds climactically through music and editing. This is the film's high point. In terms of *Legacy*, this could be considered a transcendent moment. It is grounded in the episodic structure but breaks out in a higher form that brings what was only background—the general populace of saints—to the forefront of the film.

One sequence illustrates this stylistic shift. The setting is gloomy. It is raining. As the wagons weave through entangled trees, the Morley family wagon slides off the trail and tumbles into the river and capsizes. The horses thrash about desperately. Other characters rush in to help the distressed. This is the most moving scene in the film. It is shot in a master scene with a couple of medium shots of the Morley family collecting themselves on the river bank and then gathering their belongings and trudging on westward.

The scene is sweeping in its visual impact that we see (sense) the ineffable as being more tangible and real here than anywhere else in the film. The actuality of the scene draws the viewer emotionally into it.47 We sense that the scene is "real," and as the images wash over us, we hear, "Come, Come Ye Saints" underneath. We grasp, if only for a moment,

\[47\text{The scene was not staged; it was an accident. The wagon actually slid into the stream.}\]
a sense of the Divine. This is not a highly charged dramatic Hollywood resolution, nor is it Schraderian stasis, but a simple and profound illumination of devotion, a devotion that convinces there is a Divine. It is not the witness of one but many. It is the Divine seen as clearly as perhaps as the Holy can be seen.

From this point on in the film, Young Eliza speaks no further lines of dialogue. She simply disappears from the film. For that matter, there is little dramatic action until the Elderly Eliza's voice takes control of the film in the final scene. The Young Eliza's role as a central dramatic figure is subsumed within the sweeping sequences of the wagon train's westward movement. The Young Eliza becomes just one among many saints. This is a critical movement from the perspective of a LDS filmmaking aesthetic. It defines clearly the individual /"body of Christ" relationship. The individual, the Young Eliza, has become part of the will of the Church. There is nothing separate left of the Young Eliza's romantic hopes or spiritual doubts. Her voice has found a oneness within the Elderly Eliza and the Elderly Eliza within the larger Church's legacy of faith.

How does Legacy's structure and stylistic elements compare to Schrader's transcendental aesthetic? Has Merrill intentionally used stylistic elements in a consistent way to create a text that could be representative of an LDS filmmaking aesthetic? A comparison of Legacy's overall approach to the "movements" and stylistic elements in Schrader's transcendental style may be helpful.

**Legacy and the Transcendental Style**

As I mentioned earlier, there appears to be little relationship at first glance between Legacy and Schrader's transcendental style. One would certainly not confuse it with a film by Bresson or Ozu. The surround-sound, 70mm presentational form is clearly an

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48The scene's power is grounded in a theological principle that the "will" of the one will be "swallowed up in the will of the Father." This may be one element of an LDS cinematic aesthetic.
offspring of the Hollywood classic narrative. It is clear from the outset that the film is not using transcendental elements such as effaced characters, two-dimensional framing, flat lighting, etc. But how can one account for the transcendental elements that do emerge in the film, such as de-emphasizing a single central protagonist and classic three-act structure, squashing some traditional visual presentations with theatrical framing, eliminating continuity editing, etc? Is there a clear transcendental influence guiding the film’s structural and stylistic choices, or are other elements imposing themselves on the film’s structure? One might claim that the 70mm format simply restricted stylistic choices, but this does not explain all the similarities with Schrader’s transcendental style. Legacy’s visual abundance could never be construed as anything similar to Schrader's "everyday." But I contend that in a strange way, the size of the image actually reinforces what could be construed as the "disparity" of the episodic structure. Although the sensuousness of the 70mm image is almost overwhelming, it continually redirects attention to the backdrop of toiling persecuted saints.

In terms of character development, Merrill is clearly seeking to create psychologically well-rounded characters, but I believe that he never quite accomplishes it, at least in terms of traditional Hollywood standards. There is no clear enigma-resolution in terms of the Young Eliza character. It is clear that the character of Young Eliza is an attempt at more than a two-dimensional performance, but her dialogue and expression take on an "unconventional" nature. This may not be deliberate; it may be a lack of character development rather than any attempt at effacing the characters for a Bressonian effect. Occasionally we get a glimpse of a well-rounded character as in the scene on the steps of Eliza's house when David romances her. In most instances, however, the viewer never gets "close" to her character in a way that makes her a real, living person. The viewer is never able to fill in the emotional gap between her romantic joys and her spiritual sufferings.
For example, one of Young Eliza's central dramatic purposes revolves around the romantic intrigue during the film's Nauvoo period, as David and Jacob spar for her affections. This segment essentially has a miniature classic structure with a clear beginning, middle, and end, inserted within the film's over-all episodic frame. Elsewhere the character's role is too flimsy to exert any significant influence on the narrative shape of the film. And we should not forget that even this romance is set against the backdrop of the Saints' construction of the Nauvoo Temple. The Young Eliza story element is almost a conscious overlay.

The actors' performances give us more than Schrader's non-expressive acting, but the dialogue between the characters is often awkward and stilted, relying on commentary from the Elderly Eliza for support and focus. In reality, Eliza's personal story is simply a diversion from what is really the film's purpose. It is a glimpse of what it means to be part of a larger religious community's "legacy of faith," as opposed to a microcosm of individual experience. It may be that the Young Eliza's role is used as an appetizer to hold viewers' attention since they have been nourished on the opulence of the traditional Hollywood film. The average film viewer expects romance and dramatic resolution. Legacy's structure is not a vehicle for Young Eliza's personal drama but an illustration a deeper cinematic aesthetic that is non-narrative and non-traditional.

The episodic cycle of settlement and strife is part and parcel of the historical saints' westward movement. The actual historical events appear almost to creep into and give "everydayness" to the film's highly sensuous visual and aural experience. It is here we see the closest similarities with Schrader's transcendental style. This structure functions very much like the first two movements of Schrader's style, the "everyday" and "disparity". A series of scenes are strung together to create (at least in principle if not in tone) the "rise and fall, a tension and relaxation" as each settlement is built and abandoned. Between these are wagon train transitions which build toward the end of the film. There is a similarity here to
the dull sparseness of the transcendental's "everyday" (Transcendental Style 64-65). It is the repetition of common events, compounded on top of each other, in order to strip reality of its sensuousness. But in contrast to what Schrader describes, it is not a stylistic effort to find an abstract stasis. The episodic scenes, one after another, create a rhythm that is repetitive but never ending. There is no sense of the story coming to completion, to a classic resolution, but neither is there a crowning moment of stasis. Rather it is witness to the Divine, revealed in the saints' relentless search for a place of safety where the Divine will "reveal Its arm." But how does Legacy's other stylistic elements support this aesthetic?

As was pointed out earlier, Legacy's static camera makes some effort at a seamless, conventionally "realistic" three-dimensional world but is unsuccessful, at least in traditional Hollywood terms. Characters are theatrically presented in a static two-dimensional frames. There are few close-ups, nor is there an effort through editing to create a sense of rhythm or pacing to heighten dramatic moments. As Schrader describes it, this pacing "denotes steady, rhythmic succession of events." The film's editing for the most part is governed by "regular, unostentatious cuts in which each shot, each event, leads to the next" (Transcendental Style 68).

With the treatment of sound, there is a clear distinction between Legacy and Schrader's transcendental style. While it is comparable to Bresson's and Ozu's interest in only documentary sounds natural to any setting, it is strikingly different in its musical under-scoring. Any sort of natural, diegetic sound is often buried beneath the sweeping music. If there is one distinctive difference from Schrader's transcendental style, it is the aggressive use of music. Even here there is no governing thematic score but a collection of musical styles. The mixture of Christian hymns and classical themes is not representative of Hollywood or Schrader, but more representative of a traditional documentary form, in that some of the hymns are authentic to the times and places depicted in the film.
Schrader argues that to capture a glimpse of the ineffable the filmmaker, as in other religious art, must reject all "conventional interpretations of reality." It is clear that Legacy, while attempting to appear "realistic" is, in fact, not realistic in terms of classic Hollywood films. The episodic structure of Legacy clearly undercuts the classical narrative form, which means the Young Eliza, as an individual character full of passions and personal desires, must simply disappear from the story line and the Elderly Eliza must take over to "normalize" or conventionalize.

