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SITES OF VALUE?

Discourses of Religion and Spirituality in the Production of a New Zealand Film and Television Series

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary study examines the nature of the discourses of religion and spirituality circulating in and around the production of a feature film, *Saving Grace* and a television mini-series, *The Chosen*, made and released in New Zealand during the period 1997-1999. Its interest is in the manner in which discourses of religion and spirituality are enlisted and modified in the process of mediation for public screening.

Drawing on various insights derived from post-structuralist theory, and informed by recent work in the sociology of religion, the study operates within a modified tripartite model which balances information about the production context of the projects with text-interpretation, and analysis of media constructions (or reviews) of the text. Initially, a description of the complex socio-historical context in which the texts are situated, both globally and locally, is developed. The manner in which selected members of the production teams for the two projects understood meanings around religion and spirituality is then explored through the discursive analysis of material gained by the process of depth-interviewing. The production of the projects was followed over an extended time-duration, in order to ascertain whether those understandings changed under the many influences constituting the conditions of production. The second aspect of the analysis is interpretation of the texts themselves through an analysis of their narrative and generic structures, as well as their discursive content. Finally, responses and evaluations of the text by, in the case of *Saving Grace*, a series of 'interim' audiences, and for both projects, by media reviewers, are outlined and analyzed.

On the basis of this research it is argued that investigation of the production of these projects provides valuable insights both into the changing nature of constructions of religion and spirituality within New Zealand culture and into the tensions involved in their textual encoding. These insights are to be found not just in the texts themselves, where professional norms of 'good' production, constrained and limited the ways in which discourses of religion and spirituality could be encoded, but also in the 'personal' speech of the research participants, marked both by a strong disapproval of institutional religiosity, and a wide-spread interest in informal varieties of spirituality.

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CHAPTER ONE:

This thesis engages with the terms 'religion' and 'spirituality', investigating the meanings they accumulate, within and around the production of a feature film, *Saving Grace*, (Botes, 1997) and a television series *The Chosen* (Smith, 1998), made in New Zealand in the last years of the twentieth century. This project is also envisaged as a contribution to a debate about the nature of effective methodologies for the study of texts containing religious or spiritual content.

Although *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* contain explicit religious content they are texts made in a secular environment, for a mixture of commercial and cultural purposes, by production teams few of whose members would claim to be 'religious'¹. Despite, or rather, because of, the non-religious or secular motivations behind their production, the hypothesis organising this research is that these media projects will prove to be significant microcosmic sites for examining the circulation, construction and negotiation of discourses relating to contemporary local understandings of religion and spirituality. As that proposition implies, this thesis assumes that the media are of central importance in the circulation of culture in contemporary society (Thompson, 1990; Cubitt, 2001; Hoover, 2002). It does however not claim that there is a straightforward, definite or provable relationship between the nature of specific audio-visual texts and specific societal outcomes.

This is an interdisciplinary project drawing on theoretical frameworks from both culturalist media studies and the sociology of religion, frameworks which in turn reference a large number of disciplinary areas: for instance literary studies, linguistics and anthropology. Its theoretical affiliations are largely with post-structuralist understandings of language, knowledge and culture (Macdonell, 1986; Seidman 1994). Its methodological orientation is qualitative, ethnographic and interpretive: a combination which has been variously described as 'depth-hermeneutic' (Thompson, 1988, 1990), 'contextualist' (Gripsrud, 1995), or as 'ethno-discursive' (Corner et al. 1990; Roscoe et al. 1995). Such methods operate with a conception of the production and reception of media 'meanings' as an holistic field of enquiry within changing temporal contexts. The most developed version of this model is Thompson's 'tripartite approach' (1988, 1990), an approach which enjoins study of a text, its making and reception, and the socio-historical contexts

¹ Berger provides the classic description of secularization, seeing it as a process by which "sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols [...] As there is a secularization of society and culture so there is a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the western world has produced an increasing number of individuals who look on the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretation. (1967: 107-108)

of those activities, in order to produce a robust analysis. However, in practice, largely for logistical reasons, the process is rarely studied with equal emphasis at each stage (Gripsrud, 1995; Hight, 1997; Domfeld, 1998; Michelle 1998).

This project subscribes to the tripartite ideal in that the field research consists of two longitudinal case studies of the making of *The Chosen* and *Saving Grace*. However, it also has a selective emphasis, as, simply for the very practical reason that each component of research is time-consuming and generates huge amounts of data, research efforts have been concentrated on the production stage of the process, so that exploration of the projects' reception is a minor component only of the overall thesis. The research data consists of analysis of: transcripts of semi-structured interviews conducted with production-personnel; tapes of the productions themselves; plus a collection of secondary documents relating to the production and reception of the texts. The primary method of data analysis employed is macro-thematic discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995a, 1995b). The application of materialist methodologies (Klinger, 1997) initially derived from the disciplines of the social sciences, in support of an approach which remains fundamentally hermeneutical or interpretative (Gripsrud, 1995; Nightingale, 1996; Domfeld, 1998), thus holds out hope of 'grounding' inquiry into a topic as potentially ethereal as religion.

Motivations for undertaking project

Increased visibility of productions with religious content

The project is motivated by two sets of observations. The first was the researcher's intuitive, rather than systematically substantiated, judgement, that there was renewed interest in the representation of religion and spirituality in the media in the second half of the 1990s. On television in New Zealand we saw the CBS series *Touched by an Angel* (1994 -), featuring angels as a heavenly bureaucracy of social workers, as well as the comedic British series, *The Vicar of Dibley* (BBC1, 1994-), *Father Ted* (Channel 4, 1995-1998) and the drama series *Ballykissangel* (BBC1, 1996-2001), about a young English priest in a country parish in Ireland. The darker-toned American series, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002), and later, *Millennium* (Fox, 1996-1999), which dealt with psychic and 'alien' phenomena, also seemed like evidence of a greater media interest in non-material causes and metaphysical issues.

Angels, the popular face of late-modern religiosity, featured in a raft of American feature films: *Angels in The Outfield* (Dear, 1994); *Michael*, (Ephron, 1996); *City of Angels*, (Silbering, 1997); A

Life Less Ordinary (Boyle, 1997) and *What Dreams May Come* (Ward, 1998). These contemporary angels were not however terrifying Old Testament messengers; rather they assisted people in acting morally in complex situations. The harshness absent from these new angelic films was instead found concentrated in a second grouping of movies exploring good and evil through notions of the demonic and devilish. This group included *Se7en* (Fincher, 1995); *The Prophecy* (Widen, 1995); *The Devil's Advocate* (Hackford, 1997); *Fallen* (Hoblit, 1998); *The Prophecy II* (Spence, 1998); and *End of Days* (Hyams, 1999). Some of them exploited the public fascination with serial killing or corporate greed (*The Devil's Advocate*, *Fallen*, *Se7en*), while others, (*The Prophecy*, *End of Days*) drew on the Christian concept of the Apocalypse; the catastrophic events prophesied to end the rule of humankind on earth. The Apocalypse, this time seen from the point of view of Christ, and ultimately avoided, is also the fulcrum of *The Book of Life* (Hartley, 1998).

The state of religious belief in America was the subject of another grouping of films, among them *Dead Man Walking* (Robbins, 1995); *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*, (Rhodes, 1996); *Touch* (Schrader, 1997); *Contact* (Zemeckis, 1997) *The Apostle*, (Duvall, 1998); and *Holy Man* (Herek, 1998). *The Prince of Egypt* (Chapman and Hickner, 1998), retold the story of Moses and the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, as an animated feature, while in 1999 French director Luc Besson undertook an English-language version of the story of Saint Joan: *Messenger: the Story of Joan of Arc*. Kevin Smith's film *Dogma* (1999), is a scatological Catholic comedy about the attempts of two fallen angels to get back into Heaven. In addition there are several television programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, (UPN, 1997-) and *Charmed* (WB: 1998-), which feature protagonists learning to live with uncanny abilities. These projects have been described by Clark (2002) as dealing with the 'funky' side of religion for young-adult audiences. These projects, like science-fiction films dramatizing encounters with alien species, are not religious in an explicit or obvious sense but may be considered functionally 'religious' in that they problematize the accepted conditions of everyday existence by offering alternate accounts of world and culture-organizing systems. *The Matrix* (Wachowski Bros., 1999) a film which draws on a number of thought-systems, including Buddhist and Judaeo-Christian discourses to explore the proposition that humans exist in a world of alien-created illusion, is probably the most successful recent film of this genre.

The range of productions outlined was intriguing: different topics, varied approaches and styles of production and yet all arguably connected with a realm of religion, albeit broadly defined (see chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, some years previously a book on the representation of religion in

film, Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film* (1972) had made a great impression on me. This book, dealing with the modernist filmmakers, Ozu, Bresson and Dreyer, argued that an austere, 'sparse' style was best suited to approaching an experience of the transcendent through film. It was noteworthy however that few of these contemporary productions were 'sparse' in style, rather they were spectacular, often melodramatic and predominantly aimed at mainstream, rather than art-house audiences. I was also aware that, as an inhabitant of New Zealand I was deemed to live in a strongly secular country (see chapter 3), within a broader international 'Western' culture, also understood to be undergoing rapid secularisation (Berger, 1967; Jameson, 1991; Wilson, 1982; Bruce 1996). The puzzle was therefore twofold: why, in a purportedly secular environment was there demonstrable interest in audio-visual representations of religion, and why was the material being encoded in terms of such 'abundant' style? (Schrader, 1972). Studying the production of two audio-visual projects with explicit religious content therefore presented an opportunity to ascertain some of the characteristics of that interest in the New Zealand environment.

Developments in the sociology of religion and the media, religion and culture paradigm

The second set of observations was provided by scholarship in the fields of the sociology of religion, and in the new, but rapidly developing area of the study of religion, media and culture. Both British and American sociologists of religion: (Bruce, 1996; Heelas, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2000; Roof, 1993a, 1993b; Wuthnow 1998 and Woodhead and Heelas, 2000) are some of those drawn upon in this thesis, have been analyzing transformations of religiosity² in the late-modern period, where, amongst other complex trends, there appears to be simultaneously a move away from, and a return to, traditional forms of religious expression. The hybridity of influences in the productions listed above, where Christian discourses are drawn on along with a range of other influences, gives something of a flavour of that transformation. Scholars studying the intersections between media, religion and culture (for example Hoover and Venturelli, 1996; Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Hoover 2002; Hoover and Clark, 2002; Stout and Buddenbaum 2002) have meanwhile been investigating the proposition that, whatever its specific characteristics, religiosity today is involved in a dialectical relationship with the media, that is, that forms of religious expression are shaped by media conventions as much as the media are now a primary site both for information about religion and sometimes, for religious expression itself.

² The word 'religiosity' is used in this thesis, for the purposes of brevity, to refer to beliefs and activities that might otherwise be separately categorized under the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual'. It is used only in situations where making a distinction between the two terms is not crucial.

Religion and film literature

A third set of literature, from a field I call 'religion and film', which typically employs Christian hermeneutic principles to analyze particular instances of filmmaking, has also had an influence on this thesis (for example May, 1996; Marsh and Ortiz, 1997; Malone, 1997; Baugh 1997). Although many assumptions in this field are problematic - particularly the authority it accords to the individual textual critic - the generation of conceptual schemes for categorizing elements of audio-visual rhetoric related to the representation of religion is valuable. For instance the emphasis in this field on forms of narrative structure as a contributor to various forms of religious understanding is helpful for explaining aspects of the relationship between encoding and decoding (Hall, 1973, 1980), or the production and reception, of specific texts. In this sense then, while not operating with the Christian motivation of much of that literature, this thesis uses some of its insights to bridge the gap between textual analysis and empirical research.

A background of global production and scholarship

This thesis focuses on the three-year period from 1997 to 1999 during which *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* were produced and distributed. From this viewpoint the foreground will be occupied by the processes and products of the New Zealand media industries, but a wider background of international English-language media production and international English-language scholarship is necessarily drawn upon to provide both confirming and contrasting examples. In the first instance this is largely due to the small size of the local media production sector. For example in the years 1997 and 1998 respectively 79 percent and 76 percent of television programmes screened were imported (New Zealand on Air 1997; 1998). In 1996/1997, out of a total of 224 films released in New Zealand just four were locally-made, accounting for only 1 percent (just over \$600,000) of total box office takings; in 1997/1998 the domestic box office takings for local films were even lower at \$409,545 (New Zealand Film Commission 1997: 6; 1998: 18). With such a preponderance of overseas material on our television and cinema screens, changing overseas fashions in production arrive here rapidly, and are frequently influential.

A similar relationship between the global and local obtains in the area of academic publication since there is a miniscule amount of New Zealand material specifically addressing the conjunction of the audio-visual media and religion: a handful of articles, (Nichol and McHugh, 1988; Mita, 1992; Hardy, 1997) a booklet (Bluck, 1993) and two unpublished M. A. theses (Goddard, 1999; Spencer, 2001). The local situation with regard to writing in the areas of religious studies and the

sociology of religion is more healthy (see Geering, 1986, 1994; Elsmore, 1989; Hill and Zwaga, 1989; Donovan, 1996; Gilling, 1999; Morris, 1996, 1998, 1999; Bluck, 1999; Grimshaw, 1998, 2000; Ahdar and Stenhouse, 2000) but has concentrated largely on the phenomenology of religion. I am therefore heavily reliant on overseas sources, a necessity that strengthens this study by making possible the generation of a list of 'master' discourses against which local discursive formations may be compared.

Personal positioning

In the process of researching this thesis I have discovered I am a creature of the times; characterized as both a 'baby-boomer' and a 'spiritual seeker' (Bellah et al. 1985; Roof 1993a). That is, born in the so-called 'baby-boom' period after the Second World War, I have left a Christian background to become a member of an Eastern religious system made available by the forces of globalization (Fink and Innancone, 1993; Batchelor, 1994). While raised nominally as Anglican, I have, for the past fifteen years, been affiliated with Tibetan Buddhism, a 'deterritorialized' religious system (Appadurai, 1996) which has established itself in locations outside its native country. My study of Buddhist philosophy has been informal and will not be relied upon in this thesis but I am aware that accumulated knowledge in that area is available as an alternate template for the interpretation of information about the world. For instance, whereas as an Anglican I strove (unsuccessfully) to sense the presence of God, I am no longer attracted by theological explanations of phenomena: I don't see the need to posit a sentient first cause in order to lead a meaningful life. This position is consonant with some understandings of Buddhism as an agnostic faith: 'The dharma in fact might have more in common with Godless secularism than with the bastions of religion' (Batchelor, 1997: 20). On the other hand I am inclined to support descriptions of material, social and especially mental, entities and processes, as being constantly in flux, without a permanent, essential identity in which to rest. Such 'de-constructive' and 'epistemologically sceptical' descriptions are shared, to some extent, by Buddhist thought and Western postmodern, or post-structuralist philosophy (Paz 1970; Spearitt, 1995). Since most aspects of my own worldview can be accommodated, in an academic context, by taking a post-structuralist, 'constructionist' approach to the development of meaning (Potter, 1987, 1996), I am therefore content to conduct my investigations within the terms of these contemporary Western frameworks of thought.

The development of this research topic has been organic, growing out of a combination of personal and professional interests. Before a career change in the mid 1990s I had spent seventeen

years working first as a journalist and director with state radio and television broadcasting organisations, and then as a commercial video producer. In the early 1990s I also taught part-time in a university film studies department, publishing a number of articles on New Zealand cinema. My work then was informed by self-directed study of the grouping of theoretical propositions now referred to as '70s screen theory' (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996), with an emphasis on psychoanalytic and feminist understandings of the politics of representation. At the same time as the opportunity to undertake a doctoral thesis became available, I had become dissatisfied with the solipsism of textual analysis employed as a single methodological approach. The readings produced by this method, although often pleasing in terms of their internal coherence, seemed divorced from the ways in which programme producers spoke of their work, and from the manner in which non-academics discussed films. I wanted to investigate other, less abstract, methods of studying the media. This thesis has therefore also been an educative journey into the details of materialist/discursive research techniques.

Organization of thesis

This introduction sets out the general features of this project's interests and approach. Chapter 2 will explore the theoretical framework within which the thesis-project is situated, locating it within a post-structuralist British cultural studies paradigm. It makes the case for using a 'depth hermeneutic' method, outlining the tripartite approach (Thompson, 1988, 1990) to which the project aspires, and reflects on the continuing influence of Hall's (1980) 'encoding/decoding' model of televisual communication. Discourse analysis is established as the method by which the data analysis will be conducted. Chapters 3 and 4 are literature review chapters: chapter 3 surveys scholarship in the sociology of religion in America and Britain, defining key terms and creating a background against which the New Zealand situation is then described. Chapter 4 looks at two currently distinct fields of scholarship: the religion and film field, which has been influenced by methods developed for the study of literature, transferred to screen studies, and is predominantly theological in approach, and the growing body of literature in the media, religion and culture field, which, having developed out of the study of televangelism, has a more medium-specific and social-scientific tone to it; the chapter advocates a synthesis of what is best in the two fields. The methods chapter (chapter 5) argues for a renewed focus on production, examines the specifics of discourse analysis and details the methods by which the case studies were chosen and researched. This chapter ends with a 'master' list of discursive formations against which the case study data may be compared. Chapter 6 undertakes the discursive analysis of interview material from the

pre-production phase of *Saving Grace*, while chapter 7 covers interviews from post-production and describes the film's reception in several contexts. Chapter 8 contains my own analysis of the text, considered especially in relation to the three different endings produced for it as the filmmakers tried to secure an appreciative audience for the film.

Chapters 9 and 10 repeat this process, with less detail, for the second of the two case-studies: the television mini-series, *The Chosen*, looking at the implications for the construction of discourses of religion and spirituality of working within a different production process and according to a different generic model. Chapter 11 discusses the findings of the thesis, positioning in within the field of media, religion and culture studies.

The originality of this project lies across three areas. It is the first sustained exploration of the intersection of the media, religion and spirituality in the New Zealand context. Secondly, it aligns itself with a group of international studies in the vanguard of attempts to link the media and religion as highly significant forces in contemporary cultures (Hoover and Venturelli, 1996; Hoover 1997, 1998b, 1998c; Frow, 1998, Murdock, 1997; Hoover and Clark, 1997, 2002,) - these projects mark the end of a period during which, religion was not considered a relevant or prestigious subject with which to deal. Thirdly, this is one of only two projects, in the religion, media and culture area, to my knowledge³, to research the production of texts in such detail, exploring the full range of influences on production personnel as they create representations of religiosity for circulation in contemporary culture.

³ The other being Knut Lundby's research into the production of the Opening Ceremony at the Winter Games at Lillehammer in 1994. An account of his findings is published in Hoover and Lundby (eds.) (1997: 146-164).

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for the thesis. It acknowledges that religion has previously been marginalized as a topic in two fields of study important to this project – screen studies and cultural studies - and describes recent calls for those lacunae to be redressed. It analyzes the effects of the application of both structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to the study of the media and religion, allying itself both with a post-structural view and with aspects of the ‘culturalist’ approach advocated by Hoover (1997, 2002) and colleagues. However, since the American approach is perceived as excessively apolitical, the resources of the British cultural studies tradition are also considered. Thompson’s (1988, 1990) ‘tripartite’ approach to the analysis of media texts is outlined. The chapter also discusses the potential of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b) as a method for examining the complexities of meaning-creation in media concerned with issues of religion and spirituality.

The need for improved research methods into the media and religion

This study should be considered in the context of calls for developing an awareness of religion within both media studies and cultural studies. In the first instance, it addresses a gap in the rapidly changing domain of scholarship successively known in my own university as ‘Film Studies’, ‘Film and Television Studies’ and ‘Screen and Media Studies’⁴, a domain in which typically, little attention has been paid to religion as an aspect of media content. Instead, during the last six or seven decades during which film, and later, television and digital media have become objects of study, theorists have been concerned with a relatively narrow range of topics. Projects have included describing national cinemas (Elsaesser, 1989; Hayward, 1993), delineating genres (Cawelti, 1984; Feuer, 1982; Altman, 1989), identifying recurring structures of image, sound and narrative construction (Bordwell et al. 1985; Branigan, 1992; Gaines, 1992; Bordwell and Thompson 1993), identifying the ideological positions particular texts seem to embody (Metz, 1982; Mulvey 1973), codifying methods of making aesthetic judgements about audio-visual material (Carroll, 1996), and speculating on the relationships between spectators or audiences and the texts which they ‘receive’ (Morley, 1986; Livingstone, 1990; Ang, 1991; Corner et al. 1990).

⁴ This instability of nomenclature reflects not only the inclusion of new forms of media within the field - from film and to television and radio, through to print and digital media but also a move from literary, ‘humanities’ methods of analysis to the exploration of empirical forms of research method previously associated largely with the social sciences.

While the whole range of human cultural activity is theoretically open for exploration via representation in the media of film and television, in practice the debates of the last decades have been limited by prevailing paradigms of relevance. The structuralist disciplines of semiotics, Marxist-based ideological analysis, and the Lacanian revision of Freudian psychoanalysis, have been employed with such regularity to speculate on *how* filmic images might *mean*, to *whom* and with what level of *force*, that they came to be known, especially by their critics, by the short-hand epithets of ‘grand theory’ (Gledhill and Williams, 2000), ‘70s film theory’ or ‘classical screen theory’ (Bordwell and Carroll, 1996). These approaches have often been used to find evidence of economic and social structural inequalities being reflected, promulgated or critiqued in films and television programmes (Nicholls, 2000). For instance, feminist theoreticians have both employed psychoanalytic theory and reacted against it in arguing that the majority of audio-visual products reproduce at various levels, a stereotypical set of gender positionings (Mulvey, 1973/1989; de Lauretis, 1984; Doane, 1988). In the last 10 years, postmodern, post-structuralist approaches have also been brought to bear on issues of gender, sexuality, class and race, to produce for, instance ‘queer’ and post-colonial analyses of institutional and textual strategies in film and television (Cohan, 2000). Explorations of psychoanalytical concepts such as ‘desire’, ‘fascination’ and ‘abjection’ have led classical screen studies to some degree in the direction of the irrational (Williams, 1999, Harding and Pribram, 2002), but for the most part the focus of interest has stayed firmly with the human and the secular.

That does not mean there are rarely representations of religious characters or themes on screen. Rather it is to say that the analysis of that kind of content has rarely been undertaken with the kind of rigour marking debates on other aspects of media content. The investigation of religious or spiritual aspects of film has largely been confined to theologically-inclined Religion and Film scholars in the United States or Britain. The majority of these scholars still rely on the structuralist techniques of film-analysis (Nolan, 1998) so that this type of criticism, as will be further discussed in chapter 3, has been something of an academic backwater. There has also been a similar past lack of interest in religion in another field increasingly cross-fertilized with the study of media – the cultural studies field.

British cultural studies

Standard accounts of the development of cultural studies describe it as originating from the work of a loose grouping of British scholars centered around universities in Birmingham, Leeds, and Leicester in the 1960s and 70s (Grossberg et al. 1992; Morley and Chen, 1996). Their work involved a rethinking of Marxist analytical approaches applied to studies of working and middle-class cultures (Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1958). They rejected the so-called 'Frankfurt School' concept of the 'culture industry', as an instrument of social control which obscured human understanding and the possibility of critical thought (Seidman, 1994; Storey, 1999). Instead Hoggart, Williams, Hall and others found evidence that, rather than being oppressed by mass culture, working class people used its products in the definition of individual and sub-group identities. By studying manifestations of popular culture, they argued that the category of the economic, while ultimately determinative, need not be resorted to in the early stages of all types of analysis; that the creation and circulation of ideologies was not solely the province of the 'ruling class' and that the realm of culture itself could justifiably claim to host sites of struggle between different interest groups (Morley and Chen, 1996). Under a British cultural studies definition, 'a way of life' is cultural because:

... it connects with a distinct set of *social practices*, which are specific to our culture or way of life. It is cultural because associated with *certain kinds of people*, with *certain places* ... because it has been given or acquired a social profile or *identity*. It is also cultural because it frequently appears in and is represented within our visual languages and media of communication. (du Gay et al. 1997: 10-11, original emphasis)

The instinctive biological operations of our bodies are not assumed to be cultural (Hall, 1997) but all other activities requiring the transfer, understanding or construction of meaning and value are. Since print, radio and screen technologies, along with face-to-face communication, are the pre-eminent means both by which the transmission of meanings takes place within cultures and by which culture is constructed, the media are therefore particularly amenable to be studied within this framework. The study of cultural institutions, viewed in this way, has its roots in both anthropology⁵ and literary studies (Cunningham, 1992). For instance, according to Thompson drawing on Geertz (1973), it is the circulation of symbolic forms and symbolic actions which is

⁵ Culture, says Geertz, is a 'web of meanings' within which individuals 'interpret their experience and guide their actions'. What is universal about cultures is that they are formulated and expressed symbolically – symbols are the place where meanings are stored. According to Geertz, cultural analysis is an 'interpretive science' concerned with 'sorting out the structures of signification and determining their ground and import'. The task of the analyst is to describe the structures of signification specific to a culture and to tease out the meanings they hold for the human beings who construct and live by them.

the distinguishing feature of culture, since they produce 'an acted document', an interwoven system of construable signs. Hence, says Thompson:

... cultural activities are always situated in specific social-historical contexts which are structured in certain ways. Cultural analysis is the analysis not only of meaningful actions, objects and expressions, but also of the relations of power within which these are located. (1988: 361)

However, while anthropologists were usually interested in those 'meaningful actions' and 'relations of power' clustered around a culture's religious structures (Buck, 1939; Turner 1968), apart from Hoggart's pioneering work (1957) there was little comparable interest in religion as an aspect of culture in the British situation. As Larrain suggests, Marx's critical view of religion was influential here: he saw religious belief as a 'coherent but distorted solution' [...] 'at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against real suffering' - which 'compensates in the mind for a deficient social reality', (Marx, in Larrain, 1996:54). Hall, for instance, in an essay originally written in 1983; *The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees*, links religion with astrology as a 'perfectly closed, perfectly predictable system of thought' (1996: 45). In a later interview Hall does note that religion plays a crucial role in some societies where there are: 'powerful, immensely strong [...] lines of tendential force articulating that religious formation to political, economic and ideological structures', but these are also societies he describes as having few cultural resources with prehistories 'long predating that of our rational systems' (interviewed in Grossberg 1996: 142). Murdock (1997) and Frow (1998) are others who have noted that varieties of cultural studies with strong links to the British model have unnecessarily marginalized religion as an apparently outdated force.

Recently however, there have been calls for the development of improved methodologies for the study of the intersection of religion and media texts (considered as cultural artifacts) from several quarters. For instance, the textual analysts Martin and Ostwald (1995) consider none of their three approaches for analysing texts with religious content (theological, mythological, ideological) as sufficient in themselves, and imagine a future synthesis of them all into a three-part approach. Frow (1998) has combined an analysis of the cults of dead celebrities (such as Elvis and Princess Diana) with a powerful call for cultural studies scholars to pay more attention to religion, asserting that it is crucial to develop methodologies for engaging with forms of religion in popular culture without either condescending to or participating in, religious forms of understanding. Nolan desires an approach which would work with the 'construction of meaning as it shapes the subjectivity of those who produce and consume theology and cinematic images' (1998: 11).

Hoover and Lundby note that there have been ‘ample studies of religion and culture ... [and that] theoretical elaborations of media and culture have surfaced in recent years [...] while a number of studies have contemplated relations between religion and media’ (1997: 9), but that few studies have attempted to consider all three terms together. Stout and Buddenbaum, editors of the new journal *Media and Religion*, also advocate for ‘truly interdisciplinary work that takes both media and religion seriously, that sees them in relation to each other and to the surrounding culture in which they are embedded’ (2002: 14).

Structuralist approaches: Myth and ideology

The project of cultural studies as described thus far, has strong ties with structuralism. Structuralist analyses of phenomena draw on the key influences of the linguistic structuralist, Saussure (1974), and of the anthropological structuralist, Lévi-Strauss (1968), both of whom set out to elucidate the underlying rules by which the communication of meaning is made possible, and by which social and communicative structures can be described. The synchronic methods of analysis proposed by Saussure encouraged analysts to look beneath the surface of a text for its generating principles, as expressed through systems of structured difference. This is the framework within which Barthes for instance, describes the development of ‘myths’ or resolved ideological positions, as the outcome of a process of negotiating the sets of ‘binary’ constructions typically embedded in texts. The function of myth-making processes, he says, is to naturalize ideas:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.
(1973:156)

This process of ‘myth-creation’ will be referred to in subsequent chapters when ‘mythological’ structure is discussed as a feature of certain narratives. Fictions containing religious content also bear another relationship to ‘myth’, that is, that religions themselves rely on myths or ‘socially formative’ stories (Hexham and Poewe, 1997) to provide them with coherence. All religions have a mythic dimension (Smart, 1987), while the world’s great religions are those which have developed a corpus of myths justifying the necessity of certain beliefs, social structures and moral codes, and have sustained the power of those mythic explanations over time. However acknowledging that religious justifications are mythical in nature also implies that they can undergo change and indeed, gradual invalidation, as the cultural context in which they have been effective slowly changes (Geering, 1994). A sense of such change - of the invalidation of certain

myths and the (possible) creation of new ones – is also present in this thesis project. When this sense of change at a larger cultural level is combined with the propensity of individual texts to offer ‘mythical’ solutions to existential problems in the structuralist, Barthesian sense, there is a fascinating tension at work between the observation or facilitation of cultural change and the conservative energies of mythical form. Insofar as they reflect contemporary constructions of knowledge texts may promote the process of change at the level of content, while their form, may function on the other hand, to restrain that content within conservative structures.

In discussing the functions of ‘myth’ I am bordering on consideration of another topic crucial to British cultural studies in particular: ideology. Ideology is a heavily contested term which many commentators (Eagleton, 1990; Scannell, 1998; Storey, 1999) describe as possessing both neutral and judgmental connotations. As a neutral term, according to Scannell, ‘it refers to any articulate system of beliefs and values’ (1998: 256), while van Dijk (1992) argues that ideologies are functional in nature, co-ordinating the social practices of group members and protecting their interests. However, much critical work in the middle decades of the twentieth century was influenced by a more judgmental Althusserian critique which saw consumers of various cultural products as ‘interpellated’ into restrictive roles prepared for them by various capitalist and state apparatuses. According to Althusser ideology offers seemingly true, but actually false, solutions to real problems in life:

In ideology men ... express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relations between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an ‘imaginary’, ‘lived’ relation. (1969: 233)

A similar view of ideology informed the work of the Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer (1977), who saw the ‘culture industry’ as hand-in-glove with other centralized forces - political and economic - working to control the lives and minds of ordinary people. Where this view persists into the contemporary environment, it does so in discourses suggesting that the media are involved in an attempt (whether deliberate or inadvertent) to mislead the public. Storey outlines such an attitude in his examination of Ang’s (1985) study of *Dallas* viewers:

The ideology of mass culture articulates [...] the view that mass culture, as product of capitalist commodity production, amounts to little more than the seemingly endless production and circulation of degraded commodities, whose only real significance is that they make a profit for their producers and in so doing dupe the gullible. (1996: 83)

British cultural studies has also been focused on the role of power in the development and maintenance of cultural practices, but Hall's definition is more neutral than that of classical Marxism, which sees an ideology as a *mistaken* understanding of an aspect of existence:

[Ideology is] the mental frameworks - the languages, concepts, categories, imagery of thought and the systems of representation - which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works. (Hall, 1996: 26)

This stance allies Hall with a structuralist Gramscian understanding of class struggle whereby values and meanings were perceived as always being involved in a process of struggle for influence between various dominant social groups. Media outlets, such as newspapers, television and films are seen as particularly important locations for this class-based cultural struggle.

Post-structuralism and discourse

There can be no clear line drawn between structuralist and post-structuralist theorists since analysts like Hall and Barthes have been informed by both paradigms at various points. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1960s, the theoretical movement known as post-structuralism was coalescing around the work of Derrida (1976, 1981a, 1981b), Foucault (1970, 1972, 1979) and psychoanalysts such as Lacan and Kristeva. Post-structuralism did not represent an absolute break with structuralism, rather it built on the insight that structural systems were usually defined in terms of their 'difference' to something else and therefore had characteristics of both conventionality and arbitrariness (Macdonell, 1986; Seidman 1994). The focus shifted from descriptions of phenomena as natural, to descriptions of phenomena as constructed, subject to the push and pull of forces of power and hence as ever-changing. Within a post-structuralist paradigm even the sense of self, or identity, built out of innumerable instances of language use, is to cite Howarth (2000) on Derrida, also perceived as socially constructed and therefore without a reliable essence. Rather, an individual human being becomes the subject of language and discursive practices by internalizing patterns which are found in culture.

Key developments in the formation of the post-structuralist view included Barthes' (1973) assertion that it was not the readability and coherence of a text which made it significant, but rather the opportunities it provided, through polysemy and association, for the reader to become a second 'writer' and to make out of the text whatever he or she wished. Barthes also deconstructed concepts of originality and authorship, asserting that all texts were made out of references to others

in a constant process of social semiosis or intertextuality (Eagleton, 1996, Potter 1996). Derrida, wary of the 'metaphysical' logic of structuralist systems, subverted them by deconstructing fields of language so their arbitrariness was made manifest, and their claims to power therefore unsustainable (1976, 1981a, 1981b).

Foucault, discourse, and the contingency of knowledge

Michel Foucault also demonstrated the contingency and flux of forms of social organisation, undertaking 'archaeologies' which described the complex dependencies between the rhetorical and material forms involved in establishing a certain approach to an area of life as hegemonic (1970, 1972, 1979, 1980). These temporary, yet weighty, arrangements of cultural behaviours and knowledge were described as 'discourses' and 'discursive practices'. The term 'discourse' had primarily previously been used by linguists to describe instances of human language use (McHoul and Grace, 1998). Foucault severed this literal link with language reconceptualizing the term to describe 'bodies of knowledge' which were usually expressed as 'statements'. For instance in *The Order of Things* he described his contribution to redefining 'discourse' in the following manner:

I believe that I have in fact added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements. (1972: 80)

Whether talking about discourse as an 'individualized' set of statements or as a comprehensive set of beliefs and practices - as in the beliefs and practices underlying mental asylums, prisons and sexual identities for instance - Foucault was centrally interested in the operations of power. However, he differed from the Marxist theorists who used concepts of 'dominant ideologies', in that he saw power not as something simply exercised by a privileged group over others, but as existing in all locations in societies, and as both exercised and experienced by everybody:

It [power] is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (1980: 98)

Power then is an essential component of discourse since knowledge is both understood, and deployed, in ways that enact the desire of individuals to influence others. At the same time

however, discourse is an organizing principle experienced as a constraint and a compulsion on those same individuals, placing limits on what can be ‘thought, spoken and enacted’, (Harding and Pribram, 2002: 413). According to Storey, this post-structuralist approach also positions identity ‘as production [...] It is identity constituted in, not outside, history and culture’ (1999: 135).

A set of discourses may typically be found attached to a particular ideology, but similar discourses may also be employed by those who subscribe to a different ideological stance. For instance, currently, the connotations and application of discourses of ‘terrorism’ are highly contested: the news media are full of accounts of America’s ‘war on terrorism’ and yet that campaign is itself viewed by others as a continuation and intensification of a history of ‘terrorism’ against those who oppose its interests (see for example Moore’s documentary *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), or various ‘Letters to the Editor’ in the *Listener*, January 18, 2003). The use of a particular discourse is therefore not in itself a marker of a particular ideological position, but the accumulation of a set of discourses may add up to one. Therefore, although some may use ‘discourse’ and ‘ideology’ almost interchangeably, my own preference is to employ the term ‘discourse’ as referring to a bounded set of constructions of knowledge and power, narrower and more flexible in its application than an ideology.

More than any other twentieth-century theorist Foucault has been responsible for identifying the establishment and control of discourses as something which groups in society struggle to achieve, at the same time as emphasizing that it is only through the mobilization of discourses that this struggle takes place (1980). Foucault’s work has a material basis: it implicates institutions, behaviours, even the understanding and deployment of the body, as well as language (1980, 1986, 1988). While Hall and Foucault’s understandings of the construction of identity share similarities, Hall has criticized Foucault’s approach for its lack of grounding in specific social situations, and therefore its inability to promote social change; for instance he has called Foucault a ‘proto-anarchist’ (interviewed in Grossberg, 1996:139). Purvis and Hunt (1993) however draw upon the neutral character of the Cultural Studies revision of ideology to suggest that Foucault and Hall can be combined into a common project. They suggest that if a certain ideology is an effect, then the creation and contestation of discourses is the means, the mechanism by which that ideological effect is produced (1993: 496). With the location of the connections between material social conditions and ideas identified, the analysis of discourse can therefore be added to the range of cultural studies methodologies without forfeiting the political overtones of the approach.

Discourse analysis, media and religion

Since meaning is contingent upon the circumstances in which it is developed, no one piece of knowledge or behaviour can lay claim to the status of enduring truth, yet every piece may be significant, depending on the social standing and aims of the person deploying it. It is in this process of reflecting the goals of the people deploying it that language comes to be regarded as performative, as a form of action, and that power is seen to be both inherent within and active through language (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1998). Conversely, individuals are seen as drawing upon elements of the 'discursive repertoires' available to them, when interacting in the various locations where meaning is negotiated and communicated. Much of the discussion as to how discursive struggle actually takes place revolves around various forms of media. That is because, according to some scholars (for instance Thompson, 1990; Hoover and Venturelli 1997; Cubitt, 2001), global culture is now thoroughly 'mediatized', that is to say that rather than sitting alongside other practices of governance, communication and commerce, the media have become the networks or arteries through which these practices take place. Thus media are not merely neutral channels: their habitual processes of production mesh in with those of public or commercial institutions to shape the content, form and emphasis of the information available to media audiences.

On one hand much of the entertainment and information we consume is a product of specific institutions - the outcome of the mechanisms and criteria characteristic of these institutions. These mechanisms and criteria operate as filters for the selection, production and diffusion of items of information and entertainment: they help to establish what may be described as the selective reproduction of cultural forms (Thompson 1988: 363). On the other hand the media form a kind of giant reservoir of discourses about various aspects of life, that in the (largely unconscious) process of constructing identities, people may draw upon for models of how to think, to be and to act. According to Thompson for instance:

Out of the symbolic materials which are available to him or her [...] the individual weaves [...] a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity. This is a narrative which for most people will change over time as they draw on new symbolic materials, encounter new experience and gradually redefine their identity in the course of a life trajectory. (1995: 210)

Or again, as Sarup observes, since cultural consumption is one of the ways in which we gain our identities, and we are, in part constructed out of the things we consume, ‘the market offers tools for identity-making’ (1996; 125), in the form of what we listen to, what we watch, what we read. Media professionals, the research-subjects of this thesis, are doubly interesting in this context. Like other people they have individual life histories that will have shaped their access to a wide range of discourses about religion and spirituality, and yet, unlike them, media professionals also draw upon specialized forms of discourse related to their employment in the media industry. It is an assumption of this thesis therefore, that the talk of media professionals will reveal not only something of the generally-available contemporary discourses about religion and spirituality, but also the way in which, asserts Thompson, the use of those discourses is shaped by both personal and professional experience:

In creating media products, the personnel of media institutions draw upon everyday forms of culture and communication, incorporating these forms into media products and thereby reproducing, in a selective and creative way, the cultural forms of everyday life. (1988: 363)

In this thesis project therefore, the primary analytical interest is in local discourses involving concepts of religion and spirituality, which will be compared with a list of ‘master discourses’ derived from literature on the sociology of religion. However, in order not to accord an inaccurate prominence to what may be merely a subsection of the talk about the projects, notice is also taken of discourses from realms other than the religious. Paying attention to other economic and institutional factors will also have the benefit of addressing Fairclough’s observation that, ‘any discursive “event” is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice’ (1992: 4). It is in this manner - viewing meaning as multi-layered, fulfilling several purposes at once - that I intend to explore ‘explanatory connections’ (Fairclough, 1992: 71) between the struggles over meaning which took place around the two projects. With data from 32 interviews with 19 respondents this thesis deals with a relatively small sample of interviewees, but information from them nevertheless gives some partial indication of the struggles over meaning in relation to religion and spirituality which might also be taking place within other sites in New Zealand.

The concept of ‘articulation’

In order to study the complex processes of the making of meaning, each moment of which may be multiply-determined, Hall (1980, 1996) found it useful to employ the metaphor of articulation.

Articulation, according to Storey (1996: 166), is the key concept in the Gramscian model of cultural studies that Hall employs. Playing on the double meanings of the term: to express and to join together, 'articulation' refers to the process of connecting disparate elements - which maybe either conceptual or material - to form a temporary unity. Hall explains the process in an interview originally given in 1986:

An 'articulation' is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two or more different or distinct elements under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined or absolute and essential for all time [...] The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions but need not necessarily, be connected. Thus a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures. (Grossberg, 1996: 141)

This metaphor, representing a possibility of temporary, yet nevertheless significant connections, between different discursive elements, signals a new emphasis on the contextualisation of meaning within cultural studies. For Hall that process is still 'ideological', more so than for Foucault, because, he argues, articulations issuing from some 'privileged' contexts are particularly 'potent, persistent and effective'. These constitute, for him, 'lines of tendential force' which serve to block the potential for ongoing rearticulation in some circumstances (Grossberg, 1996:53-54). According to Slack (1996), Hall sees communicative institutions, practices and relations as being adept in hindering rearticulation. This is somewhat more pessimistic a view than that of Thompson (above) who imagines media personnel reproducing, 'in a selective and creative way [...] the cultural forms of everyday life'. It will be interesting to see which of the two versions is the more relevant to the material contained in this study.

Cultural studies and media in America

In selecting discourse analysis as the method for analysing my data I am subscribing to the critical discourse approach that was developed in response to British cultural studies by linguistic analysts such as Kress, Fowler and Fairclough⁶. However, in according discourses of religion and spirituality a significant place in the study of both media and culture, I find myself in sympathy with recent developments in the field of American 'culturalist' media studies, which has a very different tone to that of British cultural studies.

⁶ For an account of this process see Scannell (1998), or Titscher and Wodak, (2000).

Cultural studies approaches did not make a strong impact in America until the late 1980s and then did so in a version routed through Geertz (1973) and Carey (1988) with influence from the Chicago school of sociology. The result, according to Hoover and Clark, is that American cultural studies are less Marxist with ‘more of an “anthropological and liberal pragmatist” orientation than British cultural studies’ (1997:26). My own observation that, with the exception of the Hoover and Venturelli article described below, American culturalist media studies is neither heavily invested in either theory for its own sake, nor the discussion of ideology, would support this claim. Instead the influences are more likely to come from quantitative approaches used in communication studies (for instance Gerbner et al. 1984). The earliest study I encountered which combined media and religion within a concept of culture was Hoover’s analysis of fans of televangelism, *Mass Media Religion: the Social Sources of the Electronic Church*, in which the author observed:

Television is itself a cultural medium. It is often central to ongoing processes of cultural and symbolic formation. A form of television that embodies a radically, self-consciously cultural reality – religious television must be seen to have at least the potential of transforming society. (1988: 12)

Since then Hoover, who also credits White (1983) for identifying a trend to wider, culturally-based studies of media, has nurtured an empirically-based, academic movement linking religion, media and culture, with his identification of a ‘culturalist’ turn in this field becoming more explicit (Hoover, 1997, 2002). The theoretical basis for interrogating connections between media, religion and culture was laid in a reinterpretation of the significance of the communication media offered by Hoover and Venturelli in their 1996 article, *The Category of the Religious: The Blind Spot of Contemporary Media Theory?* They re-interpreted writings by Marx, Weber and Durkheim, to suggest that their analyses of social change were in fact describing, not a diminution of, but a transformation in the nature of, religious consciousness, pointing to a relocation of the sense of the sacred into the possibility of unalienated work, into a search for the ideal relationship with the perfect commodity, and into mass ceremonies of simultaneous consumption. Those pillars of modernity, Hoover and Venturelli argued, were not, as is often misunderstood, repudiating the category of the religious, rather they are encouraging us to see it elsewhere than in terms of a publicly-sanctioned, publicly-practised Christian belief system. Moreover, Hoover and Venturelli assert that the public space of the mass communication media is now the ritual space which has real religious importance and that the media are ‘actually “religious” in some fundamental ways’ (1996: 258).

Hoover and Venturelli's article is framed as a challenge addressed not just to those interested in religion and media, but to all scholars in the humanities and social sciences. British cultural studies is accused of 'being distanced from the realms of deep meaning' with the authors countering that, 'media theory and research must find a way to enter into discourses beyond "the secular" if they are fully to account for contemporary practices of meaning construction' (1996: 259).

Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture

A subsequent volume, *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* (Hoover and Lundby, 1997), worked through the implications of this revision from a number of perspectives. Religion, media and culture are conceived of as complexly-related, inter-dependent strands of human activity, while an unthinking acceptance of secularization theory is viewed as having over-privileged rationality in recent times:

Part of the problem lies in a tacit acceptance of the theory of secularization, which suggests that as societies and cultures become more rational, the social significance of religion will decline. [...] Media practice - particularly in news - has equated its task with a rational product - information - and thus assumes an implicit role in this secular project. (Hoover and Clark, 1997: 16-17)

Hoover and Clark, like other contributors to the volume, do not agree that religion is waning and residual. Rather they think one must account for the ways in which it has 'changed its face'. Murdock, for instance, writes of the 'dynamics of re-enchantment', whereby, 'the loss of faith in "progress", the intensified sense of meaninglessness at the heart of modernity, and the consumer system's increasing inability to compensate - have enlarged the space through which religion can reenter the mainstream of public and private life' (1997: 100, 95). Most importantly however the book offers a 'culturalist', anthropologically-derived, definition of religion as a basis for this new approach:

Religion, we propose, is not limited to what happens in a sacred realm, traditionally conceived, but is that part of culture that persuasively presents a plausible myth of the ordering of existence. In this sense, culture and religion are inseparable: and what is "sacred" may be understood, in Lundby's phrase, "as a variable, ranging from the substantial to the functional" [...] As it exists in the wholeness of human thought and practice, religion is thus an important consideration in theories of culture and society. (Hoover and Clark, 1997:17).

While I would broadly align myself with this ‘culturalist’ media studies model and its emphasis on studying ‘meaning construction’, I do not entirely agree with its current intense concentration on the moment of reception. For instance in a 2002 essay entitled *The Culturalist Turn in Scholarship on Media and Religion* Hoover argues for many points with which I would agree. For instance he recommends ‘a focus on everyday lived experience [...] qualitative as opposed to quantitative methods [...] interdisciplinarity [and] a contextual analytic sensibility’ (2002: 29). However, he also says that ‘culturalism means a stress on reception’, that ‘research that situates itself at the site of reception [...] should have a greater capacity to contend with the complex, multilayered, contradictory and nuanced phenomenon of religion’, and ‘that we must stand with viewers and audiences and look back with them at the media sphere’ (2002: 30). Although I support the value of work on the audience, I contend it is just as important to investigate the complex nature of meaning construction at the site of production - to investigate the articulations of encoding - as it is to look at the interpretations and evaluations in reception. While Hoover does acknowledge that: ‘We must try to understand the contexts, structures, texts and objects through which media industries come to provide occasions for religious and spiritual meaning-making’ (2002: 30), this emphasis is light in comparison to the stress on reception. My speculation is that this is because the media, religion and culture work has developed from earlier studies of televangelism (see chapter 3) and there may be an ongoing assumption that work containing religious content will have been made by people with religious affiliations, as the televangelism shows were. But if religiosity is indeed transforming and relocating (see above), it may also be useful to look, as this project does, at work produced by people without strong religious commitments. Any observations about the eventual activities of audience might then be built on a stronger base since the complete cycle of communication has been explored. This issue is explored at greater depth in chapter 5 of this thesis.

Material culture

Another important resource provided by American studies of cultural practices is the proposition that material abstracts from a culture can illustrate the complexities of processes of discursive change. The study of material culture in relation to religion is a relatively small and recent area, (MacDannell, 1995; Morgan, 1996, 1998), but it justifies the study of artifacts as a way of understanding moments of paradigm change - ‘disjunctive moments’ - in cultural history:

Material culture such as imagery tends to appear at these sites of disjuncture and contradiction: popular images often serve to mend or conceal them, while avant-garde

images tend to foment the rupture of sites. The cultural work that popular images perform is often a mediating one, serving to bolster one world against another, to police the boundaries of the familiar, or to suture the gaps that appear as the fabric of a world wears thin. (Morgan, 1998: 9)

Morgan is primarily discussing the state of religion in the United States, while in this project, the fabric (or myth) which might or might not be 'wearing thin' is Christianity in New Zealand. He and MacDannell also work with religious paintings, statuary, bric-a-brac and their placement within domestic environments as examples of material culture, but I am proposing that in this case, films and television programmes may also be categorised as examples of material culture. On the basis of the hypothesis that these sets of images appeared at a time of cultural change (see chapter 2), it will be asked whether they function in Morgan's terms, to 'mend and conceal' discursive disjunctions, or rather, work to 'foment the rupture of sites' instead.

The tripartite approach

Over the course of this chapter I have been setting out a number of entities, concepts and concerns that I wish to synthesize in this study. I want to bring together two disciplines that, until recently, have largely been kept apart: the study of media and the study of religiosity; want to employ useful insights and methods from both textual analysis and empirical research, and want to do so by studying a range of views from people employed in making two cultural projects - the production of which are themselves complex in nature. Since, by virtue of both temperament and education, I subscribe to a post-structuralist viewpoint, as outlined above, I wish to use a methodology that can describe, or 'map', some of the articulations present in the developing situations studied, rather than fixing them as definite nodes of knowledge. Thompson's 'tripartite approach' (1988, 1990) - a post-structuralist approach to mass communication analysis - purports to be well-equipped to deal with such complicated fields of analysis.

Tripartite analysis operates within the larger framework of a 'depth-hermeneutical' approach which Thompson proposes as effective for understanding texts of whatever variety, embedded within the domains of contemporary social structures. In view of the contested nature of meaning discussed in the section on discourse, Thompson acknowledges that to attempt to limit the range of meanings a text might support is to move onto shaky terrain. It is therefore only by a careful, systematic approach using various methods of analysis to triangulate one another, that a credible, if still always contestable, interpretation, or description of a range of possible meanings, can be achieved. A depth-hermeneutic approach, has, Thompson claims, both the necessary robustness

and flexibility to undertake this task. The depth hermeneutic approach consists of three phases. The first phase, called social-historical analysis aims to:

reconstruct the social-historical conditions and contexts of the production, circulation and reception of symbolic forms, to examine the rules and conventions, the social relations and institutions, and the distribution of power, resources and opportunities by virtue of which these contexts form differentiated and socially structured fields. (1990: 284).

Social-historical analysis illuminates the rules, procedures and assumptions implicit in the production process, including assumptions about the audience and its needs, interests and abilities. These rules, procedures and assumptions form the institutional codes media personnel draw upon in producing particular programmes. They both facilitate and circumscribe the production process, in the process enabling the media message to be produced as a meaningful symbolic construction (1988: 375).

The second phase, of formal or discursive analysis, is concerned with the internal structure of the symbolic forms employed in the text (1990: 284), that is, the patterns - such as grammatical rules, narrative logic or the systematic juxtaposition of images - coherences and incoherences, which constitute the manner in which it 'says' what it tries to say, and the 'voice' it adopts to address its imagined recipients. This phase, investigating the detail of representation, deploys methods of semiotic, syntactical, discourse, narrative and rhetorical analysis (1990: 285) in order to establish the characteristics of the text.

The third phase, interpretation or re-interpretation, (since the text is already interpreted or encoded), is a creative act of synthesis by the analyst. He or she makes a case for a particular configuration of connections between the form of the piece, the intentions of its makers and the social contexts within which the piece makes an intervention. In other words, he or she argues for a particular set of 'meanings' for the text (1990: 293).

As well as establishing these three phases of analysis Thompson's model describes the three object domains of a tripartite analysis as being:

- 1) The production and transmission or diffusion of symbolic forms, that is, the process of producing the symbolic forms (or media communications) and of transmitting or distributing them via channels of selective diffusion.
- 2) The construction of the media message, that is, the nature of the arrangement of symbolic forms in an articulated structure.

3) The reception and appropriation of media messages by individuals and groups of individuals. (1990: 304)

The main outcome of this tripartite approach to analysis is the 'interpretation of doxa' which Thompson defines as 'an interpretation of the opinions, beliefs and understandings which are held and shared by the individuals who constitute the social world' (1990: 279). If the purpose of the analysis is to describe the operations of particular ideologies (Thompson's own motive for developing the approach), then the final re-interpretation will pay particular attention to 'the relations of domination which that meaning serves to establish and sustain' (1990: 293).

Thompson asserts that mass media messages are characterized by an 'instituted break' between the conditions of their production and reception: the latter activity can be extended over long periods of time and take place in disjunctive locations (1988: 364); such an instituted break was certainly evident between the production and public reception of *Saving Grace* for instance (see chapter 7). However the three object domains do tend to occur in chronological sequence, whereas the 'parent' depth-hermeneutic activities of social-historical analysis, formal or discursive analysis, and (re)interpretation may be employed at each stage of the life-cycle of a mass media communication.

When combined, Thompson's three phases and three aspects create a kind of mesh, which, by virtue of capturing situations in a state of flux, is suitable for analysing Hall's moments of 'articulation'. The connections between the phases and aspects are not posited as eternal or repeatable: they are the forms that those agents, forces and representations create within a particular convergence of text and context, a particular field of power. In other words they are the discursive formations viable at that time and site; they draw upon other discourses and ideologies and in turn support, critique, or create others.

This study is informed by Thompson's tripartite approach but does not achieve its full breadth. It undertakes the description of the socio-historical context of the projects' production, and applies discursive analysis to two of the three object domains: production and transmission, and to the media message, or 'text' itself. The treatment of the third domain, the reception of the media message, is, as previously noted, rudimentary, since full reception study did not take place. It is pertinent to note however, that the study as a whole, constitutes a form of 'social historical' analysis of the deployment of discourses of religion and spirituality by the production personnel.

The issue of ideology

The degree of politicization entailed in the study of cultural production becomes relevant at this point however because of the implications of Thompson's approach, and my stated preference for the more 'political' British form of cultural studies. Cultures, and religions, have been characterized, because of their construction through the medium of language, as unstable or contingent 'worlds'. Discourse analysis has been identified as a method allowing the examination of acts of meaning-construction without necessitating judgements on the ultimate veracity of these constructions. This approach may sound both relativistic and apolitical, but whether it is in practice depends on the type of discourse analysis employed. When combined with a subject of study such as religion, which has frequently been linked with politics and ideology, it becomes important to distinguish the nature of the approach taken. In particular, the term 'ideology' has a range of other meanings in different contexts, especially in relation to the application of a discourse analytic method.

Fairclough's 'critical discourse analysis' approach (1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b) - which has theoretical affinities with Thompson - is an attempt to meld linguistic analysis and a post-Marxist approach by concentrating on the potential material affects of discourse (see chapter 5 this volume). Fairclough asserts that discourse analysis is concerned primarily with the identification of the operations of power. Indeed, the definition of ideology for Fairclough, following Thompson, is: 'meaning in the service of power' (Fairclough, 1995: 14). In terms of this definition ideologies are propositions that figure as explicit assumptions in texts, contributing to producing and reproducing unequal relations of power and relations of domination. The interest in ideology thus retains some of the 'negative, critical' connotations of the Marxist tradition (Thompson, 1990: 6).

Discourse analysis as a practice can then be understood as an attempt 'to show [and expose] systematic links between texts, discourse practices and socio-cultural practices' (Fairclough, 1995: 16). However, although I believe that all communicative acts are 'ideological' in a weak sense, in that they are performed in the interests of a speaker who exists in a field of power-relationships, I am uneasy about the application of too strong a definition of ideology to a discursive study of all aspects of contemporary religion and spirituality. That unease rests partly on a post-structuralist, Foucauldian view which sees the exercise of power as a multi-directional process. However, another significant reason for caution is the vexed nature of the notion of 'ideology' in relation in

religion, since there is a ready tendency abroad to see religiosity as *prima facie* negative in an ideological sense.

While the strongly ideological potential of some of the world's traditional religions - for instance Christianity and Islam - has been re-emphasized in debates since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York, it is obvious that not all denominations within a religion share the same ideology, or indeed are as concerned with relations of power and domination as others. Furthermore, the burgeoning area of 'spirituality' in particular seems to develop out of, and respond to, a large number of trends in contemporary cultures (Heelas, 1998, 1996a; Warner, 1993; Wuthnow 1998), not all of which are strongly ideological in character. Indeed, I agree with Hamilton (1994), who suggests that religion may sometimes provide a source of resistance to 'relations of domination':

If religion were a fundamentally manipulative device one would expect it to stem largely from the dominant class in society. But Marx, in seeing religion as a product of alienation, recognizes that it springs from those who are most alienated, the subordinate classes. [...] The explanation of religion as ideological manipulation can, at best, explain only why it takes certain forms or receives certain emphases and interpretations. It does not explain religion as such. (1994: 64)

Hall's statement concerning the mutable nature of the relationships between religion and ideology is also relevant here:

It exists historically in a particular formation, anchored very directly in relation to a number of different forces. Nevertheless, it has no necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical belongingness. Its meaning - political and ideological - comes precisely from its position within a formation. It comes with what else it is articulated to. Since those articulations are not inevitable, not necessary, they can potentially be transformed, so that religion can be articulated in more than one way. (interviewed in Grossberg, 1996: 142)

Since it may be the case that some current discursive constructions in the field of contemporary religiosity are not marked by strong ideological formations, I therefore wish to hold in abeyance the question of whether all contemporary examples of discourse about religion and spirituality in New Zealand are ideological in the sense of Fairclough and Thompson's 'negative, critical' definitions of the term. Rather, it is the evaluations that the interviewees themselves make of various constructions of religiosity - what ideological status they accord them - in which I am interested. The following chapter describes the larger social-historical context in which talk about religion and spirituality in New Zealand takes place.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION AND CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF DEFINITION, WITH REFERENCE TO NEW ZEALAND

Introduction

In this chapter, which is a review of sociological writing about contemporary religion and spirituality, the complex nature of contemporary religiosity in the Western societies of the United States, Britain, and New Zealand is mapped. This provides an account of the socio-historical context within which the empirical work on *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* gains its significance. Together with material from chapter 4, which surveys the literature on religion and film, and religion, media and culture, the findings from this chapter are used to construct a reference list of discursive constructions against which the data from the case-studies is analyzed.

The area of sociological analysis of religion is a very vibrant one and consequently difficult to summarize succinctly. In America the most influential material derives from a number of large qualitative studies into the value-systems and life-histories of citizens. The Bellah et al. study, *Habits of the Heart*, (1985) was the first of these, but works by Roof (1993a, 1993b, 2001), Wuthnow (1998), and a cohort of others have continued their explorations. In Britain similar work, less anecdotally-based, has been undertaken by Heelas (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 2000), and Bruce (1989, 1996) amongst others.

Religion in Modern Times

In 2000 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhouse published *Religion in Modern Times*, an interpretive anthology drawing together significant sources discussing a range of key themes. I have been much indebted to this volume in the latter period of my research, adopting its model of forms of contemporary religion as a basis for my own analysis. Woodhead and Heelas summarize their book's findings in two key assertions:

- *religion is not one thing: modernity is not one thing*
- *diversity and coexistence, not uniformity* (2000, 6, original emphasis)

These statements are an acknowledgement of the fact that whereas, a decade ago, institutional religion was thought to be 'fading out' in a process of secularization (see below), there is now as

much evidence of a resurgence and diversification of forms of religiosity as there is of decline. Woodhead and Heelas identify four major global trends in religion: ‘secularization, detraditionalization, universalization and sacralization’ (2000: 5), maintaining that all these, often contradictory, dynamics are happening simultaneously, although not always in the same location. Briefly, secularization and sacralization are to do with the quantity of religion - whether there is less or more of it respectively. The other two terms are to do with transformations in the nature of religion:

Detraditionalization names a turn from the authority of the past and of external institutions and authority figures to the authority of the self, while universalization names a turn from the differentiated, exclusivistic, and divisive, to the inclusive, perennial, universal and ecumenical. (2000: 5)

Like the other scholars cited on the previous page Woodhead and Heelas believe that these complex transformations of religiosity are linked with cultural, economic and political changes during the periods of modernity and late-modernity. The larger societal trends by which religion has been particularly affected are, they claim:

- the rise of the market economy,
- the rise of secular nation states, and
- the rise of difference. (2000: 171)

The third trend here is the most enigmatically expressed: by ‘difference’ Woodhead and Heelas mean ‘both the assertion of strong, “prescriptive” forms of difference, [...] and the articulation of new, more open forms of difference often associated with postmodernity’ (2000: 171). I also wish to add a fourth trend to this list – the turn to the ‘self’, which is usually linked to a psychological order of discourse, (see for instance, Taylor, 1991; Peck, 1993; Heelas 1996; Griffith, 1997; Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). Under such a model, forms of religiosity are seen as ‘functional’ rather than ‘substantial’ systems (Berger, 1967), which meet human personal and social needs, and therefore interact with, and change in response to, other aspects of cultural and societal systems which either satisfy or create human needs.

Definitions of religion and spirituality

The adjectives ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’, along with their nominal forms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’, are in some ways interchangeable since each covers a range of phenomena which

embraces 'everyday' beliefs and practices but can also include extreme states of mental and emotional exploration or fulfillment. The terms 'religion' and 'religious' are probably used more frequently since their applications have traditionally been both more wide-ranging and more concrete.

Religion

To speak of a 'religion' is usually to refer to one of the world's great and enduring religious systems, such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, whose influence has secured successive national and personal identities over a period of hundreds of years. When definitions of religion are offered they typically refer to concepts of organisation, community and leadership, based around a set of agreed principles relating to something considered 'sacred' (Berger, 1967). It is this kind of religion, a collective, cultural legitimizing force, which Durkheim is referring to when he states:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things, set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, those who adhere to them. (1968: 47)

Although, according to Roof (2001), religions are 'socially produced' and, in detail, always changing, they tend to employ combinations of certain elements, institutions and practises, and share typical areas of concern - to the degree, says Roof, that they are 'isomorphic' with one another (2001: 79-80). For instance Smart's six-part model of the elements which constitute a religious system includes, religious experience, doctrines, myths, ethics, rituals, and social institutions (1987). Whaling's alternative model (1995), lists eight elements of religion: religious communities, rituals, ethics, social and political input, scripture/myth, concepts, aesthetics, spirituality. Capacious, functional definitions of religion of this type are valuable because, as King points out, there is such a variety of religious practices globally it is difficult to find a single definition which accounts for all of them: 'history does not know "religion" in the singular but knows only a plurality of religions and yet it requires a unitary concept of "religion" to look at religions in the plural' (1995: 85).

Separate religious systems and definitions of religion emphasize different combinations of elements. For example one distinguishing feature of a religion is whether or not it employs 'theistic meaning systems', that is, whether it exhibits, 'a belief in God as the force governing life', (Roof, 1993a: 121). Judaism, Christianity and Islam are theistic in nature, Hinduism, by contrast is

a polytheistic system where reverence is paid to many gods, thought to influence diverse aspects of nature and human life (Smart, 1998), while Buddhism, although philosophically non-theistic, at the level of popular practice is often either or both theistic and polytheistic (Batchelor, 1994). Some elements of religion may also operate outside the boundaries of religious institutions as well. For instance, all societies employ 'ethical' systems: rules as to correct behaviour within that society. Many ethical systems are attributed to divine revelation, but whatever their origin, these systems (ethical or moral) can be separated off to function in sections of a society not explicitly governed by religion. Hence even those who describe themselves as 'secular' are likely to invoke particular moral or ethical codes. There is, contends Webster, nothing surprising about this: 'given the traditional cultural role of organized religion as the repository of fundamental moral values of society. As a result religion overlaps with secular attitudes and morality and religion become conflated' (2001: 166).

Insofar as religions are complete and time-tested worldviews, they are usually taken for granted within societies and may demand, or offer, no more of, or to, their adherents than a distinctive cultural environment, guaranteed meanings, familiar rituals and implicit social support. This is the kind of religion characterized as being of an 'everyday' nature (Morgan, 1998; McDannell, 1995; Wuthnow 1998). However, all of the major religious traditions have also been capable of providing 'great transcendences' (Luckmann, 1996), that is, states of mind which re-frame experiences of suffering, meaninglessness and hopelessness, to the extent that they become meaningful, bearable and sometimes even pleasurable. In theistic religions the power to provide 'great transcendence' is attributed to a divine figure, while in a non-theistic religion it is located in a relationship between the practitioner of the religion and the understanding of the 'true' nature of the Universe.

In describing forms of religion the terms 'church', 'denomination', 'sect' and 'cult' are frequently used, with their definition sometimes a matter of debate. In this thesis I will follow Bruce's (1996) definitions. According to him a 'church' is a religious organization spanning a wide range of ritual and bureaucratic functions which seeks to be 'co-extensive with their societies' and 'offer their ministries and offices to all members of that society'. A church has professional clergy and is typically conservative in nature (1996: 71). A 'denomination', like a church, has a professional ministry, and is not exclusive in terms of who may join it. However it differs from a church in that it does not claim to have a monopoly on truth and therefore is content to co-exist with other forms of religious organisation within its society (1996: 75). A 'sect' is a 'form of religious deviation or

protest' and may therefore be radical in its philosophies: membership of a sect is only achieved through deliberate choice and through acceptance of that choice by other members of the sect – a professional clergy is optional in a sect (1996: 72-73). The 'cult' is the most controversial of these entities, depending on whether one views it pejoratively, or with detachment. A detached description of a cult - Bruce takes his from Troeltsch - is that of 'a small loosely-knit group organized around some common themes and interests but lacking a sharply defined and exclusive belief system' (1996: 82). However, popularist 'anti-cult' views such as those cited by Melton (1986) and Dawson (1998) may, at an extreme, imagine a cult as a group under the control of one or more charismatic leaders: 'The cunning and charismatic leaders of these groups exploit the psychological weaknesses and idealistic aspirations of their recruits, it is implied, in order to satisfy their own desires for material wealth and power' (Dawson, 1998: 2). Cults may also be perceived as inherently unstable and with potential for violence. It is this populist, anti-cult view which is employed in constructing *The Chosen*, the second case study in this thesis (see chapters 9 and 10).

Spirituality

Within a particular religious tradition 'spirituality' can be viewed as the realm of profound personal experience which makes transcendence available to a practitioner (King, 1996). Conversely, as Smart (1987) and Whaling's (1995) typologies suggest, a religion provides the structure within which spirituality may flourish. Some definitions of religion emphasize spirituality in this sense. For instance, a definition like that of Tillich, for whom religion is: 'the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of life', (1964: 3), makes room for mythical, ethical and doctrinal dimensions, but foregrounds the personal and immediate connection with existence which is a feature of a modern spiritual response.

However, Tillich's emphasis on the personal and experiential elements of religion was unusual for the 1950s and 1960s, a period during which, as Roof (1993a: 242, see also Roof, 2001) notes, spirituality was an almost forbidden term, with more formal religious language preferred. However since the 1980s the term 'spirituality' has been revived, in what Roof calls a 'grass-roots movement', within churches certainly, but more forcefully and variously outside them.

It seems that as religion's mandate to legitimize collective forms of life weakens (as is discussed further below), the term 'spirituality', has become increasingly abstracted from it and, in some

circumstances, set up as its competitor and heir (King, 1997). Rather than being viewed as a rich field of interlaced elements, including spirituality, traditional religions have been re-imagined by some, as dogmatic, even coercive institutional systems, from which spirituality is missing (Roof, 2001). Such an imaginative reduction is also the means by which a particular religion loses its efficacy, its ability to provide a 'sacred canopy' over existence (Berger, 1967). The worldview which was once guaranteed and invigorated by the myths and spirituality of that particular religion becomes, in the words of both Weber (1958), and Murdock (1997): 'disenchanted'. The situation arises where part of the appeal of the term 'spirituality' as used in popular culture currently stems from its entailing little or no engagement with religion. Consequently, late-modern spirituality can also be presented as a concept that may overlap with a secular worldview. In the words of Anna King:

... it [spirituality] suggests a non-reductionist understanding of human life. It is more firmly associated than religion with creativity and imagination, with change and with relationship. It is less associated in the popular mind with hierarchies of race, gender and culture. It indicates an engagement with, or valuing of human experience, and expression through art and music, through a response to nature and to ethical ideals as well as through the great religious traditions. It can embrace secular therapies and cosmologies as well as concerns with the environment. (1996: 345)

Amongst those studying the growth and application of discourses of 'spirituality' it is often noted that there is now sometimes an explicit opposition between uses of that term and 'religion'. For instance, in Roof's 1993 report on an interview survey with more than 2600 American respondents about their beliefs, he states:

Almost all of the people we talked to had an opinion about being "religious" and being "spiritual". While they did not always agree as to what the difference was, they were sure there was one. [...] To be religious conveys an institutional connotation: to attend worship services, to light Hannukah candles. To be spiritual, in contrast is more personal and empowering and has to do with the deepest motivations of life. (1993a: 76-77)

Five years later Wuthnow makes similar claims of results from interviews with 200 respondents about religion and spirituality:

... many people we had talked to had thus come to find special meaning in the contrast between religion and spirituality. For them spirituality was a broader term that signalled the value of drawing insights from many sources, whereas religion was simply the particular institutional manifestation of different traditions. (1998: 74)

In looking at the broader social changes that have either accompanied or motivated this shift in discursive formations around religion and spirituality - where spirituality has gone from being a minor term, to a term valued, in some quarters, above 'religion', within half a century - it is useful to look at the debates around secularization.

The secularization debate

Another term for 'disenchantment' is secularization, or, as was noted in chapter 1, the development of a situation where 'an increasing number of individuals look on the world [...] without the benefit of religious interpretation' (Berger, 1967: 108) Until recently, (according to Roof, 2001, until the late 1980s), a narrative of increasing secularization dominated discussions among sociologists of religion (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). For instance, Berger (1969), Martin (1978, 1995), and Bruce (1989) are representative of those who have argued that religion would either inevitably disappear in the modern world, or would become so weak and privatized it would retain little public significance. Although the secularization model has always been challenged even at the height of its influence in the 1960s and 1970s (see for instance, Greeley, 1972; Luckmann, 1967) it still explains the visibly secular nature of contemporary society.

Berger, building on Weber's treatise, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1985), in the late 1960s viewed secularization as a dialectical process in which Christianity has been 'its own gravedigger' (1967: 129), because its value system has legitimated social and commercial behaviours leading to a gradual separation of Church and State. This differentiation of functions has, Berger argued, left established religion with a shrinking and increasingly irrelevant sphere of influence. Others, for instance Wilson (1999) explain secularization as a rational, justified response to the avalanche of disqualifications of Christian 'knowledge' in the nineteenth century, which made it difficult for an educated person to take Christianity literally. Most of these disqualifications – Darwin's theory of evolution, questions about the authenticity of the Scriptures, based on archaeological findings – came from the ascendancy of the newer paradigm of 'scientific' (empirically testable) knowledge. Murdock (1997) contends that religious systems are thereby reduced to the function of providing information about 'non-material' matters. Roof also provides a summary of developments across a range of areas in which new discursive formations have challenged religious explanations:

Both individualistic and social scientific meaning systems have emerged as competing worldviews over against a more codified, more traditional theistic framework of

interpretation. The expansion of higher education, the spread of scientific and technological styles of discourse, and the rise of differing languages of morality have all helped to accentuate the boundaries among these meaning systems. There has been a virtual explosion of secular-humanist modes of explanation in recent decades - the vocabulary of psychological expressive needs, the vocabulary of individual success and achievement, the vocabulary of social scientific understanding. All of these vocabularies have more in common with one another than with the language of theism. (1993: 127)

A further significant support for the dynamics of secularization has been the persistence of wars, 'holy' or not, throughout history, but most crucially, in the twentieth century. The cruelty of war is, according to Tillich (1946) frequently cited as empirical evidence of a degree of evil which has made the existence of a benign God implausible for many modern people.

These arguments for secularization are supported with statistical evidence of falling church membership and attendance in many Western, especially European, countries. For instance Brierley and Wraight provide tables of church membership in Britain, showing a decline from 18.5 percent of the population belonging to a church in 1975 to 12.8 percent in 2000 (1995: 240). Webster, commenting on results from the World Values Survey and the Millennium Gallup Poll, notes that only 16 percent of people in East Germany place high importance on the concept of God, only 21 percent in Sweden and 32 percent in Britain, as compared to 78 percent for the USA, 90 percent for India and 97 percent for Nigeria (2001: 106)⁷. While there is often debate over the interpretation of statistical data, there is nevertheless sufficient evidence of the downturn of religious affiliation, here in New Zealand as well, for Morris to frame the issue in the following manner:

Is religion dying in Godzone?⁸ Well, if not quite in a terminal condition, religion as formal attendance or membership of religious institutions, is becoming increasingly located in a number of slowly withering sub-cultures. (1997:12)

However, although institutional forms of Christianity are losing ground in many Western nations there are a number of factors which undermine the case for secularization: at least if one's viewpoint shifts away from Europe and Australasia. The health and diversity of religion in the United States is one such factor.

⁷ According to Webster, these figures have been adjusted to take into account features of different religious traditions. The relevant figure for New Zealand is 42 percent.

⁸ 'Godzone' is a contraction of the colloquial phrase 'God's Own Country'.

Religiosity in the United States of America

With freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution, but without a state religion, the USA is unique among Western nations for the diversity and strength of its religious expression. The most often cited source for levels of conventional religiosity are Gallup polls, conducted by the Princeton Religious Research Center. The Gallup publication *Religion in America 1996* (cited in Marty, 1998: 17), shows that in 1944 96 percent of those polled said they believed in God; in 1994, fifty years later, 96 percent said the same. In 1950, 39 percent of people said they had attended a church or synagogue that week; in 1995 43 percent had attended. There have been both denominational and demographic changes within those parameters but overall, there is little evidence that secularization has resulted in the heavy declines in religious affiliation which have occurred in Britain and New Zealand. Rather, one can speculate, as Warner does, that in the United States 'societal modernization went hand in hand with religious mobilization' (1993: 1049). In addition, the United States has proven to be a hospitable destination for religious groups involved in global dispersion, or for those establishing a new religion. Mormonism and Scientology are both religions indigenous to America, while the Unification Church, Hare Krishnas, and the Osho movement are developments from Asian and Indian philosophies. (Puttick, 1995). Whaling estimates that in the United States alone there are something over 900 new Christian religious movements and around 600 new religious movements with no roots in Christianity (1995: 2).

More evidence against the validity of secularization theory comes from large increases in numbers of new Christians in Africa, South America, and Asia: to the point where historian and religious studies scholar Jenkins predicts that 50 percent of the world's Christians will be in Africa and South America by 2015 and another 17 percent in Asia (2002: 55-56). This change of Christianity's centre of gravity will, Jenkins argues, mitigate against the current trends to liberalisation advocated by some members of Western religious organisations who think that more tolerant churches might woo back errant members.

However, while the persistence of religiosity in the United States and the exponential growth of Christianity outside Europe and the Americas are interesting factors, they are not a key focus of this thesis. I am more interested in the 'spirituality' issue: that is, the probable increase in the use of discourses of spirituality in 'secularized' Western societies (Roof, 1993a, 1993b; Wuthnow, 1998; Schofield Clark, 2002). No one is yet sure whether this trend indicates renewed 'sacralization', or

is it itself a by-product of secularization. Bruce, a proponent of secularization theory, may argue that in terms of the larger picture of religious decline in the West, adherents to so-called 'New Age' spiritualities are insignificant in number (1996:262) but in a small, relatively simple, society like New Zealand the presence of such a phenomenon is noticeable, especially in media coverage (this issue discussed later in the chapter). Moreover this particular kind of transformation has already been studied extensively in both the British and American environments, and a number of explanations for the popularisation of concepts of spirituality have been advanced. Most of them, as we will see, can be correlated with what has been identified as the four over-arching trends in modernity: the rise of the market economy, the rise of secular nation states, and the rise of difference, and the turn to the self (see page 31).

Religion, spirituality and the 'baby boomer' generation

One of the simplest explanations for the movement from discourses of religion to discourses of spirituality is related to population change: that is, transformations in contemporary religiosity are due to the nature and reactions of a specific cohort of Western adults, the so-called post World War Two 'baby boomers' born during the period 1946-1962. The argument here, advanced most forcefully by Roof (1993a, 2001), and Wuthnow (1998), is that a combination of swelling post-war birthrates and political events of the time: the actions of the American state in Vietnam, at Watergate, and the intervening years of the counter-cultural 'hippie' revolution, produced a conflict over cultural values within America. To generalize, the populace is imagined as polarized into conservatives who thought of America as having 'a unique, divine role in world affairs', believing in the importance of 'personal moral values and salvation', and liberals, who valued the 'common concerns of humanity for peace, justice and human rights' (Roof, 1993a: 40). Liberals are thought to have developed a distrust of conservative institutions, reinforcing their own tendencies towards self-authority, and therefore doubly inscribing themselves as seekers after authentic forms of spiritual experience. By contrast, the conservatives, and their sub-groupings of fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic Christians⁹, formed a counter-balance to the liberal moral and spirituality movements.

⁹ Smart (1987) describes 'fundamentalism' as a tradition reaching back into its past to come up with a form it considers more appropriate to modern times. In practice fundamentalism seems to mean, among other practices, a strong reliance on the Bible as the inspired word of God. Evangelical Christians also accept the full authority of the Bible and are further, committed to spreading the gospel by proclaiming their faith publicly. Charismatics are particularly open to the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives and church services, which may be distinguished by sessions of 'speaking in tongues'. All three types of conservative Christianity share a concern with halting the arrest of moral decline in society.

These movements led Roof to speculate about the 'collapse of the middle' in American society. He aligned the counter-culture movement with the upper middle-classes and the political left, and contended that the lower classes were associated with evangelism and fundamentalism - due to anxiety about the security of their personal circumstances - which produced a politically 'right' desire to return to conservative moral values. Wuthnow (1998) identifies a similar polarization but labels the two tendencies 'dwelling' (conservatism and mainstream religious belief), and 'seeking' (liberalism and an interest in self-authenticated spirituality).

Women born during the post-war period - the generation that came to maturity in concert with so-called 'second-wave feminism' (see for instance, Battersby, 1989; Braidotti, 1991; Lovell, 1990) - are singled out by Roof as a category of persons who have particular difficulties with traditional forms of religion. He found that: 'Boomer women, especially the working, career-oriented women, struggle with religion more than do their male counterparts [...] many women's stories carry an undercurrent of negative feelings toward religion' (1993a: 217). Although the use of sexist language in religious contexts was the most common trigger for anger, Roof felt there were larger issues at stake:

Words that ignore the existence of women alienate and cut them off from a wholehearted affirmation of their personhood and continue to remind them of the evils of patriarchy and sexism. Women feel starved spiritually with symbols and rituals that fail to include them and nurture them as whole people. (1993a: 218)

This context and its analysis may sound specifically American, but in Australasia too, during the same period, there was a similar demographic 'bulge' and later, similar public controversy over supporting (morally and with military resources) American conflicts in Asia, and, a similar burgeoning of feminism. The repudiation of state legal and moral authority was also a feature of New Zealand society in the 1960s and 1970s (see for instance Ahdar and Stenhouse, 2000).

Spirituality and postmodernity

The movement from discourses of religion to spirituality has also been explained in terms of a movement from modernity to postmodernity. Postmodernism's tendency to collapse distinctions based on value, whether in society, art, or philosophy was seen by some as evidence of an exhausted, apolitical cynicism (Jameson, 1991), and by others as a pragmatic recognition and celebration of the pluralism-within-unity characterizing a globalized, capitalistic world. For many commentators (Bauman, 1992; Lyon, 1993, 2000; Heelas, 1993, 1996, 1998; Marty, 1998; Roof,

1993a, 1993b 1998, 2001) the movement from reliance on central religious authority to personal expressions of spirituality which constitute 'invisible' (Luckman, 1967, 1996) and 'individualized' religion (Bellah et al. 1985) is also the movement of religion from a modern to postmodern mode. The plurality of postmodernism lets 'new' voices be heard, especially the voices of those who were previously excluded because they were different to the (European male) norm; that is women, and diverse ethnic and cultural groups. On the everyday level postmodern plurality also permits an eclectic array of activities and beliefs to be counted as 'spiritual' resources. After a scant few decades of adherence to the principles of rational, scientific modernity it is manifestations of 'unscientific' regimes of belief - the interest in the occult, the mixing of spiritual elements from diverse sources - occurring all over the Western world, that have led theorists such as Bauman (1992) and Murdock (1997) to suggest that the development of postmodern spirituality is also an attempt to 're-enchant' the world.

Religion, late-modernity¹⁰ and 'the self'

Whether the impetus was demographic, a result of a philosophical shift in the way the epoch was conceptualized (postmodernism and post-structuralism), the result of a transformation in the organisation of capitalism into a later, 'free-market' form - or, most likely, a combination of all these motivations - many commentators propose that a significant shift has occurred in the way people perceive themselves in relation to cultural and moral authority. Roof (1993a) employs the concept of humanistic individualism, a philosophical self-concept or orientation which does not have the status of a concrete institution within society, yet rivals such institutions in its effects. As Heelas (1993, 1996) describes the process, a new individualism has been encouraged by the division between 'public' time when one has to sell one's labour in order to make a living, and a time which is more 'private' and a matter of personal choice because it belongs to one's self. Further, it is argued that this 'private sphere' is largely 'without institutionally predefined meaning structures and without obligatory models of biographical coherence' (Luckmann, 1996: 73). A certain degree of freedom and creativity, free from the pressures of both Church and State is therefore theoretically available to the populace in this private time and space.

It should be acknowledged however that this view of the possibilities of so-called 'private' life is probably too optimistic. Giddens, for example while agreeing that 'self-identity has become a

¹⁰ The term 'late modernity' is used here to avoid getting bogged down in debates about differences between 'modernity' and 'postmodernity', and the periodization of these differences. I follow Woodhead and Heelas (2000:4) in seeing 'modernity' as time-period in Western history which began in the eighteenth century: we are now in a 'late' era of that time-period.

reflexively organised endeavour' (1991: 5), underlines the importance of other diffuse, regularizing and standardizing forces, especially the omnipresent economic pressures of commodification which are present in the lives of all those who buy and trade (see also Marx and Engels, 1972). Decades earlier Weber (1985) had predicted that both the internal dynamics of modernity and the routines, processes and incessant consumption of goods needed to make the capitalist system function, would become an 'iron cage' restricting its inhabitants. This description is a touchstone for a significant proportion of authors cited in this section, who view 'spirituality' as at one and the same time a form of religion made possible by mature capitalism, and as an attempt at compensating for its restrictions.

In the view of Heelas (1993, 1996) and of many others (Bellah et al. 1985; Roof, 1993a, Puttick, 1997; Wuthnow 1998) the weakening of the 'external order of authority' in this private domain of life contributes to a new style of sense of self, one which attempts to be self-reliant:

Increasingly, especially during the last couple of centuries, people have ceased to think of themselves as belonging to or as informed by, over-arching systems. Such disembedded, desituated or detraditionalized selves, the argument goes, have adopted cultural values and assumptions which articulate what it is to stand 'alone' as individuals in the world. Such people consider themselves to be self-directing, authorial agents, relying on their own - inner- sources of authority, control and responsibility (Heelas, 1996a: 155)

These ideas about the 'self' and of the private individual as the locus of authority have become reference points for contemporary debates about religion and spirituality. This 'inner self' is a metaphor facilitated by Freudian and Jungian descriptions of human subjectivity; and proclamations as to its nature are ubiquitous in studies of contemporary spirituality. Heelas claims that Western society 'has become obsessed with what the person has come to offer: the *value*, the *depth*, the *potential*' (Heelas, 1996: 160, original emphasis) so that the human being becomes his or her own resource-base and site of personal 'capital'. According to Bellah, the self is 'improvisational', it 'chooses values to express itself but is not constituted by them as from a pre-existing source' (1985: 79). According to Roof the self is uniquely authoritative: 'truths found through self-discovery [have] greater relevance [...] than those handed down by way of creed and custom' (1993a: 67). According to Heelas, 'the self itself is sacred' (1996: 2) so that: 'the inner realm and the inner realm alone, is held to serve as the source of authentic vitality, creativity, love, tranquillity, wisdom, power, authority and all those other qualities which are held to comprise the perfect life' (1996: 19).

When the self is accorded primacy and ultimate value in this manner (Bailey 1998), when it is seen as ‘essentially good’ (Bruce, 2000), institutional forms of religion are likely to be viewed as irrelevant or even burdensome, indeed the other side of Heelas’s rhapsody to the self is that ‘religion is associated with the traditional; the dead; the misleading; the exclusivistic’ (1996: 23). Moreover, Roof claims that the contemporary emphasis on the importance of the self is so widespread that even conservative Christians, (who would readily describe themselves as ‘religious’) are influenced by it too, although they are less likely to see that self as ‘essentially’ good and are more likely to view it as needing discipline and control, so that the desires of the self are not permitted to run counter to God’s will. (1993a: 92, see also Griffith, 1997).

An important accompaniment to the emphasis on the value and authority of the self, is the principle that one should neither coerce others, nor be coerced one’s self, into changing religious or spiritual beliefs. Freedom is, asserted Bellah:

[...] perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value. In some ways it defines the good in both personal and political life. Yet freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having other people’s values, ideas or styles of life forced upon one. (1985: 23)

This assertion that one should be tolerant of the views of others, and may expect them to respect one’s own freedom in return, is a significant aspect of the ‘rise of difference’ described by Woodhead and Heelas (2000: 171).

Spirituality and therapy

Once the self is re-configured as of primary importance, overlaps between discourses of spirituality and discourses provided by psychotherapy become of interest. Wuthnow (1998) notes that psychology and spirituality had been kept apart in the 1960s and 70s as psychologists took care to present their discipline in scientific language, avoiding terms with religious connotations. However Jungian psychology had always taken religion seriously (Segal, 2000), and mid twentieth-century revisions and blending of Freudian psychology with other elements, most notably in the Humanistic Psychology movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Puttick, 2000), gradually relaxed the difference between psychological and religious methods of influencing the self. A key text in this area was Hillman’s *Re-Visioning Psychology*, which revived the religious concept of the ‘soul’, bypassed its traditional Christian role as the vehicle for immortality and ‘spiritualized’ it as a ‘perspective rather than a substance’ mediating between the individual, material events and ‘the principle of life, or even divinity’ (1975: x). By the mid 1980s Bellah et

al. (1985) found that the use of 'therapeutic language (concepts such as self-development, self-esteem, the explanation of one's present life-situation in terms of the state of the mind, influenced by past intimate events) was prevalent amongst their middle-class respondents.

Television programmes such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (WLS, 1984 -), radio talk shows, and more recently, 'O' the *Oprah* magazine (2001-) have all built on this synergy between spirituality and psychotherapy (Roof, 1993; McGuire, 1993; Peck, 1997; Wuthnow, 1998), as have the multitudinous 'self-help' volumes in bookstores (Roof, 1993a, 2001). The Twelve-Step programmes for recovering from addictive behaviours - Alcoholics Anonymous is probably the most well-known example - are also instances of blends of religion and psychology, where the self is strengthened within the support of a group process, supplemented by surrender to a higher power (Roof, 1993a, 1993b; Peck, 1997; Wuthnow, 1998).

Wuthnow and Roof both point out the division between the spiritual and the psychological is actually a recent phenomenon, since 'shamans, witchdoctors and priests' have rarely made any distinction between the healing of the mind, body and spirit (Roof 1993a: 69). McGuire agrees that a new 'holism of mind, body, spirit' (1993: 148) is a reaction against the rational and functional differentiation of modern life. The linking of health and spiritual concerns health thus becomes a factor in the accomplishment of a pleasing sense of self and 'well-being is the individual's resulting subjective experience' (1993: 153). Peck also argues that psychologized religiosity is both a means of reconciling one's self to modernity by trying to find meaning *within* the human being, and an attempt to 'recharismatize public and private domains of experience [...] by conflating psyche and soul, re-enchanting both terms, and reviving the immanent/transcendent relationship' (1997: 233-234). Blending psychological and spiritual language may therefore be a way of obviating the need for a God defined as transcendent, while locating the spirit and some of the (healing) powers of that God into, or very close, to the self (since often individuals engage another person to assist in that process of spiritual and psychological healing).

Market economics and spirituality

The 'iron cage' argument advanced by Weber (1985) may have posited the relationship between capitalism and the issue of human well-being early on, but a number of other relationships have also been posited between late-capitalism and the development of contemporary forms of religion and spirituality - some of them less pessimistic than Weber's view.

The first is the growth in importance of individual achievement, conceptualized in terms that straddle the border between religious and secular discourses, and are thus able to be interpreted within either framework. For instance, the *Habits of the Heart* investigation undertaken in the mid 1980s was structured around a broad question about cultural capital: ‘We wanted to know what resources Americans have for making sense of their lives, how they think about themselves and their society and how their ideas relate to their actions’ (Bellah et al. 1985: x). In answering those question it was reported that the majority of interviewees spoke what the authors labeled ‘the first language of individualism’ (1985: 20) where key values were based around secular concepts of success, freedom, and justice. Various combinations of these values were grouped into two major kinds of lifestyle which they termed (following Tipton, 1982), *utilitarian individualism* and *expressive individualism*. The first kind of ‘utilitarian’ lifestyle features a whole-hearted adoption of the secular ethics of modernity, involving strong positive valuation of worldly success expressed through devotion to career. The second, ‘expressive’, lifestyle put more value on music, books and relationships - the things which facilitate an immediate enjoyment of life.

The pursuit of either of these life styles was thought likely to separate people from traditional institutions, including the established churches, at least temporarily:

Clearly the meaning of one’s life for most Americans is to become one’s own person, almost to give birth to one’s self. Much of this process, [...] is negative. It involves breaking free from family, community and inherited ideas. Our culture does not give us much guidance as to how to fill the contours of this autonomous, self-responsible self but it does point to two important areas. One of these is work, the realm, par excellence, of utilitarian individualism [...] The other is the lifestyle enclave, the realm, par excellence, of expressive individualism. (Bellah et al. 1985: 82)

Work might therefore, although not explicitly spiritualized, be viewed as an environment in which the ‘spiritual’ needs of utilitarian individualists might be addressed. Or, Bellah proposed, after a period of self-examination, people might return to the churches but would require different services from them. Utilitarian individualists might join a church which saw prosperity as a sign of God’s approval, to motivate them to achieve - as Woodhead and Heelas note there has always been a link between certain types of religion and prosperity (2000: 173; see also Heelas, 1999). Expressive individualists might, by contrast, look for religious or spiritual situations which featured expressive qualities such as sociability, ‘warmth’ and understanding; so there would be a push for church communities to respond to those demands.

Part of the appeal of contemporary conceptions of spirituality is precisely therefore that they can be discovered or cultivated in secular as well as sacred manifestations of culture (Peck, 1993; Ferguson, 1992), so that one need not put aside an interest in material prosperity, for example, in order to develop one's spirituality. Some businesses have begun to introduce workshops on spirituality or spiritual concepts into their corporate cultures: according to Salamon, (2000), such moves are concerned with 'achieving organisational and personal wholeness and harmony at work through the development of spiritual consciousness and humanistic expressivism'. It has also been asserted that modern economics has itself become a religious system; 'The market is becoming the first truly world religion, binding all corners of the globe more and more tightly into a worldview and set of values whose religious role we overlook only because we insist on seeing them as "secular"' (Loy, 1997: 275).

Bellah's research team also found that a significant proportion of interviewees had idiosyncratic, personal collections of beliefs that might be described as 'spiritual' yet eclectic, often unaligned to any particular institution, choosing elements from any spiritual tradition which appealed to them. This is the 'pick-and-mix', 'multi-layered', 'supermarket' or 'smorgasbord' approach to spirituality which has since become a commonplace in studies of religion (see also Wuthnow, 1989; Voyé and Dobbelaere, 1993), entailing descriptions of individuals as 'tourists', 'shoppers' or 'seekers' and of the varieties of belief and practice available to them as constituting a spiritual 'marketplace' (Roof, 2001).

If the market is perceived as both offering and organizing spiritual energies in the various ways described, it is then operating at the level of 'intermediate' and 'minimal' transcendences, as outlined by Luckmann (1996), since it cannot offer the 'great' transcendences of traditional religious systems. According to Luckmann these lesser forms of transcendence involve activities, relationships, moments or symbols normally embedded in profane or everyday life which are accorded special attention, or are temporarily, provisionally, sacralized (1996: 74).

It is in this mode that the extension of definitions of religion into the realm of popular culture has also led to consideration of secular, commercial/ cultural activities as functioning in the manner of some elements of religion. For instance Chidester, employs a functional definition of religion to argue that the phrase 'church of baseball' is an accurate label: 'It is a religious institution that maintains the continuity, uniformity, sacred space and sacred time of American life. As the "faith of fifty million people", baseball does everything we conventionally understand to be done by the

institution of the church' (1994: 745). In the same article a Geertzian definition of religion as a symbolic system underpins an examination of 'Coca-Cola' - spoken of by its makers as 'one of God's gifts' - and of its distribution as 'a religion rather than a business' (1994: 749-750). For Chidester this is commodity as fetish and 'advertising-as-religion', where associations of ultimate value are associated not with a transcendent entity but with an ephemeral commercial product. He asserts that the insubstantiality of this 'commodity-religion', where almost any commodity may be gilded with attention, suggests that definitions of religion are often metaphorical in nature, and therefore open to contestation in 'the discourses and practices of popular culture' (1994: 760).

Finally on this topic, in *The Spiritual Marketplace* Roof (2001) turns the concept of the marketplace around so that religious and spiritual systems themselves are seen as competitive products. He recommends that we think of this larger spiritual marketplace as:

A "social field" where all the agents, conventionally religious or not, try to generate and preserve religious capital, i.e. legitimacy, acceptance and influence [and] we can then begin to grasp the breadth and depth of a huge, highly competitive spiritual marketplace. (2001: 80)

The work on televangelism for instance (see chapter 4), suggests that these forms of interaction between religion and the market have in fact led to religious organizations modifying their rituals and self-presentation in order to appeal more strongly as products or 'commodities' in this competitive spiritual marketplace (Ableman and Hoover, 1990).

'New Paradigm' religion

Together, these diverse ways of conceptualizing late-modern religiosity broadly cohere in what Warner (1993) has identified as a 'new paradigm' for the study of religion in America, one which challenges the idea that a religious system can any longer provide legitimation for, or a 'sheltering canopy' over, a whole society (Berger, 1967). Warner argued instead that the basis for American religiosity was the group, which provides solidarity and improved morale for its members, that the 'entrepreneur' is more of a relevant model for group leadership than the clergyman, and that, with some exceptions, the master narrative for the United States involves discussing revival in preference to secularization (1993: 1052).

Wuthnow also sees a new paradigm emerging, although he is more prepared than other commentators to use a discourse of 'secularity' to describe similar phenomena. However he offers

the significant proviso that this mind-set, whether perceived as secular, or ‘new paradigm’ is just a generation or two old, and is therefore still a novelty:

Although many people live in a world that is almost totally secular, Americans generally regard themselves a relative newcomers to such a world [...] As a way of dealing with this concern many people sacralize small moments of everyday life, reading spiritual significance into them and doing so in a way that gives these sacred moments greater meaning than they may realize. (1998: 138)

While not wanting to do away with the concept of a secular society, secularization, or secular consciousness, it is notable that many of these phenomena on the contemporary scene may be categorized as spiritual or secular almost interchangeably; definition is a matter of the larger discursive framework one employs.

Religion, spirituality and politics in America and Britain

The inter-relationship of religion and politics is a huge subject in itself; one that can be dealt with only briefly in this thesis. For instance it is clear that conservative Christianity has influence in the political arena in America in the form of the ‘Christian Right’, not a political party but a movement and lobby group with strong Republican Party connections. Martin (1999) claims that white evangelical Protestants comprise around 25 percent of all registered American voters, although only a third to a fourth of that number identify openly with the Christian Right. According to Martin the political agenda of this grouping includes:

Distrust of secular government; opposition to any perceived threat to “traditional family values”, determination to preach and practice their beliefs without hindrance and restriction; and less obvious to most secular observers, a conviction the increasing globalization is a fulfillment of dire Biblical prophecies foreshadowing the return of Christ and the onset of Armageddon. (1999: 67)

In the year 2000 a Christian Republican, George W. Bush was elected president and has since formed a strong strategic and military relationship with Britain. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair, is also an active Christian, counting the theologian Hans Küng among his mentors, although his brand of Christianity specifically opposes itself to, ‘conservatism, particularly its modern, more right-wing form’ (cited in Ahmed and Staunton, 2000: 17). In 1995 Martin documented a renewed interest in social action amongst the churches in Europe and noted that the Labour Party in Britain ‘has increasingly jettisoned any element of Marxism and has revived roots in Christian Social Democracy (1995: 301). While it is up to others to determine the significance of these

factors, Christianity, as a worldview, is presumably still influential in both British and American politics.

There is also a sense in which everyday politics can exhibit signs of a religious worldview – and that is in relation to a concept described by Bellah's 1967 phrase, 'civil religion'. This concept, which can be analysed alongside Woodhead and Heelas's description of the rise of the nation state (2000: 171) implies either that aspects of an otherwise secular nation state have become 'sacred' to the people who live in it (White, 1998), or that certain sacred symbols, such as the American flag, containing watered-down references to religion, have become part of the rituals of local and national community (Albanese, 1994). Marvin and Ingle (1999) also argue that blood sacrifice, normally a religious concept, exists in the modern state in the form of the potential demand for citizens to take part in military service.

However, in considering the differences between recent American and British writing on religion and spirituality, it is actually in the area of the ideological, 'political' significance of transformations of religiosity that the widest variance exists.

Britain and New Age¹¹ spirituality as 'political'

Unlike the United States Britain does have a 'state' religion, the Church of England, but nevertheless the population is neither as religious as America's, nor as implicated in fundamentalist and charismatic religious revivals. There continue to be attempts to modernize and re-validate mainstream Christianity - for instance the Sea of Faith movement founded by Anglican cleric Don Cupitt, but the process of secularization is visibly stronger than in the United States (Martin, 1995; Warner 1993) to the extent that Smart (1998) identifies 'secular humanism' as the predominant contemporary value and meaning system in Britain. Nevertheless manifestations of self-expressive spirituality: 'meditation, spiritual healing, shamanism, regression massage, guided visualization, chanting' (Heelas, 1996: 107) are as discernable in Britain as they are in America. Although active New Age participation probably does not occupy a large proportion of the

¹¹ Lyon, drawing on Ferguson (1982) defines New Age spirituality as a 'movement' and a 'leaderless network' operating on the assumption that there has been a 'turnabout in consciousness' which may bring about a 'renewal of society' (1993: 118). While asserting that many of the components of New Age spirituality are actually 'old' Lyon notes a gradual 'convergence between new Eastern and mystical traditions and the religious disenchantment of many Westerners' (1993: 119). See also Albanese (1993) for a discussion of the influence of American 'nature religion' on New Age spirituality.

population¹² the University of Lancaster has been the centre for research delineating the New Age phenomenon. (Beckford 1986; Heelas 1996, 2000; Bowman, 1993; Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000; Woodhead 1993; see also York 1995). Often the analysis is undertaken within the framework of ‘detraditionalization’: a Bergerian-derived concept asserting that traditional political and social institutions have lost authority, and can therefore no longer be used to guarantee previously powerful collective forms of identity¹³. Exploring the concept of detraditionalization involves a more explicitly ideological set of concerns than is usually evident in American writing on contemporary religion. It allows the opportunity of ‘re-thinking’ community as a practice as much of ‘assent’ as ‘descent’, for instance (Morris, 1996), or speculates whether the demise of ‘power-assisted, legislated ethics’ (Bauman, 1996: 58) is a disaster, or an opportunity for a newly grounded, personally negotiated sense of morality.

Foregrounding links between religious belief positions and political stances, commentators on the British scene are more apt to see certain strands of so-called New Age spirituality as ‘counter-cultural’ or ‘counter-capitalist’, actively resistant to mainstream ‘utilitarian’ values rather than as merely a form of amorphous personal expression (Heelas, 1996a). For instance, the ‘holism’ noted in American formulations of the healthy self is often extended in Britain to include the whole biosphere. This is especially relevant as the British environment has been subject to panics over food-safety in recent years and ecological ‘ill-health’ is seen to presage catastrophe:

By definition, counter-culturalists do not want to be identified with the dominant, capitalistic project of our times. They are profoundly dissatisfied with mainstream values and identities. Work is seen as alienating; politicians are taken to be corrupt; consumer culture is taken to be undermining the future of the planet. (Heelas, 1996: 138)

By contrast, Hedges and Beckford (2000) state, counter-cultural ‘New Agers’ try to live in a manner which both suggests that a ‘new’ age of health and spiritual balance has already been ushered in, and is actually designed to help that new age come to pass.

Writing about contemporary religiosity in Britain also highlights the revivalist movement known as ‘Neo-paganism’ (Bowman 2000, Heelas, 1996; Morris, 1999; Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000). If fundamentalism reaches back into the past of one of the great ‘world’ religions for inspiration,

¹² Heelas (1996) asserts that there is at present no reliable way to assess the number of people either interested or active in the New Age spirituality movement, However, surveying a range of research from both Britain and the United States he speculates that around 10 percent of the population may be categorized as affiliated with spiritualities of life.

¹³ See in particular Paul Heelas et al. *Detraditionalization* (1996).

paganism draws on traditions anterior to those religions. The nostalgia for localized (Heelas, 1996b) or indigenous, forms of religion and spirituality - which Bowman (2000) typifies as the ideas of a 'Golden Age' and 'the Noble Savage,' is widespread. Moreover, Britain has its own rich tradition of pre-Christian and Celtic spirituality to serve as a resource base for neo-pagan practices (Bowman, 1993). Wicca (a form of witchcraft) and Goddess-worship also occupy neighbouring territory (Puttick, 1995). The appeal of neo-pagan practices, according to Morris (1999), is that they offer spirituality without either institutional forms of organisation or doctrinal coercion; both he and Heelas (1996) agree that such practices are therefore ideally placed to be mobilized (or re-invented) in the service of modern self-actualization.

British writing on the issue of contemporary religiosity and spirituality is also more interested than American work in whether the spirituality movement is an improvement or declension on the past. The primary issue here is the question of the attitude towards others: are 'New Agers' and other spiritual seekers more self-absorbed and therefore less political, if 'political' implies that one attempts to bring about a better, more socially equitable future? Heelas, while acknowledging the range of styles within New Age spirituality, tends to see the movement as carrying the flame of radicalism through into the future. New Agers he says:

... seek liberation from the contaminating effects of society and culture: seek genuine experience; seek to express all that one truly is as a spiritual being: and for many - seek to experience and nurture all that is embedded within nature, beyond the reach of the artificial, the power games of the lower self, the destructive implementations of the technological. (2000: 243)

Bruce (2000) however, a theorist who holds fast to a secularization model, takes a sceptical view of this kind of spirituality:

While some elements of the New Age are tangentially radical, its fundamental principles are those of modern capitalism. Insofar as it is popular, it is so because its individualistic epistemology, consumerist ethos and therapeutic focus resonate with the rest of our culture. The New Age is important not for the changes it will bring but for the changes it epitomizes. (2000: 234)

A middle way is suggested by Hedges and Beckford, who propose that the 'true self' of expressive individualism be characterized not as essentially selfish but as 'naturally social, compassionate and attuned to the rhythms of the natural world' (2000: 172). Puttick (2000), also rejects what she calls 'dualistic dichotomising of self-development and service' since she maintains that the basis of the humanistic psychology which is one of the well-springs of new spirituality 'is

the understanding that insight, self-love and love for others are inextricably linked and mutually enhancing' (2000: 205). Again, with bland discursive formulations such as these above, one has arrived at the situation where spirituality offers only what Luckmann calls 'intermediate transcendence' of the conditions of individual everyday life (1996: 74).

Woodhead and Heelas' model of religiosity

Thus far certain features of the 'new paradigm' religious landscape in America and Britain have been identified. At one end of the spectrum they include the continued existence of conventional forms of religion, and the association of forms of conservative Christianity with right-wing politics. Further along the spectrum, but influencing all forms of religiosity, are: the development of the concept of the self in reaction to both modernity and postmodernity, the development of contrasting 'utilitarian' and 'expressive' styles of the self, and the importance of the expressive self in relation to contemporary religiosity. Further along the spectrum still there is a movement from 'religion' to 'spirituality' which extends spirituality into secular activities, and an eclectic attitude towards spirituality sharing many of the hallmarks of the secular consumerist ethic. This movement has also been described as one that, in some sectors of society, forgoes the concept of 'great' transcendences, for intermediate and minimal forms of transcendence. Most kinds of religiosity have also been affected by the globalization of religious resources, which means that individuals are able to draw on practices from many religious traditions if they wish. In the American literature utilitarian and expressive forms of spirituality are foregrounded as social practices which improve the position of the individual within small-group settings, but in Britain, expressive spirituality in particular is often seen as a low-key, leftist, form of political protest.

This spectrum of beliefs and practices has been shaped by Woodhead and Heelas (2000) into a model positing three major types of contemporary religion: religions of difference, religions of humanity and spiritualities of life. These types of religion, illustrated in the diagram over (see figure 1), are distinguished by a variant set of relationships between ideas about 'God', human beings, and the natural environment.

Religions of difference, which are theistic, place God in an authoritative position over both humans and nature, religions of humanity try and balance those elements, but favour an alliance between God and humanity, while spiritualities of life see the divine, man and nature as sharing a 'fundamental identity' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 2).

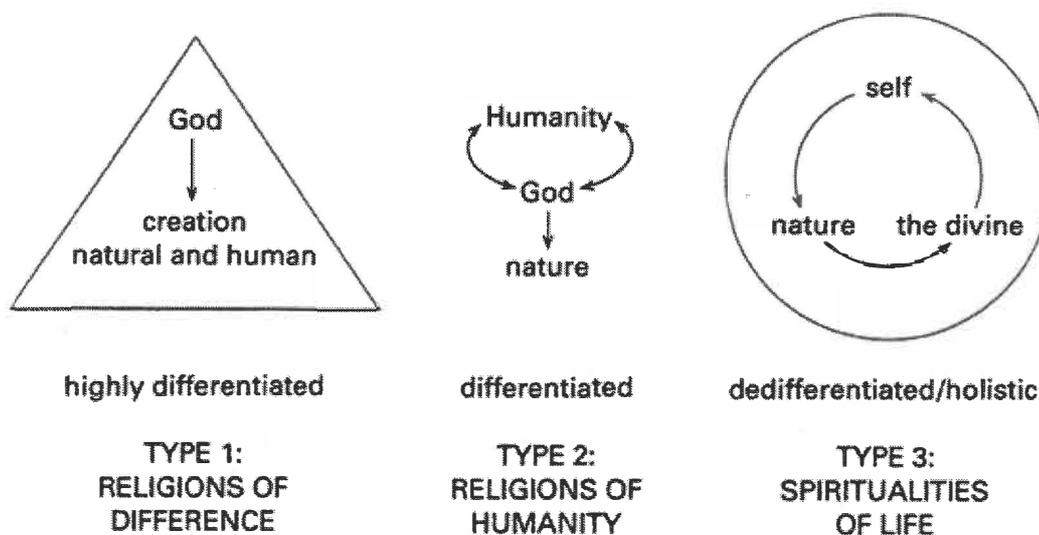


Figure 1: The spectrum of religion in modern times (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 3)

These different forms of organisation of religious or spiritual energies may, according to Woodhead and Heelas, co-exist within a larger religious system (Catholicism for instance), and there may also be organisations, which combine elements from one or more of the models. An example of one of these combinations might be an experiential religion of difference (2000: 3), which could for instance be a theistic sect where the members were given to 'speaking in tongues'. The conventional nomenclature of 'churches', 'denominations', 'sects' and 'cults' (see pages 32-33) can thus be accommodated by this model. The typology is broad and sketchy, but I find it useful as a matrix for grouping statements about religion and spirituality into discourses (see chapter 4).

As this survey of discussions of concepts of religion and spirituality has demonstrated, spirituality, in particular, is an extremely fluid concept and its exact meaning is difficult to pin down (King, 1997). However the increasing use of the term in academic analysis has greatly extended the territory for those who are interested in the study of religion as a cultural phenomenon: it is now possible to range across an area which contains distinct and traditional churches on one boundary, but which, in the other is unbounded, since it may also cover the entire area of secular or 'ordinary' life.

Religion and spirituality in New Zealand

New Zealand does not have a state religion. It was colonized by Britain at a time when the close relationship between Church and State was coming under question in the parent-nation (Ahdar,

2000) and that relationship was not re-established in the new location. However although the country may, on the evidence of legal decisions cited by Ahdar, therefore be considered 'secular' it is also reasonable to argue that it exhibits 'cultural' or 'diffuse' Christianity, in that members of the governing élite are usually nominally Christian and that 'the laws and institutions [...] naturally reflected Christian values' (2000: 63). The people of New Zealand have thus enjoyed the status of *de facto* citizens of Christendom for more than a century without having to demonstrate a high level of commitment to Christian institutions. This situation began to change however in the 1960s when the international trends affecting religiosity described previously, reached a level of visibility which affected New Zealanders' assumptions about their own culture – beginning what Ahdar calls a 'second disestablishment'. For instance, he cites Bishop Brian Carrell as identifying the 1960s as the period when Christianity began to go into 'rapid decline' suggesting that its 'demise' was 'arguably a more obvious end in this country than in any other Western nation' (Ahdar, 2000: 64).

Metaphors of death are readily applied in professional discussions of institutional Christianity in New Zealand (see also Morris, 1999) and the concept of the sacred has little official recognition in public life, since legislation increasingly allows commercial activity on Sundays and at the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter (Ahdar 2000). Aspects of the traditional moral codes of 'cultural Christianity' have also been dismantled, as, for example, divorce has been made easier, homosexuality de-criminalized, and *de facto* partnerships put on a similar footing with regard to property rights as those between married couples (Ahdar, 2000).

However, as in Britain and America, sustained exploration of the New Zealand situation produces a complex picture of religiosity. According to the 2001 Census more than 2 million people out of a population of approximately 3.7 million claimed to be Christian (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). An International Social Survey conducted by Massey University in 1998 reported that 60 percent of New Zealanders believe in God, albeit with some degree of doubt for half of that proportion (Gendall et al. 1999: 1, see also page 36 this chapter). New Zealand has also had its own fundamentalist and charismatic revivals although numbers of adherents to these dynamic churches are thought to number not more than 30,000 (Morris, 1999), and are considerably less of a social presence than in America. Christian political parties have been formed, but even when these parties stood together as the Christian Coalition in the 1996 elections, they failed to achieve the five percent threshold for representation in the New Zealand Parliament (Boston, 2000).

The New Zealand population has also diversified in the last few decades with consequent effects on religious affiliations. Before the Second World War immigrants were sought primarily from other Commonwealth countries with ethnic European and culturally Christian populations (Donovan, 2000); during the post-war period immigration policies gradually became more liberal thus introducing greater cultural and religious diversity. Indigenous Maori Christians have been influencing the practices of mainstream churches for some time but increasing numbers of Polynesian immigrants have also reinforced the tendency of New Zealand churches to become more 'Pacific' in flavour (Morris, 1999). Business immigration from Asia and refugee resettlement from many areas of the world including Africa has also seen the number of adherents of non-Christian religions increasing rapidly (Donovan, 1996, 2000). The 2001 Census for example reported 41,634 Buddhists, 39,798 Hindus and 23,631 Muslims as New Zealand citizens: numbers that had increased by 48 percent, 56 percent and 74 percent respectively in just five years, and are high enough to make the concept of a 'Christian' monoculture increasingly unsustainable (Statistics New Zealand, 2002).

Alternative forms of spirituality

On the other hand there is, as in the other countries studied, evidence that non-traditional forms of religion and spirituality are active in New Zealand. Ellwood (1996) contends that the country has actually been a 'fertile field' for 'esoteric' religion throughout the twentieth century. He defines esoteric as meaning 'intelligible only to those with special knowledge', a term encompassing Theosophists, Spiritualists, Scientologists, members of Temple of the Golden Dawn and neopagans. Ellwood speculates that the same circumstances which facilitated the creation of a secular, pluralistic nation - an opportunity to create a new society in a fresh land - also fostered support for new religions in New Zealand.

There is thus a tendency amongst New Zealanders to look for value and meaning in material practices and esoteric spiritualities as well as in mainline Christianity. This view of the cultural field is supported by Hill, who predicted in 1987 that allegiance to mainline churches would continue to fade, that fundamentalism in New Zealand would enter a period where it 'cooled' and became institutionalized, while mystic and cultic forms of religion would prosper because their values 'were more resonant with those of a scientific, secular culture' (1987: 14-15).

Maori Spirituality

A distinctive characteristic of the spiritual environment in New Zealand is the continuing influence of Maori religiosity and Maori forms of Christianity. Te Pakaka Tawhai describes Maori cosmological and spiritual beliefs as both complex and tribally determined (1996). He outlines a set of beliefs he calls ‘ancient explanations’, (*korero tahito*) – which included extensive creation myths and a pantheon of deities who inhabited nature, influencing human activities. Concepts of, *mana*¹⁴ (influence, power, status), *tapu* (sanctity, sacredness), *utu* (revenge and recompense) were also in common use as organising principles of everyday life.

Interactions between Maori and Christianity also were, and are, complex. In addition to new religious movements of a specifically Maori character (Elsmore, 1989), some Maori became involved in mainstream Christian churches. However, it seems likely that for many, involvement with Christianity has not entirely superseded the relevance of the *korero tahito*. Instead, Tawhai suggests, the two worldviews continue in co-existence, especially in situations where people gather for social and ceremonial occasions (Tawhai, 1996). This is not simply a one-way situation: since New Zealand civic secular culture often lacks drama and resonance, Maori rituals have gradually become a feature of most occasions of national ceremonial importance (Bluck, 1998; Donovan, 2000). As a result, a paradoxical situation obtains where the state may be officially neutral with regard to religion but national events are celebrated with addresses, in Maori, to the gods (of both cultures) and to the spirits of tribal ancestors. However, representations of Maori beliefs (whether or not blended with Christian formulations) are usually encoded in terms of, and received as, expressions of ‘spirituality’ rather than ‘religion’. In such cases spirituality carries the pre-1990s sense of being a lesser, informal term.

A model of Maori society as different from, and indeed superior in some ways to European culture, has occasionally been employed in imagining an ideal Aotearoa/New Zealand (see for instance, Blythe, 1994). A key aspect of this idealization lies in a perception that Maori society is more focused around ‘spirituality’ than European culture, (Tawhai, 1996; Webster, 2001). From the viewpoint of New Zealanders of European origin, sometimes known as ‘*Pakeha*’, attributing an original, untainted spirituality to Maori is perhaps part of a complicated, ambivalent process of acknowledging past and ongoing oppression (a similar construction of Aboriginal spirituality has been noted in Australia, see for instance, Brady, 1994; Tacey, 1995). There is also a nostalgic

¹⁴ In Donovan, *The Religions of New Zealanders*, Te Pakaka Tawhai defines *mana* as *mauri* (essence, or potential) construed in terms of power (1996: 17). Other important terms are *wairua*, which he defines as ‘soul’ and *tapu*, which are the privileges and constraints that accompany the possession of *mana*.

tendency among those interested in New Age spirituality, as Heelas (1996a) has noted, to look for inspiration in the worldviews of indigenous peoples considered less corrupted by the forces of modernization.

Paradoxically however, the idealization of Maori spirituality may additionally be useful in supporting Maori political aims. For instance, Greenland (1991) identifies the development of a discourse of spirituality in the 'radical ideologies' of Maori protest groups in the 1960s and 1970s, whereby claims for the return of alienated land were supported by an argument rejecting the moral basis of Pakeha society. According to Greenland, a contrast was drawn between two allegedly conflicting approaches to land - one emotive and communal (Maori), the other artificial and exploitative (Pakeha) (1991: 93). Pakeha were typified as predators while Maori were credited with spiritual integrity due to their closer links with the land:

The stereotype of the Pakeha as predators was matched with one that emphasized the sublime traits of the Maori. Maori people retained an emotional and spiritual link with the land ... [they] had an inherent integrity that had been eroded since contact. This honour could be redeemed however by a return to taking pride in one's Maori identity. (1991: 97-98)

If spirituality can be perceived as a 'natural' property of Maori it can therefore be mobilized in support of Maori causes. Recently a resource consent for the construction of a new prison in Northland was (temporarily) denied in the face of 'compelling spiritual and cultural evidence' from local people of the Ngati Rangi and Ngapuhi tribes, that the construction works would adversely affect the mauri (or life force) of the area. Similarly, upgrading of the national motorway from Auckland to Hamilton was stopped for two weeks in November 2002 because of claims from local Maori that the motorway would obliterate the home of a *taniwha*, or nature spirit (Adams, 2002; MacDonald, 2003). The debate around the validity of this objection is also in effect a debate about the contemporary status of *korero tahito*. Although these and similar claims attract the strenuous opposition of commercial forces, the frequency of such claims is increasing and there is no doubt that by activating concepts such as 'spirituality', 'sacred places' and 'life-force' in the public sphere, Maori are attempting an unusual form of political action based on a 'religious' worldview.

Women and Spirituality

The creation of forms of ritual by, and for, women has also been a strong element of the spirituality movement in New Zealand. An American immigrant, Lea Holford, who taught in Auckland in the 1980s, is frequently mentioned as a catalyst for the involvement of other women.

Works of interest in this area include Penny 1994; Kearney, 1997; Rountree 1993, and an article on the *Women's Spirituality Movement* by Benland in Donovan, 1996.

Gilling (1999) has also reported on the existence of some 50 small 'faith groups and communities' around New Zealand. Some of the groups she describes are traditionally Christian in nature, for example, 'Benedictine Events' and 'Catholic Women Knowing Our Place', but others are not, for instance 'The Matrix of Adidam' (Buddhist) and the Riverside Commune. According to Gilling, the membership of these groups is predominantly female, with many women seeing themselves as in reaction to unpalatable aspects of institutional religiosity. These include sexual or gender bias, inflexible dogma, and a hierarchy which doesn't sufficiently accommodate doubt and exploration. The terms 'spiritual violence' and 'spiritual abuse' are used in the book to refer to previous unsatisfactory imbalances of power between group members and church institutions. Gilling uses the metaphor of 'spiritual journey' (1999: 20) to describe the project all the groups have in common, where her definition of spirituality is 'that *which gives meaning to life*, spirituality being that *which enables you to keep going*' (1999: 16, original emphasis).

Civil Religion in New Zealand

The use of Maori rituals to enhance state ceremonies otherwise perceived as secular has been noted above. Donovan (1996) finds the concept of 'civil' religion particularly relevant in relation to Anzac Day (the annual commemoration of New Zealand involvement in overseas wars) and Waitangi Day (the commemoration of the signing of the Treaty in 1840 between the British Crown and various Maori chiefs). Moreover, as Sharpe noted twenty years ago whilst acknowledging that New Zealand is sometimes described as 'the most areligious and agnostic country on earth', it is dangerous to assume from the statistics that New Zealanders have a little interest in the underlying concerns which religion addresses, since some of our passions are of the 'civil religion' variety:

New Zealanders are a religious people, only our passions tend to be secular. Look, for instance, at the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981, here we saw the confrontation of two powerful religious faiths: an idealistic 'freedom' humanitarianism, and a 'superman' cult of mass rugby nationalism. (Sharpe, 1982: 5)

Donovan echoes Sharpe's comment that any analysis of a characteristically New Zealand spirituality would have to grapple with the central place of sport - particularly rugby - in the national psyche. There is of course, not one ideology underpinning sport; it is a site at which many different ideas about nationhood, gender, race (and morality) gather, but whenever one thinks

about what is actually important in New Zealand (in terms of press coverage, informal discussions, publicly-expressed emotion), sport cannot be overlooked (Perry, 1994; Hight, 1998; George, 1999). Grimshaw (1999, 2000), has recently applied a postmodern frame of reference to the analysis of rugby, seeing it as a blend of physical power and artistic ability the appreciation of which underlines the temporary and liminal nature of moments of heightened [spiritual] consciousness. The centrality of sport to New Zealand culture is so taken-for-granted that the country's record of wins and losses in international games becomes a barometer of the well-being of the nation (see for instance George, 1999; Laidlaw, 1999b).

Other views of New Zealand spirituality

Paul Morris, previously at Lancaster University, now Professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University, has brought elements of the British approach to the study of contemporary religiosity in New Zealand. In an essay published in 1999 he provided an overview of local manifestations of New Age spirituality and neo-paganism - reiki, crystal-healing, various forms of massage, channeling, some forms of psychotherapy - suggesting such practices in New Zealand, as in Britain:

[...] tend to be immanentist, that is there is little place for transcendental deities or salvation, the question is rather what must I do to heal myself and the planet, and how can I reconnect myself to the source, be it land, planet, past selves, inner selves or the god(dess) within. (Morris, 1999: 20-21)

Morris, like some of his British counterparts, is sceptical of the value of much New Age activity, noting that its adherents constitute a lucrative market for booksellers and purveyors of spiritual supplies. He also asserts much of this activity is passive and apolitical in nature - a proposition my own research does not fully support - I would contend much of this activity may be *passively* political, but it is not necessarily apolitical in its concerns or intentions.

Nevertheless, as a result of increased public discussion of these issues, especially in a venue such as the New Zealand *Listener*, a weekly magazine with a 'high-culture' bias¹⁵, there is a growing understanding that a 'post-Christian' New Zealand need not be completely areligious. In one of several features published on the topic in recent years, Matthews, a staff writer, states:

¹⁵ Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie in *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, note that the *Listener*, established in 1939, has functioned 'as a forum for the discussion of New Zealand's emerging cultural identity' (1990: 4)

What are we witnessing? Not the death of spirituality, not the death of belief, not the death of meaning, but the death of religious institutions, the death of organised religion, the erosion of the Church's historical core, its hold on the heart of the West. (1999: 17)

As in America and Britain it is perceived that although religion in New Zealand may be in the process of transformation, it is in the words of Webster, 'neither static nor insignificant' (2001:172)

The diverse nature of New Zealand sub-cultures

The most thoroughly-researched picture of religiosity in contemporary New Zealand is provided by Webster (2001) as part of *Spiral of Values*, an analysis of data from the New Zealand section of the World Values Study conducted in 1998. Rather than describing the culture of the country as homogeneous, Webster identifies six main cultural groupings, produced by the juxtaposition of data on ethnicity with self-descriptions of ethnic or cultural identity. His analyses indicate that religious and spiritual beliefs, class, moral attitudes and political leanings all intertwine to produce several distinctive 'value-cultures' within New Zealand. The issue of whether and to what degree special provision should be made for Maori as *tangata whenua* (or [first] people of the land) is a touchstone of the attitudes of all these value-cultures.

These groupings, in order of numerical size, and with the percentage of the total sample included are:

–	New Zealander	40%
–	Pakeha	25%
–	European	18%
–	Ethnic Maori who identify as "above all else, a Maori"	6+%
–	Ethnic Maori who identify as "above all else, a New Zealander"	6+%
–	Pacific Islander	2%

(Webster, 2001: 17 and 95)

The first three categories together include people of British and Commonwealth ancestry, and of other 'Western' origins, who currently make up over 70 percent of the population. Ethnic Maori constitute around 14 percent, but Webster eventually includes the more than six percent of Maori

who identify 'above all else [as] a New Zealander' (2001: 95), with the 'New Zealander' group to make that the largest single cultural grouping at 46 percent of the population. 'New Zealanders' are slightly more likely than the rest of the population to be professional and upper middle class, to be under 60 years of age and to be in a high income bracket.

By contrast 'Pakeha' has a special meaning in this study, it is not a reference to all European colonists; it designates a sub-group appreciably older, less wealthy, less educated and more conservative than the average. And, rather than being sympathetic to Maori grievances about inequitable distribution of land and resources, Pakeha, Webster asserts, tend to have: 'very low but normal support for increased land and fishing rights for Maori (11 percent) or for strengthening the Treaty of Waitangi (four percent) (2001: 107). Those who prefer to be known as 'Europeans' are also older, more likely to be office workers or skilled manual workers over half of them describe themselves as 'middle class' or 'working class' - Webster describes their attitudes as 'colonialist' finding them aggrieved, with a sense of having little political power. For instance 49 percent of Europeans want the Treaty of Waitangi, abolished and 57 percent are strongly against special land and fishing rights for Maori (2001: 118).

The group in which Webster is most interested however, despite its small size, is the 'Maori-Maori' group. Members of this group are younger, have more children, and although concentrated in the skilled, semi-skilled, and unemployed bands, show a very large range of incomes – including 10 percent with household incomes over \$70,000 a year (2001: 97). Not surprisingly 41 percent of Maori-Maori wanted the Treaty of Waitangi strengthened and 66 percent favoured special Maori land and fishing rights (2001: 131). However they also differed from the average on a large number of public values: they had strong belief in the value of community organisations, but only half thought that democracy was the best form of government, as opposed to 70 percent of the overall sample. They also seemed less materialistic than average in that only a third (as against 60 percent overall) thought that high economic growth should be a priority national goal (2001: 137). Webster calls this group 'a strongly resurgent indigenous culture [...] of major political, social and practical significance' (2001: 131), so that its presence while discernable now, may have increasing significance in the future.

In particular, there was considerable diversity amongst the cultures in statistics on religion. If, for example, regular attendance at worship is taken as an indicator, 60 percent of Pacific Islanders attend regularly, 33 percent of Maori-Maori, 24 percent of Pakeha, 21 percent of Europeans and

only 18 percent of New Zealanders (2001: 107). Pacific Island peoples clearly have the most 'religious' culture in New Zealand: 71 percent say God is very important compared to 23 percent of the total, and 59 percent have "a great deal of confidence in the church" as opposed to only 10 percent of the total sample (2001: 142). There is thus a division between what Webster calls 'secular-rational' cultures (associated with New Zealanders, Europeans and Pakeha) and the more religiously-inclined cultures of Maori-Maori and Pacific Islanders.

In synthesizing the data Webster notes that something called 'personal religion', an 'emotional-experiential' version of traditional religion, is the strongest dimension of New Zealand religiosity. This includes belief in a 'personal' (experiential) God (35 percent), as against what he calls 'the cognitive proposition' of God which 64 percent endorse. Interestingly belief in God as an (untraditional) 'life force or spirit', stands at 40 percent, while belief in a soul is at 72 percent. Unfortunately Webster does not use the term 'spirituality' in his analysis, but he does contend there is 'surplus population belief above and beyond the incidence of personal religion' (2001: 168) and this to me, is the area where, on closer analysis, discourses of 'spirituality' might be found.

The 23 percent of respondents who said 'God is very important in life' and therefore are called by Webster 'religionists', also exhibited an attraction towards conservative moral values: 'a strong relationship clearly exists between religiosity and traditional family values, attitudes to the value of life, and traditional sexual mores' (2001: 170). In this area there is an echo of the values of the Christian right in America, but the comparison does not hold, since political-social attitudes amongst this group locally are more reminiscent of left-wing politics than the right:

The religious were less likely to blame the poor for being in need, or to think the Treaty (protecting Maori rights) should be abolished. They were more likely than the non-religious to think Local Government should help provide a job for everyone and also to help control prices. The religious were also more likely to want redistribution of wealth and reduction of income differences. (2001: 170)

When these results were combined with the finding that the overall sample's belief in the concept of sin has risen from 30 percent in 1985 to 56 percent in 1998 (2001: 172), Webster makes the observation that there has been a de-stigmatization in belief in sin 'perhaps in the context of wide concern at humanly-caused social and ecological degradation (2001: 173). That remark is speculative, but suggests that something of the 'counter-cultural' impulse of New Age spirituality

in Britain (as described by Heelas, 1996) might also be a factor, in a limited sense, of the religious environment in New Zealand.

Finally, in analysing correlations between age and religious belief, Webster, like the American commentators, finds that the post-World War Two generation in New Zealand has special characteristics, being much less likely than the previous generation to be religious and a little less likely than today's young adults to be religious:

It is those born in the 1950s and 1960s who seem the least likely to feel God to be important in life. This is the same cohort [...] as was found in the previous reports [...] to be less religious than the norm. Thus the downturn in religiosity that became apparent in the twenty-somethings of the 1970s-1980 period was not so much an age-related change as an historical aberration. (2001: 168)

Webster therefore contends that the rapid drop-off in religiosity of New Zealanders after the Second World War has been significantly influenced by a particular historical (rather than merely demographic) phenomenon - the scepticism of the 'baby boom' generation, itself a result of its own particular articulation with its socio-historical context.

A model for a New Zealand spirituality?

Whereas Webster's picture of religiosity in New Zealand is elaborated from survey data, an Anglican cleric, Canon John Bluck, has imagined, from his own experience and from examining public discourse, what the characteristics of a distinctly 'Kiwi'¹⁶ spirituality might be. *Long, White and Cloudy: In Search of a Kiwi Spirituality*, provides Bluck's own 'non-religious' and rather circular definition of spirituality: 'Spirituality, then, is the art and craft of nurturing this soul that we all have and must care for in order to be whole people' (1998:12). While acknowledging that institutional religion is catering to a shrinking clientele, Bluck asserts that interest in spirituality is nevertheless ubiquitous, he calls it 'the strongest single theme of all media coverage, both in the advertising commercials and the programmes between them' (1998: 19).

The exploration of 'Kiwi spirituality' Bluck sees in the media celebrates the Kiwi 'spirit' in largely secular terms, and his own prescription for a healthy Kiwi spirituality is as much secular as sacred. It would involve, for example, European or Pakeha New Zealanders recognizing and correcting

¹⁶'Kiwi' is a colloquial term used by New Zealanders to refer to themselves. It is derived from the name of a flightless, nocturnal native bird and carries a sense of informality and unpretentiousness which are sometimes considered to be characteristics of a 'New Zealand' temperament.

their own 'shameful treatment' of ethnic and ideological minorities. It would involve skilful environmental stewardship, as well as a dialogue with other faith traditions which, he says, have until now been 'muted' by the voice of 'noisy, demonising Christians' (1998: 42). A healthy spirituality would also engage with the political sphere, challenging right-wing ideas about the world of work: 'The so-called Protestant work ethic has too often been used as a camouflage for excesses of free-market economics, justifying greed and expediency with moralistic calls by the Business Roundtable to work harder and longer' (1998: 84).

But his most frequent call is for a 'language', a 'vocabulary', the ability to 'name and recognize', which would enable New Zealanders to describe the world around them as it is (not through fantasy or nostalgia) and thus to see it as already existing in a sacramental state. For Bluck then, reclaiming a religious sense of the world is simultaneously the development of an attitude, an orientation towards action, and a matter of developing and promulgating certain kinds of descriptions of the world and of human culture. In other words, one of his strongest calls is for a re-orientation of discourse so that both religion and spirituality can be acknowledged as active forces in culture.

Religion in New Zealand: Representation in film and television

When the output of New Zealand's film and television industries up until and around the time of the production of the case-study projects is considered, the impression given is largely one of a society suspicious of, or even hostile to, religion, especially in the form of religions of difference.

Few of the approximately 200 feature films made in New Zealand by the middle of the 1990s (Martin and Edwards, 1997) were constructed around explicitly religious themes. *The God Boy* (Reece, 1976), a telefeature, was the first mainstream production to give religion a significant place in its narrative. It told a story of domestic violence and murder from the point of view of a boy who tries to escape suffering by putting his faith in God, a faith which is shown to be sadly misplaced. Religion is portrayed in the film as powerful and fascinating, but also repressive and punitive (Martin and Edwards, 1997). *The End of the Golden Weather* (Mune, 1992) is another coming-of-age story associating the end of romantic idealism with a negative critique of institutional religion. In *Utu* (Murphy, 1983) missionary religion was denounced as a tool of colonisation by the Maori leader Te Wheke, depicted decapitating a European minister in church. Christianity was also lambasted in *Trespases* (Sharp, 1984) which contrasts a household ruled by a fanatical Christian patriarch with the free-love philosophies of a rural commune.

New Zealand cinema in the 70s and 1980s focused on the exploration of the psyches of white male heroes; their relationships with the land, with male friends or ‘mates’, and, less happily, with women (Campbell, 1988, Shepard, 2000). Gradually, during the 1980s, tensions relating to the nature and authority of masculine identity came under scrutiny: one text in particular illustrates this concern and its explicit and implicit connections with religion. *The Quiet Earth* (1985) depicts the end of the world as caused by an international network of scientists. After the catastrophic ‘Effect’, the New Zealand scientist Zac believes himself to be the last man alive. Temporarily, he is happy to be unfettered by the power of the law. However, complete self-indulgence leads him to despair and he enters a church to confront God. Aiming his shotgun at a statue of Christ he calls out, challenging God to explain his purpose. When there is no answer Zac blasts the statue, declaring that he is now the only God. This existential crisis is the most explicit depiction in audio-visual terms of the secularization dynamic spelled out in New Zealand culture – and it is significant that it is also represented as a crisis of masculinity since at this, his lowest point, Zac is dressed in a woman’s petticoat. However, ultimately, Zac resolves the crisis by committing suicide, possibly reversing the Effect, and in the process restores the authority of both God and Man, by reproducing the sacrifice that instituted the Christian faith.

In the latter half of the 1980s the dilemmas of heroes took a back seat as a more diverse range of subjectivities was represented. Several women made their directorial début, featuring female protagonists struggling for self-determination - there was a strong sense of feminist politics in such films as *Trial Run* (Reid, 1984), *Mr Wrong* (Preston, 1985), *Send A Gorilla*, (Reid, 1988), *Ruby and Rata* (Preston, 1990), *Angel At My Table* (Campion, 1990), and *Crush* (MacLean, 1992) – none of which stepped outside a secular paradigm (*Angel at My Table* was about female creativity). It was a different matter however with the first feature films by Maori directors: in *Ngati* (Barclay, 1987), *Mauri* (Mita, 1988) and *Te Rua* (Barclay, 1991) the bonds between people, their forebears, material culture and the land, were spiritualized, creating a sense of a dignified, distinct, Maori worldview. *Illustrious Energy* (Narbey, 1988), a film by a European New Zealander which favourably opposed the piety and stoicism of nineteenth century Chinese gold-miners to Western racism and materialism was also made at this time.

In the first half of the 1990s, New Zealand cinema had international success with the historical melodrama *The Piano* (Campion, 1994), and *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994), a film about a dysfunctional family yearning for peace, an ideal which is represented by the golden,

distinctly spiritual, image of a traditional Maori gathering place, or *marae*. The last two decades also saw the development of director Peter Jackson through a series of anarchic adolescent-male horror movies (*Bad Taste*, 1986; *Meet the Feebles*, 1990; *Brain Dead* 1992), to the mature, ethically-sensitive work, in partnership with Frances Walsh, of *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), and, at the time of writing the mythically resonant trilogy *Lord of the Rings* (2001-).

However the *oeuvre* of a director from a Catholic background, Vincent Ward, is less easy to subsume within a narrative of New Zealand film as being predominantly secular in orientation. His features *Vigil* (1984) and *The Navigator* (1988) both make explicit reference to God and the church in a tense relationship of fascination and anger. In *Vigil* God is a cruel tyrant whom the young female protagonist curses, although her own eclectic religious rituals keep her sane. The allegorical *Navigator* is set in a medieval village at the time of the plague; a young boy leads several men on a journey through the earth to present-day New Zealand in an attempt to curtail the disaster. He successfully climbs a church spire but his faith in the church is misplaced and he too dies as a result of the plague. Ward's work would obviously have borne analysis within a religious framework, but the limited amount of film criticism done at that time was carried out largely from a leftist stance (see for instance, Campbell, 1989), and the religious references in the films were downplayed. The first of Ward's two Hollywood-made features, *Map of the Human Heart* (1992) chronicles the slow spiritual death of a Native Canadian alienated from his own culture, while *What Dreams May Come* (1999) begins with death, following a man's journey through Heaven and Hell.

It is a generalization, but a reasonable one then, to say that until the late 1990s whereas Maori blends of Christianity and indigenous religiosity usually received sympathetic representation in film, the Christian beliefs and practices of European New Zealanders were typically portrayed as inadequate, failing supports for neurotic personalities (Mita, 1992; Neill and Rymer 1995). Involvement with institutional religion was represented as something to leave behind if one wanted to grow up. In other words, filmic representation suggested there was a lack of fit between the situation of European New Zealanders and the worldview offered to them by traditional Christianity. This sense of lack of fit (without specific reference to religion) is well conveyed in Neill and Rymer's (1995) history of New Zealand cinema appropriately entitled *Cinema of Unease*.

While religion has been a matter of minor interest to New Zealand's film industry, television has been distinguished by a virtual absence of so-called 'religious' programming for a decade. In the mid' 1980s there were three series screening under the aegis of the Religious Programmes division of Television New Zealand. I had myself worked as a director for *Credo* (TVNZ, 1984-1986), a non-fiction series describing the belief systems of various groups of New Zealanders. *The Herd* (TVNZ, 1985-1989) was a programme aimed at a young adult audience, while *Praise Be* (TVNZ, 1981 -) was a programme of hymn-singing and short homilies. However in 1989 the broadcasting system was deregulated, commercials began screening on Sundays and there was pressure to achieve higher ratings in Sunday slots. Support for religious programmes was gradually withdrawn (Nicholls, 1999) and by the early 1990s *Praise Be* was the only regular programme remaining. The last 5 years however have seen the advent of televised church services from both local and American evangelistic churches: so-called 'televangelist' programmes which screen in early-morning slots.¹⁷ These programmes are funded by donation rather than advertising or taxation revenue.

Political context of production of *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen*

The pair of texts specifically discussed in this thesis were developed over a production period of two to three years each within an overall time-range stretching from 1996 to 2001. This was the tail-end of a 15 year epoch during which New Zealand politics was distinguished by successive governments' implementation of measures based on neo-liberal or 'New Right' economic theory. The divisive social effects of the consequent labour-market rationalization are well-documented (Kelsey, 1997; Campbell 1998; Jesson, 1999), as the comparative social equality on which New Zealand had long prided itself was eroded as economic wealth became concentrated in fewer hands. Rising unemployment rates, competition from low-wage economies (*The New Zealand Herald*, Oct. 24 1999) and the 1991 benefit rate cuts led to a situation where, by 1993, it was argued that one in six New Zealanders was living below the poverty line (Kelsey, 1997; see also Campbell, 1998).

However there was also a more abstract effect of the adoption of free-market economic policies - the tendency for a diverse range of discourses relating to cultural practices to be subsumed under discourses of 'efficiency', 'growth', 'value for money' and individual 'choice' - so that it became difficult to operate in the public sphere without employing the vocabulary of neo-liberalism. The

¹⁷ For instance Pastor Brian Tamaki's show at 7am on Saturday and the American *Crystal Cathedral* programme on Sundays at 8am.

operations of the marketplace were, Jesson (1999) notes, deemed always to be 'rational'. Sandra Coney was representative of many newspaper columnists of the period when she opined in the *Sunday Star-Times* on September 6, 1998:

The impact on work, income and security is one thing, but economic restructuring has degraded our whole culture. The language and tools of the economist pervade every aspect of life [...] We have become a cash register society where only things that are able to be counted and costed matter. The market reduces the vast wealth and complexity of human relationships and experience to an economic exchange. (C.7)

By the middle of the 1990s however, gaps had developed between government policy and public opinion (Webster and Perry, 1992; Gendall et al. 1999), and previously underutilized discursive formations were scrutinized for their potential to offer alternative public goals and alternative public languages. These included discourses of art and culture (James, 1999; Ralston, 2000, 2001), liberal discourses of nationalism (Jesson, 1999), of particular relevance to this work, discourses of 'values', spirituality (Cooper, 1988, cited in Kelsey, 1999), and, to a lesser extent, of religion. These were areas of life least identified with economic rationalism, and which had on occasion, been in open conflict with it.¹⁸

At first the increasing circulation of these discourses was noticeable only in a fragmentary way in public journalism - mentions in articles, letters to the editor, images developed by visual designers, and, I would contend, in the matrix of ideas that feed into the development of feature films - but by the late 1990s, in the run-up to the general election, these issues were a matter of open debate.

The linkage between these sets of concepts: spirituality, nationhood, and the arts and culture may seem tenuous, but occasionally they were made explicit. One such instance occurs in *Left Turn* (Boston, (ed.) 2000) an examination of issues around the Labour victory in 1999. In sections entitled *The 'spiritual' dimension and a disgruntled electorate*, and *The 'spiritual' dimension and nationhood*, political commentator, Colin James noted that governments in both Australia and New Zealand had been plagued by negative perceptions of their respective countries as being 'on the wrong track' and 'becoming a worse place to live'. The Howard government had considered combating this threat to its legitimacy by focusing on the 'spiritual', and so did Labour strategists in 1998/1999. James comments:

¹⁸ In September 1998 for example, the Anglican church organized a nationwide protest march or 'Hikoi of Hope', during which stories of poverty and deprivation were collected along the way and presented to the government at the Hikoi's destination in Wellington.

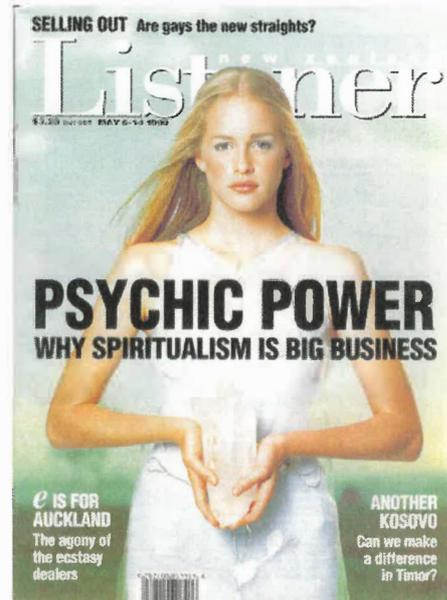
The ingredients of such a yearning are notoriously difficult to identify accurately and even more difficult to harness for electoral purposes, but Helen Clark gave it a try. By stating in May 1999 that she would take the arts and culture portfolio, she gave herself scope to talk about “national identity” and “nationhood”. From mid October 1999, she did include such an aspirational element in her speeches. (2000: 71)

In order to underline the importance of the arts the Leader of the Opposition, later Prime Minister, Helen Clark, took on responsibility for the Ministry of Arts and Culture herself. One of her early actions after taking office was to grant additional funding of 80 million dollars to the arts’ sector and another was to endorse the beginnings of an arts development programme (expressively) entitled ‘Heart of the Nation’.

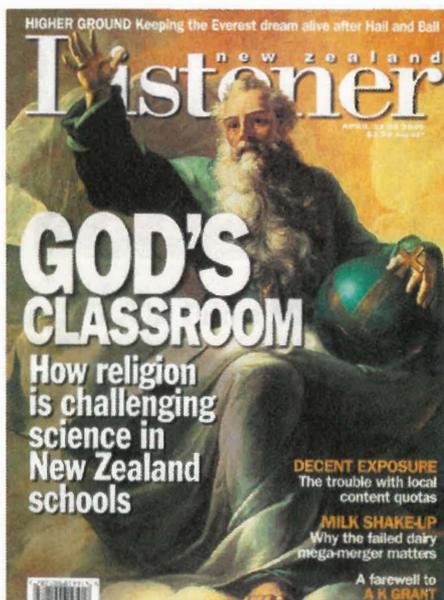
Emergent or diffuse concepts are often most clearly expressed in media images, the acts of creative synthesis undertaken by graphic designers trying to connect with the public mood. Throughout the second half of the 1990s a number of images with religious and spiritual associations appeared on the covers of various local magazines – in particular a monthly magazine aimed at a female audience – *Grace*, and the New Zealand *Listener* itself. In figure 2 a range of gendered images of religion and spirituality is provided. It can be seen that when religion is featured, the illustration is a traditional Christian image of an aspect of the male deity, but when spirituality is featured the imagery is typically contemporary, eclectic, young, and female. That the binary differentiation between religion and spirituality described by Roof and Wuthnow on page 34 of this chapter is also active in the New Zealand context is suggested by these images, although there is an additional gender inflection that is not a feature of their analysis, but may be particularly strong in New Zealand. An exception is an image of the Prime Minister, (figure 3) in *Metro* magazine in March 2001, which carries connotations of both representational trends by depicting Ms Clark as ‘Saint Helen of the Arts’ - haloed, raising one hand in benediction and holding a sacred book entitled ‘Heart of the Nation’. The computer-generated image accompanies an article reviewing the *New Zealand Herald’s* ‘Toward Shared Values’ campaign (a campaign which itself is relevant to this topic) and makes explicit the linkage between arts, the nation and spirituality. The visual reference is perhaps too conventionally religious to fit the picture of a ‘post-Christian’ New Zealand developed throughout this chapter, but is nevertheless clearly derived from similar conceptual territory.



Listener, Dec 25-31, 1999



Listener, May 8-14, 1999



Listener, April 22-28, 2000



Grace, January 2000

Figure 2: Gendered images of religion and spirituality in New Zealand print media

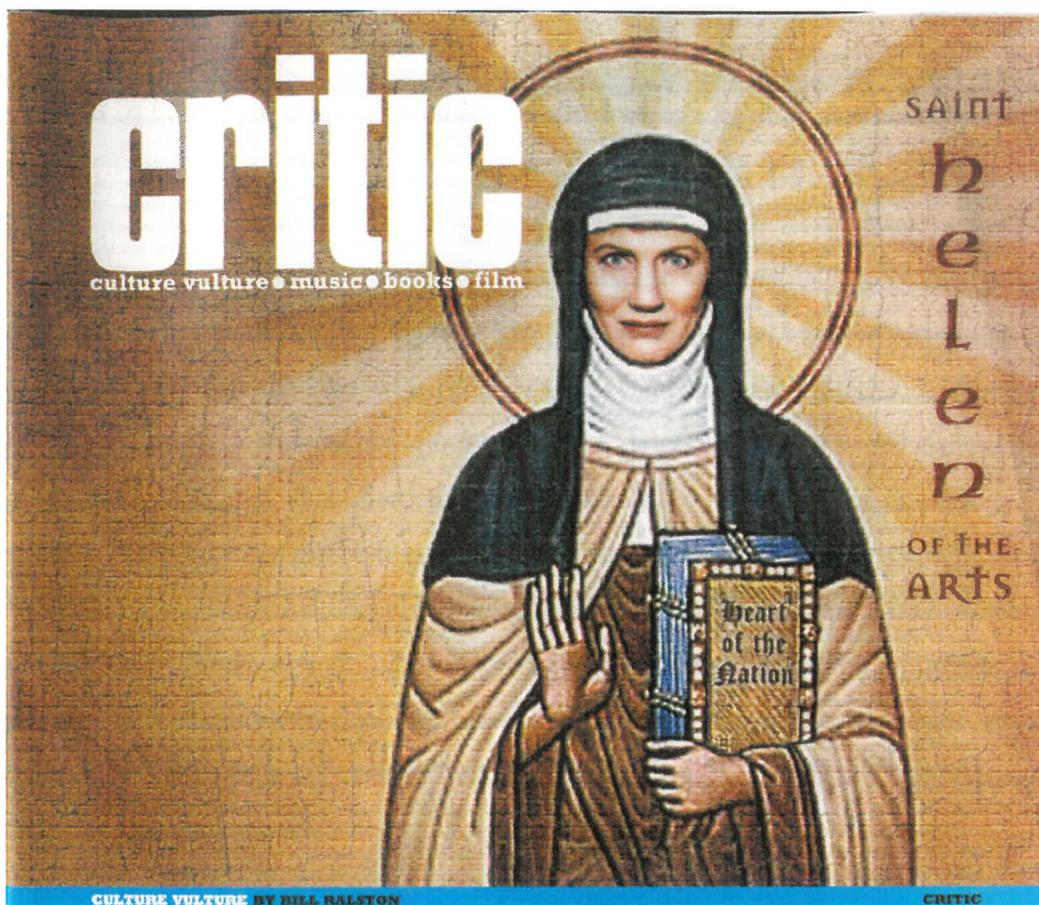


Figure 3: The Prime Minister as 'Saint Helen of the Arts' – *Metro*, March 21, 2002: 99

Not many of the left-wing theorists who challenged the free-market model during the fifteen years of its ascendancy from 1984 to 1999 were as explicit in their use of concepts of spirituality as these examples, and indeed I am not claiming that these commentators were actively religious or spiritual themselves, at least not to my knowledge. Rather it is being suggested that some concepts of religiosity, particularly those around expressive forms of 'spirituality', with their endorsement of non-material values, represented both a position which could be occupied and a discourse which could be invoked, if one wished to oppose the dominant political and economic values of that time.

It is, I contend, in such an environment, in which expressivist 'spiritual' values could be positioned as an alternative to pragmatic, materialist politics, (albeit often in an intuitive rather than a fully conscious manner) that the two case-study projects went into pre-production. Whether this selection has to be a deliberate, conscious process in order to be valid is not the issue, since discourse theory assumes that discursive repertoires of various sorts are constantly, semi-consciously, accessed by us all, both in everyday communication and in the prolonged processes of media production (see for instance, Fairclough, 1992, 1995; Titscher et al. 2000). While many discursive choices thereby reproduce conservative constructions of knowledge and power, others - especially when media producers are striving to be novel and fresh in the service of 'entertainment' - may draw on marginalized or emerging social knowledge as the material from which to build imaginary worlds.¹⁹

Conclusion

In the first two thirds of this chapter various transformations of religiosity outlined in literature from America and Britain were discussed. In the last third the local context was surveyed and a set of themes discerned in the public discussion of religion and spirituality in the second half of the 1990s. Comparing the two sets of information, the emphases on freedom and on therapy were not as marked as they were in America for instance, nor was the fundamentalist response to modernity as visible as in the United States. Neither, in the New Zealand academic literature, was there as strong a focus on the lineaments of the New Age movement as is in Britain, although there is

¹⁹ A fuller discussion of this trend, with the range of examples extended into the early years of the twenty-first century, can be found in Hardy (forthcoming).

popular and anecdotal evidence that manifestations of both utilitarian and expressive spirituality abound in New Zealand.

I have suggested that there was a reticence to talk about spirituality in the public sphere (currently diminishing) unless that spirituality was either perceived as secular or attributed to Maori. The idea of a Kiwi 'spirit' - a loosely-defined national essentialism - was however a widely used and unthreatening concept. This concept embraced several orders of discourse adjacent to those of spirituality and religion - nationhood, sport and the arts - and it was in terms of those vocabularies that many Kiwis felt comfortable expressing what 'matters to them most'. The continuing presence of mainstream religions was not forgotten but theoretical models of civic religion and the implicit spirituality of popular culture appeared particularly applicable in the New Zealand situation.

When spirituality was discussed explicitly, as was in the writings of women disillusioned with a supposedly patriarchal church system, as in the work of a small group of academics, as in the liberal journalism of the *Listener*, and the Lifestyle sections of the weekend newspapers, as it was in the writing of Canon John Bluck - a loose set of shared concerns (or discursive constructions) can be discerned. Together they gave the discussion of spirituality in New Zealand a distinctive profile. Not all these aspects of spirituality, outlined below, were represented in the beliefs or practices of any one person, but these were the conceptions of 'New Zealand' spirituality which occurred most often during my searches of the available literature.

Spirituality, in these conceptions, was connected to a respect for the land, it was thought obliged to work towards equality for all peoples in New Zealand, and in particular to address the unresolved issues of partnership with Maori. It should acknowledge the spiritual understandings of women, providing a form of belief and practice with which the descendents of the feminist movement can be comfortable. It should strike a balance between the mystical and the demands of the everyday world - this balance, in secular forms of spirituality, is often found in concepts of nationhood and in the practice of the arts. There was also evidence that, for some people, spirituality, whether practiced or just thought about, constituted a counter-cultural position to what had been the dominant free-market paradigm. At the same time aspects of religion and spirituality were commodified and available for sale so that in New Zealand, as elsewhere, forms of religiosity could be described as: agents in 'a spiritual marketplace' (Roof, 2001). Thus far, it seemed likely, as Woodhead and Heelas suggest, that the complex, interlocking processes of 'secularization,

detraditionalization, universalization and sacralization' (2000: 5), were all active in the New Zealand environment, although in slightly different manifestations and with different emphases due to the particular mix of value-cultures constituting New Zealand society.

CHAPTER FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW - RELIGION AND FILM AND MEDIA, RELIGION AND CULTURE.

Introduction

In the previous chapter broad questions of definition in relation to concepts of religion and spirituality were discussed. The media typically played a minor part only in those explanations since, for most sociologists of religion, the media exist at the margins of the particular intellectual template within which they work (Hoover and Lundby, 1997: 4). In this chapter by contrast, the media will be at the centre of discussion, or rather at the centres of two distinct discussions, since there are separate bodies of literature dealing on the one hand with conjunctions between the specific medium of film, and religion/spirituality, and on the other with more general studies of the media and of religion perceived as an aspect of culture. The first set of literature conceptualizes film as having a 'special' connection with religion or spirituality by virtue of its particular modes of representation. The second potentially deals with all media - newspapers, magazines, radio, film, television, and the increasingly convergent media of computers and telephony (Deacon, et al.1999a) - and may see religion as simply another force of social organization analogous to that of politics or economics.

Since my own interest is specifically in the relationship between religiosity and the audio-visual media I will forgo discussion of other media on this occasion. This chapter also evaluates two of the key methodologies employed in these separate fields - textual analysis and audience research - both of which investigate particular moments in the communication process, and makes the case, first, that neither method is sufficient in itself, and secondly, that it is valuable also to investigate the meanings encoded into film and television texts at the time of their production.

The two bodies of literature: religion and film, and secondly, media, culture and religion, are produced by different groups of scholars. White (1997a, 1997b) is, to my knowledge, the only author published in both fields. There are studies of religion and television (Goethals, 1981, 1990; Abelman and Hoover, 1990) or religion and film (Martin, 1991; Ferlita and May, 1976; May and Bird, 1982; May 1997; Marsh and Ortiz, 1997), but there is a dearth of works looking at the combined field.

Generally speaking, the religion and film area is an offshoot of a structuralist, auteurist (Caughie, 1998) model of cinema criticism which sees films as amenable to the analytical, evaluative techniques conventionally applied to high-culture products such as painting, drama, poetry and the novel (Bonnycastle, 1997). The role of the single critic is central to this model; he or she should ideally be well-educated, possessing developed aesthetic and moral senses which endow his or her speculations about the meaning and value of a particular text with an authority wider than the merely personal (Morris, 1988). Since many writers in the religion and film field are either clergy or committed Christians, this approach, which can be related to the practice of Christian hermeneutics (Fraser, 1998), or of spiritual discernment (Gallagher, 1997), is familiar and congenial: under this model all aspects of creation are seen to point to the existence of God.

In the media, religion and culture field the analytic stance taken is of a broadly scientific nature in that communication phenomena - institutions, practices and products - are observed, quantified and justified (Deacon et al. 1999a). Connections with other areas of culture are explored and tentative conclusions offered about the influence or effects of texts (Curran, 2002). This type of analysis, developed from the convergence of cultural and communication studies, emphasizes the status of media as carriers of messages, as well as examining the social uses of media. It is more empirically-based than the work in religion and film and the shaping power of personal taste is less evident. It is noteworthy also that, as a matter of convention, the terms 'religion', 'religious' and 'religiosity' tend to be used in the literature from the media, religion and culture domain, in preference to the terms 'spirituality' and 'spiritual'.

Religion and film literature

The literature dealing specifically with film, religion, and spirituality, while growing apace, is still relatively small in quantity. It is only in the last few years that bibliographic essays (May 1996; Nolan 1998) have been published outlining the scope of the field. They identify the first specific works on religion and film as having been published in 1959 by Lynch and 1969 by Butler respectively. However in naming these authors as the inaugurators of the field May and Nolan overlook the fact that reflection on the religious possibilities of film was already a feature of the writing of European critics such as Bazin (1997) and Kracauer (1960).

Formalist arguments for film as a 'spiritual' medium

Bazin and Kracauer both advanced foundational arguments about the possibilities of film as a medium for activating a spiritual, mystical experience of the world. While acknowledging

criticisms that cinema ‘clings to the surface of things’ (1960: x) Kracauer contended that the technical apparatus of cinema provides an enhanced form of perception capable of reviving an appreciation of the spiritual dimension of existence, by rendering visible what could not previously be seen:

We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera ... The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life. (1960: 300)

Bazin, a Catholic critic who co-founded the influential film journal *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, has left a three-fold legacy to the religion and film field, including: a particular attitude to cinema, an emphasis on directorial personality, and the advocacy of a certain kind of style. Although less adamant that the cinematic is *prima facie* spiritual in its means of expression, Bazin, like Kracauer, is interested in its ability to achieve ‘ontological realism’ by reproducing the physical world, thereby offering the viewer ‘a re-presentation of the world [bearing] witness to the miracle of creation’ (Bazin, 1997: xii). For Bazin this kind of realism has to be consciously achieved by a film-maker choosing *not* to employ all the shaping tricks at his/her disposal. Bazin therefore approves of long-takes, deep-focus and minimal editing, all of which minimize the disruption to the image, sustaining the illusion of looking in on a real world. He also drew an important distinction between films which tried to represent religious devotion and those which actually elicited it:

Everything that is exterior, ornamental, liturgical, sacramental, hagiographic and miraculous in the everyday observance, doctrine and practice of Catholicism does indeed show specific affinities with the cinema considered as a formidable iconography, but those affinities, which have made for the success of countless films are also the source of the religious insignificance of most of them. Almost everything that is good in this domain was created not by the exploitation of these patent affinities, but rather by working against them. (1997: 65)

By asserting that style is the visible result of an inner orientation to life, by elaborating critical techniques for discussing style, and by locating responsibility for a film’s style largely with the director, Bazin was instrumental in establishing the influential form of film criticism known as ‘auteur’ (or ‘author’) criticism (Caughie, 1988; Schatz, 1988; Gripsrud, 1995; Eichenberger, 1997; Bordwell and Carroll, 1997). Proponents of auteur theory believe that, from observing patterns in the technical, artistic and thematic devices used in a film, inferences can be made about the beliefs

and intentions of the director of the film. The audience, in its turn, is assumed to be trying to 're-experience as closely as possible what the author has experienced [...] and the text is the point at which the audience and author meet' (White (1997:197). As Cardullo notes, Bazin combined these notions of directorial influence and spiritual cinematic realism into a prescription for religious or spiritually aware film-making:

The best director then - Welles, Rossellini, Renoir and Murnau rank high for Bazin - is the one who mediates least, the one who exercises selectivity just sufficiently to put us in much the same relation of regard and choice toward the narrative as we are toward reality in life: a director who thus imitates, within his scale, the divine disposition toward man. (Cardullo, 1997: xv)

This is an uncomplicated interpretive model which sits well with the privileged position given to the single critical interpreter. It has been adopted by the majority of authors in the religion and film field, who continue to employ it even in the face of post-structuralist rethinkings of agency which have made it outdated. Unfortunately, as Nolan observes, many religious film-analysts, especially in America, are still, 'preoccupied with the 'vision of the director' (1998: 2).

The designation of film as 'spiritual' or 'religious' does not however depend on adopting a theory of authorship. Martin, in *Images and the Imageless*, proposes that images form a crucial constituent of both ordinary human thought and religious consciousness, since the image, he contends 'is the medium used in most human thought' (1991:15). He contends that religion is largely about humans orienting themselves in relation to worlds both physical and imagined, and that this process is carried out through spatial metaphors (for example, Heaven above, worldly existence in the middle, Hell below - or the vertical ranking of God, human, beast) (1991: 60-65), which are often exteriorized in artistic images. Morgan (1998) also argues for the validity of looking (as opposed to hearing or reading) as a religious act, a 'powerful practice of belief'. He focuses on images 'as a unique category of material object, a category characterized by the special ability to mediate imaginary, linguistic, intellectual and material domains' (1998: 8). Martin, Morgan and indeed most writers on this topic, address the paradox that, 'in theological variants of religion you are talking about something which precisely cannot be seen but is definitely believed to exist' (Morgan, 1998: 4), and that inevitably, films about the divine have the same problem. The resolution of this paradox is to concentrate not so much on the object of vision as on the process, so that one trains one's perception and hopes to 'see'. Achieving that sort of spiritual vision may result in an unconditioned experience of existence and is therefore mystical in nature

(Schrader, 1972), or, from a theological viewpoint, is ‘given’ to the seeker as a gift from beyond the material world.

A spatial metaphor, this time of ‘depth’, is also crucial to Bird’s (1982) argument about the spiritual potential of cinema. Bird draws on Eliade’s concept of ‘hierophany’, which designates ‘the *act of manifestation* of the sacred’. He speculates that insofar as any aspect of material reality has the potential to manifest the sacred in an act of hierophany, and insofar as the cinema is both an aspect of material reality and can represent material reality, it too may become a vehicle for the manifestation of sacredness. It is not that Bird claims cinema actually provides a direct presentation of that (divine presence) which is by its nature invisible, as that it makes possible a ‘sensuous realism’ or a ‘belief-ful realism’ in which ‘reality is no longer self-sufficient, but is rather experienced as opening itself to ground or depth. It is “transparent” as we feel ourselves to be gripped by ultimate power, an experience of simultaneous crisis and grace’ (1982: 6).

Narrative, myth and religion

The reason moments of potentially ‘hierophanous’ contemplation are rare in film is that they operate in tension with another of its elements - the use of narrative structures specifically shaped to maximize dramatic impact (Bordwell and Thompson, 1985). Narratives are stories about the world and human, or sometimes godly, behaviour (Kozloff, 1992) They involve processes of selection and shaping in which, from an underlying data-set, some pieces of information are omitted while others are emphasized. The resulting structure typically progresses through a five-stage process including 1) the establishing of a situation, 2) a disruption, 3) a series of actions and reactions, leading to 4) a climatic conflict, and 5) a resolution of the problems caused by the disruption (Berger, 1997).

In cinema, building a classic or ‘mainstream’ narrative structure involves subsuming individual moments to the direction, rhythm and pace of the overall work, with little time for scenes which exist merely to give the audience an opportunity to contemplate the ‘depth in nature’ for instance – in other words, a narrative is usually a model of purposeful construction. At the same time, since narratives ‘resolve disruptions’ through the reconciliation of elements initially set up in opposition, they are often also analysed as ‘mythical’ in nature, in the manner described in chapter 1. For instance, a feature many mainstream films and religious narratives share is the proposition that ‘good’, or the concern of a benign deity, will prevail (Scott, 1994). Through mythological narrative structures we can therefore achieve, vicariously, the happy endings we so desire: ‘our

fear of death leads us to prefer happy endings so we are assured in myth, if not in reality of our immortality' (Scott, 1994:5). The story of Christ's death and resurrection is a paradigmatic mythological narrative, a specific variation of the universal 'hero' myth identified by Frazer, (1922) and others, in which a hero suffers on behalf of his or her community. When the figure of Christ is referenced, this particular narrative may be designated as a 'sacramental' or 'Passion' patterning, (Fraser, 1998) where the story of Christ's victory over death is also a representation of our hope that the chaotic flow of suffering and joy on earth has some point to it after all. In this sense mythological or mainstream narrative form is a familiar, pleasing form for many Christians, and a strong correspondence can be posited between the use of narrative and a religious worldview. For instance it has been argued that, since narratives are a means of simultaneously reconciling ourselves to the human condition and trying to reach beyond it, all films and television programmes are religious to the degree that they are 'narrative' (Greeley, 1988; Schultze 1990).

Parables and transcendence

However, it has also been argued that mythological narrative form is a kind of moral escapism, with the term 'myth' then used pejoratively to indicate a reductive pattern of conflict and resolution which, rather than challenging worldly or complacent views, ultimately serves to reinforce them (Crossan, 1988; Peck, 1993). Scholars interested in mystical spirituality consider that 'genuinely' religious narratives in particular often work 'in the limit areas of human consciousness' that is in the areas where we can no longer be confident in what we know or understand (White, 1997). When viewers' ability to structure chunks of information into resolved narratives becomes tenuous, a different kind of structural presentation may be needed. This is what Crossan (1988), White (1997a, 1997b), and Scott (1994) call 'parable', or 'paradox' a form of story-telling which, they argue, is more effectively religious than mainstream narrative structure because it cannot find satisfaction within human behaviour alone. According to White, parable works 'non-mythically' to expose the genuine and irresolvable conflicts in our world, implying the existence of a larger explanatory framework, which some choose to imagine as indication of the operations of God:

This is the area where cultural myth is confronted with cultural paradox and parable, where we experience the inability of the myth to comprehend and express the transcendent. Paradox affirms that all of the human cultural aspirations to find ultimate meaning are quite moral and justifiable, but denies that meaning will be found within the limits of the cultural construction, especially in the rational construction of myth (1997a: 210).

Crossan's description of parable as an extreme form of narrative, suggests that, in exploring what kinds of interpretation a film is inviting, one should take into account the narrative form it employs. If its narrative trajectory is restorative and 'mythological' it may be relevant to the kind of religion which provides a comfortable feeling of accommodation to human society. If the form is instead non-mythical in the nature of parable, it might point towards another form of experience - what Engnell (1995) calls 'the encounter with otherness' or the mystical experience of living with paradox.

Schrader and transcendental style

All of the elements discussed so far are also evaluated in the most fully developed model of a religious, spiritual, or 'transcendental' cinema - that of the American scholar and film-maker Paul Schrader, author of *Transcendental Style in Film* (1972).

Schrader states that the term 'transcendental' does not refer to the 'Holy or Ideal itself' (the Transcendent) since that cannot be grasped or represented, rather it refers to human acts or artifacts which express something of the Transcendent, or are 'contemporary artistic hierophanies' (1972: 9). Those actions or artifacts are further distinguished from works which 'relate the human experience of transcendence' or are, in other words, stories about people seeking, 'expressing or illustrating holy feelings' (1972: 7) - these stories he considers to be mythological in nature. Rather, it is transcendental work (with a small 't') in which Schrader is interested: he contends that a particular form of film-making can reliably 'bring man as close to the ineffable, invisible and unknowable as words, images and ideas can take him' (1972: 8). Schrader derives his model of this form of filmmaking from examining the work of directors from different religious cultures: the Buddhist, Yasujiro Ozu, the Catholic, Robert Bresson and the Lutheran, Carl Dreyer.

Despite apparently endorsing an auteurist approach, Schrader departs from Bazin in actually playing down the role of the director. Transcendental style is not a matter of 'personal vision', indeed it must be extracted from 'the individual artists who employ it, [and] from the cultures which influence those artists' (1972: 4), since its defining characteristic is that it is not expressive of normal, cultural associations and meanings. Instead, it frustrates them, bringing viewers up against the limits of their intellectual understandings, while simultaneously eliciting strong emotional reactions. The key elements of this 'transcendental' style are therefore a combination of a parable-like narrative structure with an evolving relationship between what Schrader, employing terms coined by Maritain, calls 'abundant' and 'sparse' means (1972: 154).

‘Abundant means’ relate to materiality, immersing one’s self in materiality and manipulating it in order to create viewing pleasure. In other words, most cinema enhances an already rich material world by eliminating dullness and increasing eventfulness, energy and beauty. Sparse means by contrast: ‘are not oriented toward tangible success but toward the elevation of the spirit ... they are the proper means of the spirit’ (1972: 154). Abundant means in cinema are ‘sensual, emotional, humanistic, individualistic ... they encourage empathy’. Sparse means are ‘cold, formalistic hieratic. They are encouraged by abstraction, stylized portraiture, two dimensionality, rigidity; they encourage respect and appreciation’ (1972:155).

In films employing transcendental style, Schrader argues, abundant means draw the viewer in, but a gradual adoption of sparse means and ‘a stripping away’ of abundant means provokes a change of consciousness. Inexorably, the narrative moves not towards resolution but towards ‘stasis’, in which the protagonist makes a choice or takes an action that is in fact, an attempt to resolve what cannot be resolved through earthly logic. Consequently, everything stops: ‘the emotional [freezes] into expression, the disparity into *stasis* (1972: 155, original emphasis) an event which, Schrader claims, is an expression of *transcendence*, a mental construct within which such conflicts and oppositions can be reconciled and accepted as part of a greater reality (1972: 39-53). When the image stops then, ‘the viewer keeps going, moving deeper and deeper [...] *into* the image. This is the “miracle” of sacred art’ (1972: 161).

Schrader’s theory of transcendental style, now thirty years old has remained both influential and controversial, especially when measured against his subsequent work as a creator (alone and in collaboration with Scorsese) of such controversial films as *Taxi Driver*, (1977), *American Gigolo*, (1980), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). For Fraser (1998), Schrader largely succeeds in adapting transcendental style to his own choice of material since the harsh worlds his films depict wrest the spectator from comfortable belief in the mundane and commonplace: ‘the spectator thus has his worldview challenged [...] and replaced by one more in line with the spiritual truths that govern existence’ (1998: 121). However, others have criticised Schrader’s theory, rather than his films, for privileging the concept of ‘sparse means’, denouncing it as an excessively rarefied, élitist form of spirituality (Engnell, 1995; Lindvall, et al. 1996). Engnell re-interprets both Schrader and Kracauer through the lens of Rudolf Otto’s concept of Otherness, wondering what it would be for films to represent ‘plenum or cosmological spirituality where Otherness is submerged in connectedness or unity’ (1995: 248). He tests this alternative to Schraderian theory by analysing

Places in the Heart, (Benton, 1984) and *Tender Mercies* (Beresford, 1982), two American films set in rural communities, which continue *beyond* a point of stasis, the first by staging a fantastical reunion of the living and the dead, the second by ending with a moment of hope which is visually restrained but lavish, emotional and hopeful in terms of its sound-track. To Engnell these structures indicate not a distant, mystical Schraderian Other, who leaves the human being in a state of lonely amazement, but an 'assisting' Other who is aware of human beings and actively present in their lives. Lindvall et al. (1996) also examine what it would be for the cinema to represent, in an abundant manner, spiritualities such as African-American religiosity, which are themselves embedded in an abundant social context and which affirm rather than escape the richness of the world. They find the value of religion not in mysticism but in the social solidarity and bodily pleasure of worship. 'Herein' write Lindvall et al. 'films of African American Christian faith can and have captured what we call a transcendence through means of abundance' (1996: 218).

The idea that a 'transcultural' form of filmmaking could express something of the Transcendent to all peoples is an appealing one. However by discussing representations of other cultures, which prize other forms of spirituality, Schrader's critics remind us that every response is, in the final analysis, up to the spectator, or the viewer; it is his or her subjectivity which has to be 'hailed', moved, or amazed. There may indeed be forms of cinematic representation which make such reactions more likely: I suspect Schrader has identified such a form for mystically-inclined sensibilities in Western culture. Nevertheless, there are varieties of religion which are not mystical, just as there are other ways of discussing values which do not recognise themselves as religious or spiritual (Wilson, 1982; Jameson, 1991). In a world where political, legal and economic explanations carry as much if not more authority than religion (Wilson, 1982), formalist arguments that some aspects of film-making may be 'inherently' spiritual, whether in terms of representation or structure, will likely pass most people by. It may be that the abundant and obvious representations of 'religiosity' which both Schrader and Bazin disparaged are actually what is necessary for many contemporary audiences to be aware that religious concepts are being evoked.

Content-based theories of religion and film

In practice formalist claims about the 'religiosity' of films are relatively rare: most analyses in the religion and film field concentrate on aspects of film-content in terms of themes, characterizations and specific representations of religious symbols and personages.

Often, critics writing about film operate from a committed position within a Christian framework (see May and Bird, 1982; Nolan, 1998; Fraser, 1998). Most identify themselves as Christian, with a significant proportion aligned with the Catholic Church and its communications organisations.²⁰ Movie aficionados themselves, these scholars and theologians are aware that Christianity today sometimes has trouble attracting the kind of enthusiastic following successful movies can command. Scholars such as Wall (1971), Ferlita and May (1976), May and Bird (1982) May, (1997) and Jewett (1993) have therefore tried to isolate the ways in which mainstream narrative structures, allied with specific types of content, have the potential to communicate the workings of divine order to largely secularized contemporary audiences. The missiological purpose of their endeavours is therefore to use the exegesis of film to demonstrate the continued relevance of the Christian analysis of existence, thus contributing perhaps to ‘revitalizing’ the Church.

A small group of scholars do not fit this model however in that they take up a stance of areligious objectivity. Martin and Ostwald for instance situate themselves as religious studies scholars ‘committed to the pursuit of knowledge, not the saving of souls’ (1995: 5). Miles (1996) seems to be an agnostic, and the work of Heath (1998) cannot be sheeted home to any religious tradition, nor can that of Frow (1998) who wants to take religion seriously but not to compromise the ‘hard-won rationality’ of twentieth-century scholarship.

Although there has been work done on the intersection of religion and film for at least half a century, there has recently been a sense of excitement about the topic being rediscovered (Nolan, 1998) or that work on it is ‘groundbreaking’ (Martin and Ostwald, 1995). The form which most of books and articles in the area take therefore is that of listing, differentiating, agglomerating, and generally attempting to create a field of study by categorizing different forms of content and styles of representation.

Explicit and implicit religiosity in film

The most basic distinction in the religion and film field is that between films which are *explicitly*, or *implicitly*, religious or spiritual. The prospect that a film might be of no religious significance at all is functionally redundant within the field, as Martin and Ostwald (1995) acknowledge, since scholars tend not to write about films they consider irrelevant to religion. Other authors avoid the

²⁰ Along with the OCIC, the Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Communication (CICS) at the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture (CSCC), and Italy’s National Council on Research sponsored a meeting on religion and film at the Villa Caveletti near Rome in May 1993, which eventually resulted in May (1997) *New Image of Religious Film*.

problem either by following Wall's dictum that designating something as 'religious' is a matter of subtle differences on a 'continuum of perception' (1971), or by arguing, as noted above, that all films are relevant to 'religious' understanding insofar as they are narratives assigning meaning to the experience of existence (Greeley, 1988).

At one end of the scale a film which would be considered unequivocally, 'explicitly' religious is one containing material from an acknowledged religious tradition, which has been made by filmmakers who are themselves adherents of that religious tradition, for instance, May asserts, 'biography is crucial in the discernment of religious or Catholic films' (1997: 24-25). A few films made in this manner certainly come to mind. The Catholic production company Paulist Pictures has made *Romero* (Duigan, 1989), about a bishop ensnared in conflict in El Salvador, and *Entertaining Angels* (Rhodes, 1996), about a laywoman helping the poor of New York. *The Omega Code* (Macarelli, 1999), a co-production between Christian broadcaster the Trinity Broadcasting Network and Generation Entertainment, briefly made it into the box office Top 10 in the United States in 1999 (Wise, 1999). However such firm links between authorial affiliation and product are difficult to obtain. For instance, Hasenberg (1997) claims that several directors of films which appear to be explicitly religious do not identify themselves with any particular religious belief. For example, Cavalier (*Thérèse*, 1986), Arcand (*Jésus of Montréal*, 1989) and Kieslowski (*Dekalog*, 1987), were all raised as Catholics but left the Church before becoming filmmakers. Conversely, Malone notes, it is difficult to assess when a particular director is drawing on faith rather than (merely) representing aspects of culture, 'since the director may be drawing on faith experience while asserting the portrait is cultural' (Malone, 1997:60). Then again, a subject acknowledged as producing an explicitly religious film in the hands of one director may be diminished in religious content by another. For example, both Dreyer (1928) and Bresson (*Proces de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1962) have produced accounts of the martyrdom of Joan of Arc which are counted among the classics of religious film, but Jean-Luc Besson's 1999 version was reviewed as a 'camp' historical epic by at least two reviewers (Hayward, 2000; Lamb, 2000), and evaluated as successful by few.

With relevant biographical connections rarely systematically elucidated, a critic who uses a hermeneutic method is usually left with the surface of the film - the text as it is screened or transmitted - as the means by which to judge whether a film is explicitly religious. May's alternative categorization may therefore be more accurate: he writes of *religious visibility* in film where religious visibility entails the discernment of 'identifiable religious elements' (1997: 23).

However he also raises the important possibility that a film may be *visibly* religious yet not be *significantly* religious. Nolan (1998) too comments on this phenomenon by drawing a distinction between films which are *discursive*, (attempting to convey information) and those which are *presentational* (sharing the filmmaker's vision and attempting to stimulate an empathetic experience in the spectator). A film displaying visible religious content might be discursive and hence superficial, while a film which is not visibly religious might however be spiritually significant by managing to convey an authentic experience of religiosity.

Biblical spectaculars – significantly religious?

The question of whether or not films which deal with explicitly or visibly religious material are significantly 'religious' is thrown into sharp relief by the genre of films known as 'Biblical spectaculars' (Forshey, 1992) or Biblical epics (Babington and Evans 1993). Biblical spectaculars depict the deeds of Biblical heroes (including Christ) in lavishly realized historical settings and are foremost amongst films which deal with traditional Christian motifs in a sympathetic manner. The genre is subdivided by Telford (1997), into Old Testament stories, (for example *The Story of Ruth*, (Koster, 1960); *The Ten Commandments* (de Mille, 1923, de Mille, 1956), *David and Bathsheba*, (King, 1951), Roman-Christian epics, like *Quo Vadis?* (Le Roy, 1951), and *Ben Hur* (Niblo, 1925, Wyler and Marton, 1959), and Christ-films (*King of Kings*, de Mille 1927, *The Greatest Story ever Told*, Stevens, 1956). However most critics, including theologians, treat these films with scant respect, noting that although awash with references to religious characters, they actually contain little significant spiritual content (see Martin, 1991; Telford, 1997). They also offend in terms of Schrader's (1972) distinction between 'abundant' and 'sparse' means since they are typically lavish in style. Rather, Forshey (1992) suggests, Biblical spectaculars are more fruitfully envisaged as messages to America about the state of the nation, than as statements about religious belief. What is important in Hollywood's appropriation of the biblical mythos says Forshey is, 'whether the presentation coincides with the current generally accepted view, for example, of race, native Americans, women or labor'. The myth of the spectaculars, 'demonstrates how the audience must act in history if they are to receive God's blessing for themselves and the nation' (1992:11). Hence, explicit depictions of religiosity transmute into texts which can be read as promoting nationalistic ideologies. This is however an attitude which Babington and Evans (1993) condemn as too simple. They acknowledge that biblical epics have been objects of ridicule, conceding that their lavish historical settings were primarily important for what they conveyed about the wealth and confidence of the Hollywood film industry. But while allowing this they maintain that the religious content of the films is nevertheless significant, asserting that Biblical

epics are: 'The paradigmatic expression of a secular culture's redefinition of its distant spiritual sources, through an artistic machinery which is the only one not to have its origins in religious usage' (Babington and Evans, 1993: 16).

Implicitly religious films

However, according to Wall (1971), Scott (1994), May (1997), Martin and Ostwald (1995), Nolan (1998), and Deacy (1997, 2000) it is not after all necessary for a film to contain explicit or visible religious content for it to be religiously or spiritually significant. Greeley (1988) posits the category of the 'implicitly religious' film - a film in which 'powerful religious symbols lurking in the unconscious or preconscious and prevalent in the world religions, abound and create an implicit or preconscious ambience of meaning' (1988: 97). Implicitly religious films include works which feature religious motifs and figures in situations not marked as explicitly religious, and works which deal with the 'big', recurring, because insoluble, issues of human life. These include questions of the origins and purpose of life as well as explorations of human behaviour in the face of joy, suffering and death. (Scott, 1994). Hoekstra proposes that films which lend themselves to spiritual interpretation may be characterized by:

an interesting life story, drama or spiritual journey; strong inspiration, aspiration and motivations: a clear conversion, transformation ... or reorganisation of life, a demythologizing and revelatory character; an openness to the mystery of life *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, liminal experiences, crises, ruptures and points of no return; and critical attitudes vis-a-vis the dominant culture and religion.. (1997:193, original emphasis)

May (1997) suggests that it was the international distribution of films by modernist 'high-art' directors or 'auteurs' from Europe and Asia (including Bergman, Fellini, Bresson, Bunuel, Ray and Kurosawa) in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which prompted British and American critics to think more broadly about what might constitute spiritual significance in films. This interest in high-art films particularly was typical of religion and film writers until the early 1990s, but has however been tempered lately by a growing interest in mainstream or popular Hollywood films. Martin and Ostwald's 1995 collection *Screening the Sacred* for instance, sets out to challenge the notion that only an art film can be significantly religious, by including analyses of films as diverse as *Ironweed* (Babenco, 1988), *Platoon*, (Stone, 1986), *Aliens* (1986), *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) and *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976).

The growth of interest in implicit content parallels the developments in forms of religiosity detailed in the previous chapter, including a movement from the terminology of religion to the

terminology of spirituality. This movement allows for the interrogation of issues previously thought secular - for instance issues of gender, race and class - to be included as relevant to the spiritual well-being of particular sub-groups within societies. However, the development of late-modern forms of spirituality is not often acknowledged in this literature since the majority of analyses are still firmly grounded in the Christian tradition.

Theological film criticism and single-critic analysis

In fact the dominant strand of scholarship in the religion and film area is one which can be called 'theological' (Cooper and Skrade, 1970; Ferlita and May, 1976; Baugh, 1997; Marsh and Ortiz, 1997; May, 1997). Theological critics concentrate on specific religious traditions, (usually the Judaeo-Christian religions) looking at how texts talk about God, or how topics conventionally associated with God - incarnation, sacrifice, redemption for instance - can be discerned as operative in contemporary representation. May outlines the theological critic's aims thus:

From a theological or a religious approach to film and film criticism, efforts can and must be made to discover and explicate the mysterious presence of God and of his spirit also in works that depict daily life situations or everyday life stories as we find them. (1997:12)

Theological critics often work by way of the rhetorical devices of analogy and allegory (Martin and Ostwalt, 1995), revealing layers of meaning and likeness, especially when dealing with a text which is not visibly religious. When bringing to consciousness the contents of an implicitly religious film Jewett (1997), a theological critic, describes creating 'an interpretive arch' spanning two texts, in order to develop an analogical relationship between Biblical texts and the thematic concerns of a particular film. His analysis of *Groundhog Day* (Ramis, 1993) for instance, juxtaposes this comedy about an arrogant man who gets stuck in a repeating twenty-four hour time period, with the *Letter of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians*. Jewett notes that *Galatians* features the Greek phrase *kairos idios* ('in its own time'), suggesting that 'there are moments that are appropriate, distinctive and non-repetitive, designed by God for the harvest' (1997: 155). In playing on the meanings of in 'its own time' Jewett feels he is engaging in a process with almost electrical powers of elucidation:

I try to devote comparable energy to exegeting the film as I do to exegeting the biblical text [...] I look for the sparks that fly between the biblical text and the contemporary film. It is a prophetic process in which contextual truths are disclosed that throw light on contemporary situations. (1997:157)

Although Jewett acknowledges 'truth' is dialectical, 'revealing itself to us in particular historical contexts' his analysis produces firm generalizations, since he imagines himself as 'seeing' the nature of the film's themes even more clearly than the production team could:

So from the Pauline point of view, this is what a film like *Groundhog Day* is *really all about* even though the filmmakers and actors may not have fully understood these implications themselves. (1997: 160, my emphasis)

By this point in the analysis, the metaphor of an interpretative arch, grounded in two different disciplines, has been abandoned, and a 'Pauline' point of view has been installed as the authority instead. Rhoads and Roberts (1997) use a similar method, this time described as an experiment in 'intertextuality' to find common interests between the romantic historical film, *The Piano* (Campion, 1994), and *The Gospel of Mark*:

[...] the juxtaposition of the film and the Gospel is illuminating of each. The dynamics of Mark's Gospel illuminates the transformation that takes place in the film and the film portrays a concrete illustration of the liberation from oppression called for in the Gospel (1997: 47).