The episodic narrative movement of the film gradually takes on the feeling of the "everyday," the "banal and commonplace of everyday living." But while for Schrader the purpose of this everyday is to create the repetitious and dull, for the saints it is the search for a living Divine and a Zion community. This cannot end with one individual story; it is an on-going, eternal process.

Here the viewer is confronted with a series of hopes and dashed dreams that in many ways is the essence of an LDS religious aesthetic. The literal movement from one sequence or setting to the next is part of the cyclical rise and fall of seeking, over and over again from one generation to the next, the Garden of Eden or the New Jerusalem. But the New Jerusalem is only to be found somewhere over the next horizon. Hopefully, the saints will find some resolution in the construction of a temple, a symbolic representation of the house of God where the Transcendent can be found. (This is a type of the unendingness of the family unit as it extends across time, no one generation assuming more importance than the next. It is the leaving and the acceptance of a "legacy of faith" that binds one to the next.)

Legacy offers neither a classical resolution nor transcendental moment of stasis. It is instead a form that rejects the classic dramatic structure which seeks a final, fixed resolution. While the underlying episodic structure of Legacy clearly resembles Schrader's first two movements of the "everyday" and "disparity," it also directly rejects the third
movement of stasis: the "decisive moment, . . . a prelude to the moment of redemption, when ordinary reality is transcended" (Transcendental Style 39-40). Legacy is not interested in creating a stylistic moment that "freezes the emotional into expression" (Transcendental Style 78). There is no need in Legacy to create a deeper, more foreboding sense of despair in order for it to "rupture out into physical reality" (Transcendental Style 82).

From a very narrow perspective, Legacy's--and by implication a LDS aesthetic--must reject any resolution that is a classical dramatic structure or a transcendental stasis. Unlike Bresson's characters, who seek death as a resolution, the saints simply move on forward, knowing that one day in the future, all will be fulfilled. Even death is not a final closure to spiritual development. It is Schrader who provides a hint of where a LDS cinematic aesthetic might be grounded. In his discussion of the Danish filmmaker, Carl Dreyer--particularly of his film Ordet (1954). Schrader provides a possible key.

Schrader complains that Dreyer is under the influence of the Northern Gothic which expresses a conflicted aesthetic. Where Bresson's Southern Byzantine Gothic appears to unify space "in order to present only one focal point, one tension, and one confrontation," Dreyer's Northern Gothic divides space (Transcendental Style 145). Where Bresson "is the artist of the resurrection, the artist of stasis," Dreyer's film, at least as Schrader would have it, "seems restless, discontented, and at odds with itself" (Transcendental Style 145-46). The reason for this is that Dreyer, especially in Ordet, is dependent on a physical, sensual reality which Schrader complains confuses him about "whether the Transcendent is an outer reality or an inner reality." He says that Dreyer creates the surface of reality and then seemingly becomes enamored with the surface itself, mistaking the means for the end (Transcendental Style 119).

Ordet does employ the transcendental style's "everyday." All the scenes are shot primarily in one room of a rather bland house, in black and white, with a determination to
strip any visual sensuousness. The rhythms of the scenes are repetitious and monotonous, at least until the story is ruptured by a resurrection. A closer look at the film may be helpful.

Ordet is the story of a Danish family which is at odds with organized religion. They refuse to attend the local congregation. The rather gruff old father has his own perspective about spirituality and institutional religion. If this is not problematic enough, his son, John wanders the house quoting passages from the Bible as though he were Christ: "I am Jesus of Nazareth." People believe in the dead Christ, but he is the living Christ: "I have come back to bear witness of Heaven and perform miracles." This irritates the neighbors and local parish leader who think he is crazy. The family essentially ignores him. As the father jousts with the local parson and John wanders about the house speaking of himself as the resurrection and the life, Inger (John’s sister-in-law) is about to give birth. All appears normal, but during the labor, Inger dies. The family is struck dumb. But John, the supposed lunatic, raises her from the dead.

The key point in Ordet in terms of Dreyer’s rejection of a final stasis is the allegorical use of John, who is, according to Schrader, "the reincarnated Christ of a later age" (Transcendental Style 133). Within the context of the story, John’s odd monotone and uninflected pronouncements create a bizarre disparity, a distortion of reality; yet, he raises his sister-in-law from the dead. Applying the characteristics of the transcendental style, Schrader needs to interpret John’s character as the element of disparity in the story. And Schrader is disappointed with Dreyer because at the moment of stasis, Inger’s resurrection, the figure of disparity, John, simply disappears from the story. Schrader argues that "one would expect that the character who experiences the disparity and makes the decisive action would be the central character; it is his disparity which must result in stasis" (Transcendental Style 135). But there is no stasis at the moment that John raises Inger. Dreyer is after something different. He is clearly uncomfortable here with a story
that ends in stasis. The transcendent moment he seeks is very much grounded in the here and now of reality. He seeks a Wholly-Other, who reveals Itself within reality, and not some abstract internalized impression. In Ordet, an "arm of God," reaches through the veil into the immanent and heals Inger.

What irritates Schrader is that Dreyer seems to accept only part of the transcendental style. Even worse is Dreyer's rejection of the final moment of stasis, an act which appears intentional on Dreyer's part. What Schrader misses is John's true purpose in the film, believing that: "he [John] has been recycled back into life. Dreyer uses the decisive action to reaffirm humanity; it does not disembodify the passion of physical reality, it re-embodies it" (Transcendental Style 136). Schrader feels a transcendental artist must eliminate the physical if the spiritual is to find stasis. In Bresson, Schrader sees that stasis or "death lead to iconography" and art, but in Dreyer death is overcome. Schrader complains: "The emphasis shifts from John's divinity back to Inger's corporeality" (Transcendental Style 135). In Ordet the divine can make its presence known within the immanent, something Schrader only partially sees: "Dreyer does not want stasis; he seems to prefer perpetual disparity, the body and soul always alive and in tension" (Transcendental Style 136). This is the key point. Life is not found in death but in contact with a living Divinity. Dreyer even goes to far as to have Inger confirm her joy with a passionate kiss.

It is my contention that at least in the case of Ordet, Dreyer has not missed completing Schrader's final movement of stasis, but shown the ineffable, the Transcendent, as part and parcel of the immanent. Although John is a symbolic figure, he is also a living, breathing appearance of the Transcendent that ruptures reality momentarily. There is disparity here, but it is in preparation for the Transcendent to reveal itself within the immanent. This is not an aesthetic of martyrdom and death but one of living. It is Inger's passionate kiss with her husband that renews the earthly experience and gives meaning to life. The immanent is endowed with the ineffable.
What is critical to this study is that in *Ordet* the Transcendent is revealed as a tangible, corporeal reality. It is a simplistic, even simple-minded idea, but it could provide at the very least an interesting principle for an LDS filmmaking aesthetic. There may be no need to create an impression of the divine by freezing reality in some abstract stasis. The Divine is a tangible, real presence.

Schrader may believe that Bresson is "the artist of the resurrection, the artist of stasis" (*Transcendental Style* 147), but he has misconstrued the Transcendent. Schrader's transcendent experience, at least as seen from an LDS perspective, is an artistic contrivance that rejects reality in the hope of finding an intangible expression of an ineffable. Rather than working its way to salvation and exaltation in a never-ending experience with a living, present Transcendent, Schrader's aesthetic ends in a lifeless stasis, an endless moment of tranquility. For Dreyer, particularly in *Ordet*, the end is a moment of transformation. It is a new beginning that does not take us out of this world but helps us move through it.

Like the rise and fall of Legacy's episodic structure, life is a cyclical, never-ending experience of searching for moments when there is unity and we can briefly see the divine incarnate within reality before it falls back into the immanent. But the fall is not into the prison house of abstract stasis, but a place of hope where the Transcendent may reach through and reveal itself.

A Summary

An LDS film aesthetic can have no place for Schrader's frozen moment of transcendental stasis. An LDS cinematic style may share some aspects of the transcendental style Schrader identifies, such as grounding imagery in the "everyday," which then builds into an episodic feeling of disparity. But there is no need for an abstract, stylized moment of stasis. There is a fundamental difference here between Schrader's understanding of the Transcendent and Latter-day Saint theology. The nature of the
Transcendent is critical in understanding what a LDS filmmaking aesthetic might be. There is no need to "transcend" reality for the LDS because the Transcendent reaches into reality itself.

While Schrader believes that the transcendent can find expressive form only in "human art or artifacts which express something of the Transcendent," Mormon theology believes that the "Transcendent" is with us. LDS theology offers a Transcendent who is a living, breathing reality\textsuperscript{49} that manifests Himself in not just artifacts but on all three levels Schrader identifies as sacred art: (1) works that "come directly from the Transcendent," that is, nature, holy scripture, contemporary revelation, and we must add, manifestations of the Holy Spirit; (2) works which "express the Transcendent" whether it be Zen gardens or iconography; (3) works which "relate the human experience of the transcendence," (Transcendental Style 6) no matter their form of expression. I think it is very difficult to argue for "artistic contrivance" as a means of making contact with the ineffable when the "arm of God" is a theological reality. His presence is immanent through all creation, whether through nature, works of art, or individuals. From an LDS perspective, the Transcendent is present throughout reality, although often "unseen" or unrecognized. One purpose of spiritual growth is to recognize the "face of God" in all of its manifestations.

I intend no disrespect for Schrader's effort here. His theology carries the burden of an intangible deity. What he does understand is the power of the cinematic medium and he incorporates a theological framework and spiritual purpose within his cinematic aesthetics. He rejects the Hollywood model that simply entertains and titillates for an aesthetic that

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\textsuperscript{49} For example, the concept of soul in LDS theology--the fusion of the body (form) and soul (content)--suggests that there are multiple levels of possible spiritual or transcendent experience: one's own spirit manifested within the body, a personal witness from the Holy Spirit, God's spiritual presence imbued throughout reality, etc. If one believes the LDS principle that reality is infused with spiritual presence, then the transcendent is all around us. For Schrader the spiritual is only an intellectual concept, distanced from him and impersonal.
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grapples with the deeper issues of faith and repentance. We catch a glimpse of a young Schrader's devotion in this rather matter-of-fact passage:

A form can express the common ground in which all things share. An experience can only express one man's reaction to that common ground. Both form and experience can lead to experience, however. This conundrum perhaps can be clarified by this sequence of possible events: a certain form (the mass, transcendental style) expresses the Transcendent. A viewer, perceiving and appreciating that form, undergoes the experience of transcendence. He then seeks to evoke that same feeling in his friend. He tells his friend exactly how he feels; his friend is curious and faintly amused but does not share the speaker's transcendent feelings. In order to successfully induce transcendence in his friend, the viewer would have had to transform his feelings into a form (as transcendental style does) in which his friend could perceive the Transcendent, and then experience transcendence. (Transcendental Style 51-52)

Schrader seeks no more than any believer or artist. Everyone has the need to touch the divine but also to share that experience with someone else. Historically this has been the role of the church, a congregation of believers experiencing (and sharing with each other) their striving for contact with the Divine. I believe Schrader is convinced that formal religion has lost its ability to create a place where that can happen. For him, there is too much emotion and too little internalizing of the transcendent experience. His almost obsessive interest in the transcendental style is a last ditch effort to reach and share transcendent moments.

In conclusion then, how different is Schrader's dilemma from the experience of the Latter-day Saint? Legacy appears to have an uncomfortable relationship with both the classical Hollywood narrative structure and Schrader's transcendental style. It reveals a mixture of structural and stylistic tools that come from both narrative and non-narrative models. Those who made the film appear to be consciously doing certain things and others unconsciously. I would summarize as follows:

1. In terms of a transcendental aesthetic, one's conception of deity will ultimately shape structural and stylistic elements.
2. The conception of an ineffable Unknown, at least as Schrader requires it in the transcendental style, is in conflict with a LDS concept of divinity; a stylized, abstract ineffable can not be a living, tangible God.

Schrader's understanding of the need to crush film's sensuousness is valuable, but his rejection of the physical goes too far. By perceiving the ineffable as inherently and necessarily immaterial and abstract, he fails to appreciate the balance required between the sacred and the profane, as well as the soul's physical and spiritual dimensions.

3. *Legacy*'s use of an episodic structure and voice-over elements undercuts both Hollywood and transcendental elements and provides expositional opportunities. It has some similarities to Schrader's transcendental style but for different purposes. Schrader seeks an other-worldly stasis while *Legacy*'s saints are seeing the "living God."

The film's episodic structure appears to have emerged out of historical events and the underlying principle that traditional hero-driven narrative must be balanced by the idea of a community of believers.\(^5\)

4. *Legacy*'s opulent, large format, surround-sound presentation exalts the immediacy of the experience itself and overpowers other structural and stylistic devices that might assist in presenting a transcendental aesthetic more compatible with LDS theology. The rather unimaginative use of visual techniques (from camera position and movement to editing) reveals no clear cinematic approach, at least one consistent enough to reflect a style.

5. Filmmakers like Dreyer, in particular in his film *Ordet*, model ways in which a cinematic form might ground itself in an aesthetic based on an incarnate, transcendent reality as opposed to an abstract, stylized stasis.

Schrader's argument is that he has identified a transcendental style that is sufficiently broad to encompass all religious experience--but it is not broad enough to encompass an LDS concept of deity. It is clear that Schrader's "idea" of deity is very different from the Latter-day Saint's anthropomorphic Godhead. LDS theology has put a

\(^5\)I would contend that *Legacy*'s episodic structure is grounded in a theological principle. The episodic structure may be more true to an LDS aesthetic than any other. I am not suggesting that classic dramatic forms must be dispensed with, but I think that more thought and experimentation ought to be given to challenging the classic Aristotelian and conventional Hollywood structures. IMR imposes a form and attitude on artists and their work that is in conflict with Hebraic forms. Erich Auerbach is one who has explored Biblical narratives as a representation of artistic pattern. The devotion behind the moving wagon train montage in *Legacy* creates a deeper awareness of the more profound relationship of man to man and man to God.
"face" on Deity that is far from Schrader's more abstract view of deity.\textsuperscript{51} It is important not to reject Schrader's effort to identify elements of a transcendental style because of theological differences but to determine which elements may be valuable for an LDS filmmaking aesthetic.

Schrader's work makes it immediately clear that exploration of the spiritual in film art is a very complex and slippery thing. It is a subtle and complex problem. How can one create a form that induces a faithful, repentant experience? While we reject Schrader's conception of deity, we must value his introduction of the concepts of the everyday and disparity, as well as his attempt to describe an artistic form that internalizes religious experience. Even within a common theological framework, such as that shared by artists within the LDS Church, there will be extreme differences in representing personal religious perspectives in a cinematic form.

\textsuperscript{51}Schrader was reared as Dutch-Calvinist and actually did early preparation to join the Priesthood. Mormonism introduces multiple forms and purposes of deity--including the belief that God and Christ have anthropomorphic forms; that God's presence, the Holy Spirit, emanates throughout the world; and that he witnessing presence of the Holy Ghost is felt within the physical body. This considerably shifts the traditional concept of the ineffable as seen in Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as represented in traditional religious art and aesthetics.
The artist walks a tight rope alive in tension, conflict, and risk. Eliade chose a similar metaphor to describe the spiritual quest: in the last of the journey of the soul the soul must go over a bridge. This bridge is 'as thin as a thread and as sharp as a sword'. Ahead is divine presence. Below this bridge are the demons of the underworld.