After elaborating a number of instances suggesting that *The Piano* presents a compelling illustration of the suffering which arises when people 'lord it' over other people (1997; 55) Rhodes and Roberts complete their analysis by re-stating a moral position now even stronger through being formed from two sources. However *The Piano*, made by earthly authors, is positioned as being limited to a degree which *The Gospel of Mark* is not. The partnership between religion and the artwork in such analyses is therefore typically an unequal one, with religion maintaining the status of absolute truth and the artwork seen as an illustration of that truth in practice.

These analogical methods of determining the meaning of an 'implicitly religious' text are regularly employed in Religion and Film scholarship. Nolan (1998) calls this a 'biblical-hermeneutical approach, May labels the process 'religious dialogue' (1997), and Scott (1994), also uses the terms 'dialogue' and 'conversation' to indicate a similar process, which in his case covers the theological interpretation of popular films such as *Rain Man* (Levinson, 1988); *Driving Miss Daisy* (Beresford, 1989); *Pretty Woman*, (Marshall, 1990) and *Ghost* (Zucker, 1990) only the last of which makes reference to explicitly spiritual concepts.

Christ-figures in film

Within the parameters of theological scholarship, there is also a body of work dealing with representations of Jesus Christ. For every film which is overtly about the life and deeds of Jesus Christ, and therefore fits within May's category of religious visibility there are dozens more 'implicitly' religious films employing some of Christ's qualities, particularly his act of self-sacrifice, to deepen the portrayal of characters representing non-divine beings. There are various schema for categorizing the gradations of his appearances, the most influential being Malone's model (1997), distinguishing between 'Christ-figures' and 'Jesus-figures'. Influenced by Renan, Malone makes an initial distinction between the Christianity of faith and the Christianity of culture.

The former is lived Christianity, commitment [...] belief and an acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord and Savior, usually in a church community. The latter is an understanding and use of the tenets and stories of Christianity that does not necessarily involve any personal commitment. Filmmakers generally use aspects of the Christianity of culture. (1997:59)

Elements of the Christianity of culture include using Christian iconography to add visual richness and profundity to a film: see for instance Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* (1996) or Woo's *Face-Off* (1997). Images of the saints, Mary, and Jesus, (Morgan, 1998) and the use of the crucifix, (Malone, 1997) often work in this way. Other concepts from the Bible, including the Virgin Birth, resurrection, and the performance of miracles, are mythical elements available as cultural resources for scriptwriters and production teams to use in many sorts of films.

According to Malone, 'Jesus-figures' make reference to the historical personage of Jesus of Galilee, and consist of 'any representation of Jesus himself: a crucifix, a statue of the Sacred Heart, [...] verbal references, [...] the music of Bach's *Passion* or Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*' (1997: 61). Christian filmmakers who employ Jesus-figures strive to create as 'realistic' a portrait as possible (Morgan, 1998), while filmmakers working within the Christianity of culture may stylize Jesus-figures to fit the tone and direction of the narrative (Malone, 1997).

On the other hand 'Christ-figures,' are any 'purely fictional' figures in the movies who resemble Jesus significantly and substantially; that is they do not represent the historical Jesus but draw on elements of the divine archetype to endow cinematic protagonists with some of Christ's characteristics (Malone, 1997: 69-71). Christ-figures are stoic in the face of suffering, oppose hypocrisy, and are compassionate, sometimes to the point of sacrificing their lives for others. Baugh (1997) finds Christ-figures in *Shane* (Stevens, 1953); *La Strada* (Fellini, 1954); *Baghdad*

Café (Adlon, 1987) and *Dead Man Walking* (Robbins, 1995). Boer (1995) identifies the young John Connor as the Christ-figure in the sci-fi film *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), while in the sequel *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (Cameron, 1991), the role of sacrificial redeemer is given to a cyborg character. Rarely, female characters can be Christ-figures, as Bess is in *Breaking the Waves* (von Trier, 1998).

Telford (1997) essays a typology with seven divisions for categorizing representations of Jesus Christ. He writes of: *the adolescent Christ*, *the pacific* (or pacifist) *Christ*, *the subversive Christ*, *the mystical Christ*, and even a *musical Christ*, (as in *Godspell*, Greene, 1973 and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Jewison, 1973). Two of Telford's categorizations are of particular interest. He states that the most common typification of Christ in early movies was as *the patriarchal Christ* where 'the tendency was to present Jesus as a mature, majestic, ethereal, composed and essentially controlled figure' (1997: 133). In *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese, 1988) he finds evidence however of '*the human Christ*' – a Jesus who is at times, tortured, uncertain, prone to fear and anxiety, neurotic, even masochistic, (1997: 136). The human Christ may even doubt that he is actually the Messiah and comes to accept his divine responsibilities only gradually. This 'human' version of Christ, where 'Christness' as divinity is too difficult a concept to accept uncritically, is seen in films such as *Jesus of Montreal* (Arcand, 1989), *The Book of Life* (Hartley, 1998), *Touch* (Schrader, 1997), and is arguably the model of most interest to contemporary filmmakers working within the Christianity of culture.

The Christ schema

Despite variations in emphasis these Christ-figures remind us what a robust discourse within culture the Christ-schema remains. It functions as the basis for mobilization of a range of visual, narrative and moral expectations, since all images of Jesus Christ operate within what Morgan calls 'a dense intericonic space that recedes into the historical record of images, back to the fourth and fifth centuries after Christ's birth' (1998: 38). By the Victorian period representations of him had been codified into a 'standard representation' substantially unchallenged until recently. It is this standard version, a: 'blond, bearded, long-haired, blue-eyed, white robed figure, ethereal yet somewhat bland, commanding yet somewhat passive, [that has] dominated the cinema for well over half a century' says Telford (1997:129), noting that 'no serious film ... has as yet portrayed Jesus as a Jew, and with darker Semitic features, and yet such in reality would have been his appearance' (1997: 132-133).

While there is obviously a desire among filmmakers to explore alternatives to this standard representation - Christ may nowadays be dark-skinned, recalcitrant, even female - there is nevertheless a range of similar questions modern filmmakers ask as they ponder differences between the world as it was when Christ was born and as it is today: What is absolute goodness in the modern world? How would we recognize it? Would it still be possible for someone to stand outside current social structures and be influential in the way Jesus apparently did? In considering these questions what all these films do agree on is that, this time around, Christ would have to improve his relationship to the feminine: celibacy, with its implied devaluation of the feminine, is no longer seen as a virtue. The scandal caused by *The Last Temptation of Christ* on its release in the mid 1980s for instance was largely due to its depiction of Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene (Stout and Buddenbaum 1996). Since then however, forming a close, even sexual relationship with a woman has become commonplace for Jesus-or Christ-figures. It happens in *Jesus of Montreal*, in *Touch*, and is flirted with in *Book of Life*. Such a dynamic is also present in some of the apocalyptic films (*The Fifth Element*, Besson, 1997; *Stigmata*, Wainwright, 1998; *End of Days*, Hyams, 1999) where a woman is an essential part of the process of fighting evil.

Limitations of single-author textual analysis approaches

Although myself not a theological critic I find many of the approaches above useful insofar as they provide frameworks for categorizing types of textual content. It is helpful to distinguish between explicit and implicit presentations of 'religious' or 'spiritual' material for instance, and to have assistance in determining what kind of Christ-figure a text might be offering. In particular I have found formalist arguments about the hierophanous nature of film and of parable-like narrative structures efficacious in exploring the appeal of an otherwise apparently 'secular' film like *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999) (see also Hardy, 2001). Nevertheless, I have a problem with the methodology underlying this form of scholarship, previously described as 'single-author textual analysis', where a single critic (or even a small group of like-minded critics) provides the definitive interpretation of a text.

In a sense of course, all cultural reception, all occasions on which one makes sense of a message provided by another, is 'interpretive' – the action of interpretation is, as Nightingale (1996) has noted, unavoidable in communication. However, as a research method, especially on a topic which arouses such strong partisan feelings as religion, textual analysis is inadequate in the contemporary context. It falls under the category of a 'semiotic' approach to the analysis of audio-visual media in which 'close-reading' techniques (Bordwell, 1989, Bonnycastle, 1997) are

employed to detect patterns of significance in the object of study, but the information gained from semiotic textual analysis is usually not supported with other sources of data. In the context of theological criticism, 'a religiously-oriented critic' May notes, is invited 'to discover, even to 'hunt' for, symbols and metaphors' (1997: 15). While this method suits critics endorsing a particular ideological standpoint - such as those trying to ensure that audiences, or readers of criticism see the world through a Christian framework - other media scholars today would consider textual analysis as insufficient on its own - since there are methodological difficulties with issues of validity and generalizability (Storey, 1996; Deacon et al.1999a). The case against textual analysis is put most trenchantly by Miller:

The traditional means of politicized screen analysis are well-known to us all: take an audio-visual text, beat it to anthropomorphic death with a blunt hermeneutic, and effortlessly extrapolate from this (unargued for) selection of text and instrument, transforming both from one watcher's syntagmatic organisation to an overarching theoretical and social contour and legitimacy. (1994: 22)

If a textual analyst attempts to conceal the partiality and contingency of the resulting analysis, by assuming a stance of objective authority, then the charge can be brought that their findings are largely uninformative, since what has been found is simply what has been sought (Nolan, 1997). Under this rubric the text is envisaged as a chimera which can yield, within broad limits, whatever members of an interpretive community (Fish, 1980) wish to extract from it. Or, as Deacon et al. put it, unanchored forms of textual analysis are 'always in danger of being blown hither and thither by the winds of conjecture and surmise' (1999a: 181). The examples of textual analysis by Jewett and Rhoads and Roberts provided on pages 87 and 88 of this chapter certainly lack validity on these terms for any but a committed Christian audience.

This reliance on a single method is attributable to the fact that scholars in the religion and film field generally have scant knowledge of specialist screen studies and communication theories (for discussion of this factor see Martin and Ostwalt, 1995; Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Nolan 1998). The notion that a text has an author (an 'auteur', see earlier discussion on page 81), capable of implanting messages within it which are interpreted in an identical fashion by a viewer was dispatched with some ferocity in the 1970s (Foucault, 1979; Barthes, 1982; Gripsrud, 1995). However, with some exceptions (Heath, 1998; Martin and Ostwalt, 1995; Miles, 1996), religion and film scholars appear loathe to get into the self-reflexive complexities of post-modern approaches to interpretation (Nightingale, 1996; Jaspers, 1997). In particular they seem unaware of the 'cultural turn' in scholarship which stresses the importance of both context and the ongoing

negotiation of meaning in the analysis of cultural phenomena (see for instance, Morley, 1980; Radway, 1984; Ang, 1985; Fiske 1989). Moreover there is little evidence of cultural studies approaches to the analysis of communication, which locate the making of meaning either across all three stages of production, text, and reception. In summarizing my attitude towards this methodological approach, I draw upon Thompson, who while, establishing the case for a 'tripartite approach' comments:

The work conducted within a broadly 'structuralist' or 'semiotic' approach has shed light on the structural features of media messages. But by focusing on the construction of the message, such work generally fails to examine how messages are produced and received in specific socio-historical circumstances [...] the work constructed within a structuralist or semiotic approach is therefore of limited value, for it pays insufficient attention to the specific social and institutional conditions within which and by virtue of which, media messages may be ideological. (1996: 376)

Films and television programmes draw on a multiplicity of cultural discourses. Some of those discourses may be included consciously and deliberately, others are included because they adhere to habitual forms of production practices, or because they are present in the environment at the time the audio-visual product is made and constitute part of the cultural core-sample which a film or video represents. That sample is itself rarely stable, since it also changes in nature according to the contexts in which it is viewed or examined. For a model of interpretation which can cope with this degree of complexity it is necessary to look beyond the confines of the religion and film field as currently configured.

Media, religion and culture literature

The remainder of this chapter examines literature from communications theory, media studies and cultural studies approaches. In so doing it positions 'television' (its institutions, texts and audiences) as the major object of study. Whereas critics analyzing religious content in film typically employed methods originally developed to deal with written texts, the advent of the populist 'low-culture' or 'mass' medium, television,²¹ has encouraged the development of methodologies responsive to the characteristics of the medium itself.

While a film is experienced as a single viewing event, television viewing is typically conceived of as a constant 'flow' of programming, which viewers enter and leave (Williams, 1974).

²¹ Television broadcasting first took place in Britain in the 1930s, and hence antedates the cinema by just 35 years, but it did not become a 'mass' medium until the 1950s.

Alternatively television may be described as ‘segmented’ (Ellis, 1982) since it is broken into a series of half-hour and one-hour programming segments, themselves carved into smaller segments to allow for advertising breaks. Television is usually spoken of as an ‘everyday’ medium (Silverstone, 1994; Gauntlett and Hill, 1999; Gripsrud, 1999), watched at home as part of daily routines. It does not provide the large-scale, visceral spectacle in which cinema specializes, nor can it achieve the degree of emotional impact of film:

Film dominates its audience, its screening has the status of an event. Once on the screen film is the sole focus of the audience’s attention, and its image is rich and luminescent. Television is smaller, implicated in and subordinate to the domestic environment; its image is poorly defined and requires continual reminders from the soundtrack to pull its viewers’ attention back from other activities. (in Cunningham and Turner, 1993: 245)

The literature on religion and film often simply assumed powerful mind-body effects for cinema, with subsequent speculation as to how those supposed effects might be harnessed to engender religious feeling in viewers, even, as noted, in relation to films which are not explicitly religious. Television, by contrast, is a medium around which explicit and lengthy debates have raged about the nature of effects and influence. Attitudes range from Marxist-inspired theoretical standpoints which see the media as part of the complex of instruments by which the dominant classes in society maintain their dominance over those less privileged (see for instance, Miliband, 1973; Herman and Chomsky, 1994), to relativistic, postmodern accounts which envisage audience members as drawing only on those aspects of meaning which accord with pre-existing strategies for life-enhancement (Cook and Johnson, 1985; Modleski, 1992; Fiske, 1989). Moreover most theorists now assume that influence is achieved only gradually and in contexts where meaning, the basis of influence, is established through a process of contestation (for a meticulous discussion of the nuances of this debate see Curran, 2002).

In speculating on the possible effects of television, Hoover notes, that as far back as 1978 Gerbner and Connally had suggested television might usurp the traditional prerogative of religion to help define reality: ‘television they said, might well be the “new religion: of the media”’ (1990a: 52-56). There is agreement that it is largely in a functional, or ‘latent’, mode (Goethals, 1993) that such claims could have purchase, although Hoover also thought there is a sense in which all television is ‘religious’ since it is ‘about *meaning*. It [...] provides viewers with symbols and ideas which explain profound truths about the norms and values of the culture in which they live’ (Ableman and Hoover, 1990: 7, original emphasis). Similarly, Schultze observed that viewers do

not actually worship the television set but thought it could ‘capture a shared understanding of their world through the news, commercials and entertainment’ (1990: 243).

Gradually however, those views have developed in complexity: for Carey, the media are functionally significant, since they have ‘displaced’ the historical functions of religion – such as ‘ritual and rite, narrative and meaning’, to the point that ‘the media, married to the nation and nationalism, [have come] to occupy the realm of the sacred in modern societies’. Religion can no longer be considered separately from the media, he says, since the media, ‘organize religious community, transcribe and embed religious belief, and create both collective memory and modern politics’ (2002: 2-3). For Hoover, also ‘rather than being autonomous actors ... religion and media are converging’ as the media ‘constitute a realm where important projects of “the self” take place – projects that include spiritual, transcendent and deeply meaningful “work”’ (2002: 2).

Television and ritual

In order to position television as analogous to religion in function, the important place the television set occupies in the organisation domestic environments, has been noted (Silverstone, 1994; Morgan 1998), as is the fact that many people watch television habitually. When these conditions are fulfilled television watching can be described as an important ‘ritual’ of domestic life and likened to the ritual activity which both Smart (1987) and Whaling (1995) distinguish as one of the characteristics of a religion. The contemporary foregrounding of concepts of ritual come through a genealogy beginning with Geertz (1972) and developed by Turner (1986), Wuthnow (1987), and Bell (1992). Bell employs the term *ritualization* to refer to the way in which certain social activities are distinguished from others:

[R]itualization is a matter of setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’, and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors. (Bell, cited in Hoover and Clark, 1997: 27)

Imagined as a ritual activity in this sense, watching television can become, through offering predictability and familiarity, a provider of ‘ontological security’ (Silverstone, 1994). Silverstone also describes television as being ‘deeply embedded’ and as colonizing ‘basic levels of social reality’ (1994: 4-5). By producing a sense of virtual community television might also be conservative on a collective level (Carey, 1975) - reinforcing both group patterns of viewing and the discussions that take around news broadcasts or televised sporting events for instance. Television is a source of factual information about events in the world and also models which

patterns of social behaviour are approved of and which are not: it is in fact, according to Silverstone, 'a core institution of the modern state' (1994: 3.).

However other theorists of ritual activity propose that ritual is not always conservative, that it may actually provide a framework for periods of resistance and creativity. Understandings of this type, (Turner, 1982; Jensen, 1995; Hoover and Clark, 1997; Goethals, 1997; White 1997b) employ analogies between religion and mass entertainment as 'time-out' activities, where 'time-out' allows for a reflexive engagement with the routines of everyday life. During a 'time-out' or leisure period one may think about timeless values and then return to everyday life refreshed. (see White, 1997b: 40 and 42)

More recently however Grimes (2002) has criticized these uses of the concept of ritual in relation to media as unspecific and misleading. Scholars need, he asserts 'to ask not just whether some aspect of media *is* ritual, but in *what respect* it is ritual [...] just as there are many different kinds of media there are different kinds of ritual, and the differences among them are important' (2002: 227). In pursuit of specificity he outlines eleven separate ways in which the media may represent rituals or function in a ritual manner themselves. In any case, it is important to note that no one has claimed the experience of watching television offers more than temporary, 'minimal' or 'intermediate' transcendences, as defined by Luckmann (1996). Indeed, the possibility of achieving 'great' transcendences was not held out definitively in relation to film either - Schrader for instance was careful to say that one could only 'hint at' and 'approach' the Transcendent through film. The rhetoric in relation to film-viewing was slanted towards the possibility of 'deep' changes in personal consciousness, in other words towards the mystical mode, and towards substantive understandings of religion. In contrast, the rhetoric in relation to television viewing, is slanted towards the functional uses of religion, especially the redemption of the individual in terms of his or her (virtual) relationship to the collectivity of other social beings.

Television and narrative

There are several reasons for the modesty of claims made about television as a medium of possible transcendence. One is its ubiquity as a domestic technology: things with which we interact everyday are not easily recognised as sacred. But more importantly the style of television representation is typically 'abundant' - employing high-energy, colourful forms of naturalism in design, performance and technical execution, characteristics which, as described previously, have traditionally excluded products from the realm of sacred art. Moreover, narrative form in

television, especially in prime-time genres such as news, documentary and drama is almost invariably mythological and recuperative in structure (Schultze, 1990). The 'parable' form, discussed above, which leads one towards an experience of the mystery of life, is, in my observation, rarely found in television.

Television narratives are generally held to be conventional and mythological in nature, reinforcing consensually held views of cultural appropriateness. Shultze asserts that: 'Television narratives are meant to be understandable public tales for the entire community of followers' (1990: 244). He emphasizes their moral normativity, expressed, he claims, in a 'shallow Manichaeistic manner', by outlining typical narrative thematic motifs such as the ideas that, Good triumphs over Evil ... [and] society can be redeemed by the good and effective works of moral individuals'. He concludes that, 'the tube [television] has traded a mysterious and unexplainable concept of God for a more humanly understandable one. God is in us and works through us. He is immanent, not transcendent. Our good works are his good works' (1990: 244). One outcome of this propensity towards flattening the cosmos is, Schultze claims, that commercial television rarely offers tragic drama, because unhappy endings for any but evil characters are unpalatable. These observations about television narrative and religious possibility therefore reinforce the impression that television is a medium both of modest ambition and of considerable conventionality in its representational practices.

Communications theory and religion

Since television has not had the 'high-culture' credence surrounding some aspects of cinema, it is rarely mentioned by theological critics writing about religion and film. Rather the first studies of religion and television surfaced in (mass) communication studies, a derivative of the fields of sociology and social psychology (Hoover 1988; Abelman and Hoover, 1990). Codified by Laswell in the early 1970s, the study of communication focused less on the nature of the text than film studies, envisaging it instead as a 'message' passed between sender and receiver (Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996) in what is often called a 'transportation' or transmission model of communication (Hoover, 1988). Because the contexts of sending and reception of messages were also important however, the field of investigation was always wider than in film studies, since a text would usually be examined in the light of its relationships with the society from which it arose. Cunningham and Turner's (1993) definition states that mass communication studies 'primarily provide a political economy of the media, analysing the ways in which the media are articulated to networks of business and institutional political power' (1993: 13). Examining texts

situated in networks of societal power therefore entails that 'media text analysis is always moving from the text to the wider culture, or from the text to the audience' (1993: 15).

Even so there has been a reluctance to consider messages about religion as legitimate objects of study in this field. Predominantly, that is because religious beliefs are rarely amenable to the quasi-scientific techniques employed by social scientists; by their very nature they contain propositions best examined in the realms of word, thought and emotion (Hoover, 1988). In Laswell's (1971) model each stage of the communication process had, according to Slack its own isolatable identity, where what was of interest was, 'the mechanism whereby correspondence between the meanings encoded [by the sender] and the effects that meaning generates [in the receiver] is guaranteed' (1996: 123). According to these criteria religion was too slippery an object: 'Religion has not been an easy thing for social science to study or understand [...] received social theory has tended to relegate religion to a 'tangential' or residual status in the social fabric. Hence, communications studies has not been centrally interested in religion or religious phenomena (Ableman and Hoover, 1990: 5). Certainly these remarks were an accurate representation of the situation until the middle of the 1980s, but Ableman and Hoover's own work and that of a network of colleagues around the world, has increased interest in the intersection of the media and religion. The post-Second World War growth of 'televangelism' in America was the phenomenon around which work in this area developed.

'The Electronic Church' and the study of televangelism

According to Hoover (1988) American history has been characterized by at least three major religious 'reawakenings' since the end of the nineteenth century, each of which made use of the communication media available to it. By the middle of the 1970s, during the third of these reawakenings, evangelists from various Protestant denominations were ready to take advantage of several practical developments which had made it feasible for them to promote their message through television. Cable television technology became available in the 1970s and the evangelical churches were among the first to make use of it (Hoover, 1988). Furthermore, whereas in the past the churches had been restricted to broadcasting during free or 'sustaining-time' on the networks they were now allowed to 'buy' prime-time slots on network television (Frankl, 1990). By 1987, claims Frankl, there were 1,370 religious format radio stations and 221 religious television stations in America, and the preachers who appeared on some of the programmes - Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, for example - had become stars. Falwell became interested in politics while Robertson

preached a more materialistic gospel of 'health and wealth' on his much-studied television show the *700 Club* (Hoover, 1988; Schultze, 1990; Peck, 1993; White 1992).

When religion, television and politics entered into alliance in America in the 1970s and 1980s they constituted an object sufficiently visible and 'concrete' for communications scholars to want to grapple with it. These commentators are primarily interested in the *use* of the media by various religious groups, the majority of which are evangelical, American Protestant. It is fair to say that if the underlying purpose of the theological strand of Religion and Film analysis was missiological, the motivations underlying much of the 1980s literature on televangelism were a mix of fascination at the idea it might indicate a change in religious practice, and concern about the possible extent of the influence of television evangelism (Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Hoover and Clark, 1997). Peck for instance said that she wanted to, 'understand the relationships among the dramatic reconfiguration of the U.S. sociopolitical landscape, the resurgence of the Christian Right, and the meteoric rise of televangelism and the sources of its appeal' (Peck, 1993: xiii). (For more on this topic see also Hoover, 1984, 1988; Horsfield 1984, 1990; Frankl, 1987; Schultze, 1987; Buddenbaum, 1990, Abelman and Hoover, 1990; Stout and Buddenbaum, 1996).

A key topic in the Ableman and Hoover collection *Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions* (1990) concerned the probable size of audiences for these various religious television channels - an issue then considered to have a close relationship with likely media influence. In the late 1970s according to Hoover (1990b), *The Wall Street Journal* claimed the total audience for the so-called 'electronic church' at over 100 million, but Hoover himself thought this figure improbably high. By considering analyses of rating points he estimates between 1 million and 9 million people were watching in the early 1980s, but also notes that the 1984 Annenburg-Gallup Study of Religious Broadcasting (Gerbner et al. 1984) estimated that around 13.3 million Americans occasionally watched a religious programme (1990b: 110).

The high-point of the televangelism movement was reached by the middle of the 1980s. In 1987 a series of sexual and financial scandals severely damaged the credibility of several prominent televangelists. The title of Peck's *The Gods of Televangelism* (1993) - an analysis of the respective broadcasting styles of Pat Robertson and Jim Swaggart - suggests the ironic attitude with which their endeavours came to be viewed by liberal commentators. Nevertheless, today the Religious Right is, as noted in chapter 3, still a considerable force in American society and, although the

academic community is less interested in them, numbers of specialist radio and television stations have not noticeably diminished in the years since 1987 (Martin, 1999).

The legacy of televangelism scholarship

There are several significant outcomes of the work on televangelism.. Treating religious media as legitimate objects of study, in effect by-passed the secularization debates in which the sociology of religion had become enmeshed. Secondly, social science methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, were applied to the study of religion and media, thus creating an alternative to the hermeneutic method of the religion and film field. The Annenburg-Gallup study for instance (Gerbner et al. 1984) employed demographic analysis, content analysis, uses and gratifications theory, and looked for measurable effects of religious broadcasting on audience members, while the Ableman and Hoover collection (1990) employed a similar range of methods, including statistical analyses.

Rather than being restricted to analyses of particular texts, the televangelism work looked at the environments in which programmes were produced (Peck, 1993), or investigated what significance programmes held for viewers. For example, Hoover's *Mass Media Religion* (1988) gained demographic information about viewers of the *700 Club* developing this data by interviewing selected viewers about their faith experiences and viewing behaviour. Hoover concluded that the relationship between viewing behaviour and faith is not straightforward since, rather than creating new believers, watchers of religious broadcasting tended to be people who were already religious. Since watching religious broadcasting did not necessarily create 'new' Christians, he argued the influence of religious broadcasting was likely more limited than previously thought. Peck's work in the *Gods of Televangelism* advanced similar conclusions with, evidence 'that the relationship between program and viewer is a complex, interactive construction of significance, rather than a one-way injection of ideology' (1993: 21). The interest these studies displayed in the actual experiences of the viewers of television, and in critiquing assumptions about media 'influence' has carried over into later work on broader questions about religion, spirituality and the media.

A further insight was that influence works both ways; that religion and religious broadcasting have themselves been shaped by secular culture and by media environments. It has been suggested for example that in order to appeal to audiences, the electronic church had partially 'adopted the formats and techniques of popular secular television' (Ableman and Hoover, 1990: 4). In

particular Peck (1993), Schultze (1990) and White (1992) all suggest Pat Robertson's *700 Club*, modelled on the television 'news magazine' format and featuring public figures such as rock musicians, authors and sports stars amongst its interviewees, was evidence of religion itself adapting to secular media values.

By raising questions about the extent to which televangelism actually influenced public opinion, this scholarship pointed beyond its immediate subject of study to wider issues of cultural formation. Peck, for instance, saw televangelism as a set of responses to anxieties about changes in belief systems:

The resurgence of religious revivalist movements might be understood as an attempt to respond to this period of (historical) transition by articulating new relationships between the older belief system and the values associated with the emerging 'postmodern era'. (1993: 18).

Moreover, Abelman and Hoover thought the enterprise of applying social science methodologies to the phenomenon of televangelism had wider implications for all studies of communications since it had thus provided 'tantalizing new clues as to how people consume and make meaning of mass media in contemporary life' (1990: 5).

Religion and the Media: a British approach

A volume published in Britain in 1993, *Religion and the Media; an introductory Reader*, edited by Chris Arthur, shares some of the insights and concerns of the American work on televangelism: 'Are society's values now communicated by the mass media and can television be seen as part of a powerful new pseudo-religion?' it asks. However, apart from the inclusion of a chapter by Hoover on newspaper readership and religiosity, the focus of the book is theological, with its interest, as Arthur states, in identifying 'ways in which modern mass media might be considered relevant to religion and religion to such media' (1993: 2). Nevertheless, several contributors demonstrate an awareness of relevant contemporary debates in media studies and of the specifics of television form as both an institution and mode of representation.

Gregor Goethals, for instance, was one of the first authors to suggest television could be viewed in a sacramental sense within increasingly secular cultures, developing the argument that television, in providing 'pageants, panoplies and special days', may be able to give provide a focus for spiritual energies (1981: 128). In *Religion and the Media* Goethals' stance is even more emphatic. Although 'drained of explicitly religious subject matter (1993: 25) television performs a quasi-

religious or ‘latently’ religious function she contends, by, for example, providing live coverage of important events, which allow us to participate in collective acts of grieving, celebration and commemoration, even though we may be, physically, alone. Through the medium of television, Goethals proposes, ‘like-minded persons may leap over temporal and spatial boundaries to ‘live’ in ritual time and space’ (1993: 27). In this manner television becomes in particular an important site for the transmission and reproduction of the mythical forms of understanding underpinning particular national cultures (1993: 29).

For Horsfield (1993), writing from within an Australian context, the mass media do not merely reinforce national identity; rather they are the material through which a ‘new international culture’ expands, forming a ‘web’ touching and influencing other cultural systems. The mass media are so significant that they form ‘a new symbolic environment within which societies organize and express themselves’ (1993: 41-42). Horsfield, like Goethals, believes the media have assumed some of the functions of religion in modern societies by presenting for instance, ‘a consistent and integrated system of belief and social interpretation as a pattern for social understanding and development’ (1993: 45). For Goethals this process is different in kind to religious expression of the past but not necessarily different in quality. Horsfield is more wary, observing that media representations are constricted by economic or ideological forces, and suggesting that the true diversity of forms of social reality is not evident in media products. Finally, McDonnell applies Greeley’s concept of ‘implicit religion’ to the mass media, noting that even as ‘ethical and moral issues are the stuff of television’, their dramatic realization is also full of ‘folk-religion’, which he takes to mean ‘the half-remembered residues of traditional languages and symbols’ (1993: 93).

Religion, media and cultural studies

By the middle of the 1990s American scholarly interest in the specific phenomenon of televangelism had diminished, but, as outlined in chapter 2, attention had become engaged with wider questions about relationships between the media, religion and culture. As far back as 1988 Hoover had demonstrated an interest in linking those terms:

Television is itself a cultural medium. It is often central to ongoing processes of cultural and symbolic formation. A form of television that embodies a radically, self-consciously cultural reality – religious television must be seen to have at least the potential of transforming society. (1988: 12)

Hoover’s work has already had a significant place in this thesis. Trained in theology, phenomenology and anthropology, he is now Professor of both Journalism and Religious Studies

at the University of Colorado at Boulder. By virtue of his own scholarship and through collaborative relationships with others Hoover has nurtured a 'sharper' not-necessarily theological, empirically-based academic movement linking religion, media and culture. There have been other forays into this hybrid territory, notably by Miles (1996) and by Frow (1998) who has called for cultural studies scholars worldwide to pay more attention to religion. However it is Hoover and associates who are currently driving the field forward. Many of his colleagues (Robert White, Lynn Schofield Clark, Janice Peck) are American, but there is a long-standing link with Australia through Peter Horsfield, ties with Latin American through Jesús Martín-Barbero and, an entry into international cultural studies through scholars such as Graham Murdock, Keyan Tomaselli and Arnold Shepperson. There has also been considerable work done in this field in Scandinavia by Knut Lundby and the Uppsala Group: in 1993 these elements coalesced at a conference in Uppsala, the outcome of which was the edited collection *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* (Hoover and Lundby, 1997). Following on from Hoover and Venturelli, (1996), with its bold assertion that 'the public space of the mass communication media is now *the* ritual space which has real religious importance and that the media are actually "religious" in some fundamental ways' (1996: 258), *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* is one of several projects which explore the ramifications of that premise.

Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture

By drawing on 'new paradigm' formulations describing transformations in religiosity - as Hoover later put it: 'Religion today is much more a public, commodified, therapeutic, and personalized set of practices than it has been in the past' (2002: 2) - the way was open for Hoover and Lundby to reintroduce the media as a third term implicated in the process of creating meaning. They use 'media', not just as a reference to various products of media industries, but also as a link to the wider process of 'mediation', where the whole context of the cultural practice of communication, involving the circulation of symbolic forms, is implied.

As well as constituting a 'fundamental dimension' of culture in their own right (Hoover and Lundby, 1997: 6), the media are now envisaged as one of culture's most significant means of operation. In a metaphor shared by many of the authors, Horsfield suggests that the media are 'the "web" of culture, the matrix where most people now get most of their insight, influence, values and meaning' (1997: 177). Hoover and Lundby assert that the institutions of the media now 'condition and determine' access to the public sphere (1997: 4-5), for religion as much as anything else. Consequently, says Hoover, 'Religion is no longer something which transported *to* people as

messages by various means, it is seen as being itself *shaped* by the process of mediation through which people communicate' (1997: 289, original emphasis). To explain this expanded process of mediation, a chapter by Hoover and Clark promotes the idea that the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; White, 1997b) has collapsed into the '*mediated public sphere*', thus making the media 'the primary public forum for the debate over cultural identities' (1997: 32, original emphasis). The resources of religion become available, amongst others, as resources for the construction of identity, while media representations provide opportunities for viewers to imagine how particular forms of identity would fit with their own self-image. Hoover and Lundby stress that they are not suggesting that the media *constitute* religion, rather, they are suggesting 'that there are aspects of modern social and cultural embedment in the media that necessarily imbue the media's powerful symbols, icons, values and functions with religious significance' (1997: 7).

The book argues that the so-called 'irrational' (with which religious belief is often aligned because of difficulties of intersubjective validation) is no less an important component of life than, for instance, scientific methods or scientific understanding. However in practice, considering the social science backgrounds of many of the contributors, manifestations of the irrational are infrequently discussed. Marty's (1993) characterization of contemporary religion as being more 'practical than mystical'; at once ordinary and yet central to culture, (cited in Hoover 1997: 293) is preferred. Yet there is also a wish, as White puts it, 'to allow discursive autonomy to the sacred, with its implications of unity, ultimateness, and transcendence, in a public sphere that is increasingly pluralist, secular, hegemonic and pragmatic' (1997: 40). The way the volume handles this difficulty is to allow for the possibility of 'substantive' as well as 'functional' elements occurring amongst the religious phenomena they describe, as in Lundby's fieldwork described below.

Issues of method in the media, religion and culture field

Religion, Media and Culture, and a new *Journal of Media and Religion*, first published in 2002, (edited by Stout and Buddenbaum but with contributions from Hoover and Carey) both recognize the need to establish the parameters of a suitable research programme for testing this new model of understanding relationships between media and religiosity.

In practice most of the chapters in *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture* were theoretical pieces exploring various ways to approach issues in the field. Textual analysis continued to be employed

albeit in sophisticated variants, such as Peck's discussion of psychologized discourses of spirituality employed by Marianne Williamson and Oprah Winfrey on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*:

The psychologized religiosity endorsed by Williamson and Winfrey ... seeks legitimacy by borrowing the scientific grammar of psychology; recognizes the validity of and commonalities among all religious belief systems, defines its public significance as the cumulative result of private transformations and attempts to recharismatize public and private domains of experience. (1997: 233)

The single report on a piece of fieldwork was Lundby's (1997) case-study of the cultural negotiations involved in producing the televised Opening Ceremony of the Lillehammer Winter Olympics, one of those spectacular media-rituals which is arguably a form of international 'civil' religion (Bar-Haim, 1997). The ceremony had to be both solemn and entertaining, redolent of a specific national identity and yet trans-nationally relevant, 'sacred' and yet not offensive to adherents to any of the world's mainstream religions. In describing how religious ideas are shaped by the process of their mediation for large international audiences, Lundy comes up with a three-part taxonomy of mediated events: categories he calls 'rallies', (calls for the substantive nature of a religious tradition to be honoured), 'rituals' (a term not defined in this instance) and 'resistance' (referring to the conflicting interpretations expected from the various cultural factions who will constitute the audience for the piece). This 'resistance' had to be anticipated and managed by those involved in the production process. The solution eventually arrived at, which Lundy evaluates as 'weak, temporary and general', was the on-stage transformation by actors playing Norwegian fairy-folk (*vetter*) of a huge white egg into a representation of the globe, accompanied by wordless (and thus inoffensive) religious music.

While Lundby's categories are somewhat ill-defined, especially the concept of 'resistance', which seems to equal the potential for viewers to make varying interpretations of the same text, but at other times appears to mean 'ideological refusal', his work is attractive for its interest in the production of meaning. Drawing on Gitlin, (1995) Lundby describes looking at constructions of the sacred in connection with 'fugitive communities', a late-modern form of social organisation where: 'people move in and out of various groups and belong to shifting and overlapping collectivities, each developing their sacred references' (1997: 160). Lundby also notes that in media spectacles such as the Olympic Opening 'there are substantive sacred elements and sacred functions simultaneously operating in relation to secularized ordinary everyday life' (1997: 161). The sacred feelings aroused by these spectacles may be 'feeble' he says, but he is of the opinion (without offering an account of any actual audience research), they do nevertheless offer some

‘sacred locus’ for the worldwide public. Since there is no detailed account of method Lundby’s report cannot function as a guide to undertaking production research, but its mere existence and its acknowledgement of the complexity of influences feeding into the making of meaning are inspirational.

Otherwise, there are some other general suggestions for future work provided in *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture*. Hoover and Clark suggest: the extension of previous work on producers, texts and audience, especially in studies of religion and news, and televangelism; research on the interplay between religious thought and popular culture; and research on new modes of spirituality and on mediated therapeutic discourse, as well as research on the ‘affective’ domain in religion (1997:31). More recently, in the first issue of the *Journal of Media and Religion* Buddenbaum has called for research that is ‘ecumenical’ in approach in the sense that it:

a) is interdisciplinary; b) triangulates evidence by making use of multiple methods and methodologies; c) Is fully cognisant of the reality that religion and media (and society) are variables; and d) considers *emic* and *etic*, insider and outsider, perspectives in setting up studies involving religion and interpreting findings from them. (2002: 21)

A recent book edited by Hoover and Clark, *Practicing Media in the Age of Religion* (2002), is the outcome of the first Public Conference on Media, Religion and Culture held in 1996. It contains reports of several qualitative and interdisciplinary research projects. There are accounts of explorations into evangelical Protestant imagery (Morgan), popular manifestations of Elvis-worship (Dass), the creation of ‘sacred’ public space through mural art (Shawn Landres), and into Islamic (Lawrence), and neo-pagan, websites (Femback), amongst others.

The two chapters of particular interest are those by Rosenthal and Schmalzbauer, since both investigate the intersection of public discourse and religious positioning. Schmalzbauer, writing on the tension between private belief and professional practice amongst Catholic and Evangelical journalists, focuses on the beginning of the communication process, using a similar method to my own by interviewing twenty journalists about a number of professional issues, including, ‘the relationship between faith and work, focusing particularly on the influence of religious identity on the content of journalistic writing’ (2002: 169). Some of his respondents practice ‘bracketing’ - keeping their personal beliefs and work separate - but the majority, Schmalzbauer claims, do not. Rather they employ what he calls ‘multivocal bridging languages’ emphasizing the values of ‘journalistic empathy, intellectual refinement, and justice and peace’ (2002: 171) which allow them to express their personal beliefs through their work, albeit in a manner which causes them to

seem religious when viewed in one light but not when viewed in another. Christian values are thus discernibly active in the writing of these journalists but in a manner sufficiently diffuse not to attract controversy.

Rosenthal's chapter looks at the various treatments given to discussions of television by the Protestant magazine *The Christian Century* during the period 1946-60, during which television was both gaining in popularity and American society was being affected by the forces of secularism. The weekly's overall strategy was either to denounce or ignore television, but Rosenthal's diligent analysis shows its disapproval was neither consistent in expression, nor consistently motivated. She suggests that hostile responses to Roman Catholic media intervention, to the domestic 'female' sphere of life (where television was situated), and to the emergence of a new secularized 'leisure society' were all factors at work in the development of successive editorial statements. In treating her topic in this manner Rosenthal is looking at what I would describe in my own work as the transformation of discursive frameworks, in the service of exploring the question – how and why does a set of discourses succeed, while others do not, under specific historical circumstances?

The limitations of these (nevertheless impressive) pieces of work, which fulfill at least two of Buddenbaum's three prescriptions for effective work in the study of media and religion, are in relation to the narrowness of their method – since neither 'triangulate' their research well. Schmalzbauer appears to use at least two sets of primary sources – interviews and newspaper articles (although there is little evidence of the latter), but Rosenthal's work is more thoroughly historical and her research seems based largely on textual analysis of the periodicals themselves. In neither case, as in Lundby's work also, is there any indication of how the media product was received by the audiences at which it was aimed.

A focus on audience

In one of the last chapters of *Rethinking Media, Religion and Culture*, Hoover had called for 'a religious anthropology of the audience', an audience he perceives as 'active [and] sentient', in relation to 'texts that are not overly determinative' [and where] 'a negotiation of cultural power takes place at the site of consumption' (1997: 287-288). For him an 'anthropology' of this sort would remedy what he evaluates as previous over-emphases on the role of the institutions producing mediations, and on the nature of the text itself.

This move towards the audience on Hoover's part is consistent with his own (1988) interest in viewer motivations for watching religious television but also follows developments in the general field of media studies, where a large number of audience or 'reception' studies were undertaken from the early 1980s (e.g. Fiske, 1989; Morley, 1980, 1986; Livingstone 1990). These were studies focusing on the negotiation of meaning by, and experiences of, audience members in their interaction with media texts. Morley's path-breaking research, for instance, suggested that differences in interpretation are framed and constrained, but not determined, by sociocultural factors such as class, although he also argued that interpretation cannot be reduced in any simple way to socioeconomic location. Rather the relationship between interpretation and class location appeared to be mediated by the discursive and institutional affiliations of differently positioned viewers (Morley, 1980). In moving towards the audience this, and other studies, also therefore took a move away from study of both production and the text.

The majority of audience studies dealt with television: film viewing has been less well-explored, probably because access to 'real' cinema audiences in a public setting is harder to achieve than access to groups of television viewers in domestic environments (Lealand and Martin, 2001). Moreover screen studies in the 1970s and 1980s had been marked by their elaboration of theoretical constructions of 'spectatorship': psychoanalytically inflected debates about the gendered nature of an ideal, rather than an actual spectator (Mulvey, 1973, 1981; Gledhill 1992; de Lauretis 1984). A handful of cinema audience studies do exist, including Staiger's (1992) study of the reception of Hollywood movies from 1915 to 1983, Stacey's (1994) analyses of female fans' responses to a questionnaire about the imagined relationships between themselves and Hollywood stars of the 1940s and 1950s, and Corbett's small study of the place of movie-watching in the relationships of 14 couples (1999), but this is clearly an area where further research could be undertaken.

Audience and 'The Media, Symbolism and the Lifecourse' project

The emphasis on the audience was utilized by Hoover, Clark and others in a large research project - The Media, Symbolism and the Lifecourse project, (1997 -) employing observational, interview and focus-group techniques amongst households in Colorado to ascertain where people are getting their ideas about religion from, and to explore new ways of 'conceptualizing public communication'. At the time of writing publications from the project are still forthcoming but early results, detailed in papers and reports on the project's website²² suggest the conceptual

²² (<http://www.colorado.edu/Journalism/MEDIALYF/> -accessed 5/4/00)

model employed has proved productive in uncovering the various ways media function as storehouses from which people choose identity symbols and concepts;

Media artifacts have an important function as objects that ground identity. They are touchstones through which people define themselves and their place in the social and cultural landscape. The media provide the symbolic resources through which these definitions take place. Their power is not a power to convict or manipulate so much as it is a power to provide the means within culture to define or name. (Hoover 1998b: 3)

Published summaries of research-team meetings suggest the emphasis of the research has gradually shifted away from religion ‘as a central question’ (Hoover, 1988b), to a larger focus on ‘how people construct meaning and identity within the context of the everyday flow of life’, including the ways in which people draw on ‘non-rational resources ... (in) negotiating meaningful senses of self in modern life’ (Hoover, meeting summary 30/1/2001). Even so, this project of investigating how individuals construct self-images and value systems, will doubtless shed further light on the fractured, mutable, nature of contemporary religion and spirituality. As Hoover puts it: ‘Looking back, so to speak, through the eyes of audiences, towards the panoply of media-based sources and then understanding how they navigate that universe, renders the problem of atomization and fracturing less formidable’ (1998c).

However, the heavy emphasis put on the activity of audiences in the Colorado project, and in other recent articles by Hoover, (1998a, 1998b, 2002b) seems to me unnecessarily restrictive. On one hand, the large amount of work already done on audience research in media and cultural studies in the last two decades has resulted not so much in clarity about the mechanisms by which meaning is produced as a plethora of further questions about that process (Nightingale, 1996, Livingstone, 1998). On the other hand, I contend that the production or ‘encoding’ section of the process (see chapter 5) has rarely been treated with sufficient respect or subtlety in the period during which research into reception has dominated. It has been assumed too often that meanings encoded into productions are functionally irrelevant to the eventual reception of those meanings, without actually checking how that process works in specific contexts.

For instance in celebrating the shift towards audience-study Hoover wrote, ‘religion scholars now find themselves looking to the “audience” (religious practice) rather than at the “purveyors of texts” (religious institutions)’ (1997: 285). When Hoover thinks of the production stage of the cycle he assumes on almost all occasions (see 1997: 7,9,19,31,288) that the purveyors of ‘religious’ texts are synonymous with religious institutions. Furthermore, in *Religion, Media and*

the Cultural Centre of Gravity (1998b) he states; ‘we must remember that meaning happens not in the messages we produce but in the audiences which receive them’ (para. 45). There are instances where Hoover acknowledges that this might not always be the case: ‘an evolving view of the nature of contemporary religious practice [...] challenges as well the notion that “religious media” is a category wholly coterminous with those texts constructed by religious groups or with religious intentions’ (1997: 287) and, in ‘We must try to understand the contexts, structures, texts and objects through which media industries come to provide occasions for religious and spiritual meaning making’ (2002: 30).

Meanwhile Lundby’s study of the Games Opening Ceremony stands alone at this point as research which does not assume that the producers of ‘religious’ meanings are necessarily religious. One wonders if this preference is particularly strong in relation to studies of religion and media because of the subject’s origin in televangelism study, where the programmes were typically produced by religious people, and there was, as previously noted, a wariness or even antipathy towards that kind of ‘abundantly’ religious content. This may have fostered a mindset that saw ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ content as necessarily originating from only ‘religious’ people. This assumption appeared to be active again in both Rosenthal’s and Schmalzbauer’s research where the subjects researched are all identified as Christian, and those identities are posited as relevant to the content of their work (see also a larger study on journalists and religion by Silk, 1995). Additionally, the majority of the religion and media empirical work has also dealt with the ‘cooler’ non-fiction manifestations of media such as televangelism and news programming: fictional programming, which arguably adds even more layers of mediation to the process of representation has been largely ignored, another lacuna I wished to address.

The value of studying the production of texts with religious content

It seems to me that in societies where the location(s) of religiosity are theorized to exist in a constant dialogue between the secular and the sacred (White, 1997b) and where the media are envisaged as holding a key position as providers of symbolic resources, it is unreasonable to assume that texts amenable to religious or spiritual interpretation are produced only by people who are themselves religious. If the symbols and forms in which religious ideas are expressed are indeed as fungible, diverse, and steeped in secularity as commentators in the media, religion and culture area claim, then indeed Hoover’s insight that ‘religious media’ are not always constructed by religious groups or indeed, by people with religious intentions, may be highly relevant. If

discourses of religion (and secularity) are swirling around in culture to the degree that these contemporary descriptions of religiosity imply, then their utilization and dispersion would not necessarily be confined only to those who use them for self-consciously religious purposes. In such a case both the import of media messages and the religious/spiritual positioning of media producers become once again useful objects of study.

In a cultural environment which is heavily mediated then, it has been argued that the media come to share religion's traditional role of monitoring and evaluating what can be said and done in a particular culture, what is within certain ethical and rational boundaries and what is not. The meta-studies of those processes; religious studies and media studies, therefore become agencies of 'reflexivity' (Giddens, 1984), where reflexivity is 'the conscious monitored dimension of social life that is constantly assigning meaning to the transactions of everyday life' (White, 1997: 41). Nor is meaning-creation and the monitoring of it always conservative in nature; reflexive practices may be able to distinguish between meanings which 'configure' existing constructions of meaning and power and those that 'prefigure' possible new developments of culture (1997: 42-45). White, for instance thinks that social systems can, from time to time, enter into periods of more intensive reflexivity, although not necessarily in all levels or in all spheres of a system at once. He draws this supposition together with the concept of creative, prefiguring, 'time-out culture' from ritual studies (Jensen, 1995; Goethals, 1997), to suggest that the present era would a good one to scrutinize media products for symbolic constructions which 'prefigure' different visions of religious and societal possibility. However White cautions that 'media studies are still stuck on the debate between advocates of the power of the media and defenders of independent interpretation by audiences' (1995b: 45) and are therefore missing out on the opportunity to carry out innovative projects.

It is as an 'innovative project' examining specifically, but not exclusively, the early stages of the construction of discourses of religion and spirituality that this thesis is positioned, and it is this stage of the negotiation of meaning in religious texts at the point of production, the means by which, in Albanese's words, 'the mass cultural rendition of popular religion becomes a dominating context shaping the emergence of religious vernaculars' (1994: 740) which the remainder of this thesis will explore.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Introduction

This chapter makes a case for, and describes, the methods used in researching this thesis. Firstly it reviews Hall's highly-influential 'Encoding/decoding' model, and the application of that model since its début in the 1970s. After examining the case against a single-minded focus on audience study it explores recent arguments (Comer, 1995, 1998; Gripsrud, 1995; Deacon et al. 1999b) suggesting that the moment of 'encoding' (or production) is more relevant to the process of creation of meaning than previously thought, and that effective studies into the circulation, reproduction and creation of social meanings, should maintain, as an ideal, the analysis of all three phases of production, text and reception. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 1998) is identified as the method by which the discursive analysis of the production and text object-realms of analysis will be carried out. In the second half of the chapter the actual method applied to the study of *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* is described.

Research questions

This research has set out to address the following questions:

- 1) In what ways (thematically, stylistically) are religion and spirituality represented in selected English-language film and television productions within New Zealand?
- 2) To what degree do selected production teams 'intend' their films to contain religious or spiritual material and how do they plan to represent that material?
- 3) How are these intentions and plans affected by the process of production?
- 4) To what degree are the understandings and intentions of the production team received and understood in the same manner by audience members?

These initial questions were focused on issues specific to the process of communication: issues of intention, representation and response. As my knowledge of the research-field increased however, while those basic questions remained relevant, additional questions presented themselves. They involved two topic areas, the first linking discourse practices with sociocultural practices, and the other concerning the relationship between form and religious content.

In relation to the first area I now hypothesized that discussion around the production of these local audio-visual products would offer discourses of religion and spirituality similar to those found in the American and British literature: to what extent were discourses active in a New Zealand situation similar to those identified overseas, or did New Zealand offer its own distinct versions of religion and spirituality?

The second question explored was whether either of the audio-visual texts might be *significantly* religious or spiritual, that is was either of them perceived by the people who made them and/or the people who watched them as resonating with their own understandings of religion and spirituality? While the theory of audience research suggested that the answer to this question lay at the disposition of viewers, arguments from the religion and film area suggested that specific kinds of form had influence here. I was therefore also interested in whether links existed between the ways in which the production personnel imagined and shaped the material and the ways both myself, as textual critic, and other viewers of the text constructed and evaluated the material .

Methodology

The Encoding/Decoding model

One of the most enduring and influential models in media and cultural studies of how meaning makes its way from producers to viewers is Hall's 'Encoding/Decoding' model (1980). The model sets out to account for the circulation and variability of meaning across the various stages of the televisual communication process. Hall speculated about 'the specific modalit[ies] and conditions of existence' of each of the moments of the process, proposing that, 'because of a lack of equivalence between the two sides (sender and receiver) in the communicative exchange', 'distortions' or 'misunderstandings' would occur during the transformative processes of 1) encoding, and 2) decoding. He saw the process in its ideal (impossible) form as 'symmetrical':

The degrees of symmetry – that is the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personifications', encoder-producer and decoder-receiver. (1980: 54)

By activating the concept of (flawed) symmetry, the encoding/decoding model provided a basis for challenging, as Corner (1998) notes, any conception of a smooth flow of ideological effects from society, through the text, to the consumer of the text. Structures of knowledge, which Hall typified as 'discursive' were theorized as circulating through the communicative process but were

always conceived of as being embedded in, and affected by, social and labour relationships, and by the specificities of technical infrastructure.

In terms of the model, each stage of the encoding/decoding process is seen as a site of struggle over the making of meaning. Bennett and Woollacott, in reference to both literary and film versions of 'James Bond' narratives, provide a clear statement of this assumption:

Texts constitute sites around which the pre-eminently social affair of the struggle for meaning is conducted, principally in the form of a series of bids and counter-bids to determine which system of intertextual co-ordinates should be granted an effective social role of organizing reading practices. (1987: 59-69)

Speculating about transformations of discourse at the moment of reception, Hall proposed a threefold paradigm of possible outcomes. He thought the viewer or receiver might a) accept the *dominant* or *preferred* meaning in its entirety, b) accept aspects of it but add personal associations in a *negotiated* reading, or c) reject the terms of the dominant meaning altogether, substituting an alternative frame of knowledge to produce an *oppositional* reading. Those who encoded the message were thought to filter pre-existing meanings through their own 'professional' code, operating within the dominant cultural code, rather than making explicit the ideological assumptions with which they were working (Storey, 1999). However, encoders were thought to have only limited control over what kind of decodings viewers might produce, since each viewer would draw upon discursive resources representing a contingent combination of knowledge and attitudes drawn from his or her class, gender, personal circumstances and so on.

This model is clearly compatible with Foucauldian-influenced discourse analysis as outlined in chapter 2, and also meshes with Thompson's tripartite approach (1988, 1990) since it contributes to an explanation of continuities and discontinuities between the various phases of analysis. It is my intention therefore, in undertaking discourse analysis of the interview material to look at the nature of preferred, negotiated and oppositional meanings in relation to *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen*.

Developments based on the Encoding/Decoding model

Since the 1980s three strands of development have been discernable in relation to the Encoding/decoding model. The most significant in terms both of quantity and influence has been the testing of the decoding stage of the model by a number of empirical studies of audience interpretation and evaluation. These were discussed briefly in the previous chapter but as we will

see below, have reached a critical mass which has more recently, itself attracted critical evaluation. Some of this scrutiny has engendered the second response: a explicit return to Hall's model in order to look more closely at other elements in the process (see for instance Deacon, et al. 1999b and Hagen and Wasko, 2000), since it is suggested that the underlying holistic nature of the model has not been sufficiently recognized.

Thirdly, as the British cultural studies approach itself has developed over the years the discursive, material/contextual and temporal characteristics of the encoding and decoding of cultural production have been synthesized into what has been described (du Gay et al. 1997) as the 'circuit of culture', a complex, multi-directional interaction between five cultural processes of representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation. That is to say, the examination of a cultural practice or text should explore 'how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use' (1997: 3). Any of these moments of the process can affect any other - they need not occur in a linear chronology. For example, although the material form of a film or television programme is usually fixed at the completion of the process known as 'post-production', its representational matrix may also still be altered at that or other points, by the influence of various forces related to identity, consumption or regulation.

This notion of a circuit of culture perceived in terms of articulations of diverse material and discursive elements, offers a framework for investigating links between particular media texts and the discursive constructions active in the cultures within which the texts are produced. In undertaking a 'cultural materialist' analysis of this sort one tries to demonstrate, according to Hall, the ways in which (social, institutional, technical, economic and political forces):

[...] at a certain moment, yield intelligible meanings, enter the circuits of culture - the field of cultural practices - that shape the understandings and conceptions of the world of men and women in their ordinary everyday social calculations, construct them as potential social subjects, and have the effect of organizing the ways they come to or form consciousness of the world. (Hall, 1989 cited in Slack, 1996: 124)

Once the concept of culture has been re-oriented around the production and circulation of meaning, cultural practices, whether they are behaviours or products, can be described in a manner similar to traditional written texts; that is to say that an analyst 'reads' them by undertaking interpretation and explanation of what is observed (Gripsrud, 1995). The implication of this transposition of cultural performances of various sorts into 'texts' is that, whereas I have been

arguing that single-author textual analysis is too partisan and ‘shallow’ a method of understanding the meanings a particular text might carry or elicit within a culture, a more complex, empirically-buttressed version of textual analysis (critical discourse analysis combined with empirical research) becomes an appropriate method for cultural analysis. Or, in Fairclough's words: ‘Textual analysis can give access to the detailed mechanisms through which social contradictions evolve and are lived out’ (1995:15).

Although I have already indicated that I consider the emphasis on audience research somewhat overdone, methodologically, the enterprise has introduced a range of ethnographic techniques into the study of media. These include: the observation of ‘natural’ viewing environments (Morley, 1991, Machin, 2002), the constitution of discussion or ‘focus-groups’ (Schlesinger et al. 1992), the interpretation of fan-letters (Ang, 1985; Tulloch, 1990; Stacey, 1994) and the practice of one-on-one ‘depth’ interviewing, with the subsequent analysis of the ‘talk’ produced from those situations (Radway, 1984, Machin, 2002). This ‘turn towards the audience’ has moreover diverted researchers from what Livingstone called ‘the problematic old arguments’ of single-author textual analysis: ‘the assertion of linear, causal effects on a passive audience, and the homogeneous “mass” audience’ (1998: 195). Nightingale (1996) also sees the benefits of ‘the cultural studies audience experiment’ as being its moves away from a single, privileged textual analyst and from reproductionist accounts of ideology, towards multiple readings of texts produced by people in everyday situations.

However, before long a ‘well-trodden path’ had developed in reception studies conceptualizing the viewer, in a stance criticized as over-optimistic by Roscoe et al. (1995), as ‘active, social and critical’ (see for instance Fiske, 1987). As the television audience ‘experiment’ progressed however, more nuanced research strategies were advanced in pursuit of a ‘truer’ reading of audience interpretations, and areas of scholarly debate also became more pronounced. For instance, since television viewing is often a social activity is the truest reading obtained from talking to an individual viewer, or from a viewer in a group situation? (Roscoe et al. 1995). What sort of influence does the presence of the researcher have on the data obtained; how does he or she transpose and translate it? (Nightingale, 1996). Indeed, what is the ‘audience’ itself? - Lealand and Martin (2000), drawing on Ang (1991), remind us the term is an abstraction, creating an often artificial unity out of diverse individuals. Moreover, according to Sharp, in reception studies; ‘the concern with the nature of the text which forms the basis for the decoding has usually been absent’ (1996: 94), an absence which can render the connection between text and audience apparently

irrelevant. A further criticism is offered by Corner, who claims concern with micro-analysis of the moment of reception has too often lead to 'political quietism' which can displace 'an engagement with the macro-structures of media and society' (1998: 111).

By the middle of the 1990s, under the force of such objections, the plurality of oppositional and negotiated interpretations celebrated as a possibility by Fiske and others was cast into doubt by Nightingale who found the possibility based on a 'misunderstanding', which 'conflated the power to decode with ownership of the text' (1996: 122). With audience research seen to be at a 'crossroads' (Livingstone, 1998), a reconsideration of the importance of other moments and entities in the communication process came to have renewed appeal. Hagen and Wasko (2000) for instance, suggest that both political economy and textual analysis approaches should be reinvestigated for the light they can throw on the degree of interpretive freedom actually available to audiences, with the broader aim being to undermine the concept that investigating production and investigating audiences is an either/or choice. As a subsection of political economy approaches - defined by Mosco as, 'the study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources' (1996: 25), production research itself has a history and it is to that I will now turn.

Production studies

Until the 1980s the majority of investigations into production had concentrated on the production of news, which is easy to study because it comes in a discrete form consisting of fixed ingredients put together in an ordered way, distributed within an established framework (Halloran, 1998). Moreover, since it deals with matters of 'fact' in the public sphere, news has been assumed to have a strongly ideological nature and a consequent importance in the transmission of ideologies within societies (Fairclough, 1995a; Deacon et al. 1999b). It was therefore in order to understand how and why journalists made decisions that White observed the work of a wire-editor at a mid-western newspaper in 1950, and Gieber studied 16 wire editors in Wisconsin in 1956 (Schudson, 1991). Tuchman investigated the strategic use of the concept of 'objectivity' by journalists as a means of warding off criticism and in 1978, 'the processes by which news is socially constructed, how occurrences in the everyday world are rendered into stories' (cited in Hansen et al. 1998: 41). The conclusions of these studies tended to be similar: that news organisations necessarily developed special ties to legitimated and centralized sources of information, thus making their jobs easier and producing news supporting existing structures of social power.

The emphasis on news has continued with a group of works described as ‘the public knowledge’ project (see also Lewis, 1985; Schlesinger, 1987; Dahlgren 1992; Corner et al. 1990; Cottle, 1995, 1998). According to Corner, the public knowledge project is concerned with ‘the media as an agency of public knowledge and “definitional” power ... and [with] the viewer as citizen’ (1998: 110). Another strand of research known as the ‘political economy’ approach has examined whether and how, patterns of ownership in the media industries, aspects of government regulation and the relationships between those two forces, affect the production of the news, by way of ‘the economic foundation of the news organization’ (Gamham, 1991, Golding and Murdock, 1997,).

The production of television documentaries has been studied by, amongst others Elliott (1972), Silverstone (1985), and Domfeld (1998), all of whom mixed on-location observation with interviews with key informants. Elliott’s single case-study approach established a paradigmatic process for production research by undertaking detailed examination of points of decision-making: identifying critical conjunctures at which production personnel made conceptual, technical and aesthetic choices. The chronology of the production process therefore became the organizing principle of the research; a strategy also employed by Domfeld, who followed the making of a television series called *Childhood*. Domfeld identified compromise as a key facet of production, although it is a series of accommodations between ‘expert’ advisors, programme-makers and their conceptualizations of the audience, that, in his opinion, reflected and reinforced representations of social divisions in the topic-area he studied. Gesturing towards a tripartite approach, Silverstone and Domfeld provide brief accounts of reaction to the completed documentary from media reviewers, and, in Silverstone’s case, from focus groups of ‘ordinary’ viewers, although Silverstone states that understanding the effects of a particular programme on individuals in society is an ‘impossibly difficult task’, which would require intense investigation of individual viewers, including detailed ‘biographical and psychological study’.

In the sphere of drama production, the broad genre in which my own study sits, the single-text case study approach was employed by Tulloch and Alvarado in *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Text* (1983), where production decisions were investigated in the context of a larger analysis of the use of scientific and Romantic discourses within the science-fiction genre. A group of studies has investigated the influence of producers and the place of individual creativity inside commercial structures (Cantor, 1988; Newcomb and Alley, 1983; Tulloch, 1990). Cantor concluded that individual creativity is highly controlled by organisational structures despite potentially more

progressive values existing among producers but Newcomb and Alley (1983) argued that ‘strong’ producers could manipulate the industrial system as much as they were manipulated by it.

Todd Gitlin in *Inside Prime Time* (1994), combines both case-study and occupational grouping models by tracing individual productions through time, and by offering individual perspectives from television professionals. He decides there is complexity in the struggle over meaning and expression, but overall, takes a jaundiced view of American television, asserting that ‘there is still virtually no place in television, commercial or private, for a serious writer or director to make a career’ (1994: xi). By contrast a study of the production of the Australian drama series, *A Country Practice*, (Tulloch and Moran, 1986), takes a closer, more approving attitude to the process than Gitlin, noting the pleasure production workers take in being creative within the limits of their resources.

In the sphere of media, religion and culture studies, Lundby’s account of the production of an Olympic Games opening ceremony (discussed in the previous chapter) stands out as exceptional. Peck, in her study of the appeal of two different forms of religious television programming, purports to address ‘the totality of [the] process of production, signification and consumption’ (1993: 43), but her own research is limited predominantly to a textual analysis of the programmes themselves.

Certain themes can be abstracted from these production studies - for instance, the significance of regulatory practices and political pressures from outside the immediate production environment, the degree to which various regulatory norms are internalized within the production process, or the importance of technical practices in framing content in typical ways. In particular the set of practical questions which Newcomb poses in relation to television drama is useful as a guide to undertaking production study:

What are the roles of specific points of influence such as writers, supervising producers, executive producers, directors and actors? What influence is exerted by “external” forces such as networks, advertisers, special-interest groups and regulatory agencies? ... What is the role of “forms” historically developed by interested parties, or “culturally given” in shaping and maintaining content? (1991: 94)

Nevertheless, there have been insufficient production studies completed as yet, especially in the years during which audience research has been dominant²³, for general theories about production processes to have developed. Newcomb (1991) notes that although a single-case study can provide interesting insights any single study is 'potentially unique, potentially aberrant' and cannot provide generalizable results. A programme of studies examining the various levels of production - societal, institutional and individual - is needed, he says, to produce a more robust body of data.

Recent debates about future directions in media studies have shown a renewed interest in production studies, although the discussion has largely remained at a theoretical level. Livingstone's 1998 *Audience Research at the Crossroads*, for instance, suggests that in order to answer the critics of reception studies: 'A research agenda is needed that connects audience research with production/texts/context research as firmly as actual audiences are inevitably connected with actual production/texts/audiences' (1998:196).

Comer also argues that paying more attention to production would ultimately result in an integrated approach to media research:

In my view a reengagement with 'production' – institutional structures, institutional settings and specific production relations – must be part of any development here. Studies of institutions and of production which themselves engaged more closely with representation and/or consumption could make a significant contribution. (1998:160)

Firth calls the production of television programmes and, to a large extent the programmes themselves (since textual analysis has also been unfashionable), the 'black box' of television analysis, urging the importance of production studies combining 'economic and sociological analysis, ethnographic and survey methods' (2000: 49). Born (2000) argues for 'the ontological priority of production over consumption. Production is processually and temporally prior to consumption: it conditions the television text, and in this way sets limits to and conditions consumption' (2000: 416). This reorientation towards the reconsideration of production, within the context of a model acknowledging the significance of all stages of the circuit of culture, is justified not so much in these cases by a rejection of the findings of audience research, which are undoubtedly valuable, as from a more detailed investigation into concepts of 'meaning and influence'.

²³ Such has been the popularity of audience research that, Frith notes, production was allocated just 10 pages out of 120 in a recent survey of the state of Television Studies (2000:38).

Theorizing and researching variations in meaning-construction

In *Television and Public Address* (1995) Comer notes widespread belief that the media are very influential in postmodern cultures, but argues this belief rests on assumption and assertion rather than proof. While acknowledging the permeation of television into public and everyday life, Comer tries to be more specific about what form that influence might take. For instance, he asserts that television is a major source of social imagery and public information which routinely addresses itself to matters of public concern and public value, and thus indubitably contributes to the knowledge environment which surrounds us. But, he envisages a relationship, between television and society which is both 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' at the same time. By 'centripetal' he means: 'the sheer capacity of television for *cultural ingestion* and the way in which so much in the culture necessarily bears some relationship to what is 'on' television' (1995: 4, original emphasis). While to say that television is 'centrifugal' is to suggest that it: 'projects its images, character types, catch-phrases and latest creations to the widest edges of the culture, permeating if not dominating the conduct of other cultural affairs'. (1995: 5)

This diffuse model of influence sits well with approaches emphasizing the importance of both production and reception. Although centripetal and centrifugal forms of influence may be active at all moments of the communication cycle, it is sensible to propose that incoming, centripetal influence may be particularly active in the production context, while at the reception phase the centrifugal metaphor may be apt.

Comer then turns attention on the meaning-processes through which influence functions, asserting that the term 'meaning' is too often used imprecisely, when there are actually three levels of usage;

- 1) The level of *denotation* - the recognition and comprehension level at which a word, image or sequence's primary signification is understood.
- 2) The level at which a word, image or sequence's secondary, implicatory or *associative* signification is recognised and comprehended.
- 3) The level at which viewers and readers attach a generalized significance to what they have seen and heard, *evaluating* it. (1995: 115- 116, my emphasis)

If these levels remain undifferentiated in analysis of reception data, then, argues Comer, it is possible for one level to be employed in a metonymic relationship for the others and for inaccurate claims to thus be made. For instance, when researchers talk of the 'response', 'reading' or

‘interpretation’ a particular media artifact has elicited, Comer argues it is usually the third level of ‘meaning’ (evaluation and response) being called on: one cannot necessarily claim viewers have understood or comprehended the text at the first, denotative level, in divergent ways. However, he adds, if the third or general level *is* emphasized then it is possible to see how the process of making meaning can become creative in ways similar to those the more optimistic of audience researchers have described. It is thus that Comer allows for divergence in evaluation and response while contending there is usually a strong degree of correlation between the meanings made by producers and by audiences, at the basic level of denotative meaning. It is at the second, personal, implicatory and associative levels of meaning that the differences in the third level of evaluation and response are seeded.

The ‘natural history’ of a news item

These distinctions between comprehension, association and response were tested in a piece of case-study research by Deacon et al. (1999b). Their article *From Inception to Reception: the Natural History of a News Item* also makes a case for a reconsideration of encoding as part of what Hall had called a ‘complex structure in dominance’. They report on a chronological study, or ‘natural history’, of a (newspaper) news item, describing how the reporter’s interpretation of a set of materials on the subject of ‘false memory syndrome’ was produced. In particular they demonstrate that he gave greater credence to the ‘official’ views of the British Psychological Society in preference to those of a diffuse group of interested commentators. The researchers then asked several groups of people, categorized according to gender, class and education, to make readings of the news item. They found that all readers understood the text in a manner similar to that in which it had been encoded (that is they recognised the preferred reading) but the ways they *felt* about what was said in the text differed, as did their judgement of whether or not the item was convincing:

Where renegotiation of meaning does occur it is at the level of response – the evaluative level, i.e. what people make of the validity of the item and the research. Readers may respond by rejecting the accreditation of expertise offered in the text [...] This would suggest that critical purchase is rooted in personal and professional experience. ... When these pre-existing frames of reference are negligible or non-existent the definitional power of the text is seen to increase. (1999b: 24)

Since it is the readers who ‘understand’ the topic best who are least likely to evaluate the particular presentation positively, this research suggests it is the acceptance of subtle variations in worldviews which is at issue when readers (or viewers) respond to a text, rather than, as Hall

proposed, a matter of the misunderstanding of information and attitudes 'encoded' in the text. Although Deacon et al. observe that news items are denotatively more 'transparent' than fictional texts, and that this process is therefore easier to discern in a factual context, their argument nevertheless adds weight to calls for a reconsideration of production. If encoded, 'preferred' or 'dominant' meanings are generally at least recognized by audience members - even if they later choose to refuse them or diverge from them at the level of association and response - then the manner in which issues are framed by 'authors' (individual, collective or processual) of texts is as determinative of meaning as any other part of the process. Moreover, that texts should be at least partially determinative of their interpretations should not be surprising, Corner says, because most of them are constructed from 'systems of signification based on widespread social/national acceptance and having relatively low levels of ambiguity' (1998: 116). In other words, in the majority of cases, the producers of texts draw upon discursive constructions already in circulation in the cultural and social environments within which they produce.

Exemplary holistic studies

Until this point there are actually only a handful of studies which examine the whole circuit of media production. Radway's *A Feeling for Books* (1997) sets out the history of the American Book-of-the-Month club, undertakes ethnographic observation of its production processes, and provides decoding data by the author, substituting reflection on her own experience as a reader for broadly-based audience research. Dornfeld's *Producing Public Culture* (1998) has already been mentioned as has *A Country Practice: Quality Soap?* (Tulloch and Moran, 1986), which sets the programme in its socio-historical context before working through an examination of each of the craft areas necessary for production. However the most satisfactory model of an holistic, hermeneutic inquiry into a media product I have encountered, is Gripsrud's *The Dynasty Years: Hollywood Television and Critical Media Studies* (1995).

Gripsrud's investigation is into the impact of the American dramatic serial *Dynasty* on Norwegian culture, organizing it on the chronological single-case study model, progressing from production through text to reception. In the production research, carried out by way of interviews, Gripsrud took a Newcombian approach, 'chart[ing] some of the major sources of influence, both institutional and personal' (1995: 54) on the way that meaning was encoded into the programme. Perhaps the most contentious aspect of Gripsrud's production study however is its tentative re-deployment of the concept of 'authorship', a concept also implicit in the Deacon et al. (1999b) study. This is not the same 'auteurism' - the attribution of creative origination to a single

intelligence - that had died at the hands of post-structuralist critics in the 1970s. Rather it is a diffuse form of collective authorship, in which the specific characteristics of a text are created by a specific group of people out of a much wider range of possibilities. As Gripsrud explains:

[...] the point is that the intersection of a complex of pre-existing ideological constructs did not come about by itself, and that intersections of ideological constructs cannot make anything appear on any television screen. Any such intersection is a specific one, in some sense created out of many possibilities by way of specific selections and more or less idiosyncratic additions which mark the specificity of a particular text. (1995: 54)

Gripsrud's revised notion of authorship claims that while there is a constant pressure in the audio-visual production industries towards a *sameness* of texts (to ensure commercial success) 'the vital *difference* between texts in the same genre, their specificity can only be fully accounted for with regard to the actual people involved in leading roles in the production process' (1995: 53-54, original emphasis).

The second point I found inspirational in Gripsrud's work was his revival of Gans' (1957) concepts of 'audience-image' or the 'implied audience', as used by production personnel. This concept is one, I believe, which enables a bridging of the artificial divide between production and reception as moments in communication. Rather than seeing media production as a merely 'centrifugal' process Gripsrud, like Gans, is interested in the 'creator's' image(s) of the audience, and how it feeds back into the production of an audio-visual text. This imagining of the audience involves more than just the outlines of gender, age, class, and taste implied by certain genres - it entails an ongoing process of visualizing how audience members might react to technical and artistic choices specific to the production; 'Gans holds that this audience image functions as "an external observer-judge" which plays an important if mostly unconscious, role in the creative process, which Gans regards as a series of choices between different alternatives' (Gripsrud, 1995: 55).

This audience-image need not be straightforward or unitary - it may involve, Gans suggested, a partial displacement whereby the creator(s) see him/her, or themselves, as representative of the audience, similar to them in background, taste, knowledge and way of life. They then expect that what satisfies them will also be pleasing to the eventual audience. Dornfeld provides a similar view of the centripetal influence of audience on production in his aforementioned study of public television documentary, claiming that 'authorship' needs to be re-thought, as a 'grounded, empirically assessable dimension of cultural production' since: 'Producers' projections about their

audience greatly affect the selection, encoding and structuring of the media forms these institutions distribute' (1998: 13 and 17).

Tulloch and Moran (1986), take that argument even further by asserting that each of the production personnel on *A Country Practice* may also be thought of as an audience member, as they move from action to reflection at various times: 'The director watching back episodes of *ACP* before plotting his first block is [...] an audience member: and so too is the pair of producers watching the first assembly of an episode near the end of the production cycle' (1986: 100). If crew members serve as audiences in this manner and if 'audience images' are indeed mobilized during production in a circular, self-referential process, the stark divide between production and audiences which has developed over recent decades can then be removed. Or, as Dornfeld suggests:

[...] the very separation made between "audience members" and "producers" is an artifact of the history of mass communications scholarship tied to an industrial model of communications research. As such, it has become an ideological distinction that, when transcended, offers the richer conceptualization that the production and consumption processes are intertwined. (1998: 14)

Thinking of production, text, and reception as articulated through the development of a chain of imagined audience positions may therefore be fruitful even if those positions are not all recognised or inhabited by actual viewers later on. Gripsrud for instance, asserts that audience positions are not unlimited in number in any production and that it is the limitation and organizations of viewer positions which gives a television show its particular profile. For him therefore production research entails investigating the specificities of the particular social and historical contexts of individual production personnel. He calls this the 'explanation' of how a text came to be the way it is; 'the diachronical, more or less analytical socio-historical description of how it achieved its specific shape' (1995: 64). For Gripsrud, 'interpretation' then is the activity of attempting to grasp the 'synchronically available meaning(s) [of a text] for whoever is perceiving it' (1995: 64). This is also how I view this thesis-project, as an investigation into the meanings the case-study productions held, at various times, for those who made them, including taking into account what the producers/encoders imagine about the audience.

Discourse analysis as a method of interpretation

In chapter 1 a case was made for combining Foucault's understanding of discourses as combinations of cultural behaviour and knowledge with the politicized, empirical study of popular

culture enjoined by British forms of cultural studies. However, despite the strong explanatory appeal of Foucault's seminal work in the field of discourse, he had not been specific about the means by which forms of knowledge circulate within the micro-contexts of everyday life 'at a particular time, in a particular place, with particular participants' (Wodak, 1996). It is therefore in the direction of enhanced particularity that more recent analysts have taken discourse work. Specifically, for this project, the analytical tool is the form of critical linguistic analysis (Deacon et al. 1999a), also called 'critical discourse analysis' (Titscher et al. 2000), and developed by Fairclough (cf. 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b, 1998).

As with British cultural studies, critical discourse analysis is influenced by Althusserian and Gramscian theories of how cultural production achieves acquiescence to institutional forms of power (Titscher et al. 2000), through the circulation of ideologies by way of mediating institutions and their prescribed practices (Fairclough, 1995b; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Discourses function as social practices by alternatively, legitimating certain forms of knowledge, identity and behaviour, thus increasing their acceptability, or by discounting, or de-legitimizing other forms of knowledge, identity and behaviour, thereby reducing their status and effectiveness in social life (Deacon et al. 1999a). Change, or creativity, is also possible because some discourses are dominant and have definitional power at particular times while others are marginalized (Comer et al. 1998). Yet there is scope for that discursive balance to change as constructions of power and knowledge currently lacking in persuasiveness may later achieve greater power.

All social domains, including domains of religious and spiritual explanation and practice, may be analysed in terms of the configurations of discourses by which they are characterised and which they offer as resources for collective and individual constructions of knowledge. To use the term 'order of discourse' is to speak of an extensive phenomenon: 'a structured configuration of genres and discourses (and other elements such as voices, registers and styles), associated with a given social domain - for example, the order of discourse of a school' (Fairclough, 1998: 145). At a smaller, everyday level, discourse, following Hall, is the stuff of social interaction, the particular ways, or 'logics-in-use' with which people frame and present knowledge when they are talking to one another (see also Comer et al. 1998).

In noting the construction of social identities through discourse, discourse analysis does not however, attempt to delve into the 'private minds' of either texts or those who create them. According to Howarth it is an anti-cognitivist approach which does not seek to uncover the 'true'

underlying meanings of texts and actions, as if they were deliberately concealed by ideological practices and discourses. Instead; ‘while discourse theory does seek to provide novel interpretations of events and practices by elucidating their meaning, it does so by analysing the way in which political forces and social actors construct meanings within incomplete and undecidable social structures’ (2000: 129).

Most discourse analysts adopt a ‘social constructionist’ stance (Potter and Wetherall, 1987; Potter, 1996; Hoover and Lundby, 1997; Parker, 1998) which sees meaning as socially-produced through language: Potter uses the metaphor of a construction yard and of discourses as ‘prefabricated’ building components for this process (1996: 193). Since human agents construct expressed views in response to specific circumstances, critical discourse analysis therefore accepts what research participants say about their experience as relevant research data. It is appropriate moreover, considering the ‘building materials’ potentially available in a specific context, to be concerned with the discourses that people have chosen not to use, as well as those pressed into service.

Texts and discourse analysis

In the critical discourse analysis model, a media text is one of many forms of text (or interaction) where discursive struggle can be observed: ‘Texts provide usually temporary and short-lived ways of resolving the dilemmas into which people are put by the tensions and contradictions which frame those texts’ (Fairclough, 1995a: 15). Discourse is typically studied in transcripts of conversations and speeches, news reports, films and television programmes, that is, in recorded instances of human interaction. Discourse analysis so far has an ‘unreasonable’ bias towards language-based texts (Deacon et al. 1999a), but visual texts, which communicate meaning on the basis of semiotic codes of signification (Metz, 1982; Nicholls 1976; Domfeld, 1998) are included in Fairclough’s list of the types of material which can be approached through discourse-analysis (1995a). However, Fairclough asserts that texts are never ‘definitively accomplished entities’, rather, they occur as the interplay between the ‘traces’ they bear of their production and the ‘cues’ they provide for their interpretation. These cues for interpretation tend to steer readers or viewers towards constructions of the text which seem natural and appropriate to them, thus accounting for the frequency of interpretations which have strong links to the encoding moments of the text (see also Deacon et al. 1999a, 1999b).

Another important concept in discourse analysis is ‘intertextuality’. It recognises that discursive interactions can be categorised into genres, according to their characteristics and purposes

(Fairclough, 1999). By 'genre' Fairclough means 'a socially ratified type of linguistic activity with specific positions for subjects (1999: 208) - examples of which might be interview situations, television news reports, casual conversations, counselling interviews, religious sermons and so on. When producing new texts people draw upon other texts and text genres available to them, blending them according to their own needs (Comer et al. 1998), and their productions are therefore 'intertextual' in the sense of being hybrid: a hybridity which can be unpacked in analysis. Secondly Thompson and Bell both observe that all types of media discourse 'have a heavily embedded and layered character [...] in the sense that earlier versions are embedded within later versions and constitute so many layers within them' (Bell, 1991:50). For instance, at each stage in the construction of a media text relying upon successive drafts of a script, as *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* did, earlier versions are transformed, says Bell, in accordance with 'the concerns, priorities and goals of the current stage' (1991: 51). The resulting texts therefore have syntagmatic discursive histories as well as exhibiting paradigmatic choices at any specific point in those histories.

Criticism, conservatism and change

Critical discourse analysis is critical in that it follows Habermasian injunctions that theory must both be self-reflective about its own assumptions and take account of the historical contexts of communicative interactions. It is politically both pessimistic and optimistic: pessimistic in assuming most discursive formations place negative limits on the thinking of citizens (Titscher et al. 2000) but optimistic in proposing a mechanism by which new forms of discourse can become viable (see above). Fairclough sees language and the social as always partnered in this situation; 'critical discourse analysis explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and the socially constitutive, rather than opting one-sidedly for one or the other' (1995a: 55).

The metaphors employed for this dialectical process are those of fluidity and combat; discourses proliferate, shift and change on a terrain of hegemonic struggle. Thompson's formulation of this process acknowledges that texts are not necessarily in an ideological steady-state and might contain traces of what he calls 'incipient' ideologies, those which have not reached a critical mass in public awareness (1990). For Fairclough, whether language has a conservative or transformative function depends on prevailing social circumstances, for example on the degree of flexibility in the power relations of a defined context. Potentially transformative texts are likely to be heterogeneous, displaying contradictory styles and semantic properties, since a stable set of

social relationships and identities implies a relatively orthodox and normative use of discourses and genres together with a respect for social conventions. On the other hand ‘the questioning of conventional [...] interactions leads to creativity and innovation in the use of orders of discourse and results in relatively heterogeneous texts’ (Fairclough, 1992b: 215). It was my assumption that since discourses regarding religion and spirituality are understood to be undergoing a process of change currently (see chapter 2), I might find that both my interview transcripts and the audio-visual texts themselves were ‘relatively heterogeneous’ and perhaps, creative, in nature.

Discursive paradigms relating to religion and spirituality

In the work on social-historical context done in the literature review chapters of this thesis, it was established that there is, in the United States, Britain and New Zealand, no one hegemonic construction of religious knowledge. These Western societies might all be considered culturally Christian but the underlying myth of Christianity is activated within them to varying degrees and in diverse formations, most of which are inflected by other forms of social, economic, and political interest. For instance, as outlined in chapter 2, religious fundamentalism and discourses of both atheism and spirituality may all be viewed as reactions to anxieties occasioned by changing forms of modern social organisation. The ongoing process of discursive intertextuality is also a factor in contemporary religious and spiritual discourse as constructions of knowledge from other domains - for example those of science, social science, and from non-European cultures - clash and hybridize with more traditionally European, ‘religious’ discourses (Beckford, 1986; Campbell 1999). It should also be remembered that there are certain discourses likely to be employed right across the spectrum in Western societies - these are for instance, discourses associated with Woodhead and Heelas’ three major societal trends: the rise of market economies, the rise of secular nation states, and the rise of difference (see page 31, chapter 3), to which can be added the influence of psychotherapeutic discourses in Western culture (see for instance, Peck, 1993).

For these reasons it is difficult to disentangle various forms of religious, spiritual, and secular discourses from one another in order to study them. As a consequence it must be acknowledged that in undertaking such a disentangling, one is also partially engaged in constructing the discourses one identifies: other analysts might possibly construct a different list in similar circumstances. Nevertheless, despite that qualification, certain discursive formations around religion and spirituality *have* occurred repeatedly in the academic and popular literatures surveyed in the first three chapters of this thesis. They might therefore be said to constitute a significant

sample of the major discursive constructions of religion and spirituality available to cultural producers operating within English-language environments, including New Zealand, during the last few years. These discourses are categorized according to Woodhead and Heelas's three-part typology of religions of difference, religions of humanity and spiritualities of life, (2000, see also page 53, chapter 3), with an additional fourth set of observations relating to religiosity in New Zealand. This fourth section - 'the Kiwi spirituality' discourse - is extremely tentative in nature, since, compared to the overseas data, it is based on a small literature sample.

The constructions are therefore divided into 'global' and 'local' forms. If discourses are active globally it means they can be discerned across all the cultural environments surveyed in the literature review in chapter 2, and are also therefore available for use in New Zealand - although New Zealanders may or may not use them to the same degree that they are employed in other countries. On the other hand the discursive constructions in the 'local' section are given more emphasis in discussion of the New Zealand situation, but may also be active in analogical forms in other cultures.

Global discourses

Discourse of religions of difference

This model of religiosity is described by Woodhead and Heelas, as 'highly differentiated' (2000: 3), that is those who draw upon it posit God, the world and human beings as separate entities, between whom there are proper relationships of dominance and submission (Barth, 1963). Within this discourse, the source of divinity is transcendent to both the natural world and the world of human culture (Otto, 1958; McGuire, 1982) and it is thought that transcendental powers either benign or malignant, may choose to intervene in worldly matters (Lindsey, 1983). However since this transcendental power is rarely revealed directly, heavenly authority functions through its delegation to a religious institution, which may emphasize either, or both, tradition (Heilman, 1982), or the authority of a sacred text (Antoun, 1989, Toumey, 1994). Those who support a religions of difference worldview may also express the opinion that the maintenance of correctly structured relationships, between members of a religion and non-members (Hobspawn, 1995; Hunwick, 1997), between men and women (Pope Pius XI, 1930; Khomeini, 1979; Davidman, 1991) is important to preserving the vitality of a religious tradition. Finally, someone drawing on a religions of difference discourse may assert that the world would be a better place if fundamental religious values were reasserted in the civil/political sphere (for example, see Voll, 1987).

Discourse of religions of humanity

According to Woodhead and Heelas, in this type of religiosity, which they also call 'liberal religion' (2000: 73), God and man are thought to have a close bond, with man, if anything, the locus of the enterprise, rather than being subordinate to God (Nehru, 1983). There may be rites and institutions associated with this model but within a discourse of religions of humanity it is thought that human reason, and its ability to reflect on human experience, is a powerful tool for understanding the nature of existence. Authority is therefore shared between the human and the divine (Passmore, 1970; His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 1996). Compassion and tolerance towards other people and their beliefs is a strong value within this discourse (Rammohun, 1934; Ammerman, 1997) since correctly-motivated action is more important than strict adherence to doctrines and dogma. Nevertheless, those who draw on a religions of humanity discourse are usually not fatalists; they believe it is possible for human beings to build a better social world through correctly-motivated action (McLeod, 1981; Radford Reuther, 1983; Ammerman, 1997).

Discourse of spiritualities of life

This third discourse is the most wide-ranging, covering concepts associated with such movements as 'New Age' spirituality, Neo-paganism and the huge range of activities and attitudes connected with 'expressive spirituality' (Bellah et al, 1985; Heelas, 1996a; Woodhead and Heelas, 2000). Those drawing on a spiritualities of life discourse will tend to assume that the divine, the human and the natural are one and the same, since in effect, they are all manifestations of the same 'spirit' (Bloom, cited in Perry, 1992), Nevertheless, while everything may be connected in this way, divinity and authority are to be found as aspects of 'the self', rather than originating from a point outside the human being (Berger, et al. 1974; Taylor, 1991; Heelas, 1996; Harding, 1986). At the same time however, it is assumed that the 'divine' aspects of the self may need to be cultivated to be fully activated; this can be achieved by the employment of various technologies of self-improvement, or psychotechnologies (Ray, 1990; Sivananda, 1990; Gehlen, 1980). Another of the tenets of the spiritualities of life discourse is that it may be appropriate to construct one's own spiritual system out of views and practices from a number of sources (Bell, 1979; Bloom, 1991, Voyé and Dobbelaere, 1993). Some forms of spirituality may extend beyond the self to involvement in social, political and environmental matters (Tipton, 1982; Carpenter, 1996; Heelas, 1996a), but a spiritualities of life discourse may also occur in a 'utilitarian' variation where spirituality is seen as a means of gaining prosperity, or of enriching the working environment (Schneider and Dornbusch, 1958; Rose, 1985; Thrift, 1997). It is common to find that people who

use elements of a spiritualities of life discourse also hold the opinion that some non-European cultures and worldviews, especially those with elements of pre-modernism, are more spiritual than contemporary Western cultures (Herrigel, 1953; Radhakrishnan, 1970; Heelas, 1996). Finally, another feature one might find in a spiritualities of life discourse is the statement or assumption, that religion is linked with male authority and spirituality more in touch with the 'feminine' (Christ, 1992; Starhawk, 1989; Gilling, 1999).

Constructions of religion and spirituality emphasized in New Zealand

As noted above it is necessary to be extremely speculative about the nature of local discourses of religion and spirituality since there has been insufficient research yet done on this topic in New Zealand. However, drawing on the sources outlined in chapter 3, I venture the following propositions as representative of the ways that religiosity is understood in New Zealand. In particular I note that this set of choices comes from the perspective of a European New Zealander and that, as Webster's data suggests, someone from another of the sub-cultures of New Zealand would doubtless offer a different set of perspectives. In New Zealand it is often assumed that explicit religion is of little importance in discussion of public life (Bluck 1999; Ahdar, 2000). Rather, there is a secular principle called the 'Kiwi spirit' which is both a reaction to, and an active expression of, the advantages of living in a small society in a beautiful environment (Preston, 1992; Bluck 1999). From experience with media representation one may argue that this sense of spirit reaches public consciousness in discussions of sport, the arts and national identity (Sharpe, 1982; Bluck, 1999; Grimshaw 1999, 2000; Ralston, 2001). It has also been suggested that spirituality in a religious sense is seen as a property of Maori and as a lack in many European New Zealanders (Greenland, 1991; Mita, 1992), although there are indications that if a distinctive New Zealand spirituality were to be delineated it would involve an expression of the human relationship to the land (Preston, 1992; Bluck, 1999; Webster, 2001) for both Maori and European New Zealanders. It is my own proposition (Hardy, forthcoming), supported by James (1999, 2000), that the spiritual (as an emphasis on the health both of human beings and of their relationship to the country's natural resources) may sometimes function in opposition to the principles and effects of late-modern capitalism.

Use of the master-list of discourses

In the remainder of the thesis this 'master list' of discourses, especially the first three, is used as a template against which the statements of the production team members and the representatives of audiences (focus group members, reviewers) are able to be compared. For instance, do the

production interviewees draw upon all, some, or none of these discourses? Do their statements align them with one particular model of religiosity or do they make eclectic choices from amongst various discursive repertoires?