Christine Laub-Novak\textsuperscript{52}

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND TOPICS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This purpose of this study is to explore if and how a cinematic art form can represent spiritual or transcendent reality, particularly how cinema can represent theology. How can a medium so dependent upon representing physical reality present the images of a spiritual reality? Filmmaking has been the target of much criticism because of its power to represent reality better than reality, but few understand the deeper working of the cinematic form.\textsuperscript{53} I have argued that the moving image can represent a spiritual reality, that it can take the "stuff," the sounds, shapes, colors, and movements of physical reality and make it "more real" than the real, can make the immanent appear "transcendent."

In the introduction I presented a series of questions: (1) Is it possible to conceive of a transcendental aesthetic or film style? (2) How have classic Hollywood versus foreign filmmakers represented spiritual themes and ideas? (3) In comparison, how have LDS films

\textsuperscript{52}Cited in Apostolos-Cappadona's Art, Creativity, and the Sacred, 15.

\textsuperscript{53}This criticism is primarily motivated by the distribution systems of television and Hollywood. There is an interest in Hollywood to see film as an art form but commercialism is by far its higher priority. In addition the ease of recording cinematic images and stories hides the deeper workings of film's structural and stylistic elements. In other art forms these elements lie closer to the medium's surface. Few question the applicability of a brush stroke or the purpose of an actor's movement across the stage. Cinema has the ability to disguise all this.
and filmmakers used the transcendental style or stylistic elements to represent the transcendental? (4) In conclusion, can any aesthetic principles be identified that might be helpful in guiding the LDS filmmaking community?

I would like to summarize my findings in the framework of these questions, from an LDS perspective that encompasses theology, as well as film form and content.

Is There A Cinematic Transcendental Aesthetic?

There is confusion of religious terminology and definitions, and when one adds LDS theology's concepts of deity, it becomes even more complicated. The confusion rests not with issues of cinematic style but by what is implied by the word "Transcendent." A review of Schrader's transcendental style reveals confusion as to how the terms "Transcendent," "transcendental," and "transcendence" have been defined historically. As Schrader points out, artistic efforts throughout history have been primarily concerned with seeing beyond the immanent, the here and now, to a higher plane of spiritual awareness. But modern LDS theology challenges both the historical concept of the Transcendent and ways in which the Transcendent is immanent--how it reveals itself within temporal reality.

Schrader's view of the Transcendent as an abstract and impersonal deity is incongruent with an LDS perspective. This puts Mormon theology in opposition with most artistic and religious concepts of what is considered Transcendent and what the framework of what should be considered religious art. Schrader's transcendent is not identical with an LDS transcendent. Nor is the transcendent of Ozu, Bresson, and Dreyer identical.

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54 From Joseph Smith's first vision to the very heart of LDS temple worship, we are introduced to the reality of a living, physical divinity that stands just outside reality ("beyond the veil") but can manifest itself in various forms, both physically and spiritually, within reality.
Some LDS artists have suggested that the objective of Mormon art is to represent a "celestial" art; that is, what a more pure, otherworldly "celestial" reality might look like. But cinema is very much grounded in earthly or "terrestrial" reality at least to the degree that it has to use representative imagery to create its form. The transcendent is present in the here and now. The challenge is how to make the invisible visible without making it common and earthly. One must look along reality's edges or between light and shadow to reveal it.

An LDS cinematic style must portray the divine not as some abstract intangible concept, but as a "tangible" force that has the power to representationally rupture conventional reality (as demonstrated in Ordet for example) and can literally "heal" the living, both physically and spiritually. Arthur Henry King has said,

There are no such things as abstracts—they don't exist. People exist...Thus it is that principles are ultimately rooted in a Gospel of personal relations. God, the God of love, makes us that He may have someone to love and to love him.

This tangible force of the Holy must be the touchstone of any LDS cinematic art form, the idea that the incarnated Christ is willing to "reveal his arm" within the reality we occupy on earth. It is the rupture of the Divine within the immanent that creates the dramatic moment. Thus the purpose of an LDS transcendent cinematic style is not necessarily to create fantastic or heavenly reality but to firmly ground its images in presenting the Divine as a presence within reality, the living relationship between the Living God and man.

Schrader describes not the transcendental style—but at least two different transcendental styles. His condemnation of Dreyer's technique could actually mark the emergence of a second transcendental style, one with some affinities for LDS theology and

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55See for example Merrill Bradshaw's discussion about celestial music and Hagen Haltern's artistic study of celestial art.
filmmakers. At present no single cinematic transcendental aesthetic has been employed successfully in publicly accessible films.

The Transcendental Film Style and The Hollywood Religious Epic

Historically art was primarily concerned with transporting the mind away from the temporal and profane, but cinema's visual immediacy exalts the temporal. Schrader is unrelenting in his criticism of the Hollywood classic narrative and religious epics. His concern is that many foreign filmmakers' concerns with representing spiritual themes have been ignored by Hollywood. For Schrader, quoting Amedee Ayfre, the "role of cinema. . .is to cause in the spectator. . .the illusion of the Sacred" and not make fantasy seem real (Transcendental Style 162-3). But for the LDS filmmaker, the illusion, the Sacred, is reality and something to be made more real. The key to Schrader's transcendental style is rejection of the Hollywood narrative interest in representing the sensuousness of reality at the expense of access to the spiritual. For Schrader film's sensuousness must be crushed.

Schrader argues that the transcendental style patterned itself on the religious icon which abstracted its visual representation to force the viewer to seek the truer image of the transcendent in the mind's eye. To truly seek the Wholly Other, one must eliminate all contact with the immanent through the three-part movement of the everyday, disparity, and stasis. The transcendental style forces the viewer to look beyond the realistic presentation in any of its forms. By flattening the image, eliminating expressionistic acting, slowing the narrative it creates a "cold stylization" (Transcendental Style 133) that emotionally puts the viewer into contact with something beyond reality.

Schrader is particularly critical of Cecil B. DeMille's "sex-and-sand" epics where "fireballs . . . zip across the screen and collide with blank tablets," where the operative rationale is that "the film is 'real,' the spiritual is 'on' film, ergo: the spiritual is real" (Transcendental Style 163). As Schrader points out these films do "induce a belief; the
weeping of millions . . . but this belief cannot be ascribed to the Holy Other; it is more accurately an affirmative response to a congenial combination of cinematic corporeality and ‘holy’ feeling" (Transcendental Style 163).

The key for the LDS filmmaker is in Schrader's criticism of Dreyer. For Schrader, Dreyer represents a stage in the development of the transcendental style, an incomplete form because he was conflicted. Schrader felt Dryer relied too much on the Gothic and continually turned away from stasis back to a physical reality and the opposing elements inherent in religious art. In Ordet, Dreyer presents the need to represent the physicality of divine nature and its complex forces. This may be the beginnings of a less rigid concept of transcendental style.

Legacy, Hollywood and The Transcendental Style

The most important idea that emerges from examination of Legacy with the framework of Schrader's transcendental style is the understanding that the ineffable is not an abstraction in some other-worldly place but elemental within reality. The Transcendent, from an LDS perspective, stands outside of time's borders waiting to reveal itself and it is revealed or emanates through all creation. (And each human consciousness comes into physical reality as an essential transcendent element, embodied in flesh--incarnated if you will--during mortality. Humans are partially divine and thus are both within and beyond time.)

The final refinement of Schrader's transcendental style rests on a concept of a nameless, formless, impersonal abstract deity beyond space and time. From an LDS view, this deity is not a reality but an artistic fabrication that replaces the divine. But in Schrader's desire to eliminate all association with the immanent in search of the ineffable, he distorts the true balance between the sacred and the profane and rejects the idea of incarnation, the act whereby the Divine enters into and redeems the immanent. One has to
look to Dreyer's *Ord* or even *Legacy* to see a transcendental aesthetic that provides a better balance between the ineffable manifesting itself within the immanent.

Schrader actually undercuts his own argument by introducing a second transcendental style in his concluding chapter when he introduces Jacques Maritain's concepts of "sparse" and "abundant" means. These terms are similar to the concepts of the profane and sacred but better illustrate the balance between the physical sensuousness of the visual image and the underlying spiritual immanence found in reality. Schrader's interest is to squash the sensuous, realistic image in order to create an expression of the Transcendent. He demonstrates this by suggesting that the transcendental style historically has worked to eliminate film's ease of representation: "Spiritual cinema has had to continually draw away from its potential; being 'abundant' at birth it had to discover the 'sparse'" (*Transcendental Style* 158). Maritain's "abundant means" include the "sensual, emotional, humanistic, individualistic...characterized by soft lines, realistic portraiture, three-dimensionality, experimentation...[They are] the means concerned with practicality, physical, and sensual feelings." The "sparse means" are the "cold, formalistic, hieratic...characterized by abstraction, stylized portraiture, two-dimensionality, rigidity" (*Transcendental Style* 155). Schrader argues that the sparse refers to "the proper means of the spirit...The less burdened they are by matter, the more destitute, the less visible---the more efficacious they are. This is because they are pure means for the spirit" (*Transcendental Style* 154). His point is that

the ratio of abundant and sparse means can be a measure of the "spirituality" of a cinematic work of art. The more a work of art can successfully incorporate sparse means within an abundant society, the nearer it approaches its "transcendental end" (*Transcendental Style* 155).

But then he counters, "the abundant means keep the body alive so that the sparse means can elevate the soul" (*Transcendental Style* 154). Schrader is never clearer about his rejection
of the physical than in this statement.\textsuperscript{57} His transcendental style has no interest in the physical and completely rejects Christ's incarnation and the plan of redemption as accepted in LDS theology. It is the Young Eliza’s family’s ever forward movement—and the backdrop of the wagon train saints—that balances out the sensuousness of \textit{Legacy}’s opulent format.

What Schrader fails to comprehend is that a truly "transcendental" style will not elevate the sparse at the expense of the abundant, nor will it elevate the abundant at the expense of the sparse; the physical and spiritual are inseparably connected. Although the "sensuousness" of the cinematic image exalts the "abundant" (the profane), it is not at the expense of the spiritual but is in fact its very life. The sparse and abundant must merge, each sustaining and energizing the other.\textsuperscript{58} This is essentially the point of Dreyer's \textit{Ordet} where the sparse setting and the monotone John are balanced by a literal resurrection and Inger's passionate, physical embrace.

Despite this, the LDS filmmaker should take Schrader’s work seriously, especially his attempt to find a cinematic style more compatible with spiritual themes. Once you get past his obsession with abstracting divinity, his questioning of Hollywood models draws clear attention to the delicate balance between the sacred and the profane in cinematic representation. His concepts of “everydayness” and “disparity” is not far removed from LDS theology’s interest in subjugating the physical to the spiritual.

\textsuperscript{57}Even though Schrader suggests that somehow the sparse and abundant balance each other, this contradicts his earlier discussion of stasis where there is no interest in sustaining an aspect of the physical.

\textsuperscript{58}In a conversation with Gene Siskel, Schrader quoted from one of his scripts: "It is not God who will save us, it is we who will save God, by battling, by creating and transmuting matter into spirit" (in Siskel, “Playing with Ire: Writer/Director Schrader Pushes the Limits,” \textit{Chicago Tribune}, September 11, 1988, Arts: 6).

It is clear Schrader’s rejection of the physical and suggests something about his interest in the existential themes of most of his films. I do not see here any philosophical inclination that the sparse and abundant are balanced and sustain each other.

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The LDS filmmaker may find elements of the Divine all about him—in nature, in works of art, and in the expressions of others. The challenge is to put oneself in a place where one can assist in encouraging its manifestation. This is more than technical skill; it is accepting that one’s gift must be perfected and then be willing to wait upon the Divine. The good, the true, and the beautiful are intertwined. The challenge of the LDS filmmaker is to represent an Immanent Transcendent whose presence is found everywhere and no-where in reality.

Principles of LDS Filmmakers

Although Legacy, and by implication LDS theology, rejects the concept of Schrader’s abstract deity for a living, personal God, it does share with him a concern over film’s sensuousness nature. I have identified (at least in the case of Legacy) stylistic and structural elements that are compatible for an expression of an LDS aesthetic. For example Merrill’s interest in large format, surround-sound presentations seems to either have technically limited his stylistic choices or co-opted any greater concern for discovering a way to embody a transcendental LDS aesthetic. Despite this, Legacy seems to plow fresh ground by allowing what is the most transcendent element—the montage of westward marching saints—to emerge and find its presence within the film. To understand the cinematic at deeper levels requires a more serious concern about (and awareness of) stylistic choices even though those choices must adapt themselves for each new idea or theme. What I reject is the attitude that simply turning the camera on a reasonably constructed scene is sufficient for tapping into the deeper issues of LDS cinematic representation of the spiritual.

I am not confident that some prescriptive list of structural and stylistic elements is valuable. This actually may be a major weakness of Schrader’s approach— it is too narrow and restrictive. The very multiplicity of our concept of the Divine and the many ways in which it manifest itself within the immanent world would make this impossible. I would propose that there are perhaps only general principles that might be a starting point in creating a conversation among LDS filmmakers. Anything more than this would quickly become too religiously mosaic. There are at least three potential aesthetic concepts or principles that deserve highlighting:

1. **Episodic versus Classical Structures.** A very important discovery in this study is that classic Hollywood narratives may not always be the best model for representing religious themes and ideas. I would argue that Legacy’s episodic structure is documentary in form, despite the effort to impose a classic narrative structure. The insertion of a dramatic tension ("a love story") is clearly to accommodate the general viewer’s perceived need for romantic Hollywood drama. This says much about our entertainment needs, but we ought to be looking for more serious religious models or, at least in everything we produce, make sure that "abundant" romantic notions do not strain the necessary balance with the more "sparse" foundations, the core of spiritual awareness.

What is important in terms of Legacy is how its episodic structure takes possession of the film. I am convinced that the episodic structure, the rise-and-fall of the saints settling and expulsions, was not overtly designed into Legacy’s structure but imposed itself. It became more prominent because inherent within the film’s aesthetic is something larger and more significant than Eliza’s individual romantic notions. It may be that the search for Zion—where the Divine will reveal its face to the body of Christ (the community of Saints)—is more (but not less than) any individual dramatic struggle. The individual must be part of the larger body of Christ. This may mean that some individuals may
sacrifice for the benefit of the whole, the archetype of Christ. In this aesthetic no heroic character(s) can dominate a story line without undermining the idea that the one (a part) is never more important than many (the whole). No individual story can be told without the historical backdrop of Christian devotion across time. It is Legacy's background story, the rhythmic, episodic sequences of the Saints' westward movement, that holds the true visual and emotional power.

I am not suggesting that Aristotelian drama must be dispensed with outright, only that it should not dominate. Traditional Hollywood IMR structures tend to feature the individual at the expense of the group (not unlike auteur theories that exalt individual creativity). In Legacy the Young Eliza must transform herself into the Elderly Eliza. What is most critical—and dramatically missing—is how that transformation takes place. We see a portion of that metamorphosis, but I am unconvinced. The hero's dilemma cannot be highlighted at the expense of the larger body of Christ as the church moves across time.