The aim of this thesis is to investigate which discourses were circulating in both the production phase and texts of *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* in order to speculate on how they might be linked with one another, and with wider socio-cultural practices. My approach was to elicit statements about the religious and/or spiritual positionings of people working on the production, in order to determine what kind of relationship they might bear to discourses circulating in international and local publications on religion, spirituality and the media. I did not however expect to find any such thing as a *bounded* or *pure* discourse on matters of religion and spirituality. I assumed that there would be competition between religious discourses themselves in everyday conversation such and that discourses would always impinge on and be impinged by, discourses from other realms of culture. For instance there are ‘professional’ discourses about what it means to be a ‘good’ (effective, employable) actor, director, writer, editor or producer. There are ‘economic’ discourses, where economic might refer to the process of establishing and controlling a film's budget. There may be ‘aesthetic’ discourses in operation, either about what constitutes a successful film, or what constitutes satisfying self-expression. Since there is always fluidity and contestation in the discursive environment I took care to make space for explanations that came from orders of knowledge outside those that were of primary interest to my research.

Method

Description of project

The empirical inquiry with which this thesis is concerned is described as a pair of production case-studies where data gathered primarily by the method of depth interviewing, is analysed by means of critical discourse analysis techniques. The subjects of the case-studies are the production, text, (and to a minor extent) reception, of two audio-visual texts - a feature film, *Saving Grace*, and a television mini-series *The Chosen*. The projects were followed from shortly before production began until after the time of their public screening or broadcasting, so the research therefore follows a chronological model of organisation. The data interpretation is focused on an intertextual analysis of discourses related to religion and spirituality offered in transcripts of interviews with production and industry personnel and in secondary documents including shooting scripts, letters, newspaper and magazine reviews. There is also some discussion of a third-party research report on audience reaction to the test-screening of *Saving Grace*.

Project design

In 1997, having established the focus for this thesis and its research questions I looked for projects to study. Films with either explicit or strongly implicit religious or spiritual content seemed the most promising case-studies for this project: and it was also necessary that I could gain permission to study them.

I was aware that forms of research involving the investigation of an environment different to that the researcher customarily inhabits share similar constraints. First, access to the research situation must be acquired. This permission can be difficult to obtain from media professionals who may see themselves as members of cultural and commercial élites, used to controlling access to public information, and loathe to make time in their work-schedules for interactions with outsiders, or to cede to others the power of judgment. For instance, it is rare to get open access to executive producers or chief executives of television organisations, so their influence may not be easily researchable (Curran, 1990). This was certainly my experience in relation to *The Chosen*, where I was never able to interview the series' Executive Producer. Access may therefore be partial, intermittent or subject to unacceptable conditions (Newcomb 1991); factors which Schlesinger (1980), and Born (2000) report as significant in their own research projects with the BBC. As a result, research may be guided sometimes by opportunity rather than logic (Newcomb, 1991), and, one's gratitude for access granted can lead to a too-easy acceptance of the research subjects' point-of-view (Domfeld, 1998).

In the film-industry magazine *OnFilm*, I found an article about the forthcoming production of *Saving Grace* - a film about a man 'who thought he was Jesus'. The director, Costa Botes, agreed to my proposal with quick generosity, as did the project's producer Larry Parr. After initial permission had been granted any restrictions on access on this project were my own. However, since filming was due to begin three weeks later I was propelled into field research more quickly than expected. I drew up a list of standard questions to be explored with each of the interviewees (see Appendix A).

The *Saving Grace* fieldwork and transcriptions occupied most of 1997, and then in November of that year I noticed another *OnFilm* article announcing the imminent production of a television mini-series *The Chosen* - about a conflict between a priest and a cult-leader. Permission was gained by email from the Executive Producer to study the production. In this case however actual

access was severely restricted as the production was both large and extremely pressured. Arrangements to visit could be made only through the Production Manager, for whom my research was low on the list of priorities. As a result my data on *Saving Grace* is more extensive and in greater depth than that for *The Chosen*. Nevertheless I did have access to two productions, both of which contained content that is clearly religious in reference.

Data gathering by in-depth interviewing

The 'depth' or 'semi-structured' interview is often the method of choice for production research. According to Priest (1996) the depth interview is an open-ended conversational exploration of some aspect of an individual's worldview. The researcher starts out with a set of written questions to be explored, but these need not be followed in a rigid order, and participants are free to ask for clarification or to explore any issue in greater detail. The assumed benefits of one-on-one 'depth' interviewing are that a researcher can ask several people about the same topic and gain multiple perspectives on it. The perspectives can suggest the participants share discursive frameworks, or can give a sense of the tensions active in the production environment. Conducting multiple interviews can therefore increase the comprehensiveness and reliability of information and bring in specific, personal knowledge difficult to obtain in a group situation, where opinions may be collectively negotiated at that moment.

There are however several points recognized as compromising the objectivity of one-on-one interviewing. The participants may be unequal in status and the information gathered may be shaped by the wish of one or another to please, annoy, or confuse. Or, Hansen et al. (1998) the informants may be unreliable; may have inaccurate memories, may give self-serving answers, and may sometimes lie, although the questioning of several people on the same topic, providing a form of data triangulation, may protect against the interviewer being misled by interviewees. On the other hand, the interviewer may ask only for information that will confirm her original assumptions - the thoughtful advance planning of a question schedule is the best safeguard against this possibility.

All these points are rendered relative however by Machin's admonition that one ought not to rely on people knowing, and being able to talk about, the 'real' reasons for doing what they do, since those reasons are often not available to them (2002: 38). Rather, than looking for 'truth' he argues, we should be content with realizing that what comes out of the analysis of interview material are 'official' or public discourses and explanations; that people typically use sets of ideas that have

already become established in society to explain themselves because these sets of ideas seem acceptable and appropriate in the circumstances. This is not a qualification either myself or Machin ultimately find problematic however because it is precisely the issue of which ‘sets of ideas’ around religion and spirituality are currently acceptable that I wish to investigate, and it is the negotiation between such public discourses that is central to production.

Ethnography and media research

Both the ongoing strand of production study in media research and the larger interest in studies of reception have contributed to what has been identified as an ‘ethnographic turn’ in media and other cultural studies (see for instance, Nightingale, 1996; Deacon et al. 1999a; Hagen and Wasko, 2000). In its fullest form of *participant observation* (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991; Priest, 1996; Hansen et al. 1998; Machin, 2002) ethnographic study entails the researcher participating in the research subjects’ daily or professional lives over a period of time, watching what is happening in the situation, listening to what is said and asking questions to improve understanding (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). However participant observation requires such extensive resource and time commitments that few researchers carry out the ethnographic method in its fullest form and in media studies the term ‘ethnographic’ has also come to be used ‘as a diffuse description of any qualitative research involving extended observation, or indeed interviewing, over a period of time’ (Deacon et al. 1999a: 252). This project is ethnographic in this second sense.

I chose not to observe the productions, partly for financial reasons and partly because I judged there was insufficient value to be gained from watching the filming for constant observation to be necessary. Having worked as a director myself the dynamics of production were already broadly familiar to me, and I also believed - as Comer says of ethnographic media research in general (1998), and Dornfeld (1998) says of observing television production in particular - that events uniquely significant to one’s research are often submerged in a welter of fragmented activity: one could observe for a long time and still not be sure of capturing the ‘right’ moments. An interview method seemed more appropriate since I was interested in the production process largely insofar as it concerned a specific, intellectual, aspect of content - the construction of religious material in the projects. Filming is only one stage of that production process: many of the decisions about content had already been made months before and could already only be studied retrospectively. Moreover the data in which I was interested included the individual religious and spiritual beliefs of the production team, and I assumed that these subjects are not often dealt with in public,

particularly not in a pressured workplace. On several occasions I did observe aspects of the process, most notably the test-screening of *Saving Grace* and the subsequent focus-group discussions held by a market research company, but depth-interviewing was the central method employed.

It is accurate therefore to describe this project as 'case study research' where a particular instance is studied as part of a larger phenomenon. A case study approach involves 'gathering information from a variety of sources which have a bearing on the institution, group or individual which is the focus of your study' (Rountree and Lang, 1996: 106). According to Titscher et al. (2000) case studies are particularly appropriate if the context is unusually rich or complex, and one may use a variety of materials - for instance interviews, examination of documents and artifacts, and observation - to construct a precise description of the phenomenon which is of interest. Since any finding or conclusion in a case study can be supported by a chain of evidence based on several different sources of information, case-study research tends to carry greater conviction and accuracy than more fragmented forms of enquiry (Yin, 1989). In the production research studies described previously many investigators have undertaken just a single case-study, but if two or more case studies are involved the project constitutes a comparison. Nevertheless, according to Titscher et al. (2000) multiple case studies are not designed to achieve representativity of results by an increase in the number of cases, since the number is still insufficient to draw strong conclusions. Rather, researchers who use this kind of design 'are interested in theoretical rather than statistical generalizations' as an outcome of their research.

Other considerations in fieldwork

Once *in situ*, according to Cottle (1998) the researcher must be a good observer, must be skilled at talking with and interviewing subjects, and must be able to retrieve various forms of organizational documentation. Since unforeseen events may occur during the research period success is more likely if researchers can 'respond flexibly to opportunities when presented, [pursue] unforeseen lines of enquiry, [secure] new findings, and following a period of conceptual and theoretical labour, revised understanding may result' (1998: 37). Research is strengthened by gaining prior knowledge of the field, undertaking careful planning, including consideration of the work-schedules of the research subjects (Newcomb, 1991), and gaining information about the same topic from several sources, thus cross-checking (Cottle, 1998) and thereby achieving a modicum of data triangulation (Rountree and Lang, 1996). One also needs to take into account Schlesinger's observation (1980) that disengagement from the research material, and hence

greater insight into its significance, may only occur some time after the fieldwork is concluded, since research into a sub-culture necessarily gives an account of a particular social group at variance with that group's view of itself, and it can take time to loosen one's ties to the situation researched.

Domfeld (1998) has noted the problem inherent in researchers 'studying up', that is, researching situations in which the research subjects may be perceived as having greater social status than the researcher. Since my production credentials were now in the past, potential for status disparity existed in relation to both projects. However, in *Saving Grace*, it was mitigated by the fact that most members of the production team were making their first feature. My experience of interviewing them was that they were unpretentious, thoughtful and communicating from a position of equality – with one or two exceptions, I did not feel, as Newcomb (1991) warns, that I might be getting 'canned' or routine responses to my questions. The exceptions were my interactions with the Film Commission staff, and some friction in a second interview with the producer, done at the point where he was beginning to be disappointed with the production: I did not explore the reasons for the testiness evident in these interactions. As a result of the warm welcome I received on *Saving Grace* I was aware of becoming 'attached' to this project, wanting it to succeed; however the intervening writing-up period has allowed me to gain academic distance again in relation to the material gathered.

Field research

The information for the field research was gathered primarily by means of a series of one-to-one interviews with those members of the production team who, in my judgement, would have the most opportunity to influence the structure, tone and emphases of the production.

The range of people interviewed on the productions was:

***Saving Grace* (Film)**

Scriptwriter
Director
Producer
Lead Actors (x2)
Editor
Funding provider (NZFC)
Marketer (NZFC)

***The Chosen* (TV)**

Scriptwriters
Producer
Production Manager
Lead Actors (x3)
Editor
Funding provider (NZOA)
Director
Production Designer
Public Relations

Each participant was asked similar questions from the interview guide although the order of questions varied, and greater expansion and clarification occurred with some people than others. With the exception of the lead actor from *The Chosen*, interviewed by telephone two years after the mini-series' production, all research subjects were interviewed in person, at a location of their choosing: usually either at their workplace or at home. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts made of them. Copies of transcripts were offered to the participants and sent where requested.

On the assumption that the forces shaping a production are always as much commercial as 'creative' the first round of interviews attempted to identify the complete range of influences and motivations which participants thought were significant in the production environment. Each interview was prefaced by explaining that I was exploring the representation of religion and spirituality in New Zealand film and television, but did not want to assume that because the script contained references to religion, this was necessarily a matter of either professional or personal importance for the interviewee. I then asked why they were involved in the production, what they thought it would be 'about' and who they thought it was 'aimed at' in terms of audience (refer to Appendix A). The writer, director and producer were also asked for their recollections of the process by which the script was developed. About halfway through interviews I would ask both about the subject's positioning on spiritual and religious matters and whether those positionings were (dis)consonant with what they thought the film was saying about religion or spirituality. Typically, I would then be asked about my own beliefs and would reply that I was a member of a Buddhist group, briefly answering any questions about that allegiance.

While this procedure was similar in researching both productions, because of the differing extent of access, and because of the different paths the production and post-production processes of the two projects took, the research activities for them will be described separately.

Saving Grace

In the case of *Saving Grace*, after reading a final draft of the script, initial interviews were done with the writer, director, producer, and two lead actors the week before filming began in January 1997. Individual interviews lasted from one-and-a-half to three-and-a half hours.

A second set of interviews, conducted six weeks later, investigated the participants' recall of the production and post-production processes once the filming had finished and editing begun. I was

particularly interested in the outcome of interviewees' predictions as to what would happen during filming, and how their views of what the film was about might have been modified by the practical exigencies of production. The film editor, who was to become an important contributor to the final form of the film, was added to the list of interviewees in this round. I also collected secondary documents including an amended script of the film, a script of the original play, and an assessment of the script done on behalf of the Film Commission.

After these two sets of interviews my focus changed. The actors and writer were no longer involved in the production, so I interviewed only the producer and director on a further trip, and began collecting secondary sources of information such as publicity materials and newspaper articles. At this time interviews were also conducted with two staff members of the New Zealand Film Commission about their recall of the process by which the project was developed and approved for funding. I observed both a test-screening of *Saving Grace* and focus-group discussions in reaction to that screening. I obtained a copy of the market-research company's report, interviewed their supervising researcher for clarification of comments, and was given copies of written feedback to the director from the Film Commission and a number of industry colleagues who had been invited to comment. Eventually, I also collected media reviews of the film.

By now the film had received negative evaluations from some people in the industry and the tone of the interview material changed from optimism to defensiveness and blame attribution. Since it seemed likely the positioning of the film through marketing strategies would influence whether and how its messages about religion and spirituality actually reached audiences, subsequent steps in the film's marketing and distribution were tracked by a series of phone calls to the producer and director. In all I followed the progress of the film over a period of two years until it eventually received a disappointingly restricted two-week season of public screenings in New Zealand's largest cities of Auckland and Wellington. This limited release was also a factor in the decision not to undertake detailed audience research.

The Chosen

The time between production and broadcast for *The Chosen* was briefer than that for *Saving Grace*: from December 1997 to June 1998. The number of interviewees in this section of the research was larger for three reasons. The first was the particular division of labour and responsibility on the project - the production team was composed of television industry veterans,

organised in a hierarchical manner. The second was because the fictional world created for *The Chosen* was broader in reference than *Saving Grace*, and as a consequence employed a larger cast of actors: I chose to interview only the three lead actors. Thirdly, although gaining access to this production was in general, more difficult than for *Saving Grace*, on one of the two occasions I visited the production centre, most of the crew were present at one time and I took advantage of this to widen the ambit of my interviews. For instance the line producer and production designer were interviewed because, in contrast to the situation on a film production, they had actually been contracted to the production before the producer and director joined the team, and thus had influence in setting the parameters that those workers would follow.

Timing and range of interviews

In contrast to *Saving Grace*, and due to the access problems discussed above, two thirds of the research subjects on *The Chosen* were interviewed once only - the exception being the producer and the originating writer, who each spoke to me on the telephone and then were interviewed twice in person. The line producer, production designer, production designer and two of the three main actors were interviewed, face-to-face, once production was underway. The director and editor were interviewed later as they undertook post-production in Wellington, and the third of the lead actors, was interviewed, as noted above, considerably later. Two of the interviews (those with the writers Strawhan and Fleming, and with the director and film editor, were, at their choice, joint interviews). Because of the difficulty of access, there were therefore only three subjects in this data-set who were interviewed on two or more occasions, as opposed to five in the data-set of *Saving Grace*. However, the time-spread of interviews on this project did mean that, although there was less opportunity to track changes in discourses used by individuals, overall the chronological development available in the study of *Saving Grace* was approximated²⁴. Furthermore, as will become apparent, on the evidence of the statements gathered there was significantly less diversity in understandings of the meaning and significance of what was being made than there had been with the film production. That is, there was a narrower range of discourses, on all topics discussed, offered by the interviewees, a situation I judge would have been maintained even if more interviews had been undertaken.

As with *Saving Grace* I collected successive drafts of the script, publicity and marketing materials and reviews, although in this case was not able to view any 'internal' documents related to the

²⁴ I have therefore opted to treat *Saving Grace* as the main case-study and to use *The Chosen* as a comparative case-study.

production, other than scripts. Again, transcripts of interviews were sent to those respondents who requested them. The only comments I received were from one of the actors, Cliff Curtis, but these were extensive and useful. Curtis pointed out that I had misunderstood statements he had made about the reasons why a rape scene was dropped from the programme. I had assumed that the removal had been an initiative from the Executive Producer, objecting on feminist grounds. However Curtis pointed out that the wish to remove the scene had been his, since he was tired of playing 'angry, violent Maori men'. Our subsequent discussion on this point reinforced the importance that a Maori cultural framework held for him, and caused me to reflect on the likelihood that, in conducting interviews, one may sometimes filter information too narrowly through one's own discursive priorities.

In commenting on the experience of researching the production of *Saving Grace* I noted being struck by the open, generous engagement of most of the interviewees in the research process; my experience with *The Chosen* was somewhat different. In essence, apart from initial, comparatively relaxed interviews with the writers and producer, I often felt like a supplicant: waiting for calls to be returned and arrangements made on my behalf became frustrating. When interviews took place they were frequently interrupted by telephone calls, and other meetings. While these events are on one level simply indicators of the pressured nature of television production, I also speculated that the production team saw my research as similar to that for journalistic or public relations purposes - expecting it to be completed in a shorter time than it actually required. The resulting tension was most palpable in my interview with Jeremy Sims (see chapter 9). He was available for just thirty minutes and had previously been engaged in an interview with a journalist. In view of the limited time I decided to go straight to my questions about his religio/spiritual positioning. However this caused difficulties between us in that he held a view of his identity as much more multi-faceted than he thought I was suggesting. This interaction reminded me of the desirability of having time to set up the interview carefully so that the interviewee and myself could agree on what topics we would be discussing.

Furthermore, I had an increased awareness in the television research setting of a process of 'impression management' sometimes taking place; of a discernable distance between 'person' and professional persona. This process, vague and difficult to write about, is most visible in ephemeral instances of body language, in the intensity of attention a research subject accords one as interviewer, and in the choice of speech register, a feature that can sometimes be detected in the transcriptions. Suffice it to say that while I found several research subjects on *The Chosen* to be

just as open as those on *Saving Grace*, I was however more often aware that some were 'in role' as capable professionals, and were rationing the amount of attention and depth of information they felt able to give me. I note too that, often, but not always, gender factors may have been an issue since I usually found it easier to maintain a productive rapport with female interview subjects.

Data analysis: the process of discourse analysis

Following the interviews the audio-tapes were transcribed, During this process of transcription pauses in the interviewees' responses were indicated by the marking '(.)'. It is accepted as unavoidable that in the process of transcription a degree of 'translation' also occurs (Nightingale, 1996; Howarth, 2000) that is, the content of the material may be changed slightly due to the interpretation of the person making the transcript. A coding system was then developed in accordance with the theoretical framework and with the research questions in mind. I was interested in the continuity of discourses, in change in discourses used, and in conflict and tension between discourses. I tried to keep in mind which discourses from an order of discourse had not been drawn upon, as well as those that have been. I was interested both in how discursive positions were justified, and in the overall purposes of the communicative interaction. An initial reading was carried out with these factors in mind and selections of material for further analysis made.

In this project my files were coded according to a series of categories. These included: a) significant events and sources of influence on the production, b) individual life-history narratives including involvement with the production; c) interpretations of the 'meaning' of the piece; d) discussions about imagined audience reactions; e) mentions of religion; f) mentions of spirituality; g) mentions of issues that might be cognate with spirituality; e.g. psychological discourses, discussions about moral and ethical values; and h) predictions about the future of the project and speculations about its likely success. I also noted where two or more individuals spoke about similar incidents and issues, looking for both convergence and disagreement in separate accounts. The interview material is deployed in two ways. Where similar information is provided by two or more respondents about a set of events, that information, paraphrased or quoted briefly, is used as a basis for an account of the development and production of the programme. Where constructions of knowledge about religion and spirituality are offered this material is subject to discourse analysis, with the statements compared both with the master list of discourses presented earlier in this chapter.

On the other hand when accounts of the same events were at variance (see particularly Botes', Moriarty's and Hamilton's account of filming the final scene of *Saving Grace* in chapter 7), I looked to see if, and what kind of, differing discursive frameworks were being employed to explain the same circumstances. It was also of interest when individual accounts were changeable and internally inconsistent - as happened regularly. This is to be expected in conversation, says Machin (2002), because speakers work spontaneously to support their own strategic interests, presenting a certain kind of self-image by patching up clashes of discursive frameworks on-the-hoof, and also, he argues because most of us don't know what we are going to say until we say it - and what is of significance then are the conceptual props, or discourses, that we automatically reach out for and find acceptable in constructing verbal accounts.

While my own hope had been to leave interview extracts largely unedited in order to allow the reader substantial freedom to develop his or her own interpretation of the material provided, I gradually accepted the need to edit the extracts for presentation in as succinct and focused a form as possible. The ellipses where editing has taken place (usually to remove repetitious phrasing) are marked by three dots within square brackets '[...]'

Level of Analysis

Fairclough states discourse analysis may employ both *linguistic analysis* and *intertextual analysis*. Linguistic analysis can include not only 'the traditional levels of analysis within linguistics (phonology, grammar up to the level of the sentence, and vocabulary and semantics) but also analysis of textual organization above the sentence, including intersentential cohesion' (1999: 184). In addition intertextual analysis shows how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse, 'the particular configurations of conventionalized practices (genres, discourses, narratives etc) which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances' (1999: 184). The size of the units of discourse studied, which may range from 'individual words to complete arguments' (Titscher et al. 2000: 232), varies according to the particular goals of the research questions. For instance does one wish: a) 'to explore and find explanations for the facts to be investigated; b) are theoretical concepts or hypotheses to be tested; or (c) is it a matter of finding a description of a particular field or defined population?' (Titscher et al. 2000: 7). In the case of the current project it was the third goal which was particularly relevant - developing a description of some of the religious and spiritual discourses in use in the contexts in which the case-study texts were produced. Because I had so many statements from individual respondents on a range of topics, I decided that in order to identify relevant discursive constructions the data

would best be analysed at 'macro' levels of linguistic and intertextual analysis, including and above the level of the sentence, rather than dealing with the minutiae of pausation, grammar or tum-taking, as is possible when only a few extracts are studied intensively.

In the rest of this thesis therefore a concept of 'discourse(s)' as particular structures of knowledge and power will be used to identify some of the constructions of religion and spirituality active in global and local environments, and available to be drawn on in the context of local film and television production. Hall's related concept of discourse as 'logics-in-use' will be employed to analyse actual instances of talk and text (or discourse practice) arising from texts concerning the production and reception of *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen*. In the final stage interpretations and explanations are made of the selections analysed (this is also Thompson's third stage of re-interpretation). These then may be related to the discursive practices involved in the situation - and finally to the larger societal practices of which text and discursive practice are a part.

Conclusion

It has been argued that there is a danger in using the case study approach, of a descent from general, abstract discussion to the details of a particular instance, or instances: 'Examples are nearly always "illuminating" but the relationship between preceding discussion and specific instance can be awkward. Certainly, the example cannot reasonably be expected to "prove" what has gone before - the misfit in levels is too radical for that' (Comer, 1995: 20). Grisprud's response to this difficulty is partly to let the situation lie - by accepting that in 'thinking things together at different levels of abstraction' there will be moments of confrontation, when modes of inquiry cannot be smoothly reconciled with one another (the 'articulations' Hall mentioned, not of the object of study but of academic inquiry itself?). Grisprud's own preference is to acknowledge the ultimate primacy of interpretation as the active principle of cultural criticism and of theory as 'the dominant moment since it guides the empirical investigations' (1995: 111).

In accepting the validity of Grisprud's stance I am revisiting my own objections to the practice of textual analysis in chapter 3. Further inquiry has led me to narrow my objections to the practice of analysis which is both clearly partisan and unreflective on its own assumptions, in that the methodology employed is not justified against other alternatives, yet is considered to produce a uniquely persuasive case. Advocates of tripartite, holistic and discursive approaches do not seem to be victims of such partial sight in that they openly acknowledge themselves to be agents in the

act of interpretation. Halloran for instance urges researchers to, 'rid ourselves of the phoney objectivity which has characterized the positivistic research effort. Most of us believe that some things are more important than others [...] our task is to make this clear' (1998: 17), while the phase of (re)interpretation is described by Thompson as:

[...] a risky, conflict-laden activity [...] risky because the meaning of a symbolic construction is not given, fixed, determinate; to offer an interpretation is to project a possible meaning, one of several possible meanings which may diverge from, or conflict with one another ... it is not only a projection but a potential intervention, that is, a projection that may intervene in the very social relations which the object of interpretations serves to sustain. (1988: 373)

Paul Ricoeur argued (1981), that 'epistemological prudence' is a valuable element of the scholar's mindset because of the recognition of the interpretive element present in all writing about things past. Titscher et al. update that attitude of prudence by stating that interpretations should always be considered as 'dynamic and open to new contexts and new information' (2000: 146).

While acknowledging that the research subjects and myself sometimes misunderstood each other, and that on several occasions my questions or comments may have encouraged respondents to speak about issues in an unfamiliar way, I have nevertheless taken steps to ensure that my methods are robust. In interviewing several people about the same events, putting similar questions to them, I have achieved a degree of data triangulation, and in supplying transcripts to those who wished to read them I have made space for comments on and revisions of the data by those who supplied it. My discourse analysis is done in reference to categories developed from an accredited model of contemporary religiosity.

The concept of 'validity' when applied to holistic and discourse-analytic research is a difficult one because of the small size of research samples and because of the obvious presence of the interpretive element in analysis (see Silverman, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Titscher et al. 2000). However by undertaking the procedures above I have addressed all of Hammersley's (1992) criteria for achieving validity in ethnographic research: a) plausibility; b) credibility; and c) empirical evidence. Meeting these criteria positions 'validity' therefore as a 'trust in results rather than absolute certainty' (1992: 50), and as means of investigating constructions of religion and spirituality within a limited context I am content, in the chapters of analysis which follow, that I have achieved a standard of justified 'trust'. This project now moves to the production analysis of the first of the case studies - *Saving Grace*.

CHAPTER SIX: CASE STUDY ONE – The pre-production of *Saving Grace*

Introduction

This chapter is the first of two chapters describing and analysing the discourses surrounding the production and distribution of *Saving Grace*, which are followed in turn by a third chapter undertaking a textual analysis, or ‘re-interpretation’ of the film itself.

Extracts from interviews with five members of the production team - the writer, director, producer and two lead actors - are included in this chapter. Initially, a description of the genesis of the project is provided. The religio/spiritual positioning of each of the key creative personnel is then explored. Other issues considered include: the means by which person became involved with the production, their interpretations of what the piece is ‘about’, and the range of influences they think are affecting the production. As the chapter progresses, the input and opinions of the two lead actors are explored in a similar manner, and in addition, a series of new concerns begins to emerge out of the data, bearing specifically on the ways in which religion and spirituality were encoded into the film. These developing emphases include a tension in the production team between the desirable ratio of ‘realism’ to ‘ambiguity’ in the film’s style, and different ‘imaginings’ of what would please future audiences for the production. The events and opinions covered in this chapter all refer to the period of time before the filming of *Saving Grace* began, the so-called ‘pre-production’ period. The research subjects were interviewed in the last week of that period, and are therefore in the midst of some of the events discussed, but are also relying on their recall of previous events.

Context of production and data gathered during pre-production

Origins of *Saving Grace* - play and film

Saving Grace was first produced as a play of the same name, written and directed by Duncan Sarkies and staged at Bats Theatre in Wellington for a two-week season in April 1995²⁵. Sarkies, a New Zealander of European descent, and only 24 at the time he wrote *Saving Grace*, claims it as his second professionally-produced play. The following year Sarkies won the Bruce Mason Young Playwright Award for his work, a nationally-significant recognition of his talent.

²⁵ Coincidentally, I attended a performance of the play at this time.



caption: Jim Moriarty in 'Saving Grace', Kahukura Productions (1999)
 credit: Stills Collection, New Zealand Film Archive
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caption: Kirsty Hamilton in 'Saving Grace', Kahukura Productions (1999)
 credit: Stills Collection, New Zealand Film Archive
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caption: Kirsty Hamilton and Jim Moriarty in 'Saving Grace', Kahukura Productions (1999)
 credit: Stills Collection, New Zealand Film Archive
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Figure 4: *Saving Grace* - Jim Moriarty as 'Gerald', and Kirsty Hamilton as 'Grace'

Saving Grace was the type of play known as a ‘two-hander’, featuring just two characters called Grace and Gerald. With the addition of a few ‘extras’ and half-a-dozen brief speaking parts, this basic situation remained in the film, as did the play’s events and narrative structure. Grace is an 18-year old ‘street-kid’ or homeless person, and Gerald, an unemployed former woodworker in his late 20s or early 30s. They meet in the tense, dehumanizing confines of a government office for the support (and control) of the unemployed, forming a verbally combative, humorous, initially platonic, relationship. Grace moves into Gerald’s home and a few days later he announces to her that he is in fact the second incarnation of Jesus Christ. After successively rejecting, then interrogating, and finally provoking Gerald into miraculous action by means of a suicide attempt, Grace gradually comes to accept his ‘real’ identity. Together (by now they are also lovers), they set out to fulfill his divine mission. Unfortunately, as in the original of the Christ-story, this mission entails Gerald’s death by crucifixion, which he incites Grace to perform.

Until this point the play unfolded in a dramatic unity of time and place, carried out in a performance style combining an exaggerated domestic realism with ritualized, incantatory exchanges between Grace and Gerald. The result of the alternation of these modes was an intriguing series of changes of tone within an overall progression from black humour to hysterical, consensual, violence. However, after the climactic crucifixion, the play (and the film) takes a sharp turn into the unexpected. In a scene echoing the anonymous routines of the unemployment office at the beginning, an unseen voice accuses Grace of murdering Gerald, while a videotape projected onto a wall of the theatre shows an alternative version of the crucifixion-scene in which we now see an implacable Grace murdering an unwilling Gerald as he begs for his life. The play ends soon after: Grace is incarcerated and Gerald comes back to visit her (whether resurrected or in her imagination is unclear). They engage in a final litany of **re**crimination and reassurance.

The inclusion of video and the change of tone this late in the play served not only to introduce a radically open ending by offering two irreconcilable versions of the play’s climactic events: they also suggested that the rest of the play might not have been trustworthy either; that any or all it might have been Grace’s fantasy for instance. This subversive ending was controversial but the subsequent debate over it was apparently pleasurable for the theatre-going audience, as the playwright Sarkies notes:

Generally people would come out of the theatre having arguments with the person they went to see it with over, ah, whether he was or he wasn't [Jesus], or what happened, and it generated a lot of talk, a lot of talk. (8/1/9: 9)

On stage, *Saving Grace* was a considerable success. The reviews were, in the main, highly enthusiastic, it had productions in three different cities, and won the 1995 Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards for the Best New New Zealand Play. It was welcomed as, 'astonishingly good [...] a major play with a powerful idea at its core' (Welch, 1995), as a production which, had the potential to be 'a landmark piece of New Zealand theatre' (Rose, 1995), and as a outstanding piece of writing for a young audience:

You might think he's weird and outrageous, but you've got to admit that Duncan Sarkies is helluva clever. He's like the jazz maestro of Generation X playwriting, taking an idea and running with it to the most unreal places, gobsmacking the audience with his audacity. (Halba, 1996)

While the majority of comments about the play were favourable, the few reservations expressed about it related to the way it resolved the religious issues it raised:

[Gerald and Grace's] situation is classic folie à deux, Christ complex and all, but, as a play, *Saving Grace* seems not to have reached full maturity. The nature of Gerald's delusion promises a depth that the play fails to deliver. More prosaically, Gerald and Grace's life together is ripe for more profound observations than those we're given.. (Johnson, 1996)

Aside from the desirability that both art-forms receive largely approving reviews, the qualifications for a play being successful are different in magnitude from those for a film. For instance in its three theatrical productions *Saving Grace* would have been attended by audiences of no more than 3,000 people in total²⁶, while for a New Zealand film to be deemed successful it has to attract audiences of at least 150,000 (Dixon, 2001). For a writer/director it is a large step therefore from being successful in theatre to guaranteeing crowds at the movies. However, as a result of his reputation as a writer attractive to a youthful constituency, Sarkies was asked to be part of a team developing stories for a proposed 'omnibus' film. The freelance director, Costa Botes, was also working on the project, and he and Sarkies started discussing turning *Saving Grace* into a film production which Botes would direct. It was intended that the story-line, scale

²⁶Figure estimated from seating capacities of the theatres in which the play appeared, and the length of the seasons played at each.

and tone of the film would be similar to the play, but that the piece would undergo minor revisions to fit it for the screen.

Environment of production

In 1996, when the film production of *Saving Grace* was first mooted, the New Zealand film industry was seeing a period of unprecedented commercial success receding into history. Two features in particular, *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994) and *Heavenly Creatures* (Jackson, 1994) had done extremely well with audiences both locally and abroad: *Once Were Warriors* sold to some 60 countries and took more than \$6.3 million dollars in total box office receipts by mid 1998 (NZFC, 1998). But by the following year the glow was already fading; three new features *Chicken* (Lahood, 1996), *Whole of The Moon* (Mune, 1996), and *Flight of The Albatross* (Meyer, 1996), all had very short runs at the box office. Even the glossy, fast-moving melodrama *Broken English*, (Nicholas, 1996) which dealt with issues of ethnicity and domestic power struggles similar to those in *Once Were Warriors* did not do well locally. It was in this wider environment characterized by questioning and a loss of confidence therefore, that *Saving Grace* was developed and went into production.

Assembling the project team

The movie and film-making industries in New Zealand are small and tightly-knit in nature, with cross-overs in personnel between the two production media. Most people working in the audio-visual media have several projects at any one time in development, or less frequently, in production. They join creative and economic alliances of varying duration, seeking funding and distribution guarantees for specific projects. In this case the key personnel in the development of *Saving Grace*, Botes and Sarkies, both novices in feature production, were joined by Larry Parr, of Kahukura Productions, as producer.

Costa Botes: professional background

Botes, a New Zealander of Greek descent, had developed a dual reputation as a writer and director of short dramas and documentaries, as well as being the film critic for Wellington's daily *Dominion* newspaper for ten years from the mid 1980s. However, despite 15 years in the industry Botes had not yet made the transition to feature film-making. In 1994 he had collaborated with friend and fellow director, Peter Jackson, on a 'mockumentary' *Forgotten Silver*, which detailed the achievements of a newly-discovered (but actually non-existent) pioneer film-maker called

‘Colin Mackenzie’. The success of *Forgotten Silver* was a supporting factor in Botes’ and Parr’s subsequent application to the New Zealand Film Commission for funding to make *Saving Grace*.

Larry Parr: Professional Background

Parr is a senior producer who had been involved in the film industry since 1979. His list of credits as associate producer or producer includes two of the most successful local films of the 1980s: *Smash Palace* (Donaldson, 1981) and *Came a Hot Friday* (Mune, 1984), as well as a clutch of less successful productions later in the decade. Following the making of *A Soldier’s Tale* (1991) of which Parr was also the director, his production and distribution company Mirage Entertainment Corporation went into receivership and he was absent as a producer from the New Zealand scene for several years. *Saving Grace* would mark his return to feature film production.

Funding *Saving Grace*

In 1995 Parr was one of 11 producers who received money under the Film Commission’s Producer Operated Development Scheme (PODS) to assist in the development of feature film projects of the producer’s own choice (NZFC, 1995). Under the PODS scheme Kahukura Productions paid for the development of *Saving Grace*, supporting all the necessary work on script and production development until the project was at a stage where it could attract other funding.

While funding may be sought from a range of commercial and quasi-governmental sources, the majority of local funding in feature film production tends to come from the quasi-governmental agency the New Zealand Film Commission, or NZFC. With the script developed to third-draft stage the proposal for the film was submitted to the Film Commission Board in September 1996. A month later the Commission agreed to fully fund the project and, moreover, gave Kahukura Productions \$1.5 million instead of the \$1.3 million requested. According to Botes, they got the support because he and Parr were seen as a good team, ‘a winning combination’, working with material that had already won acclaim as a play. There were also few other suitable projects in development at that time and this low-budget proposal was not seen as too much of a financial risk (Botes, 6/1/97).

Once the Commission agreed to support the project it had the right to approve further changes to the script and the appointment of key crew, cast, and production guarantor. Its staff would be able to check on the production whenever they wished and would comment on the film at rough-cut

stage. And, in what was a recent development for the local film industry, the Commission had also stipulated that the film be put through a test-screening process before it was approved for release, although there was no requirement (Parr, 7/1/97) that the film be re-cut on the basis on that screening. It was the expectation of all the interviewees however that since the project had the Commission's full approval its stewardship of the project would be light-handed.

With funding secured casting of the production went ahead and the principal shoot began in mid-January of 1997. It was in the week before filming began that I started my field research, interviewing Sarkies, Botes, Parr, Moriarty and Hamilton over a period of five days.

Religio/spiritual positions of production team

Duncan Sarkies: religio/spiritual positioning

Writing 'a good play' can bring rewards in the form of cash prizes, overseas travel, status in the literary community, and access to other opportunities for work. Although these rewards had already accrued to Sarkies, and he would therefore seem in practice to be motivated by a mixture of aesthetic and commercial concerns, the statements he made about his work were characterized by a consistent emphasis on his desire for self-expression. Sarkies employs a discourse of artistic 'integrity' whereby an artist who is 'true' to him or herself is able to enlist the interest of like-minded people. Sarkies values professional skills such as experimentation with concepts and narrative structures and his determination to keep his integrity displays itself in statements about his wish to be 'intuitive' and not to censor himself; for him a good writer is one who writes 'from the heart' (8/1/97).

When Sarkies speaks about the genesis of *Saving Grace* he claims that, as with all his plays, both the idea and its specific treatment came about through a gradual accretion of ideas and influences. The difference is that on this occasion some of those influences came from his own musings about religion.

As a child the adults in Sarkies' life subscribed to Presbyterian, Anglican and Christian Science beliefs. He says he was 'brought up religious but not very strictly' until in early adolescence he decided he no longer believed in God. So, he said, he went from being 'religious to not religious' (8/1/97), although he retained a good knowledge of the Bible. In adulthood, Sarkies described

himself as an agnostic, with the ambivalence that would be a feature of both the play and film active in statements about his personal beliefs.

[...] my religious viewpoint is that I don't actually have one. Bit sort of lost and confused in it all. Some people have said 'well aren't you just sitting on the fence?' Well of course not, religion is something, you don't have (.) to make a choice. It's, well it's just like me honestly saying I don't know. (8/1/97).

While acknowledging that he may be merely 'lost and confused', Sarkies is suggesting that acceptance or rejection of religious beliefs is within the purview of the individual and that there can be no external compulsion to believe. In discussing religion in this way he seems to be drawing on discourses from the region of the religious spectrum encompassing religions of humanity and spiritualities of life, where the source of authority is located either within the individual himself or in a mutually responsible relationship with the divine, rather than relying on the strong external authority posited by a religion of difference for instance. His reason for not completely rejecting a religious worldview is however connected with one of the basic matters with which religion deals: the fate of the human being at death:

Things like death (.) have always haunted me. And I've wanted to believe in something (.) I'll toss and turn at night, ever so often, and just hope that there is something, and whatever forces there may be might look kindly on me. And might have the same sense of morals that I have, and go, yeah, you're right to do what you did. So I feel I'm quite a moral person. (8/1/97)

As an agnostic, rather than an atheist, Sarkies describes an intermittent longing for a benevolent being who might intervene on his behalf, although he would like this being, morally, to be similar to himself. In the space of two brief statements therefore Sarkies employs at least four distinct discursive formulations - a discourse of individual responsibility, a psychological discourse about anxiety, an (agnostic) theistic discourse, and a discourse about morals. Several of these discourses may fit together - a person who subscribes to a religion of humanity or a spirituality of life for instance might employ individualist, psychological and moral constructions of discourse in combination, but it is difficult to make a unity of the whole four, especially once a theistic discourse is also introduced, thus giving an impression that the speaker is indeed 'confused'.

With Sarkies unable to take refuge in a god, he finds safer ground in the idea of structuring one's life according to a personal moral sense, the predominant features of which appear to be

respecting the opinions of one's self and others, and desiring to improve the quality of life for everyone:

Well there are things I believe in, so I don't run around offending people for the sake of it. [...] like a lot of other people, I'd like for it to be a better place and I'd like to do what I can to make it one. You know, you can't change much of the world, but you can have a little effect (8/1/97)

Sarkies said he has seen acquaintances have their lives 'turned around' by an accepting a particular religion, but while he could understand their conversions he also interprets them as acts of self-surrender and abasement. He claims that adopting a theistic religion would involve surrendering his internal locus of authority: something that is abhorrent to him. To justify rejecting this possibility he draws on a discourse which recurs, expressed with varying degrees of passion, amongst the majority of people interviewed for this study. The public institutions of religion - the churches - and the 'creeds' or dogmas which they are thought to impose on their members are frequently seen as the potential source of an aggressive, abusive power which leaves little or no room for individual self-determination (for instance see also Hamilton, 9/1/97; Horton, 28/2/97; Sims 2/2/98). This discursive formation owes something to the influential contemporary idea that one should be respectful and tolerant of the beliefs of others (see page 42, chapter 3). A religions of difference discourse where what church members should believe is laid out in advance, therefore holds little appeal, while humanistic, expressive discourses emphasizing self-protection, self-acceptance, and a vague sense of goodwill towards others (see chapter 3) seem more relevant in outlining strategies for negotiating life. Sarkies expresses this negative view of religion passionately:

[...] I don't believe in lowering myself (.) I think every one should respect themselves. And I think there are a lot of religions that don't encourage people to respect themselves. There are religions like the Anglican religion where in the Lord's Prayer there's a line about 'we're not even worthy to lick the crumbs from under your table' [...]. And (.) people recite that all together out of a book, and that disturbs me because that's the creed telling them that, that's not God. I struggle to believe, I always hope that if there's a God, I hope it's a fair God, that doesn't talk like that. (8/1/97).

The obverse of these humanistic, expressive discourses of 'self'-centeredness, is the idea that 'God', if one did exist, would be like a human being, insofar as the deity would think in modern terms, sharing Sarkies' worldview and values. Conceptualizing God as 'immanent', also means that concepts of sin and transgression (of God's law) can be avoided, since there is no judgmental viewpoint outside the self. The rejection of dogma is thus another means of avoiding the judgment

and power of others. On the evidence of this brief selection of extracts, it seems likely that power, the evasion of external power, and the maintenance of a space for personal experimentation, are extremely important to Sarkies and that these are ideas he can explore by thinking about religion. However, constructing such an energetic repudiation of organized religion also demonstrates a fascination with the idea of an omnipotent entity outside one's self; a fascination which is audible in Sarkies' wish for someone to save him from the most inescapable of human flaws - a finite lifespan.

Sarkies' background knowledge of the Bible, his adolescent rejection of religion, and his attempts to develop strategies to deal with fears of mortality are all factors he describes as feeding into his creativity. The specific choice to make a play about someone thinking he was Jesus however, coalesced, he claims during a plane trip across the Tasman:

[...] in retrospect I actually remember an episode of *Barney Millar*, right, in which there was some guy in prison who thought he was Jesus. [...] it actually says it in the play, [...] "Who is the most important person in your world?" And the answer is "Me". Therefore, "Who's the most important person in the world? Me? Who's the most important person in the world? Jesus Christ?" It was like one natural step to go from one to thinking therefore you're Jesus. (8/1/97)

The choice of a Jesus-figure as a narrative fulcrum is therefore expressed primarily in terms of a psychological, not a religious, discourse. Having shown a desire to protect personal power against the claims of religion, Sarkies creates a dramatic situation which will allow him to explore those tensions. The aura attached to Jesus as someone who has high status in both the material and immaterial worlds is transferred to the individual in order to compensate for a lack of status and recognition in the everyday world. As Sarkies describes it seeing one's self as Jesus may be a narcissistic delusion, but the desire to be deluded is justified as a reasonable response to a society which gives individuals insufficient attention;

[...] everyone wants to be important in the world, they say that a lot of depressive people are simply people who see the world as it is and see the fact that they haven't got very much importance in it. And everyone's desire is to be important. That's why Jesus was the next logical step. Because I've wandered around the world with a sense of self-importance that I can't justify. (8/1/97)

At one level therefore, Sarkies' statements are an explicit formulation of the kind of solipsistic self-concern judged typical of the so-called 'Me Generation', first described in the 1970s (Lasch, 1978, Hexham & Poewe, 1997). Insofar as the play and film scripts are built on that concern, the

projects are an exploration of some of the ramifications of operating with a narcissistic philosophy. However, as we have seen above, at other moments, Sarkies claims to want to sponsor positive change in the world. These contrasting discursive formations may not be incompatible. Stories about Jesus have sometimes been used to refresh society's conscience about the living conditions of those who have been marginalized. And the critical manner in which the play, and to a lesser extent, the film, present the operations of bureaucratic state institutions such as the Income Support Service, which take no account of the suffering of individuals, supports Sarkies' claim to have a social conscience.

According to Sarkies, an interest in his own sense of self-importance was augmented by a more objective set of speculations about what it would be like for the historical Jesus to re-appear in a contemporary situation. In discussing this idea he makes the intertextual nature of discursive creativity obvious as he describes being inspired by a song from the group *The The*:

[...] it's got a song lyric – "If the real Jesus Christ were alive today, he'd be gunned down cold by the CIA" [...] and I also concurrently thought, it would be very interesting if the real Jesus Christ did come back today. How would we know? [...] He's not going to have sort of glowing lights coming round behind him. (8/1/97)

It is interesting to note that the idea of basing a play on the possible 'return' of Jesus did not come to Sarkies from a traditionally authorized source such as reading the Bible, but from other works of popular culture; a television programme on an unrelated topic, and a track from a record album. His representation of Jesus Christ/Gerald evolved out of sources from the globalized mass entertainment market which are already hybridized with norms and values from other, unreligious, cultural spheres. Sarkies' interest in the use of aspects of the Jesus-figure in both the play and film, comes therefore from attempts to deal with emotional reactions to issues like human mortality, the 'right' way to live, and from intellectual curiosity, rather than an active belief in Christian principles, although childhood knowledge of the Christian worldview also informs his speculation. He is therefore dealing with what Malone (1997) refers to as 'the Christ of Culture' where attributes of the figure of Jesus are a useful ready-made representational and discursive nexus for an assortment of concerns.

Costa Botes: religio/spiritual positioning

Botes, in his 40s, describes himself as an atheist. Like Sarkies he expresses contempt for traditional religion, asserting his conviction that Jesus was no more than human:

[...] I look at a lot of organised religion and it really irritates me and I think their answers are so shallow and so contrived and so kind of deeply wrong -and I think, "Well you know who was Jesus?" He was just a guy and you know, he had some nice notions and some nice ideas but really ... (6/1/97)

While discounting the divinity of Jesus, Botes nevertheless considers himself to be a 'spiritual' person:

I often get a kind of, (.), spiritual feelings from being in a certain place [...] I definitely don't believe in a God in a beard and robes and clouds (.) but I think that they're really important questions to think about [...] why is it we've invented religions? I think about that a lot (.) and why do we have this image of God? And why do we need it? I find those sorts of questions interesting, but to me the answers don't lie within churches. I'm interested in Buddhist ideas of spirituality and find that really useful - you know, kind of Western ideas of religion are kind of pretty dead - it's just there, it's tradition and routine rather than, you know, a questioning act of faith. (6/1/97).

There is not much indication here of what 'spiritual' means, apart from an unspecific emotional response to specific environments, and a preference for answering metaphysical questions outside the confines of institutional religion. Botes also constructs a dichotomy between 'Western' ideas of religion as 'dead' and 'Buddhist ideas of spirituality' to which he says he is somewhat attracted. This was a binaristic construction that also occurred in other interviews (see Fleming, 3/12/97; Mitchell 2/2/98), in relation to which Campbell (1999) makes the point that not only that cultural hybridization is occurring but that concepts formerly thought of as 'Eastern' are becoming naturalized in contemporary Western contexts.

However Botes did amplify his idea of what it means to have 'spiritual feelings', referring to his observation of a sense of order in the natural world:

I think about the way the world organises itself into patterns and, you know, the shapes and the colours and all that, and you can't help but feel like, 'wow this is all so much bigger than I am' [...] I'm just, you know, a monkey on a planet full of monkeys whirling around an insignificant star somewhere. I don't find that scary, I don't have to have a God to take the scary feelings away, I don't have any scary feelings, I just accept it as being what it is, however, you can't help but, you know, go up in an aeroplane and look at the clouds and you get this deeply aesthetic kind of thing, (.) I'm not sure I even understand what spiritual is, maybe it's an aesthetic kind of response to things. (6/1/97)

In describing his wonder at the vastness of the natural world Botes draws on a style of language often used in contemplating 'the sublime' (see for instance, Eagleton, 1990, Ferguson, 1992). To engage with the sublime is to contemplate an aspect of nature which can scarcely be

comprehended by virtue of its magnitude, or splendour, or terribleness, and at which reason balks - before ultimately finding pleasure in accepting that magnitude or terror as unconquerable. This is a form of romantic, secularized discourse, which in other circumstances, under a religious worldview, might have led to the postulation of a creator-God as an explanation for that which exceeds human experience. The statement is similar to some aspects of Sarkies' statements about religion - particularly in its interest in the issue of personal power. In this case however the feeling of powerlessness is described not just as a threat but also as a source of a resigned form of pleasure - a pleasure Botes labels 'aesthetic'. King (1997) notes that the meaning of the term 'spiritual' depends on who uses it - in this case, it has associations of awe in regard to nature, of self-depreciation on one hand, and of self-appreciation on the other, through the pleasure of perceiving one's self as an artist.

Like Sarkies, Botes claims not to fully understand his own belief position, but on this occasion at least, his statements are more unified than of his colleague. He seems less immediately challenged by the issues under discussion, and while without a positive motivating philosophy, doesn't seem concerned about needing one in the face of the on-coming project. If the kind of formulation Botes offers here is placed against Woodhead and Heelas' topology of forms of religion it would fall into the category of a spirituality of life discourse, as an existential, self-reliant response to the facts of human life. One can see where Sarkies and Botes would be in sympathy with one another in wishing to engage in a tentative, open exploration of religious concepts, but Botes' account is more distanced and meta-spiritual than Sarkies', reflecting on the very need for religious and spiritual beliefs.

When discussing his reasons for being involved in *Saving Grace* the fact it dealt with religious motifs, critically, was of major importance for Botes. He had worked in similar thematic areas in previous short films *Lamb of God* (1985), and *Stalin's Sickle* (1987). In becoming involved with *Saving Grace* he was therefore returning to familiar territory:

I liked the kind of spiritual issues in it (.) I guess its view of God. (.) I don't believe in God, I don't believe in a Supreme Being but I think if there was one then this is the kind of God I could relate to, a kind of profoundly mixed-up and very human one, well certainly a Christ-figure that I think people can relate to. (6/1/97)

In this extract Botes uses 'spiritual' as a qualifier for the noun 'issues', putting it on a par with other orders of discourse, for instance, discussions of 'economic', 'political' or 'psychological' issues. The idea of God can then be re-assigned to functions of cultural maintenance within the

social world. Rather than guaranteeing the meaning of existence from outside the system, a spiritually useful God would therefore be more like a fallible ‘buddy’ with whom people could have a mutually beneficial relationship: this is a similar discourse to that offered by Sarkies.

Having domesticated God in the name of spirituality, Botes then produces a varied set of arguments about the appeal of *Saving Grace*. He begins by drawing on a discourse he attributes to the New Zealand religious studies scholar Lloyd Geering, in which Christ is a flexible signifier, with different uses for each age:

I think it was Lloyd Geering that said [...] oh that Christ is born again to every generation and every generation makes him in the image that they need, in other words that Christ is defined in terms of the need of the person who comes to Christ, and I thought “that’s Grace” - she basically creates a figure that’s exactly suited to what she needs. (6/1/97)

Spirituality, in this construction, involves forging an altered, updated representation of a Christ-figure which can be used to address an unspecified range of community needs. Botes then moves into a psychological discursive framework talking about the mechanisms by which the characteristics of divinity are more visible projected onto another individual than they are in one’s self. The idea of an incarnated Supreme Being becomes attenuated into the concept of one’s neighbour as mirror and therapist:

It seemed that in many ways when Grace is talking about herself she is really talking about Gerald and vice versa (.) that they each are kind of reflected in each other, but that’s an idea apart from its spiritual dimension that works beautifully just as a human thing, as a piece of drama, that the two characters are so far apart, and in many ways they’re very different from each other, and yet in other ways they’re precisely the same, they each have very similar needs and each answers that need in the other. So, yeah at root I just thought it was a good piece of drama - simple and focussed and contained. (6/1/97)

In following this train of speech Botes completes a movement from a traditional ‘religious’ discourse, traces of which were discernable in his speech at the beginning of the extract, to the kind of secular, psychological, self-growth discourse which has been posited in the international literature as one feature of the human-centered ‘new’ or ‘expressive’ spirituality (King, 1997; Peck, 1993). Finally, he moves to re-contextualise spirituality as merely one dimension of human behaviour. All human beliefs, including ideas about religion and spirituality, are subsumed into source material for ‘drama’ as carriers for the more (commercially, professionally) important value of assuring dramatic conflict. In other words, like Sarkies, some of the themes and motifs of religion are appealing to Botes as dramatic material, because they give form to questions which

both intrigue him personally and which he thinks will interest others at this time. Nevertheless, these religious themes and motifs are not his primary motivation for committing to the project: he brackets them within a larger professional framework. While he speaks of the content with a sense of personal involvement, the 'religious' nature of that content is probably less important to him than the opportunity to make an effective, successful film.

Directing a first feature is a momentous undertaking for any film-maker. Positive publicity and further funding can follow a successful debut, while unsuccessful directors will find it difficult to gain further support. While, as the material above indicates, Botes was in sympathy with the content of the project, his statements about his reasons for committing to it also show an awareness of this wider industry context. Compared with Sarkies, he places a greater emphasis on the 'practical' factors which attracted him to the project: 'It seemed to be a containable project [...] I just thought that it was one that we could win on for the amount of money that we could get, which would be small, that we could deliver something relatively audacious and controversial which was no bad thing.' (6/1/97).

There was a degree of calculation admitted in the choice of religiously-referenced material. Botes felt the film might be interesting to audiences because of its proximity to the so-called 'Millennium', the 2000-year anniversary of the date thought to mark the birth of Christ:

We're coming up to the end of the millennium and it's always a great time for religious sort of ideas to start bubbling up [...] Hollywood is starting to turn up various religious theme pictures, mostly of the light entertainment variety but they're there nevertheless and there'll probably be more of them as we get to the year 2000 (.) It's no bad thing actually, I think our timing is probably quite good (.) the question is whether that translates into bottoms on seats. (6/1/97)

When, however I suggested that this might mean the religious elements of the film were there just as a marketing lure, Botes rejected that suggestion, asserting his personal creative integrity, saying that, in terms of the 'creative effort you've put into making the picture [...] you want an audience'. This assertion is consistent with other references during the interview which imply that sometimes Botes would like to be seen as aligned with high-culture constructions of directorial creativity. For instance, whereas Sarkies recalled being influenced by sources from music, television and movies, many of which had little connection with religion, the range of influences Botes cited was concentrated on two films by international art-house directors: *The Last Temptation of Christ* (Scorsese, 1988) and *Jesus of Montreal* (Arcand, 1989). Both films emphasized the human

dimensions of doubt and fallibility of their central Jesus-figure as well as exploring his relationship to the feminine, as *Saving Grace* does also.

Larry Parr: religio/spiritual positioning

Parr's statements about his motivations for being involved in the production of *Saving Grace* were more explicitly commercial than those of Sarkies or Botes. While appreciative of the original play's qualities as a well-shaped piece of writing, he was more interested in its 'size' - that is he wanted the project to be achievable on time and on budget. The fact it had just two main characters and was set in confined locations made it attractively 'small', yet the grandeur of the story 'angle' - is Gerald Jesus or not? - seemed likely to counteract any dullness resulting from its simplicity. Parr spoke of the film primarily as a project for advancing Botes' career and, probably by association, of solidifying his own:

I wanted to do something that we could do for under a million dollars. [...] I didn't see it as a hugely commercial film, but I saw it as being incredibly audacious, and a very interesting first film, a very challenging first film for a director. [...] It's provocative. It's going to be controversial. [...] I think we're fortunate that those who could see it as a religious parable outnumbered those who saw it as blasphemous, in the money-giving stakes [...] there was a risk that people would be particularly cautious, would say, look this is a little bit too controversial and we should stay away from this [...] that's what I mean by audacious. (7/1/97)

In this exchange aspects of the film's content are seen as integral to its acceptance by the Film Commission, but integral in a generic, subsidiary sense: it would seem that other content which was 'audacious', might have done just as well in fulfilling the specifications for a fundable first film. In further discussion around this topic Parr used a way of speaking about the film that would later prove to be important - 'this is Costa's [first] film'. Producers can have several degrees of involvement on a film production: Some concentrate largely on raising money and managing the budget, while others also have creative input into the script or influence day-to-day production decisions. On *Saving Grace* Parr took a position somewhere in the middle. He secured the funding and was available for consultation on creative matters when requested. However, he said he took the stance that Costa's opinions should prevail in the event of there being more than one point of view on an issue - even secured the right of control over the form of the programme, or 'final cut' for Botes. This seemed like a strong act of trust in a novice feature film director. However as the research progressed I began to notice that the use of the phrase 'this is Costa's film' was also strategic in purpose. In this initial context the phrase is benign, with Parr presenting

himself as a mentor at the beginning of what he hopes will be a successful feature filmmaking career for Botes.

Parr offered less of himself in explaining his personal philosophies than did Sarkies or Botes, preferring to give ‘professional’ explanations where possible. Perhaps this is because discussing one’s motivations is not usually required of a producer, whereas writers and directors, more visible as the ‘creative’ forces behind a production, are often required to explain their passions and motivations to media representatives when publicizing the project. Or, perhaps, as the exchange above suggests, the film’s content was less personally important to Parr than it was to Sarkies and Botes. Nevertheless, along with Jim Moriarty, Parr was the only team member who currently associated himself with a ‘traditional’ religious identity, observing, with his family, the minor religious practice of giving thanks for food:

Well, I don’t go to church. We say Grace at dinner every night. I went to a Maori boarding school. [...] it was an Anglican church school. Lynn, my wife, is a Catholic, and went to a convent, primary school and secondary school she went to, a Catholic girls’ secondary school. [My son] Quentin’s baptised a Catholic, but went to an Anglican Maori Church school. And, so we don’t actually go to church, but I’d say that, we’re spiritual. (7/1/97)

Here, Parr, while demonstrating an understanding of denominational structures, also settles on the capacious term ‘spiritual’ to describe his identity, alluding as well to the issue of a specifically Maori inflection of that term. We have seen in chapter 3 that although many contemporary Maori would describe themselves as Christian, there is a popular discourse in New Zealand culture that ‘Maori culture’, under certain definitions, is inherently and pervasively ‘spiritual’ in ways not wholly contained by Christianity. As someone of both Maori and European ethnicity, whose production company has a Maori name - ‘Kahukura’ - and employs a high proportion of Maori staff,²⁷ Parr is able to combine discourses from both worldviews. The following statements suggest that he sees a Maori sense of spirituality as a desirable aspect of his identity:

[...] you look out there and there are lots of Polynesian faces out there, lots of Maori faces actually. And, somebody said to me the other day, well, what about the *karakia*²⁸ for the first day of filming? And I said yes, well, let’s organise that. [...] I guess we’re Christian. But I wouldn’t say we’re deeply religious. And I suspect that we seek more rational explanations of Christ than dogmatic Catholic ones. (7/1/97)

²⁷ The fact that Kahukura Productions had a high proportion of Maori and Polynesian staff in the production team was also particularly valued by Jim Moriarty who said it gave him a “good feeling” about working on the project (10/1/97)

²⁸ A *karakia* is a prayer.

Even though Parr eventually identifies as Christian, his use of a discourse of spirituality (which seems here to imply the 'spirit' of religion rather than its 'dogmatic' forms) suggests that he too does not fit on the 'religion of difference' end of the spectrum. His statements bear most resemblance to those of someone with affinities to a religion of humanity - not totally reliant on his own inner authority, as in a spirituality of life - but ceding some influence to established religious forms and practices. In comparison to the other interviewees his statements are also distinguished by an emphasis on his individual identity as being part of a family, or professional, group identity.

Film Commission's assessment of significance of religious elements in *Saving Grace*

The fact that *Saving Grace* dealt with religious or spiritual issues, albeit interpreted differently by each of the interviewees, was of fundamental importance to the scriptwriter, a major determinative factor in the involvement of the director, and of less central concern to the producer who felt that a bit of 'religious' controversy might be good for business. I was therefore interested in what part the 'controversial' nature of the film's content might have played in the Film Commission's decision to fund it. I interviewed two senior Film Commission staff: Ruth Jeffrey, Director of Film Development and Lindsay Shelton, the Commission's Marketing Director. They provided me with a copy of the script-assessment they had commissioned from one of their panel of script assessors.

Bryn Tilly's two-page assessment was balanced between enthusiasm and caution. He calls it (echoing Parr's description) an 'audacious', 'intriguing' and 'promising' screenplay with 'rich ideas' dealing with faith, morality, madness, betrayal and death, approving both of its unorthodox narrative structure and its potential for 'striking' imagery. The examination of religious and metaphysical concepts in the screenplay, including the figure of Christ, was viewed as one of the strengths of the project yet, Tilly also noted, those issues were not pursued to a clear conclusion. He decided instead that a statement by Gerald: 'There's no such thing as sanity and insanity, just graduating levels of insanity', pointed to the screenplay's key theme, but that 'provocative ideas on Christianity and urban psychosis' were also important, with the possibility that Jesus/Gerald was actually 'a twisted cog in the slowly disintegrating mind of Grace' as the lynchpin between the two sets of concepts. (Tilly, 1997:2)

However, Tilly was concerned about the possibly uncinematic nature of the script's theatrical elements, including the tiny cast, limited locations and extensive use of dialogue. If *Saving Grace*

were to make a successful film he felt the casting decisions would be crucial and that effort needed to be put into making the narrative visually 'expressive'. He refrained from a recommendation that the project proceed, (calling it merely 'a bold contender') and advising that another draft be prepared.

It is in this brief assessment that the project's religious content was apparently given the most consideration. Ruth Jeffrey, for instance, cannot recall the subject coming up, although she states that she was particularly busy with administration duties at that time. According to Shelton, the group of senior staff who read incoming scripts felt *Saving Grace*, 'was a strong story worth telling 'while it also gave 'an opportunity to an emerging film-maker to make his first feature' (19/11/97). Shelton did not remember the religious content of the script being a strong factor in their deliberations:

What we were looking for was a film which told such an interesting story that it would create a good response from cinema goers and hopefully achieve that magic word of mouth thing where people tell their friends to go and see the movie and it becomes a success in terms of audience numbers [...] the major element that we were looking at was a story which seemed to be about an unusual relationship between a young woman and an older man. (19/11/97)

The hierarchy of discourses here prioritizes factors which will attract audiences and make the project a (commercial) success, among them the film's genre (it is re-framed as a heterosexual relationship film). The specific character of the film, as an exploration of issues from a religious or spiritual realm, is occluded by this transformation into secularized discourses of genre and commercial appeal. The film was apparently therefore not viewed by those who funded it as a contribution to a public discussion about religion or spirituality. However, the lack of priority accorded to the specific content of the piece (for instance the lack of reference to any discussion as to whether its treatment of a Jesus-figure might be blasphemous, for example) also, paradoxically, allowed the representation of those issues to be given access to the public realm with minimal regulatory constraint.

The addition of the actors

The draft of the script approved by the Commission did not however represent a fixed form for the project. Script revision continued and further modifying influences were provided by decisions about design, casting, visual and aural style, meaning and performance. The process most often referred to by the research subjects was the process of casting, an activity which, according to

Botes, caused him to feel ‘physically sick’ with anxiety since he was aware the whole production could ‘stand or fall on it’ (7/1/97).

One of the constants of the three stage productions of *Saving Grace* had been the casting of a young Maori woman as Grace and of a slightly older European male as Gerald. This ethnic combination was reversed in the film version of *Saving Grace* and the age gap between the characters was widened. Kirsty Hamilton, a 23-year old European New Zealander was chosen to play 18-year old Grace, and Jim Moriarty, a Maori in his mid 40s, was selected to play Gerald. The choices he made surprised Botes himself who had expected to see Grace as a Maori or Polynesian and Gerald as ‘white’. Once the decision was made Moriarty’s ethnicity was seen as a benefit however; it was an aspect of the challenge Botes hoped the film would issue to people for whom the specifics of Christianity, its ‘differences’, really mattered:

[...] the Christ figure that we put up (.) doesn’t fit the ideal, he’s not tall, sort of blond and Aryan (.) he’s short, stocky and Maori and he’s kind of a bit nerdy, so he’s far from, I guess the ideal that many (.) Christian churches would accept as an ideal (.) so that’s going to infuriate a lot of fundamentalist Christians right off. (6/1/97)

Whereas Botes sounds gleefully aggressive about the possibility of upsetting ‘fundamentalist Christians’, Moriarty’s enjoyment of this iconoclastic aspect of his role was more gently expressed; he hoped his casting would challenge preconceptions about ethnicity:

I mean, a brown Christ for example, with curly brown hair. I mean okay in the part of the world he came from at the time he should of [sic] had tanned skin. The blond fair skin is a bit of a misnomer I think to some extent. That puts that into question any way: “What’s a Maori doing, playing Jesus Christ?” (10/1/97)

There were other outcomes of altering the project’s casting dynamics however. One was that Hamilton adopted a rough, working class accent to suit her role as a vagrant. The second was that since Moriarty was considerably older than the other actors who had played Gerald, his and Grace’s relationship was now that of an older man consorting with a teenage girl. In the professional realm the difference in experience also brought issues of status to bear on the interactions of the two actors.

Kirsty Hamilton: religio/spiritual positioning

Kirsty Hamilton initially said she considered herself ‘not at all religious’ although that hadn’t always been the case. She had been baptised Presbyterian and had been through a period in her

teens where she had ‘prayed a lot, largely as a ‘safety thing - ‘please take care of my family you know, bless my Mum’, [...] it was more a fear of not being safe’ (9/1/97). At that time she thought of Jesus as a powerful figure: ‘I guess I probably thought of Him as God, the Jesus we all know’ but this intense form of protective devotion had crumbled as she got older, influenced Hamilton said, by the insights of feminism and by challenging events in her own life: ‘people talk about you need something to believe in, you know there’s so much shit going on that you have to have it whether or not it’s there. It’s like you create this thing for yourself’ (9/1/97).

Hamilton said she no longer required the idea of a specific God, that her beliefs had become more personal and informal. Indeed she generally drew on agnostic formulations to describe her current beliefs, although still described using a form of prayer: ‘for me now, I guess if I pray, or ask for some help, it’s to whoever, or what ever is up there that’s good (.) and makes all the good things in the world happen. All the parts of this world that I like, that are nice’ (9/1/97).

When I then commented that it seemed odd then for her to claim she wasn’t at all religious Hamilton and I engaged in an exploration of the ways in which she used the term. An extract from Hamilton’s response illustrates the fluidity of discourse as she rethinks statements she has herself made a few seconds earlier:

I guess (.) I’ve got a rather simplistic view of what religion is. Its come from when I was young, that religion is about going to church or a church, or belonging to a specific group. [...] Whereas spirituality is this personal thing I have of goodness and just being right with yourself and stuff like that. That’s what I see as spirituality, I guess, and I see them as two different things, which they probably aren’t. So spirituality encompasses a lot of things to me, and [...] my personal view is, Grace is at peace with her spirituality, or has more of an understanding of perhaps, perhaps she got a beginning of her own spirituality at the end of the film. (9/1/97)

Hamilton works her way to a discourse which fits squarely into the spirituality of life model: norms of goodness, psychological and spiritual health are internalized, and the self itself becomes the most important judge of spiritual validity. This view of spirituality is also attributed to her character, Grace, who is spoken of as a *seeker* after self-understanding and self-acceptance. Additionally, the conversation is also an example of a phenomenon found throughout this research - that there can be a robust diversity about the ways in which the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ are currently employed. The terms are either sometimes used interchangeably, or else people are not adroit in speaking of their own beliefs and practices. If these beliefs do not fit with a traditional religious model, (which has been rejected) they may not be recognized as being

informally religious or in the nature of personal 'spiritual' systems. It therefore seems advisable to probe further when people claim not to be religious.

Towards the end of the interview Hamilton offered further explanation for having said she was not religious, this time a variation on the 'organized religion is bad' discourse familiar from the speech of Botes and Sarkies:

[...] there's someone at the top who thinks that they're either spreading their message or that they just want they want as many people to come in as they can. (.) I guess it comes from all the extremist things you see to do with cults and people taking advantage of people, and using, using religion to, as a means of power, as a means of manipulating people. For their own good. Whether it be money, or whatever (.) it's that en-masse, one person at the top, 'I've got the power over all you people,' kind of thing. (9/1/97)

In this case however the 'wrongness' of religion is based not just on what is perceived as its suppressive, dogmatic characteristics, as on extreme situations where religious organisations have been used by unscrupulous individuals for self-aggrandisement through manipulation of others. Hamilton's use of this discourse is clearly intertextual since she is attributing her knowledge of cults to the media (the phrase 'all the extremist things you see' suggests this). This popular negative discursive formation about religion is explored in miniature in the gendered relationship in *Saving Grace*, where crucifixion is re-cast as an act not of sacrifice, but of manipulative abuse. It will also be played out in a larger, but also gendered, pattern in the relationships between community members in *The Chosen*.

Jim Moriarty: religio/spiritual positioning

Of all the people interviewed for this project Jim Moriarty expressed the strongest connection to the religious and spiritual issues raised by the material with which he was working. His own religious biography is eclectic: a local version of the 'baby-boomer' and 'seeker' patterns of religiosity described by Bellah et al. (1985) and Roof (1993a), but customized by the Maori aspects of his background:

My mother was a Mormon, my father a Catholic, so I was exposed quite heavily to both those things as manifestations of Christian religions. At the same time my grandparents who also practiced Mormonism, were also very staunch in the old Maori ways, of tikanga²⁹ and all the platforms of belief in the gods that go with that. That became comfortable for me to embrace and understand as much as a Christian way of seeing things. Further on, as I grew up I rejected the Christian ones for a while. [...] I'm pleased

²⁹ *Tikanga* means 'protocol', 'custom' or traditional way of doing something.

I had them to (.) as a watermark, anyway, to begin to assess other spiritual belief systems that were on offer. And I looked at Babaji for a while, and in more recent times, studying the writings of Baha'i. (10/1/97)

In the light of his parents' and grandparents' affiliations there would have been opportunities for Moriarty to be enculturated into the tenets of a religion of difference. There are certainly traces of this kind of formation in his speech. For instance when speculating about how others might experience *Saving Grace* Moriarty draws on a discourse which he imagines that a 'diehard' Christian might use: 'Seeing somebody take their mentor, their leader, a key player in their belief structure, and make him flesh and blood in a film, they might not take that very well [...] its blasphemous and invokes acts of heresy and things' (10/1/97).

The use of the terms 'blasphemous' and 'heresy', words Parr also employs, suggest Moriarty has a sense of where the boundaries of a particular religion are, what is acceptable and unacceptable in a religion of difference. However he also describes attending a school where the priests provided him with a more liberal view of Catholicism - Catholicism as a religion of humanity - focusing on similarities between human beings rather than on highly differentiated religious practices. He particularly appreciated: 'The sharing of their philosophy, in terms of human beings being kind and nice to each other, and good to each, whatever the label was, the label happened to be predominantly Catholic' (10/1/97).

Moreover, he suggests that the dual emphasis on both Christian and Maori ways of imagining the cosmos (where gods animate the living world and the current generation can speak with the spirits of ancestors) has prevented him from adopting a singular worldview. For instance, talking about his decision to take the role of Gerald, he describes seeking the opinions, and blessings, of older members of his tribal group: 'And I've seen my old people, out Takapuwahia, my marae at Porirua where I come from, and I've flown it past the old folks, and they said "With our love, with the blessing of your *tipunas*"³⁰. Said a *karakia*, away we go. So I'm covered' (10/1/97).

Yet another element in the mix is the philosophy of the Twelve Steps programme for treating addiction. Moriarty described himself as an 'obsessive-compulsive' who has been married three times and has an alcohol addiction (10/1/97: 15). Finding himself desperate for 'balance' in his life he went through an Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Steps programme and its teachings, with their

³⁰ A *tipuna* is an ancestor.

focus on turning the addict's life over to a higher power, have also found their place in his hybrid personal belief system:

[...] I think I'm a fusion of the Maori [sic] thing, the Christian thing, some eastern stuff, and the Twelve Steps stuff, which is eclectic anyway, that's taken some of the best from all over the place. [...] I believe in the general overall director. No doubt about it. (10/1/97)

The image of the expressivist 'spiritual seeker' as developed by various sociologists of religion (Roof 1993a, 1993b; Wuthnow, 1998) is typically of some one with serial commitments to various belief systems, moving on to the next as their life-needs change. In Moriarty's case there is an element of accessing new systems according to need, but I was struck more by the extent to which resources from all these experiences co-exist in the present for him, readily accessible to embody nuances of thought, emotion and intention. For example, in the extracts above Moriarty characterizes the 'higher power' with which he has a beneficial relationship as the 'general overall director': a metaphor derived from blending his spiritual understanding with his professional vocabulary; God is the general overall director who allows him to source his own power, just as an actual director allows him to access his power as a performer. Being in command of such a rich body of discursive resources puts Moriarty in a powerful position when discussing religion and spirituality: he offers so many potential points of contact, from a doctrinaire, almost fundamentalist construction of religion, to a liberal, tolerant form of expressive spirituality, that he can easily change his mode of expression to fit diverse contexts.

Moriarty talked about his religious and spiritual beliefs with such commitment it was impossible to find statements about his involvement with the production which were not based within that wider order of discourse. When asked about why he agreed to be involved in the film he employed a rhetoric de-emphasizing the importance of money or career opportunities and prioritizing an intuitive, spiritual 'fit' between himself and the project:

Other roles may come along that might have a lot more money attached to them, but if they're not right for my spirit to be part of it, no way would I be part of it. I'm not in it for the money only. It's like on behalf of the characters I play the end result has to have something to do with moral integration. I like to be part of movies that go down that path, rather than just action things that are inane and meaningless, and what do they do, for me or for the world? (10/1/97)

This overall commitment to a religio-spiritual framework led me to the conclusion that unlike Sarkies, Botes, and Hamilton, Moriarty was not at all 'lost and confused' about religion: he was

not an outsider contemplating an emotionally or intellectually fascinating phenomenon with an air of intrigued uncertainty. For Moriarty there was rather a substantial overlap between personal and professional forms of discourse, and as a result, in both spheres, he was 'inside' religion. In terms of discourses of religiosity the emphasis on how that identity might be expressed changed depending on whether he was drawing on Maori spirituality, liberal Catholicism, or themes from eastern spiritualities - but Moriarty appeared to function with a template that caused all these discursive resources to seem effortlessly compatible to him.

Preferred meanings of the text

Having established that, to some degree, all the key creative personnel of *Saving Grace* understood the project to be religiously or spiritually significant - whether as an endorsement of religion or a criticism of it - I now explore how those different forms of understanding, linked with constructions of knowledge from other realms, might have been material factors in the way the project developed during pre-production.

My research focus on discourses about religiosity may give the impression that the question of whether Gerald was a second incarnation of Christ, and the issues such a 'second coming' would raise in a contemporary context were primarily what the film was 'about': that this was the preferred, or dominant meaning the team expected the audience to decode. However a crucial aspect of this analysis is that the primacy of this religiously-focused interpretation was by no means beyond question. Rather, the material was perceived by those encoding it as supporting a plurality of possible categories of interpretation. Furthermore the creation of ambiguity of meaning around certain areas of the narrative was a strategy several of the interviewees discussed. Ambiguity was held dear by the writer, was a source of ambivalence to the director, and was challenged by the producer. But what nobody doubted was that the text could be interpreted in the light of at least three, and possibly four thematic strands. It could, they said, be seen as an exploration of religious issues, as a love story, as a story of the effects of insanity, and perhaps, also, as social criticism.

Mainstream narrative structure

For a feature-length film to privilege more than one category of interpretation is typical, not unusual. It is considered essential to sustain audience interest by 'dimensionalizing' the narrative so there is always more than one thematic strand operating over the duration of the plot's unfolding. In professional jargon the main story-line or thematic strand is called the 'A story', but

there can be 'B' and 'C' stories (also called sub-plots), and so on (see for instance, Seger, 1987; McKee, 1997). The research interviews asked how many thematic constructions each of the production team thought the film carried, and how each person prioritized them; whether they thought any one set of thematic concerns was likely to dominate, (to find out what they thought the 'A' story was) - although that precise term was not used in the questions.

Saving Grace as a story about the (possible) second coming of Christ

The first option was that the preferred meaning concerned Gerald's possible divinity. As noted, Moriarty was the only interviewee however who consistently spoke of the film as being primarily 'about' religious or spiritual issues. Despite acknowledging that, if evaluated according to fundamentalist discourses of religion, it could be construed as anti-Christian, he also insisted that, seen in the light of his own less formal, construction of belief, it is a 'pro-Christian' film:

[...] my own personal belief, it's a big endorsement of Christianity, and that the character of Grace, effectively in the end - whether Gerald is real or not - it is in you. Whatever you believe in strong enough, is in you. I think the film is saying that about Christianity. That it is in you [...] that commitment to the wellbeing, the harmony and the peace of mind that Christianity is supposed to give Christians. That's something that is personal, that it's in you. (10/1/97)

In that case, Moriarty is presenting a discourse about Christianity influenced by a psychological discursive framework. Christianity here is not a matter of redemption from sin, for instance, rather the emphasis is on more general qualities, which secular culture might also value, of 'wellbeing, harmony and peace of mind'. The location of this religiosity, 'personal', 'in you' is also a marker of such a discourse.

In talking about her reasons for being involved in the production Hamilton described a number of thematic strands in *Saving Grace* she found attractive: including the fact it could be seen as a love story, that it featured a 'real' female character with strength and humour, and that it had an unpredictable narrative structure. However, for her, in this discussion, the religious story was paramount: 'there's millions of love stories. The difference is that this guy's Jesus Christ. Or, if you take that point of view, the whole religion is the thing that sticks out the most (9/1/97).

Parr would have preferred the film had slotted into a mainstream categorization as a film about love - a topic he felt was more marketable to audiences - but said nevertheless. it would be seen primarily in the light of its references to spiritual matters: 'from a producorial, marketing point of

view it'll be quite good if there was a more fulfilling love story. But at the end of the day the nature of piece is that it's (.) an exploration of spiritual issues' (7/1/97).

The complex set of discursive constructions Botes offered when asked about being involved in the project has already been explored - suffice to say that at this point he too privileged a spiritual interpretation of the text. However, it seems to me that one set of preferred meanings can sometimes be linked with another: even if it is seen as self-evident that the film will invite interpretations carried out in a religious or spiritual register those interpretations can sometimes be cognate with, or perceived as a sub-mode of expression for, another set of discourses around another theme. The relationship between spirituality and romantic love may be one of those substitutions or translations.

Saving Grace as love story

For instance the material is also structured as a relationship story or love story - although for more than half the film the relationship is not actively sexual. It is thus possible to view *Saving Grace* primarily, alternately, or simultaneously, as a love story in at least two modes. It can be seen as a symbolic relationship or combat between the feminine/earthly and the male/divine, or it can be seen more prosaically as a tragic real world 'love story', where both of the characters have emotional needs which they attempt to meet through using each other. It was this latter realm of interpretation that some members of the production team privileged at various times.

Sarkies said the project is ultimately a love story - a twisted one. In his view Grace is wounded, unloved, needs someone else's attention to heal her - or, alternatively, cannot be healed, she is completely damaged and has need of someone else onto whom her hurt can be transferred. He claims she sees herself as a killer because of her mother's death, and the nature of Gerald's claims about his identity (having conquered death) provide the circumstances she needs to reinforce that view. In the following statement Sarkies constructs dual discourses about love. The first is the familiar, psychologically-inflected concept that human love can be a self-inflicted delusion, where the beloved might not have one's own interests at heart after all. The second, more of an implication than a developed discourse, is that a re-incarnation of Jesus Christ might not be thoroughly benign - that he might be prepared to sacrifice individual human beings to his own purposes.

[...] at its heart, it's a love story between two people [...] but then, it does cross over. There's a cross-over point, so it does become complex at that point. And what does it

mean? He gives out all his love, and she's supposed to take it. [...] sometimes it's like (.) you can be led on a false journey sometimes, by someone that doesn't necessarily know what they're doing [...] What if the person you gave everything to was simply wrong, or was simply unsure themselves? (8/1/97)

The possibility that a Christ-figure might be in error runs counter to the most basic characteristics of the archetype (see chapter 4). However, the idea that Christ should be considered in relation to sexual, romantic love has become popular in recent films containing Jesus-or Christ-figures. In the Christian tradition Jesus Christ is celibate: able to resist temptation of all sorts, including sexual temptation. In compensation he represents Love in an idealized mode which is generally, but not always, asexual - the sexualized tone of the raptures of mystics supposedly in communion with God is another order of discourse altogether³¹. But, as noted in chapter 4 representing Christ as being impervious to sexuality has come under attack recently in the light of wider cultural developments. However, although *Saving Grace* could fit into the pattern of an idealized, mystical love-story, none of the team spoke specifically of the relationship between Grace and Gerald in these terms, perhaps because it had been taken for granted from the start of the project. Rather, Botes spoke of the love story as a way of attempting to lessen the burden on the spiritual aspects of the film:

I've tended to flee a little bit from the bigger questions and try and pitch it more on the level of there's two people in this particular relationship. (.) You know, those big questions are so huge that (.) I don't think there are any answers really, all you can do is kind of hint at stuff and let people thrash it out afterwards. (6/1/97)

Hamilton offers another perspective - a psychological perspective - by agreeing that *Saving Grace* is a love story but one with only a single participant. She now sees the plot in terms of Grace's circumstances, actions and motivations. In so doing, she contradicts her earlier assertion that it is 'the religion thing' that was most significant and thus demonstrates it is possible to employ contradictory discursive constructions of the same topic within the shifting dynamics of a single conversational framework.

[...] the most important thing to me, is that it's a love story with herself really. Because at the beginning she wants to kill herself. She thinks she's killed her mother, she just wished she said "I love you" [...] And she's been in these shitty homes, and shifted around and been on the street, and basically had no love. Doesn't love herself. But at the end I think the biggest lesson is that she realises that, you know, life is shit at times, but she learns to love yourself more, through all of it (9/1/97)

³¹ For a full discussion of changing representations of the sexuality of Christ see Steinberg (1995).

So, Parr thinks the film is about spiritual issues yet wishes it were more of a love-story, Botes highlights the relationship because it is a way 'into' the film for the audience and because he 'flees' from the larger issues. Sarkies sees a love relationship as a way of dramatising the difficulty of trusting anyone else. Hamilton now thinks *Saving Grace* is an internalised love story, where Grace sees what she needs in Gerald and has a relationship with him in the outer world to fulfill an inner need. Even in discussing something as obvious to discern as a love-relationship, this small group of interviewees indicates that people preparing to make a film can have different ideas about the function and meaning of particular narrative elements.

Saving Grace as a story of madness

The third major interpretive framework, or set of preferred meanings, is the possibility that either or both of the participants in the relationship is mad and that the film is in effect the backstory to the kind of psychopathic crime one hears about in the media. The double ending of the play/film could then be understood as revealing, and then undercutting, an 'insane' point-of-view.

It has already been noted that psychological discourses are often compatible with discussions of religion and spirituality - but what kind of psychological discourse? The term covers a huge field, encompassing notions of psychological health and sickness, and dealing with extreme processes as well as descriptions of mundane functioning (Peck, 1993; Lilliston & Shepherd, 1999; Hedges & Beckford, 2000). Just as conventional notions of Christ are now routinely challenged in audio-visual representation by recourse to the challenges of sexuality, so it has become common for contemporary texts to link extreme psychological discourses (of madness) and (extreme) discourses of religion. The import of many of these productions for instance the films *The Devils* (Russell, 1971), *Breaking the Waves* (von Trier, 1996), and *Heaven on Earth* (TV, 1998), is that intense religious belief can lead to madness, or alternatively, that mentally unstable people are attracted to religion. This construction is reflected in Hamilton's comments about being afraid of extremists using religion as a platform for self-gratification. This linkage of madness-and-religion is generally de-constructive, anti-religious, or secular in nature.

Prioritizing a negative psychological framework to explain *Saving Grace* is therefore largely incompatible with the interpretation that Gerald is Christ, since many of the events in the film, especially images signaled as 'flashbacks' or memory-images, could then be 'read' as symptoms of psychological illness, rather than as confirmatory or illustrative of genuine experience. So, while recognising the possibility of this kind of interpretation - that either Grace, or Gerald, or

both, are mad - none of the production team wanted this angle to become other than a secondary framework for interpreting the film, since prioritizing it would obviously undercut the religio/spiritual aspects of the text. According to Botes:

It was kind of boring if you nailed it all down to Grace being crazy [...] I thought it was far more interesting and rich if Gerald really was Jesus and (.) you see him as this half divine half human person who's kind of a bit mixed up and a bit fucked up and capable of falling in love with all the hassles that brings. (6/1/97)

Sarkies provides the most imaginative rationale for the existence of the theme of madness in the film - he constructs it as a state to which we are all prey, and its representation as a device to elicit a deeper level of involvement and self-questioning from audience members:

What the play does is that it draws you in, first, before it drops its bombshell [...] and in a way, if they are mad then it introduces the audience to their madness. And takes the audience along for the ride. So the audience therefore is complicit with it. And the audience could see that they could've just as easily have been in Grace's position. (8/1/97)

The intricate nature of Sarkies' aims for the film are becoming clearer here - he wants the audience to question the way their own minds work. While providing a plurality of preferred meanings for a text is normal it is also 'normal' for those meanings to be pre-aligned in some way, to reinforce or amplify one another. However there is a possibility that audience members will find it difficult to make a coherent interpretation of the text if two or more sets of preferred meanings are mutually incompatible. It is more usual for multiple thematic strands in a text to amplify each other rather than to engage in blunt contradiction.

Social-critical interpretation

For Moriarty, discussion of the theme of mental illness deviated into a fourth set of preferred meanings: that the text is critical of a culture and economy where many people are excluded from employment, consequently marginalized from society, and where mental illness can be viewed as both a response to and an excuse for that exclusion. To construct such a discourse Moriarty makes a play on the word 'crazy', redefining it to mean something like 'immoral', 'stupid', 'indefensible' and attributing craziness to 'they' and 'you' (vague words which usually refer to a combination of the government and of majority collective values). Overall, Moriarty seems unsure whether the other form of 'craziness', expressed by the socially marginalized is to be deplored or valorized:

I think its crazy, they're closing down the mental hospitals. What is crazy? [...] What's crazy is if you kill or murder somebody, or rape and pillage and plunder. That takes many forms as well. I don't view these characters as crazy, at all. To me they are people who may not conform or fit in as the majority may do, and who get about their business in a way they can. (10/1/97)

Botes also provides an interpretation critical of the competitive materialism of contemporary culture. The Jesus-figure then represents a compassionate principle, accepting and consoling those who are marginalized:

... you could say "this is a culture that's kind of disintegrating from within because it's materialistic" [...] if you're not in there competing commercially then you're not (.) most of all it's a culture that sort of separates people, it sort of pushes them into their own little corners rather than promoting contact (.) and so she gets a Jesus who holds out his hand and says "Touch me, I'm here". (6/1/97)

Unlike the 'return of Christ versus madness' tension, for the film to offer a critique of New Zealand society as excessively materialistic is not incompatible with also interpreting it as spiritual film or as a love story, since such a discourse is broad enough to hold the others within it. The beginning of the play had emphasized such a social-critical discourse, as an explanation of Grace and Gerald's unhappiness, but in the film-text that interpretation was diminished in favour of the other frameworks for interpretation (see chapter 8).

To identify these broad sets of preferred meanings is important because they represent the preferred meanings which the production team, before production began, claimed they would draw on in encoding the text. Although team-members ranked them differently in terms of significance, they felt these formations would provide contact points between their interpretations and those of the audience (see discussion below). However, with so many individual constructions of meaning circulating in the pre-production environment, which ones would actually get priority in the formation of the text - who had the power to encode their particular viewpoint(s) into the text, and by what process would that happen?

The re-writing process

While the structure and broad outline of events remained the same in both play and film, re-writing of the script had been an on-going process ever since Botes and Sarkies began to work together. According to their descriptions, they would discuss possibilities, Sarkies would sketch out new scenes, then the two of them would work together - Sarkies pacing the room talking, while Botes wrote things down. Significant changes in pre-production included the truncation of

the opening events in the Income Support office, and of Gerald and Grace's sessions playing video games. Short scenes of Gerald flipping coins and consistently landing them on their edges were added, as was a highly dramatic scene where Grace slashes her wrists to provoke Gerald into action. Also, Grace's spoken references to her dead mother in the play were turned into a series of visual flashbacks of her corpse. For Botes these changes speeded up the action, making it more interesting by rendering visual concepts which had only been implied in the play. He said the playscript was somewhat 'dull and meandering', describing desirable changes in the following terms: 'I wanted more things to happen, I wanted to shorten the first act where there was all that blather and fish and chip shops and video game playing, I wanted to shorten that right down and get more meat in the second act' (6/1/97).

Botes is here drawing on a professional discursive framework used by mainstream scriptwriters to describe an 'ideal' or 'effective' film script (see Seger, 1987; McKee, 1997; Aronson, 2000, and many others). Having been a Script Assessor for the Film Commission himself, and a member of the Short Film Fund assessment panel, Botes had experience of what was found 'good' and 'readable' by funding authorities. Under such a model irrelevant material ('blather') is removed, and relevant material is arranged into linked events - 'story' - then sculpted into chains of action which turn on major points of change or surprise. The narrative is divided into 'acts', with the third act rising to the film's climax, followed by a brief resolution. The well-made mainstream script also values seeding of clear motivations for character's actions and choices within the plot of the film. Sometimes this motivation comes in the form of 'backstory', where relevant details of a character's previous life and personality formation are quickly sketched out. For instance the new flashbacks to the death of Grace's mother provide Grace with a backstory, which constitutes motivation for her lapses into mental distress. The provision of backstory is particularly desirable in a humanist, post-Freudian society in which human behaviour is considered to have complex psychological causation.

This model, including the psychologizing effects of providing backstory, did not sit comfortably with Sarkies who, as previously noted, liked to write 'intuitively', disliked preset 'rules' and wanted Grace to remain psychologically unspecific so a range of audience members could imagine themselves in her place. However he also repeatedly positioned himself in the low-status position of a 'novice' filmmaker in need of advice from others. Nevertheless, in talking about this issue he still only wanted to modify his script insofar as the changes either maintained or enhanced what he saw as the unique core of his 'vision'.

For instance, an aspect of his original work *Sarkies* particularly valued was the fact it was a 'slightly wordy' play, which would make a dialogue-reliant film. However this dialogue/heavy style had already come under pressure in the re-writing process since it was viewed as slowing the dramatic action. The greater professional status of the director became visible as Botes described his dislike of the repetition in the script:

... one thing I've been doing right through is trying to curb Duncan's love of repetition. He loves characters to repeat each other's lines and I hate it, so I've gradually gone through and cut them out. I thought well, I could live with one or two because that's like a stylistic thing and I don't want to kind of completely sit on him, but I want to make sure that every moment that I shoot is kind of justified. (6/1/97)

In the face of this feedback *Sarkies* had started to view his own interest in repetition as 'some sort of pathological addiction' (8/1/97: 8) and had participated in editing much of it out. Moreover, just before funding had been secured Botes had become more active in working on the script himself, since he felt that once it went before the Film Commission the script had 'to speak for itself', in other words perform in terms of institutional norms (6/1/97).