Who is to say, for example, that narrative models are better for conveying spiritual truths than experimental or documentary forms? Unlike Schrader's paradigm of the Transcendent (which must be revealed through iconic representations that "transport" the viewer's mind out of reality), LDS structures do not have to be dominated by dramatic narratives. Every visual form—whether expositional, promotional, documentary, or

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60 This follows the "type" of Christ's atonement, embodied in the individual who sacrifices himself for the whole. And yet we cannot look very far in scripture without seeing Abraham's journey to sacrifice Isaac, which is also clearly dominated by the idea of the hero's quest.  
61 This is a clear rejection of the ideas of the "artist" as hero (auteurism in its most exaggerated forms) and "art for art's sake."  
62 In addition, film viewing may be one more way to help committed religious people become part of "the body of Christ." If film can give a shared spiritual experience to viewers, it obviously helps generate a community of believers that function as part of "the body of Christ."
experimental—ought to take into account the fact that their representation of reality reveals something of the other-worldly and an LDS perspective of reality. Much can be learned from Hollywood models, but LDS filmmakers need to be open to other forms and structures. We see this clearly in other LDS films (for example, *Man's Search for Happiness*) where an expositional structure and dated visual effects still retain transcendent power. Biblical narratives may be more compatible with LDS aesthetics than Greek, as Auerbach and others have explored.

Some attention should be directed toward the work of documentarians, in particular John Grierson, who is considered the father of the documentary film. For Grierson there was no essential distinction between the fiction versus the non-fiction film: they were both fabrication of some reality. What is valuable about his work is that he was committed to making film a political and social instrument for change. Propaganda was not a dirty word for him but a description of how the film medium could be used to improve man-kind; it was to be used for “the mobilization of men’s mind to what was right and good” (Grierson 143-4). From this perspective film could—and should—become a more aggressive instrument, especially in terms of filmmaker’s personal manifestos of values and principles.

In addition as the LDS faith expands across the world, it should never be assumed that any society’s cultural heritage should be dominated by western civilization’s perspectives on storytelling. What must be assumed is that our narrative models will need

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63 If a classical dramatic form is employed with a central heroic character in a Mormon aesthetic, it seems to me the heroic story line must find itself set against the broader canvas of the religious community, irrespective of whether the hero is a part of it or reacting against it.

64 Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* is particularly relevant, as he explores the tension between Greek/Roman and Hebrew narrative forms.

65 See Grierson’s *Grierson on Documentary* and Forsyth Hardy’s biography on Grierson, *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography*. 

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to change to accommodate other cultures whose forms may be more compatible with a transcendent reality. What is clear is that filmmakers should not be driven solely by conceptual models picked up at local movie theatre or video store.

2. **Eclectic versus Seamless Forms.** Another guiding principle for LDS filmmaking is that the model of Hollywood fictional narratives with their seamless visual editing ought to be questioned. The objective of a Hollywood film is to make the viewer believe that s/he has stepped into a fictional space within which the viewer is captured. For them, illusion without viewer awareness of any illusion is the key. Obversely I have suggested that *Legacy* is an accumulation of disparate mixture of elements, and this inconsistency in fact may be a positive element. The core of this idea is reflected in Hugh Nibley's description of early Christian art:

> One thing that's always impressed me is that early Christian and Jewish art, of which you have a great deal now, is almost uniformly bad. It's terrible. It's so bad, that in the world of greater artistic heritage, it must have been deliberate. And I think it was deliberate. They knew that all one could hope for was to indicate the indescribable in a symbolic or sketchy way: "Don't try to give us heaven by special effects." They knew they couldn't do it. It would be counter-productive. 66

Slick, classical representations may in fact draw our attention in the wrong direction. Their execution is so polished that they inherently idealize story and character. It may be that a roughness of presentation, as in Schrader's description of some elements of the transcendental style, undermines the idealized form and sends the mind's eye looking for something beyond the presentation.

> Beyond the fact that an individual artist may wish to distort reality by presenting a rough, alternative form that suggests the other-worldly, roughness of execution could come from another source. In fact this roughness may come because film is a collaborative form and is constructed with many hands.

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3. **Creator versus Community.** A closely related principle is the relationship of the creator to the religious community at large. The idea of an artist expressing collective values is anathema to the creative world which prides itself on individual artistic "genius." But in terms of an LDS cinematic aesthetic, the highest expression may need to be a communal one.

In Panofsky's "Style and Medium in the Motion Picture," he suggests an interesting model:

It might be said that a film, called into being by a co-operative effort in which all contributions have the same degree of permanence is the nearest modern equivalent of a medieval cathedral. The role of the producer corresponding, more or less, to the bishop. . .the director to the architect. . .the actors, cameramen, cutters, sound men, makeup men, and the divers technicians to that of those whose work provided the physical entity of the finished product. . .And if you speak to any one of these collaborators he will tell you, with perfect bona fides, that his is really the most important job—which is quite true to the extent that it is indispensable (29-30).

I find it interesting that Schrader criticizes Dreyer for his obsession with the Gothic and yet Panofsky uses the image of a Gothic cathedral to illustrate that the highest religious art form may in fact an earthly physical representation of the Divine that is created not by a single artist’s effort but a collaborative creation of a body of believers. Panofsky’s parallel between cathedral-building and filmmaking suggests that through the collaboration of creation the Divine is revealed.

Behind Panofsky’s idea of the cathedral as Divine representation is a series of concepts: (1) temporal expressions of the Holy as physical reality take on material form; (2) medieval cathedrals, although revered for their unique religious expression, are often criticized for their rather eclectic and unfinished form; (3) a film is a collaborative art experience, created unlike almost any other art form, with the individual and the group (the body) collectively supporting, sharing, and fulfilling each other; and (4) from an ecclesiastical perspective, the relationship among participants must not be confrontational but protective of both the individual and the organized church or group. This kind of
religious art is not marked by abstraction and stasis but is a clear representation of the Divine’s presence within reality.

Panofsky’s religious comparison is confirmed in Paul’s biblical analogy of the body of Christ, where the body is made whole through the various gifts of its members, each complementing the others and all believing that God will somehow make up the difference. Without appearing facetious, the film-maker must see him/herself much like Legacy’s saints or Panofsky’s craftsmen, moving forward, ever preparing to build a house unto the Lord. The filmmaker must be as dependent upon others as himself and may have to call on God. As Jacques Maritain points out, the spiritual redeems art:

religion alone can rescue art from its pretensions, from the absurdity of believing itself destined to transform ethics and life.67

The filmmaker’s work must somehow frame a religious experience that cannot replace the actual experience of touching the Transcendent, but may bring the viewer close enough to the veil to see oneself clearly. In addition, I would suggest that film can never replace ritual. Ritual is participatory and goes beyond even visual language and experience.68

Another problem exists in the “creator versus community” idea—the role of the artist within the organized church. Panofsky’s analogy of the cathedral also indirectly addresses the relationship of the artist and ecclesiastical authority. As with the subtle balance needed between the abundant and the sparse, as well as the immanent and the ineffable, the artist’s efforts need to complement and not conflict with the church’s institutional eternal purpose. The idea that somehow any one can do without the whole or the whole without the one is


68For more discussion of the relationship of ritual and the spiritual, the moral, and the aesthetic, see Arthur Henry King’s “Religion, Art, and Morality,” in The Abundance of the Heart (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986) 119-138.
destructive for an artist who hopes to express individual spiritual expression and enhance the work of the Church.

In *Religion and Art*, Thomas Martland makes distinctions among the principles (concepts) of faith and belief that are helpful in clarifying the artist's (the one's) relationship to the Church. First he distinguishes the characteristics of the faithful artist: "It is the man of faith [fides], who by thinking, falls forward into the dark, moves into a state where he has not previously been" (52). The person of faith "has faith, not in things he has seen, but in those things he shall see if he has faith" (52). Martland uses an analogy of painting to clarify: "Faith is akin to painter's use of light when that light gives existence to things the painter paints. When the light goes out, the objects disappear. When faith goes away or grows weary, its objects too disappear" (52). Faith is the "falling forward out of that accommodation into what is now not yet, but nevertheless will be the new world" (51). The individual artist must continually fall forward into faithful action, but if he has no stable place to fall from, his effort may be in vain. Thus Martland introduces the balancing concept of belief:

The contrast and counterpart to faith is belief. Whereas faith hovers in tremendum, always on the brink of the yet-to-be, belief holds forth and idolizes, in fascinare, in what religion has already established (51-52).69 Belief is like chiaroscuro where light becomes illumination, the theatrical lighting of objects, "bestowing clarity on what was previously obscure...when the light is removed or the belief departs, the objects remain" (52). Belief is stable, the organized whole, the church, the sure ground on which we stand. It is always there, the object that remains even when the light goes out. It is historically what we are and know ourselves to be. Faith is the desire to discover something new, to contribute to the whole body. There must be a

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69Martland’s use of the term “idolizes” implies fixing one’s mind on that which can be seen and interacted with, such as the organized church or historical artifacts and a structure that implies some historical context.
balanced relationship between faith and belief within the individual soul and between ecclesiastical authority and the individual artist. As with the body and the spirit, faith and belief must nourish and sustain each other at all levels of their tension and expression.

Vision and insight must come from every participant in the body of Christ or the body is not whole and cannot expect to meet the Bridegroom. But no individual, artist or otherwise, can bring something within the body that will destroy it. The welfare of the whole body must come first. If we are seeking to touch the divine, we must submit ourselves to something that is greater than we are. The wagon train must continue to move on. But this can only happen if we are seeking and being blessed with new visions that move us toward “seeing” the face of God. Artists must be active participants in seeking new insights into the soul’s journey. To deny their participation is to maim the body and not make it complete. But artistic efforts cannot be ends in themselves. Our hands are there to assist in reaching toward the Divine, not to craft images that can replace Him.

Possibilities for Further Research

Given the complex areas related to this project, it is not surprising that several issues emerged which clearly deserve further attention.

Central to these is further discussion of the nature of Mormon "reality" and its recording via cinema. The power of the cinematic process is that it can reconstruct reality with physical and emotional materials which are a form of reality. But what in fact is "real"?

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70It may be that there are two distinct functions for media in a religious system. The organized church has a responsibility to keep “belief” grounded; the role of the artist is to be “faithful,” falling forward into new spiritual worlds. It is a symbiotic relationship, since one cannot function without the other. The strength of the church is dependent on the individual faith of the members and the expression of faith in “falling forward” or creating art.

71Spencer W. Kimball wrote: “Spiritual learning takes precedent. The secular without the foundation of the spiritual is but foam upon the milk, the fleeting shadow. Do not be deceived: One need not choose between the two...For there is opportunity to get both simultaneously” (cited in Haltern 125).
to a faithful Christian? What exactly are reality’s dimensions and characteristics? Is determinant reality where God dwells or here on earth? What is the immanent in daily experience, if not another construct that is representatiive of a higher reality?

If the cinematic process can capture the deep presence of a higher reality in a way that no other art form has ever come close to, then there is the possibility that within filmic constructs there may be God’s presence. How would such presence be discerned by viewers? How would such presence be recorded (or traced) by collaborators in filmmaking? What kind of art can capture an element of the Wholly-Other as His presence emanates in the world around us? How is it best shared by film? Is there a way to capture the ineffable by either seeing more deeply into the unity and beauty of nature itself (as suggested by Andre Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer) or by stylistically combining images in a way that reveal something of the ineffable?

Secondly, the nature of narrative models is clearly as essential to a discussion of cinematic transcendence as any other stylistic element. Earlier in this study I suggested that classic Hollywood narratives are based on dramatic structures originating with the Greeks. How are these models different from the narrative models employed in Biblical studies? Auerbach, Boman, Alter, and others have proposed that not only are the narrative models different but that they reflect (and can shape) a mind-set with a different relationship to immanent and spiritual realities. Hebrew thought is described as being "dynamic" while Greek thought is "static."72 How might this influence cinematic narrative models?

In addition some study should be directed to the advantages and disadvantages of interactive narratives. It is clear that the experience that we have when we participate in narratives (as opposed to passively viewing them) is very different. Since digital technologies and the internet now provide the option to participate in constructing

interactive games that allow for the viewer to choose or construct his/her own story line. How might this affect the narratives that we construct for religious purposes?

A third area for future consideration is the relation between film auteurism and the idea of a community of believers. One of the challenges of the cinematic form, specifically its production process, is that it requires a collaborative effort. Unlike most other art forms which are executed individually, cinematic forms require a collaboration of many different skills. In the 1950s a debate was initiated by Francois Truffaut and Andrew Sarris over the concept of film auteurism. They argued that the greatest films were created by individual directors whose work bear the marks of their unique genius, despite collaborative production teams and the Hollywood Studio system.

I believe that true and faithful artistic expression cannot be reached unless the visual artifact is a representation of a "body" of creative believers working in concert where the simplest—even weakest—contribution is accepted as being as viable as the strongest. Is it possible for God to make our efforts whole if we are collectively one, even if the process is more difficult and the art work flawed? Could He then not step in and make up the difference? If that is true, how does the model of auteurism relate to film? Is God the true author of all artistic work that is faithful and filled with his spirit? Is film one more means of revealing God's truth to the world when it is overseen by the prophet, seer, and revelator of this day? Paul in Corinthians 13 speaks of the body of Christ and its members. How does that Biblical analogy offer guidelines for further study of "authoring" transcendent films? How is Paul's body of Christ analogy helpful in clarifying the relationship between authorized church production and other forms of artistic/religious expression?

73 The obvious exceptions here are group music performances and dramatic stage presentations, where a group execute a pre-existing composition or play. Some film critics and historians have argued that the film director serves not as conductor or stage director but as an author of the cinematic work, like the author of a book.
A fourth area of further research is the connection between faith and belief (in Martland's terms, as described in an earlier section of this chapter), as it applies to official and un-official projects that reflect an LDS transcendent aesthetic. There may be two distinct functions for media in a belief system. The organized church has a responsibility to keep the body of the church theologically in harmony with each other and with God. But it also is responsible for sustaining individuals in their spiritual growth. How is the distinction between the faith and belief played out--or can it even be considered--in the contemporary Church? Do artists working on institutional films need to adapt and adjust themselves irrespective of their own individual gifts? How will future LDS institutional films support both faith and belief as presented by Martland? How have previous LDS institutional films balanced these two fundamental (but paradoxical) qualities? What is the common ground? Where are the boundaries? How will the individual artist use the moving image to present or recreate his personal witness about the real or "spiritual" world? Where are the boundaries between a faith's institutional messages and inspired images of the individual artist?

With the advent of digital technologies, expanded access to distribution channels will make available other less traditional narrative and episodic forms which may function better for individual religious expression. There are a variety of religious experiences, whether institutional or individual, each requiring its own structures and styles. Digital imaging and internet connections will put into the hands of almost every filmmaker the tools for shaping and sharing artistic-religious expression. An institutional film may use a typical docu-drama form, while an individual film may function more at a confessional level. Such technological developments as computer-assisted art, home digital cameras and editing tools, and easy access to internet distribution provide new ways for every member of the body to communicate with the community of believers.
What role will individual artists and believers play in the new communication world? What role will educational institutions like BYU play? It seems clear this is not something that the Church can do internally. Its primary mission is to push the work foreword through missionary, family history, and gospel teaching. What will be the role of the individual artist?