A turn towards realism

Altogether, Botes said, the cumulative effect of the changes made to the project was to have moved it more in the direction of 'realism'. Since the notion of 'realism' (and its relation - 'naturalism', see also chapter 9) was important to the teams making both *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen*, yet seemed not to have a clear, explicit meaning, it needs some discussion. This is Botes' explanation of the term:

[...] that's been the gist of my whole contribution to it really [...] in the sense that I have made it less stylised but more natural, I've tried to bring it back more to, you know, the real world in the way that people speak and the settings (.) there were all kinds of little stylized touches that were in the play that aren't in the film and I think that the film is far more grounded in psychological reality in the fact that the scenes are dramatised more (.) like there's a better shape and flow to what goes on (.) all of which I think will help the audience (.) feel interested and stay with it. (6/1/97)

On the one hand Botes is suggesting that filming actors in a manner that uses as little obvious artifice as possible helps makes something 'real'. By 'real' I speculate he means 'convincingly like-life', or mimetic. However, he also speaks of another order of 'reality' - 'psychological reality' - which is not 'real' in the same, observable way. Finally, as he had done in discussing the

discourses of religiosity he perceived in *Saving Grace*, Botes reframed both these versions of realness in terms of their utility, that is, their usefulness in attracting and holding an audience: it was, for instance, buttressing ‘psychological reality’ that had been a major aim of the script-changes discussed above.

In moving unconsciously between these different versions of ‘realism’ Botes is performing the same blurring of discursive boundaries that Tulloch and Moran noticed in their study of the production of *A Country Practice* (1986). In this environment the achievement of ‘realism’ (or naturalism) was a highly valued professional goal: ‘to be “real” in the eyes of other TV professionals is the highest accolade to be looked for’ (1986: 119). However, Tulloch and Moran view both ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’ as ideological forms of understanding as much as strategies of representation. For them ‘naturalism’ is the more appropriate term since it rests on the basic illusion that ‘it is not the camera but the audience’s eye which “sees”’. The ‘good’ naturalistic drama team therefore uses audio-visual techniques in as unobtrusive a manner as possible, so that the audience’s experience of the ‘world’ before it will seem largely unmediated. Or, in the words of Raymond Williams, whom Tulloch and Moran cite: ‘The naturalist habit is an assumption of an immediately negotiable everyday world, presented through conventions that are not seen as conventions’, (1977, in Tulloch & Moran, 1986: 179). Furthermore, a naturalistic idea of character, according to Tulloch and Moran, views characters as ‘formed by and *controlled* by their environment’ (1986: 183, original emphasis), a view which meshes with a psychological view of character.

Realism, by contrast, offers a deeper, structural view, whereby ‘social inequality (rather than “fate”) is the major determinant of human actions, and where social structure, once understood, may be open to change’ (1986: 183). If a social-critical discourse (outlined above) had been privileged in the discussion and encoding of the text, then discourses of realism would have been appropriate. But, the overall context of production – featuring the still-hegemonic discourses both of market economics and of a naturalistic view of the Self, as explored in chapter 3 – made it unlikely that the dominant preferred encoding would be so radical. Therefore what Botes is really describing here is the various steps he has taken to make the text more ‘naturalistic’ in approach.

The fact that Botes was well aware of the environment in which he was working was reinforced when he outlined his thoughts on the visual style he would employ during filming; a nexus of decisions about lighting, shot-size and degree of camera movement. In this area, paradoxically, the

push was away from naturalism, towards a demonstration of his individual ‘flair’ as a director. He expected to be judged by others in the industry not only on his ability to create ‘panache’ but also on his efficiency in the use of resources:

[...] we can’t [go over budget], that would be a little professional black mark [...] the danger is that I’ll [...] compromise too much and that I’ll end up with bland shots and bland coverage [...] I want to make a movie, and movies tend to look different from television and I know I could go out and shoot this like television, do it in my head, do it all the time, but I want to be much more ambitious than that - I want to make it look like it’s a movie and give it a bit of sweep and visual panache (6/1/79)

Note that television is used here as a ‘bad’ object – its opportunities for creative expression considered inferior to those of the cinema.

An ambiguous text

Numerous changes (with which Sarkies had concurred, in his stance as a learner) might have taken place in the text-preparation thus far, but as long as the narrative remained essentially ambiguous as to the real nature of Gerald/Jesus’ identity Sarkies would remain satisfied (Sarkies, 8/1/97). However, from the evidence of the interviews the point that was most explicitly at issue just prior to filming was the question of how much ambiguity the text could sustain and still succeed with audiences.

Declining to decide whether a character who claims to be Jesus really is Jesus, is consistent with Sarkies’ statements about his anxious agnosticism: his wish for assistance from outside tempered by his fear of the submission on his part that might entail. A fractious text that won’t fix the identity of a key character is a continuation of the discursive conflict that is a feature of his own self-descriptions:

No, I haven’t decided and I don’t want to decide. So that’s, that’s quite a conscious decision. Sometimes when I’m thinking that he’s not, [...] that’s when I have to go into the script and I’ll write a bit more that he is. ‘Cause I always want it to be in the balance. I don’t want people to know. It just seems really important to me that it becomes more interesting if people don’t know. (8/1/97)

The ambiguity of the text was therefore seen as serving an ideological, almost a moral purpose, of not constraining the audience’s freedom of belief, as well as reflecting Sarkies’ own ambivalence about the existence of God.

That it should remain ambiguous whether or not Gerald was Jesus was also attractive, intellectually, to other members of the production team. In the light of the anti-religious discourses they had all offered, it was appropriate that they would not wish to proclaim that Gerald and Jesus were self-identical. Leaving the question unanswered was attractive primarily because to lock in the idea that Gerald was Jesus could be seen as endorsing the whole Christian system. Then, they would be re-installing the 'difference' (Jesus Christ as divine as well as human) that supported a whole religion of difference, including the oppressive creeds and repressive, patriarchal systems of organization and morality, of which they had spoken unfavourably.

But nobody else cared about ambiguity as passionately as Sarkies did. For the others there were others issues, other discourses - primarily professional discourses - which weakened their allegiance to the cause of ambiguity. These views were linked to their various conceptions of the audience.

Audience-images for *Saving Grace*

The subject of audience and audience, or reception, research, has been canvassed in chapters 4-5. While the meaning of the term 'audience' is contested, it commonly refers to viewers placed at some remove, both in terms of location and time, from the production of a film or television programme. However in chapter 5, the idea was introduced that there are also other types of audiences - public and professional (the production teams themselves, industry bosses and peers, test-audiences, and reviewers) - which watch and evaluate the piece before it is officially released, thereby having a double status as both recipients of and contributors to, the production process (Tulloch & Moran, 1986; Domfeld, 1998). And there are also perhaps the most influential audiences of all, the imaginary or implied audiences, which, according to Gans (1957) and Gripsrud (1995), production teams keep in mind as they navigate their way through the film-or television-making processes. It is to consideration of these interim audiences, the ones that feed back into production, that I now turn.

Early on in the pre-production process, when potential funders are first approached, the question will be asked 'who is this film/television programme 'for', who is it 'aimed at', what is it's potential audience?' The answers to such questions, including reference to the age range and tastes of the imagined audience, are built into the production in terms of choices about casting, design, styles of dialogue, inclusion of appropriate cultural references, the range of camera techniques and

sound effects, styles of music employed - and, in general about the pace, or rhythm of filming and editing as it is finally presented on screen.

The interviewees on *Saving Grace* described their imagined audiences in varying degrees of detail. Sarkies' image of the audience was sketchy, subordinate to his ongoing discourse about authorial creativity. He said he sometimes wrote plays 'for people like me, people about my age', describing the audience at his hometown Bats Theatre as 'fairly radical, not radical but vaguely liberal's the word', (8/1/97):

[...] I sort of wrote for me 'cause I find it interesting, and hopefully other people find interesting what I find interesting. (.) Cause I think that if I do try and write for other people I'll just end up in trouble [...] But, I wrote it for myself, and generally I'm right. [...]. It doesn't mean that everyone's going to like it. Hopefully they will. (8/1/97)

Sarkies implies that since he enjoys ambiguity and uncertainty in art, others will enjoy it too. This is a somewhat romantic discourse of 'auteur'-ship which can be contrasted with a more utilitarian model of writing 'for' an audience (see the chapters on *The Chosen*).

Botes and Parr drew on different vocabularies from Sarkies since they wanted the film to be successful in industry terms; an outcome judged against two standards. Critical success would come from acceptance for overseas film festivals, from winning awards at those festivals and from positive reviews abroad and at home. Commercial success was ideally built on initial critical success but could also be boosted by skilful publicity - it would come from attracting sizeable audiences by means of favourable recommendations, or good 'word-of-mouth'. Botes, and also Moriarty, said they preferred critical success: they saw the film as appealing to an 'art-house' audience; that is, well-educated urban people who can afford to go to the cinema frequently. These people have obtained, through experience, what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'cultural capital' in that area and are thus able to appreciate films which deviate from more straightforward forms of storytelling. For an 'art house' audience the film's ambiguity would hopefully be an attraction not a difficulty. Botes spoke of aiming the film at the more mature section of this audience:

I think the audience is realistically going to be people in their early 20's up to 40's (.) it's not going to be the sort of hip young thing kind of movie and it's not going to be a comfortable middle class experience either [...] guess I'm aiming for the sort of art-house, sophisticated urban wheelers [...] I don't see it in any way shape or form being a huge popular hit, I think it'll be hopefully a respectable contender on the art house circuit, and hopefully it can sort of hold its head up at film festivals and garner a respectable critical reputation (6/1/97)

Parr on the other hand, wanted the film to appeal to a younger, larger audience:

I think it's a sophisticated 18-30, (.) I hope that we can edge it a little bit younger than that, in terms of the girl [Grace]. [...] the audience today, the young audience is capable of actually reading more from a film than I think a lot, that people like me who have been in the industry a while. (7/1/97)

In imagining how this audience will react, Parr spoke of consulting an audience of one: his young adult son Quentin, who he describes as both 'incredibly moralistic' and 'spiritual': Quentin, he says, 'goes to bed and lays and reads the Bible' (7/1/97). In relation to *Saving Grace* this Bible-reading was useful to Parr because Quentin had been quick to give him opinions about the rightness or wrongness of aspects of Gerald's behaviour as Jesus Christ. However, in order to ensure the widest possible audience, Parr wanted to limit the film's ambiguity, an excess of which he felt would be off-putting for viewers. He wanted to ensure the film had a strong 'emotional through-line' so that audiences knew what they were supposed to feel. He was concerned however that *Saving Grace*, through its formal and conceptual complexity, was going to encourage people to think – a trait he found unsatisfying, since, personally he liked 'to go to the films to be pushed and pulled around, emotionally, more than intellectually' (7/1/97).

In his role as an advocate for the audience Parr characterizes the script as being equally balanced in favour of opposing interpretations: that it's a story about the second coming of Christ, and that it's a story about madness. Parr said this was an issue Botes needed to resolve:

He's got two options. He can have an audience walking out and saying, "The stupid bitch was mad". Or, he can have, people saying, "He really was Christ". And, you want 50 percent saying she was mad, and 50 percent saying he was Christ. But if you're going to err, let it be on the side of people saying he was Christ, (.) so that if you're doubtful as to where the line is, let's be safe and go that way. (7/1/97)

Parr wanted to intervene on this point: he wanted to see 'a slightly more positive saving of Grace'. But having set the project up as 'Costa's film' he felt he could not be too insistent. In his judgement the texture of the final moments of the movie would be the key to how it would be received and he was hoping to exert some influence on how the scene was actually filmed.

When questioned about particular scenes in the script, Botes could describe moment by moment, how he imagined an audience member thinking about what was taking place. For instance, talking about the penultimate scene, he says that Sarkies had wanted it to be filmed so that Grace kept her

back to (the resurrected?) Gerald the whole time. Botes disagreed saying it would have made it too obvious Gerald was a figment of Grace's imagination: 'I argued strongly to the contrary, that they should look at each other, that we should do big close ups of Gerald, [...] it will seem like he's really there, flesh and blood and all, and he really is back from the dead' (6/1/97).

This extract also suggests he has taken a stand on the issue of Gerald's identity, one that would please Parr:

[...] I wanted to do it like that because although I didn't want to irrevocably say "this is the way to interpret it as opposed to the other way". I just really felt that if the audience bought into the idea that he was Jesus, that was actually a far more rich and interesting interpretation than the fact that she was just crazy and met this guy and ended up killing him. (6/1/97)

Botes is saying he wanted to make it possible for audiences to decide that 'Gerald' was a second incarnation of Christ - not because Botes is a Christian and wants to promote a Christian worldview, but because, within a professional framework he thinks this outcome will provide the most coherent, satisfying experience for an audience. For aesthetic and commercial reasons therefore, he plans to side-step the psychological discourses he has otherwise prioritized as explanatory of the religious content of the text, and instead support the proposition that the divine, conceptualized along Christian lines, can be present in everyday life. How this move to visualize divine intervention might fit with his efforts to move the production into the area of increased 'realism' is not discussed, but one could also suggest that the Christ-figure is merely being swept up into that naturalistic paradigm along with other aspects of the plot.

What all the respondents had in common as they imagined the audience however, was their expectation there would be a 'fundamentalist' constituency that would be outraged by the film's approach. These expectations were not in fact unreasonable since, other films about Christ, for instance *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), had been the subject of furious protests in the US (see Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996). The combative metaphors employed by interviewees imagining this conservative reaction ranged from Hamilton saying it would be 'excellent' if people were 'up in arms' about the film, Parr predicting that 'fundamental Christians will see it as Jesus-bashing and church-bashing', to Botes offering an image of himself as an aggressor picking on a contemptible opponent: 'I want to see the fundamentalist ants sort of come scurrying out and loudly complaining, I (.) sort of want to kick their mound a little bit' (6/1/79). The commercial hope accompanying this aggression was that fundamentalist Christian outrage would provide the

film with free publicity, which would attract other audience members. An alternative construction of Botes' comments is that he thought the film was sufficiently anti-religious (anti-religion of difference that is) to unsettle people who were complacent about their Christian beliefs.

Rehearsing performance

If the final minutes of the film were the focus of the discussions about ambiguity, they were also highlighted in the accounts given of the two-week rehearsal period. This was seen as the moment when the different interpretations of the text's meaning had to come together, to be tested in performance. Botes, Hamilton, Moriarty and Sarkies were all active in the rehearsal process, despite it being unusual for a writer to be so involved throughout pre-production.

In talking about rehearsals Hamilton and Moriarty drew on the constructions of religion and spirituality they had already discussed, working them up by each undertaking their own forms of research. Hamilton, who had approved of the film's increased 'realism', tried to make her character more credible, enhancing Grace's 'reality base' by talking to homeless people, reading books about their experiences and watching videos about homelessness (9/1/97). She talked about understanding better why her character had such an aggressive demeanour - it was to compensate for an inner sense of vulnerability - and said she intended, as already noted, to play Grace as someone on a journey towards self-reliance and an understanding of her own spiritual strength.

Meanwhile Moriarty had been exploring the Christian resources of his hybrid background in a relaxed manner, relying on his claim that he lives in a society that is still significantly 'Christian':

Well, I read the Bible, that's reasonably big research isn't it? I've lived in a Christian society in the main for most of my life, observed its teaching, been in its halls of residence. Gone along to some of these new fundamentalist church type gatherings, to get a sense of the sweep that they get into. (10/1/97)

Moriarty therefore has gone back to the source text of Christianity and has explored fundamentalist (rather than liberal) constructions of contemporary religion. He combines these with professional discourses to suggest a state of absorption in the character:

HARDY: So do you think he's Jesus Christ? I should ask that directly.

MORIARTY: Well, as an actor, of course I do. I have to take on 100% commitment that the character believes he is. And I will. I'll play him to the utmost of my conviction that

that's who he believes he is. And use all the clues in the script to carry out that purpose on behalf of him. Yep. (10/1/97)

As a result, both he and Hamilton told me, Moriarty had been 'standing up' for his character in rehearsal, trying to change things in the script that he thought were not 'Christ-like'. These included a scene where, after turning water into wine, Gerald forces Grace to drink, and shortly after, has sex with her for the first time. The implication that a Jesus-figure would get someone drunk in order to exploit her was unacceptable to Moriarty and the scene was changed so that Grace was the more active partner both in drinking and initiating sex. He also described a recurrent wrangle over a line of dialogue where Gerald says that, in the light of the world's present circumstances 'we need people to die'. Moriarty felt Jesus, no matter how angry, would never use such a phrase:

I can't imagine any one, pertaining to be Jesus Christ to say something like that. [...] I don't think it's the word of Christ. I know, that you're taking the whole Christian thing, swerving it around a bit, but it's too fundamental to ... (10/1/97)

Moriarty claimed to have been re-reading the Bible, and indeed this statement suggests he takes the text seriously as representative of 'the word of Christ'. There is a hint of respect for the Bible in Parr's account of his son's activities and Sarkies is able to quote snippets of Scripture, but otherwise, on a production where the figure of Christ was co-opted and reshaped to fit the agendas of several other people, few of whom actually believed in the divinity of Christ, Moriarty's adoption of traditional Christian discourse was unusual. He hadn't been able to get the line deleted by the time we spoke. But, like Parr, he claimed he intended to rectify the matter during shooting 'on behalf of his character'. On the evidence of his and Parr's statements it seemed that they saw the forthcoming filming period as a labile situation where contesting discourses might contend with one another in real time.

Several factors seemed to be significant in determining the relative status of the people involved in the production team at this point. Age and experience conferred status (on Moriarty, Parr and Botes for instance), while the ready-made hierarchy of a film crew also placed Parr and Botes at the top. Sarkies was in an unusual position: since his own youth and inexperience were mitigated by his pre-existing status as an award-winning theatre writer/director: he therefore describes making many suggestions during the rehearsal process. By contrast I gained the impression that Hamilton was disadvantaged in the pre-production negotiations, not just by age and inexperience, but also by gendered patterns of behaviour, which led her to express herself more tentatively than

the males. However, this tentativeness has the advantage of displaying some of her thought processes, perhaps indicating how others might evaluate and choose amongst, discursive resources.

For instance, although Hamilton initially stated she was satisfied with the opportunities available to negotiate her own characterization, she also mentioned spending time listening while the males in the team discussed their interpretations of the piece:

... I tend to just sit back and listen to what everyone else has to say, rather than, bleat on. [...] I know that Jim had a lot of standing up for his character, or the themes of the story, or was very concerned about the interpretation. Or what the audience would think. So it was mostly between Jim and Costa and Duncan I think. And I was just interested to know what they had to say. But if I didn't feel something was right I would say it. And usually they'd agree. (9/1/97)

There is a hint of subversion in the expression 'bleat on' and an implication that her own restrained form of self-assertion was well-targeted ('usually they'd agree'), which makes this statement a polite hair's breadth away from a critical, feminist, discourse. Moriarty supports this impression by volunteering that Hamilton seemed to have found the rehearsal process less comfortable than he did. At the same time he stresses the confident nature of his own approach to performance – by using the metaphor of a machine, a sort of instinctual mind/body machine:

I think Kirsty got a bit frustrated by the process because it didn't feel as though she was allowed to discover enough herself. [...] I was really happy with all the stuff they offered. As much as they could. Because in the end it all goes in here, it gets processed in there, and it comes out how it comes out. [...] I trust what my machine does, on behalf of the characters I play. (10/1/97)

Moriarty stated above that he intended to play his part from within a traditional Christian framework. What about Hamilton, what was her opinion on the 'real' identity of the character she was playing opposite? When we spoke she was still trying to formulate a position by reviewing both the clues in the script and the opinions the other members of the team had offered. This extract shows her evaluating a number of different discursive constructions of the situation, including the concept that it is actually irrelevant whether or not Gerald is Jesus:

The consensus is that he is [but] I still don't think that I'm totally clear about it. [...] Do I believe he's Jesus Christ? For a long time I didn't, I thought that this was something that Grace needed to believe, because she's come from such shit (.) that it was possible for her to achieve what was in the second video take of the version, where she murders him [...]

she wants to pay somebody back for what's happened to her. So for a long time I believed that, and then I just wanted it to be a love story, and wanted him to be some guy who's perhaps - just a Jesus-like person (.) it maybe would be nice to think there was a bit of Jesus in more people. (9/1/97)

First, a negative psychological discourse: - no Gerald wasn't Jesus, her character is very angry and a man who claims such high status makes a good target. Secondly: a positive romantic, psychological discourse, with overtones of social comment - it would be good if more people cultivated the positive characteristics of the Jesus-archetype; this would make them good partners, amongst other things. Thirdly, below, a psychological, agnostic discourse of idealization - an apparently good person fills Grace's need for something positive in which to believe:

[...] all I know is from Grace's point of view, is that originally that this guy is trustworthy, and he's a friend. [...] The thing is whether he is to her (or not) she wants to believe it 'cause that he means so much to her by this stage, and she hasn't had anything to believe in for such a long time (.) But, I guess he's got to be, because he saves her. When she slits her wrists, and that's it, he saves her. (9/1/97)

And finally, above, a theological discourse based on narrative convention, on cultural knowledge about Christ, and on her experience of playing the character - Gerald performs a miracle therefore he must be Jesus within the diegetic world of the film.

Although Hamilton works towards a statement accepting Gerald's semi-divine identity, in these extracts she is still uncertain which of the preferred meanings she wishes to prioritize. She has a preference for psychological (rather than theological) explanations of human behaviour, but a coherent psychological explanation cannot be synthesized from the welter of competing discourses, and the theological discourse is therefore chosen as a default. As with Parr and Moriarty it would seem that Hamilton too imagines that the actual shoot will be a field of contesting forces, which she will enter with some trepidation .

Conclusion

In this chapter then the views of the key creative people involved in pre-production have been canvassed and the power dynamics of the situation mapped. The two most influential personnel in pre-production were probably the director and scriptwriter, although the scriptwriter was the junior partner and his influence would lessen during filming. The producer spoke of himself in a strong support role, and, while the two actors expressed many opinions about the nature and the potential

of the piece, they had not yet had the opportunity to manifest their influence through a recorded physical performance of the written script.

There was a further unseen, source of influence that was even more powerful however. This was not so much the funding body, the New Zealand Film Commission, as a set of internalized norms about 'good' and 'successful' film-making, which were at their most audible in the talk of the producer Parr and the director Botes. Sarkies' somewhat anarchic theatre piece, was, as we have heard, gradually shaped and trimmed to conform more closely to those norms. Ideas about the audience - what they would understand and how they would react - formed part of these norms, and were used to guide decisions about narrative structure, performance and filming style. All the respondents mentioned the co-operative and harmonious nature of the working relationships involved. The stage seemed set then for the smooth production of a project which was generally deemed to be well-crafted and 'audacious': a suitable vehicle for Botes' directing debut. It was obvious however that there were a number of different interpretations circulating as to the meaning of aspects of the film, and that these were primarily related to the participants' ideas about religion.

In terms of religious or spiritual affiliation none of the interview participants provided a preponderance of statements associated with a discourse of religions of difference. From time to time statements were made (Sarkies, Hamilton, Moriarty) which referenced the concept of an external authority, or God, and raised the possibility of a basic insufficiency or wrongness about human behaviour - the sorts of views which might support a religion of difference. However, strong criticisms of religions of difference were made by almost all of the respondents, and they seemed to have been drawn to work on the project partly by the fact that it offered an open-minded exploration of religion that was precisely not dogmatic.

Botes and Hamilton I would categorize as loosely affiliated with spiritualities of life - a category resilient enough to accommodate people whose interest in spirituality may be infrequently or only partially articulated. Both of them displayed a strong psychological inflexion to their statements about spirituality - in that they saw positive spirituality as associated with the ability to recognize and surmount difficulties in life without personal or emotional disintegration. Parr I have already associated with the kinds of discourses that identify an affiliation with a religion of humanity - although this was expressed in both European and Maori modes of discourse.

Sarkies and Moriarty are more difficult to categorize because of the diverse provenances of the discourses on which they drew to create their self-portraits: and the fact that while both of them seem to have had considerable input from adherents of religions of difference in their childhood they have adopted the now-ubiquitous language of religious and spiritual freedom and tolerance. They certainly reflect different configurations of the available discourses: Sarkies I would characterize as predominantly 'outside' religion, as predominantly secular, since for him the motifs and themes of Christianity appeared partly to be a way to explore relationships of power. Moriarty, as has already been proposed, is 'inside' religion: his interest in it seemed to span the whole spectrum of forms of religiosity, and, like Parr, was marked by a bi-cultural ability to move between Christian and Maori paradigms. At least in this interaction, religiosity was presented as an important discursive framework for him which affected and ordered other parts of his life.

As we have seen, the fact that *Saving Grace* featured religious motifs, such as a Jesus-figure and a crucifixion, and religious themes such as the possibility of miracles, sacrifice, redemption, and resurrection after death, was of varying degrees of importance to the interview respondents. For most, professional issues were equally or more important, and, for the funding body, the New Zealand Film Commission, it seems the actual content of the film project may have been of minor importance. Nevertheless, on the evidence of the verbal statements, it seems justified to assert that the fact the project had a religio/spiritual emphasis, was significantly positive for all of the respondents working on the production team. Some of the presentation of discourses of religion and spirituality would doubtless have been elicited by my explicit focus on the topic - with Hamilton for instance it has been shown that my questioning prompted her to modify an initial discourse of non-religiosity. However, in the light of my later experience of *The Chosen*, when respondents were quite forthright in claiming that they were not religious or that the project itself was not religiously significant (see chapter 9), I contend that my intervention was not typically so coercive as to elicit religio/spiritual interpretations from respondents who did not wish to give them.

In regard to the fact that the narrative used material derived from Christian tradition almost everyone considered openness of meaning around that material to be one of the strong points of the project, since an abhorrence of dogma was a common factor amongst them. Jim Moriarty was a partial exception, in that he had decided the character he was playing was Christ, and was thus concerned to ensure his behaviour was as Christ-like as possible. Kirsty Hamilton on the other hand, while appreciating changes which looked likely to making her character and the film more

socially and psychologically 'realistic' was still processing the options for understanding that character and her situation.

While, for the most part competing interpretations of actions, events, images or lines of dialogue in the script could coexist with each other, where they were potentially crucial was in relation to ideas about the meaning and treatment of the final minutes of the film - a scene which all of the interviewees specifically discussed. That scene would later become critically problematic for the production, as both the production team, and some 'interim' or test-audiences would have to decide which of its possible encodings they preferred to decode. That process will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CASE STUDY ONE – The Post-production and Distribution of *Saving Grace*

Introduction

This chapter undertakes analysis of interview transcripts and documents relating to the production, post-production, and distribution of *Saving Grace*. Unlike the previous chapter, which contained a discrete set of research material, the data analyzed here was gathered over several consecutive time periods, during the 22 months from February 1997 until November 1998. The material in the first 15 pages of the chapter comes from a second set of interviews carried out with the production team, six weeks later than the first, after filming had finished. One new interviewee, the film editor, is added to the group. From then on the data analyzed includes a number of interviews, reports, and other secondary documents, including media reviews, related to the project's distribution.

The objectives of doing second and subsequent interviews were: 1) to investigate whether the discourses of the production team about religion and spirituality had altered as the project progressed; and 2) to explore whether and how, the nature of the meanings encoded in the project changed as it was embedded in different contexts and received by different sorts of audiences. In particular as the text became available to audiences outside the immediate production context - including industry personnel and a test-audience - it was of interest to discover what discourses viewers not closely connected to the project employed in its interpretation and evaluation.

Second set of interviews with production team: Post-production and distribution

The filming, or production, phase of *Saving Grace* was completed by the middle of February 1997. A second round of interviews was conducted at the end of February. Costa Botes and the editor, Michael Horton, were interviewed at the National Film Unit, where they had just completed the rough-cut of the film. Kirsty Hamilton, unavailable during this visit, was not interviewed again until late April, by which time the film had been through the test-screening process and a decision had been made to modify it.

The replies received in this round of interviews were more focused than previously around practical factors concerned with production, and with the aesthetic outcomes of those factors.

Whereas statements related to the religious and spiritual issues contained in the script had been readily offered by the respondents in the pre-production period, a more deliberate effort was now needed to get feedback about those topics. This change in focus was not unexpected since it was my own experience as a director that during the filming process the practical, technical pressures of obtaining the requisite footage are sufficient to relegate more abstract considerations to the background.

Production dynamics and perceptions of progress

The previous chapter described the way in which the work environment during pre-production on *Saving Grace* was at once both collegial and hierarchical; a combination that everybody involved had felt worked well. Now, according to the statements of the interviewees, the power dynamics had shifted during the process of production, with the director assuming increased authority. Duncan Sarkies had however continued to be welcome on the set, taking particular interest in the actors' performances, and functioning, according to Botes, as 'a voice in his ear' during rehearsals for filming. Several people mentioned that Larry Parr, staying true to his previous assertion that this was 'Costa's film', had been an unobtrusive but supportive presence on the shoot, providing a range of options to help resolve problems as they arose. Representatives of the Film Commission had visited the set from time-to-time to check on progress, but had made no particular interventions the interviewees chose to mention.

A 'key creative relationship' – a film editor joins the team

According to Botes, his 'key creative relationship' while shooting was actually with someone not on set at all - the film editor, Michael Horton. With his arrival came a new source of influence and a different set of discourses about the production. Horton is probably the most experienced editor in New Zealand, credited with editing 19 of the 116 feature-length productions made between 1977 and 1996 and co-editing two more (Martin and Edwards 1998). As someone who has worked on more feature films than any of New Zealand's directors, Horton projected a strong confidence in his own judgement during our interview.

Horton speaks of his reasons for being involved with the project as primarily professional and pragmatic, since *Saving Grace*, with its concern with metaphysical matters, its ambiguity and unusual narrative structure was not the kind of project on which he usually chose to work, saying: 'I prefer to come in for broader audiences than this picture I suspect will have' (28/2/97).

With the addition of Horton to the team there was an intensification of ‘professional’ discourses about industry practice. Horton presents industry norms as self-evident rules both for good filmmaking and for the efficient conduct of one’s working life. And insofar as Horton was prepared to discuss religion his discourses about it were subservient to this professional framework as well.

Horton on religion and *Saving Grace*

Horton initially refused to discuss the question of his own religious positioning, asserting that it was a private matter about which I was not entitled to inquire. However after a discussion about the purpose of the research, he agreed to answer my questions. He told me he was an ex-Catholic and then quickly reframed the issue within a professional order of discourse:

[...] I’m interested in seeing what moral question gets thrown up, answered, and from (.) I mean, most films deal with it somewhere along the line. If they don’t deal with spirituality they deal with morality (.) morality is, is explored in every spag. [sic] western. It’s good versus evil and on it goes, you know, pull ‘em out, have a look and that tends to be what drives the drama. So in that regard I’ve got to be interested because it’s part of the trade. (.) So, yeah, I would have thought that sanctity might be putting too high a price on it but sure, there’s normally always some moral dilemma that causes action or reaction in most pictures. (28/2/97)

Horton gives no explanation of what the difference between religion and spirituality might be for him - although one is implied. He instead draws on a secular, functional discourse about morality - about the desirability and inevitability of dividing behaviour into ‘good’ and ‘evil’. This distinction is drawn not in order to actually say anything in particular about morality (nor religion or spirituality), but to make claims about the basic structure of story-telling, which heightens difference and conflict in order to produce dramatic texture (as discussed in previous chapter). It is a discourse that draws on similar material to the discussion in chapter 3 about ‘implicitly’ religious or spiritual texts, where the purview of the concept may be so wide that almost any film may be deemed ‘religious’. Horton’s speech-strategy successfully renders the topic of religion insignificant by translating it into another order of discourse.

When asked if he had observed a trend towards the production of more films with explicit religious or spiritual content Horton replied by linking religion with conservative politics in a manner reminiscent of the ‘organized religion equals oppressive power’ discourse the majority of other respondents had already employed:

Well, you always think there's going to be a trend for more of this as, you know, Thatcherite, Reaganite, right wing, pendulum swinging in the direction I think it's been swinging in the last decade (.) Sadly, you get the feeling that religiousness seems to come to the fore and it seems to be tied with right-wing thinking, which is very sad but that's how it strikes me. (28/2/97)

However, although I concluded that, on the basis of his replies on this occasion, Horton was the most 'secular' of the interviewees on the project (he was the only one who did not ever use the language of 'spirituality' for instance) he said he was able to find a point of attraction in one of the basic premises of the film: it was an amusing incongruity that someone who might have inhabited his local environment could also be Jesus Christ.

[...] the audience is asked to decide whether this Maori joker is the carpenter from Lower Hutt is Jesus Christ. [...] being Lower Hutt born and bred, this amused me and that's really, at the end of the day, that's one part of what's being asked. I suppose the big question is - what are they saving Grace from? That's a good question for me and that's, that's yet to be decided. (28/2/97)

In the second half of that statement Horton demonstrates that, even if he doesn't express strong sympathy for the content of the film, he does have a residual identification with religious patterns of speech. That is, he understands the (Christian) redemptive reference of the phrase 'saving Grace'. And furthermore, his familiarity with the narrative patterns of mainstream cinema leads him to home in on the same aspects of the project, for instance the motivation of the ending - which some of the others have found problematic. In the context of the workplace he does not need to have a current positive interest in religion in order to resolve issues that may simply be perceived in terms of questions of structure and emphasis.

In practical terms Horton spoke of an important aspect of his contribution as being to keep pruning back the dialogue. The 'cardinal sin' in film-making he said is 'to bore your audience' and he felt some of the long dialogue scenes in *Saving Grace* weren't working so he would cut lines out and replace them 'with a look [...] you're trying not to throw away good material, you're trying to advance the narrative' (28/2/97: 6). In other words the norms of good film-making continued to be applied in order to effect the transformation from play to film.

Pressures on production

In discussing what had happened during production, the director now also offered explanations drawing largely on technical and professional frameworks, in contrast to the reflections on themes and interpretations which had been a feature of his speech during pre-production. Whereas Botes

had previously been undecided about the visual strategies he had intended to use in realizing the script, by now those decisions were in the past and able to be described. He said he had opted for a formal, controlled style, keeping the camera on a tripod even when it was being moved around by means of a 'crane-shot' (vertical movement) or 'tracking shot' (horizontal movement). He hoped this choice, which usually has the effect of de-emphasizing the presence of the camera (and therefore serves a naturalistic aesthetic), would impart a sense of 'stillness and a languid quality' to the scenes. He had considered a more informal, 'hand-held camera' style which can be used to create an expressive sense of busyness, and involvement with the characters, but decided that style was currently over-used. Rather he hoped that the unobtrusive cinematography would lure the audience into a sense of security that would make Gerald's proclamation of his divinity even more provocative. However, he was worried that he might have over-done the control and the quietness

[...] I thought I'd gone too tight with it - too conservative - it wasn't loose enough and you know, that might well be the judgement of some viewers on it, it's up to them to decide, but after about four weeks I was pretty comfortable about it. (28/2/97)

Similarly, Botes spoke of having found the shoot in general more stressful than he had expected. He attributed the stress to a gap between the time available and the amount of work he had wanted to do to a certain standard. On some days he had found himself having to obtain five to seven minutes of footage a day, the pressure of which, he claimed, forced him to think like 'a TV director' rather than a film director, so that his shot choices had sometimes been more utilitarian than he would have liked. For all his expressed anxiety about the project however Botes was, at this stage 'cautiously optimistic' that it would be successful; he spoke of it as a 'fun movie that will get people thinking and talking and laughing and crying' (28/2/97).

Text changes during production

According to the interviewees' descriptions the text had continued to change in emphasis as the film was being shot and edited. The team thought the most noteworthy changes had occurred in two areas: there had been a consolidation in the idea that the film was coming from Grace's point-of-view, and there had been a continued effort to 'streamline' the dialogue in order to make the film more appealing to cinema audiences. As the interviewees discussed these changes I noted a greater convergence in the types of discourses being used to describe both the goals of the project and the means used to achieve them. These factors, in turn, influenced the ways in which discourses of religion and spirituality were now constructed.

Point-of-view in *Saving Grace*

The phrase ‘point-of-view’ is shorthand for another of the key principles of mainstream film making. In order to promote empathetic identification with key characters and to provide viewers with a stable viewing position from which to experience the imaginary world a film constructs, it is considered desirable to structure both individual scenes, and ultimately whole films, around a dominant ‘point-of-view’ (Branigan, 1992; Smith, 1995; Aronson 2000). Typically this point-of-view is identified with the film’s protagonist, although presenting a single protagonist point-of-view is not invariably the case: there may be more than one protagonist, or a minor, ‘bad’ or even temporarily unidentified character, may be allocated the controlling point-of-view briefly to create a particular effect. However, almost invariably, aligning the viewers with a specific point-of-view by the end of the film is an integral component of deciding the film’s moral stance. Usually that stance is positive in a conventional sense, and it is only in some transgressive sub-genres such as certain horror films (for example, *Silence of the Lambs*, Demme, 1991) that the culminating point-of-view is assigned to an ‘evil’ and/or vanquished character.

Earlier, Sarkies had said a prime creative motivation for writing *Saving Grace* was to make a piece which featured irreconcilable points-of-view: he had cited an episode of the American television series *Happy Days*, where the story was told from two conflicting points-of-view, as a precedent, implying that the point-of-view in *Saving Grace* would alternate between Gerald and Grace. In this round of interviews, I found that both Botes and Sarkies offered this issue of point-of-view as their biggest ‘discovery’ during filming. Botes said he had noticed that he was continually setting up shots implying the action was being seen from Grace’s point-of-view:

In the script [it] tended to be ‘now here’s Grace and now here’s Gerald and here’s Grace again and now here’s Gerald again’. What we did was, control every scene by Grace so that she was the key focus (.) everything you see in the film is controlled by her point of view, which was a genuine surprise to me. (28/2/97)

Sarkies also spoke about the increased importance of Grace as a point of identification for spectators of the film: hoping that some of the difficulties envisaged in relation to the (ambiguous) ending of the film might be avoided, if viewers were more clearly on Grace’s ‘side’:

It is [now] Grace’s movie effectively and Grace is our view-point to view Gerald (.) Grace is pretty much the strong character in her own right, I’m not saying that the audience is necessarily going to identify completely with Grace, but they’ll definitely be in terms of being a protagonist (.) they know that they could meet Gerald and he could win them over. (26/2/97)

In saying this Sarkies appears to have compromised on his insistence on maintaining the play's ambiguity of meaning through into the film: an ambiguity that I thought had links to his own understandings of religion and spirituality. However, he was not the only one whose speech had changed. Six weeks earlier, Botes claimed to have decided it was best for the audience if they were given cues in the final scene to suggest that Gerald really was Jesus after all. He still refers to this interpretation, yet now, in the light of choices made during filming and editing downgrades it - ('but') - in favour of the possibility that Grace really is crazy after all:

I'd always felt from the beginning, that the interpretations I wanted to see coming to the fore, was that "this is real" that he is in fact J.C. (.) Jesus Christ and I still feel that way, but (.) I found in the shooting that the argument that she's in fact crazy got stronger and stronger [...] just because the way some scenes were shot and the way other scenes were cut together and Mike Horton, for instance, every so often he'd turn around and go "Oh, he really is an unemployed carpenter from Lower Hutt", then say "No, no, no, he's Jesus Christ". (28/2/97).

Botes is quoting Horton here, indicating how, I contend, one person's formulation of events (in this case Horton's playful cynicism) can be persuasive enough to be incorporated as justification for a change of mind in the statements of another. Botes returns to the topic to note that the reinforced privileging of Grace's point-of-view also gives more justification for employing a discursive frame of insanity:

That's one of the reasons why the idea that she might be a crazy person got stronger because if you accept that everything is seen through her eyes and (.) you always see her before she sees something, then any truth in the film is controlled by her point of view, therefore she's crazy, and so is the audience watching it. (28/2/97)

As Botes follows the logic of his own speech here, and in the several pages of talk on this topic, it becomes clear that, at this point, he is no longer articulating a coherent interpretation of the film; his previous confidence has fragmented in the twists and turns of his attempts to incorporate new knowledge and shared discourses in his talk, so that now, the audience too, is 'crazy'. Once again he is thrown back on the proposition that all will rest on the final scene, the one 'where you're [still] not really sure which interpretation to go for' (28/2/97).

Discourses of religion and spirituality

It was my observation that there was now a smaller range of discourse frames offered about religion and spirituality - that the discursive resources on which people were drawing were less

diverse than they had been. This is probably to be expected when a group of people has been working intensely together for six weeks, and when a text that was previously only a field of possible choices, has finally been put into a material form.

We have seen that for Horton, the editor whose opinions are so emphatically expressed that they echo in the speech of others, the patterns which underlie stories about religious figures can be abstracted and translated into the dynamics of good and evil, dullness and drama. For him there is nothing special about 'religious' content (in fact he expresses a political and ethical suspicion of it), nor have references to the contemporary concept of a diffuse 'spirituality' become part of his repertoire.

In the previous round of interviews the producer, Parr had talked about minor religious observance and an appreciation of Maori spirituality as part of his private life. I had wondered if, more so than the others, he might be producing talk about religion and spirituality largely because that was what the interview context seemed to require. And indeed, it was interesting that in this round of interviews, that framework could no longer be accessed. Even when asked explicitly if the spirituality we had talked about previously had 'come through' in the filmed footage, he replied blandly: 'Well, I don't think there's anything other than what's in the script. There were some nice little moments' (26/2/97). Rather, Parr talked now in terms of money and budget, schedules, performances, personal dynamics and the likelihood of whether the film would be successful.

As outlined above, Sarkies, the writer, was concerned, in this second interview, with negotiating the fact that *Saving Grace* was passing out of his control. When Sarkies now spoke about spirituality it was in the service of hoping his treasured 'ambiguity' would be preserved despite the increased focus on mainstream modes of structuring the narrative. In particular he mentioned that Botes intended to make the ending more 'up' than he, Sarkies would have chosen. 'I think Costa wanted it to be a happy ending, he wanted it to be a sense of her finding salvation in herself' he said, 'but for me the ending has also got a certain amount of bleakness in that (.) part of it is saying "you have to find your own strength from somewhere, whether he [Jesus Christ] exists or not", you're still you at the end of the day [...] she has to find her own peace somehow' (26/2/97).

While still describing the ending in terms of 'bleakness' Sarkies's talk about religion and spirituality has also changed. Previously, it had been characterised by the use of an extensive discursive repertoire which ranged right across the complete spectrum of religious and spiritual

formulations. This time, without specifically using the word 'spirituality' he offers a more coherent discourse which has moved closer to Hamilton's assertion that the development of her character's internal spiritual power was the most important issue the film could explore. With this formulation Sarkies too has now moved his speech firmly into the area of a discourse of spiritualities of life. That is, he too has adopted the psycho-centric discourse of spirituality which Heelas (1996) and Wuthnow (1998) argue is one of the primary shaping trends of the modern Western worldview. The 'bleakness' that was the sign of a Christ prepared to make use of human beings for his own purposes has been replaced by the warmer, domestic, metaphor of 'inner peace', for which the idea of Christ is merely a symbol.

When Botes was asked if the spiritual content of the script had been enhanced or diminished during the process of filming, his reply now linked two discourses which he had previously kept separate. He spoke again of his moves to make the narrative more 'realistic', but this time contrasted them with a construction that suggested he saw spirituality not as a characteristic of the everyday world (a stance he had taken previously), but as something outside, beyond, or in opposition to what is 'real'. Moreover, by employing the traditional distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane' he moves away from the discursive elements which previously tied his talk to the model of a spirituality of life, using a form of speech more characteristic of differentiated - religion of difference, religion of humanity - forms of religiosity.

I don't think it's become less spiritual but it's certainly become more earthy, like, I always wanted to ground it to make it realistic and solid and I think it's become more so. I think there's some quite interesting shifts between sacred things and profane things, I think it would definitely interpret as spiritual-like (.). I think for anyone who's at all interested in the movie, like, if they watch the first few scenes they go "Oh I'm interested in this film, I'm interested in this guy, I wonder what's going to happen". If they engage a little in that kind of story level then they can't help but have to grapple with the spiritual things it raises. (28/2/97)

By prioritizing earthy realism on one hand and professional notions of story-structure on the other, and by de-emphasizing spirituality through the use of glib ('sacred and profane') and minimizing constructions ('spiritual-like', 'spiritual-things') Botes is suggesting his interest has shifted away from the topic too. Rather, he is framing the discussion once again as oriented towards a concept of audience, with aspects of content now subservient to the deployment of the craft ('story') skills with which he and Horton are honing the narrative.

For the members of the team involved with writing, directing, production and post-production then, discourses of spirituality, while not entirely absent, had receded in importance as other topics, especially those concerned with preparing the film for a paying audience, had become more pressing. What mention was made still drew on a mutable range of resources, from secularism through spirituality to more traditional religious formulations, while people who had drawn previously on constructions from one section of the spectrum might now call on another. However, it was notable that the talk of Sarkies and Botes about spirituality had more shared characteristics than previously, with Sarkies having moved toward a more 'orthodox', contemporary construction of self-spirituality. This move was paralleled by his increased use of professional industry discourses of audience and story-structure.

Jim Moriarty and spirituality revisited

Now that the jobs of the actors were apparently completed how did they choose to represent their experience of filming? In particular, since several weeks earlier it had seemed they were going into production with markedly differently interpretations of crucial points of character-motivation, how had they experienced the task of negotiating those tensions and putting them into some kind of physical form?

In his second interview Moriarty's retrospective account of the production process is unique in being as dense with religious and spiritual discourses as his first. He continued to represent himself as a person immersed in various forms of spirituality and implied that he had spent time in the intervening period developing more complex interpretations of his character's motivations. For instance he now talked about Gerald/Jesus as having been diverted from the divine purpose with which this second incarnation had been charged, by the appeal of human love. He justifies his interpretation by references to Maori spirituality:

The physical thing develops in the film too. He fell in love with her - in her need to find herself (.) he became really human as a result of that, observing that need and what happened, I think, is he got off God's plan a bit and you know, the crucifixion and all that stuff is almost like, inevitable, for him because (.) he didn't quite do the job because he got caught up in the human stuff.

I find that absolutely fascinating 'cos you know, from my own Maori cultural and spiritual background, you know, my ancestors and tipuna, I communicate with them all the time, you know, they live in my children. You know, I take the babies up to my mother's grave and sit them on it and they suddenly start talking. Stuff like that. These are real to me, they, you know, it's just about a change in form really, that the spirits of my tipuna are with me

all the time, I can call on them at any particular moment of the day if I need to but I know they're there. (27/2/97).

Unlike the other speakers so far Moriarty is not looking outwards to the audience, instead he presents himself as immersed in his own life-experience, of which his role as Gerald/Jesus is but a continuation. By telling the story of the unusual behaviour of his children when they visit their grandmother's grave, Moriarty is calling on an interpretive framework from his Maori background: a culture in which life-forces are deemed to circulate between one generation and the next. He continues by making a case that understanding the material and non-material worlds as interpenetrating one another can explain both the events within *Saving Grace* and can model a way in which viewers of the film can re-frame their own experience:

[...] I'd like to think this film would say is that we are of spiritual essence as well as the physical stuff [...] concurrent with my beliefs in Maori spirituality I never found it difficult to allow Gerald to, if you like, live in both these worlds, walk in both these arenas. [...] I hope that, you know, the audience will look at this film and see Gerald as, almost as a (.) something that's in them. A concept that is about one's own, you know, journey into the light, if you like, you know, into spiritual awareness or something like that, you know, peace, peace of mind. Yeah. (27/2/97)

By the end of this second extract Moriarty has moved his attention to the audience, but not in the same terms as Horton, Parr and Botes did. He doesn't speak of simply attracting them to watch and holding their interest, rather he presents himself as wanting to deliver a specific message to them about their own natures. In other words he presents himself as having a didactic, almost missionary purpose in making the film. In this manner a discourse initially grounded in Maori spirituality becomes a missiological discourse hybridizing Maori and European Christian formulations to transform them into a third discourse about 'inner' spirituality. And yet again, this discourse is ultimately expressed in terms very similar to those offered by other members of the production team. For instance, according to Moriarty the internalization of the idea of Christ has activated Grace's 'belief in herself', the audience members may achieve 'spiritual awareness' if they attend to the message, while the final phrase 'peace of mind' echoes Sarkies' assertion that Grace must find her 'own peace'. Once again, after initially offering a statement that was startlingly different from those made by others, Moriarty's talk has gradually converged with their descriptions, by now sounding like the 'official' description, or preferred meaning, of how the spirituality encoded in the film is to be understood.

Performing the final scenes

In the pre-production interviews there had been emphasis placed on the final two scenes of the film as the site where the tensions around the preferred meaning of the text would be exposed. Moreover, Hamilton, Parr and Moriarty had all spoken of the filming of those scenes as an opportunity for them to advocate their own interpretation of the text. Parr had wanted to make sure the film was resolved in an upbeat fashion, while Moriarty had said he intended to play his role there as if he were Jesus '100 percent'. Hamilton said she wanted to ensure that her character demonstrated an inner spiritual strength not dependent on anyone else.

Certainly when I spoke with Botes this time - in contrast to his general frustration at the constraints of production - he said this final scene had gone extremely well. He was pleased to have used a moving camera, weaving around the actors, it was complicated to work out, but the final scene had been like a 'dance': 'So I walked away from that one and thought "Yes, I'm not a complete loser if I can do that"' (28/2/97). However when I asked Parr about the same scene - had he been able to bring about the changes he had hoped for? - he growled in reply, making his preference for framing issues in relation to the imagined (commercial) audience explicit:

No, I didn't and I think that if the film fails it will be because of that [...] the ending is not as satisfying as a commercial audience requires, but having said that it's Costa's film and Costa and Duncan are 100 percent confident. I am not going to say I'm 100 percent confident but I'm satisfied that it's got a shot, and it certainly, um, the crew were convinced that it worked which is very interesting. (26/2/97)

While this statement is interesting because it demonstrates how two people can evaluate the same scene very differently, it also serves other purposes. In a sense, this is a statement 'for the [historical] record', in that Botes, rather than Parr, is being situated as primarily responsible for any shortcomings the finished film might exhibit. Parr is also adding new meaning to his previous statements that 'this is Costa's film' (see previous chapter). These comments were an insight into the possibility that the concept of 'collaboration' can be a time-specific category and that as the film moved towards completion it would increasingly be identified with the name of its director; largely his responsibility and his success or failure. Certainly the other members of the production team continued to carry out their responsibilities and Parr for instance, worked hard to make sure the film was completed, modified, tested and marketed, but in this (and other) statements a discernable distancing from Botes develops - thus is the director as 'author' born - the only person who can't ultimately disclaim responsibility for the production!

As we have seen, Moriarty's talk about the character of Gerald/Christ had become more flexible, accommodating the idea that the character pointed the way to a form of self-spirituality. Yet in performance, Moriarty told me, he had - 'yes, absolutely' - carried out his determination to play the role as if he were the New Testament Christ. In support of this contention he provided an account of times when he was so immersed in his role that he did not remember undertaking the work:

So there were times when I felt quite light, not humanly driven if you like, that what I was playing was sometimes a concept and beliefs and this whole sort of territory of "Well this is about, you know, a spiritual awakening" [...] sometimes we'd do scenes and they'd go "shit that was terrific" and I'd go "Well what happened?" you know "I hit my marks didn't I? I moved my hands at the right time" and they'd go "Yeah yeah of course you did" and it was like well, just by trying to be the instrument on the day, you know, scenes went past and I can't remember. (27/2/97)

In contrast to that discourse which not only takes the religious content seriously but also brings a sense of transcendence into the production process, Hamilton spoke with a sense of care-worn anxiety about the production, similar to that of Botes.

As previously noted Hamilton had been diligent in her preparation for the role, determined to 'become' her character. As a result of this effort of empathy she stated she frequently found herself being 'carried away in the emotions of the character', although it was difficult to keep playing someone who was always 'furious and angry (11/4/97). She talked about identifying so strongly with the role of Grace that she felt she should sleep outside as her character would have done. However for her, emotional immersion in the role didn't make dealing with the fragmented technical processes of film production easier, instead she found her concentration broken by requests to perform mechanical actions repeatedly. Often, she said, Moriarty's shots were filmed first, which meant she had to do her performances several times over and still try and keep it fresh for when the camera was focused on her. Although by no means stating that she had found the filming an unpleasant experience ('it was a challenge but a good challenge'), Hamilton presented herself as reticent and unconfident, especially at the beginning of the shoot. In discussing her working relationship with Moriarty, Hamilton alternated between statements appreciative of his extroverted style of communication, and statements which imply she found that style disorientating:

[...] he's a really neat, supportive actor, really encouraging and he's really open (.) whether I was open enough to always contribute was another thing [...] He's got an interesting

process, he's kind of out all over the place when you're filming but then you see it on screen and you go "Wow, he knew exactly what he was doing the whole way along" (.) He's a real, improvisational spontaneous kind of actor ... (11/4/97)

With two such different constructions of the performance process - one of effortless mastery, and one of committed but tentative progress in reaction to a more experienced, spontaneous colleague - it was not surprising that their respective accounts of the final scene would also be different.

Jim Moriarty did not talk much about his performance of the final scenes. He regarded the shoot as wholly successful, and did not single any scene out as having provided particular challenges. When he does speak about the final scene Moriarty does so in terms of its meaning, offering a further construction from the spirituality of life position:

[...] his purpose, if you like, in the film was to bring about some sort of enlightenment in the character of Grace, to merely act as a catalyst to her finding a place that was okay to be in [...] So by the end of it he's symbolically there - what's the last line? "I'm here, you're not alone anymore" - It's almost as if it's her voice, it's her inner voice saying, (.) "I started out on this film, if you like, bloody detached, lonely (.) A number, you know, by the end of it I matter to me (.) Hell I'm in jail or I'm in a psych hospital but I matter to me", and Gerald's whole purpose in the film could be seen as that. (27/2/97)

In this extract Moriarty positions his character as secondary to Grace, as a tool (an 'inner voice') by which she can achieve her own 'enlightenment' - a word which has connotations of the eastern worldviews which Moriarty has claimed as another of his spiritual influences. This is a modest construction of his character's role and somewhat inconsistent with his claims, at other times, to have been studying the Bible and familiarizing himself with fundamentalist discourses so that he could play his part as if he were an embodiment of the biblical Jesus. This inconsistency between the description of the overall function of his character in the narrative and the description of his intentions for his own performance of that character was not something he presented as a problem.

Hamilton's account of the penultimate scene

By the time I interviewed Kirsty Hamilton six weeks after speaking with Moriarty, she had access to another set of perspectives on the film's ending - she knew that Botes and Parr had decided it would be re-shot. This decision came about because the spectators they had imagined for so long became an actual audience, albeit a test-screening audience, and as a result of their feedback, Botes and Parr had decided the ending as filmed was unsatisfactory after all (see later discussion in this chapter). Now, however I wish to use Hamilton's interview, doubly inflected by hindsight as it is (hers and mine), to provide an interpretation of her experience of filming the original

ending. Hamilton had presented herself as particularly permeable to the opinions of others, and also as the one most perplexed by the several possible constructions of the material. At the time of the first interview she had not decided whether or not she thought Gerald was Jesus. By time of the second interview she knew what she had decided but still expressed bewilderment at how she had come to that conclusion.

Hamilton said that in earlier scenes, such as one where she and 'Gerald' made love, she had been secure in her understanding that Gerald was merely a human being, with some of the qualities of Jesus. Now however she describes being surprised in the actual performance of the penultimate scene by a very different reaction to his presence.

I think when you talked to us at the beginning we all had slightly different versions of what we thought the film was and we needed to have the same version. For me it's (.) like I said about Grace finding her own spirituality and that there being some hope at the end and when we came to shoot it (.) because all the way along I had the version of I think (.) this is Grace's story and he's not necessarily Jesus (.) when we came to shoot it I thought "this guy is Jesus". (11/4/97)

Hamilton is saying that when she came to perform the scene on the day of filming, she felt as if she were in the presence of Jesus; that that was indeed Gerald's true identity. Since I was obviously surprised by her statement, she explained further:

[...] we came to do the scene and I went (.) physically I was embracing Jesus, you know - so I mean that's the message and a lot of people thought that, you know this is a, pro God/Jesus/Christianity film and that's not what I thought it was going to be [...] It wasn't really fantastic or really bad, it was just (.) 'I can't believe this' (.) like, "oh my God!". I guess it was just like, (.) it was kind of neat, just unexpected (.) I guess in a way it was kind of like, it was like embracing a security, yeah, but it was just strange, yeah, the look in Jim's eyes was just really, really amazing, yeah, when he said 'I'm here' he really meant it (.) it was quite kind of a neat feeling. (11/4/97)

In this extract Hamilton claims that her reaction to the strength of Moriarty's performance meant that she lapsed into a discourse of dependency on a stronger power, in the very form associated with 'religion', with the religion of Christianity. In explaining this she highlights the word 'security' - which carries gendered connotations of emotional and economic dependency, as well as an unwavering sense of trust in the other party's goodwill. This word is a link with statements Hamilton made in her previous interview, where she had said she thought God and Jesus were one and the same and that she prayed to 'Him' in order to feel safe, and for other members of her family to be safe also. While having initially claimed that religious belief was behind her, it

appears that those old 'religious' understandings were not inactive after all. Instead they reappeared in performance to produce her subservience to Moriarty in the role of Jesus Christ. And this was not an outcome that pleased her:

I guess I just wanted it - and this is me personally as the actor, I wanted it to be, more for herself, "I can cope on my own, I don't need Jesus or I don't need my mother, I don't need outside things, I can rely on myself", that's what I wanted it to be, and [instead] in the end when she's embracing Jesus it's, "I'll be all right if you're here (.) because you said 'I'm going to be here for you' - Oh well that's okay I'll be all right then". (11/4/97)

In her wish that Grace had found a resolution that was 'more for herself' Hamilton is employing a 'psychological' discourse of spirituality in which an attitude of self-reliance in the face of obstacles, indicates a state of psychological health/maturity which itself is equated with spiritual well-being. The attainment of such a state which, because it is individualistic, limits no-one else's freedom of belief, would have met the criteria for anti-dogmatic tolerance which was important to all the team of *Saving Grace*. For Hamilton/Grace to have been successful in vanquishing Moriarty/Gerald/Jesus with her spiritual strength would have constituted an effective repudiation of the unattractive aspects of institutional religion, specifically patriarchal authoritarianism, with which the figure of Christ is now often linked.

Hamilton's statements suggest how difficult it can be for a performer to enact a psychologized discourse of self-spirituality under certain conditions - that is within the wider context of a (still) culturally Christian society, in physical confrontation with someone who has claimed that he intended to draw on those Christian resources to the best of his ability. In terms of Hamilton's account it would seem that a traditional discourse of 'religion', embodied in the presence of the actor Moriarty, playing Christ, prevailed over the discourse of nascent (self) spirituality she was attempting to embody.

The picture that has been established is of course much more complex than that since Moriarty's use of Christian resources is inflected by talk about Maori spirituality (itself already a hybrid discourse) and by formulations from other world-views. Additionally, as we have seen, Moriarty had also offered an interpretation of his role which suggested he too had come to prioritize a discourse of self-spirituality. Yet, it seems clear, that, on the day, Hamilton did not experience his performance as permitting such an interpretation. Hamilton herself comes from a broadly Christian background and the resources with which that early socialization had provided her seem, in the light of her statement, not to have been as outdated as she had claimed. Moreover, she has

earlier implied that professional issues around performance and confidence were elements in her understanding of events. Any assessment that a traditional view of Christianity ‘prevailed’ in this encounter must therefore be tempered by an appreciation of the multiply-determined nature of any such interaction.

This is an analysis of an account of a specific set of circumstances, and its significance cannot be generalized beyond this research context. However it may be suggestive of what happens in other micro-interactions in which agents favouring different discursive frameworks come up against one another in a material situation. This is likely one of the mechanisms by which discursive change is attempted, sometimes succeeds, or, as in this case, is rebuffed.

This account also makes the claim that a true test of discursive dominance may not be in the realm of words but in physical interaction: that embraces and acts of looking and being-looked-at are themselves active constructions of knowledge and power. Indeed, this is the area that Foucault was exploring in his *History of Sexuality* (1979-1988). Furthermore, whereas much of the previous discussion about the interpretation of the text had been framed in terms of ‘thinking’, the core points in this account are framed in terms of emotion, of ‘feeling’, with the implication that, in certain circumstances, feeling takes priority over rational justifications. This is not a topic that can be explored at present but Hamilton’s account of this interaction suggests it would be interesting to pursue theories of discourse beyond the verbal realms to which they are currently usually confined.

Audiences and the ongoing modification of *Saving Grace*

It was mentioned above that, by the end of April 1997, it had been decided to alter *Saving Grace*’s representation of religiosity by re-shooting the ending, since it had been received by an audience, according to Hamilton, as a ‘pro God/Jesus/Christianity film’. To understand how this happened, and to look at a new range of influences that were brought to bear on the production of *Saving Grace*, it is now necessary to return to March 1997 and discuss the time at which the text met its first external audiences.

In the previous chapter the model of audience or reception research was briefly outlined, and some of the assumptions on which that research has rested were questioned. Specifically, I was interested in assumptions about the location and identity of audience members: who counts as an audience member and where in the process do they need to be located in order to have

significance? I drew on the work of several scholars: Tulloch and Moran, (1986); Gripsrud, (1995); and Dornfeld, (1998), who argued that members of production teams should themselves be thought of as audience members of a particular sort - as they step outside an immediate immersion in their work to imagine how others might experience it. We have already seen this process of imaginative construction in the talk of the production team of *Saving Grace*, where images of the audience were used as a guide to shape the text in production.

It might be argued that I am talking about two sorts of audiences here, one of which is no more than 'imaginary', and that one cannot research imaginary beings. However some analysts, including Hartley, (1992); Grossberg (1988); Radway (1988, 1997) and Ang (1991) have already made the point that 'the audience', as a stable entity, does not exist, that it is a construct developed in the speech and writing of either academic analysts, or of the participants in the various stages of cultural production. Hartley puts the point most starkly when he claims that: 'Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction which serves the needs of the imagining institution' (1987, cited in Höjjer, 1999: 180). It is therefore justified I claim, both to envisage production personnel as, sometimes, being audience members, and also to be primarily interested in the uses made of various forms of audience by 'the imagining institution'.

Indeed I speculate that it may be fruitful to conceptualize audience-ness not in terms of previous models of communicative process, whether linear (Hall, 1973) or circular (du Gay et al. 1997), but as a *mode* of cognitive action which is potentially available to any individual, regardless of whether he or she is also a producer of meaning; a mode that one might choose to operate from at any appropriate time. The object addressed by that mode may be a communication issuing from an/other(s) but it may also be something one has taken part in producing one's self. There is a precedent for this type of conceptualization in the professional literature on scriptwriting, where the writer is encouraged to envisage his or her mind as operating in two modes, 'lateral' [creative] and 'vertical' [critical] (Aronson, 2000), both of which are considered necessary to producing an effective text.

Hellman (1999) offers a specific process by which the illusory audience becomes reified when she points out that there are two major paradigms employed by broadcasting policy makers: that is the idea of the audience as a public, and the idea of the audience as a market. A 'public' audience is imagined to desire the acquisition of knowledge as the primary result of its reception of media

products, while an audience as ‘market’ is conceived of as a group of people whose attention must be attracted and held. This formulation seems applicable in the analysis of talk around *Saving Grace* in that discourses of the audience as ‘market’ (such as that prioritized by the Film Commission and Parr) gradually gained ascendance over discourses (as offered by Sarkies and Moriarty for instance) of the audience as ‘public’.

Specifically, in regard to *Saving Grace* I wish to propose that, although the film only ever achieved contact with a limited public, paying audience, it was thoroughly audience-ed, by individuals and groups at varying distances from the centre of production, well before it ever went into general release. These audiences included: Parr and Botes, a group audience from the film-funder, a selection of industry peers who viewed the film as individuals, people employed in the service industry of marketing, an invited audience drawn from the cinema-going public, overseas festival selection committees and festival audiences, and finally film reviewers of different degrees of professionalism, addressing different audience constituencies.

The documents analysed in this section include: transcripts from later interviews with Botes and Parr, letters to members of the production team, and reviews and articles published in the print-media. There is also analysis of a report on the test-screening process published by the market research company hired by the Film Commission, supplemented by my own observations of the test-screening process itself. As before discourse analysis is the method by which these texts are analyzed.

While I have argued for the utility of studying imagined audiences on the ground that these imaginings can have a material effect on the shape of the text, another of the processes described in this section is the viewing of the film by an ‘actual’ (albeit non-paying) ‘test’ audience. Analysis of a selection of their responses will show that although they overlap to some extent with the imagined responses, the match is far from complete.

Marketing strategies for *Saving Grace*

As full funder of the film project the New Zealand Film Commission had also undertaken to be its sales agent, that is to find distribution and exhibition opportunities for the film. However, within the production team itself it was primarily the responsibility of Larry Parr to help the Commission. Parr and Botes had deliberately not sought any advance publicity for the film during production, largely because they thought one of its major assets, the revelation of Gerald’s claims to divinity,

would be devalued if publicly known. Parr's broad strategy was to get *Saving Grace* accepted for film festivals in the hope it would win awards, which in turn would act as support for securing a distributor, and for both national and international marketing campaigns. Parr spoke of the Venice Film Festival to be held in September 1997 as his first choice.

In the meantime a series of private screenings were organized for particular audiences from within the professional community: for the cast and crew, for the project-funder - the Film Commission - and for colleagues in the film industry. They were asked to comment on the understanding that the production team would be prepared to listen to their responses and decide which ones to act on.

Response from Film Commission

The screening for the staff of the Commission took place on the evening of Friday the 14th of March 1997. It was followed three days later by a letter from the Acting Chief Executive Mladen Ivancic to Parr (17/3/97), the overall tone of which was negative. Noting that an attractive aspect of the film was that it had caused vigorous debate amongst those who had seen it, and hence had clearly engaged the audience, the letter then proceeded to lay out a series of criticisms. It stated that the majority of staff had found the ending of the film 'unsatisfying' and 'confusing'. Specifically, the viewers had been uncertain as to what to believe about the mental states of the two protagonists; 'the ending does not seem to leave either Gerald or Grace in a position of redemption' Ivancic said, 'In fact Grace seems to have been put into a worse position than she was in before [...] She did not seem to be saved.' Presumably because the Commission had previously approved the script, the letter criticizes the execution of the final scenes rather than the writing on which they based. The costuming used for Gerald in this scene (he appeared in red and white robes, much in the manner of a Catholic statue of Christ) therefore became an issue:

Even though we agree you have filmed the scene as written - we do not now believe, having seen the scene, that the dialogue is clear and contributes to a resolution. Nor do we believe that the costuming for Gerald, the traditional Christ-like robes, adds to the quirky originality of the preceding film. It seems clunky. (Ivancic, 17/3/97)

It is at this point that another issue arose which was to become a feature of several subsequent criticisms of the film: the rough 'street kid' accent that Kirsty Hamilton had adopted did not find favour: 'Our staff were consistent in their dislike of the sound patterns and abruptness of Grace's speech. They found the sound irritating and the accent to be inconsistently sustained' (17/3/97).

Yet another set of comments related to the direction of the film, which was considered not to have modified the 'theatrical' characteristics of the piece sufficiently:

... there are still vestiges of the stage origins of the script in both performances and direction, we believe. One thing noted was the rather static nature of the film - little movement and a lot of dialogue taking place while the actors are sitting still. (17/3/97)

The letter does not offer solutions to the matters raised but expresses hope that the production team will deal with them.

While I have included reference to just three of the twelve criticisms made in the letter, as the first indication of audience response this document is interesting in several ways. It suggests the emphasis the production team had laid on the ending of the film was warranted, since a third of the criticisms related to that issue. Furthermore it seemed that some members of the production team (especially Parr, Horton and Botes) had been accurate in predicting the terms in which the text would be received by an 'industry' audience. For instance, Horton had said (page 197, this chapter) he did not understand what Grace was being saved from, and a similar verbal formulation - 'She did not seem to be saved' - featured in the Commission's letter. Botes had expressed concern that his choice of directorial style might be evaluated negatively, and here the comment is that the film is perceived as 'static'. These pairs of statements relate to interpretation and evaluation respectively, but suggest that is indeed a relationship between some aspects of how the producers imagined this text being received, and how indeed it was received by a (specialist) audience.

On the other hand, there is also the fact that several of the criticisms (of costume and vocal performance for instance) are not points that had come up in the previous interviews: that is they were formulations the production team either did not have access to, or did not choose to express in their interactions with me. In other words, their imaginings of audience reaction were immediately exceeded by the wider field of actual reactions and evaluations.

According to Parr, the Commission's concerns were noted and, along with other issues Parr and Botes themselves identified, formed the basis of questions to be put later to the test screening audience.

Peer Response

Meanwhile, another set of written responses was received, this time from three individuals involved in the film industry as writers and or script assessors. Botes asked Russell Campbell, a Wellington academic and Film Commission-trained script-assessor, for his comments on the rough-cut, while Horton sent copies to two Auckland scriptwriters: Greg McGee and Dean Parker.

Campbell (23/3/97) framed his response within an overall positive evaluation. But he too focused his criticisms on the film's ending, recommending that it be re-shot, saying that it had 'confused and disappointed' him. In contradistinction to Sarkies and Botes' opinions, he typified the film not as Grace's story but as Gerald's, the story of 'a man who thinks he's Jesus Christ', stating that, for the most part, the film offered two possible interpretations: '(a) he's crazy; (b) he is Jesus Christ'. The unexpected possibility that, it is instead Grace who's crazy - which comes about with the video of the crucifixion - is enough extra cognitive challenge he claims, for himself and any other viewer within one film. The last-minute reversal in the final scenes: 'written, played and shot in such a way that it admits of only one interpretation: this is the truth, Gerald *has* risen from the dead, he *is* therefore Christ', he evaluates as coercive. In other words, from the standpoint of a secular discourse about religion (which, Campbell implies will also be the standpoint of a significant proportion of the audience), he judges the text to have fallen into the authoritarian, pro-Christian trap the production team were anxious to avoid.

If like me, and I suspect a large section of the audience you're a bit of a skeptic [...] if you think it's more likely that Gerald is the victim of a psychotic delusion than that he actually is the Saviour and you've been viewing the film in this light, then to be told abruptly that you're wrong is to be enormously let down. The film in fact for spectators such as me loses its credibility at this point and hence carries no emotional charge. (Campbell, 23/3/97)

In rejecting the logic of the film's ending Campbell is not expressing a disdain for spiritual content in cinema; his objections are rather an amalgam of professional discourses regarding narrative and audience, with a cultural, personal, discourse which finds simplistic religious solutions incredible. It is interesting to note that he does later however employ a vocabulary of the spiritual possibilities of film-form which draws on the conception of 'transcendental' style as developed by Schrader (1972).

Now there are films which make us believe in the power of grace, or spiritual liberation in physical confinement (I'm thinking of Bresson's *Pickpocket* for example). But this last

scene of *Saving Grace* is bereft of any hint of transcendence, is hence depressing in addition to being confusing. (23/3/97)

Campbell makes two suggestions for re-working the ending of the film whilst retaining some ambiguity of meaning:

This might mean portraying Gerald in a way which suggests the hallucinatory - perhaps only his voice was heard. Certainly I would suggest rewriting to convey the idea that Grace has found an inner peace, a release from emotional torment, alienation and the daily drudge of having to find food and shelter; maybe God. (23/3/97).

These suggestions are similar to the way in which the ending would finally be constructed, - and it is in this manner perhaps, that an individual audience member, albeit one with special knowledge, can also become an active contributor to the ongoing re-shaping, and hence production, of the text.

In contrast, the suggestions of the second peer-commentator, Greg McGee (11/4/97) who recommended that Gerald and Grace go off together at the end to live in either a virtual-reality video-game, or a movie, were not taken up by the production team, although it could be argued the comic mode implied by those suggestions was active in the second (but not final) ending that was shot and edited (see chapter 8). While identifying the same possibilities for interpretation as Campbell - that Gerald is Jesus Christ, or that Grace is crazy, in addition McGee discusses the issue of Christ's implied 'malevolence' in manipulating Grace:

[...] the internal dialectic of this movie is whether he is in fact JC, not whether JC is good or evil. So to have that question of whether JC is good or evil raised at the very end is rabbit-out-of-the-hat territory, because that question has not been seeded in the movie and has played no part in its internal dialectic. (11/4/97)

By framing his critique within a professional scriptwriting discourse, making the issue of Gerald's identity integral to the logic of a structuring 'dialectic', McGee is able to contribute an opinion on the text without committing himself to a standpoint on the underlying religious issues.

The third commentator, Dean Parker, (11/4/97) launches into the debate with a vigorous but somewhat mystifying statement of his own position.

I suppose I could go at length about the collapse of religious values in our society, and what it means, and the vicious bastards that have moved into the vacuum, but I won't. However, I think the matter is crucial. This film doesn't. That's why we're all sitting

around trying to make it satisfactory. I happen to agree with Marx that religion is “the opium of the masses, the sigh of the oppressed, the heart in a heartless world”. (11/4/97)

The first sentence suggests Parker is sympathetic to religion, although his other, passionate, comments also suggest that, ideally, he sees religious ‘values’ as a counter-balance to the values of capitalism. This implication is made explicit by the citation of Marx’s famous quote about religion as compensatory illusion. I later emailed Parker (14/2/02) to find out how he interpreted the Marx quote and whether he was as sympathetic to religion as he seemed in this letter. He replied he was not religious, but admired people who were. At the time he wrote the report on *Saving Grace* he had himself been working on a script containing a character interested in Gnosticism; and thought some of those religious concerns had rubbed off on him. Since the rest of his letter shows Parker has a detailed knowledge of events in the life of Christ, it is probably best to see him as combining a professional framework, which assumes a writer will undertake research on his sources, with a framework which operates on a functional, compensatory, understanding of the role of religion.

In gathering these opinions on the rough-cut of *Saving Grace* Horton and Botes consulted people with whom they had already something in common. One aspect of that similarity is their status as fellow professionals in the film industry; peer-critique is according to Hagen (1999) perhaps the most frequently-employed ‘audience’-testing in film and television-making. However, all three were also, like Horton and Botes, not Christian but had a good knowledge of the topic in a cultural sense. Two of the three (Campbell, Parker) were also known for their left-wing politics³². Each of them provided an analysis that had one foot in their cultural and political understanding, and another within the norms of ‘good’ scriptwriting. By choosing relatively ‘secular’ peer-critics, and by eventually taking the advice of one who suggested Gerald be reduced to a hallucinatory element in Grace’s journey to self-spirituality, Parr and Horton assured that their film would not move further in the direction of ‘religion’, but would reach for a solution within the realms of either spirituality or secularism.

Market research with an audience

Although standard practice in the American and Australian film industries (Wintonick, 2002) audience test-screening procedures were new to New Zealand in 1997. Previously it had been considered sufficient to undertake informal peer review. Now the Film Commission had contracted the market research company Colmar Brunton to undertake test-screenings on their

³² Campbell is a long-time member of the Vanguard collective for making political documentaries, Parker’s most recent project had been *Share the Dream* (1997) a sympathetic drama about trade unionism.

behalf. *Saving Grace* was the third film to be subjected to the test-screening after *The Ugly* (Reynolds, 1997), and *Topless Women* (Sinclair, 1997), both of which had been tested in the second half of 1996.

The procedures used by Colmar Brunton were a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods; that is, a questionnaire for statistical analysis was given out at the test-screening while the responses of a smaller number of focus group members were used to make qualitative judgements about the film's reception. The research report subsequently produced from the data highlights the centrality of the commercial motivations for establishing a regime of test screening. It states the objective of the research is to: 'provide producers and directors of films it [NZFC] is a significant investor in, with a level of audience feedback that will allow the film makers to maximise the film's commercial success, or at the very least set realistic expectations of the film's commercial potential' (Colmar Brunton, 1997: 1). The research set out to discover, 'how the audience positions the film in their own minds'. Specifically, it wanted to identify particularly likeable elements of a film, to encourage pithy statements about it to be used for marketing purposes, and to identify elements which 'detract' from the likelihood that audience members will become 'involved' with the film. According to Colmar Brunton;

The aim is not to simply identify those elements that create audience discomfort and subsequently delete them in the hope of making a more acceptable film, but rather to isolate things that have the potential to detract from the audience's participation in the film and to do so in a way that allows the film's makers to decide what to do about them. (1997: 2).

The test screening took place on the evening of Sunday April 4th 1997 at a Wellington cinema, The Paramount, which usually screens art-house movies. The audience for it had been obtained by distributing 1000 double tickets to people between the ages of 18 and 40, who either attended 'art house' films,³³ listened to student radio, were students on local University and Polytechnic campuses, or were selected from the marketing company's own panel of 'consumers'. Approximately 20 of the ticket recipients had been pre-selected to take part in the focus groups to be convened afterwards at the Colmar Brunton offices nearby. I attended both the screening and focus groups as an observer.

³³ According to the Appendix of the Colmar-Brunton research report to the Film Commission these films were *Shine* (Hicks, 1997), *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1997), *Lone Star* (Sayles, 1997) and *The People vs Larry Flint* (Forman, 1997). It is arguable whether the first two of these are indeed 'art house' movies, since they were market edas melodramas and attracted relatively large general audiences

Description of test screening Process

On the evening 326 people viewed the film and filled in questionnaires about it afterwards. Staff from the Film Commission were also present, as were Botes and Hamilton. A VHS camera set up at the rear of the theatre recorded both the screen and the audience in front of it. The research team explained that the sound track from this camera was useful as a record of when the audience laughed or became restless. The version of the film screened had been edited to an advanced stage although the sound track was unfinished.

In general the audience was attentive, with some restlessness in the final third of the screening. In the sequence when Gerald exhorted Grace to love both herself and the rather bizarre chair she has created, there was considerable good-natured laughter from the audience. When Grace nailed Gerald to the cross with a huge industrial stapler however, the reaction was of (derisory) laughter as much as horror. When the film finished the questionnaires were handed out - the impatience of most of the audience to leave was palpable - the majority finished the questionnaire very quickly, although a few sat there for a long time working on it.

Observation of focus groups

The focus group sessions were held at the Colmar Brunton offices. There were three sessions, but I managed to observe sections of only two in adjacent rooms. The groups represented the two main audience groupings the production team had imagined for the film - young adults, and mature art-house viewers. One was a group of 7 males, 16-24 years old, the other an older group (31-37) of mixed gender composition. A third session with young females took place upstairs. The speakers remained unidentified.

Since the format of these focus-group sessions entailed the leaders eliciting brief statements on any topic, rather than elaborated, contextualized information, it is difficult to tell much about the discursive frameworks within which these respondents operate, but I include this material due to the effect it had on the process of post-production.

Summary of comments made in focus groups

Young Males

The general reaction of the young males to the film seemed appreciative. One speaker said he was completely uninterested in the film but his rejection of it was untypical. Other participants had points of which they were critical: the logic of having ghostly figures turn up at Gerald's

'crucifixion' was questioned, two of them thought the growing friendship between Grace and Gerald was not given enough time to develop at the beginning of the film, there were complaints that the title of the film was boring and off-putting, and also that there was too much swearing in the film. Somebody wanted a more attractive actress in the lead role, and there was criticism of Grace's accent as inauthentic.

On the positive side the pace of the film was considered good, and the young male viewers reported being intrigued by the prospect of what would happen next. While there were some assertions the end of the film was confusing and unresolved, this was not necessarily seen as a barrier to enjoyment of the film, since its unusual structure was appealing to some participants. It was suggested that some of the surprising or irrational events in the film were appropriate for a film featuring a Jesus-figure.

- In a good way it was unclear with the second video
- Maybe you don't have to decide what's right - you can just walk away.

Q. So the ending left a few questions?

- That's what I liked about it, when he was a lad they were straight into it - experimenting - I just liked it, eh? Like they're not meant to do it but they just do it!
- It crossed boundaries, surprised a lot of people.
- Kind of what the film was about was Jesus being able to do that shit.

With this group of viewers then, Sarkies' intuition that experimenting with narrative structure, leaving some aspects of meaning ambiguous, would be challenging and pleasing for younger audience members seemed to have been borne out. They could understand what he was doing as 'experimenting' and 'boundary-crossing', and evaluated his strategy positively.

For the focus group facilitators, primed to find out what was and wasn't liked by viewers, questions about the religious or spiritual aspects of the film were no more important than other topics. When asked how they felt about Gerald revealing himself as Jesus Christ, one of the group said he was bored with the idea that Gerald might be Jesus, but others talked about the ways in which what had happened did or did not fit with their ideas about Jesus. Sarkies' ideas about presenting the human, flawed aspects of Jesus had been picked up on by at least one viewer, while another proposed that Grace could become the next Christ, and a third said the events of the narrative had suggested to him that Gerald/Jesus too was being controlled by a stronger power. For instance:

Q. What do you feel the ending was telling us?

- That Jesus isn't perfect - he can screw up too.
- No matter how bad things get you should always believe in yourself.
- That God has got a higher purpose than Jesus, more power.

However the members of this group did seem to have a background store of information about the characteristics of Jesus. They are at least one generation removed from the group, born in the post-war period, amongst whom secularism is reputed to have gained a strong hold (see Webster, 2001) but their replies suggest that at least basic information about Christianity is still circulating in New Zealand society. For example the idea that Jesus is celibate is one of these background beliefs, as can be seen from the following exchange:

Q. I'd like to check with the group - was anything offensive in the film?

- No, no, but I can see how it would offend people.
- If he's Jesus Christ (why?) has he just had sex?

In my judgment, there was enough basic cultural knowledge of the Christian framework in this group for the overall topic to be 'workable' for this sub-section of the audience. The relatively unsophisticated nature of the religious references in *Saving Grace* appeared to be a reasonable match with their own discursive resources, and they were therefore not overly bewildered by the level of ambiguity remaining in this first version. Combined with the pleasure they clearly received from the film's unusual formal strategies, it occurred to me, in the spirit of market research, that the lightly-cooked, hybridized, mixture of religious motifs, spiritual themes and challenging structure which constituted *Saving Grace* might have had a reasonable chance of success, if it were marketed to an expanded version of this young male audience, which was after all, the demographic to which the writer himself belonged.

Mature 'art-house' viewers

By contrast the atmosphere in the group of older viewers was cynical. They knew what the film was trying to do technically and thematically, assuming that it aspired to kinship with a group of recent art-house movies which had explored metaphysical issues of identity in time and space (*Lost Highway*, Lynch, 1997), or had depicted conflict between a harsh religious institution and a fervent, nonconformist, personal spirituality (*Breaking The Waves*, von Trier, 1996). When asked how they would categorize *Saving Grace* it was these other films that were given as exemplars:

- *Breaking the Waves, Lost Highway* - they've all got that feeling, you keep thinking about that.

- What everybody seems to be doing lately, something different with a little bit of hocus-pocus in it.

They considered *Saving Grace* to be a 'smaller' and more lightweight film than these examples - one speaker said it would make a great 'TV movie'. Other opinions were that the film lacked 'Oomph', that it didn't stand out, and that it didn't have characters which one could believe in and care about. For this group however, the religious and spiritual content of the film was a more central topic for both discussion and disapproval:

Q. The Christian theme, who liked it?

- I thought it was okay - I've just seen *Lost Highway* and *Breaking the Waves* so nothing surprises me.
- Found it irritating.
- The religious theme really put me off - he could have been a prophet.
- Standing on the water trivialized it.
- When the film finished I thought "So what?" I'm not going to do anything or take anything away from the film.

The evaluative aspect of these comments is predominant – all but one of the comments evaluates the film negatively. However, before any expansion of these answers could take place the discussion headed off in a different direction, addressing questions of madness and relationship:

- It turned out he was just a loony, at the end where we were supposed to think he was (Jesus) - it was too much.
- But I think that it was important that she had faith in him - better to have faith in a lunatic than nobody at all.
- Two lost souls, finding each other and believing in it.
- That it was all in her mind, I would go along with it.

This series of comments suggests that the group members were more willing to react in a thoughtful, rather than an emotional, manner to interpretations around psychological discourses than they were to specifically Christian references, although there is a positive use here of the religious concept of 'faith', albeit also perceived in psychological terms. In terms of the two sets of comments however it is interesting that the complete range of possible 'preferred' meanings identified by the production team, is also identified by the audience-members. That is, they recognise that the film is a love story and a story of madness, as well as posing the question of whether Gerald is Jesus. It is asserted that Gerald is mad and alternatively, that it is Grace's perceptions which frame the text. All the meanings the production team spoke of encoding in the text are here decoded by members of a sample audience, and yet, as with the production team, the meanings lie side-by-side, rather than having been resolved into a coherent interpretation.

There was greater division of opinion in this group, than with the young males, on the ‘ambiguity question’ concerning Gerald’s identity and the true nature of his relationship with Grace. The younger group had found this a generally positive feature of the viewing experience but here, while two people felt the ambiguity was necessary, the rest were bored or irritated by it:

- I was frustrated at the end, that all the passion she had shown at the beginning (.) that at the end she was accepting of all this person had done for her - it annoyed me.

Q. So what did you read out of the ending?

- What could have been interesting was that if he was J.C. he was very forward and he asked for her forgiveness. He could have developed it through the film - that would have been funny - he was a goof in many ways - and explore that.
- He cheated her - she’d loved him, believed in him totally.

A respondent here is confident enough to suggest a ‘better’ ending for the film - that Gerald/Jesus apologize to Grace. If that possibility had been taken up it might have addressed contemporary negative constructions of Christ associating him with dominant power and gender relations, and would indeed have seemed like a feasible extension of one of the strands of logic in the text. Otherwise, the respondents place the text within an emotional, psychological frame and judge it for its inconsistency with conventional constructions from that framework, implying for instance that the expression of love will inevitably attract a positive response from the person towards whom that love is directed. Generally, this group predicted a future of mediocrity and rapid disappearance for the film.

Colmar Brunton’s construction of results

Two days after the test-screening I interviewed the research, team-leader, Maria Millar (8/4/1997). While neither the analysis of the quantitative data nor that from the focus group sessions had been completed, the research team had already come to some conclusions and had conveyed their interim findings to the director. I found it interesting that although the data analysis was incomplete isolated comments had already been reified into hard summaries, complete with justifications for the stated judgements of the participants. This was Millar’s interpretation:

There were two real issues with the ending, [...] the older, mixed gender group thought that him coming back in his robes was too suggestive of the fact that okay, so he is Jesus Christ. They didn’t like that and they didn’t like the whole religious theme either, they felt like the religion idea was sort of being rammed down their throats and they didn’t want that. They don’t want to have to question their own beliefs, they know what they think, and they thought that that was too suggestive.

Whereas for the other two groups, they wanted more of an indication of where she was - is she in an asylum or is she in a prison? - because if they're told that much then that will help them figure out everything that's happened before. I mean there are still too many questions for them, like "Is she mad?", "Did she murder him?", "Has she always been mad?" "Is he really Jesus Christ and did he really do her over?" There are so many possibilities and they're sort of left thinking "Well which is it, you know, I'd quite like to come to a decision about one" and I don't feel they can. (8/4/97).

It is here stated categorically that the older group perceived the ending entirely in terms of a religious construction, and that this religious construction was evaluated as excessively aggressive in nature. By contrast the comments of the younger groups have been collapsed into a critical discourse on the ambiguity of the final scene - which had not been my impression of the opinions of the young males. While both these summative judgements are clearly relevant to the text they seemed to me surprisingly reductive.

The questionnaire data, when eventually published, provided as wide a list of possible interpretive categories for the film as both the production team had originally imagined, and as the mature focus group had reproduced - with the addition of a new category relating to grief and loss. Although no distinction was made between the terms 'religious' and 'spiritual' as descriptors, more people thought the film was about spiritual and religious issues than thought it was a relationship movie, for instance. (The answers below were gathered in response to an open-ended question: 'What would you say the film was about?')

What Was the Film About?	% of total comments made
Spiritual or religious issues	34%
Self-belief, search for love, truth	18%
Madness or insanity	15%
Grace and Gerald's relationship	9%
Coping with grief, death, loss	4%
Miscellaneous comments	7%

(Colmar Brunton - market research report April 1997:10)

The relevance of this material for my research is limited since it was set up to answer a different set of questions and had a commercial focus. It does not for instance establish the self-assessed religious or spiritual positionings of the participants, so that their interpretations of the film might be cross-referenced against them. However these results suggest that there is at least a basic

correspondence between the ways in which the production team spoke of the encoded meaning of the text and the ways in which this audience interpreted it - that is, both sets of people seem to be operating within a similar range of preferred meanings. One wonders therefore why a wider set of contact points with the audience (for example acknowledging that the 'psychological' aspects of the text had been apprehended and appreciated by many viewers) could not have been abstracted from the data in order to have been deployed in the marketing of the film.

It was however the evaluation, rather than the interpretation, of the film which caused both the research company and the production team anxiety: there was now a much stronger and more general sense of negativity surrounding *Saving Grace*, which fed back into its post-production.

Gaining as large as possible a commercial audience for the film had always been one of the aims of the project, and as we have seen, that aim had been a guiding principle in its translation from stage to screen. But the quantitative data showed that only 27 percent of the audience rated the film as 'excellent' or 'very good' - compared to Australian and US norms of 57 percent and 61 percent for those ratings respectively (Colmar Brunton, 1997: i). Only 9 percent were definitely willing to recommend *Saving Grace* to a friend. These figures were interpreted by Colmar Brunton, the Film Commission, and by Parr and Botes as very poor, and were material in motivating the decision to re-shoot the ending. It is however noteworthy that 65 percent of males under 20, 63 percent of females under 20 and 72 percent of males aged 21-24 rated the film as 'excellent' or 'very good', compared to a low of 42 percent for males 25 to 34 (1997: 5). Again, this data appeared to suggest that marketing aimed at a young audience might have had some effect, although Parr interpreted these figures as meaning they merely disliked the film 'less than most'.

This opportunity to observe someone else's research process around the film, specifically the interview with Millar, provided an insight for me into how two researchers, coming from different research paradigms, can make significantly different interpretations of the same text. The Colmar Brunton focus was on identifying features of the film that might attract and repel for marketing purposes; and its results were employed as material for the ongoing modification of the text. Its usefulness to me - trying to identify responses specific to the religious and spiritual constructions of the text - was confined to an reinforcement of Comer's distinction between 'understanding' and 'evaluation' in audience response and hints that any future study of audiences around this

topic would indeed need to be structured with a mind to likely generational differences in knowledge and attitudes.

The director's response to market research

However, by the time I next interviewed Costa Botes, a month later, he had the air of a man galvanized to forestall disaster. He told me he had got the message 'in no uncertain terms' that the film's ending didn't work. His speech on this occasion was now a decisive synthesis of the many different inputs provided for him: the various sources of audience-comment had been fused into one Audience holding the same set of opinions – a key characteristic of which was anti-religiousness:

People felt confused by it, they felt sort of, it was too bleak and dark (.) they felt, and this was quite a strong one - a very unexpected one, they felt that the film was in fact preaching at them, that it was putting up Gerald as Jesus Christ as the Jesus of the New Testament (.) and they overwhelmingly rejected that image. (21/5/97)

Botes was now putting more weight on the religious issues in the text if only to see them as a problem he had previously avoided. In trying to shape the film as a relationship movie, he claimed he had, 'completely failed to see, [...] the way the film developed, the themes and issues in it were more, they were bigger than the idea of a relationship' (21/5/97). He spoke of being aware that the ending had worked in the original play, which he described as, 'a metaphysical, abstract kind of piece'. Now, reviewing the film in the light of the feedback, 'What was obvious to me then seeing it fully for the first time was that the film was far more human and down to earth than the play ever was and again that put unbearable pressure at the back end to deliver' (21/5/97).

Botes is conveniently eliding a significant point from this summation. That is, his own earlier decision to encode a representation of Gerald as Christ in the final scene, on the grounds that this would provide a sense of resolution for the audience. It seems likely that such a decision actually served both as support for the 'religious' performance Moriarty apparently gave on that day and as an obstacle to the 'self-spirituality' discourse which Hamilton had tried to embody. It was this ending with which Botes had previously been so pleased, that was now spoken of as anathema to audiences. He offered a reading of the text which took more seriously its status as a negotiation of discourses of religion and spirituality in a late twentieth century context.

[...] what really came home to me, was that we'd staged a setting (.) this modern day crucifixion and not really talked at all about its impact or what it meant (.) and once I

started thinking about that I suddenly saw with awful clarity that (.) there was no way that you could deal with that stuff and not get totally embroiled in all kinds of Christian issues. [...] Another message we got from the second test screening, was that people were not interested in Christian issues, they did not want to think in terms of religion, they didn't want to think in terms of (.) they were not at all accepting of the idea that God could be flesh and whole and here in the world (.) they didn't want to know. (21/5/97)

When asked if he'd thought about why people might have reacted in that way Botes replied by talking about the issue of how religious material is represented in cinema.

I think we live in a very secular age where any kind of supernatural event (.) if you're presenting it as being real, if you're being unambiguous about it, then you have to offer really, really strong proof or everything in the film has to prepare one for that. See it works, it works but only just for *Breaking the Waves* because the shape of the film and what happens in it, everything's a preparation for that final (.) but even then a lot of people didn't buy it. (21/5/97)

Again, both professional ideas of appropriate structure and a discourse about religion is present but on this occasion their priority has been reversed, or rather they are both subject to a metadiscourse about contemporary protocols of intertextuality. Botes presents himself as forced by circumstances to consider the conditions under which one can co-opt material from a Christian frame of reference and then deploy it in the service of a worldview and a set of media processes which are not thoroughly Christian themselves. He has perceived the difficulties inherent in using one aspect of the Christian discursive repertoire, as if one considers it valid (that a being who is the Son-of-God may come back from the dead), within a wider context which otherwise employs concepts from the same source ironically or metaphorically. Indeed Botes own awareness that he may have presided over some sort of discursive boundary-infracture ('there was no way you could deal with that stuff and not get embroiled') is what gives a sense of urgency to his speech.

This extract therefore shows Botes himself influenced, in this moment, by circumstances. He has tried to engage in the flux of one of the currently most slippery, changeable fields of constructions of knowledge and power, and is finding himself unable to keep in touch with all it contains. As a result of negative feedback from others he has reconsidered one of the most enduring, and rigorous constructions in the field - the Christian worldview (in terms of a religion of difference - and has realized that using it still comes with rules and consequences attached. He offers two alternatives in response: to acknowledge those rules and negotiate around them, or to condemn the worldview as invalid and thus not be subject to its power. He appears to favour the second option.

A second ending for *Saving Grace*

In what Botes insisted was an artistic, not a commercial decision, he called a group of colleagues together – Sarkies, with the addition of Russell Campbell, Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh – to devise a new ending. Their key decisions, he said, were to abandon the idea of reconciliation between Grace and Gerald, to concentrate on developing a sense of ‘saving’ Grace, and to make greater use of the humorous strand present in the earlier parts of the text. The result, which will be analyzed in the next chapter, was to substitute for the previous version of Gerald’s return, a semi-comic scene set in a graveyard, where Gerald/Christ egotistically combs the international newspapers for accounts of his death and resurrection. In this version Grace accuses him of exploiting her in order to create publicity for himself and repudiates all his attempts at explanation. Botes explained, that in order to construct this ending the group drew upon the idea of casting Grace in the role of Judas, the disciple whom Jesus loved, but who was drawn in to betraying him. By employing this re-working of the original New Testament story, Botes reasoned, they would create an ending in tune with what he perceived to be the mindset of the audience: effectively *anti-religious*:

[...] the message that the film’s giving now is that we’ve had 2000 years of Christianity [...] yes, there’s a lot of good in Christianity and a lot of good in the doctrines but (.) do you need a divine being to administer those things? Do you need God to have self respect? And what I’m saying is, “No, you don’t”, because along with a lot of those good things come a lot of bad things to do with ritual and dogma and empty rituals, you know, and (.) so in effect I’m saying, “Yes, there may be a God but we’re better off without him”. So it’s now become a very pointedly anti-God film which it wasn’t at the beginning but I’m actually happier about [it] because it’s far closer to what I believe. (21/5/97)

This revised final section would culminate with Grace still imprisoned in her cell, but according to Botes, having dismissed Gerald/Christ, she would endure imprisonment with a new strength and sense of her own spirituality. It was this sort of construction he hoped, that would connect with the audience as he and Colmar Brunton had defined it - a local audience uninterested in religion.

An overseas audience

Unfortunately, the next audience *Saving Grace* encountered was neither local, nor from a secular culture. The film was included in a package of New Zealand Film Commission material invited to screen in a festival at Villadolid, Spain, in October 1997. Reports on its reception there came from three sources - Shelton, as sales agent for the film (19/11/97), Parr (25/11/97), and Botes (25/11/97). All three agreed the exercise had been a painful one, in which the new ending, and the

film itself, had been judged unsuccessful by audiences including film industry professionals, film journalists, critics, and Spanish filmgoers.

Shelton claimed the Spanish couldn't make 'head nor tail' of the (subtitled) film. They didn't know if they were supposed to believe Grace was crazy or sane, they didn't know whether or not they were supposed to believe Gerald was Jesus, and they were confused by the new ending of the film. These points were not disputed by Botes, who described his experience speaking at a press conference in the strongly Catholic town, defending a film he had deliberately re-shaped to be 'anti-religious', as like 'experiencing a bullfight from the viewpoint of the bull' (25/1//97). In a report for the Film Commission Botes reflected on Spanish criticisms that the film was 'blasphemous' and that there was nothing 'spiritual' in it:

[it] depends what you define as 'spiritual'. To my way of thinking the film is about the *human craving for God* - the hunger for spiritual comfort, or the need to feel 'we are not alone'. [...] *Saving Grace* isn't necessarily about *God* - a concept I don't believe in [...] I was quite frank about the disquieting implications of the story's open-ended, ambiguous design: but I tended to steer interpretation of its ultimate meaning away towards secular and emotional areas. (27/11/97, original emphasis)

Now Botes is speaking of the film in terms of a wide, functional, formulation of spirituality, where human need produces many forms of spiritual searching, whether they be 'secular and emotional' stratagems for securing companionship, or the formation of a relationship with a transcendent deity. He seems however to be re-asserting that it is allowable for someone who doesn't subscribe to the tenets of a religion of difference nevertheless to use iconographic and verbal references to that religion's belief system in order to discuss a more generalized set of concerns. This is despite Botes' self-described moment of 'awful clarity' several months earlier when he had spoken of being misguided in using elements of the Christian worldview outside their conventional context. It is my speculation that the pull towards something like a postmodern ethic of free speech, or untrammelled intertextuality, must have been strong for him to persist in this form of justification although the context of having to account to industry superiors might also account for these statements.

Further adventures of the text

After the unpleasant Spanish experience, *Saving Grace* underwent further modification and the ending was re-edited in a manner that resembled Campbell's earlier recommendations. In this final version, Gerald as Christ was present only at the level of a faint audio-visual memory,

marked as existing only in Grace's mind. She used the memory of him to conclude a process of self-understanding and self-reconciliation the achievement of which is symbolized by a bright, white light entering her cell and by the entrance of the film's climatic music-track. By withdrawing Gerald from the scene the awkward associations with traditional religion were removed, and the new ending finally re-framed the film as Grace's own spiritual journey of which her experience with a putative Christ-figure has been but a part. In terms of my re-interpretation, the journey of the text from the reproduction of a traditional religious figure of Christ to the foregrounding of psycho-therapeutic and individualistic discourses of spirituality now embodied the stance that Hamilton had always wished it to have and which the others had come to share.

In the meantime, the film was exhibited at the Asian Pacific film festival in Korea where it was nominated for three awards, and was rejected by the selectors for the Venice Film Festival; the venue on which Parr had originally hung his hopes for success. It had also not been possible to find an Australasian distributor for the film. Therefore, by November 1997, Parr had decided to distribute the film himself through Kahukura Productions, with the Film Commission, as was its normal practice with films for which it was the sales agent, contributing funding for marketing and publicity.

The rights to screen *Saving Grace* in Canada were sold to a distributor who released the film there to a muted response at Easter 1998, and later in the year it was programmed to screen in the Auckland and Wellington sessions of the annual International Film Festival. Costa Botes introduced the film at those public screenings, neither of which I was able to attend. Normally, a debut at the Film Festival is a precursor to national release, but that did not happen on this occasion. There were two-week runs at cinemas, again in Wellington and Auckland in February 1999, but the hoped-for conservative Christian outrage did not materialize, publicity was limited and *Saving Grace* thereafter faded from view. Soon there was even another film of the same title in circulation, a British film about a widow who goes into marijuana-growing to make a living, and by 2001 the New Zealand *Saving Grace* was mentioned only as an entry in the Film Commission's list of the country's 10 most commercially unsuccessful feature films (Dixon, 2001: 74).

It was a sad end for a venture that began with such optimism. It is not within my field of expertise to say why the production failed, although the reasons seem to be multiple and cumulative - from script through casting, through direction, through the impossibility of fully imagining the

responses of all audiences who might see the film, through to problems in the marketing process. There is obviously however, in the data presented, a strong suggestion that the project had not found a way of dealing with matters of religion and spirituality that could appeal to a large and diverse enough range of audiences. But was this the main cause of its lack of appeal? To explore this final question I will turn to the constructions of the text offered, once it had finished in post-production and gone public, from another sort of professional audience: media reviewers.

Media constructions of the text

Eight reviews of *Saving Grace*, were located, six in print and two from the Internet. One of the print reviews is from the American show business paper *Variety*, and one of the Internet reviews is from the Toronto-based *eye WEEKLY*, written at the time of the film's release in Canada. The other reviews however, are all written by New Zealanders, with the majority produced in response to the film's screenings at the Auckland and Wellington Film festivals.

Approximately half of the reviews predominantly make mention of technical and aesthetic issues, praising or criticizing the film largely in those terms. The frameworks within which the film is evaluated include the consideration of craft skills, such as direction, editing, cinematography and performance. *North and South's* reviewer Nicholas Reid gives *Saving Grace* a laudatory review in these terms calling it a feature with 'style and brains', praising its overtly fantastic sequences and suggesting that 'Jim Moriarty's optimistic presence lets us see how he could be mistaken for a Messiah' (1998). Scheib's review on the Internet Movie Database site also finds several elements to praise, including the performances of the actors, the cinematography and editing, stating that 'Botes does a fine job of expanding the two-person play out beyond the confines of the stage' (1998, para. 2). Derby, in *City Voice* (29/7/98) comments unfavourably on the 'low-budget' look of the production, and on Hamilton's vocal mannerisms. Her performance is also judged to be 'one-note' by *NZ Catholic*, which also judges some of the dialogue to be 'rather stilted'. Botes' direction is the focus of negative comment in two reviews; the American paper *Variety* suggests he should have taken 'a much bolder approach', directing the film as either 'fierce, dark, comedy or sharp Bunuelian satire' (cited in *OnFilm* Nov. 1998: 6); the *Listener*, says the direction is 'flat and dull, plodding and workmanlike' (1/8/99: 44).

Of the eight reviews the religious or spiritual content of the film is of major importance (that is, takes up at least half the review) to three, and of little significance (brief mentions only) to the other five. In the reviews which accord the topic little space a brief plot summary is typically given

and the technical/aesthetic features of the film outlined and evaluated as above. In only one of the reviews, is either of the other two possible interpretive categories for the film (i.e. that it is a romance, or that it is a story of madness) given precedence over a religious or spiritual emphasis – that’s in the *North and South* review, where the idea that Gerald, in the words of the reviewer, is some sort of ‘nutter’ is prioritized. In another of the reviews comparatively uninterested in the religious question however, it is suggested that Gerald’s function in the story could be filled by any kind of ‘eccentric character’, not necessarily one claiming to be Christ. Two of the reviews (*Metro* and *eye WEEKLY*) offer a plot summary couched in psychological terms, focusing on issues such as Grace’s low self-esteem. Nevertheless, all reviewers accept that the issue of Gerald’s divinity is the distinguishing feature of the film, even if it is a feature they do not wish to discuss. The reviews that briefly mention the issue of Gerald’s divinity but do not discuss it in detail are all between just 90 and 320 words in length: that is, they are brief reviews on entertainment pages which also contain other reviews. On the evidence of an admittedly small sample, it seems typical for these brief reviews to survey a number of aspects of the film’s construction but not to dwell on any at length.

If nothing substantive is said about religious issues they are obviously not privileged in this context, thus giving weight to Botes’ claim that ‘people [...] did not want to think in terms of religion’ (see above), but, on the other hand, neither are religious issues rigorously excluded. All the reviews assume that readers have at least a basic knowledge of the Christian paradigm insofar as none of them feel they have to offer explanations of the terms ‘Jesus Christ’ and ‘Messiah’. From the evidence of these reviews the Christian religion is just one of those things present in culture - accepted, but not accorded preeminence. Instead other frames of explanation, particularly psychological discourses, are given equal weight.

The reviews which accord the religious and spiritual issues in the film major significance are in the longer formats - two of approximately 850 words apiece, and one of 580 words. These reviews are in the *Listener* (Matthews, August 1, 1998), the *NZ Catholic* (Evans, August 23, 1998), and on the *Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film Review* website linked to the Internet Movie Database (Scheib, 1998). What these reviews have in common is their choice to emphasize a Christian framework of interpretation.

In Scheib’s review an analysis of the accuracy and (lack of) sophistication of the ‘theology’ of *Saving Grace* is combined with an evaluation referencing narrative norms in popular culture. For

instance while noting that there are moments where the film ‘interpolates the idea of a Christ for modern times with amusement’, he writes:

This Jesus does miracles, walks on water, raises the dead [...] and so on but they just seem magic tricks that come without any sense of purpose. And even though this Christ says he doesn’t do tricks they seem to be the only things he has up his sleeve - there should be more to a film about Christ than it having to be ‘Portrait of Jesus as an Amateur Magician’. [...] The script seems to lack any greater understanding of the symbolic meaning of what crucifixion represents for Christians - about redeeming the world through sacrifice and so on. (Scheib, 1998, para. 3)

This review is built around a strong sense of what the Christian myth entails. It is written in a liberal tone, it is not outraged, but is redolent with a sense of disappointment at what it perceives as an opportunity not taken. ‘A story about Christianity should be a tale about salvation and moral redemption’, Scheib asserts ‘but instead all we have is a film that sits on a fence and plays the old is it real or is it in her mind game’ (para. 4). This review is, I would contend, written from the point of view of a religion of humanity discourse; it does not see the film as attempting to say anything about personal spirituality, neither does it insist on reverence for difference (although it inclines in that direction) - but it does however imply that in the culture from which the review issues the Christian order of discourse is still intact and relevant.

By contrast, Matthews’ *Listener* review demolishes *Saving Grace* with a determination given extra force by being conducted from a lofty, high-culture, vantage point. As a periodical designed for a well-educated audience interested in the arts, with articles written especially for the magazine by local writers, the *Listener*’s frame of reference has always been nothing less than the development of national culture, but even so this review employs heavy artillery in assessing *Saving Grace*’s claims to be part of that culture. What Matthews does is invoke the poetry of James K. Baxter, the renowned New Zealand poet and iconoclast, for whom Christianity, in the forms of Quakerism, Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, was a life focus. In 1967 Baxter wrote *The Maori Jesus* which Matthews describes as ‘an assault on bourgeois-ness, ‘on mountainous, mile-deep civilized darkness’ (1/8/99: 44). For a third of this review Matthews quotes from the poem, praising its courage and perspicacity in attacking social and racial hypocrisy through the lens of Christianity. In eulogizing Baxter’s poem, one might expect he is going to examine how *Saving Grace* also uses the symbol of a Maori Jesus, but while noting the similarity of the milieu in which the two works are set, and after condemning the film as neither as ‘dramatic’ or ‘convinced’ as *The Maori Jesus*, Matthews swerves off to claim that the idea is now dated and over-familiar, and that *Saving Grace* is just not ‘weird’ enough. It is difficult to avoid

the impression that this is a review designed to display the reviewer's erudition and to perform an 'entry test' for admittance into New Zealand high-culture. Measured against standards the production team did not include among their imaginings; the twin standards of a modernist political revision of religion, and a mature work from one of New Zealand's most esteemed poets - *Saving Grace*, and Botes in particular, are denied entry. The cultural value of *Saving Grace's* religious themes is affirmed at the same time as the film is judged inadequate to carry them.

The most generous of the reviews is one with the strongest links with an actual religious institution - the *NZ Catholic*, a fortnightly subscription paper published under the auspices of the Catholic Bishop of Auckland. The reviewer, Graeme Evans, also does not think *Saving Grace* is a perfect film - he criticizes aspects of dialogue and performance - but he does think it is a valuable one. The extent of the latitude he offers the film is set out in the opening paragraph, as is his understanding of the environment within which it will be received.

Religion is a fairly difficult topic to handle directly in a feature film. Much of the audience simply won't be interested, and there's always the possibility that the church-going minority will take offence at any perceived mishandling of revered religious symbols.

I can see that the new New Zealand film *Saving Grace* could give offence to some but I am willing to give it the benefit of the doubt. (23/8/98:19)

Working from within a Christian order of discourse, this review does not see the film's premise as something exotic, so has no need to be as declarative and assertive about the content as some of the other reviews. For instance it employs the name 'Jesus Christ' only once, in order to be specific about the nature of Gerald's claim, and otherwise concentrates on enumerating both the difficulties that Grace faces 'soured on life by her mother's recent suicide and fairly self-destructive in her behaviour', and the virtues that help to counter them. Gerald is 'the very model of charity' in sheltering Grace, he 'tries to bring her out of herself by teaching her carpentry', his stated purpose is 'to save humanity once again'. There is no commitment in the review to the idea that Gerald is Jesus since the miracles can be accounted for by viewing everything as Grace's hallucination, but the point is made - a point Sarkies had certainly hoped would be grasped by someone: 'how many of us are totally secure and balanced creatures when we come to our conclusions about the nature of the universe?'

It can be noted that these formulations, which, like the Scheib review, approach the religious content from a liberal point-of-view, also draw on the language of psychology. This choice

suggests that virtuous Christian behaviour and the qualities needed to pull a person back from self-destruction are almost indistinguishable from one another. The *NZ Catholic* review can find *Saving Grace* palatable because it draws on a liberal, psychologized version of Christianity, but also because it fails to engage with the more difficult aspects of the text, including the sexual relationship between Gerald and Grace, and the sado-masochistic scenario in which she crucifies him. It is by ignoring these incidents that it manages to provide a coherent account of the text, a text which it can therefore commend to others: 'It doesn't hit the heights of the few other New Zealand films that have had genuine religious overtones (*Illustrious Energy* or the films of Vincent Ward) but its questionings are genuine ones'. One could suggest that this publication is commendatory of the film because here the 'circuit of culture' works in a mutually beneficial manner, in that the existence of a text about aspects of the Christian worldview validate a pre-existing Christian identity, and allows the reviewer himself to produce a further contribution to Christian culture.

As a group these reviews throw some light on two specific issues in which this project is interested: the progress of the text from producers to audience, and the constructions of religion and spirituality which are offered, accepted, declined, and ignored along the way. Like the responses of both the peer-evaluators and test-screening audience, these reviews suggest there is a significant degree of correspondence between the ways in which the production team imagined the audience responding to the text, and the manner in which actual individuals, operating in audience mode, did indeed respond. However, as with the test-audience, the correspondence is also incomplete and imperfect. There are several ways to understand both the similarities and the differences.

Conclusion

One way is to note the shaping effects of the situations and formats in which people are able to express themselves. The production team, in an interview format which involved each interviewee talking about the production for between from one (Horton) to eight hours (Botes) have been able to offer many different versions and revisions of the meanings they were hoping to encode in the text. We have seen that those meanings were not always in alignment with one another, and were prone to change over time, although the degree of difference in the statements provided was reduced over the period under study. However, the text itself cannot represent the entirety of that complication of meaning and some sets of meanings were given preference over others in the

process of thespian, directorial and technical performance. We have seen that, in the opinions of the interviewees, it was Botes', Moriarty's and Horton's preferred meanings which were originally encoded in the text, whereas Hamilton, Parr and Sarkies spoke sometimes, but not always, as if the strength of their preferences had been eroded in a process of discursive struggle.

Another point to be considered is the difference between understanding and evaluation. I have previously noted Comer's (1995) contention that preferred meanings are generally acknowledged and understood by audiences, but that it is the matter of how they are prioritized and evaluated by them which is at issue. Audience members may for instance choose only to mention those meanings most pertinent to their evaluation of the text and ignore others that they have, nevertheless, perceived. For instance, I noted that the *NZ Catholic* review which evaluates *Saving Grace* positively, avoids exploring the violent strand in the film perhaps because it is trying to build up an attractive picture of Gerald as embodying Christian virtues. Meanwhile, the *Listener* reviewer also seems interested in Christian meaning in the text, but has a different agenda to the *NZ Catholic*. The overall situation appears to be that (with the exception of the confusion about meaning around the final scene) most people understood what *Saving Grace* was supposed to be about, more or less in the terms, and across the range of terms, that the production team intended. Nevertheless their evaluations of it, aesthetically, in terms of entertainment value, and as a product viewed within a larger context of New Zealand culture, were usually not as positive as the production team had imagined and hoped.

When he became aware of the first negative evaluations of the text back in May 1997 Botes claimed it was because most people weren't interested in religion and didn't care to think about it. However two sets of audience responses showed that wasn't always the case - I refer to the condemnatory response from Catholic critics in Spain, and the three later reviews from New Zealand that gave considerable 'thought' to interpreting and evaluating the film employing Christian frameworks. Interest in discussing religious content was low in the reviews in generalist, popular publications, and the evaluation of religion itself was especially ambivalent in the contributions made by two of the three peer-respondents - although they still considered the topic worthy of engagement. It is therefore difficult not to conclude that the problem was in the constructions of the topic that the film offered, and in the aesthetic realization of the material as much as in the subject matter itself. The reviews provide a collection of criticisms setting out the film's technical/aesthetic shortcomings, but the consensus undoubtedly is that the film's ending failed to endorse a dominant preferred meaning for the overall text. That it would do so was an

expectation that most (if not all) of the audience-responses expressed, and the lack of such a resolved ending appeared to have undermined much of the appreciation they might have had for the earlier parts of the text.

In terms of the discourses of religion and spirituality noted in the expressions of audience-response I found more 'religious' language than I had expected, and less 'spiritual' language, since I had mistakenly come to assume that the discourse frame 'not-religious-but-spiritual' (associated with spiritualities of life) was near-ubiquitous. That is especially so in comparison with the talk of the production team, who were well aware of the differences between the two modes of discourse and who strove to express that difference in the text.

By this I mean that responses which considered the text in detail - the test screening-audience and the reviewers - tended to discuss it either in relation to a Christian framework (Christ would and wouldn't do this or that), or in psychological terms (characters were crazy or not crazy, mentally and emotionally satisfied or not), - they did not use the concept of spirituality to bridge those two orders of discourse. This leads me to speculate that discourses of spirituality, at that time, - at the time of writing, now five years ago - were not strongly embedded in New Zealand culture. The peer-critics gave slightly different responses: Campbell did refer to 'transcendence' and 'spirituality', concepts that were referenced to a specific provenance as a film studies academic: but generally, there was left-wing political/moral inflection to their comments about religion.

There were, as has been discussed, indications of other frames of reference in the statements of audience members. In particular amongst the focus group containing older viewers there were statements about Grace's state of mind and the positive development of it which Gerald facilitates, that were possibly references to a framework of self-spirituality. However these references rarely came together into a discourse of, or about, expressive spirituality. From the admittedly tentative evidence of these responses the constituent elements of such a discourse might have been present, but had not cohered into a form with evident cultural legitimacy. If they had perhaps *Saving Grace* would have been better received.

Instead it seemed that a Christian discursive framework - either Christianity as a religion of difference, or as a religion of humanity - is still active in New Zealand culture. It is perhaps not something in which people have a fierce belief, perhaps not even a framework they themselves readily employ (for instance, the minimal references in the more cursory reviews), but is still

powerful as an *interpretive* framework. It is an interpretive framework that comes complete with its own set of characters, expected events and most importantly its own internal logic, and once that logic/myth is triggered, a majority of people expect it to be played out both according to pattern, and with a certain intensity of tone. To innovate upon or deviate from that pattern requires a detailed, incremental negotiation with the audience. It is this state of affairs that Costa Botes recognised when he stated (see pages 226-227, this chapter) that: 'I suddenly saw with awful clarity that (.) there was no way that you could deal with that stuff and not get totally embroiled in all kinds of Christian issues' (21/5/97).

In response to that recognition the team re-shaped the material, not so much to conform to the logic of the Christian myth, but in order to deviate from the pattern more decisively. However, no matter what they did, and even when they produced a third and final ending that was explicitly 'self-spiritual', there were other factors already in the text - Moriarty's assured performance, the 'realistic' depiction of miracles, the extremely strong trigger of the act of crucifixion - that continued to anchor the film within the Christian framework. In such circumstances it seemed that audiences could respond with confusion and disapproval, but, with the exception of some younger viewers, were not able to envisage the film, as Sarkies had originally perceived it, as an attempt to move through the deconstruction of Christianity and on to something else.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CASE STUDY ONE – Textual Analysis of *Saving Grace*

Introduction

In this chapter the last on *Saving Grace*, aspects of the various versions of the text - stage and screen - will be interpreted in the light of two sets of interests. Primarily, I want to discuss what kinds of discourses of religion and spirituality I think these various versions offer, comparing them, as before, to discourses organized according to Woodhead and Heelas' model of forms of religiosity (see chapter 5). However my second interest is in considering reasons why the screen-versions were not as successful as the play, and therefore did not reach a large audience. It is my contention that in the translation from stage to screen, well-intentioned as it was, certain elements that had made the play a satisfying, if challenging, experience for a certain audience, were pushed into the background, and an ostensibly more accessible, but actually less satisfying, text produced for an imagined general audience. The elements focused on in this section of the analysis are the likely effects of providing naturalistic representations of miraculous events, and the likely effects of downplaying the self-reflexive use of language in the text. The complete text will not be analyzed in detail, rather the focii of the analysis will be the contrasts between the stage and screen versions and the three different endings sported by the filmed version at different times.

The problematic text

One byproduct of the discussion so far has been to problematize the text. At what moment does it exist and in what form? This problematization is even more relevant in the case of *Saving Grace* because of the existence of four different versions of the text. The first is the original Wellington production of the play, of which Sarkies was both writer and director (referred to in the following discussion with the suffix [play]). There are also three successive versions of the film-text. While more than 90 percent of the narrative events are similar in the three film versions, each has a different ending. All of these versions were put before an audience at some point, even if it was only the test-screening audience in Wellington [first version], or the festival audience at Valladolid [second version]. The third and final version [third version] was however the variation that received the most exposure to an audience in terms of public release.

Each of the three endings of the film version draws on a different discourse. This was done, as noted in the previous chapter, as a series of attempted solutions to the problem of reconciling the

narrative dynamics of the film with the production team's changing understandings of who the audience for the film might be. In the course of this process of reflection and change the film, in my opinion, came to offer three distinctive constructions of religion and spirituality. A reconsideration of the origins of the discourses drawn on in the various versions of the text makes those changing constructions easier to discern.

Sarkies and the figure of Christ

Some of the material Sarkies worked with, in both play and film, was traditional in character to the point of being established as myth; that is, it drew on a two thousand year old discursive template concerning the attributes, intentions and purpose of Christ. These attributes can and do change (Morgan, 1998), but they do so slowly, and often in the face of opposition from those who wish the myth to remain static. Sarkies had consciously and perhaps unconsciously absorbed information about this template from several sources. Those he discussed with me included Bible study from his childhood as well as more recently mediated exemplars from specific sources in popular culture.

Material from the Biblical version of Jesus Christ is used in both the structure and plot of play and film. Fundamentally, the structure of a male figure's progress through the performance of good works and miracles, into increasing public visibility, temptation, betrayal, self-sacrifice and finally resurrection, is the structure of the 'passion' or 'sacramental' narrative identified by Fraser (1998) and others. This is the basic structure all versions of *Saving Grace* employed for three quarters of its length. In terms of plot, or the presentation of the story through a syntagmatic texture of gestures, actions, words, sounds and images, there is also frequent reference to words attributed to Christ in the New Testament and to the central Christian visual symbols of the cross and the act of crucifixion. In nature the typical Christ-figure is kind, gentle, wise and forgiving although he also can be sternly critical of venal and cruel behaviour. Again, these elements were present in *Saving Grace*, and although not sufficient on their own to secure Gerald's identity as a Christ-figure, when combined with the other structural and plot elements described, seemed to cue viewers that they should be activating their own knowledge of the Christian myth in order to interpret and evaluate the text of *Saving Grace* [play and film].

However, in all versions of the text, there are also aspects of Sarkies' treatment of Gerald/Christ's actions that are not a good fit with traditional constructions of a Christ-figure. These deviations begin in the second half of the narrative and increase in frequency as it progresses. While early

quirks such as Gerald being unemployed and intrigued by computer arcade games, are likely to be overlooked, even by conventional Christian viewers, as attempts to place the character in a contemporary context, the first significant deviation is probably when Grace and Gerald have sex. The idea that a contemporary Christ-figure must confront the feminine (and therefore sexuality) with a new degree of intensity is, as previously noted, so common in recent cinematic reinterpretations of the Christ-story that it has become a cliché, but in both the test-screening and focus group responses to *Saving Grace* this narrative development was still sufficiently transgressive for a small group of viewers to form a negative evaluation of the text, because Jesus wouldn't do 'something like that' (previous chapter, page 221). The scene in which Grace and Gerald infiltrated an intensive care ward removing patients from respirators, also had an edge of 'harm' about it inconsistent with the Christ-template, as was a scene where Gerald refused to restore life to a dying child, stating that the world is overpopulated and some people need to die. A core aspect of the Christ-template is that Christ defeats death; he does not promote it as a solution to the world's problems.

Other deviations from type were less explicit, but their combined presence increasingly made the task of producing a coherent interpretation of the text difficult. If, for argument's sake, one were initially to support a case that the Gerald character might be a reincarnation of Christ, the rapid turnover of epistemological positions at the end of the text produces the possibility that this Christ is instead an actor in a chain of manipulations. He has manipulated Grace into killing him, while he himself is being manipulated by his (heavenly) Father. In this chain of logic heavenly power is ruthless, cruel, and capable of betrayal when the end justifies the means. Sarkies himself gave support to such an interpretation in the interview data by his frequent recourse to anti-Christian discourses about the arbitrary, abusive nature of religious power, but to present Christ himself as manipulative is likely to alienate many audience members. Moreover, another of Sarkies' motivations for dealing with this topic had been his fascination with the idea of what it would be like to have the universe revolve around one's self - if one were as important as Christ for instance. This use of the Christ-figure for narcissistic reflection is also at odds with the more usual representation of him as someone who sacrifices his own interests for the greater good.

As someone who styled himself as 'agnostic', but who had already proven he was able to communicate with young, urban theatre-goers on other topics, Sarkies was not apparently intimidated by the contradictions inherent within his simultaneous endorsement and subversion of aspects of the Christian myth. He was content rather to heap up contradictions under what he

described as an aesthetic strategy of ‘ambiguity’. Indeed, the fact that this strategy was successful in the theatre, not just once, but in three productions, does suggest that there was something felicitous in the combination of Sarkies’ conceptualisation of the topic, its realisation in theatrical terms, and the characteristics of the niche audience for independent theatre productions. On the evidence of its reception given in chapter 7, there must have been sufficient satisfaction in the patrons’ experience of the theatre performance to render the discursive contradictions of its religious content either less important than other facets of the production, or alternatively, as a source of positive value to them.

In the translation from stage play to film text however, that original balance between text, realisation and audience was disrupted. As has been demonstrated in the previous two chapters, the text underwent many changes to make it amenable to screen industry technologies, and to prepare it for a larger, mainstream audience. The intention behind these changes was to make the production stronger, but instead the conceptual weaknesses of the text seem to have stood out in greater relief, or to have mattered more, to the audiences the film encountered.

It is impossible to discuss all the changes the text underwent, in all its versions, but in my opinion, the most significant changes took place in the first transition from stage to screen. They clustered, in particular, around moves to give Gerald’s claims to be Christ greater plausibility by mobilizing visual strategies that drew increasingly on traditional Christian models. And of equal significance, I contend, was a change in emphasis in the role that verbal language played in the construction of the text.

‘Low’ Christology and epistemological indeterminacy in the stage version

Deacy (2000) notes that two major sub-models relating to Christ are typically employed in film representations. Either Christ is seen primarily in terms of his divinity, (‘high’ Christology) or in terms of his humanity (a ‘low’ Christology). In the play version Sarkies draws on a low-Chристology model where the humanity of Christ, his status as ‘one of us’ is emphasized. Gerald often seems like an unpretentious New Zealand lower-class male: laid-back and humorous. Perhaps largely due to the budget constraints of independent theatre production, his claims to be Christ exist predominantly at the verbal level, and therefore retain an uncertain epistemological status - they may be no more than assertive words. There are a handful of points where Gerald’s speech is complemented by visual aspects of staging: he unveils a large wooden cross in his workshop as he informs Grace that he’s the reincarnation of Christ, and later, a short piece of

'promotional' video footage, aiming to introduce the new 'Jesus' to potential followers is played on the back wall of the stage. Neither of these pieces of visual evidence is conclusive in any way however. The cross, while a resonant visual symbol, tells us only that Gerald is obsessed with idea of being Christ-like, whereas the video-advertisement is made with such bumbling good humour that a preferred reading is to view it as satirical of the commodification of contemporary spirituality and spiritual 'gurus'. The ambivalent status of Gerald's claims is therefore not shifted towards certainty by the use of these onstage devices.

The second set of visual materials used in the play - the projection of slides of Gerald's body and an alternative video account of his death, showing Grace as an aggressor - are a different matter however. Accompanied by an authoritative offstage voice, the effect of these interventions is not to reinforce Gerald's claims but to throw them even further into doubt, by shifting the focus of the narrative onto Grace, and her mental state and motivations. Once Grace is re-constructed as probably psychotic the nature of Gerald's claims becomes relevant only as the key to the particular method Grace has used to dispatch him - crucifixion. Gerald's subsequent return then, is coded as most likely to be a purely mental and emotional event in Grace's guilty, confused mind. The appearance of a Christ-figure at the end of *Saving Grace* [play] thus likely represents an ideal of forgiveness and a memory of love, an insubstantial consolation, rather than the glorious resurrection of a divinity revealed in his true form. That is, a 'high' Christology is only momentarily evoked at the very end of the piece, probably too briefly and symbolically for audiences to be required to commit to a judgment on its veracity.

Increasing materiality of Gerald as Christ in the screen versions

The effect of the play's staging was to create an intense, abstracted diegesis where the only indication other people existed came in the form of a disembodied official 'voice' conducting ritualized interrogations out of the darkness while Grace and Gerald squirmed under the lights. On screen however the metaphorical nature of many of the play's claims mutated into more concrete forms of illustration, thus strengthening the case that Gerald might actually be a supernatural being.

Although the budget for *Saving Grace* [film] was only \$1.5 million there was still enough money for a range of special effects employing digital technology. These included an on-going motif where Gerald tossed coins that would land balanced on their edges (according to Botes, a symbol of ambiguity). A new scene was included during which Grace slashes her wrist in an attempt to

force Gerald to perform a miracle, and indeed he appears to do so, closing up her wound and clearing away the blood with pressure from his thumb. There were also new 'flashbacks' to scenes involving the death of Grace's mother, a vision purporting to come from God which Grace and Gerald experienced at the movies, and a montage of images of Gerald in the persona of Christ, in one of which he is holding a beating heart in his hands. Gerald and Grace also walked on water in the bath tub, Gerald's cupboards were found to be full of bread and fish, and a scene from his childhood was played out in the background while he recounted childhood fears. In this manner, using techniques too complex and expensive for a simple stage presentation, the film version melded the supernatural into the texture of the plot, causing Gerald to seem like the source of magic and miracles. His claims to be someone special were now validated by the manifest action displayed on the screen.

At the same time as visible unearthly causation was introduced into the film, there was also, as described in the previous chapter, a conscious decision to move the overall 'feel' of the production into the realm of 'naturalism'. For instance in the play Grace and Gerald often played the *Space Invaders* ('spacies') arcade game, but the games-machine did not have a physical presence - that was indicated by gestures and sound-effects. By not existing on a literal level the concept of the games-machine was thus able to function across two worlds - as a reference to the pleasure and violence of popular culture, and as a kind of receiver of messages from a realm transcendent of the physical world. In the film versions however, the 'spacies' were visibly and audibly situated in a 'real' environment - a video-parlour - where the disembodied (transcendent) 'voice' was replaced by briefer comments from an electronic voice generated by the machine itself.

Other decisions which pushed the film in the direction of greater naturalism included depicting Grace squatting, or camping, under a motorway bridge, setting the interrogation scene in a 'real' Income Support Office with an efficient 'real' woman asking the questions, and replacing one of the 'spacies' scenes with an interaction between Grace and Gerald in a supermarket. Later in the film Grace walks through locations recognisable as downtown Wellington and visits the city library. Grace and Gerald are seen in a café, at the movies and in a hospital, although in the latter two locations, and in the 'night' sequence where Grace returns to a squatters' encampment, special effects and the alteration of pace code the experience as existing as much within the (now hysterical) psyches of the protagonists as within any realistic environment. The location of the final sequence, in both play and film, remains at once utterly vague and brutally real; some official place of incarceration in which Grace faces the stone walls of society's judgment.

Most of the new scenes and new visual effects clustered around the question of Gerald's claim to be a reincarnation of Christ. Several of them are the depiction of 'miracles': coins do not usually balance on their edges, people cannot actually walk on water. These 'miracles' rendered visible by technology, therefore tend to support Gerald's claim to be divine - we actually see him doing things ordinary human beings cannot do. The film thus moves beyond the low-Christology model (Christ as man of the people) which characterised the play, to include elements of a 'high' Christology (Christ as miracle worker, Christ as glorious risen Saviour). This shift takes the film closer to the pattern of the traditional 'sacramental' narrative (Fraser, 1998) - and thereby made it easier for audiences to interpret the first version of the film as 'pro-Christian' that is, as endorsing the idea that Gerald was Christ and that, like Grace, one should therefore admire him and subscribe to his worldview.

The creation of more exciting visual highpoints in the cinematic text also had effects on the underlying structural arrangement of the narrative. Effectively the changes provided more 'beats' (Cooper, 1994; Aronson, 2000) to the plot, that is more moments of fascination and uncertainty with which the audience could become engaged. The increasingly violent nature of events in the last third of the narrative also did what is known in scriptwriting parlance as 'raising the stakes' which involves increasing the level of tension by presenting the protagonists with conflicts they find increasingly difficult to resolve, therefore forcing them to dig deeper into their personal reserves and to display more extreme facets of their personalities (Segar, 1997). Employing this structure is supposed to ensure that an entertainment 'involves' an audience, as the spectators vicariously share the dilemmas of the characters, with the pay-off being a satisfying release of tension when the conflict is resolved. An enhanced 'rising' structure was therefore in evidence for the bulk of the second half of the film version of *Saving Grace*, making it 'bigger', and bringing it more in line with the characteristics of a typical mainstream movie. As a consequence viewers were also invited to become more thoroughly emotionally involved in the world of the film, rather than thinking about the interesting, unorthodox, aesthetic strategies employed in the construction of the play. This was the effect Parr was after when he stated that he would prefer audiences to 'feel' rather than 'think' whereas Sarkies had always stressed that he wanted people to become involved but then wanted them to think about their own complicity in the action.

In none of the versions could this absorption ever be complete however, because all of them retained the penultimate scene in which the alternative versions of events provided on video,

undercut the traditional 'restorative' narrative trajectory (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997), making it difficult for audience members to achieve a satisfying sense of narrative 'closure'. While this last-minute assault on audience expectations seems to have been acceptable in the context of a stage narrative already coded as experimental, the test-screening data suggested it came as a considerable shock, and source of confusion, to some viewers watching the more naturalistic, version of *Saving Grace*.

Therefore, in terms of the changes described so far, there is arguably, in the film, an exacerbation of two opposing tendencies already existing in the play. A play which was originally significantly abstract and allegorical, was, by virtue of the decisions made to set the film version in detailed physical space, rendered considerably more naturalistic. The movie text could therefore be viewed as making claims along the lines of, 'these things might actually have taken place in Wellington, New Zealand'. On the other hand many actions rendered visible are events which audiences know are impossible in the everyday world. To show them happening thus strengthens the case for Gerald indeed having divine ancestry. By opening the text up simultaneously in these divergent ways, the film is arguably made into even more of a 'hybrid' construct than the play - more difficult to accept as being entirely fantasy, more difficult to experience as being 'real' - with the two tendencies consequently more difficult to reconcile.

The changing emphasis on verbal language in versions of *Saving Grace*

The implications of these changes in visual and structural aspects are significant enough, but just as important are the effects of alterations made to the linguistic texture of the piece in the transition from play to film. I would argue that Sarkies' original project was, to a significant degree, a play *about* the limits and implications of language use, with this project carried out primarily in the medium of verbal rather than visual language. In the translation to a cinema once again, Sarkies' theatrical priorities were modified by the institutional processes of cinema production. For instance, one of the themes of the interview data in chapters 6 and 7 was about the reduction of the amount of dialogue in *Saving Grace* as the film script developed.

The fact that both the play and, to a lesser extent, the film, were heavy on dialogue was, as discussed, intentional. This stylistic feature was a source of satisfaction for Sarkies and, especially in the early stages of the project, for Botes also. In justifying this approach they called on the example of 'independent' film makers active in the 1990s (Hal Hartley, Quentin Tarantino, Mike Leigh) who had achieved an enthusiastic following for films crammed with dialogue: a formalist

technique operating on an awareness that speech is an expression of personal and cultural style and status. However, it is an article of faith in scriptwriting manuals that large quantities of dialogue do not make for a 'good' movie: the use of images to suggest meanings and arouse emotion is far preferable (Seger, 1987; Cooper, 1994; McKee, 1997). In talking about the play Sarkies said he was aware of the standard model of scriptwriting but had chosen to reject it, preferring the promptings of his own intuition and experience.

Nevertheless, as has also been discussed, the normative model of narrative construction was deployed most evidently in the director's, and film editor's, determination to prune repetitive dialogue. As a film industry novice Sarkies accepted the advice that was given to him about trimming and re-shaping his dialogue for the screen.

While *Saving Grace* remained a dialogue-reliant film throughout all versions it is my observation that this 'pruning' of dialogue in combination with the other changes already discussed, lessened the emphasis on verbal language in some sections of the film. An effect of this reduction in emphasis was also to reduce, in comparison to the play, the cues available to support a reading of the film in terms of the games it plays with language. From Horton's point-of-view especially, Sarkies' use of repetition was seen as a 'mistake' he had committed - rather than as a necessary characteristic of a strategy which was sometimes only semi-conscious. By cutting down on repetition, replacing it with visual equivalents which were often literal or 'realistic', the production team, including Sarkies, thus decentered the emphasis on the various forms and functions of language. For example, by streamlining the dialogue some of its banality and redundancy are removed. This may sound like a desirable result, but the contrast between the banality of the language and the potential sublimity of its subject matter had been one of the charms of the play. The bathetic nature of the humour in the playscript, and its dogged pursuit of pretension were hallmarks of the 'quirky' Sarkies style, an aspect of its appeal to a young, urban audience.

Speech texture in versions of *Saving Grace*

In both the play and the film the characters of Grace and Gerald are differentiated by the manner in which they present themselves in speech. Gerald has several modes of speech available to him and moves between them with rapidity. Although shy and sometimes awkward, he has a wide vocabulary and a good command of polite everyday transactional conversation. He is thus able to negotiate the procedures at the Income Support Office more easily than Grace does for instance. He also initiates a light-hearted, friendly conversation with Grace and, as they get to know each

other better, exhibits a ready, if laboured, sense of humour. From time to time however a different note inhabits his voice; a smug seductivity resonant of door-to-door missionaries, especially when he begins to talk about his 'father' and when he asks Grace if she has ever considered herself to be 'special' [all versions]. He develops a predilection for abstract speech and begins to sermonise about the nature of human existence, often, as in an extended speech comparing a well-built 'chair' and a healthy human-being which draws on discourses informed by popular psychology. Gerald uses speech to connect with Grace and to persuade her of the validity of his point of view: he tries to manipulate her through his choice of language and style of delivery.

Grace, on the other hand, uses speech as a defensive weapon, as a complement to body language and as an indicator of attitude rather than to convey specific meaning. She is surly, taciturn, and aggressive when roused, but makes an impression with as few words as possible, many of them profanities. Grace has a small choice of words to express disappointment or anger - she uses 'fuck' a lot - when she gets really upset she uses 'fuck' more often. She is loathe to engage in conversations requiring her to be precise about meaning, and when Gerald tries to make her be serious she is likely to shy off with a joke, or some abuse that calls his language-bluff: 'You're a comy son of a bitch' [all versions]. She also undercuts his pretensions by giving only minimal acknowledgement to what he is saying - at the end of a long speech for instance, she replies in an off-hand manner: 'sure'.

At the beginning of the play in particular the style of Grace and Gerald's speech is ritualized - it is banter, abusive, an art-form. There's a lot of non-specific 'phatic' speech in order simply to establish status through competition - what is said at this point is almost inconsequential. A function of the repetition in the play, where Grace and Gerald often echo each other's lines, is therefore to foreground the use of language as game and defence. In the stage version, I contend, the construction and use of language is highlighted: how it can be used to inform, compete, distance, seduce, pass the time, convey emotions. In a bureaucratic context, such as the Income Support office it can be used, by authority-figures, to define and hence to control. Language can also be used as a weapon, to shock by saying what is not usually said.

Sarkies therefore, especially throughout the stage version of *Saving Grace*, contrasts everyday uses of language, (superficial communication, defense, aggression, pleasure) with the formal language that is used to address and deal with/construct, matters of ultimate concern - religious

matters. Because Gerald does not look like Jesus, act like Jesus, in the play, his Jesus-ness is, for the most part, a result therefore of what he says about himself.

Christ as first signifier

The idea of Christ returning can function in at least two ways, linguistically, in the fictional text. He is a symbol of a primary, unrepresentable benign experience - an experience which would make life satisfying and is therefore desired by both of the characters. Both Grace and Gerald are largely inarticulate in the face of their longing for that experience and retreat into linguistic nonsense when they come closest to it. For instance, when Gerald shows Grace the cross he is making and tells her he is Christ all she can say is: 'Far out ... fuuuuuck ... intense'. When he tries to protect himself against his terror of death he babbles 'Chocolatecake, chocolatecake, chocolatecake', a habit that Grace later adopts. For the first two thirds of all versions of *Saving Grace*, whenever the limits of everyday human experience are reached, whenever explanations need to be found for death or for the meaning of existence itself, the characters fall into verbal incoherence. Spoken language is shown to be inadequate to matters of ultimate concern and spirituality is thereby reconfirmed as the realm of the unrepresentable.

But there is another way to look at this issue; a development of this first approach. As the earthly incarnation of heavenly authority, Christ is also its representable representative. In taking physical existence, and through his ability to speak on his Father's behalf, he becomes a guarantor of meaning, the beginning of a structure of belief and behaviour which has long shaped Western cultures. In a reading of *Saving Grace* done in terms of such a semiotic model, He (Gerald/Jesus), functions to structure both language and Christian culture. Operating in this mode Gerald makes several speeches which quote from 'his' words in the Bible, solidifying his claim to divine identity at the same time as instructing Grace what to believe and how to behave. The grandeur of the character's formal rhetoric at these times is in particular contrast to the repetitiousness, vagueness, obscenity and off-hand banality of Grace's street-slang. Yet, almost as soon as this form of linguistic authority is asserted, it is, as noted above, undercut by rapid changes of speech register at Gerald's expense, usually involving a descent into kitsch or bathos. Once again, Sarkies is playing with language and once again he is ambivalent about his project, but this time, his game is with the underlying conditions that make speech, meaning and communication possible. He raises the possibility of an authoritative anchor for the language system within which he writes but cannot resist, after a few seconds, cutting it loose again.

In my opinion therefore, a significant portion of the project of *Saving Grace* [play] was to interrogate various modes of language, asking whether and how, experiences of utmost value might be discussed in a post-structuralist environment in which all discourses, theoretically, have equally valid or invalid claims to truth and influence. On one hand Sarkies seems repelled by the unquestioned authority traditionally accorded to Christ, but also seems fascinated by the figure as an indication of the existence of a realm of spirituality, which might also be viewed as a realm in which genuine communication could be possible. In this manner my analysis of *Saving Grace* makes points similar to those of Heath's (1998) essay on *Breaking the Waves* (von Trier, 1996). Heath argues that the restless visual style of that film is an analogue of the text's restless, almost hysterical search for the existence of God - for something that cannot be located or represented. In such an effortful quest the appeal of the literal and the kitsch, polar opposites of the mystical and transcendent, is also always present as a seductive resting place. This is the controversial solution that von Trier availed himself of when he ended his film with a shot of bells pealing in Heaven - God finally shows his hand.

While, as we shall see, 'kitsch' solutions would characterize two of the three film versions of *Saving Grace*, in the original play Sarkies managed to avoid representing the unrepresentable by an assiduous refusal to construct a preferred reading for the text. For every step forward he took a step aside. Gerald's claims were never either proven or disproven, Grace's motivations and mental state were never made clear, and the text had two incompatible endings, with a final coda that scrupulously maintained ambiguity. In showing simultaneous scepticism about and fascination with, the idea of embodied divinity in a postmodern context, Sarkies was aided by the circumstances of low-budget theatre production, which, by necessitating the use of sparse means, suited his preference to play out the tension between belief and disbelief both within the mode of spoken language, and in a meta-commentary on language use. In the final stages of the play, with the inclusion of videotaped material, the problematization of language use did extend to visual language, but the weight of the theatre piece was nevertheless clearly placed on the dialogue.

The production team for the film devised visual equivalents for some of the ideas previously played out in language, such as the image of coins standing on edge, and the development of realistic sessions in the 'spacies' parlour. However, I contend, these changes provided so much new, non-verbal, information that the opportunity to interpret the film as, in part, a linguistic battle embodying a struggle between structuralist and post-structuralist views of language and belief, was diminished.

By contrast, in the film production environment the tensions about meaning were, as discussed in chapters 6 and 7, perceived not so much as a property of the whole text, and of a general approach to language, as an issue to be dealt with specifically in relation to the final section of the film. Increasing emphasis on the final minutes as securing the meaning of the text retrospectively went hand-in-hand with various attempts to influence the interpretation of the film in generic terms; that is, to debate whether it was a 'love story' or a 'story about madness' or a film about 'religious or spiritual issues'. This gradual narrowing of focus to issues of genre imbricated with the difficulties of the third-act resolution was, moreover, as much commercially as aesthetically motivated. It was ultimately an outcome of the desire to present information about the film in a manner that could connect with sub-markets within a mainstream audience.

When the first version of the film-ending was not as successful with a test-screening audience as the production team anticipated, it was re-shot and re-edited. Due to a second negative response from the Spanish festival audience, a further re-editing of existing footage was undertaken to produce a third and final ending. The first of these changes occurred just as my planned interview schedule drew to a close, while the final ending was added several months later. Because of continued contact with the film's director, I have informal accounts of the ongoing process of modifying the text which were outlined in the previous chapter, but here I wish to analyze the endings themselves, as examples of three different ways of conceptualizing religion and spirituality in a contemporary context. They represent a series of distinctive choices made in drawing from a resource-base of discursive elements, all of which can be employed in, although their use is not restricted to, the representation and discussion of religious issues. The three different endings can be seen to employ different modes, for instance drama or comedy, to feature different levels of ambiguity and explicitness, and retrospectively, to configure the text into alternatively, the different narrative formats of myth and parable as discussed in chapter 3. The content of the endings will be summarized but the full text of each ending can be viewed in Appendix B.

First version of film ending

In the first version Grace is alone in a dimly-lit cell. The videotape played in the previous sequence has shown us that she has murdered Gerald, so we therefore assume she is either in prison, or in an institution for the mentally ill. Suddenly, Gerald appears behind her dressed in white and red robes identifying him as the Christ of Catholic iconography. His manner is lofty and

serene, while Grace, unsurprised to see him, is simultaneously resigned and angry. The two exchange ritualistic phrases in an attempt to understand the meaning of what they have undergone. She accuses him of betraying her trust and raping her, he apologizes and offers her his love. She rejects it but he tells her she has no choice. Accepting the situation, Grace asks what happens next and says she is frightened. Gerald tells her she is not alone and she sinks to her knees and embraces him.

As experienced at the test-screening in April 1997 this ending was effective dramatically: the combination of performance, direction and dialogue had an emotional intensity and dignity that produced a strong sense of closure, even in the face of the epistemological instability of the preceding scene with its double view of 'reality'. However, Grace's capitulation to Gerald's viewpoint, a capitulation played out in gesture, as much as dialogue, was, as previously noted, not allowed to stand. The reasons for this decision are not hard to find since the ending offered a construction of religion inimical to the majority of the production team, and to many of the test-screening audience, on a number of counts.

In effect, this version drew upon discourses associated with the characteristics of a religion of difference, a model of religion to which, according to their statements in chapters 6 and 7, few of the production team members subscribed, and which is of minority interest only in the general population. I have noted above that, by increasing the number of scenes and events linked to a 'high' Christology model and by representing miraculous events naturalistically, the filmic text had moved in this direction of supporting a traditional model of Christianity anyway. However this particular ending gave additional weight to a preferred reading that was almost unambiguous in suggesting that Gerald was an avatar of Christ after all.

For instance, by causing Gerald/Christ to appear in Grace's cell in circumstances which reference Christ's resurrection, an aspect of the religions of difference discourse: that the source of divinity is transcendent to both the natural world and the world of human culture, is supported. So too is the religions of difference proposition that, transcendental powers, either benign or malignant, may choose to intervene in worldly matters. When Gerald/Christ then acts with firm authority to reassure Grace, he is acting in accordance with the religions of difference discursive formation that authority is therefore more properly the preserve of an institution or tradition than the individual.

Throughout *Saving Grace* reference to the institutions of Christianity has been light-handed, a situation facilitated by the fact that authority has been contested between Gerald and Grace so that neither has dominated. However, in the final scene Gerald is portrayed as incandescent with authority encoded in the norms of traditional Christianity. In this mode he serves as a mediator between heaven and earth, between divinity (albeit the self-serving, manipulative divinity previously discussed) and the flawed human being - Grace. This construction, the necessity of using a mediating object or practice to approach the divine, is also a discourse typical of those associated with a religion of difference.

By contrast however this final scene of *Saving Grace* has little to say on another religions of difference proposition: that 'the world would be a better place if fundamental religious values were reasserted in the civil/political sphere'. However, it does trigger the final proposition in the discourse of religions of difference, that the maintenance of correctly structured relationships - for example between the human and the divine (and) between men and women - is important to preserving the validity of a religious tradition. The appearance of this construction is significant because, with its implication of the subservience of the second term in the binary, it is at odds with contemporary liberal ideas about correct relationships between men and women. In the analysis of the interview data in chapters 6 and 7 it has been suggested that Kirsty Hamilton considered a feminist stance of self-determination central to her interpretation of her role as Grace, while Botes and Sarkies were also aware of re-shaping the text in pre-production to facilitate such an interpretation. We have seen that Hamilton's experience in performance of slipping into the divine/human, male/female structuring associated with a traditional Christian religion of difference was, on reflection, anathema to her. Additionally, it has been noted that her consequent performance of a ritual of submission was unexpected and unappealing for a significant proportion of the test-audience. Feminist understandings, although not universally accepted throughout society, constitute a type of discursive formation that pervades many different cultural arenas, especially predominantly secular environments. For such a formation to be swept aside in a text about religious matters, so that the heroine ends up embracing Christ, one of the most resonant symbols of male authority, is a strong cue the model of religion being explored is neither up-to-date nor in the liberal mainstream.

To put it another way, this version of the ending produced a preferred reading for the text which supported a 'structuralist' model of language and meaning after all. In this final sequence Grace and Gerald are using language as if it were possible for it to mean something they could both

agree on - they are using it in a forensic sense, in a search for truth - at the same time as their phrases lie alongside one another in a laconic ritual of complaint and submission. In this interpretation, because Gerald/Christ has the final words: 'I'm here', to which Grace can respond only with a gesture of adoration, Christ is still the reference point of the chain of difference that institutes meaning.

Or, to use a third framework of interpretation, this version of the ending marks the text as, in the final analysis, *mythological* in structure and nature, since the contradictions of the text are resolved through the actions, and in the person of, a single figure who represents the simultaneous synthesis and transcendence of the opposing terms of the textual problematic.

At a simpler level the interview data has shown that before filming, most of the production team expressed opinions about traditional, institutional Christianity that were critical of those aspects of it linked with the model of a religion of difference. While the make-up of their individual stances varied (for instance Sarkies and Moriarty occasionally showed some fascination with the power of the exalted position accorded to Christ and Moriarty took steps to ensure that his performance of the role was a 'Christ-like' as possible), they were unanimous in a dislike of institutional Christianity because of its perceived propensity for coercing belief and submission. Paradoxically, to hold such a critical view is not considered dissonant with the wider trend of respecting 'difference' (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000) because to be critical of a religion of difference form of Christianity, is part of a discursive complex associated with tolerance in regard to other systems of belief. However, as the result of a complex articulation of circumstances and influences unfolding over time, an ending that seemed to endorse a religion of difference was precisely what the team had inadvertently produced.

Obviously, they were disappointed when the test-audience and the peer and industry feedback made this clear to them. Moreover they were concerned that an ending originally conceived of as ironic and ambiguous, perhaps even controversially anti-Christian, but now evaluated as effectively pro-Christian, would not please the largely secular audiences they hoped to attract.

Development of second ending

In trying to forestall negative responses on *Saving Grace*'s public release, it was decided to replace the first ending of the film. While input into the first ending had come only from members of the production team this time the consultation was wider. Sarkies and Botes formed the core of

the team supervising the re-write, but Russell Campbell, and Botes' friends and colleagues, Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh, also provided advice. Botes described the principles guiding the formation of the second ending as being: to focus the ending back on Grace, to provide an 'uplifting' ending by emphasizing her achievement of a new sense of self-respect, and to 'inject some humour into the finish' so the film would not seem so 'dark' (21/5/97). Whereas Grace's submission to Gerald/Christ had been one of the perceived problems with the first ending, it was agreed this time that no reconciliation between the pair was possible. Instead, the mythical template animating Grace's actions would be that of Judas, the apostle who betrayed Christ. The intention was that this revision would allow a re-interpretation of the whole text as 'very pointedly anti-God'.

The second version of the ending, while still framed by Grace's incarceration in a cell, relocates her posthumous confrontation with Gerald to a graveyard. Gerald, resurrected, but this time dressed in casual clothes, is sitting on a tombstone reading aloud from a Japanese newspaper. A comic discussion ensues between Grace and Gerald on the unsatisfactory nature of the press coverage of his crucifixion, where vegetable prices rate higher than the death of someone claiming to be Christ. However Grace breaks the mood by accusing Gerald of duping and abusing her. He replies by saying part of his (divine) job description is to help everybody not just her. His unctuousness infuriates her and she tells him the world 'doesn't give a fuck' about his claims to be Jesus Christ. He has encouraged her to respect herself, she says, and she can no longer do that and forgive him. She walks away from him and back into the present-day world of her cell, which is now looking much brighter.

There are, in my opinion, at least two ways to interpret this second ending done in the mode of 'black' or sardonic, comedy: as a secular interpretation, and as a reflection on the commodification of religion. Certainly the scene does not take Gerald's claim to be Christ very seriously. The language of religion is turned aside in favour of other, less pretentious vocabularies. For instance, the notion of being a 'saviour', translated into business discourse, is re-stated as having a job description that entails making everyone happy. Gerald has to fight to keep some special meaning for the word 'crucifixion' above and beyond the tabloid classifications of crime and accident. Grace's speech is less respectful and more aggressive here too - the power of her scorn reduces Gerald to placatory fragments of talk. He is eventually dismissed: just another, deeply flawed, human being: not a god this time but an egotistical man lambasted by a woman who refuses to be victimized.

At the least, such an ending should maintain or increase the sense of ambiguity about Gerald's identity because his claims to be Christ are no longer supported by Grace, either in words or in body-language. Nor is the religious potential of the scene strengthened by a perceptible realisation of Botes' statement that Grace symbolizes Judas. On the face of it therefore, discourses of religion do not seem crucial to this ending, which is worked out rather in terms of secular discourses grounded in notions of moral fairness and psychological fitness, of an understanding of the equal worth of persons, and of the conventions of media coverage. There may be a sense in which the ending might be called 'spiritual' if spirituality is defined in terms of psychological self-reliance and a turning towards increasing self-awareness, but it is also possible, and perhaps more likely, to interpret this scene from a standpoint that does not privilege religious or spiritual discourses at all.

However, there is at least another interpretation that can be made of this ending in the light of its choice to explore ideas about the media. The route that this version of *Saving Grace* took around the problem of divinity and contemporary culture is one also employed by at least two other recent films of which I am aware which take a comic view of a similar subject. *Holy Man* (Herek, 1998) and *Touch* (Schrader, 1997), both feature gentle male protagonists with supernatural powers who come under intense scrutiny from the media. In *Holy Man*, 'G', a pilgrim in Eastern dress found prostrating down the median strip of a Los Angeles motorway, turns out to have a loving rapport with everyone he meets - a talent that is put to use by broadcasters to boost sales at a local tele-marketing channel. 'G' becomes a media phenomenon, but exhausts his energies, and is eventually set free by the media executives who have been exploiting him. The talent possessed by Juvenal, the ex-monk who is the hero of *Touch*, is more classically religious in nature: he bleeds from stigmata and can heal those upon whom he lays hands. Juvenal's abilities attract the attention of a number of people wishing to benefit from them, including a woman who falls in love with him and a shyster-evangelist who schemes to get Juvenal on to a live television talk-show. For a while it seems as if *Touch* will follow the same dark trajectory as *Saving Grace*, but the film, based on a novel by Elmore Leonard and directed by Paul Schrader, concocts a slyly subversive ending in which Juvenal appears on the talk show without compromising his integrity, gets the girl, goes nowhere near a site of crucifixion and drives off into the sunset.

The relevance of these comedies is that they explore overtly religious and spiritual issues in contemporary settings, using figures that bear some resemblance to Christ, without endorsing models of religions of difference. Instead they foreground another of the over-arching trends of late modernity, one that cuts across discursive boundaries: the commodification of religious and

spiritual ideas and products, as a result, in the West, of the rise of market economics (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000: 171-175). This trend, dialectical in operation, involves ‘spiritualizing’ commodities by implying that possessing them can bring contentment (which is what ‘G’ does in his infomercial sessions). In return ‘the spiritual’ itself is commodified by presenting it as something that can be purchased and controlled. For instance, in *Touch* the plot revolves around the issue of whether the healing power of the blood from Juvenal’s stigmata can be produced on demand and therefore is available to be bought and sold.

For the most part *Holy Man*, *Touch*, and *Saving Grace* probe the intensification of this commercial dynamic rather than condemning it. However, the question of whether there are, or ought to be, limits to this process is posed in all three films. For instance it is the commodification of his miraculous powers that Gerald resists after Grace agrees to recognize him as a reincarnation of Christ. And, Coincidentally, both *Touch* and *Saving Grace* employ the same biblical text concerning the difficulty of interpreting ‘the signs of the times’ (Matthew 12 v.39), to highlight moments when the pressures of exploitation are becoming particularly acute. This is Gerald’s use of the text:

GERALD: A wicked and adulterous generation looks
 for a miraculous sign, but none will be given
 it but the sign of Jonah,
 (*pause*)
 You want a miracle Grace? ...
 Go see a fucking magic show!
 (1996:65 [filmscript])

In employing this Biblical reference there is a comparison implied between some idealised past in which religious understanding and social behaviour were consistent with one another, and the present environment in which the compartmentalisation of aspects of economic, social and spiritual life leads to the possibility both of boundary transgressions between realms and to the etiolation of discursive formations within particular realms. By dramatising an extreme case in which something previously held sacred (an individual with divine powers) is shown reduced to the level of other commodities, these texts provide a criticism, albeit good-humoured, of contemporary society from a liberal, moral perspective, rather than from an explicitly religious standpoint.

There is also a further sense of commodification at issue in these films: the commodification of personality and charisma, with the media being the means by which this commodification is

effected. Again, there are two ways of looking at this. The first, the assumption on which Gerald is operating in his monologue above, is that the media are the public space of prime importance in the contemporary world, and that one must attract media attention in the hope of gaining a following for any cause. This injunction applies to any public activity, not just to a person wanting to start or revive a religion, but many contemporary film-makers seem intrigued by the question of how someone like Christ, someone 'genuinely' good, would fare when confronted by today's media environment, in which neither genuineness or goodness are reliably media-worthy commodities. This first approach views the media as gatekeepers to the public sphere.

The second approach is to adopt the terms of Frow's (1998) essay on celebrity entitled, *Is Elvis a God?* which argues that some public figures, especially popular entertainers who die prematurely, are indeed credited with the status of 'demi-god' in that a mental and emotional conception of them functions as a mediation between the profane world and its transcendental 'other'. For Frow it is not however the actual physical presence (or absence) of the person that functions in this manner, since these people have been already separated from themselves during their lifetime by virtue of existing in mediated representation and re-representation. That is, they have been recorded, photographed, filmed and written about so often that a complex simulation of them lives outside ordinary time anyway - this process is merely laid bare by their personal death:

The star belongs to a domain constructed by recording and the modes of repetition specific to it which exists outside or beyond ordinary life, profane time: this is the basis for the promise that, in identifying with the star, we too will overcome death (1998:206).

In *Saving Grace* too the exploration of the possible hybridity of the human and divine is accompanied by a narrative about the mediatization process Frow describes. Grace encourages Gerald to go on talkback radio, they set up a website together and Grace shoots a promotional video introducing Gerald in the role of Christ. Within that framework then, the ending above can be read as an extension of that strand of logic within the screenplay; a gathering together and revision of discourses about media representation and celebrity, seen in the light of the supposition that Gerald wishes to participate in the process of becoming a 'star'.

While not necessarily as thoroughly 'anti-religious' as it first seemed then, this ending cannot nevertheless be readily categorized in terms of Woodhead and Heelas's model of religious and spiritual organisation. By placing Grace and Gerald on an equal footing the ending does seem to reflect the religion of humanity proposition that human reason is a powerful tool for understanding

the nature of existence and that authority is therefore shared between the human and the divine. With its emphasis on the psychologically inflected project of developing Grace's self-esteem it also draws on a concept particularly active in models of spiritualities of life. However these references on their own are insufficient evidence for categorization, especially since the serious tone in which they are made is tempered by the parodic treatment of Gerald's obsession with his own reputation.

Perhaps the relevant articulation here is not so much with a model of religious or spiritual organisation *per se*, as with a broader, functional explanatory framework. Both the interpretive approaches above have commonalities with Hoover and Venturelli's (1996) argument that the media form the pre-eminent sacred space in contemporary cultures, even if producers and consumers of media are not always explicitly aware that they can fulfill such a function. For instance, during the production research, interviewees sometimes suggested that thought about religious and spiritual matters can be affected by media representation. Furthermore, some of Sarkies' more philosophical statements about his artistic strategies can be construed as positing an ethical dimension to the relationship between author, style and audience. However, none of the other interviewees offered a discourse of the media as spiritually important in themselves; their interest was in the type of content carried by the media or the imagined reactions of audiences rather than in the functions that mediated communication itself might perform. Even when Botes outlined the second ending the role of the media was not something he chose to talk about despite its forming an important aspect of the manifest content of the scene he had just shot.

However there seems to have been a taken-for-granted understanding demonstrated in *Saving Grace*, that any successful attempt to establish a new religion would rely on access to the media. An understanding of the media's central importance to the commodified forms of religiosity that characterize late modernity however, seems to remain at a level where its presence in discourses of popular culture is implicit, incipient or marginal, rather than explicit or well understood. That is particularly so in contrast to the explicitness of statements from the interviewees about the differences between institutional religiosity and personal spirituality - that distinction seems already well-embedded in this particular context of cultural production.

Third version of film ending

While the second ending may have been a creative attempt to locate the conundrum of apparent divinity within the context of a secular, psychologized and mediatized culture, it also however did

not meet with the favour of the audiences it encountered. Consequently Botes and Parr changed the ending again, although this time they worked with more modest resources, re-editing existing footage.

By this time the circle of influence surrounding the production had shrunk back down to Parr and Botes, with input from Horton and Sarkies. According to Parr, he had argued the film should simply conclude after the scene in the police station where the video providing the alternative record of events was played. The film would thus end with a 'twist' and a 'bang': the audience would understand that Grace was crazy and that therefore many of the claims and apparent events in the film had been merely the product of her [dis]ordered mind (18/11/97). Botes disagreed with this proposal however because he was not prepared to 'throw his character to the wolves', and the ending therefore represents his judgment of an appropriate conclusion for the film.

In this final version Grace is still in a cell, morose, refusing to eat. Gerald again appears but only as an indistinct figure viewed through the lens of memory. He and Grace are dancing and laughing while the discussion between them is brief and conducted solely on the sound track. Gerald says he is 'here ... all around', Grace asks if he thinks she's crazy, and he answers, echoing one of Sarkies' interpretations of a key theme of the play: 'No one's crazy, no one's sane either, we're all just somewhere in between'. When Gerald disappears Grace climbs up to look out of her cell-window, through which light is pouring. She seems optimistic as a track by the New Zealand singer/composer, Dave Dobbyn entitled *Language* (bemoaning the difficulty of the attempt to communicate with others), plays over the credits.

In this version Gerald no longer stands outside Grace either as combatant or saviour. Instead his influence is depicted as having been assimilated by Grace, so that she can call on, and dismiss, his presence at will. There is still an image of transcendental power in the form of the close-up of an eye, but again, this image appears to be under Grace's control - and, may also be interpreted as a representation of her own 'mind's eye'. Grace appears no longer to need an external relationship with Gerald in which he is master and she is acolyte. She does seek his reassurance on the state of her mind but his reply has a humanist rather than a godly tone to it. Having thus reframed 'Gerald-ness' (or 'Christ-ness') as a quality she herself possesses, Grace is free to choose what she does next, even within the constraints of physical imprisonment. What she does is begin to notice both the 'light' coming from the window in her cell, and the lightness of mood that is possible when

she decides to communicate with the warder, demonstrating, through the choice of one food commodity over another, that her desire for life is active again.

In this configuration of images, sounds and ideas then, the idea of 'the religious' in the sense of a religion of difference or even of a religion of humanity in which human and divine are equal, has been nearly evacuated from the text. The gendered connotations of heavenly authority associated with Christ are also set aside in favour of a formation that establishes Grace as mistress of her own destiny. The register of the psychological is again employed, as it has been in all three versions, but this time the ambiguous problematic of 'crazy/not crazy' is dissolved in a positive discourse of psychological growth through increasing self-awareness.

By presenting information in this manner this final version of *Saving Grace* is unequivocally allying itself with constructions associated with a spirituality of life discourse. That is, by placing Gerald within the purview of Grace's imagination, the scene is suggesting that divinity and authority are to be found within human beings, or 'the self', thus implying that the divine, the human and the natural are one and the same. By dramatizing mental events in which Grace undergoes an important life transformation - from misery and guilt to hope - by reflecting on her own experience, the text also makes itself available to readings in the light of the psychological focus of the 'self'-spirituality model. That is, it explores the proposition that there may be an internal disjunction between the 'higher' (divine) aspects of the human self and the 'lower' (enculturated and conventional) aspects of the self, a disjunction that may be healed by employing various technologies of self-improvement.

As was the case with the first ending, this version does not draw on all the discursive resources of the relevant model of religiosity. Except for the fact that Gerald, no matter how attenuated his presence on this occasion, is still ethnically Maori, the scene does not for instance reference the nostalgic proposition that non-European pre-modern cultures are more 'spiritual' than contemporary Western cultures. Nor does it explore possible links between spirituality and politics, or make much play on the idea of 'difference' as a spiritual resource. It does however, by virtue of subsuming Gerald's presence to Grace's individual interest, support the proposition that religion is linked with male authority and that spirituality is more in touch with the feminine - a proposition that, from the evidence of the media images provided in chapter 2 - seems to have some support in other New Zealand cultural production. So, additively, there are sufficient links with the spiritualities of life model, I contend, for this ending of the film, considered on its own

merits, to advance the metadiscourse that characterizes this model, which is that ‘being religious’ is undesirable (old-fashioned, illogical, representing submission to authority) whereas ‘being spiritual’ connotes a sensitive appreciation of life and one's place in it. By being formed in this way, the text was now, finally, encoded in a manner which accurately reflected the religio/spiritual positioning of the majority of people involved in its making.

However since this chapter has looked specifically at possible interpretations of the three different endings the question needs to be asked - if the ‘right’ ending for the team had finally been constructed, was the film more successful in connecting an audience? On the evidence of its box-office takings (Dixon, 2001) - the answer is no. The most straightforward reasons for this are logistical. First, the ending didn't have a chance to resonate with many people because hardly anyone got to see it - it had a limited number of screenings in just two cities. The reasons for its failure to be more widely available have already been canvassed in chapter 7 and seem to involve a complex of reasons dispersed across the complete context and process of production and distribution. In the end the failure cannot be attributed to the construction of a single scene, even if some of the team had come to see changing that scene as essential. Secondly, the interpretations and evaluations of the few hundred people who did see the film on those occasions were not studied - there was no audience research, in the conventional sense of studying the reactions of paying customers for the film, conducted by me, or anyone else. The reviews gathered give just a glimpse of the reactions to the film when it did go public but they are no substitute for an extended engagement with the responses of actual viewers: the text may conceivably have been experienced by some of them as valuable, as the challenging and relevant film Sarkies and Botes set out to make. I will now turn to the second case-study project - *The Chosen* - a programme which was not at all burdened by the need to be ‘challenging’.

CHAPTER NINE: CASE STUDY TWO – Pre-production of *The Chosen*

Introduction

This chapter introduces the second of the two case studies, the production of a television mini-series entitled *The Chosen*, made in New Zealand during the summer of 1997-1998. The programme took the form of two two-hour episodes, which were broadcast on TV2, the second of two state-owned television channels, on the evenings of 23rd and 24th August, 1998.

As with the analysis of *Saving Grace*, the purpose of this case-study is to produce a map of the discourses of religion and spirituality surrounding the production of this programme. This chapter, the first of two on *The Chosen*, explores the forces active during the period of pre-production. Specifically, it looks at the manner of the programme's commissioning - in particular the generic and audience-targeting constraints introduced at that time - and, as with *Saving Grace*, at the personal positionings and constructions of preferred meaning offered by the key production personnel involved in developing it.

Similarities and contrasts with *Saving Grace*

This second case study is offered as a comparison to the data obtained about *Saving Grace*. There is a pair of strong similarities between the two projects. Like *Saving Grace*, *The Chosen* makes explicit reference to religious themes and characters; in fact the emphasis is even more pronounced in *The Chosen* since the two main male characters are a Catholic priest and the leader of a hedonistic cult. Yet, like *Saving Grace* this 'religious' material (setting aside for now the question of whether or not a pro-religious stance is actually a preferred reading of the text), was shaped by a production team the majority of whom stated they were secular in orientation, and none of whom claimed to be Christian.

Nevertheless, although both projects were produced within the same broad cultural and economic context over a similar time period, there are significant differences in the mode of their making, and particularly, in the manner in which the workers on the project perceived the purpose and nature of what they were doing. For instance: unlike *Saving Grace*, *The Chosen* was made by a highly experienced group of programme-makers and actors and was written specifically for the medium on which it would screen: television. The team making *Saving Grace* took seven weeks

to film 90 minutes of on-screen material, but the crew making *The Chosen* had to produce twice the amount of on-air material in the same time. While, as we have seen, at least some of the production team of *Saving Grace* thought they were producing a film for an ‘art-house’ audience, the team behind *The Chosen* had a common understanding that they were making a programme specifically targeted at a ‘blue collar’ audience with an age demographic of 18-39 years.

Saving Grace was made under the oversight of, and with, 100 percent funding from, the New Zealand Film Commission, while *The Chosen* was a joint venture between the state television funding agency, New Zealand on Air, the private production company Communicado, and the broadcaster, Television New Zealand, with additional funding from an Australian distribution company³².

In other words, while *Saving Grace* was perceived by those making it as primarily an artistic project, which would prove its quality through being successful in finding an audience, *The Chosen* was designed right from the start as a televisual entertainment product, intended to gain the maximum audience within a tightly specified semi-commercial context. There are thus useful comparisons to be made in terms of intention, production regimes, and mode of address to intended audiences. Whether these different production paradigms are associated with different constructions of religion and spirituality around these two productions is something these chapters will explore.

The context of New Zealand television production in the late 1990s

By the time *The Chosen* project was mooted New Zealand television was seven years into a market-led broadcasting regime that has been described by industry sources and local commentators as ‘the most deregulated in the world’ (SPADA, 1996, cited in Lealand, 2000), ‘totally commercial’ (Easton 1997), and as particularly ‘tough-minded, commercial, competitive’ (Horrocks, 1996). This régime was instituted in 1988/1989 when a Labour government replaced the existing Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand with two State Owned Enterprises: Radio New Zealand Limited and Television New Zealand Limited. Both were ‘commercial’ since they were required to return a profit to the government by pursuing overseas sales for New Zealand-made product as well as raising revenue at home. The two state-owned television channels TV

³² The Australian distribution company was called *Beyond Distribution*. Due to commercial confidentiality clauses I was unable to ascertain both how much money they contributed and what conditions they put on the production.

ONE and Channel 2 were also 'commercial' in a second sense in that they both exhibited, and were partly funded by, seven-day-a-week on-air advertising. In addition to the two state-owned channels, private broadcasters, including the Canadian Canwest company and the Australian-owned Prime Television ran the channels TV3, TV4 and Prime Television, in competition with TV ONE and Channel 2 (Lealand, 2000).

Although the two standards outlined above - the necessity to make a profit and the presence of on-air advertising - identified the system as commercial, the government did retain support for the notion of public service broadcasting by distributing revenue collected from a public broadcasting fee. This money, marked for funding local production, was administered by the Broadcasting Commission, also known as New Zealand On Air, established in 1989. The enabling legislation required NZOA to: 'reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture' including 'promoting Maori language and culture', and to ensure that 'a range of broadcasts is available to provide for the interests of Women, Youth, Children, Persons with disabilities; and Minorities in the Community including ethnic minorities'. Finally, section 36 (d) of the legislation charges NZOA with encouraging 'a range of broadcasts that reflects the diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders' (NZOA, 2002).

New Zealand on Air typically supports programming too costly to guarantee cost-recovery through local and overseas sales. It is therefore not in itself a commercial entity, but interacts with the television networks, who are charged with making a commercial rate of return and who are reluctant to transmit programming that is unattractive to advertisers in prime-time. The funding and broadcasting system is therefore a hybrid of commercial and public service motivations, although the emphasis on attracting mass audiences has fostered a commercial, ratings-driven culture that permeates the talk of all involved with this production, including the staff of NZOA.

Outline of *The Chosen*

The Chosen is spoken of by those associated with it as a thriller hybridized with romantic drama. It is set in a fictional farming community in northern New Zealand, which in the previous century had played host to and then burned to death, the leader of an unorthodox religious group. Now, a hundred years later, his great-great grandson, Peter McAllister, also a preacher, has returned for revenge. In the meantime the town's handsome young Catholic priest, Father Albert Tahere, finds the mutual attraction between himself and a beautiful 19-year old girl Sarah Gordon, a challenge to his vow of celibacy - a challenge which he is determined to resist. When he turns her down in



Figure 5: Sarah Gordon, her mother and Father Albert Tahere from *The Chosen*



Figure 6: Sarah and Peter MacAllister in cult wedding ceremony

the first half hour of the programme, Sarah berates Tahere for his hypocrisy in not acting on his feelings for her.

With rapidity the cult's philosophies of complete self-acceptance and drug-assisted worship attract many young people from the town, while McAllister works to make himself indispensable to the local economy. A series of apparently inexplicable and grisly events takes place which expose hidden tensions in the town. Included amongst them are a hit-and-run murder, revelations of incest and alcoholism, two suicides, and two rapes, one of them a homosexual rape. As it becomes increasingly clear that misfortune befalls all those who stand in the way of McAllister's plans the town's crimewave expands to include arson, crop and cattle poisoning and two more murders. Nevertheless, despite Tahere's protests, Sarah is attracted by McAllister's seductive charisma and joins the cult.

In response Tahere abducts Sarah, taking her to a cabin in the woods where they engage in a debate about the doctrine of original sin and the consequent guilt with which the church burdens its members. Tahere's memory of the past begins to sharpen and in a climactic speech confesses to Sarah that he has taken refuge with the church in an attempt to hide from his own guilt about the suicide of his young, pregnant lover many years before. Tahere and Sarah have sex.

McAllister's minions recapture Sarah, shooting and wounding Tahere in the process. McAllister, by this stage obviously mentally unhinged, begins preparations for his wedding to Sarah which is to take place in the complex of rooms underneath the cult headquarters. Fuelled by both righteous indignation and love, Tahere, with the help of Sarah's mother, storms the compound. The cult members respond with an orgy of self-destruction, which culminates in Sarah being hoisted onto a cross for burning. Tahere kills McAllister and rescues Sarah.

On sober reflection, Tahere finds that he can no longer remain with the church. He chooses a life with Sarah and they leave town together.

***The Chosen* as melodrama**

In my judgment one of the most distinctive things about *The Chosen* is that it is a melodrama, in the old-fashioned sense of postulating extremes of purity and villainy, and in moving the plotline through a series of extreme and shocking obstacles. Smith provides a concise definition of

melodrama as ‘a dramatic piece characterized by sensational incident and violent appeals to the emotions, but with a happy ending’ (1973:5) to which he later adds that the term may be applied to any entertainment ‘dealing in vulgar extravagance, implausible motivation, meretricious sensation and spurious pathos’ (1973: 7) (see also Brooks, 1976; Schatz, 1981; Byars, 1991; Bratton et al, 1994; Klinger, 1994). If this definition of melodrama is adopted then the genre is defined in opposition to realism, as one of stereotyping, of exaggerated conflict, and of overblown staging. As a means of treating content concerned with religion it is therefore *prima facie* incompatible with Schrader’s injunction that a film which wants to ‘approach the transcendent’ should be restrained and austere (1972). The implications of taking a melodramatic approach to content which features religious characters and ideas is therefore significant, an issue that will be discussed further in the next chapter. In the meantime it is necessary to remember that the categorization of ‘melodrama’ is nowadays primarily a scholarly term and that, with the exception of Chris Hampson, the other production personnel preferred to use other genre descriptions such as ‘thriller’.

A fit subject for study?

I began researching this project unsure whether it would yield much usable data, since the initial interviewees were adamant *The Chosen* had little religious or spiritual significance. For instance, during an initial telephone interview with the producer Chris Hampson, he told me:

It’s designed as a commercially viable bit of television. It’s not a piece of art-house material, it’s aimed at a specific demographic audience on a particular channel (.) a slick and sleazy bit of TV. It is exploitative in that respect [...] it’s deliberately using those spiritual elements to hook the audience. It is not an investigation of spirituality. (26/11/97)

The ‘spiritual elements’ Hampson referred to were the status of the two main male characters as representatives of rival religious organisations - known to the production team as ‘the [Catholic] church’ and ‘the cult’ - and the struggle the Catholic priest has in trying to reconcile priestly discipline with his attraction to a young townswoman. At this stage Hampson expressed certainty that these elements of the plot were so thoroughly subordinate to the status of the mini-series as a commercial project that an academic researcher would not be able to separate them out in order to study them. He also aligned the (academic) ‘investigative’ treatment of a subject with ‘art-house’ cinema as a proper object of study, opposing that to a common-sense discourse of television as essentially populist, and therefore less suitable as a research object. Hampson’s statement here suggests a generalized disdain for the activity of making television programmes, while the

repeated characterization of the programme and the situation as ‘it’ also suggests he wishes to maintain a distance between himself, his own tastes, and the project on which he was working.

The writer who originated the project, Gavin Strawhan, was more comfortable asserting a personal connection with the work, but also positioned himself as subordinate to impersonal institutional processes, in that he was already wistful about lost opportunities in relation to the project. He said it had been his intention for the series to present a positive expression of spirituality, which would have been located in the cult, the eponymous ‘Chosen’. However, he claimed the normalising pressures of the television commissioning system had already compromised the distinctiveness of the presentation, since a ‘good’ cult group was not acceptable to the broadcaster and its advisors. Like Hampson, he now felt there was ‘not much point in discussing spirituality in relation to the project’ since it was the issue of whether ‘the story’ would work (to please an audience) that had been prioritized by the executive producers and commissioning broadcaster (26/11/97).

The development phase of *The Chosen*

Information about the development of *The Chosen* was provided primarily by Strawhan, and Maxine Fleming, the other writer responsible for the bulk of the writing for the mini-series.

Gavin Strawhan: Professional background and the development of *The Chosen*

By the late 1990s Gavin Strawhan had been a practitioner of New Zealand television drama for more than a decade. Born in Australia, he worked there as a playwright for several years, before becoming involved with the long running serial *Neighbours* (Grundy, 1985-) as a writer and script editor. In 1991 Strawhan was invited to New Zealand to help set up TV2’s then-new venture into soap opera, the medical series *Shortland Street* (Grundy, 1992-), where he was first script supervisor, and later producer, of the series. By 1996 however, Strawhan was engaged in a period of freelance work, when he was asked by the private production company Communicado to set up some television drama projects. Until that point Communicado had been successful in the areas of non-fiction ‘reality’ television and in producing two feature films (*Once Were Warriors*, Tamahori, 1994; *Broken English*, Nicholas, 1996), but had little presence in television drama.

Communicado in turn, was responding to an invitation by Mike Lattin (from 1994 to 1997 Head of Television at Television New Zealand) to provide ideas for increasing local drama content.

According to Strawhan, Lattin himself proposed the mini-series format since he saw it as a means of increasing the hours of local drama content without committing to the financial cost of a long-running series. Strawhan was therefore requested, in consultation with Robin Scholes and Chris Bailey, development executives for Communicado, to develop a couple of concepts; ‘one of which would be a thriller and one of which would be more relationship-based’ (3/12/97). The idea for *The Chosen* fell into the thriller category. It is thus possible to see that format, the containment of cost, and the use of a defined genre provided the guiding principles for the development of the programme, so that right from the beginning, specific content was secondary to more general parameters. In this regard the genesis of *The Chosen* was different to that of *Saving Grace* which had existed as a text before it entered the audio-visual production arena - although containment of cost was a feature of both projects.

A ‘treatment’ for the project was then developed: a detailed outline of concept, characters and story events that could be used as a basis for seeking production funding. This treatment was largely Strawhan’s work but he asked former *Shortland Street* scriptwriter and storyliner, Maxine Fleming, to join him in developing the first draft. By the time my research began they had been working together for six months.

Gavin Strawhan and Maxine Fleming: religio/spiritual positioning

Gavin Strawhan

It was difficult to ascertain what Strawhan considered his own religio/spiritual positioning to be. When, following up on some contextual clues, I asked if he was a Catholic he replied, ‘No, but I’ve slept with a lot of them’, thus diverting the conversation into an implied assessment of his sexual prowess. Later, he recounted a family story indicating that at the age of 10 he intended to be a priest and used to read ‘the *Bible* and Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* hand-in-hand’, an anecdote which is perhaps an assertion of intellectual ability as much as of incipient piety. There was a sense of direct communication however about his account of a formative experience at secondary school; an experience of disillusionment with religious education practices which he shared with Fleming, and Hampson. Since they were interviewed together Fleming and Strawhan’s answers are often a joint construction.

STRAWHAN: [...] I enrolled in Catholic religious instruction, and they kicked me out (.) for asking questions.

FLEMING: Yes, well that's what happened to me when I was 12 you see. I started getting hassled for asking questions (.) for questioning.

STRAWHAN: I wanted to know the proof of God (.) and instead of bothering to explain it to me they kicked me out.

FLEMING: Told you not to be insolent?

STRAWHAN: Yes.

[...]

HARDY: So what are you now?

STRAWHAN: I'm a devout atheist

(3/12/97)

Despite his stated atheism Strawhan claimed that the idea for *The Chosen* came from a long-time interest in cults and spirituality. He rationalized this interest not by claiming to be 'spiritual' (rather than religious) but by drawing on a discursive paradigm that both emphasized the status of religious groups as entities within a wider cultural formation, and offered a picture of himself as a seeker after 'truth':

I'm (.) an anthropologist really [...] I will read books like (.) like I say Carrie Armstrong's History of God or [...] lectures about spirituality [...] and I will debate at great length with friends of mine who are either witches or (.) whatever and (.) about spirituality and what makes us human. [...] I don't seem to have a personal belief, I would actually (.) if I write a character I could write a deeply religious character with as much conviction as I can write an atheist (.) I understand both of them. (3/12/97)

On the evidence of these and other statements made during the interview Strawhan's speech falls outside the categories of religiosity enumerated in chapter 5. That is, the discourses on which he draws do not seem to come from the models of religions of difference, religions of humanity, or even spiritualities of life, since he exhibits no personal adherence to any cluster of beliefs. In terms of Woodhead and Heelas' model of religiosity, he certainly exhibits the late modern tendency towards tolerance of the religious beliefs of others, since he speaks of his friends' allegiances, but is able to do so without implicating himself in a discernibly religious or even spiritual set of attitudes. Except for a single comment echoing one of Fleming's where she claimed that 'I can live with the theory that God is love' and he replied, 'Yeah, I mean I would just call it love' (3/12/97), any response that impinges on the discursive territory of religion or spirituality is re-directed into discursive frameworks implying either intellectual reflection or a professional, non-discriminatory form of creative empathy.

This privileging of a professional discourse concerning the ability to imagine one's self into the mindsets of many different kinds of people is probably a very pertinent feature of the skill-set of many individuals working in the creation of entertainment for mass audiences, although Strawhan

was the first to make this claim explicitly. His comments on this occasion suggest that the position he is offering here is perhaps, although a strict test for such a state has not been established, effectively 'secular'.

Maxine Fleming

Maxine Fleming by contrast, describes herself as a 'lapsed Catholic', but still has an active interest in spirituality. Although not an active practitioner of any spiritual path she said she reads books on spirituality 'every now and then':

I guess I was in the no man's land there for a while and that didn't matter [...] being raised Catholic or perhaps any other religion (.) but most mostly definitely Catholic is (.) it makes you ask the big questions (.) but you don't necessarily find the answers within Catholicism [...] I'd describe myself as quietly spiritual (.) Buddhist and stuff but I have no desire to ...

HARDY: Not practising but just interested?

FLEMING: Yeah well I think that's the stumbling block of religions in a way is the practice of them (.) I don't see why it's necessary (.) I think it's just about how you live your life [...] (3/1/97)

These statements: the claim to be 'quietly spiritual', the implications of eclecticism ('Buddhist and stuff'), combined with the lack of an active allegiance to a religious organisation suggest that Fleming is another who can be classified as drawing on a 'spiritualities of life' discourse of religiosity. Indeed, she reinforces that impression in the last lines of the extract where she undertakes the now familiar discursive manoeuvre of speaking of religions as problematic, asserting instead that, 'being quietly spiritual' is just about 'how you live your life'. She then went on to make the statement mentioned above, where God is conceived of not so much as an entity as a symbolic representation of the force of 'love'; a metaphor which arguably locates God or Love within the human being, a construction that is also in the manner of a spirituality of life.