A fifth area for future related work is application of the paradigm of LDS cinematic transcendent to other institutional films. Preliminary examination of *How Rare a Possession* and *Man's Search for Happiness* suggests a varied, multi-layered time-space "reality" and narrative that generates a certain kind of eternal, metaphysical "otherness." What would a history of transcendence in LDS filmmaking from *Windows of Heaven* to the present reveal? What would close readings of such texts (like the case study of *Legacy*) suggest? What other non-LDS transcendental film texts (beyond Ozu, Dreyer, Bresson, and DeMille) exist? For example, what can be learned from Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* or even a Hollywood product like Peter Weir's *Fearless?* Particular attention should also be given to non-fiction films, since documentaries are often "true" and fictional narrative simultaneously.

Another potentially fruitful area is consideration of how the knowledge generated by film historians and theoreticians might be useful in understanding the spiritual impact of film as a medium. How can such information be made accessible and useful to practitioners creating media as faithful Latter-day Saints? In particular, the work of Sergei Eisenstein on montage and Andre Bazin on mise-en-scene as means of conveying and restructuring "reality" could be useful. Or what could be learned from Dziga Vertov's work, where montage is employed not to replicate reality but to attack viewers' preconceptions? The area of spectator- or reader-response also offers fruitful material for understanding the underlying processes of film.
One additional idea related to a community of believers returns us to Grierson, and it may be the most important of all. He was convinced that film "could be mobilized...to give image and perspective to the national and international scene" (Grierson 185). His efforts in Britain and at the National Film Board of Canada is an interesting model for what might be possible within the LDS filmmaking community. Grierson was committed to the idea that the cinematic medium could be used for civic and educational improvement, and to do this he was continually organizing small film units to facilitate this effort. Is this something that should exist within the LDS filmmaking community? Where are we nurturing each other? Where is the place that LDS filmmakers meet to challenge perspectives, test new ideas, and organize efforts?

Summary

I think it is fair to argue that LDS theology's ultimate purpose is to bring a believer into the presence of the Divine. This is not dissimilar to Schrader's definition of the purpose of the transcendental film style he identifies. To accept Schrader's argument (and Bruno Bettelheim's, for that matter) you must essentially dismiss most contemporary religious belief and practice. Schrader's illustration of this dilemma is very clear. The transcendental style takes him, as he puts it, "down the aisle of the church and then beyond it." But is it not in fact true that the transcendent is all about us--in nature, in the revealed word, in artistic efforts, and most evident in the faces of others? Obviously film--however transcendent--will not replace LDS theology and ritual.

To dismiss or ignore the fact that there is an intimate relationship between religious belief and a cinematic aesthetic is to entirely miss the point. In things spiritual, either you take seriously your religious belief or entirely ignore it. To ignore it puts you in a place of compromise where everything and anything is at play in your cinematic choices. To take it seriously forces you to take a far more discriminating position in terms of underlying
structural and stylistic choices. The real question is whether your art is in competition with your belief and faith or at their service.

Are we clear about the role of film-maker in the LDS framework, both institutionally and individually? Is art a handmaiden to something higher or have we been injecting our own insecurities? Art is not an end but a means. To give it a role as an “end in itself” is to assume that artistic efforts can replace the Transcendent in the lives of those around us, as Schrader does. I believe it is slightly naive to assume that the emotional “rush,” created through a cinematic moment, is of God. We may find that contact with the Transcendent might require more of us. I assume that the Holy Spirit is not magically or mystically called to our presence by a nifty camera move or edit. But I believe that the Spirit can work upon us through many means--and film can be one of them.

It is clear, though, that we cannot put new wine into old bottles. If LDS filmmaking is true to its theology, it must not be too imitative of Hollywood narrative models. Those involved must spend the time and effort to discover structural and stylistic elements that are compatible with the project’s purpose and an underlying intent or conviction or theology. This is essentially Schrader’s complaint against the Hollywood religious epic: it attempts to represent spiritual reality as though it is real without taking account of the fact that cinema’s truer shaping powers lie more deeply than visual or musical effects. If we cannot commit ourselves to cinema’s deeper phenomenological powers, we surrender to superficial entertainment--and to superficial spirituality that simply entertains, as opposed to helping us to discover our true selves.74 This means no commitment to filmmaking as religious art form. It is a public relations effort only, and the bigger the better.

74 Or as Arthur King says, “[P]eople want not to be disturbed; not to be made vigilant. They want to be soothed, to see in whatever they read the mirror of their rosy selves” (Arthur King, “Poetry as Art,” BYU Moral Studies Group Report, n.d.: 18-19).
In saying this I make no categorical judgments about what, when, where, and how the LDS Church might make use of the moving image. I think it is clear from the preceding discussion that *Legacy* has a place and purpose in the Church's mission. *Legacy* may not consistently tap into the deepest aesthetic waters. But it does break fresh ground by revealing elements in which a LDS filmmaking style can begin to take root.

Are we formulating principles that can guide our filmmaking efforts to reflect our particular perspective on divinity and life's purpose? Do we clearly understand that cinematic structures and stylistic forms represent a theological world-view? We cannot be naive about the power of this new medium. LDS filmmakers must resist the temptation to imitate classic Hollywood forms or any other form that is not reflective of Gospel truths. (It may not only be content that is irreligious.) The question is not an issue of "what" but "how?" How to create images that reveal the presence of a transcendent spiritual reality manifesting itself within the experiential world. This is much more than entertainment and less than temple ritual, but it certainly challenges conceptions about the relationship between the sacred and the profane. We need to free ourselves from our own cultural myths. We must do more than simply mimic secular perceptions. We must understand that great potential comes from collaborative efforts that "fall forward" leaning upon the "arm of the Lord": "And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things" (D&C 59:21).

The contemporary LDS film-maker must assume more responsibility to discover the forms and shapes that best allow the working of a spiritual reality. He must learn the

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75I must be cautious here because this may in fact not have been the desire of the Church or the film's director. You could easily argue that the Church has strong convictions about where representational media leave off and spiritual matters begin. For example, representing "spiritual" scenes in front of the camera might be considered "throwing pearls before swine." And yet there are scenes within *Legacy* that are clear attempts to represent deeply moving moments in which believers are healed or believe themselves to be in contact with a Holy transcendent reality.
underlying processes of motion picture technology and work harder at identifying and
developing stylistic elements which share in some Hollywood traits but may diverge
dramatically in acquiring a style that is truly compatible with our theology.

One limitation of this study is that space did not allow me to extend the analysis to
other LDS films and filmmakers, rendering *Legacy* the only case study. I am confident
additional analysis will reveal other issues that could help determine better ways to reveal
our unique religious experience. I believe I have been fair in central criticisms of *Legacy.*
It is too much the product of the traditional Hollywood religious epic, yet it somehow
reveals unique traits that might be valuable for other filmmakers.

Salvation does not lie in abstraction but must be found within a transcendent,
physical reality. This distinction lies at the heart of any attempt to create an LDS cinematic
style that reveals spiritual ideas and yet is compatible with theology. The search for the
divine must not take us out of reality but seek to represent a divinity that finds a place
within temporal reality itself. The cinematic art form has no more access to the "divine"
than any other art form, because it has greater access to the immediacy of the real world,
the incarnated world which from an LDS perspective is both material and spiritual. When
technical skills become matched with Divine inspiration, a transcendent cinematic style will
emerge.
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In Search of a Transcendental Film Style:
The Cinematic Art Form and the Mormon Motion Picture

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ABSTRACT

This project is an effort to establish a paradigm for reading and tracing transcendence in film art and film propaganda. It addresses the intersection of aesthetic and spiritual planes which is supported by a long and complex tradition of art within religious worship. The study selects a single film as a microcosm of larger issues of cinematic representation and spirituality, in particular the theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). It makes a formalistic comparison of structural and stylistic elements between a Mormon long-form narrative, Legacy (1994) with the classic Hollywood narrative on the one hand and Paul Schrader's transcendental style on the other. The goal of the study is to clarify the relationship between film and spirituality, especially transcendence. In particular, its aim is to develop a model which may be useful for assessing and producing "Mormon film," institutionally as well as otherwise.

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