However, while Strawhan credited a state of professional, creative neutrality for his lack of a personal attachment to a religious or spiritual view of life, Fleming proposed that gender is a contributory factor to his secularity, wondering if women were more likely to be attracted to 'spirituality':

I was wondering if it is a female male thing because (.) like my husband is much the same as Gavin (.) very much you know (.) the committed agnostic and [...] I can keep my funny little spiritual things to myself thank you very much, which is fine by me (.) but (.) I don't know, I wonder if it is almost a male female thing [...] I notice that (.) that women tend to go "Oh well, you know (.) there's something in all that, there's got to be".
(3/12/97)

Specific origin of *The Chosen*: Communities, cults and repressed violence

Strawhan and Hampson had both earlier emphasized how important the commercial, institutional framework of the project was, and Strawhan had moreover identified himself as an atheist. I asked him why he had then written a script containing explicit reference to religious motifs, ideas and people? In reply he talked about what he perceived as the differences between New Zealand and Australian cultures:

[...] when I just arrived here the stuff about Centrepoint³³ had been just been blowing up and it seemed like New Zealand was a real hot bed of cults. [...] it's also an attempt like as an Australian to define what's different about New Zealand and Australia when you come here because it's technically the same in some ways and then you basically learn the differences (.) you know the obvious difference is the Maori and Pacific Islanders but within the actual white culture (.) everyone fervently denies that they are anything like Australia and it sort of sets you the task of working out why (.) and part of that is Australia really identifies with its convict Catholic ancestry where New Zealand is much more Protestant. (3/12/97)

Strawhan's status as 'something of an [Australian] outsider' gives him a particular viewpoint he can use to generate ideas for scripts. In this case he describes gradually focusing on an idea by juxtaposing a generalizing discourse about national characteristics with the memory of a specific topic that had been newsworthy a decade previously. There are several results of this focus. Strawhan decides for instance, not to explore the 'obvious difference' within the country; the presence of significant Maori and Polynesian cultures, but instead to concentrate on the context of 'white' culture, a context analogous to that which he comes from in Australia. The European, specifically the Celtic, heritage of many white Antipodeans is therefore mined for story material to be used in constructing the cult milieu. In particular factual information about the self-styled prophet Norman McLeod and his followers, who came from Scotland via Nova Scotia to establish a settlement in Waipu in the 1850s is used as one source of inspiration for the television text. This material had also previously been employed by Fiona Kidman in her novel, *The Book of Secrets* (1987), a volume to which both Strawhan and the producer refer at various times.

Another discourse Strawhan used in discussing his sources for the script was an idea of New Zealand as a (repressed) country ruled by a Protestant ethos, whereas Australia is seen as a more

³³ Centrepoint was a commune north of Auckland, set up in 1978. Although not 'religious' the commune was under the charismatic 'spiritual' leadership of Bert Potter who espoused controversial philosophies promoting the open expression of sexual desire. The fact that this open sexual expression was later proved to have involved activity with pubescent children resulted in Potter's conviction and imprisonment in the 1990s.

relaxed country marked by Catholic influence. 'It's the Christchurch syndrome', he said, 'the city of churches and mass murders [...] you've got a culture that prides itself on its decency and its ordinariness [and yet] New Zealand's a very violent society (.) a very high murder rate (3/12/97).

It is interesting to observe here that Strawhan is placing together a number of concepts that are not necessarily related. Indeed, as he implies, there is evidence that New Zealand has been a fruitful location for alternative religious and spiritual groups to establish themselves (see for instance, Ellwood, 1993). But there has never been a scandal involving violence, murder and suicide on a large scale at a religious centre in New Zealand, whether mainstream or marginal³⁴. The courts have found the sexual abuse of children took place at Centrepoint, and, at the time of writing there are numerous allegations circulating about the sexual abuse of children at Catholic boarding institutions in the last three decades, but the specific linkage of religion with ideas of mass murder is not a reality in the New Zealand context. Rather, as Strawhan later acknowledges, he is also drawing on his general knowledge of a handful of events that took place in the Americas and Europe in the late twentieth century. Specifically, they are the mass suicide of Jim Jones and his followers at Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978, the ill-fated siege of David Koresh's compound in Waco, Texas, by the FBI in 1994, the group suicides of 74 members of the Solar Temple in Canada, Switzerland and France in 1994, and of members of the Heaven's Gate group in San Diego in 1997. These well-publicized tragedies exert a fascination over the contemporary imagination that exceeds the physical effects of the actual events. They do so because they draw together and manifest many of the concerns of late modernity, especially the interrelationship of gender and power. These fatalistic cult groups, which are usually led by a charismatic male, have become emblems of a discursive linkage between fanatical religious or spiritual belief, untrammelled male authority, and probable psychological illness - both in the leader and his followers.

In the data on *Saving Grace* the widespread incidence of an anti-religious discourse linking organized religion with hypocrisy was noted: reference to violence, madness and cults is an extreme version of this kind of discourse. For many people the mere fact these events have taken place is therefore proof of the undesirability of strong religious belief. The coercive power wielded by a cult leader, in its violent material effects, is the polar opposite of the tolerance of belief and

³⁴ The example which has come closest to suggesting a fully dysfunctional community is that of the Full Gospel Mission Fellowship, established in North Canterbury in the late 1960s by Douglas Metcalfe. Weapons were stockpiled against prophesied millennial insurrections and there were suggestions of sexual abuse by males in leadership positions. The community disbanded in 1996 as a result of internal divisions and lawsuits.

speech which was enjoined by the majority of respondents. In this sense foregrounding a self-destructive cult ultimately constitutes an anti-religious discursive formation, no matter how much the scriptwriters claim to want to explore the 'attractive' aspects of the cult. It was as an anti-religious discourse where strong belief shades into psychosis and leads inevitably to evil therefore that the plot-line concerning the cult was included in the discursive matrix of *The Chosen*.

There is however also a sense in which reference to such a cult transcends notions of earthly religious organisation and references a mythological level of human guilt and fear; a level which viewers might, in some ways, find attractive. This is what Giddens (1991) refers to as 'apocalyptic consciousness', a sense that as a collectivity we have mishandled our guardianship of the world and have arrived at a time where that guardianship will be judged and perhaps terminated. The violent end of a cult such as the group known as *The Chosen*, is at once a human acting-out of this kind of judgement, and a sign of a disordered time when 'the end of the world' comes closer. It is an unpredictable event which suddenly reaches public consciousness, and is an indicator, as Strawhan said, that the smooth surfaces of society do not always tell the full story. The use of a beleaguered cult group as both a setting and character is then a topical reference to millennialist philosophies which see the re-intervention of transcendental powers in earthly matters as imminent, and social disorder as an indicator of the approach of these times (Melton, 1986; Bruce, 1996; Dawson, 1998).

Strawhan, Fleming and other members of the production team were well aware of this set of references when they developed *The Chosen*, seeing them as a possible source of commercial advantage, as indeed Botes had done with *Saving Grace*. Elaborating a millennial theme so near the millennium itself seemed guaranteed to attract audiences, although in the final result, they blurred the specificity of the concept, also for commercial reasons.

STRAWHAN: [...] so it was opportunist and I think we'd go "Oh this would be a good time to do this story". In fact originally I was going to do an end of millennium cult but then we decided, purely for practical reasons, that by the time it got made it might be over .
FLEMING: No-one would have wanted it in 2001. (3/12/97)

This statement speaks of the programme in the metaphors of the marketplace: a reminder the miniseries was seen as a potential export product that must appeal in timeliness and applicability not just to the local market but also to international customers. However, like Duncan Sarkies, Strawhan and Fleming did have a proprietorial concern for their script and wished the programme to be produced in a form as near as possible to its original state. The fact that there were constraints

on the aesthetic aspects of the project has already been referred to in Strawhan's comment on the compromises that had been made before production began. For example these included: fending off attempts from an Australian script-assessor to turn *The Chosen* into a drama about vampires, being required to make the cult leader less likeable, and being prevented from having Sarah die in the final scenes. Strawhan also spoke of having to reduce his interest in sub-plots and secondary characters in order to increase emphasis on the main dramatic through-line, and of being required to make the language of the piece, less 'poetic' and more prosaic because 'there's a perception of the television audiences wanting more basic English' (3/12/97).

The programme's construction of religion

Taking this mélange of justifications for the content into account I asked Strawhan and Fleming what overall attitude to religion they thought the programme might offer as a preferred reading. They were initially bemused by the question since they saw the project in terms of individual choices about belief and morality rather than in terms of attitudes about religion or spirituality:

STRAWHAN: It's actually not saying anything about the church (.) when you think about it.

FLEMING: I was just going to say (.) I don't know if we're making judgments about (.) one or the other.

STRAWHAN: Our priest goes into the church for the wrong reasons and (.) he has to accept what (.) what he did in the past to move on. (3/12/97)

That is, Strawhan especially, spoke of Father Tahere in terms of discourses of psychological well-being; that the character had made an unwise choice of vocation in the grip of self-delusion and needed to see the situation more clearly in order to regain his self esteem and the possibility of personal development. In other words, while not claiming a spiritual belief-position for himself, Strawhan describes his fictional creation in terms of the psychotherapeutic discourse that so often overlaps with 'self' or 'expressive' spirituality nowadays, and which was present in many of the statements about *Saving Grace*. However, not long after expressing criticisms of Catholic education (see above) Strawhan surprisingly, offered nostalgic views of Catholic ritual as an ideal against which modern mainstream religion is found inadequate:

We're talking about the central dilemma of the church being (.) does it (.) does it reintroduce the ritual and magic that's actually missing from it or does it (.) and you end up with the embarrassing spectacle of, you know, church is full of people with guitars singing crappy songs as a way of trying to attract young people. Or do you return to the kind of dignity of the past or how do you find a way forward? I mean it also suggests that the cult fills that need because it is full of rituals. (3/12/97)

Because the violent, apocalyptic aspects of the plot had been, under pressure from television executives, eventually attached to the cult, the positive aspects of the battle between evil and good, would therefore have been, one might think, attached to the church and its heroic priest. However, the writers' speech here suggests that, despite the external pressures, they had still tried to work within a functionalist metadiscourse that saw all forms of religious organisation, no matter what their moral tenor, as in some sense *prima facie* worthwhile. This metadiscourse is visible above in the suggestions that collective organisation meets a need for human sociability and moreover, that religious organisations can provide 'magic' in people's lives; magic derived, according to Strawhan, from the heightened intensity of being involved in ritual:

The reason why people join cults is not because they're stupid it's because they have a need and that he's fulfilling that need [...] And yet television people won't be able to get their heads around that concept [...] Cults are an expression of a search for a need (.) social need (.) and people need to believe and belong in clubs. (3/12/97)

Although the range of opinions on the preferred meanings of *The Chosen* was less diverse than for *Saving Grace* there is nevertheless an indication here of a behind-the-scenes debate about emphasis in the text. Rather than seeing himself as part of 'television' Strawhan is positioning himself as distinct from 'television people', who, it is implied, lack his nuanced understanding not only of the moral universe of the text but also of the ways in which one may create a satisfying drama for an audience to experience. Strawhan is arguing that he and Fleming can provide a thoughtful, subtle treatment of content without compromising mass appeal, but also imply that the television executives tend to divorce content from aspects of form, aspects which are seen as attractive regardless of the issues they envelope.

Overall, in this interview, the writers represented themselves personally, as having different levels of interest in religion and spirituality, but professionally, as both being interested in religion as a topic that provides a vibrant situation for discussing ideas about society. Some of these ideas appear to be contradictory: for instance, aspects of Catholicism are bad because they are dogmatic and indoctrinatory, but other aspects are good because religious observance brings people together, and the performance of ritual brings 'magic' into peoples' lives. From the evidence of our conversation the scriptwriters were aware of the paradoxical nature of the discursive resources at their disposal, but felt comfortable operating with those tensions around meaning, since they saw them as representative of the contemporary environment. References to 'the television people' however, construct those individuals as either ignorant or dismissive of this wider

discursive, social reality, and guided only by a narrow template containing the purported characteristics of 'successful commercial entertainment'. Strawhan and Fleming present themselves as having to conform to this commercial template, but also wish to emphasize that they are creative, skilful people, whose writing, even within a genre product, is nuanced and thoughtful.

Funding and script content

Once the initial treatment for the series was completed in December 1996 the national funding body for local television, New Zealand on Air, was approached for production funding.

The then-chief executive of NZOA, Jane Wrightson recalls that \$40,000 was allocated to *The Chosen* in December 1996 to fund further development. Two full treatments and two draft scripts were re-submitted in February 1997. Further work was undertaken for the next meeting in April 1997 and approval for production funding of \$2 million was then given (27/3/98). Her role, and that of NZOA subsequent to the funding decision, was restricted to 'supervisory management' said Wrightson. Unlike the New Zealand Film Commission, NZOA was not involved in approval of casting for instance, nor, was it mandated to engage in detailed discussions about content - these matters were the responsibility of the production company and the potential broadcaster.

It appears from Wrightson's comments that despite its charter, which required NZOA to encourage 'a range of broadcasts that reflects the diverse religious and ethical beliefs of New Zealanders' the funding body had no specific interest in the content of a programme that contained explicit religious references. Instead, as had been the case with the New Zealand Film Commission and the funding of *Saving Grace*, the primary interest was in whether or not the proposed programme was 'a good story', whether the production team could 'pull it off', and whether or not it had strong New Zealand resonance, since: according to Wrightson:

[...] if you have a project like this which lands on your desk, which it did, that it's about religion is sort of secondary, because it isn't about religion actually. It's a ripping yarn about a small town and a cult (.) that it's a cult is just the stuff of popular fiction. (27/3/98)

In other words, a generic discourse about the characteristics of 'popular fiction' takes precedence over seeing the project as potentially significant in religious, spiritual or ethical terms. This is puzzling because other matters mentioned in the legislation, specifically the representation of

women and of Maori, and the achievement of ‘a strong New Zealand resonance’ were singled out for consideration as matters of content:

[...] there were two or three or things I suppose from a cultural perspective that were talked a lot about [...] and that was the depiction of (.) if the priest was to be Maori, he should be a real Maori. [...] There was another issue of representation of women in there for us (.) that the women were rounded and sensible too and not just screamers. And again you have to be careful because some of that is the stuff of popular fiction but on the other hand when you’re spending two-odd million dollars of public funding you’d like (.) if a programme is to be criticized it isn’t for making cardboard characters. (27/3.98)

What this discussion - and the similar discussion with Film Commission staff about *Saving Grace* - implies is that, for the two public bodies funding audio-visual culture in New Zealand in the late 1990s, discourses of religion and spirituality had no particular priority in their deliberations. Or perhaps to be more accurate, issues of content in general were not as important as other issues - size of budget, making a product to appeal to as large an audience as possible - thought to be contributory to success. In the case of the representation of religion however there is a positive side to this lack of scrutiny since material that might be controversial in more religiously conservative cultures passes unchallenged through the funding and production systems. However the statements from both statutory bodies do tend to support assertions (see for instance Ahdar & Stenhouse, 2000), that ‘official’ culture in New Zealand is indeed secular in orientation.

Funding and audience

Rather, the NZOA’s main goal was supporting a successful drama for a specific channel and audience, that is, the 18-39 demographic on Channel Two. Other recent forays into local drama: the TV1 series *Cover Story* (Gibson Group, 1994-1996) and *City Life* (South Pacific Pictures, 1996-1997) had both been unsuccessful in attracting audiences. *The Chosen* was therefore not only another (risky) local drama production but was being made for a channel that had scant history of screening local drama apart from soap opera. Wrightson clearly felt that a great deal rode on the success of this production:

[...] So it’s success in the 18-39 band we’re after. We, I think New Zealand’s desperately in need of a successful drama at the moment. People are taking *Shortland Street* somewhat for granted. [...] The industry is very gloomy at the moment and rightly so. If this doesn’t work, then yes, there is certainly a problem. (27/3/98)

Once NZOA had approved funding the total amount available was still less than had been hoped for and consequently, there were changes in the script to make the production feasible. For

instance the original script had been set in the South Island, so that the community could be located downstream from a hydro dam which the cult leader would blow up in his final fury. That option was now too expensive and it was decided to shift filming to the upper North Island so that all locations would be within a short drive from Auckland. At this point the final crewing and casting of the project also took shape.

Pre-production: the hierarchical organisation of production staff in television.

Although the titles of workers on television productions may be similar to those on feature films, the way that status and responsibility are allocated is different. Usually it is the name of the principal production company - or companies, if investment and responsibility are shared - that is associated with the finished programme. The television industry, especially as it developed in the United States and Britain, is a producer-led industry (Tulloch, 1990; Newcomb and Alley, 1993; Gitlin 1994) although, in the United States, the producers in question are likely to be 'executive' producers, or the representatives of large media production companies. There are only a handful of production companies that could claim such a status in New Zealand, but Communicado, the production company for *The Chosen*, was one of them. Gitlin and Gripsrud also note that in the United States particularly, the names of the lead actors, as 'stars', will sometimes be highlighted in the marketing of a television programme and they may be shareholders in the production. This was not the case at that time in New Zealand however since few performers had the level of visibility necessary to gain such influence.

By contrast with the film industry therefore, the actual production personnel on a television project are comparatively anonymous hired hands - it is rare that television audiences would choose to watch a television programme because of the identity of its director for instance. Nevertheless, within the television industry the names of talented people are well-known, and such people move from production to production as work becomes available. In New Zealand also, there is a degree of cross-over between the television and film industries especially in writing and post-production. In this instance the producer of *The Chosen*, Chris Hampson, had produced a feature film, *Illustrious Energy* (Narbey, 1988), albeit many years before, while the editor, John Gilbert, worked on features as often as on television projects, as did the designers. Despite these occasional crossovers however, the hierarchical nature of the production team's organisation was still more marked than that for *Saving Grace*.

For example, it has been asserted that the development of the concept for the programme was a collaboration between executive producers from Comunicado and an experienced writer who had himself been a television producer. Working from such a strong power-base, the script for the production was therefore established in all major points before the producer and director were appointed to the production. Indeed these two functions, so central to a film production, were not filled, according to Hampson, until just over three months before shooting began. Instead, the production company employed a line producer and production designers first. The term 'line producer' is a title for a powerful production manager who administers the budget, establishes the shooting schedule, sets up monitoring and reporting procedures, and hires the majority of the crew. The production designer's role is to establish the visual style of the piece, including costuming, props, lighting style and the broad choice of locations. This role, job-shared on this production by Grant Major and Brett Schwieters, was also filled early since design elements require a significant proportion of the budget and it was important to establish firm costings in order to operate within budget. Although personnel are not always employed in this particular order, on this production a significant consequence of hiring procedures was that the producer and director had to operate largely within style and budget parameters set for them by others.

Production designer: Brett Schwieters

When asked about his own beliefs, Brett Schweiters, one of the two designers on the project, drew on constructions related to a spiritualities of life discourse. He said for instance, that he was 'fairly agnostic' about religion since he was: 'positive there is a God but (.) not particularly interested in the (.) rites that go with it. (.) my God's probably a little bit different to most of the accepted models (.) more like a (.) cosmic consciousness if you like, a great one' (1/2/98).

Schwieters agreed he could therefore be considered a 'spiritual person' and espoused the position that one ought to be tolerant of the beliefs of others; 'I'm not devout by any means but I'm accepting of peoples' beliefs and interpretations, read a bit of philosophy and stuff when I'm forced to' (1/2/98). However, he saw little connection between his personal positioning and the content of *The Chosen*, a project about which he was cynical, emphasizing that it was, 'conceived, written and created as a money making venture not as an educative process' (1/2/98). His work on the project was 'just a job' for him, with the primary appeal of the content being that it provided an opportunity to dramatize mysterious events. In a manner similar to Horton on *Saving Grace* Schwieters proposed that ideas about religion form a particularly attractive kind of resource for audio-visual production:

Religion is another (.) still one of the great unknowns (.) like the bottom of the ocean and (.) not so much Everest, you know it's one of those things that has hidden (.) you know, it might be connected to the pyramids for God's sake, no-one knows. There's a huge lot of people watch those amazing (.) you know, feats of nature and all that kind of stuff. Religion falls in that category for a lot of people: (1/2/98)

Since a similar formulation recurred in two other interviews (see Smith & Gilbert, next chapter), this construction of religious and spiritual material as kind of a conceptual toy-box appears to be a significant framework within which production professionals can understand their work. Prioritizing such a construction also serves to minimize the chance that the religious content will be perceived as noteworthy in its own right.

As with *Saving Grace*, intertextuality was embedded in the production, especially by virtue of the sources called upon in making design decisions. Sources cited by the producer, director and Schwieters included, Ken Russell's controversial film about sexual hysteria amongst nuns, *The Devils* (1971), Levinson's *Sleepers*, (1996) and the television series *X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) and *Millennium* (Fox, 1996-1999). As the producer himself pointed out, none of these productions treats religion in a wholesome manner, rather they are characterized by darkness, violence and perverse sexuality in their treatment of religious institutions and the paranormal. While the influences actually discussed were of a technical nature - how to make it look as if someone was being burned alive, how to light spaces in an eerie manner - this choice of exemplars suggests that the production team were trying to walk a fine line between creating a decadent, threatening mood, variously described as 'sophisticated' or 'trashy', and trying to keep the production suitable for viewing by a primetime audience.

Although Schwieters claimed to find little about the project that supported his own spirituality, his account of the process of researching and creating the design 'look' for *The Chosen* nevertheless suggested that in his decision-making he might have been drawing on his own spiritual positioning, as well as on established professional routines. For instance, his assumption that it was timely and appropriate for a contemporary cult to be thoroughly eclectic in the sources on which it draws, can be seen as a reflection of his own tolerant attitude towards the spirituality of others. If Schwieters had been a member of a particular religious denomination for instance, the parameters of his design choices might have been more restrictive.

In practice the operation of both personal and professional frameworks meant that Schwieters researched in the ‘fantasy, occult and unexplained mysteries’ section of the public library, and on the World Wide Web for information about unexplained phenomena such as ‘crop circles’. The Web was also used for research on cults; Schwieters mentioned the Brahma Kumaris, the Moonies, Jim Jones, Waco, and Heaven’s Gate as topics he had explored online. Both he and the line producer, Sally Campbell, noted that the Web was the only source used for information on this area; they did not approach any representatives of New Zealand ‘cult’ organizations. By contrast it was considered necessary that the more mundane, Catholic aspects of the production be represented accurately and so an arrangement was made with the Auckland diocese to provide a priest as an adviser on Catholic ritual³⁵.

While it was a priority to ensure that the Catholic design-references were accurate, Schwieters otherwise combined influences from a range of quasi-religious sources to produce the set-dressing for the ‘Chosen’s’ headquarters. As he put it, ‘everything has to feel vaguely religious [but] God knows what religion it comes from’ (1/2/98). Some references were predominantly Christian: for instance Schwieters collected a large number of different kinds of crosses. He also spoke of ‘getting into’ Celtic art and symbology, and of researching pagan imagery: ‘sketches of religious symbols, bulls, [...] tree of life, tree of knowledge’ (1/2/98). He wanted, he said, ‘that whole range of religious expression (.) like a dream catcher from the Sioux Indians to [...] a plaster icon of Mary’; the justification being that the character of Peter McAllister, young and globe-trotting, would be ‘aware of all those things’ (1/2/98).

Most of the limitations on what Schwieters could do were budgetary, but he also discussed ensuring that the choices made were ones with which ‘the audience’ could identify, or as he put it, were choices made from ‘the public domain’:

[If] it’s sort of out there in the public domain people are already consuming it and throwing it away, [... so] it will have a currency about it, it’ll refer back to what people know about [...] Sometimes, you know, you go looking for reference and the only thing you can find is made in the 18th century and is in the Smithsonian and it’s just not right. You know you want the one that the lady, old lady down the road used to use every day of her life. (1/2/98)

³⁵ At an early stage of pre-production advice was also sought from a Religious Studies academic, Associate Professor Peter Donovan, about the religious content of the script. He pointed out a number of plot-elements that he considered unfeasible, but there were no major changes made to the text as a result.

My interest in this statement is in the explicit expression of a proposition probed throughout this research; that there are articulations between the range of discursive forms in which religion and spirituality are represented in mass entertainment products, and the range of ways in which religion and spirituality are constructed in the wider culture. An account of such a connection is provided here by someone whose professional responsibility it is to turn complex sets of ideas into material objects. He is suggesting he does this by restricting his choices to a range of objects that can be found in contemporary, everyday life, by turning information into 'elements'. Or, in his own words; 'My job is just to consume all that information and spit it all out as visual elements. I don't have to judge it and I don't judge it, you know' (1/2/98).

However, despite Schwieter's claims he does not 'judge' the validity of the subject around which the project revolves, he clearly takes care to shape his decisions around criteria of public relevance and decorum in relation to that subject. The principles of religious and spiritual eclecticism considered characteristic of a spiritualities of life model - a model from which Schwieters draws his own statements about spirituality - are used as a guide to the accumulation of the artifacts that mark the cult environment as a site of a hybrid 'New Age' spirituality. Schwieters appears to have a relatively free hand to construct the detail of the cult environment, but nevertheless operates according to a paradigm referred to as 'that range of religious expression'; a range suitable for presenting an attractive form of alternative spirituality to a young contemporary audience.

On the other hand, Schwieters did not feel free to employ a comparable iconographic eclecticism in his representation of Catholic artifacts. In contrast to the unspecific, informal nature of 'spirituality', Catholicism is a specific, differentiated religious tradition which still has cultural power in New Zealand. So, although Schwieters may share the anti-religious attitude demonstrated so frequently in this data, (at one point he speaks of Catholic 'mumbo-jumbo'), the physical expression of his personal views is constrained by the need to consult with, and defer to, an external authority in religious matters.

It is by means of these paradigmatic choices then that the set for the production can 'speak' as eloquently as the dialogue delivered by the actors. In this set of statements by Schwieters therefore, there is a description of the process by which particular discursive articulations are constructed: in this case articulations between, at an ideological level, specific formations of religion and spirituality and, at material level, the material objects which are co-opted to serve as signifiers of those formations.

The producer: Chris Hampson

Once the producer for *The Chosen* was appointed, he became the day-to-day leader of the production. Chris Hampson, with more than twenty years' experience as a writer, script editor and producer, was directly responsible to the executive producer, Robin Scholes, and carried her delegated authority on the set, while Scholes maintained an active interest in cost reports and viewing the rushes. Whereas Larry Parr on *Saving Grace* had described himself as a supporter and advisor to the director, Hampson had the more active of the two roles on this production, describing himself as:

[...] the one person who has the overview of all of the elements (.) the financial, creative (.) artistic elements [...] those latter two are all in (.) are in the hands of the director, but the balancing of those against the money and always the driving of the script [...] is in the hands of producer. (3/12/97)

Specifically, Hampson had the key commercial task of guaranteeing, or 'warranting', to Communicado that he would deliver the product as specified, that is, that the finished version of *The Chosen* would resemble the particular entertainment product in which the funders had invested. This is an issue that would become more important as the production progressed.

Hampson and the content of *The Chosen*

Hampson's cynicism about the relevance of *The Chosen* to a study of religion and spirituality in New Zealand film and television has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, by the time of our first face-to-face interview he seemed motivated to provide a more multi-faceted view of the project and of his reasons for being involved in it. Like Fleming and Strawhan he mentioned the topicality of the cult element in the script in relation to the deaths at Waco and amongst the members of the Solar Temple organisation. Also, echoing the dominant industry view that a dynamic, spectacular narrative is a necessary basis for a popular product, Hampson said he was attracted to the project because it was 'a good read'. Moreover, it seemed that he had now revised his opinion of the project as 'sleazy', asserting that it some moral worth after all:

[...] it's not often that things, particularly things in commercial television, touch on areas of (.) of debate, of any kind of (.) and I hesitate to say intellectual or philosophical debate because it's a (.) a very specific commercial audience but it does deal with moral themes and it does deal with issues of morality, in that it deals with the very clear issue of good and bad (.) good and evil (.) it shows [...] suppression of emotion and suppression of sexuality and things like that (.) which makes it kind of interesting (3/12/97)

This mode of interpreting the text, mythologically, as a clash between the forces of good and evil and defined as a moral conflict, rather than a religious or spiritual one - even when the context within which the conflict takes place is explicitly religious in reference - is familiar from Strawhan and Fleming's comments. The contemporary recasting of good and evil as related to notions of self-expression and repression is also consistent with their presentation. In chapter 7 similar statements, deployed by Horton, were categorized as belonging to a professional discourse, used by someone who, unlike the other members of the *Saving Grace* team, presented himself as having a routinized, surface attachment to the project. On the set of *The Chosen* however, self-presentation as a professional, a worker for whom engagement in this project was just one in a series of past and future productions, was the norm for the interviewees. In fact, as Hampson's reference above to his low expectations of commercial 'television' suggests, there was usually a distance implied between the speaker and the medium for which he or she was working. Interviewees spoke of the norms and practices of the institution for which they were working: 'television', in a reified fashion not as apparent in the material about *Saving Grace*. And in such a context, Hampson's mode of describing the text - that it was (simply, and therefore not significantly) a narrative about the ongoing, timeless battle between good and evil was, initially the preferred mode for understanding amongst all participants. Hampson himself however later further modified his view, as discussed in the next chapter.

Hampson and Catholicism

It may also be relevant that Hampson, along with Fleming, Campbell and Curtis, identified himself as a 'lapsed' Catholic. Hampson provided an account of his break with the Church - 'kicked out of the Christian Brothers school at the age of 16 or so' - similar to those given earlier by Strawhan and Fleming. Like them, he attributed his early departure to asking inappropriate questions of his teachers. The questions were, he said:

[...] your average 16 year old stuff (.) the existence of God (.) I mean I'd read Eric von Daniken (.) seemed to be much more logical (.) explanation that God was probably some kind of space man or something (.) that seemed to me to be a hell of a lot more logical in what was it, 1967?, infinitely more logical than that God was a being from another dimension. (3/12/97)

Strawhan, Fleming and Hampson were all teenagers in the 1960s; a period notorious for a range of social changes, pivoting on the relationship between 'youth' newly defined as a demographic power bloc, and authority in various forms (Roof, 1993a, 1993b; Wuthnow, 1998). This is also the period in which some of the most influential descriptions of the process of secularisation were

published (Berger, 1967; 1969), and the same period in which the Catholic Church was responding to the pressures of modernization and secularization. Since the accounts gathered for this thesis are presented within a restricted framework, it is difficult to determine their relationship to the wider social forces of the 1960s and 1970s, but they may be suggestive of a change in perceptions of paradigms of legitimate knowledge and power during that period. For instance, Strawhan's request that he be given 'the proof of God' may not be a request for modern 'scientific' proof (as opposed to a concept taken on trust, see for instance, Giddens, 1991), since the Church has always been able to argue logical proofs of God's existence, but it suggests that Strawhan saw himself as entitled to that proof, and therefore of equal status to the Catholic instructor. The fact that Fleming and others describe similar experiences of punishment for questioning 'official' knowledge implies the development of an attitude of self-reference or self-authority within that cohort (Bellah et al. 1985; Giddens, 1991; Heelas, 1996, 1998; Wuthnow, 1998), even allowing for the possibility of that attitude having been reified in the course of subsequent discussions.

Reaction to memories of Catholic beliefs and practices was therefore a strong feature both of the text of *The Chosen* and of the environment in which it was produced. The description of the narrative as a battle between good and evil was presented as a secularized, professional description but perhaps there is also a specificity of connection or reaction with Catholicism here that, never having inhabited a Catholic milieu, I cannot fully understand.

When outlining his own beliefs Hampson preferred to operate within a framework of moral discourse since, he explained, he had not thought about religion 'for a long time' although he felt the legacy of his religious education remained with him, in a negative sense:

I think Catholicism leaves you with [...] it cripples you with guilt, which is a tragic thing. I've got two small children and I quite consciously keep them away from (.) notions of organized religion, very consciously. I mean if they want to find something for themselves later on that's fine [...] But (.) oh God it crippled me as a small child, those appalling notions of guilt (.) that appalling burden of sin that Catholicism leaves on you. And that's the interesting thing about Tahere of course. You see Tahere in this series has a burden of sin (.) he believes himself to be (.) to be (.) to be a sinner. I mean what kind of a religion is it for God's sake? What kind of a [...] philosophy of belief is it that tells very small children that they are fundamentally corrupt? They are (.) they are born with original sin, they are born fallen? (3/12/97)

It was noted in the chapters on *Saving Grace* that 'flaws' (a concept used rather than the religious concept of 'sin') were seen as an integral part of being human: Sarkies, for instance, wanting to

humanize God, had created a 'flawed' Christ-figure, sometimes deficient in honesty and compassion. Hampson, a generation older than Sarkies, in the passionately-expressed statement above, provided an insight into the archaeology of these developments of discourse. In particular he spoke of memories of considering himself as fundamentally sinful. This self-labelling is presented as a permanent psychological wounding, the contemplation of which now causes him anger, and he is determined his own children will not possess a similar self-perception. He explicitly links this analysis of his own situation with the situation of Tahere onto whom he transfers his own declared inadequacy. This set of descriptions and claims is reminiscent of Giddens's (1991) discussion about the nature of the self in late-modernity, central to which is a distinction between guilt and shame. 'Guilt', Giddens claims:

[...] carries the connotation of moral transgression: it is anxiety deriving from a failure, or an inability, to satisfy certain forms of moral imperative in the course of a person's conduct. It is a form of anxiety which is most prominent in types of society where social behaviour is governed according to established moral precepts, including those laid down and sanctioned by tradition' (1991: 153).

Shame, on the other hand, relates not so much to a specific moral transgression, a 'bad' act which can therefore be put right by expiation, but to a more general sense that there is something 'wrong' with one's self; shame is based on 'personal insufficiency' (1991: 65). Giddens argues that 'the more self-identity becomes internally referential, the more shame comes to play a role in the adult personality' (1991: 153).

In chapter 2 the case was made that concepts of self-identity have become increasingly internally referential in contemporary subjects, and that this process is sometimes visible in terms of the pervasiveness of discourses of psychological health and illness. This formulation appears to have been active in the research subjects' discussions of religiosity in their own lives and work. That is to say, they have tended to reinforce the hegemony of a psychological model of positive self-esteem over an externalized, hierarchical model of the individual as being judged (as sinful for instance) by an authority representing God. Hampson's statement above contains traces of both these forms of discourse: a discourse of guilt in relationship to the strictures of the church; 'those appalling notions of guilt (.) that appalling burden of sin that Catholicism leaves on you'; and a discourse of shame - 'I've known all my life that there was something appallingly wrong with me'. While Hampson misrepresents Tahere's situation: (in the script he is actually guilty of having seduced and abandoned another human being), it may be that his own blurring of a sense of guilt and a sense of shame is indicative of an incomplete transition between different forms of

understanding: the first of which belongs to a world ruled by traditional religion, and the second of which has affinities with either contemporary secularism, or 'spirituality', depending on one's interpretation.

Hampson: discourses about television

In the context of the overall interview however, Hampson's disquisition on the relevance of the project to his own ideas about religion took up a short proportion of time. Rather, production issues were discussed at greater length, or the topic of the institution of television itself; 'the ordinary diet of commercial television', the norms of which, Hampson considered, made it likely they would produce only a superficial treatment of 'a very serious sort of question'. That was because he claimed, *The Chosen* was structured, to capitalize on a notion of televisual 'slickness':

It plays to the strengths of commercial television which are (.) a certain glibness (.) a certain (.) ability to take ideas and make (.) emotional (.) much emotional capital out of them, that is probably the (.) the function of a great deal of contemporary commercial television. [...] you get shot through a little emotional roller coaster ride and popped out the other end and you either feel better about something or you feel worse about something and they like to feel better about something if you possibly can [...] that is like the perfect formula for commercial television I think. God (.) do I sound cynical? (3/12/97)³⁶

While not offering an explanation for why he chose to work in television at all Hampson amplified his critical assessment of commercial television production by reference to the tight practical constraints under which they all had to work: with the implication that these constraints made it difficult to produce 'quality' material. The limitations most often mentioned were those of money and audience.

Budget constraints and the constraint of the imagined audience

While tight budgets and schedules were described as the norm for local television production, respondents were of the opinion that this production was uniquely pressured. The reason most often provided was the spectacular nature of the script, which entailed the use and costuming of numerous actors and extras as well as a large number of locations, plus a lot of pyrotechnical work - explosions and fires. In addition Hampson noted that the shooting period of eight weeks had already been reduced to seven weeks by the time he joined the project. The strength of the

³⁶ Schweiters also professed to be very disillusioned with working in television, and with the exception of the director Mike Smith, most of the other interviewees also made critical or cynical comments about television and its mode of production.

resource-pressures on the project meant that Hampson envisaged the team would have to compromise from the beginning on production standards:

We've got to shoot it very fast because of the schedule, because of the money [...] we may not be able to get as precise a version of it as we want. We will have to compromise from Day 1 (.) because we have to shoot a very demanding schedule every day. So we will never have enough time to work on performance, we will never have enough time to work on the lighting (3/12/98)

Equal in strength to the tyranny of the budget however was the focus on the target audience for the programme. The comments of the Chief Executive of NZOA have already established that *The Chosen* was seen as an important initiative in getting local drama onto TV2, the second and more populist of the two state-owned television channels. The venture was characterized as a risk, a risk to be minimized by always keeping an eye on the institutional image of the audience. The image in this case was outlined by Wrightson in the following terms:

TV2 is simply for late teens to 39 in age group, which means you've got a generation who only remember life after television [...] They tend to like, as most youth does, slightly more in-your-face, slightly more brash, slightly more sensationalist tones of programmes. As with all of us they enjoy a rip-roaring yarn that's probably more action-oriented than thinking-oriented and that's simply an age demographic thing. It's obviously a massive generalization, but it does tend to be how that audience sort of works. (27/3/97)

As Wrightson acknowledges, this construction of the audience is highly speculative. At the nub of the description is an institutional discourse that envisages the audience for television as a mass constituency able to be split out into bands distinguished by age. Also in action is the kind of psychological and lifestyle categorization of audience segments typical of marketing discourse (Lawson & Todd, 2001). Overall, these institutional and marketing discourses combine to characterize the audience in a manner similar to that of a 'purchaser-driven' model provided by the Institute of Economic Research:

From the point of view of advertising funding, audiences are involved in the process, as access to their attention is what is being sought. But they play only an indirect role in the economic decisions that are made in the industry. They are clients rather than paying customers. Programmes are not therefore a final product. Rather they are an intermediate good. They enable the broadcaster to assemble the audience, which is what is for sale. (NZEI, 1994: 38)

While NZOA's primary commitment to *The Chosen* is ostensibly in terms of its legislative mission to 'reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture', there is nevertheless evidence

here of the influence of a model of the audience as something to be assembled and delivered to the broadcaster by means of the programme. The model of audience is so sketchily defined however that it suggests a hybrid body of institutional and commonsense knowledge is being drawn on here. This knowledge is used to justify decisions about the content and the form of production, but it exists in a relatively nebulous form, one that it is difficult, for instance, for third parties to access and evaluate.

Moreover, despite all the production team using this 'TV2' audience image as a guiding principle for their work, there were shades of response to its dominance. For example, the writers, while acknowledging that they had made changes to the script in order to conform to the dictates of that image, preferred to interpose other discourses between themselves and the idea of audience. Like Sarkies, Fleming drew on a discourse of authorial integrity, claiming to write, in the first instance, for herself: 'I don't really think about the audience (.) other than that the audience is me when I'm writing. It comes up in discussion and then we have to adjust I guess' (3/12/97). Strawhan, by contrast, presented the demands of genre (which is itself a means of packaging plots for audience recognition) as more immediately pressing:

It doesn't come up cynically, you don't sit there and go. "Oh what will the audience like?" You actually go "Oh what's the best way to reveal this?" [...] The characters of a story I don't find difficult but how to tell it is really hard ... (3/12/97)

Hampson, however, was much exercised by this notion of the television audience, claiming that he no longer understood what an audience was or what it wanted:

I've been involved in focus groups (.) of audience analyses of programmes and things and (.) and at the end of it (.) I knew no more than I knew at the beginning except [...] all you can say is that if you've got an audience of 20,000 people you have an audience of 20,000 individuals. [...] I mean ratings are so dangerous in terms of quality. But this programme they want it to rate, they do want it to rate [...] they don't want people to be not watching it (.) so it's kind of salacious and racy ... (3/12/97).

This extract, which problematizes what Wrightson had reified, disaggregating her unified audience into a collection of individuals, comes from a much longer interaction in which Hampson laments what he sees as the shortcomings of the present ratings-measurement system. While cinema producers can use box office receipts as an indicator of the ultimate popularity of their product, the television system, with its dispersed audience, has to rely on other methods to tell if people are watching. In New Zealand the Peoplemeter ratings system, administered by

research company, ACNielsen, is the primary means for determining viewer numbers. In 1998 Peoplometers were installed in some 470 homes around the country, representing the activities of an estimated 1,050 potential television viewers who are requested to push a button on the meter whenever they start to watch television and again when they finish (Lealand & Martin, 2001). This method of measurement is controversial with academic commentators since it gives no indication of the viewers' quality of attention, nor of their evaluation of what they have watched (Lealand, 1998; Lealand & Martin, 2001). The extract above shows Hampson caught on the horns of a dilemma: he wants to discredit ratings research, since it makes no room for the evaluation of quality, but is aware that the dispersed collectivity he poses as an alternative model is difficult to study. He tries to escape the hegemony of the ratings system, but returns to a realization that, in the current commercialized climate ('they don't want people not to be watching it') that the level of ratings is still the standard by which the programme, and presumably his own performance as producer, will be judged.

Imagining the reception of *The Chosen*

With such a level of anxiety about the failure of previous one-off or short-form local dramas, the remainder of Hampson's interview canvassed the systemic factors he thought might impinge on the reception of *The Chosen*. In particular he wanted to discuss the topic of style, specifically the issue of 'realism'³⁷. This issue, which also came up in the material about *Saving Grace*, was, according to Hampson, relevant to *The Chosen*, because of the tension inherent in the project between the elements of the text modeled on life and the elements of the text modeled, self-reflexively, on the conventions of cinematic and televisual melodrama. The project could theoretically be directed to favour either tendency, (or 'tone') but the pull from the major institutional inputs was reputedly, it has been noted, in the direction of melodrama. Hampson was still considering his strategy on this point:

I know where the tone should sit but [...] it's very, very difficult to explain. [...] I once described it as trash, if you can use the word trash in the least pejorative term [...] it's slightly melodramatic (.) you know, when people get killed they actually, literally lose their heads [...] it's something that for some people they should get "Oh, my God" and some people should giggle (.) you know, it's a really fine line, (.) and the programme itself treads that line [...] My take on it is to play it with absolute conviction and absolute reality (.) this is small town New Zealand and I want it to look real. (3/12/97)

³⁷ While a media scholar would wish to distinguish between a plethora of categories of realism, and of the purposes for using such a notion (for an excellent discussion of the complexities of 'realism' see Williams, 2000), in this case Hampson is using the term to refer to what audience members find acceptably 'believable' within the parameters of a particular fictional genre.

On both the *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* projects there seemed to be a strong assumption operating that 'being realistic' [or naturalistic] is the best or perhaps, the only way, to get a local audience involved and committed to watching a film or television programme. This appeared to be the case almost regardless of whether the content was suited to a naturalistic approach, although *The Chosen*, as a widely-focused drama about a community, was better suited to a realistic treatment than *Saving Grace*.

Conclusion

Whereas, with *Saving Grace*, the impetus for the creation of the film originated with first a pair, and then a trio of individuals, the impetus for making *The Chosen* was extrinsic to most of the people actually charged with producing it. That is, it was not 'their idea' or, if it was, as is partially true in the case of Gavin Strawhan, it had been substantially (and in his opinion, detrimentally) altered by the requirements of an institutional system largely uninterested in content. We have also seen that while few of the team making *Saving Grace* were conventionally religious, most of them professed, in the research context, a strong personal interest in exploring the nature of spirituality and its relationship to the Christian myth. There is also something of that contemporary discursive matrix - the oppositional tension between religion and spirituality - visible in this first round of interviews for *The Chosen*, specifically in the talk of Fleming and Schweiters. However, there were also further strong, anti-religious discourses presented, in the form of detailed, personalized criticisms of Catholicism, and there is initial evidence, from Strawhan and Hampson, of a mindset that might be described as thoroughly 'secular', since it does not rely on a concept of either spirituality or religion in order to explain life.

While it seems that the personal views of these members of the production team are likely to have informed the text - there have been descriptions of decisions made about content, design and directing style - there is also a sense that these influences are weaker and less direct than they were for *Saving Grace*. That impression is created by more frequent references to the power of 'outside' influences, that is to authorities outside the circle of people with whom I have spoken. The interviewees tend to see themselves as subject to this larger institution of 'commercial television', its values and processes: in fact on several occasions they offered statements expressing a sense of alienation at having to produce a programme according to professional values that were not wholly their own

The interviewees thus far, appear to have dealt with this situation in a manner analogous to that of Hampson, when he is trying to decide about a desirable 'tone' for the programme: that is they spoke of small negotiations, presented as acts of professional integrity, within boundaries perceived as having been set by others.

If a picture of the relevance of the religious content of the project to my research topic can be drawn on the basis of the statements made so far it appears to be that the programme recognises the social appeal of religion (whether in traditional or cult forms), but is agnostic in relation to the existence of a God. Moreover it is probably more hostile, at least at first, to the established church than *Saving Grace* - seeing it as a site of repression - than it is to the cult, which is initially viewed favourably in terms of a model prioritizing free self-expression as a key component of human well-being.

CHAPTER TEN: Case Study Two - Post-production and Distribution of *The Chosen*.

Introduction

This chapter contains analysis of discourses of religion and spirituality relating to the post-production and distribution phases of *The Chosen*. These are dealt with by examining the differing relationships of four individuals to the religious content, contrasting their personal narratives with those from three others which highlight professional discourses and practical constraints active in the post-production context. Some of the difficulties encountered in using the ‘depth-interview’ method in this specific study are also discussed. As with *Saving Grace* the development of *The Chosen* is traced through to the point where it leaves its makers’ hands, in this case when it is broadcast. The second half of the chapter undertakes a textual analysis of the programme as an example of melodramatic form, looking at the implications of the use of that form for its religious content. Finally, there is analysis of the critical frameworks used by reviewers to evaluate the mini-series on its public release.

Analysis of discourses regarding post-production and distribution

The second round of interviews for *The Chosen* took place in the first week of February 1998. By this stage six weeks of the shoot had been completed, and the production had moved back to the studio for the final three days of filming. Two of the lead actors were now available for interview. In this round I focus on the talk of those actors, and on a third interview done with the producer Chris Hampson. Material from other interviews done four months later (with the director and editor), and two years later (with the third lead actor) respectively, is also included. This time the material is arranged thematically rather than chronologically since the intention is to explore contrasts between several modes of understanding the same set of circumstances.

The actors

Two of the actors in the production, 32 year old Jeremy Sims, who played the cult leader ‘Peter McAllister’, and 27 year old Radha Mitchell, who played ‘Sarah Gordon’, were Australian, while the third actor, was a New Zealander, Cliff Curtis: he played ‘Father Albert Tahere’. Hampson spoke of choosing the two Australians on the basis of talent and suitability, but there was probably also a desire to ease the programme’s way into the Australian market in the future. All three of the actors were both more experienced and ‘higher profile’ than the actors in *Saving Grace* (they had

all starred in feature films for example). Curtis, for instance, is one of the few New Zealand actors with a flourishing international career, having played significant roles in *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994); *Three Kings*, (Russell, 1999); and *Bringing Out the Dead* (Scorcese, 1999). Curtis is Maori and frequently offered roles as an exotic 'other' in American films - usually, to his regret, as a villain.

In interviewing the actors I found, as with many of the personnel from *Saving Grace*, a significant apparent level of personal interest in religion and spirituality, and a variety of ways in which personal belief was seen either to relate, or not, to the programme being produced.

Jeremy Sims: religio/spiritual positioning

Sims said while his parents were members of the Church of England, his father was effectively an atheist. His mother had been a regular churchgoer and Sims had often attended church with her until the age of 20, at which point he said, he 'challenged her quite strongly about it', a challenge he credits with persuading her not to attend church any longer (2/2/98). Sims himself claimed to be 'fascinated by religion', explaining it as people's need to worship something and 'to be part of a group'. He said he was currently reading about the religious worldview in Greek and Roman times and could understand how the concept of the gods had been useful at that time. However, he felt that more modern forms of religion like Christianity and Islam 'operate more as a way of organizing armies than anything else' (2/2/98). This latter statement I interpreted as a milder variant of a 'religion breeds conflict' anti-religious discourse, a discursive position articulated more strongly as the interview progressed.

Wanting to determine if Sims, interested in the functions of religion but simultaneously personally dismissive of it, was another who drew on a spiritualities of life discourse, I mentioned one of my analytical frameworks was the concept of New Age eclecticism. Sims brushed that reference aside as referring to the need of others: neither did he make any connection to the word 'spirituality'. However, he did respond to the most general of my discursive frameworks: the concept that spirituality can be related to 'what you value most in life'. He replied that actually, most of his professional work in theatre, involved playing 'men dealing with precisely those issues' - that is, whether or not to believe and in what to believe. For himself he said, 'until now the best answer I've ever had is that it's the pursuit of excellence in the sense of Robert Pirsig's kind of ideas', citing both *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1979), and *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals* (1992). The philosophy that attracted him he said:

[...] is the idea that goodness and quality (.) can be nouns as opposed to adjectives, [...] that quality's a thing that can be found in objects and recognised (.) and if that if you pursue that as opposed to trying to be good or bad or whatever (.) that that will lead you on the right path generally. It's a really interesting attitude in a lot of ways (.) it has echoes in eastern religions (2/2/98)

Sims eventually described himself as 'probably agnostic'. He claimed no sense of the existence of a higher power, but was however intrigued by the gaps in human knowledge in relation to the smallest elements of matter. That is, he was interested in the issues raised by quantum physics:

[...] at a quantum level things operate in a way that we simply can't understand and in fact in a way which seems to completely mess with ideas of time and causality and those sort of issues which we've always presumed (.) even with the god structure, that they make the universe operate. And if there is a god they gave us time and movement and space, and quantum physics says that they don't even exist apart from your point of view, from your subjective point of view. [...] the forefront of religious thought is (.) physics is tied up very closely with it (.) in a lot of ways. (2/2/98)

This was the first time that an interest in science had been proposed as analogous to, or convergent with, a religious worldview, (an interesting change from psychological explanations) but such an order of discourse is certainly active in wider culture (see for instance Teilhard de Chardin, 1965; Wilber, 1995). The moral pursuit of 'goodness' and 'quality', and an appreciation of the mystery inherent in contemporary science, were then the two formulations of personal belief that Sims offered on this occasion, both of which I would categorize as sitting on a border between 'spiritual' and 'secular' belief systems. In particular, Sims presented himself as a strong person - intellectually, emotionally, morally - who did not need to rely on the 'crutch' of religion. If religion was to be useful, it would be something one controlled through the exercise of reason, and definitely not something to which one submitted. And in viewing religion primarily as a support for weakness, Sims found common cause with the character he was playing:

You can either find strength in religion through your intelligence and through using those parts of the religion that you need (.) or you can kind of approach it from a weak point of view, which is what Peter preys on. [...] and in that sense it (.) religion can be a really seriously evil thing, you know, and that's why millions of people go and kill one another in the name of God very often, because they would rather call themselves a member of a group than (.) really seriously think about, you know, what the implications of, of the teachings are. (2/2/98)

In explaining McAllister's view of Father Tahere, his adversary in *The Chosen*, Sims draws a distinction between 'being a religious man' and 'hiding in religion' due to a reluctance to face

one's nature. He sees a congruence between his own opinion of hypocritical forms of religiosity and his character's opinion of his rival:

He is the sort of person that annoys me too. Someone, someone that (.) is ostensibly good and preaches goodness and without actually having made the personal (.) sacrifices necessarily to have that (.) authority if you like. [...] He [McAllister] believes that (.) and the same with all [...] organised religion, as far as he's concerned, most of the people running it are hypocrites with their own agendas, [...] they're all ambitious people, they work within the structures they call their religion and within that structure they're just like everybody else and what gives them the right? Because it's religion to feel superior to other people, that's basically his premise (.) pretty much my premise as well. (2/2/98)

The second half of this statement is similar to Hamilton's explanation of her negative feelings about institutional religion in chapter 6 where she also spoke of religious groups primarily as environments that could be exploited by power-hungry people. Sims' statement seems to offer an identical construction; however, viewed in the context of his other remarks, it is relevant to note that he stands in a different relationship to concepts of power than Hamilton. She consistently saw herself as less powerful than others, identifying with the homeless subjects she researched for instance. Sims, on the other hand, identifies, at least intermittently, with his character, and therefore makes comparisons with others who have the right to wield power. His talk is more concerned with the 'personal sacrifices' one needs to justify authority and with the conditions that might qualify or disqualify someone from exercising power over others; acting on a hypocritical basis being such a disqualification. Sims does offer a blanket criticism of organized religion, but I suggest that his position is actually similar to that of Sarkies who, fascinated by power, talked about rejecting generalized, exterior authority, while wishing to consolidate his self-sovereignty. Since Sims consistently draws on binarized constructions of strength and weakness, placing himself on the side of strength, he appears more confident in his place in the world than Sarkies does, and therefore more concerned about the temptations of power.

As has been noted on several occasions, the discursive formations that buttress statements critical of organized religion appear at this time to have taken on a routinized, hegemonic form: religion is seen as a promoter of conflict and religious people as power-seeking hypocrites. Nevertheless the interview data also shows that even when they are drawing on almost identical discourses different respondents stand in different relationships to those statements and may be deploying them for different purposes.

Like the majority of the interviewees Sims thought *The Chosen* was not really 'about religion'. He did recognize the topic as forming a cultural frame of reference, being aware for instance of the echoes of the several recent cult tragedies in the role he was playing, as well as of the more conventional references to Catholic concepts of God. However, he claimed any significance the story possessed was actually about successful forms of personal behaviour. By that he meant that it was primarily about two people (Tahere and Sarah) 'finding their own strength'. He said the concepts of God and goodness were just a 'metaphor' for this process, which involved the need of people to 'believe in something' - in this case romantic and sexual love (2/2/98).

Again, the phrase 'finding their own strength' is reminiscent of Hamilton's discussion of her role in *Saving Grace*. In that context the phrase was identified as drawing on a psychological order of discourse which is itself linked to contemporary, expressive 'self-spirituality' - a formation that occurs across both religions of humanity and spiritualities of life. So, just a while after drawing on a less common scientific discourse, Sims is now too resorting to the dominant manoeuvre of re-framing religious content as psychological content, reinforcing how ubiquitous that framework is.

The analysis of *Saving Grace* also proposed that ideas about love and ideas about God might be cognates in certain situations. There is thus little that is ultimately 'unreligious' or 'unspiritual' about what Sims is saying, at least not in terms of the frameworks this research employs. However it is important that he does not see these discourses as being 'religious' in nature, since a speaker's perceptions and categorizations are highly relevant in discourse analysis. If a certain order of discourse is not recognized as relevant, not given priority in terms of framing experience, it consequently has little power in either the speech or the life of the individual or collectivity concerned. The same may also hold if phenomena must satisfy a narrow set of criteria in order to qualify as relevant to a particular discursive framework. For instance, if religion is narrowly defined as only traditional, institutional religion then many phenomena which fulfill similar 'religious' functions in peoples' lives will not be able to be recognised as such. In Sims' case he is able to talk about the connections between quantum physics and religion, and can articulate a moral code which he sees as non-religious, but does not see a connection between the development of the self, the self in relationship, and contemporary forms of religiosity.

Radha Mitchell: religio/spiritual positioning

By 1998 Radha Mitchell, who played Sarah Gordon, had already worked on the soap opera *Neighbours* (Grundy, 1985-), the low-budget feature *Love and Other Catastrophes* (Croghan,

1994) and the American independent film *High Art* (Cholodenko, 1998). Mitchell had also done screen studies at Melbourne University and took more interest than other interviewees in the purpose and method of my research - this interest was evidenced for instance by questions about why my inquiries were limited to New Zealand-made productions.

Mitchell described *The Chosen* as essentially 'a love story with a spooky edge', these elements being, in her mind, more important than its consideration of the ideology of Catholicism, which was 'more just like an area to sort of create characters out of, it's not really hard core interested in that' (2/2/98) Nor, she said, was the cult explored in any great detail, rather it was viewed as a 'cancer within the community', the central issue being how the community dealt with it. This was a stereotypical attitude to take to the topic, Mitchell asserted and from her point of view it would have been more interesting if the world of the cult had been explored from a closer perspective. Actually, she said, she found the word 'cult' itself a strange one, since she had herself been brought up in a group that could have been called a cult. Her mother, a woman interested in 'anything mystical', had been associated with the Hare Krishnas, and Radha had been taken on several trips to ashrams in India as a child.

This piece of biographical information was a surprise. In my research until this point I had gained the impression that the production team felt connected to the religious content only either tangentially (for instance through Sims' negotiation with the concept of religious authority), or largely through an emotionally-driven rejection of the Catholic worldview, as with Fleming, Strawhan and Hampson. It was unexpected that someone would actually have lived in, and moreover, did not repudiate, the cultic milieu that formed the tantalisingly 'bad object' in the value system of *The Chosen*. Yet, this was Mitchell's situation, and furthermore, she presented the experience of living with Hare Krishnas not as having restricted her personal freedom but instead as having given her the resources to relativize the claims of all worldviews:

I think it was good because it showed me that (.) you know (.) that our views of things are definitely constructed by (.) the community that we're involved in and that we live in and that there's nothing that's given necessarily true. [...] I'm a bit cynical about, you know, totally devoting your life to somebody else's rules but at the same time I find it really strange that you wouldn't question these aspects of yourself and that you wouldn't be curious. [...] I mean there's a lot of people that don't and I find that really vacant. (2/2/98)

Mitchell raises the possibility that the actual experience of being involved in a 'cult' may be less all-encompassing than the authors of *The Chosen* imply, since her statements suggest she has

come out of the experience with her powers of judgement intact. In particular she claims to have gained ‘new’ and ‘different’ perspectives, which mean that her own attitudes to eastern religions is ‘less excited’ than that of many of her contemporaries. Moreover, she also argues that her early socialisation has given her a propensity to view life through a spiritual framework, when others cannot, an ability she values. This is the obverse of the situation discussed in the section above, where Sims prefers not to draw on religious or spiritual discourses to embody his understanding either of life or the programme.

Although Mitchell stated that, for the last few years, she has not felt ‘personally that attached to the whole religious side of these things’ she continues to engage in practices associated with eastern spiritual traditions: ‘I do a bit of yoga and a bit of meditation, I sort of meditate through my work I guess (.) it’s like a creative kind of space, which I think is the same feeling’ (2/2/98).

Like Jim Moriarty in *Saving Grace*, Mitchell was one of the few research subjects to claim that her work overlapped in a significant sense with her personal spirituality. Like him, she claimed to sometimes be so immersed in acting that she ‘gets lost’ in her work, but she also described a conscious effort to use some of the waiting time between performances to engage in meditation. More specifically, Mitchell also saw a connection, not so much spiritual as imaginative, between her mother’s experience and the situation of the character she played in *The Chosen*: she said being able to think about her mother’s experience at that age had helped her to play her part in the production with more conviction.

Mitchell also dismisses what she labels ‘religion’, although she does so in a more moderate manner than most others. Still, detecting that discursive formation in her speech and listening to the descriptions above indicated to me that she was probably yet another of those who drew upon a spiritualities of life model. When I asked her explicitly if she identified with a model of New Age spirituality, she said, ‘No’, she wouldn’t align herself with New Age thought. However, she then offered a series of tentatively expressed, linked clarifications that echo the eclectic attitude Woodhead and Heelas consider typical of an aspect of a ‘spiritualities of life’ model;

[...] having, you know, tasted so many different varieties as well, [...] it’s all pick your own, choose your own adventure kind of thing [...] I believe that anything, you know, is potentially possible, whatever (.) whatever floats your boat. [...] certainly I’m interested in (.) in things that are working (.) you know from different cultures, [...] (2/2/98)

That extract envisages life as a self-directed (rather than externally directed) journey - 'choose your own adventure', 'float your boat' - thus generally referencing the late-modern hegemony of the doctrine of self-authority. Mitchell also evinces different assumptions about life from the rest of the production team since she has a mixed background featuring both Western and 'Eastern' cultural influences. She has had a more direct encounter with eastern forms of religiosity than other respondents, the majority of who report gaining their knowledge from books. As a hybrid subject then, Mitchell expressed less idealistic opinions about eastern-influenced spirituality than several other respondents. Nevertheless, whilst possessing an unusual background and expressing idiosyncratic attitudes, Mitchells' language is not markedly different from that of the other interviewees since she makes little use of specialized 'eastern' terms for instance. It would seem likely that her early experiences of difference may have been modified by a subsequent immersion in the largely secular environments of Australasia.

Gender and the role of Sarah Gordon

In the context of my questions six weeks earlier about the genesis of the script Strawhan and Fleming, had spoken of the character Sarah's role as crucial to the programme since she was the 'seeker after truth', the one who had to choose between the validity of two conflicting philosophies of life. This had interested me because of the possibility that it would mirror the moves in *Saving Grace*, to make the female character Grace, the narrative and ideological centre of the film. If that had indeed been the case in *The Chosen*, it might have been possible to hypothesize that spirituality is often represented as subaltern in New Zealand texts; associated either with female or with Maori characters. But listening to Mitchell's interpretation of the storyline, the validity of those earlier claims seemed doubtful:

[...] she's a protagonist in the sense that she is trying to instigate a relationship with the priest. I mean she does do, you know, active things that make that happen and it's constantly being taken up or rejected [...] She's not passive (.) but at the same time then she does get influence and she becomes kind of passive [...] I know that definitely in the last episode she's really (.) she's got a lot less to do, she's changed, she doesn't have anything to say really because them two are fighting so I guess it's kind of traditional in that sense. It's a traditional piece. (2/2/98)

Although describing a representational and ideological matrix where the female character is gradually relegated from protagonist to becoming a sexual and emotional 'reward' for the victorious male, Mitchell notably does not choose to use explicit feminist language to critique the programme. Instead, Mitchell clothes her perception of the sexist nature of the plot of *The Chosen* in professional terms which suggest merely generic differentiation - it is a 'traditional' piece; that

is not an 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' or art-house' programme. For her instead, the stated rewards of playing the role were the enjoyment of the company of her fellow actors, and the chance to play a 'paradoxical' character who 'gains a greater knowledge of the world' and 'a level of maturity' through undergoing the experiences the script prescribes for her.

Cliff Curtis: religio/spiritual positioning

Since, by the time I finally made contact with him, it was two years since Curtis had played the role of Father Tahere in *The Chosen*, his talk about it was less specific than that of the other interviewees. Curtis's stated reasons for becoming involved in *The Chosen* fell into three categories: professionally, he was keen to take opportunities to work back in New Zealand; personally, he was interested in the topic because of aspects of his own background; and thirdly, seeing himself as a representative of Maori in general, he was interested in playing a positive, heroic character since, 'this was not a stereotyped role for a Maori'. The first reason was not discussed further in the interviews, but the second and third reasons were.

While also 'aware of Maori spirituality', Curtis had been brought up a Catholic, had been an altar boy, and had some attraction to the idea of becoming a priest, claiming to have been really 'into religion' from the ages of 6 to about 13. He still found religion a topic of interest and said that before *The Chosen* came along he had been developing a story of his own 'about a priest in a community split by different ideas about beliefs' (17/5/00). He had originally assumed that *The Chosen* would replace that story but said, once production began, he quickly realised the project, 'was never going to have the courage or subtlety I wanted'. Nevertheless, if there had been any connection between his own interests and the character of Father Tahere, it was, he asserted, in the 'struggle to be good',

There he was trying to be good but trapped within all those rules and regulations and he's thinking (.) 'If I stick within these rules I have to sit here as this wanker [McAllister] tears the town to bits'. If there's any connection it was that. I've seen the Church do that many times (.) it has sat on its hands many times. So he's stuck within an infrastructure that requires correct behaviour. He's having lascivious thoughts about this woman for example (.) and he has to sit on his hands. He doesn't face up to the idea that 'Why can't I serve God and love this woman?' (17/5/00)

There are three subject positions occupied by Curtis in the course of that statement, which prioritizes a moral discourse over the desirability of sticking to Church doctrines. He speaks as an actor about his character, he speaks in terms of the motivating thoughts attributed to that actor, and he speaks as a mature individual reflecting back, critically, on his experience of the Church and its

customs. From each of these positions he provides a justification for seeing two forms of 'goodness' as in tension with one another: an institutional form of goodness associated with priestly celibacy, and a humanistic concept of goodness as the expression of natural passions. His own preference is to reconcile these tensions, which he imagines doing by ignoring institutional codes of behaviour and focusing instead on the object towards which those behaviours are directed: the service of God. In a manoeuvre familiar from the discussion of *Saving Grace*, serving God can then be equated with loving a human female. In itself this manoeuvre is not an indication of the use of a discursive framework particular to any of the three major discourses of religiosity, since an analogy between heavenly love and human love may be a feature of them all. However the addition of the word 'lascivious', implying that sexual desire is equal in claim to a love of God, suggests the speaker is not associated with a religion of difference in the conservative form described by Woodhead and Heelas (2000). The affiliation is more likely to be with liberal forms of religions of humanity or spiritualities of life. However it was this none of these categories that were evoked by Curtis' remarks about the frameworks he and Mitchell had used to inform their performances. I asked him about Hampson's claims that the production had become more serious in its treatment of religion as a result of the improvisation and re-writing that had taken place on set. Curtis saw the situation differently: 'Radha and I (.) rather than the religious or spiritual way, pushed the internal human conflict [...] She knows that he loves her and desires her and he's not being true to himself. It makes him hypocritical to her in her eyes' (17/5/00).

Here the psychological framework suggested by the phrase 'internal human conflict' is not linked specifically to spiritual health and independence but, to a moral framework within which 'being true to one's self' and not being 'hypocritical' are values in themselves. There is an increased sense here that, rather than individual self-reliance being the goal (as it was for Hamilton), that right, 'ethical' relationship with others - a view of one's self as part of a dyad at least - is a controlling dynamic. Curtis again draws on the hegemonic psychological order of discourse but arguably, has a less 'self'-centered view than some others of what psychological health entails.

I asked what Curtis did find positive in a spiritual sense. His worldview, which fitted within the model of a spirituality of life, drew on a hybrid range of sources, including traditional Maori religiosity:

In terms of like (.) the godly aspect, I don't have a problem with that being a possibility but I tend more towards the idea of (.) pantheism (.) where there is a spirituality inherent in all things. (.) I'm interested in traditional Maori structures [...] I am interested in exploring

indigenous religions, they are not as reductionist to me. You know there's the tri-union (.) *mauri*, *wairua*³⁸ (.) And a physical element. Something can have *mauri* for instance but a spirit is not moving through it. (17/5/00)

Other sources of spiritual sustenance he mentioned included reading philosophy, and using both the *I-Ching* and a divinatory activity called: 'The Dictionary Game', in the service of an ethic which he framed as an interest in 'responsibility' rather than 'control'. The elements of this included responsibility for himself, his environment and his relationships; it was too common he said 'to abdicate that power to God':

I use these (random) things to help me, an easy way to extend my inquiry. It's not that I have a deep belief or faith in these things (.) These things like I Ching or Tarot or prayer or *karakia* or thoughts or affirmations (.) manifestations, metaphysics [...] when one opens one's self up to these things they can be a catalyst to correct action, a random or interesting angle on where you're going. (17/5/00)

The constructions of spirituality that Curtis is presenting provide an almost 'textbook' picture of a late-modern, hybridized, globalized spirituality. He draws on techniques from the East (*I Ching*), the West (prayer) and from his own specific ethnic heritage (*karakia*), as tools (rather than 'deep beliefs'), for making choices about taking action. The concept of God is not rejected but neither is it held close; God is not explicitly within him, as it is for some affiliated with spiritualities of life, rather God is held in reserve, perhaps for future use - since at one point Curtis speculates about returning to the Church one day. The diverse elements of this self-created, eclectic spirituality constitute one framework which Curtis uses in the construction of his identity. However, he largely draws on professional discourses when discussing projects on which he has worked, and a positive discourse of spirituality is isolated in a more 'private' discursive space. In relation to *The Chosen* an historicized, slightly critical account of his own involvement with the Catholic church was provided, but when we talked about his work in the wider industry it soon became clear that Curtis thought that film and television-making and spirituality just don't mix!

In common with many of his colleagues Curtis did not hold the institution of television in high regard. He said he did not watch much television himself, spoke of the project as 'a fair shot at it for the constraints of television' (17/5/00) and described a 'making-the-best-of-it' mood amongst the actors: 'Radha and I especially - Jeremy, he was more pragmatic, "just do it, just get on with it.

³⁸ According to the Ngata Dictionary (1993) *Mauri* means 'life-force' whereas *wairua* has the more specific meaning of 'spirit'.

It's television, we all know the rules" - thought, "We're here, we're breathing, we're spending a number of weeks on this programme [...]' (17/5/00).

I assumed then that Curtis might rate film-production as a more satisfying activity, perhaps even a more spiritually satisfying, activity than making television. I had a particular expectation this would be the case because I had recently seen him in *Bringing out the Dead* (2000), a film that had an impeccable (implicitly) 'spiritual' pedigree: directed by Martin Scorsese from a script by Paul Schrader, the author of *Transcendental Style in Film* (1972). In one scene Curtis, (admittedly playing a drug-dealer), had expired Christ-like, impaled on a metal balcony-rail against the glittering darkness of the New York skyline. Nonetheless, analyzing the actor's statements about the industry, it was notable his attitude was considerably less romantic than my own, ephasizing the commodification of spirituality 'It is a highly exploitative industry' he asserted, 'as a machine it will take [...] any issue, any time or place and if it's got some dramatic cachet or currency they will just cash in on it' (17/5/00) In fact, in all his career in the film and television industry, said Curtis, he had not experienced anything 'that was coming from a place of considering one's spirituality - not that I've worked on' (17/5/00).

Providing such a bleak summation of the films with which he had been associated seemed, at that point, rather blinkered to me, especially since *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994), in which Curtis had also been involved, had been understood by some critics as having spiritual overtones: as, like *Bringing out the Dead*, representing a journey towards redemption undertaken in very tough territory (see for instance, MacDonnell, 1984; Hallam and Marshment, 2000). However this was not a point of view Curtis found relevant, in fact my remarks seemed to have touched a sore point: he spoke of the film as 'exploitative', based on a 'notorious' novel by Maori author Allan Duff. The tension increased when I misunderstood the reasons for the excision of a rape scene in *The Chosen* (as discussed in chapter 5).

I gradually realized that this interaction was me something about the complicated way in which identity - gender and ethnic, in this case an identity specific to New Zealand - interacts with, and influences, a specific aspect of representation. I had thought it would be easy for Curtis to talk about spirituality in a professional context because he so obviously had a strong concept of it personally. For instance it had been easy for Jim Moriarty to explain the connection between his spirituality and *Saving Grace* when because he felt little discontinuity between his work, his life (including spirituality) and his hybrid ethnicity. However, not only did *The Chosen* take a more

negative view of religiosity, but, for Curtis, work, because of past experiences, was placed at more of a remove than it was for Moriarty. These factors were related to his third reason for being involved in the production: because of his wish to be a positive role model for other Maori men. Curtis told me he was tired of being cast as a villain, a bully, and a rapist - he did not wish to play any more of those roles. Once this had been established it was no longer surprising that someone who, largely because of the colour of his skin, has been repeatedly cast both in New Zealand and America, as the evil against which good is defined, should fail to see any 'spirituality' in the work with which he had thus far been associated. I understood then that assessing the content in relation to an ethno/political framework was more important to Curtis than the 'spiritual' framework I was trying to prioritize.

Differing models of the relationship between self and work

The significance of discussing these three viewpoints is the light they throw on how different subjectivities, informed by different experiences, conceive of the links between private and professional realms. The statements of these three actors suggest that they could articulate links between their personal beliefs and the roles they were playing, but while these links may have worked individually, as motivations to inform their performances, they did not have strong shaping effects on narrative texture and hence on the encoding of meaning in the production.

On the other hand the fact that Mitchell could see her involvement in this production as no less beneficial to her personal spirituality than other projects, was intriguing, especially when set against Curtis' passionate assertion that he had never yet worked on something that was spiritually significant. Some elements of Curtis' background - specifically the access to both Maori and Catholic worldviews - are similar to those of Jim Moriarty, but Curtis did not, in this interview context, bring those into his work in the same way that Moriarty does, instead prioritizing political discourses about ethnicity. These three performers appear to have different concepts of identity - Mitchell's and Moriarty's holistic, and Curtis's compartmentalized - and therefore present different understandings of the relationship between themselves and 'work'. Sims, different again, is able to articulate a range of attitudinal similarities between himself and his character, but, building on an anti-religious standpoint, makes discursive choices which reframe discussions about religion to within secular frameworks of rational self-reliance.

Changes made during production

It seemed to me there was less scope than in *Saving Grace* for individual members of the production team to have an influence on structures of meaning in *The Chosen*. This may be attributable to the fact that, having spoken to some of them once only, I had less chance to build a relationship with the interviewees, so the information gained was less detailed and there was reduced scope for me to observe changes in their modes of expression. However, it was clear that the production was both larger and more hierarchically managed: several of the interviewees (Hampson, Sims, Campbell) confirmed this. Add to that the intense financial and time pressures and there would have been little space for differences of opinion or interpretation. Even so, several interviewees mentioned there had been minor changes in the script during filming, and it appeared the producer, Hampson, had been at the centre of these.

The majority of the changes were motivated by shortages of time and money. When I re-interviewed Hampson the exigencies of the budget were uppermost in his mind. To give one example that must stand for many others, he said that a sequence in the final showdown at the Chosen's compound had originally involved a female cult-member setting herself on fire and running through a tunnel towards Tahere. To perform this scene as written would have involved employing a stunt double, necessitating costly safety measures. Instead, the scene had been simplified so it consisted of a conversation between Tahere and the distraught cult-member, finishing with her self-immolation taking place outside the frame, signified by flames reflecting back on Tahere's face.

There were also claims that in other places whole sections of storytelling had been removed. For instance Hampson said most of the flashback scenes detailing Tahere's past, establishing his motives for wanting to 'hide' within the institution of the Church, had been dropped, to save money on locations and actors. Instead Tahere had presented the information in dialogue, in an extended scene that will be described shortly.

The wish to simplify scenes for budgetary reasons had overlapped, so Mitchell (and later the director) claimed, with the actors finding that some of the lines, as written, did not make sense in performance. That modifications to the script resulted from this process is not unusual, since it is an expected part of the television drama-production process. What is unusual however is that the producer himself stepped in to do some of the re-writing (he also directed some of the second-unit action). His power and flexibility in this part of the process are therefore in contrast with Larry

Parr's hands-off stance in *Saving Grace*, reflecting not only different personal dynamics in the two productions, but also differing organisational systems in the filmic and televisual modes of production.

The modifications appear to have been most significant in a long scene in the third hour of the mini-series. As Hampson explained, it takes place when Tahere has kidnapped Sarah from the Chosen compound, confining her in a cabin in the bush while he attempts to break down her attachment to the cult:

That was the de-programming sequence which was Radha and Cliff [...] and we re-wrote it [...] they had a big rehearsal session on it, re-worked it a lot. Both (.) Radha and Cliff are actors of the kind of method school I guess [...] in order to (.) do something, kind of need to go there as well. So the day that they did the de-programming sequence which was a series of set scenes, they were really intense down in the studio. [...] the result's great (3/2/98).

Hampson's enthusiasm for the changes, and enjoyment of the energy of production is evident in his speech here. At this time he was speaking of the work proudly, and had changed the exemplars against which he was referencing the programme; now not so much other television programmes (*The X-Files*, 1993-2002), as a work of 'art-house' cinema, Wender's *Paris, Texas* (1984). That film had contained a five-minute long speech by the main female character, a speech Hampson judged to be 'amazing'. Now, he had provided Tahere with an emotional five-minute speech in which he revealed his past, outlining his reasons for becoming a priest. 'I've never made a programme that had a five minute speech in it before' said Hampson, but he had done so for the first time now. It had been, he said, also an 'amazing moment' (3/2/98).

A changed construction of religion?

The data in relation to this project so far has probably indicated that the initial impetus to view this programme as having anything significant to 'say' about the representation of religion or spirituality in New Zealand, had come largely from myself as researcher. While all involved in the project recognized it made reference to religious matters the majority of interviewees did not prioritize activating religious or spiritual frameworks in talking about the project. The strongest exception to this was amongst the ex-Catholics in the group, where anti-religious discourses were readily activated in response to questioning, but overall, the proposition that the programme had anything significant to say about religion seemed risible to most of the production team. Mitchell's

succinct summary of the situation speaks for them all when she noted that the programme says ‘religion is crap, [but] it doesn’t really offer an alternative to religion either’ (2/2/98).

I was therefore surprised when Hampson, who had been the first to describe the programme as ‘not a meaningful exploration of spirituality’ had changed his mind in our second interview. This change became apparent when I commented that the range of changes made to the narrative during production might ‘not take religion any more seriously than it had [...] done before, but it sounds like it’s bulked it up psychologically’. Hampson interrupted me,

Well I think it takes religion pretty seriously [...] I think it deals with Catholicism pretty strongly. There are some interesting new speeches in it that I’m extremely fond of. At one point Tahere says to Sarah, ‘Come on you’ve been brainwashed’, and she says ‘‘Yeah, I’ve been brainwashed all right, you know, I’ve been taught this and that and the other thing, [...], that’s what being a Catholic is all about’. So, you know, she addresses his charge of brainwashing [not just] as relating to her involvement with the cult but in her lifelong involvement in Catholicism and she actually comes up with something that I think I probably said to in the first interview, when we were talking about Catholicism, about (.) the effect it can have on children... (3/2/98)

Initially, Hampson claimed to have been involved in re-writing the script because there was no more money to pay for writers. Now, he appeared to be saying that he was also motivated by the opportunity to put some of his ‘personal’ views into the script; particularly regarding what he saw as the coercive manner in which Catholic doctrine was passed on from institution to individual. Previously Hampson had condemned the intellectual content of the piece, conveying at best a sense of ironic detachment from his work, at worst a sense of shame at being involved in it. He now sounded at once involved and satisfied, claiming that the project contained ‘a lot of meat’ in the form of ‘intellectual debate of an essentially philosophical kind’. He was also now able to talk about the piece in terms of a consistent ‘throughline’ which assigned the Chosen a compensatory function in relation to the repressiveness of Church doctrine.

Hampson explained his assertion that the programme now ‘took religion pretty seriously’ as partially, a result of the contacts he had had with the Catholic clergy advising them on the film. They hadn’t changed his bitterness about his childhood experiences he said, but he had had, ‘some great conversations’ with them and enjoyed talking to people ‘motivated by an essentially spiritual ethic’ (3/2/98). He specifically contrasted this spiritual orientation with the materialistic attitudes he found in television:

I spend most of my time dealing with people who are motivated by essentially commercial ethics or some sort of graft expressed in terms of artistic ambition or whatever [...] people are forever after you for something, [...] be it their artistic expression or spare money or you know, be it position or whatever (.) mostly it comes under some kind of mercantile consideration. (3/2/98)

The church is not of course, free from mercantile considerations he said, but at least its ethic has a different basis. However, I was also aware that there was an uncanny aptness to some of Hampson's statements which reminds one that he is a skilled writer and producer of dramatic tales, and that I, although a small audience, might have been considered able to appreciate his creativity and sensitivity. For instance the following speech summed up some of the themes of this thesis in an impressively succinct manner:

Another thing that I've given great thought to over (.) over the course of this is that it does seem to me that as the millennium sweeps upon us, [...] there seems to be a need abroad for conviction, for belief, which is why I'm kind of interested in doing this show about a cult (.) and which is why in the end I didn't want to do it as a bodice ripper. I wanted to treat the cult a little more (.) with a bit more respect than that. [...] I mean the more I look about there does seem to be (.) at times a desperation amongst people for something to believe in (.) be it an honest politician or something, anything. (3/2/98)

Hampson is not claiming that *The Chosen* will now contain an explicit discussion of this supposed contemporary need for belief, but he has, at this point, and in this context, and, for a whole complex of reasons, elevated the priority of such a discursive framework in his own explanation of the project.

The reassertion of professional discourses

Hampson's explanation of one set of changes made during the production may have seemed like a welcome break from the cynical pragmatism expressed by many of the other workers on the project, but whether it had any lasting significance is another matter. With the final group of interviewees: Sally Campbell, the line producer, Mike Smith the director, and John Gilbert, the editor, professional discourses and institutional norms were back in control.

Sally Campbell: line producer

Campbell was another lapsed Catholic. She said she had not thought of *The Chosen* as containing religious themes at all until she had spoken with me in the process of making arrangements for the research. Even so she prioritized institutional discourses of narrative and genre construction in speaking of the programme:

[...] what's being explored is good versus bad, you know (.) the evil elements coming through [...] and that evil has brought about this satanic cult and the good is in the Catholic church. But it's only a background [...] it's not the key reason why it's there, it's just a vehicle (.) it's a vehicle to drive the drama (3/2/98)

The opinion that 'the good is in the Catholic church' is expressed less equivocally here than it is in the statements of other speakers (for instance see discussion of Mitchell's statements above) but otherwise, in characterizing the programme as a conflict between good and evil, Campbell is reiterating the standard institutional understanding of the relationship between the project's content and its function. Moreover the brevity of this recurring formulation is an indication, I think, of the low priority that consideration of the content had amongst crew members with predominantly technical or organisational roles in the production.

Campbell was resolute in privileging the professional framework for discussion, keeping in mind the imagined 18-39 year-old TV2 audience, and the requirement to deliver a product to the promised specifications. When I asked her if she thought the project was going to be successful, she asked 'Am I meant to lie?' and spoke, warily and elliptically, of her fears that the programme might be drifting off-course. To summarize her concerns, she felt that there had been too many alterations to the script, some of the minor actors were too old to appeal to the target audience, the lead actors had perhaps made too much of a contribution, and that generally, the piece had become 'more serious'. It was, she said 'well done but I don't know whether it is a TV2 product' (3/2/98).

On one level it may seem excessive to be so concerned about a few changed lines in the script and the employment of some older actors. However Campbell relies on the industry to make a living and for her, and the industry itself, the programme is a product, a very expensive product on which they hope to make a profit in a difficult environment. For that product not to meet specifications might be calamitous. The speaker therefore seemed torn in this conversation between two sets of loyalties. The first was to the immediate production and her boss, Hampson, who had been instrumental in making the changes she was concerned about. In relation to that set of priorities the data showed her repeatedly 'talking the production up', trying to ensure it was seen in a favourable light. But she is also employed directly by the production company; her interview was therefore marked by a competing concern to show a more distanced and accurate sense of judgement, which would support further employment with the same employers. In those circumstances this

interview appears to function strategically for the interviewee as a place in which she could leave a record of her professional judgement of the project.

The Director: Mike Smith

It was three months later when I interviewed the director, Mike Smith. He was working on post-production with John Gilbert, the editor. Hampson still had overall responsibility for post-production but was unwell and not present. A seasoned drama director, Smith had returned from Australia two years previously. While there he had directed drama series such as *Flying Doctors*, (9 Network, 1985-1992) and *Halifax* (Channel 9, 1999-2002). He had also directed *Cover Story* (1994-1996) and *Share the Dream* (Gibson Group, 1997), two of the projects the ratings-failure of which had so discomfited Hampson.

Smith said he had engaged in meditation in an earlier, more troubled, part of his life, and also, like Sims, and Strawhan, claimed to have a 'philosophical interest' in metaphysical and moral matters. However he was adamant that religion in itself had never been of any significant interest to him.

He saw *The Chosen* primarily as a 'genre' project, that is a project full of 'mystery, suspense, horror, good versus evil' and said he found it exciting to try and create the requisite tension and shock in the piece. In explaining his understanding of *The Chosen* Smith relied on psychological rather than explicitly religious or spiritual frameworks. He repeated the formulation, also offered by Sims, that the priest, Tahere, was in the church because he was 'hiding' from who he really was. He also outlined the psychological journeys of the other two main character, Sarah, who (as Mitchell had also claimed) 'gained a new level of maturity', and McAllister, who started out 'mildly possessive and manipulative but ends up totally mad'. As a result of viewing the text within this psychological frame the fact that a significant part of the programme revolved around religious situations was unimportant to him:

I thought it gave it a really rich context but I wasn't interested in the message of it because [...] those issues didn't involve me deeply personally at all. [...] As I said the psychological journey of the characters was more interesting than the religious aspects because to me the religious aspects come out of the (.) the religious comes out of the personal, not the other way round. I mean the man is a priest because of his psychology, not because God told him to be. And I think that's the attitude and Peter is a priest, another sort of priest because of his inner psychology or need (27/3/98)

The use of the term 'rich context' indicates the employment once more of the hegemonic secular discourse framework used by the production team for *The Chosen* - that the use of a religious

setting and themes, at the explicit level of context, is a resource base for the creation of drama, but is not considered of particular ideological significance by the team. The term 'message piece', which the programme is deemed not to be, serves to reinforce the team's opinion that there are certain programmes which are considered active ideologically and others which are not. This programme is considered inactive in that sense, designed to be read by its audiences as merely (but satisfyingly) entertaining. If there is to be an overarching explanatory framework, Smith would prefer it to be of the psychological variety, where religious activity is seen as a response to psychological unease, and unease of an individual nature at that, rather than as a justified response to collective social problems. In chapter 2 the use of a psychological discursive framework was seen as sometimes connected with descriptions of spirituality, but not necessarily so, since the use of psychological discourse is widespread on its own account in contemporary culture. In Smith's statement the psychological framework is an alternative to describing events in spiritual language and is therefore allied with a non-or even an anti-religious view.

Smith did not speak of *The Chosen* at all negatively - he did not call it 'trash' for instance, nor suggest that there was a significant gap between himself as a private individual and his professional role on the production. In fact he was pleased with the project, which he described as initially appearing 'undoable' because of its size. 'It's probably the toughest thing I've ever had to do but the results [...] I'm really proud of it' (27/3/98).

The important audience for Smith was not so much the mass audience - the 18-39 'demographic' - as the intermediate audience of his employers; the commissioning company and the representatives of the television broadcaster. In contrast to the critical response that *Saving Grace* had encountered for the first time at this stage of the postproduction process, the feedback Smith had received had been positive - he said the network were talking about it 'as the drama event of the year'.

Therefore, in terms of direction the programme received strong input at this point from someone who had no particular interest in building up an interpretation that supported a positive interpretation of its religious or spiritual content. Instead, Smith's speech suggests, such content would be shaped by choices made according to professional paradigms of what constituted effective mass entertainment.

The Editor: John Gilbert

Whereas Smith had worked as a director only in the television system, the editor, John Gilbert, moved regularly between television and film postproduction. He had just finished editing a feature, (McCarten, 1998) and comparisons between the two production contexts were a feature of his speech: to the detriment of television. He also saw the religious content of *The Chosen* as merely a particular form of story-telling resource:

I see it as a way of tapping into a lot of emotion and spiritual material sort of by proxy in a way. It's there and the images have all this meaning which by throwing up on the screen you can extract drama from that that wouldn't be there if someone was a car salesman talking to a bank manager. [...] I mean you're always looking for situations where personal relationships are heightened by or extra drama is extracted by context and you know that's probably legitimate. (27/3/98).

Being 'not religious' himself, Gilbert claimed that he was probably typical of the audience in that he assumed not many of them would be interested in religion either: 'I think the TV2 audience is not particularly a religious audience and is not really interested in religious questions and they're probably more interested in good guys and bad guys' (27/3/98). However while asserting that he understood his imagined audience's lack of interest in religion however, Gilbert criticized what he saw as the underestimation of audience taste by institutional opinion:

[...] the frustrating thing about the perception of a TV2 audience is that the show doesn't have to have any substance or intellectual content, so you know it's essentially quite slight, [...] I'm not saying that there's not a lot of thought gone into it but the process with the audience is essentially about identifying with some characters and being worried about them (.) to see if they survive through to the end [...] whereas the intellectual ideas (.) they don't have any great weight. They're certainly not primary to how the show goes together. (27/3/98)

These formulations, demonstrating a frustration with the values of the institution, are common in this data-set compared with *Saving Grace*. Hampson and Schwieters for instance had expressed a similarly strong ambivalence about their roles as makers of material designed to attract a mass audience. Some of this negativity may be attributable to the research-context - that it is a safe place to vent frustration. However there is so much disapproval expressed of the intellectual quality of the programme, that this topic warrants further consideration in my opinion: it must be corrosive for people constantly to do work below the standard of which they feel capable, not to mention the likelihood that the intelligence of the local audience is also underestimated.

Changes made during editing

The principle that had guided this production throughout - the concept that it was to be definitively a TV2 programme - may have loosened during production but the emphasis was back to full strength in the post-production environment. It dealt not so much with the content however as with aesthetic/technical matters such as the 'look' of the programme, the way it sounded, and the pace at which it was edited and structured. For instance there was, said Gilbert, a concern that the show started too slowly, therefore scenes establishing the rural community before the Chosen arrived had been dropped, and the beginning was consequently 'much tighter' than it had been. The programme had been 'too soapy' in structure, he claimed, in other words that there had been too many subsidiary stories and characters - so these 'peripheral' stories had also been trimmed.

These changes continued a process of reduction of complexity that Strawhan had complained of several months previously. His original vision for the mini-series was as a programme about a community, with the cult representing the repressed forces within it. He and Fleming had therefore used a multi-faceted style of story-telling, that built in intensity after a slowish, expository beginning. They had also spent time in constructing an elaborate backstory for Father Tahere, justifying his reasons both for being in the church and for simultaneously loving and fearing Sarah. However, as we have seen, even at the stage of script development, the writers had been required to rein in the number of community members whose stories could be featured in the project, and, during filming, most of the visual aspects of Tahere's backstory had disappeared as well. From their accounts of the editing process it sounded as if Smith and Gilbert had continued reinforcing the trend of these changes.

In my judgement, although it had been never radical in form to begin with, the narrative had now moved even closer to the mainstream norm of mythical structure where a protagonist and antagonist, imagined in terms of binarized clusters of attributes, face each other around a central, personalized conflict. Smith's understanding of the narrative, explained above in terms of 'psychological journeys', which he and the actors have tried to highlight, is consonant with this form of structure. After these efforts to make the programme, according to Gilbert, 'faster [...] more linear [...] and more an action show' (27/3/98). Hampson's and the actors' changes to the dialogue may have remained, but it is not likely that the rest of the show, now even faster-paced and more superficial, would have provided the best context for that 'five-minute speech' to be regarded as, in Hampson's words, 'taking religion pretty seriously'.

Summary of post-production findings

These analyses of the talk of the makers of *The Chosen* indicate there were divergent views about religion and spirituality amongst them. As with *Saving Grace* respondents might, at different times, draw upon discursive constructions from across the spectrum of religious and spiritual affiliation and non-affiliation. In comparison with *Saving Grace* however, while there was minimal favourable reference to discursive constructions from the religions of difference end of the spectrum, there was more detailed justification for a set of strongly negative views about religion in general and Catholicism in particular. Still, in addition to the other attitudes they expressed Fleming, Schwieters, Mitchell and Curtis can all be identified as making significant use of discourses related to the spiritualities of life discourse. This favourable reference to forms of spirituality was similar to the attitudes found amongst the *Saving Grace* personnel.

There was more evidence, in this group of respondents of the use of discourses that could be identified as being predominantly secular or non-religious. Smith and Gilbert were perhaps the clearest representatives of this tendency, although others, notably Strawhan and Sims, used similar constructions.

My account of this case-study began with assertions from two key informants that the production was not worth studying because it had nothing significant to say about religion and spirituality. While that attitude continued to surface throughout the research, in the event many of the respondents, admittedly in interaction with the researcher, were able to speak of connections, whether negative or positive, between their 'personal' beliefs about religion and spirituality and their work on the project. While the actual, practical nature of the connections described cannot be fully determined, in the case of the production designer and the producer at least, examples have been provided of how articulations are formed between the ideological and the material. For instance, the production designer suggested the choices he made about the collection of properties were the result of a negotiation between his own paradigm of post-modern spirituality, and his sense of what the public would understand, while the producer described intervening during production to re-write dialogue so that it made a better fit with his own ideas about the Catholic Church.

Although these examples are suggestive of how private influences can become encoded into a text, we have also seen that the production personnel appear to have been most strongly motivated

by adherence to non-religious, non-spiritual, professional industry codes of practice. The evidence for this assertion is the greater amount of time the interviewees devoted to describing (and often complaining about) the operation of these codes. The priority awarded to the requirements of those codes of professional practice - the sheer amount of mental space they must occupy in day-to-day work - is perhaps a reason why the employment of discourses relating to religion and spirituality was initially so low on their list of priorities, despite the manifest content of the piece on which they were working.

Marketing *The Chosen*

The marketing campaign for *The Chosen* was bold and intensive. It consisted of advertising trailers on TV2 in the week before the screening, feature articles in national and local newspapers, and full-page advertisements in newspapers on the day the first episode went to air. This was an unprecedented level of exposure for a television drama production and underlined TV2's determination that the programme should rate well. However in accordance with the production team's understanding of the programme, little of the publicity engaged with religion.

The publicity targeted a number of different audiences, not all squarely situated within the 18-39 demographic. Feature articles were generated in nationally-distributed populist venues, such as the tabloid weeklies *TV Guide* and the *New Zealand Women's Day*. The *TV Guide* article, two weeks before the programme screened, had a subheading, '*Shortland Street* duo script TV2 mini-series', addressing the fan-base of that soap-opera. Subsequent paragraphs, informed by an interview with Strawhan, outlined the themes of the programme within the melodramatic moral framework: 'a good-versus-evil confrontation dividing a small local town' (Jelly, 1998: 10). Strawhan, showing traces of his initial desire to present the cult in favourable light, presented McAllister, as, in some ways, a useful role model for the audience: 'The message he sends is not necessarily a bad one - make your own decisions and learn in life through experience, not through being told' (Jelly, 1998: 90). That construction is moral, individualistic and secular, - a utilitarian individualist point of view (Bellah et al. 1985). The only mention of religion in the article is the following; 'Tahere is a man whose soul is lost in a modern world. He is driven by secrets from his past and earnestly seeks solace in religion' (Jelly, 1998: 90). This brief formulation neatly combines a psychological justification for his behaviour with a binary construction that separates the soul, Tahere's spiritual centre, from a necessary connection with institutional religion. It thus provides a lure for those interested in spirituality without making the programme sound overly 'religious'.

Also included in the *TV Guide* (8-9) is a double page advertisement for the programme. The hybrid cross developed as a visual brand for *The Chosen* - a combination of a Celtic cross and a saltire or Saint Andrews cross - is set against a glossy black background. It is bright-red, like a luminous bloodstain, or flames, and has the following words superimposed on the transverse bar of the central cross: 'If you're reading this you have been chosen'. The cultic connotations of the text and Strawhan's idea of the violence underneath the proper surface of small-town New Zealand, are here developed as a both a threat and challenge to the audience - personalizing the threat and daring them to watch.

A similar, even larger advertisement was placed in the nationally circulated weekly newspaper *Sunday Star-Times* on August 23rd - the day the first episode screened. This time head-and-shoulders shots of the three main players were disposed in a triangular pattern around the top half of the page. Under the picture of Tahere wearing his clerical collar a caption reads: 'He wants her heart', under MacAllister; 'He wants her soul', under Sarah; 'She must decide'. These lines of text reinforce the triangular nature of the relationships between the three, also hinting both that the narrative is about themes of emotion and sentiment. A rather different message though is suggested by the much larger text across the centre of the cross: 'Let us prey' - which mixes connotations of vampirism or the demonic, with a promise of a perversion of religion.

It is highly unlikely that anyone would 'read' the advertisements as promising anything like a serious treatment of religion or spirituality. Religious content is not represented with quite the degree of insignificance the production team attributed to it in the research interviews - the cross is huge and portentous - but any religious associations are with earlier 'satanic' films like *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973) or the *Omen* series (Donner, 1976; Taylor, 1978; Baker, 1981).

A more conventionally literate audience is addressed by a large feature article in the *New Zealand Herald* also published on Sunday 23rd August, (Grant, 1998). Based on an interview with Curtis, discussion of the religious aspects of the programme formed just a seventh of the total text. In those four paragraphs Curtis described his character as beset by internal and external dilemmas (his explanation of the role in psychological terms), and, as a lapsed Catholic, claimed to be comfortable about playing the role of a priest with the exception of some feelings of awkwardness about being seen to hear confessions. In a sidebar to the article, where Fleming and Strawhan are quoted in relation to the timeliness of the cultish story material due to its similarities with news

items about the Heaven's Gate suicides and the siege at Waco, Texas. 'We were not aiming to say anything heavy', Fleming reassures potential viewers, 'the primary aim is simply to entertain'.

In these examples of publicity for the programme then, generally the spectacular, perverse, controversial and psychological aspects of the programme were highlighted rather than the realistic, religious or spiritual. *The Chosen* was presented as a genre production, but the designers' decisions suggested a dual generic identity in order to widen the pool of potential viewers. Then again, while these strategies addressed the middle-brow young viewers imagined as the core TV2 audience, there was also material presented (in the *Woman's Day* and the *Herald* interview with Curtis) that expanded that imagined audience to include prospective viewers among older women and amongst a more thoughtful constituency of the kind of people who read about upcoming cultural events in newspapers. At the last minute the channel's publicists seem to have tried to attract the widest possible audience - whether traditionally TV2 viewers or not.

Media constructions of the text

In contrast to the large amount of data collected about the production of the programme, information about its reception is comparatively scanty. The press reviews over the period of the next week after its screening were balanced between appreciation and disparagement, with qualified appreciation only just winning out. The two weekend national circulation papers which had published publicity or advertising material the previous week were both appreciative of the programme.

Rapson of the *Weekend Herald* called *The Chosen* 'a classy thriller', noting that 'the deftly woven plot line, pacing and dialogue of the big local drama production of the year could only have been produced by experienced hands' (1998: D3). His review then, in the manner familiar from the reviews of *Saving Grace*, takes as its main subject matter the evaluation of the level of achievement of the creative and technical tasks required to constitute the text. The thematic content of the piece is dealt with briefly: Rapson praised the portrayal of 'the motivations and techniques of cultdom' as being done with an 'intelligent authenticity'. However he had nothing more to say about the treatment of religion in the programme, acknowledging Tahere's situation within the framework of psychological disturbance: 'Curtis, who invested his priest with a convincing sense of internal struggle, remained watchable' (1998: D3).

Peter Hawes, television reviewer for the *Sunday Star-Times* was wildly enthusiastic about the programme in a piece entitled; 'Well chosen! Newzild telly at its choice best' (1998: F7). One gets the impression he approved of it largely because recounting its plot provided him with the opportunity to pun and joke;

There are some good lines, good acting and an identifiable atmos, helped by fine Newzild words like 'clubrooms' and 'root'(vt). By this stage I was really hooked [...] Back in the Chosenry, wedding ensues, to background of impending Jonestown mass suicide. Enter priest! Bullet of course was deflected - probably by crucifix. Sneaks into bobby-trapped Chosenry. Up it goes; BOOM! (1998: F7)

It seems pedantic to analyse this deconstructive parody, which celebrates the low-culture aspirations of *The Chosen*. But if there are identifiable ideological concerns within Hawes' review they are with morality ('Eileen is rescued from gang rape in the nick of time - with morals like hers, that means after about three [...] another disposable moral module is old Ben'), with the celebration of New Zealand linguistic identity, and with the commodification of sex: 'Now we learn the key to Sexy Chosen's power - a pill, with the strength of about 10,000 oysters'.

Finally, Hawes' review takes one aspect of the discussions about *The Chosen* that I have chronicled - its producers' wish to make truly popular programming, not for themselves but for a group of imagined, less discerning 'others' - and turns it back on itself. Hawes accepts the validity of the concept of 'pure entertainment' and chides the producers for the remaining traces of pretension to seriousness that he discerns in the text;

Great! *The Chosen* races down the middle of the road at thrilling speed. The worry is that producer Communicado is taking it rather more seriously. As it did with *Once Were Warriors* which they tried to convert from flummery to sociology. This is A+ B grade stuff; leave it there. *The Chosen* is choice. (1998: F7)

A similar approach was taken by Diana Wichtel, the *Listener* television reviewer. She called the story 'impressively complex', noting that at one stage there was 'an incestuous rape, a gang rape and a dogicide/suicide in the space between two commercial breaks'. This was also a programme, she observed, that contained 'rudimentary social comment'; 'The townsfolk go along with the cult because it is bringing in money. Or, as a character points out, "Market forces, eh?" [...] But then it was on to another head-lobbing or dog-shooting' (1998: 71).

Wichtel's is the only review to use the word 'spiritual', noting that the (early) scene where Father Tahere gave Sarah communion had 'a neatly spliced spiritual and erotic charge'. Otherwise in relation to religious or spiritual content, she invokes a moral framework, with the simple evaluation 'that dealing with moral dilemmas isn't what it once was'. Nevertheless, Wichtel's summary of the programme was that it was worth both making and watching. 'It was trash' she said, 'but it was the sort of trash we watch. Which makes it a small but hopeful leap for local television drama' (1998: 71).

There was less generosity among detractors of the programme, who judged it as having failed in the execution of the same creative, technical and generic tasks that Rapson and Hawes had judged to be well-done. For instance the reviewer in *The Waikato Times* opined:

An uneven script was stretched to breaking point across four interminable hours. [...] *The Chosen* [...] failed as story and when that happens you might as well watch teletext. This thriller without thrills just wasn't interesting. Or chilling. (Thompson, 1998)

The Dominion's television reviewer, Jane Bowron (1998) was also scathing, fuelled by a crusade against the excessive sex and violence she had watched in more than one programme that week. She described the programme as 'loaded up like a Tomahawk cruise missile with all the heavy artillery of incest, homosexual rape, gang rape, racism and all the joys of small-town and cult living gone wrong' (1998: 35). In so doing she inadvertently demonstrates that she has taken at least one of the points that Strawhan and Fleming wanted to make (the small-town repression theme) but, unlike Hawes, cannot see it as an attempt at sociological reference, no matter how oblique.

However, as the programme-makers had anticipated, nobody saw the fact that the programme dealt with religious or spiritual themes as highly significant or worthy of extended discussion, although there was some notice taken of the timeliness of representing a cult group. Hampson's stated efforts to raise the profile of those matters during production had therefore seemed to have little effect with this specialized group of viewers. Instead, as the actors and director had done, the themes of the programme were perceived in terms of secular discourses of moral and psychological struggle. In contrast to *Saving Grace* for instance, there was no recourse to wider discussions of specific issues of Christian belief or the state of religious and spiritual belief in society. On my very first conversation with Hampson he had asserted that the programme had no genuine interest in discussing religion; these reviews suggest that this was also and indeed the

spirit in which the programme was received by press reviewers. However it is additionally noteworthy that none of the critics criticized the programme for its exploitation of that thematic material. I speculate that either indeed there is a particularly secular mindset amongst television critics or that the other characteristics of the text were so dominant in claiming attention, that there was no time, or need, for the reviewers to move to a level of analysis that included significant discussion of religion or spirituality.

And what of the all-important evaluation of the programme's success - its rating amongst the TV2 audience demographic the producers had so assiduously pursued? The first indication that they had not succeeded in their aim, came when the programme did not appear in the ratings summary 'What We Watched' (published in the *Sunday Star Times* each week) for the period August 24 - September 1. The so-called 'drama event of the year' had not made the top ten programmes on TV2 for that week. For a programme to make that list requires that it rate at least 15 percent of the possible viewing audience, or more than 450,000 viewers (Lealand, 2002). In a conversation with Strawhan on the third of September, 1998, 10 days after the programme had screened, that indication was confirmed - the programme had rated an average of only 9% - not an abysmal rating but not the success they had hoped for. Strawhan was reluctant to discuss the topic further; I was given to understand that all involved in making *The Chosen* had already moved on to other projects.

The Chosen: Textual analysis

In the textual analysis of *Saving Grace*, it was argued that the film, across all three versions, drew on several different forms of storytelling. Successive endings were, in my opinion: 1) narratively unconventional yet judged conservatively 'religious' (or 'mythical' in import; 2) in a comic, secular genre; and 3) transcendental and 'spiritual' in nature. In some ways the uncertainty about the best form for the film was a reflection of the uncertainty about how to define religion and spirituality for a contemporary audience.

In contrast, on *The Chosen*, the opportunities for alternative, positively 'spiritual' views influencing the production were limited by the industrial, hierarchical and normative production environment. For a start, the balance of the creative input was weighted towards a predominantly 'anti-religious' view embedded in the script by the originating writer, and reinforced by modifications made during production and post-production. Therefore, while individual members of the team may have expressed views sympathetic towards a spiritual understanding of both life

and the topic with which they were dealing, the production environment only allowed the potentially 'spiritual' cult to appear as an attractive alternative for the first half of the programme. Thereafter it was represented as an increasingly irrational, dangerous organisation.

One notable effect of this unified professional and ideological framework was that there was minimal divergence in understanding of what the programme was about. That is, with the qualified exception of the producer there was agreement that the religious content of the programme was not to be considered as significant in itself. Throughout this set of interviews then, the makers of *The Chosen* have described as their over-riding aim the creation of an exciting, violent and sexualized narrative, a 'clash between good and evil' that would appeal as entertainment for a youthful audience. In this textual analysis then I wish to comment on, not so much individual moments in the programme, as the implications of the generic form chosen for it, which I see as reinforcing the likelihood that the religious content would not be taken seriously. Rather than the categorizations 'mythical', 'experimental', subversive' and 'transcendental', all of which I applied to *Saving Grace* at various times, the narrative genre that comes to mind as a categorization for *The Chosen* is therefore that of melodrama, the specific form of literary or dramatic style which revolves around emotion and spectacle.

Nevertheless, it should be remembered that even on this production there was some tension related to style. At the same time as implying the text is melodramatic in nature, the writers, producer and director have also described wanting to provide it with an air of realism achieved through naturalistic acting styles. The aim of achieving this air of realism was to make a specific link with ideas of 'New Zealandness' and therefore to persuade viewers to reflect on the likelihood of such events taking place in their own neighbourhood. The textual analysis of *The Chosen* therefore concentrates on finding traces of those two stylistic forms, melodrama and realism, within the finished, broadcast text.

Melodramatic style in *The Chosen*

The basic characteristics of melodrama were outlined in the previous chapter, however over the last thirty years the scope of the melodramatic mode has been a topic of considerable debate. For perhaps the most influential twentieth century writer on melodrama, Peter Brooks, melodrama, is not just a limited genre, it is the dominant form of modern story-telling, 'a mode of high emotionalism and stark ethical conflict' (1976: 5), which, in its turn fed into the development of two supposedly 'scientific' modes of explaining the world - Marxism and Freudian

psychoanalysis - and thus had a double direct and indirect effect on modern culture. The particular relevance of his observations to this thesis are that Brooks argued that melodrama was a mode particularly suited to a 'godless' age, in which neither author nor audience can reach the certainty of belief in transcendental causation necessary for the production of convincing tragedy. That is, it is a fundamentally secular mode, the opposite of the parable-like or 'transcendent' mode which, it was noted in chapter 4, has been considered the most effective way to convey 'something of the transcendent'.

Under that definition then, human beings in melodramatic texts struggle against man-made (not transcendently-ordained) systems of cultural and moral oppression, their desire for self-expression and self-fulfillment challenged or thwarted by repressive social ties or unyielding laws - rather than, for instance, acts of God. For those who consider it to be a mode suited to the exploration of social tensions, particularly psychosexual tensions, melodrama defined in this manner has radical political potential, on the grounds that displaying intensified conflicts between individuals and society is a means of alerting viewers to the contingent and therefore alterable nature of those conflicts. According to Mulvey for instance, 'ideological contradiction is actually the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes' (1989: 39). If this style of definition is adopted then melodrama and realism are not necessarily inimical to one another, since both are styles used to convey something about the experience of everyday life in late modernity. For instance when related to the terms that this thesis has been using to describe contemporary society, the melodramatic mode can be viewed as uniquely appropriate to an era that privileges the development of the individual self, and of a materialistic, psychological understanding of human nature.

The Chosen undeniably exhibits melodramatic attributes in the generic sense that Smith (1973) describes. It is full of sensational incidents: the opening scene shows someone being burned at the stake, the first murder occurs ten minutes into the programme, there are four more murders, two suicides, three rapes and numerous other acts of violence and property destruction, all of which are depicted with a level of energy and explicitness that definitely qualifies as 'vulgar extravagance', producing 'meretricious sensation'. The text makes violent appeals to the emotions, by frequently representing characters sobbing with misery or wracked by lust and guilt. It has a happy ending, where Tahere leaves the priesthood to start a new life with Sarah Gordon, an ending implausibly tacked onto the end of the climatic conflict as the cult and its leader are destroyed. Tahere's

motivation for taking refuge in the priesthood - ostensibly because he had encouraged a former girlfriend into prostitution and drug-taking - is also implausible, as is the basic proposition that a town council would invite a cult group, sight unseen, to settle in the locality in order to rescue their horticulture business.

Stylistically the piece is also melodramatic. It was saturated with music in order to manipulate audience response, and there were at least four different scenes of explosive conflagration filmed in slow-motion detail, while numerous other compositional and lighting techniques were employed to enhance the emotional meaning of scenes. So, although some portion of the mise-en-scène did aim at subdued realism, it is justified to claim that the overall aesthetic impression was one of stylistic 'excess'. Additionally, in the post-production phase the pace of the editing was quickened and the content streamlined in order to imbue the narrative with a more dynamic, emotionally effective sense of pacing. The character grid employed in *The Chosen* also fits into a classic generic melodramatic model as gradually, the stereotypical central roles of good and strong hero (Father Tahere), innocent young woman (Sarah Gordon), and black-hearted villain (Peter McAllister) emerge. By the end even the cliché of tying the heroine to the railway track is referenced, as Sarah is trussed up on a pyre, rescued from burning by Tahere.

If the melodramatic nature of *The Chosen* is undeniable at this basic level, the low cultural status of melodrama (which is often perceived not only as lower class, but as particularly appreciated by female viewers, see for instance, Mulvey, 1989; Bratton et al. 1994; Williams, 1999) helps to account for the embarrassment that some team members expressed about being associated with this production.

Melodrama and social tension

But what about the broader frameworks for understanding melodrama then - the proposition that it is a mode dealing with unresolved social tensions? How might they be useful in considering this text?

Again, the evidence is compelling - *The Chosen* is overtly and substantially 'about' a problem of psychosexual conflict explored across a number of personal and community relationships. Father Tahere and Sarah Gordon are depicted as motivated by mutual sexual (veiled as 'romantic') desire. However the priest is blocked from acting out that desire because of his role as a Catholic priest, a position hedged about with strictures, most specifically the injunction to celibacy. As a

result of his limitations Sarah in turn is blocked from fulfilling her desire for him. While Peter MacAllister's motivations for bringing his cult group to Hopetoun are not primarily sexual, his mode of gaining influence over his followers is. He uses his knowledge of society's repressive attitudes towards sexuality to promise healing to those made miserable either by conventional attitudes, or who are victims of attempts to circumvent them in 'illegal' ways, such as rape and incest. Sarah persuades herself that by joining the cult she can transfer her desire to Peter and gain happiness, but he becomes an even greater source of control and restriction than Tahere. This increasingly unsatisfactory situation is resolved only when Tahere transgresses the law of priestly celibacy and makes himself available to Sarah. They are then both free to express their desire, although a condition of that expression is that they form an exclusive pair-bond, the constitution of which marks the final image of the programme.

The Chosen thus advocates a philosophy in which the expression of sexual love is a cardinal value, at the same time as unbridled sexual expression is portrayed as dangerous - the Catholic Church as represented by Tahere, forms a convenient nexus for these anxieties about sexuality. While Tahere himself is presented as a 'good' man, that is because he has a naturally good 'heart'. His religiousness is not the source of his goodness but is rather presented as a prison house of self-delusion and hypocrisy that prevents him from expressing his true desires. A contemporary awkwardness with the idea of celibacy is also explored through a series of jocular asides about priests molesting children and having sex with their housekeepers. Since Tahere's past, as he describes it just before he and Sarah have sex, was also one of sexual experimentation, it is as if the Church represents one of the few spaces in a public culture saturated with sex, where it is not required that one be sexual. That, and its position as the most visible location of resistance to evil, are its key functions in this text - the state of being a religious person is not of interest in itself.

While the exploration of sexual love is a typically melodramatic topic, the melodramaticity of *The Chosen* also inheres in the way in which the topic is treated. That is to say the text explores the appeal of transgression and self-indulgence, but ultimately chooses to recuperate the sexual impulse within an accepted social form - monogamy. Melodrama may be a form which exposes the contradictions in social conventions, but its divergence from those conventions is temporary and will be eliminated by the time the text is concluded.

Realism, naturalism and *The Chosen*

In the discussion in chapter 6 on the shift towards ‘realism’ in *Saving Grace* it was noted, according to Tulloch and Moran (1986), that a useful distinction may be drawn between ‘realism’ (an investigation of the forces underlying social structures) and ‘naturalism’ - the use of unobtrusive filming techniques to produce a life-like audio-visual representation of the world.

Here, in relation to *The Chosen*, both terms - realism and naturalism - are relevant. When talking about the style of direction and performance he wanted, Hampson had talked about ‘absolute conviction and absolute reality’, about wanting it to ‘look real’ - these are phrases describing the desirability of naturalistic styles of performances, and of the filming of locations, making it seem as if the fictional community of Hopetoun could exist ‘realistically’ within the landmass and cultural space of New Zealand.

In practice, what the implementation of these principles meant was that the performances of Mitchell and Curtis and several other of the actors, were initially restrained, and subtle. However as the story-material became insistently, generically, melodramatic in the second half it was noticeable that the performances also changed. In particular the script required MacAllister to develop into a murderous lunatic, and Sarah’s friend Eileen to become his unquestioning slave. Father Albert Tahere became an action-hero and Mitchell as Sarah Gordon, became passive – someone Tahere and her mother had to save. Overall more than half of the text was distinguished by this anti-realist, generically melodramatic tone. The ‘realism’ [naturalism] the producer, director and majority of the actors had aimed for was therefore not a predominant feature of the text as screened.

Real-world references

However there was also an sense in which the programme did make a nod in the direction of ‘realism’, of comment about underlying social pressures, by making reference to actual issues in New Zealand society, although these were also ultimately swamped by its melodramatic attributes. I will briefly sketch out what those other issues might be, the relevance of that effort being in reference to my argument in chapter 3 that the ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ may sometimes function in New Zealand as an alternative to a heavy materialistic and secular emphasis within the culture.

For instance, there are repeated, brief references within the programme to issues around the organisation of the economy and of productive labour. On the three occasions when the town council meets, and in several shorter scenes, there are angry debates about the proper uses of the community's resources in the shape of land and capital. The Chosen are typified as wealthy 'foreigners' coming to buy and exploit 'our land', a matter of increasing concern in contemporary New Zealand society. Unbeknownst to most of the community the chairman of the town's agricultural co-operative, Jim Gordon, Sarah's father, has lost their capital in failed business deals and has resorted to fraud (and, it turns out) murder, to cover his ineptitude. He sees enlisting the support of MacAllister as a way to make good the losses, but instead places himself and the town under MacAllister's increasingly malevolent control. While not appreciating the extent of his deception the townsfolk mutter about which is more important: economic activity or their freedom to enjoy life. In outline this set of concerns looks suspiciously like reference to economic and social controversies that have dominated New Zealand society since the late 1980s where the right-wing 'market' model of economic liberalisation with its support for increased globalisation of markets was seen to be at odds both with social justice and national sovereignty (Kelsey, 1994; Jesson, 1999 and others).

The text also explores a set of concerns around biotechnology, which is envisaged as being able to increase agricultural production, yet also as potentially producing mutations that will damage the environment, causing harm to animals and to humans consuming the crops. This issue, which according to Strawhan, featured at greater length in the first drafts of the script, is not explored with any consistency, especially once the plotline gathers speed, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that the desirable practices of organic agriculture, which the co-op already employs, are threatened by the vengeful activities of the Chosen in poisoning crops.

There is thus an imbrication of ideas of local and national community, of environmental sustainability and ethical business practices. While not foregrounded to the degree of other topics, discourses around these matters nevertheless form a significant value-system within the text that does seem to refer to issues of concern in 'real' New Zealand. As the text stands however the melodramatic texture of the piece is so strong that, just as the 'realistic' aspects of style are gradually replaced by non-naturalistic ones, so real-world concerns, including perhaps the observations about religion and culture that Strawhan had always wanted to make, are likely to be occluded by the demand to attend to the conventional patterns of relationship-based conflict which the text foregrounds.

Conclusion

To treat religion in a melodramatic manner - whether it be through the sentimental stylistic excesses of the melodramatic genre itself, or through the humanistic, 'realistic' filter of the larger melodramatic mode - is a common strategy in contemporary audio-visual production. In fact, I would argue, that it is the predominant strategy for film and television-makers within late-modern western culture. There has long been a strain of cultural activity that has dealt with religion through the lens of melodrama, but, as was discussed in chapter 4, during the modernist period, this strain, with its 'abundant' style, tended to receive critical opprobrium, critical praise being reserved for texts that treated religion in a reserved, ascetic, possibly even 'transcendental' style. Nowadays, however, possibly because of the factors canvassed in this thesis - the complex interplay of secular, religious and spiritual forces that mean there is little agreement about either the value of religiosity or its ideal form - it is rare to come across a text that deals with religion, or spirituality, in a manner that is at once accepting and ascetic. The degree of commitment to the topic of religiosity and the narrative focus necessary to produce a 'transcendental' text is therefore difficult to achieve. Nor are the grandeur and finality of 'mythical' forms of religious narrative in which prophets sort out the ills of the world, easily credible. It is far more common for religious or spiritual content to trigger complex, contradictory sets of discourses that may or may not be obviously aligned with religion. Religiosity becomes just another of the range of complex contemporary social issues that we may choose to think about and as such it is perhaps fitting that it is dealt with in the form in which audio-visual culture chooses to deal with many of our other social tensions.

However it is also helpful for this tension between melodramatic form and religious content to be recognised so that film and television-makers can make informed choices about modes of representation. In a discussion of recent films featuring the figure of Christ, Forshey (1998) provides the following explanation for the predominance of melodramatic form:

In the final analysis, the central problem is dealing with a sacred story in a technological and pluralistic society. [...] Since Christian doctrine has supplied the imaginative resources for much of our literature it is understandable that artists would want to present the story of Christ in the most technologically advanced medium. Since the story is so fundamental to society, the spectacular form seems the only proper genre. But the spectacular form no matter how it is manipulated, seems to demand a melodramatic archetype: and a melodrama fashioned from the paradigmatic story of Christ works

against itself, creating a 'moral fantasy' out of what has been considered the supernatural norm or realistic behaviour (1998: 801)

I would extend Forshey's insight not only to material that is specifically Christian in reference but also to audio-visual material that deals with religiosity generally. Certainly, *The Chosen* team did not want to prioritize 'religious' interpretations of their particular programme, and the fact that did not want to is interesting and relevant in itself. But given also a demonstrated continued public interest in both 'new paradigm religiosity' and cinema and television, the implications of embodying religiosity in a melodramatic form are important, as the form has a tendency to deflect attention from that specific aspect of content. In other words, since discourses of religion and spirituality are in a state of flux in the West, representations of that flux, treated melodramatically, are a useful means of examining, albeit once-over-lightly, a range of other relationships and values also in flux. Religion was considered, as we have seen, by many of the people on *The Chosen*, as a 'rich' context in which what a particular culture values, and what it condemns, can be seen standing out in stark relief, in the form of figures of 'good' and evil'. The porosity of religion to these other concerns explains why the melodramatic treatment of religion seemed workable to this team of people, functioning within a specific commercial context. However although, personally, the religio-spiritual positionings of the production team seemed to be dichotomised across a narrow range from secular to 'spiritual', professionally it was not necessary for any of them to have any particular attachment to religious ideas, in order to work on the project, since the programme itself had no central or serious interest in the actual institutions and tenets of religion. Ultimately it offered a discourse not of religiosity but of secularity.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Conclusion

This thesis has engaged with the mediation of religion and spirituality within the New Zealand context. It has looked at the symbolization of religious content in a situation marked, on the face of it, by the secular nature of all the entities involved. That is, it has undertaken case-studies of two projects - made in a 'secular' culture by 'secular' production teams, for audiences also assumed, for the most part, to be 'secular' - with the aim of investigating, in detail, how discourses of religion and spirituality are encoded in a specific section of the circuit of culture. In the process it has demonstrated that discourses of religion and spirituality do exert some influence in the contemporary New Zealand media environment but take different forms at different levels in the process of encoding.

In the examples researched there was a lack of synergy between the levels of personal belief and professional practice, and the resulting, highly negotiated and compromised texts, apparently made little contribution to public debate on matters of religion and spirituality. However, although there is little visible evidence that these texts would cause anyone to revise their opinion of New Zealand culture, in the late 1990s, as predominantly secular, the research indicates that there are underlying 'lines of tendential force' (Hall interviewed by Grossberg, 1996), at the personal level, which, should they gain in influence, might make such an attribution less secure in future instances of cultural production.

The field of study in which this research is situated - the media, religion and culture field - is itself a dynamic one: although rapidly growing, it lacks both a hegemonic theoretical model, and a settled range of methodological approaches. Part of the considerable effort involved in undertaking this thesis-project has therefore been the enterprise of synthesizing information from a diverse range of sources into a workable theoretical framework within which the specific research topic could be located. The case-studies themselves have demonstrated the complicated nature of the underlying relationships between religiosity, media and culture in these two specific sets of circumstances. Undertaking two case-studies represents only a small starting point even within the comparatively limited field of the mediation of religion and spirituality in New Zealand, let alone the huge field of such mediation on a global scale. The intensity of focus provided by concentrating on the 'encoding' or production phase of film and television-making has however provided a rich resource of detail indicating tensions around the production of meaning that would be likely, I speculate, also to be found in other instances of cultural production.

The case-study productions, *Saving Grace*, and *The Chosen*, were similar in several ways. The production teams both worked within very tight budgets and time constraints. They were both staffed by New Zealanders born since World War Two, who would probably be classed as 'liberal' in moral and political terms. They were both made in broadly the same cultural context, they were both publicly-funded, and were both aware of shaping material connected to the forthcoming millennium. In so doing they both made reference to explicitly 'religious' characters and ideas but did so from points-of-view that assumed institutional models of religiosity were no longer hegemonic.

One of the focussing questions of this research has been in what ways (thematically, stylistically) religion and spirituality are constructed in selected examples of film and television production within Aotearoa/New Zealand. In these two texts institutional religion is, in the end, represented negatively - there is no great salvation or comfort to be found for the characters in either Church, cult, or in elements overtly derived from the Christian tradition. The Jesus-figure in *Saving Grace* is not a beneficent redeemer and the Catholic Church in *The Chosen* is something the hero has to leave if he is to achieve his potential as a human being. In this regard, the texts continue a New Zealand tradition of negative evaluation of institutional religion in audio-visual production. This is not to say however, that the values presented in the films are not, for the most part, *culturally* Christian, since those values tend to function in a taken-for-granted fashion.

However, when assessing the significance of the research-findings it is useful to step back from the manifest story-content of the texts and consider their broader status as fiction entertainment products. The two projects were made on the assumption that they would have the status of products belonging to 'time-out' or leisure culture (Jensen, 1995). This assumption was explicit in the case of *The Chosen*, where the mini-series was publicized as 'the drama event of the year', as something potential audience members should clear a space in their schedules to watch. The injunction featured in the advertising 'Let us prey', was also, in a perverse manner, an invitation to engage in a 'virtual' public ritual. As such, both *The Chosen* and *Saving Grace* were theoretically available to be considered as examples of the process whereby media products, while retaining their status as commodities, also function as sites for reviewing and prefiguring cultural meanings. That is to say, in the terms used earlier in this thesis, it is appropriate to ask whether, in relation to discourses of religion and spirituality, these projects, serve as 'creative' or 'conservative' instances of discursive encoding (see page 20), and whether, in Morgan's terms, they work to 'mend and

conceal' discursive disjunctions, or work 'to foment the rupture of sites' instead (1998: 9, see also page 24, this thesis). An assessment of the nature of the two projects in these terms requires that one take into account their differences, at the professional level, as well as their similarities.

The projects represented two different organisational models of audio-visual production with slightly different work practices, assumptions about the nature of what they were making, and attitudes toward its content. *Saving Grace* was produced in the medium of film, a choice which produced certain requirements for distribution, and also raised expectations about the 'size' of experience, or the impact, it would ideally provide for those audiences. Although there was some difference of opinion about its intended audience, it was broadly seen as an 'art-film', a classification that meant its style, structure and conceptual framework could afford to be reasonably sophisticated and perhaps even 'challenging'. The development of that piece was initially driven by the director and writer, who, within the institutional constraints of feature-film-making, felt reasonably free to express themselves and to approach the project with moderately idealistic motivations. As others joined the project they were made part of a collegial 'team' in which they all had an opportunity to put forward and discuss their views of the project. With a couple of exceptions however, this team was inexperienced in feature-film-making. While both *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* were made according to a mixed public service and commercial model, in the case of *Saving Grace* the 'public service' ethos, where the film was seen as a contribution to a national-cultural body of work, dominated. As a result of these and other factors, including the fact that the original play was largely the product of a single mind, the *Saving Grace* project took both itself and the religio/spiritual aspects of its subject matter seriously. For all the ambiguity and uncertainty about meaning demonstrated in the interview material, the team intended to make a film that would contribute to public discussion about contemporary forms of religiosity.

By comparison, the television programme *The Chosen* was produced according to a model more heavily marked as industrial and commercial. The specifications for the product were pre-set - it should be popular, spectacular, entertainment for a specific audience demographic. The decision was made that a genre product (a romantic-thriller) would most reliably guarantee the desired outcomes. Because the resource pressures on the production were so tight the production team needed to be efficient and experienced crew members were therefore hired. Decision-making was also more streamlined and hierarchical than on *Saving Grace*, so that professional norms could be reinforced more speedily and securely.

In terms of this model of production the religio/spiritual content of the piece was, at the professional level, widely considered of minor significance only. In fact there was a pervasive air of cynicism both about the topic and the process of populist television drama production in general. The use of religious content in *The Chosen*, when there was little commitment to the idea of that content being significant in itself, can therefore be considered evidence of the *commodification* of religion in contemporary New Zealand. That is, the programme is representative of a trend where religious (and spiritual) ideas, practices and objects, are seen as components of identity in a 'lifestyle' sense and therefore as saleable commodities, whether to physical customers or to advertisers and audiences. The discussions about millennial appropriateness (a minor factor in the *Saving Grace* interviews as well) were evidence of the presence of that mindset, which has the effect of bringing the representation of religiosity under the authority of a secular worldview, rather than representing an equal negotiation between the religious and secular.

The assumptions that were made about audiences were also slightly different between the two case-studies, even within the parameters already established. *The Chosen* team employed a simplistic conception of a secular audience that was not particularly interested in religion, except as a colourful background for an exciting narrative. The team did not, for instance imagine that a segment of the audience would be shocked enough by the programme's treatment of religion to be outraged by it.

On the other hand the *Saving Grace* team employed more diverse, although still limited imaginings of their audience. Some did hope that their film would antagonize 'fundamentalist' Christians, but the director in particular gradually realized that there might be another group of viewers to whom the specifics of the Christian tradition mattered, insofar as they would hold certain expectations about the accuracy, consistency and significance of the material. These two specific views of audience stood alongside the more general assumption on this production also that many potential viewers were secular, to the degree that, as Botes said on another occasion, 'they didn't want to know about Christianity'. However, significantly, on neither production team was there explicit or sustained discussion of the possibility that some sections of the potential audience might be more interested in spirituality than religion, despite that preference being a feature of the two research-populations themselves at the personal level.

The role that narrative form plays in shaping the representation of religious or spiritual content in the two projects is also significant. Although I do not claim that form is necessarily determinative of a text's ultimate reception and evaluation by viewers, it seems clear narrative form is a factor in determining the range of responses that the text may receive. Mythological narrative style - where aspects of religion resolve the problems of individuals and societies - is one of the variants that has been discussed, with the 'passion' or 'sacramental' narrative as its explicitly Christian form. Both *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* flirted with the use of this style (Gerald's crucifixion and resurrection, Tahere's apparent death, Sarah's imminent death at the stake), but in the end neither of them carried it through to its full import. In *Saving Grace* while the crucifixion remained, the final version of the ending altered its meaning, and in *The Chosen*, the portentous sacramental version of mythical form was transformed into a melodramatic mode, which helped to downplay the significance of the religious themes.

Schrader's view of form, his theory of 'transcendental' style has also been linked with the 'parable' form of story-telling (see also White, 1997a) and with mystical variants of religion and spirituality. Rather than offering worldly comfort, (the comfort of religion) the use of transcendental form implies the possibility of a direct, unmediated encounter with some other mode of reality that must remain undefined. This form of story-telling was not appropriate for *The Chosen*, where at a professional level, the religio/spiritual content of the piece was not taken seriously. However, I would argue that the third version of *Saving Grace* exhibited elements of transcendental style in its final stages. The first ending of the film version retrospectively produced the narrative as mythological and sacramental, while the second took the film into the realm of secular, comic absurdity. However, the final ending placed Grace, in a static situation where, in order to progress, she had to accept a formless forgiveness she did not fully understand. It is on the basis of the persistence with which the director in particular, worked towards that ending, an ending that was in accord with his own identification as 'spiritual' rather than 'religious', that *Saving Grace*, despite its detractors, does evince a desire to present a significant representation of contemporary religiosity.

In the researching of *The Chosen*, this thesis has also identified the implications of the use of the melodramatic mode in the representation of religion and spirituality. That mode may be uniquely suited to the exploration of contemporary issues: it may especially have strong affinities with the psychological discursive framework so active in contemporary New Zealand as elsewhere, however it is also a mode which tends to produce texts where any meaningful discussion of

religion or spirituality is swamped by aspects of melodramatic style. Such is the intense focus on sexualized relationships, social and communal identities, on action, emotion and spectacle, that consideration of metaphysical issues (even when markers of their relevance are present) is reduced to a shallow celebration of a showy conflict between 'good' and 'evil'. The perfunctory nature of this approach is particularly reinforced when production takes place, as it did for *The Chosen*, in an environment where even melodramatic values are subservient to commercial exigencies. In this case the effects of the use of this style were not a large problem for the production team since, in the context of pressured commercial production, they did not have ambitious aims for the programme as a contribution to public debate about religion and spirituality. Nevertheless, the fact that this production too, did not receive the large and appreciative audience for which it was hoping, is perhaps an indication that the tensions involved in applying the melodramatic mode to religious and spiritual content could be better understood.

Overall then, at the professional level and at the level of manifest results, judged by evidence such as reviews, attendance figures and ratings, the very limited success of these productions would suggest that they did not - even taking into account their different aspirations - function as sites of discursive 'creativity' and 'fomentation' in the public sphere. However, at the personal level in the productions, at the level explored by the in-depth interviews, the picture of the understanding of religion and spirituality gained was significantly different. Overall, I found a much greater personal interest in matters of religion and spirituality than expected: the majority of interviewees were able to offer extensive accounts of their thoughts about religion and spirituality, which they attributed to reading, to contemplation, and to various (if often minor) forms of 'irrational' practice.

Assigning positions to people on the basis of conversational interactions is not straightforward because most speakers are able to reference a large range of discourses of religion and spirituality. Their speech may be slanted, at one moment, to a certain position on the spectrum, yet moments later, because they have a different conversational goal in mind, may reference a different set of discourses. For instance several people described themselves as 'atheists', or 'agnostic': however that did not preclude two of them from also drawing, at times, on 'spiritual' discourses. Additionally, no matter what talk is provided, whether or not any religious or spiritual identity is claimed is a matter of self-perception, since an interviewee might persist in describing him/herself as 'non-religious' even when drawing on constructions others might acknowledge as 'spiritual'. These self-perceptions are important because they contribute to the visibility and influence of

discursive constructions within culture since, if people refrain from using a particular label for a body of knowledge, that knowledge may be reclassified, and therefore lend force to an alternative order of discourse. The most common example of this kind of discursive transposition in the data was the assignment of speech about the desires and activities of the 'innermost' self (what might perhaps in the past have been called the 'soul' or 'spirit' - see Hillman, 1975) to a psychological order of discourse.

One of the strongest findings of this research has been that none of the interviewees could be thoroughly associated with a discourse of religions of difference. In these two groups of people, admittedly a special sub-culture, there was little evidence of the bifurcation into conservative and liberal found in descriptions of the American environment for example: everybody clustered towards the liberal side. Neither could anybody be definitively labelled 'religious' in the sense of drawing consistently on a religions of humanity discourse. In general then, 'religiousness' in the institutional sense was not a current feature of these media professionals' personal fields of identity. However past religiousness was such a feature of identity, in fact several of the respondents were ex-Catholics. This shared experience had left them with a critical attitude towards religion. Anti-religious discourses (anti institutional, anti-dogmatic) although another predominant feature of the whole sample, were particularly strong amongst this group. This set of facts and opinions reminds us, as Wuthnow (1998) does, that 'secularization' is a recent phenomenon for many people, demonstrating that the thought-habits surrounding religion can still be powerful, in varied and ambiguous ways, even after several decades. Especially in the case of *The Chosen* these attitudes seem to have supported a negative portrayal of religiosity as embodied in both church and cult.

By contrast several respondents readily described themselves as 'spiritual'. 'Being spiritual' involved, for different people: a reliance on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and 'turning one's life over to the universe'; a sense of wonder at the immensity of the world and one's own insignificance in the cosmos; a determination to live life as a journey according to one's inner judgment; and an interest in eastern religions. This explicit use of discourses of spirituality was not unexpected and accorded with the trends described in the British and American sociological literature. Other constructions frequently found in the research included the plentiful use of discourses from a psychological framework. This was probably the dominant framework used for understanding 'deep' issues related to the projects on which the interviewees were working. This understanding of events in the text was accompanied, for the majority of the interviewees, by the

personal assumption that spiritual development was a private project: a project of self-development carried out through self-reliance. Finally, the British literature in particular linked a spiritualities of life model, and to a lesser extent, the religions of humanity model, with counter-cultural political views. There is some evidence of this in talk about the two projects, particularly from the writers of both texts, who saw themselves as dealing with a range of undesirable outcomes resulting from the then-dominant 'free market' political/economic model. These included reference to callous bureaucracy, unemployment and poverty in *Saving Grace*, free-market economy, exploitative and corrupt business and agricultural practices, and domestic abuse in *The Chosen*.

There were thus a considerable number of similarities between the ways that religion and spirituality were described in the international literature and the ways they were understood by the research subjects. There were also some differences. Woodhead and Heelas (2000) maintain that both secularization and sacralization are taking place at once, and there is certainly evidence of this, especially in the United States, where there is strong support for forms of conservative religion. Although there is a significant conservative, and traditional, religious presence in the overall New Zealand environment (see chapter 3) it was not discernable amongst this sample of interviewees. However, there did seem to be an assumption that while traditional religiosity was still a male preserve spirituality was somewhat associated with a female gender identity. This was most discernable in the text themselves, where both Grace and Sarah fought with the text's male authority figures, but it was also evident in accounts of how the actresses playing those roles experienced the production context itself. Nevertheless, this emphasis on a female point of view seemed to be a distinctive feature both of the productions and of the talk about them.

It was the special character of the talk of the Maori interviewee subjects that provided the most distinctive difference however, between the master-list of discourses and the data gathered. Most of the discussions of indigenous religiosity and the nostalgic, idealized appreciation of it (see for instance Rountree, 1993; Tacey, 1995; Heelas, 1996) are provided by people outside the tradition studied, whereas these interviewees are situated, at least partially, within such a tradition. Their accounts indicate that claiming a Maori spiritual identity is itself a complex matter, since the tradition is overlaid not just with Catholic influences but with their own interest in other forms of religion and/or spirituality. This hybrid positioning was also apparently employed to slightly different ends: Moriarty spoke of wanting to provide a sense of 'moral integration' for an unspecified audience, whereas Curtis was more focused on a potential Maori audience and on

providing a positive role model for Maori men. It may be that these two interviewees in particular are examples of the kind of growing 'Maori-Maori' sub-culture that Webster marked as of particular interest in the New Zealand environment (see chapter 3). While the ethnicity of the characters these men played was not highlighted, their mere presence in the roles, a form of counter-stereotypical casting, also gave an unusual, specifically New Zealand flavour, to the representation of religiosity in the two texts. Both also ally an interest in spirituality with a muted form of political critique.

It is also valuable to consider what discursive constructions were not drawn on as much as one might have expected. In chapter 5 a tentative discourse of New Zealand or 'Kiwi' spirituality was provided containing ideas about land, about ethnic harmony, about civil religion and so on. In *The Chosen*, set in the countryside, and with the stewardship of the land at issue, there was a degree of implicit reference to the concept that if a distinctive New Zealand spirituality were to be delineated it would involve an expression of the human relationship to the land. However this emphasis was not strong, either in the text or the interview material, and in comparison *Saving Grace* did not use the spiritualized natural landscape trope at all: the film was unusually, thoroughly urban and grimy. Another of the usual showcases for the concept of the 'Kiwi spirit' - the sports field - also did not function in a typically idealized fashion, since in *The Chosen* the rugby changing rooms were the location of a male character's breakdown as a result of the trauma of being raped. There is therefore no unified discourse of a specifically New Zealand spirituality that arises from analysis of either the two texts or the interview material. There are some similarities, which have already been outlined, and which may point towards possible components of such a spirituality, but this is too small a sample on which to base a discursive model.

While the projects themselves, in terms of the text, had offered substantially different constructions of religion and spirituality, I found that the discursive constructions employed by the production teams in their personal capacities were remarkably similar. These findings suggest a group of people, working in the media, largely without current connections to institutional forms of religion, but for most of whom personal, informal forms of religiosity ('spirituality') appeared to be active frameworks for organizing conversation. It seems that religiosity may, as Roof (1993a, 1993b), Luckmann (1996), Wuthnow (1998) and others have proposed, have become, in New Zealand as elsewhere, largely a matter of private concern, but that, at that level, the interest in 'spiritual' worldviews is widespread.

In this sense, it seems that discourses of spirituality may be claimed as an 'emergent' or 'creative' use of discourse, undermining the perceived hegemony of discourses of secularity. Still, a significant minority of the research-subjects claimed, at some time, to be secular. This was the most difficult set of claims with which to deal, since secularity is usually defined in a negative mode, as a lack of recourse to a religious world view (see Berger's definition footnote 1, page 1). It is therefore difficult to know what to make of statements that, for instance, someone is interested in religion in an 'anthropological' manner, sees its societal benefits, is attracted to its rituals, or is 'interested' and yet says they are secular. The dearth of detailed descriptions of so-called 'secular' worldviews and value-systems, and their connection to spirituality, in contrast to the voluminous work that has been done in defining 'new paradigm' forms of religiosity, seems to me a gap in the fields both of the sociology of religion and that of religion, media and culture.

I suggest therefore that there was a discursive disjuncture in the way the interviewees spoke about religion and spirituality, personally, and the encoding of the text in the professional context. They recognized and could speak about, usually dismissively, the presence of religiously referenced material in the texts themselves. They could also speak about their own less formal, personal beliefs, but especially on *The Chosen*, saw little connection between these and the text; there seemed, most of the time a strong barrier between personal worldviews and the construction of the text. The explanation for this is likely to be found in the borders and gaps between the concepts of public and private, between work and leisure; in the compartmentalization of contemporary societies. However, it may also be an indication of the difficulty involved in introducing the 'creative' aspect of discourse (relating to new usages of 'spirituality') into the public, collective realm. Those new usages exist at the personal level but there is a weight of conventional usage - narrative form, generic expectations, publicly-sanctioned discourse - that works against the advances of new discursive formulations, especially when they are, by virtue of not being dominant, fragmented and tentative.

Nevertheless, some of the respondents thought that some of their personal beliefs were encoded into the production. The writers were the people with the most opportunity to do this, although the director of *Saving Grace* and the producer of *The Chosen* also made some contribution to the rewriting of the text. This encoding was more explicit for *Saving Grace* where the text was based on the (agnostic) writer's doubt and narcissism - expressed through exploration of the notion of a Christ-figure. Meanwhile, *The Chosen* was marked by the originating writer's 'secular' fascination with elements of religiosity both in themselves and as a vehicle for exploring ideas

about New Zealand society. The clearest example of a link between personal positioning and encoding was however, to be found in the first screen-version of *Saving Grace*. In that case Moriarty's forceful engagement with a religio/spiritual worldview seems to have motivated a performance that caused another performer to experience him *as* Christ during filming, and so to forego her own plans for encoding the ending as an assertion of the value of self-spirituality.

In *The Chosen* the expression of personal belief was encoded into smaller choices about design and performance: for instance a 'spiritually-eclectic' designer chose spiritually-eclectic props to dress the set; the actress raised by a Hare Krishna mother imagined what her mother's reactions might be when playing the role of a young woman being seduced into a cult; the producer who felt the production was leading him to a re-evaluation of his anti-Catholicism, rewrote some speeches for the priest-character while filming was taking place.

Nevertheless, in neither production did one person's interpretation of religion or spirituality dominate - there was no single 'author' of the text. On both projects the development of meanings related to religion and spirituality was a collective, negotiated and contested enterprise, with changes being made in emphasis of meaning right up until the later stages of post-production. Furthermore, it seemed as if, in both cases the 'institution', the diffuse collection of professional norms, practices and resource allocations which set the parameters for production, was ultimately a highly significant influence on the encoding of meaning. The interviews sometimes made that connection explicit, as when the director and editor talked about cutting repetitive dialogue in *Saving Grace*, or the producer spoke of excising flashbacks in *The Chosen* because of cost. Most often however those shaping, disciplinary influences were applied without specific comment, subsumed in the larger discourse of making a 'good' film or programme. On the basis of my research therefore I would propose that there *were* connections between personal religio/spiritual positionings on these projects and encoding, but that these are modified and filtered by codes of professional behaviour, to the extent that definite instances of belief leading practice were uncommon. This finding, if related to religious content, tends to support the earlier assertions of scholars such as Ableman and Hoover (1990), Schultze (1990), Horsfield (1993) and Peck (1993), that the secular values of media processes themselves tend to dominate in the process of encoding, producing only a simplified version of the diverse range of human capital potentially available to the production.

The question of the relationship between the encoded text and the responses of general audiences for the two productions has not been addressed as thoroughly as other research questions, because of the focus on the complexity of the production phase of communication. However, I did find a surprising degree of audience ‘imagining’ by the production teams, suggesting that the concept of ‘audience’, in the most general terms, is present in the production process also. Indeed, the uncertainty of finding an audience appears to be a key part of that process, an uncertainty that was exacerbated in these instances by the choice of content, since the production teams had a lack of knowledge about the degree and nature of ‘religious’ understanding in an assumedly secular society. In the *Saving Grace* case study for instance we saw how uneasy the findings of the market-research company made the producers, who moved to revise the preferred meaning of the text, in the process employing a different discourse of religiosity. This aspect of the research broadens the concept of production to include the actions of certain audience members as part of the process of encoding, rather than being theorized as always at a remove from the process.

The indications of response from specialist audiences were best demonstrated in the *Saving Grace* case study, which was scrutinized by the interim audiences of peer-commentators, a test-audience, and an overseas festival audience. I have argued that these audiences seemed indeed to recognize the range of dominant meanings that the production team had tried to encode into the text. However it was in the mode of evaluation rather than understanding that there was an unexpected divergence between the imaginings of the production team (who thought viewers would enjoy and value their ambiguous narrative) and the audience reaction. In relation to the media reviews, of the film’s public release, a divergence of interpretation was noticeable, in that the framework chosen for understanding the text depended on the positioning of the publication and its purpose. For example a Catholic publication liked the fact it featured ‘religious content’ and although with some reservations about the way it was handled, evaluated the material within a religious framework. The *Listener*, by contrast, compared the film, technically and artistically with a work from another medium, poetry and thus, the religious aspects were subservient to a certain model of Art. Other, more popular media, tended to be mainly interested in the mad and violent aspects of the text, and in whether the performances of the actors were well done. The critical reception of *Saving Grace* therefore indicates that those responding to the production in audience-mode selected which of the preferred meanings encoded into the text they wish to emphasize, and did not typically produce unexpected meanings for it from outside that range. The readings, at the level of understanding, were thus, in Hall’s terms (1980) ‘dominant’ or ‘negotiated’ meanings

rather than 'oppositional', while, if I may use the term in that way, the evaluations of the text were indeed largely 'oppositional'.

In terms of the critical response to *The Chosen* there appeared to be, on one hand, a strong correspondence between the encoding of the text by the producers, and the understanding of decoders: the majority of both groups agreeing that the religious content was of minor importance compared to the programme's commodity status as a 'good yarn'. Instead, a psychological discourse and the recognition and evaluation of the text's generic elements were used as guides to interpretation. In that case I would say that it was largely the dominant encoded meaning that was decoded by the critics, although again, the evaluation was not as positive as the production team hoped. On the other hand there was a small group of reviewers who made 'oppositional' readings of the text: Hawes (1998) and Wichtel (1998) by lampooning it as an absurd fantasy about national identity, and Bowron (1998) by reading, and condemning, it almost entirely in terms of its violent subtext.

I reiterate however that these responses are only indicative of possible audience responses and would assume that the eventual meanings of the text could only be located within a similarly detailed study of the projects' public reception. Moreover I would expect, on the basis of these few and partial examples of response, that the complexity of the way in which discourses of religion and spirituality were drawn on in the encoding process would also be reflected in the decoding of the texts. That is not to say that there would be an endlessly variable range of decodings possible: one outcome of this project has been to demonstrate the relevance of the production teams' intentions in constraining the variability of meaning available in the text; but it would be presumptuous to delineate those decoded meanings without investigating the ramifications of specific interpretive contexts.

This method, the discourse analysis of data gathered by means of 'depth interviewing' has, inevitably, provided an incomplete picture of the range of discursive interactions within the environments of both case studies. There are obvious benefits from using this method however. By interviewing a large number of people involved in a field of cultural production and by comparing their accounts with one another, the majority of influences in that situation can be identified, at least insofar as they are recognized by the participants themselves. Semi-structured depth interviewing allows for the investigation of the participants' discursive resources in relation to specified topics and is particularly useful when dealing with nebulous topics like religion and

spirituality which are emotion-and-attitude, as well as fact-based. Repeat interviewing over a period of time allows for the articulation of discursive expression and the influence of context to become more obvious. Moreover, the comparison of discourses used by interview subjects with a pre-established list of discourses derived from a literature review provided a deliberately specific focus for analysis.

Some difficulties with the method however have become clear during this research. Access to the research context and to specific interview subjects was a problem at times, especially during study of *The Chosen*. This meant some interview subjects were interviewed in a more cursory manner than was desirable, that one important source of influence (the executive producer) was never interviewed at all, and that one interviewee was interviewed so much later than the others that his comments were less well-focused on the actual production under study. There were also times at which it was obvious that misunderstanding or tension due to status and gender differentials between myself and interview subjects had an influence on the talk produced. Sometimes these factors may have constricted productive interaction but I also judge that there were times at which some people talked to me more freely than they might have done to a male interviewer for instance, and that these fluctuations in the standard of interaction are probably within an acceptable range for research done by a single investigator.

The strongest benefit of this approach is also its greatest drawback: the sheer volume of relevant material for analysis and organization that the method provides. In retrospect, I would have liked to have made better preparation for undertaking the interview research, by having my list of master-discourses constructed in advance: my questioning would have been more tightly targeted and the task of analysis therefore less time-consuming. However, as I have indicated, the field of religion, media and culture has developed rapidly over the time of this project, and it is inevitable that new and useful information, such as the Woodhead and Heelas model (2000) has become available only recently.

The case for reconsidering production is a good one. This research has demonstrated at once how tentative, fragmented and contested the encoding of meaning can be when viewed microcosmically. At the same time however one can see how those encodings are articulated to their time and context. The production team were shown to be acting centripetally (Comer, 1995) in the sense of drawing on discourses already existing in society, shaping them by processes of selection and emphasis, and then re-broadcasting those altered configurations of discourse into the

culture in a centrifugal manner. That these constructions related to religion and spirituality gives the projects a particular significance in that the meaning of these terms is in so much flux at present that a robust symbolization of the issues, which will be relevant to a large section of the public, is difficult to achieve. In particular there is the difficulty I have identified of the gap between significant personal interest in spirituality (and in religion as a cultural phenomenon) and a professional, institutional, 'secular' view of these matters as unimportant.

Further research in this area could proceed in several directions. It could entail developing a more nuanced picture of religious and spiritual resources and affiliations in the New Zealand context, since this description and analysis of cultural production in a supposedly 'secular' society has revealed a picture as complex (and fascinating) as that described in the British and American literature. It could certainly entail a more directed, sustained investigation into the nature of audience reception of these and similar local products - Webster's sub-cultures model (2001) might be employed as a framework for exploring differences in reception, and a generationally-based analysis could also be illuminating. Further analysis of the intersection of melodramatic style and religiosity is also a topic worth following up in the textual realm.

As a study of the influences on production then, these accounts of the mixed fortunes of *Saving Grace* and *The Chosen* reveal the complicated dynamics between artistic, commercial, and ideological factors present in the encoding of this text, including the dynamics between both imagined and actual instances of audience response. Specifically, in *Saving Grace* we saw how, after disappointing responses from peers and at the test-screening, the production team increasingly sought to shape the film's content into a discourse of spirituality (rather than religion) that would match discourses they thought were already circulating in society. Their motivations were not primarily ideological in the sense of wanting to impose particular constructions of power and knowledge on their viewers, rather they wanted to connect with an audience for artistic and commercial reasons. However, this attempt to change elements of representation in order to meet with an imagined audience was in itself a risky activity since, as discussed in earlier chapters, many of those discourses, due to their status as marginal or emergent constructions, were already hybridized and fluid. Rather, those in audience-mode proved more apt either (still) to read relevant material wholly in terms of the Christian paradigm, or to prioritize a reading of the text in terms of a materialistic psychological model often not regarded as being spiritual in character.

The title of this thesis asks whether these two projects were 'sites of value'? The answer to that question must be two-fold. As research objects I think they are indeed valuable: they add to a growing body of knowledge in the religion, media and culture field, and might encourage sociologists of religion, for instance, to add the analysis of processes of mediation to their investigations of contemporary religiosity. As specific entertainment productions however, the result is less clear. While these two particular configurations of strategies, representations, performances and discourse, provide an insight into the complexity of the symbolization of religious and spiritual meanings in contemporary New Zealand, they were apparently not successful in constituting objects that could catch the public imagination, at that time, and in that context - and in that regard, their value remains to be proven.

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- American Beauty*, (1999), Sam Mendes, DreamWorks SKG/Jinks/Cohen Company, US, 122 mins, [Motion picture].
- American Gigolo*, (1980), Paul Schrader, Paramount Pictures, US, 117 mins, [Motion picture].
- Angels in the Outfield*, (1994), William Dear, Buena Vista/Walt Disney, US, 102 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Apostle*, (1997), Robert Duvall, Butcher's Run Films, US, 134 mins, [Motion picture].
- Bad Taste*, (1987), Peter Jackson, Blue Dolphin/Wingnut Films/Peter Jackson, NZ, 92 mins, [Motion picture].
- Bagdad Café*, (1987), Percy Adlon, Mainline/Pelemele/Pro-Ject, West Germany, 91 mins, [Motion picture].
- Ballykissangel*, (Feb 1996 – Apr 2001), BBC/Ballykea/World Productions, BBC1, UK, [Television series].
- Ben-Hur*, (1925), Fred Niblo, MGM, US, 170 mins, [Motion picture].
- Ben-Hur*, (1959), William Wyler & Andrew Marton, MGM, US, 217 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Book of Life*, (1998), Hal Hartley, Haut et Court/La Sept-Arte/True Fiction Pictures, US/France, 63 mins, [Motion picture].
- Bowling for Columbine*, (2002), Michael Moore, Alliance Atlantis Communications/Dog Eat Dog Films/Salter Street Films International/United Broadcasting Inc/VIF Babelsberger Filmproduktion GmbH & Co. Zweite, Canada/US/Germany, 120 mins, [Documentary film].
- Braindead*, (1992), Peter Jackson, Polygram/Wingnut Films, NZ, 104 mins, [Motion picture].
- Breaking the Waves*, (1996) Lars von Trier, Guild/Zentropa/Trust/Liberator/Northern Lights/Argus, Denmark/Sweden/France/Netherlands/Norway, 159 mins, [Motion picture].
- Broken English*, (1996), Gregor Nicholas, Communicado Productions/New Zealand Film Commission/NZ On Air/Village Roadshow Pictures Worldwide, NZ, 92 mins, [Motion picture].
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, (Mar 1997 -)20th Century Fox/Mutant Enemy Inc/Kuzui Enterprises/Sandollar Television, WB/UPN, US, [Television series].
- Charmed*, (Oct 1998 -), Northshore Productions Inc/Spelling Television, WB, US, [Television series].
- Chicken*, NZ, (1996) Grant LaHood, KeirFilm/NZFC/Senator Film International, NZ, 90 mins.[Motion picture]
- City of Angels*, (1998), Brad Silberling, Atlas Entertainment/Monarchy Enterprises B.V./Regency Enterprises/Taurus Film/Warner Bros, US/Germany, 114 mins, [Motion picture].
- City Life*, NZ, (Jul 1996 – Jan 1997), South Pacific Pictures, [Television series].
- Contact*, (1997), Robert Zemeckis, South Side Amusement Company/Warner Bros, US, 153 mins, [Motion picture].
- Cover Story*, (1994 - 1996), The Gibson Group, TVNZ, NZ, [Television series].
- The Craft*, (1996), Andrew Fleming, Columbia Pictures Corporation, US, 101 mins, [Motion picture].
- Credo*, NZ, 1984 – 1986, TVNZ, [Television series].
- Crush*, (1992), Alison Maclean, Metro/Hibiscus/New Zealand Film Commission/NFU/NZ On Air/Movie Partners, NZ, 97 mins, [Motion picture].
- David & Bathsheba*, (1951), Henry King, 20th Century Fox, US, 116 mins, [Motion picture].
- Dead Man Walking*, (1995), Tim Robbins, Polygram/Working Title/Havoc, US, 122 mins, [Motion picture].
- Desperate Remedies*, (1993), Stewart Main & Peter Wells, Electric/NFU Studios/NZ On Air/New Zealand Film Commission/James Wallace, NZ, 93 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Devils*, (1970), Ken Russell, Warner/Russo, UK, 111 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Devil's Advocate*, (1997), Taylor Hackford, Kopelson Entertainment/New Regency Pictures/Taurus Film/Warner Bros, US, 144 mins, [Motion picture].
- Driving Miss Daisy*, (1989), Bruce Beresford, Warner/Zanuck Company, US, 99 mins, [Motion picture].

- Elizabeth*, (1998), Shekhar Kapur, Channel Four Films/PolyGram Filmed Entertainment/Working Title Films, UK, 123 mins, [Motion picture].
- End of Days*, (1999), Peter Hyams, Beacon Communications LLC/Universal Pictures, US, 122 mins, [Motion picture].
- The End of the Golden Weather*, (1992), Ian Mune, South Pacific Pictures/Blue Dolphin/New Zealand Film Commission/TVNZ, NZ, 103 mins, [Motion picture].
- The English Patient*, (1996), Anthony Minghella, Buena Vista/Tiger Moth/Miramax, US, 162 mins, [Motion Picture].
- Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*, (1996), Michael Ray Rhodes, Paulist Pictures, US, 111 mins, [Motion picture].
- FacelOff*, (1997), John Woo, Douglas/Reuther Productions/Paramount Pictures/Touchstone Pictures/WCG Entertainment Productions, US, 139 mins, [Motion picture].
- Fallen*, (1998), Gregory Hoblit, Atlas Entertainment/Turner Pictures, US, 127 mins, [Motion picture].
- Father Ted*, (Apr 1995 – May 1998), Hat Trick Productions, Channel 4, , UK, [Television series].
- The Fifth Element*, (1997), Luc Besson, Gaumont, France/US, 126 mins, [Motion picture].
- Flight of the Albatross* (1996) Werner Meyer, TopShelf/Fritz Wagner Film Produktion/NZFC, NZ, 88mins. [Motion picture]/
- Flying Doctors*, (Mar 1985 – 1992), 9 Network/Crawford Productions, 9 Network, Australia, [Television series].
- Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree*, (1989), Martyn Sanderson, Graham McLean Associates/New Zealand Film Commission, NZ, 92 mins, [Motion picture].
- Forgotten Silver*, (1995), Costa Botes & Peter Jackson, New Zealand Film Commission/NZ On Air/Wingnut, NZ, 55 mins, [Motion picture].
- Ghost* (1990), Jerry Zucker, UIP/Paramount/Howard W. Koch, US, 127 mins, [Motion picture].
- Godspell* (1973), David Greene, Columbia/Lansbury/Duncan/Beruh, US, 102 mins, [Motion picture].
- Goodbye Pork Pie*, (1980), Geoff Murphy, New Zealand Film Commission/NZ United Corporation/Nigel Hutchinson/Geoff Murphy, NZ, 105 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Greatest Story Ever Told*, (1965), George Stevens, UA/George Stevens, US, 225 mins, [Motion picture].
- Groundhog Day*, (1993), Harold Ramis, Columbia Pictures, US, 101 mins, [Motion picture].
- Halifax f.p.*, Nov 1994 – Jul 2002, Channel 9, Australia, [Television series].
- Heaven on Earth*, (1998), Stuart Orme, Red Rooster/Chrysalis Group Company/BBC, UK, 170 mins, [Television mini-series].
- Heavenly Creatures*, (1994), Peter Jackson, Buena Vista/Wingnut/Fontana/New Zealand Film Commission, NZ, 98 mins, [Motion picture].
- Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, US/NZ, May 1994 – Nov 1999, MCA Television Entertainment/Pacific Renaissance Pictures Ltd/Renaissance Pictures/Universal/Studios USA Television, [Telefeatures].
- The Herd*, (1985 –1989), TVNZ, , NZ, [Television series].
- High Art*, (1998), Lisa Cholodenko, 391 Productions/October Films, US/Canada, 102 mins, [Motion Picture].
- Holy Man*, (1998), Stephen Herek, Caravan/Eddie Murphy Productions/Roger Birnbaum Productions/Touchstone/Walt Disney, US, 114 mins, [Motion picture].
- Illustrious Energy*, (1987), Leon Narbey, Mirage Entertainment Corporation/New Zealand Film Commission, NZ, 90 mins, [Motion picture].
- Ironweed*, (1987), Hector Babenco, Taft Entertainment/Keith Barish/HBO, US, 143 mins, [Motion picture].
- Jesus Christ Superstar*, (1973), Norman Jewison, Universal, US, 107 mins, [Motion picture].
- Jesus of Montreal*, (1989), Denys Arcand, National Film Board of Canada/Max Films/Gerard Mital Productions, Canada/France, 120 mins, [Motion picture].

- Joseph Campbell and The Power of Myth : Vol. 1 The Hero's Adventure*, (1998), Apostrophe Productions/PBS, US, [Television series].
- King of Kings*, (1927), Cecil B. de Mille, Pathe/Cecil B. de Mille, US, 155 mins, [Motion picture].
- Kingpin*, (1984), Mike Walker, Morrow Productions/Film Investment Corporation of New Zealand, NZ, 89 mins, [Motion picture].
- Lamb Of God*, (1985), Costa Botes, TVNZ, NZ, 50 mins, [Short film].
- The Last Temptation of Christ*, (1988), Martin Scorsese, Universal Pictures/Cineplex Odeon, US, 163 mins, [Motion picture].
- Leave All Fair*, (1984), John Reid, Pacific Films, NZ, 88 mins, [Motion picture].
- A Life Less Ordinary*, (1997), Danny Boyle, Channel Four Films/Figment Films/PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, UK, 102 mins, [Motion picture].
- Lone Star*, (1996), John Sayles, Rank/Castle Rock Entertainment/Turner/Rio Dulce, US, 135 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*, (2001 – 2003), Peter Jackson, New Line/Saul Zaentz Company/Wingnut, NZ/US, [Motion pictures].
- Lost Highway*, (1997), David Lynch, Asymmetrical Productions/CiBy 2000/Lost Highway Productions/October Films, US, 134 mins, [Motion Picture].
- Love and Other Catastrophes*, (1996), Emma-Kate Croghan, Beyond Films/New Vision/Screwball Five, Australia, 79 mins, [Motion picture].
- Map of the Human Heart*, (1992), Vincent Ward, Rank/Working Title/Map/Sunrise/Polygram/AFFC/Vincent Ward, UK/Australia, 109 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Matrix*, (1999), Andy & Larry Wachowski, Groucho II Film Partnership/Silver Pictures/Village Roadshow Productions, US/Australia, 136 mins, [Motion picture].
- Mauri*, (1998), Merata Mita, Awatea Films/NZFC, NZ, 101 mins, [Motion picture].
- Messenger: the Story of Joan of Arc*, (1999), Luc Besson, Gaumont/Leeloo Productions, France, 160 mins, [Motion picture].
- Michael*, (1996), Nora Ephron, Rank/Castle Rock/Turner Pictures/Alphaville, US, 105 mins, [Motion picture].
- Millennium*, (Oct 1996 – May 1999), 20th Century Fox Film Corporation/Ten Thirteen Productions, Fox, US, [Television series].
- The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey*, (1988), Vincent Ward, Recorded Releasing/Arenafilm, NZ, 91 mins, [Motion picture].
- Neighbours*, (1985 -), Grundy Television Productions/Network Ten/The Grundy Organisation, Australia, [Television Series].
- Omega Code, The* (1999) Robert Macarelli, Code Productions, Gener8Xion Entertainment, US. 100 mins. [motion picture]
- Once Were Warriors*, (1994), Lee Tamahori, Entertainment/Communicado/New Zealand Film Commission/Avalon/NZ On Air, NZ, 103 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Oprah Winfrey Show*, (1986 -), Harpo Productions, WLS Chicago, US, [Television series].
- Paris, Texas*, (1984), Wim Wenders, Road Movies/Argos, West Germany/France, 148 mins, [Motion picture].
- La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, (1928), Carl Dreyer, Société générale des films, France, 110 mins, [Motion picture].
- The People vs Larry Flint*, (1996), Milos Forman, Columbia TriStar/Ixtlan/Phoenix, US, 130 mins, [Motion Picture].
- Phenomenon*, (1996), Jon Turteltaub, Buena Vista/Touchstone Pictures, US, 124 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Piano*, (1993), Jane Campion, CiBy 2000/Entertainment/Jan Chapman, Australia, 120 mins, [Motion picture].
- Places in the Heart*, (1984), Robert Benton, TriStar Pictures/Delphi, US, 111 mins, [Motion picture].
- Platoon*, (1986), Oliver Stone, Hemdale/Arnold Kopelson, US, 120 mins, [Motion picture].
- Powder*, (1995), Victor Salva, Buena Vista/Hollywood/Caravan, US, 112 mins, [Motion picture].

- Praise Be*, (1981 -), TVNZ, , NZ [Television programme].
- Pretty Woman*, (1990), Garry Marshall, Buena Vista/Touchstone, US, 119 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Prince of Egypt*, (1998), Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, & Simon Wells, Dream Works SKG, US, 101 mins, [Motion picture].
- Proces de Jeanne d' Arc*, (1962), Robert Bresson, Agnes Delahaie, France, 65 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Prophecy*, (1995) Gregory Widen, NEO Motion Pictures, US, 96 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Prophecy II*, (1998), Greg Spence, NEO Motion Pictures, US, 87 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Quiet Earth*, (1985), Geoff Murphy, Cinepro/Pillsbury Films, NZ, 94 mins, [Motion picture].
- Quo Vadis*, (1951), Mervyn Le Roy, MGM, US, 171 mins, [Motion picture].
- Rain Man*, (1988), Barry Levinson, UIP/United Artists/Guber-Peters, US, 133 mins, [Motion picture].
- Rocky*, (1976), John G. Avildsen, UA/Chartoff-Winkler, US, 119 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Robe*, (1953), Henry Koster, 20th Century Fox, US, 135 mins, [Motion picture].
- Romero* (1984), John Duigan, Paulist Pictures, US, 102 mins, [Motion picture]
- Te Rua*, (1991), Barry Barclay, Pacific Film Productions/New Zealand Film Commission/Berlin Senate and Film Commission, NZ, 105 mins, [Motion picture].
- Runaway*, (1964), John O'Shea, Pacific Films Limited, NZ, 102 mins, [Motion picture].
- Saving Grace*, (1997), Costa Botes, Kahukura Productions/New Zealand Film Commission, NZ, 87 mins, [Motion picture].
- Se7en*, (1995), David Fincher, New Line/Entertainment, US, 127 mins, [Motion picture].
- Shane*, (1953), George Stevens, Paramount, US, 118 mins, [Motion picture].
- Share the Dream*, (1997), The Gibson Group, TVNZ, 50mins. NZ, [Television drama].
- Shine*, (1996), Scott Hicks, Buena Vista/AFFC/Momentum/SAFC/Film Victoria, Australia/UK, 105 mins, [Motion picture].
- Shortland Street*, (1992 -), Grundy Television Productions/South Pacific Pictures, TVNZ, NZ [Television series].
- Silence of the Lambs*, (1990), Jonathan Demme, Orion/Rank/Strong Heart/Demme, US, 118 mins, [Motion picture].
- Sleepers*, (1996), Barry Levinson, Polygram/Wamer/Propaganda/Baltimore, US, 147 mins, [Motion picture].
- Sleeping Dogs*, (1977), Roger Donaldson, Aardvark Films/Broadbank Films/New Zealand Film Commission/QE2, NZ, 101 mins, [Motion picture].
- Smash Palace*, (1981), Roger Donaldson, Aardvark Films, NZ, 108 mins, [Motion picture].
- Stalin's Sickle*, (1987), Costa Botes, South Star Films, NZ, 50 mins, [Short film].
- Star Wars*, (1977), George Lucas, 20th Century Fox/Lucasfilm, US, 121 mins, [Motion picture].
- Stigmata*, (1999), Rupert Wainwright, FGM Entertainment/MGM, US, 102 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Story of Ruth*, (1960), Henry Koster, 20th Century Fox, US, 132 mins, [Motion picture].
- La Strada*, (1954), Federico Fellini, Ponti/de Laurentiis, Italy, 94 mins, [Motion picture].
- Sylvia*, (1985), Michael Firth, Southern Light Pictures/Cinepro, NZ, 98 mins, [Motion picture].
- Taxi Driver*, (1976), Martin Scorsese, Columbia/Italo-Judeo, US, 114 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Ten Commandments*, (1923), Cecil B. de Mille, Paramount/Famous Players-Lasky, US, 150 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Ten Commandments*, (1956), Cecil B. de Mille, Paramount/Cecil B. de Mille, US, 219 mins, [Motion picture].
- Tender Mercies*, (1982), Bruce Beresford, Antron Media Products/EMI Films, US, 92 mins, [Motion picture].
- Terminator, The* (1984) James Cameron, Cinema 84, EuroFilm Fund, USA 108 mins, [Motion picture].
- Terminator II: Judgment Day* (1991) James Cameron, Carlco Pictures, Le Studio Canal USA/Fr. 137 mins, [Motion picture].
- Topless Women Talk About Their Lives*, (1997), Harry Sinclair, John Swimmer Productions/New Zealand Film Commission/NZ On Air/TV3, NZ, 89 mins, [Motion Picture].

- Touch*, (1997), Paul Schrader, Initial Productions/Lumière International, US/France, 97 mins, [Motion picture].
- Touched by an Angel*, (Sep 1994 -) Caroline Productions/Moon Water Productions, CBS, US, [Television series].
- Trespases* (1984), Peter Sharp, Finlayson-Hill Prods./Broadbank Investments, NZ, 101 mins, [Motion picture]
- The Ugly*, (1997), Scott Reynolds, Essential Films/New Zealand Film Commission, NZ, 91 mins, [Motion picture].
- Utu*, (1983), Geoff Murphy, Glitteron, NZ, 118 mins, [Motion picture].
- The Vicar of Dibley*, (Nov 1994 -), BBC/Britcom/Tiger Aspect Productions, BBC1, UK [Television series].
- What Dreams May Come*, (1998), Vincent Ward, Interscope Communications/Metafilmics/PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, US, 113 mins, [Motion picture].
- Whole of the Moon*, (1996), Ian Mune, Tucker Films/Cinar Productions/NZFC, Canada/NZ 94 mins. [Motion picture].
- William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, (1996), Baz Luhrmann, 20th Century Fox/Bazmark, US, 120 mins, [Motion picture].
- The X-Files*, (Sep 1993 – May 2002) 20th Century Fox Television/Ten Thirteen Productions, Fox, US/Canada [Television series].

CASE STUDY PRODUCTIONS

The Chosen

Director	Mike Smith
Producer	Chris Hampson
Associate Producer	Chris Bailey
Writers	Gavin Strawhan Maxine Fleming
Production Designers	Grant Major Brett Schwieters
Editor	John Gilbert
Music	Murray McNabb Murray Grindley
Director of Photography	Allen Guilford
Executive Producer	Robin Scholes
TVNZ Network Executive Producer	Geoff Steven

Cast

Father Tahere	Cliff Curtis
Peter McAlister	Jeremy Sims
Sarah Gordon	Radha Mitchell
Jim Gordon	Sean Duffy
Andrea Gordon	Catherine Wilkin
Eliza	Yvonne Lawley
Eileen O'Connor	Willa O'Neill
Peg O'Connor	Hester Joyce
Eddie O'Connor	Frank Whitten
Trevor O'Connor	Joel Tobeck
Ben	Bill Johnson
Andrew Scott	Dean O'Gorman
Scotty	Paul Ellis
Matthew	Stuart Turner

Brian	Stephen Ure
Denise	Alison Bruce
Rachel	Jay Saussey
Doctor Bell	John Sumner
Bernie	Greg Johnson
Darren	Craig Hall
Rebecca	Mandie Gillette
Father Hennessey	John Cairney
Father McCrory	Grant Tilly
Carol	Brenda Kendall
Maurice	Chris Bailey
Detective Graham	Peter McCauley
Jock	Clint Sharplin
19 th Century McAlister	Iain Rea
Line Producer	Sally Campbell
Production Co-ordinator	Linda Fenwick
Assistant Co-ordinator	Sarah Metcalfe
Production Runners	Sam McCauley
	Emma Hinton
Production Accountant	Michelle Taggart
Assistant Accountant	Heidi Salter
Camera Operator	Richard Bluck
Focus Puller (A Camera)	David Hall
Focus Puller (B Camera)	Kirsten Green
Clapper/Loader	Bruce Polwart
Script Editor	James Griffin
Casting Director	Liz Mullane
Stills Photographer	Stephen Langdon
1 st Assistant Director	Robin Murphy
2 nd Assistant Director	Quentin Whitwell
3 rd Assistant Director	Nicola Rush
Continuity	Judith Trye
Location Manager	Liz DiFiore

Location Assistant	Jared Connon
Unit Manager	Pete Moerenhout
Unit Assistant	Mike Turner
Gaffer	Mark Archibald
Best Boys	Stuart Page
	Grant McKinnon
Generator Operator	Trevor Stark
Key Grip	Kevin Donovan
Grip Assistants	Ben Bell
	Al Dunn
Sound Recordist	Richard Hansen
Boom Operators	Aaron Davis
	Lars Eldby
Art Department Co-ordinator	Carey Johnson
Art Director	Graham Aston
Props Buyer	Amanda Mollow
Assistant Buyer/Dresser	Sally Thomas
Standby Props	Nick Bassett
	Megan Otto
Art Department Assistant	Tony Shields
Set Finisher	Eamon O’Kane
Construction Manager	John Miles
Costume Designer	Jane Holland
Standby Wardrobe	Cushla Foley
Wardrobe Assistant	Krick Barraud
Wardrobe Runner	Sarah Chetwin
Makeup Supervisor	Dominie Till
Makeup Artist	Debbie Watson
Visual Effects Supervisor	Peter McCully
	Cinemagic
Processing Lab	The Film Unit
	Grant Campbell
Film Transfer and Grading	Images Post
	Grant Baker

Sound Post Production
 Supervising Sound Editor
 Sound Editor
 Sound Mixers

The Film Unit
 Mike Hopkins
 Tim Prebble
 Michael Hedges
 Peter Mills

Saving Grace

Director
 Producer
 Screenplay
 Editor
 Director of Photography
 Art Directors

Costa Botes
 Larry Parr
 Duncan Sarkies
 Mike Horton
 Sean O'Donnell
 Rob Outterside
 Chris Elliot

Cast

Grace
 Gerald
 Receptionist
 Mum
 Sister
 Young Gerald
 Gerald at 20
 Truck Driver
 Doctor
 Preacher
 Glue Sniffer
 Pregnant Woman
 Bum
 Bag Lady
 Anti-Vivisectionist
 Talkback Host

Kirsty Hamilton
 Jim Moriarty
 Tina Cleary
 Denise O'Connell
 Wairere Bamsley
 James Moriarty
 Rhys Morgan
 Phil Grieve
 Costa Botes
 Eteuaati Eti
 Willie Plumb
 Mel Johnson
 Noel Coutts
 Janet Dunn
 Duncan Sarkies
 Pauline Gillespie

Distraught Mum	Perry Piercy
Passer-by	Inoke Afeaki
Girl Patient	Erica Low
Older Woman	Audrey Stewart
Young Man	Charlie Bleakley
Kieran Mihaka	Wi Kuki Kaa
Newsreader	Bruce Phillips
Reporter	Nicola Murphy
Psychiatric Nurse	Simon Ferry
Production Manager	Carol J. Paewai
Production Co-ordinator	Toby Mills
Production Secretary	Tamara Finou
Production Runner	Quentin Parr
Production Accountant	Ann Bould
Location Scout	Trent Hiles
Location Co-ordinator	Mawhi Torrance
Unit Managers	David Saena
	Maurice Newport
1 st Assistant Director	Carey J. Carter
2 nd Assistant Director	Ainsley Gardiner
Continuity	Karen Tongaere
Camera Operator	Simon Riera
Focus Puller	Adam Clark
Clapper/Loader	Charles K. G. Edwards
Video Split Operator	Jock Fyfe
Steadicam Operator	Gerry Vosbenter
Gaffer	Warwick Peace
Best Boy	Antony Waterhouse
Genny Operator and Lighting Assistant	Roland Ebbing
Lighting Assistant	Rajcev Patel
Key Grip	Alex Collins
Grip Assistant	Olly Coleman
Sound Recordist	Brian Shennan

Boom Operator	Jon Poske
2 nd Boom Operator	Hayden Collow
2 nd Unit Photography	Gerry Vosbenter
2 nd Unit Camera Assistant	Jock Fyfe
Props Buyer	Tim Robinson
Standby Props	Stephen Jessup
Art Department Co-ordinator	Amanda Neale
Art Department Assistant	Annalise Christensen
Wardrobe Designer	Janet Dunn
Wardrobe Standby	Helen Olwyne Morris
Wardrobe Assistant	Suz Deck
Makeup and SFX Makeup	Erin Kelly
Prosthetic Effects	Richard Taylor
	Michael Asquith
	WETA Limited
Carpenters	Anton Byers
	Brett Blenkin
	Neil Tennant
	John Shearman
	Bruce John Gigg
Painters	Chris Ramsay
	Dave Cleary
Assistant Film Editors	Chris Todd
	Kathryn Horton
	Tupu Gregory
Stills Photographer	Chris Coad
Casting Director	Tina Cleary
Catering	Vi's Victuals
Focus Puller	Harry Slowey
Sound Recordist	Ken Saville
Boom Operator	Sam Spicer
Lighting Assistant	Chris Mathews
Grip Assistant	Les Parr
Music	David Donaldson

	Steve Roche
	Janet Roddick
Guitar	David Long
Violin	Yury Gezentsvey
	Dean Major
	David Gilling
	Elsbeth Gray
Violin Solo	Yury Gezentsvey
Cello	Allan Chisholm
	Christopher Kane
Laboratory	The Film Unit
Laboratory Manager	Sean Glasson
Laboratory Liaison	Grant Campbell
Laboratory Post Production	Colin Tyler
Colour Grading	Lynne Seaman
Negative Matcher	Linda Sinclair
Rostrum Camera	Rebecca Smith
Digital Effects	Wayne Stables
	WETA Limited
Film Clip	'Shaker Run' courtesy Overseas Filmgroup
Video Games	'Star Wars'
	'Virtual Racer'
	'Virtual Fighter'
	Courtesy SEGA of America Inc.
Post Production Sound	Pacific Sound
Project Manager	Sam Negri
Sound Designer	Tim Prebble
Dialogue Editor	Chris Todd
Sound Editor	Germ Geor
Sound Trainee	Nat Kitiona
ADR/Foley Recordist	Chris Ward
Foley Artists	Katy Wood
	Carolyn Lambourn
Sound Mix	The Film Unit

Project Manager

John Neil

Mixers

Michael Hedges

John Boswell

Camera Equipment

Film Facilities

RTs

Capital Communications

Unit Equipment

Peter Tonks

Grip Equipment

Love Your Grip

Film Stock

Fuji

Hanimex (NZ) Limited

Phil Curtis

Garth Burleigh

Completion Bond

FACB

Rob Fisher

Tom Burstall

Insurance

Aon Risk Services

Paul Weir

Chris Lane

APPENDIX A

Questions for first set of interviews with key creative personnel of *'Saving Grace'*

Semi-structured interviews.

Basic set of questions was asked of all interviewees. The order in which the questions were asked varied according to the flow of the interview. Supplementary, unscripted questions were asked as follow-ups to particular questions.

A. Questions asked before filming began.

1. What is your role in the production of this film?
2. What was it that attracted you to the project?
3. Where there any other factors which made it a good project for you at this time?
4. What do you think the film is about? (this topic tended to create discussion and typically, several follow-up questions were asked)
5. I'd like to ask you about your relationships with other people and institutions involved in this project – who or what has had the most influence on the way the film is developing? (e.g. for the director and writer this question led to lengthy descriptions of the process of script development)
6. What kind of audience do you think the film is aimed at?
7. What effect or range of effects do you imagine it will have on them?
8. Now, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you about your own religious or spiritual positioning - Do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person?
9. What is the meaning of those terms for you?
10. What do you understand by the term spiritual? (these last three questions typically resulted in lengthy discussions)
11. Do you think there is any connection between your own beliefs and this project you're working on?
12. What do you think is going to happen during the process of filming? Do you foresee any particular challenges or problems?

B. Questions asked during post –production

1. What happened during filming - did things go as expected?
2. What were the significant developments affecting the production?
3. What were the constraints on the production?
4. How are you feeling about the project at the moment?
5. Did the working relationships operate in the way you expected?
6. Have you changed your mind as to what the film is about as a result of anything that happened during filming?
7. Have you changed your mind about the audience you think it's aimed at?
8. A major part of our discussion last time was about concepts of religion and spirituality in relation to the film – have you changed your mind about those topics specifically?
9. What do you think are the factors to keep an eye on now as the film moves towards completion?
10. Have you had any thoughts about how the film should be marketed?

APPENDIX B

First ending of screen version of *Saving Grace*

(description)

GRACE: You betrayed me.

GERALD: I'm sorry.

GRACE: I trusted you.

GERALD: I appreciate that.

GRACE: You betrayed my trust.

GERALD: I didn't mean to.

GRACE: You had no right to do that.

GERALD: I know.

GRACE: You raped me.

pause

GERALD: I love you.

pause

GRACE: I don't want your love.

GERALD: Yes, you do.

GRACE: I don't want to love you.

GERALD: You don't have a choice.

pause

GRACE: That's the way it is then.

pause

Where to from here?

GERALD: I don't know, Grace.

GRACE: Where does that leave me?

GERALD: I don't know.

pause *Grace is crying quietly*

GERALD: Will you be all right?

GRACE: Don't know.

pause

I'm scared

GERALD: Sssh.

pause

You're not alone.

[change]

The light illuminating Gerald goes out. He walks over to Grace and stands just behind her, to her right. He holds his hand out and Grace slowly lifts her right arm in the air. Gerald holds the tips of her fingers.

I'm here

Lights fade down extremely slowly. Suggestion: the following music fades up: "Everything's Alright" from Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Jesus Christ Superstar".

Second ending of *Saving Grace*

GERALD: Cauliflower prices rise by 15 yen - Tokyo Times, top of page 48. Now, look what's underneath it, 'Bizarre Ritual Killing in New Zealand!' We're less important than cauliflowers, Grace! ... The Independent page 4, Sydney Morning Herald, 3 lousy columns on page 12 ... USA today, no mention Grace, no mention, no bloody mention whatsoever! And how did we do locally? Man impaled with nail gun - makes it sound like some farm accident! I wasn't impaled, I was crucified, crucified ... it's shoddy bloody journalism! Nobody's interested in the real McCoy anymore ... it makes me angry, it really hacks me off!! ... Hey ...

GRACE: ... Don't!

GERALD: Grace ...

GRACE: Just shut up Gerald! Just shut up okay?! ... You used me!

GERALD: I chose you ...

GRACE: You used me ... you sucked me in!

GERALD: I did my best. I'm not perfect. I make mistakes.

GRACE: Some saviour you turned out to be.

GERALD: My job is to make everyone as happy as possible, not just you, everyone ... it's one tough job description, everyone is a lot of people!

GRACE: I hate you!

GERALD: You're hurting Grace, I know, but life is made up of sacrifices.

GRACE: Easy for you to say

GERALD: I died ...

GRACE: I'm locked up! Everyone thinks I'm crazy.

GERALD: I died for the world.

GRACE: The world doesn't give a fuck!

(pause)

GERALD: I shouldn't have come back ... I just wanted to say I'm sorry...
I need ... I need you to forgive me Grace ... please.

GRACE: You taught me to respect myself Gerald, I can't forgive you
and respect myself

(pause)

GERALD: So, what's it to be ? ...

GRACE: I'm going to miss you Gerald ...

Grace turns and walks away. A series of light flashes return her to her cell where, remaining bathed in light, she exchanges words with a guard and eats her food with newfound enthusiasm. As the credits roll she looks towards the light.

Third ending of *Saving Grace*

Grace is alone in a cell. Hunched over on the edge of a bed she repeatedly drops a coin onto the concrete floor. A white-coated attendant enters carrying a tray of food, which he puts on the bed beside Grace.

ATTENDANT: Hi Grace. (she ignores him) You can't keep this up for
ever you know. (she continues picking up and
dropping coin.) ... Have it your way.

As he leaves a heavy door clangs shut. Grace looks up and appears to go into a trance state. She sees: A coin spinning intercut with a close-up of an eye.

GERALD (V/O) I'm here, Grace.

GRACE: Where?

GERALD(V/O) All around.

A silent sequence of Grace and Gerald dancing and laughing, as if in a dream, accompanies the ongoing dialogue.

GRACE: Everyone thinks I'm crazy ... Do you think I'm crazy?

GERALD: (V/O) No one's crazy, no one's sane either, we're all just somewhere in between.

With Gerald's imagined presence gone, Grace, backlit by the light streaming down from the cell window behind her, seems struck by a new awareness of her surroundings. A few seconds later the observation panel in the door is slid back from the outside. and the observer can see that Grace is now eating the food she had previously ignored.

ATTENDANT: Everything okay?

GRACE: I hate casserole.

ATTENDANT: What do you like then?

GRACE: Fish and chips.

ATTENDANT I'll see what I can do.

Left alone Grace climbs on to her bed and stretched to look out the window, peering into the light as, the lyrics of the Dave Dobbyn song 'Language' begins and the final credits roll. The lyrics are as follows.

Oh, my hands are tied
I could be a victim
When my tongue won't move,
you had it tied with your heartstring

When I needed you most I couldn't find the language

When I needed you more I couldn't say a word ...