Attaining tranquility through religion and Pixar*

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Welcome to the uncharted world of religion and Pixar! Pixar, an animation giant in the entertainment industry, is an influential example of offering "religious experiences" by enchanting viewers to a whole new world. In his book *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*, John C. Lyden points out the interesting relationship between religion and film: “though we may see the powers of the new media, we often fear them and do not wish to recognize them as sharing in the same functions that historically have been accorded to religion.” Whether it's a world of talking toys, ants, or fish, Pixar's feature length films enrapture audiences in an ethereal context. In particular, the movies *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, and *Finding Nemo* exhibit traits from theories of sacred space offered by Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith. By examining the three Pixar movies through the lens of Eliade and Smith's theories, I propose that the animation films supplies an underlying need for human beings to attain inner tranquility in their lives.

**Mircea Eliade: The Sacred and the Profane**

Mircea Eliade was a prominent Romanian scholar, known for his phenomenological approach to the study of religion. His *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* contributed greatly to the field.2 Eliade wrote about the meaning of sacredness within the context of traditional religious beliefs and practices including space, time, nature, and human experience. This study draws particularly on Eliade’s suggestion that a physical location is not nearly as important as the perception of transcendence. The transcendent presence is sought out by forlorn people as a coping mechanism in order to deal with trials and tribulations. Eliade's analysis is paramount to this study of religion and Pixar films because he depicts the hidden yearning for the "sacred" despite individuals living in a secularized environment. Pixar films are not synonymous with religion, yet beneath their seemingly secular nature lies an

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elucidation of Eliade’s observations. The following key quotes from *The Sacred and the Profane* encapsulate different aspects of Eliade and Smith’s overarching theory of the sacred space. Each excerpt about chaos and transcendence feeds into the end objective of investigating people’s desire of attaining the "sacred." Chaos leads to uncertainty in one’s life, thus by aspiring to attain the "sacred" within the dimension of the transcendent world, a sense of complacency can be achieved.

“Religious man thirsts for being. His terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness.”

Eliade writes “since ‘our world’ is a cosmos, any attack from without threatens to turn it into chaos.” He focuses his discussion of the term ‘chaos’ in the context of physical locations as, “any destruction of a city is equivalent to a retrogression to chaos.” My interpretation of Eliade’s discussion of chaos is that once an individual is in a perceived chaotic environment, it is almost as if one has an allergic reaction. One cannot stay in that place if he or she feels that it compromises the need to have a purpose in life. For instance, if someone has certain religious morals and obligations that need to be upheld and the location in which they are does not accommodate or allow those values to be expressed, the person would perceive the area as chaotic. Consequently, the desire to escape from that area grows. The terror subsides only if the perceived threat of chaos recedes.

“Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent, in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos.”

Eliade uses the term “transcendent,” in relation to divine work as transcendence “spontaneously reveals the many aspects of the sacred.” For example, the sky ‘naturally’ reflects the “transcendence of the deity” as it “reveals the infinite distance.” Eliade links the transcendent with nature and argues that for “religious man the supernatural is indissolubly connected with the natural, that nature always expresses something that transcends it.” For this film analysis I consider the “transcendent” as a North Star to which life must be oriented towards. Without this North Star life becomes a mess. Human beings require a sense of direction and purpose and the opening towards the transcendent can be achieved through access beyond the limitations of this world. Order is established when one finds a cause greater than oneself to align their life towards. It is in this seeking out of a higher power that life’s purpose can be made tangible and attainable.

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3 Eliade uses gender exclusive language, but whenever Eliade uses “man” in the general sense, I understand him to mean all of humanity, men and women.

4 Ibid., 64.

5 Ibid., 47.

6 Ibid., 48.

7 Ibid., 34.

8 Ibid., 117.

9 Ibid., 117-118.
“Every construction and every inauguration of a new dwelling are in some measure equivalent to a new beginning, a new life. And every beginning repeats the primordial beginning when the universe first saw the light of day.”

Eliade argues that, “habitations are not lightly changed, for it is not easy to abandon one’s world” and that “habitation constitutes an imago mundi, it is symbolically situated at the Center of the World.” Thus, when we change habitsations, the temporal cycle starts again. For every beginning, there is an ending. Thus, for those who strive to have a new life (perhaps it could be a conversion to a new religion), a physical shift might be part of turning a page in that person’s chapter. Eliade highlights the significance of environment and how it plays a key role in whether a person truly thinks that they are “home.” This can also apply to their internal state and seeing if the dwelling in which they reside is favourable for maintaining a balance in their life, rather than fostering conflict.

Jonathan Z. Smith: Map is Not Territory

The University of Chicago’s Jonathan Z. Smith is the most influential historian of religion in the world. Smith’s research is diverse with works on ritual theory and Hellenistic religions amongst others. In Map is Not Territory, Smith revisits the meanings behind texts from Late Antiquity and examines the notion of sacred space. Using Eliade as his primary reference, Smith highlights issues in the study of religion. For this film analysis, I draw on the sections of Map is Not Territory that focus on how rules shape a society. Rules serve as an indication of societal values, so obeying those rules can lead people to feel like they belong in a space. Even if the legislation is determined in a secular manner, it can have an effect similar to religious institutionalized laws. The following quotes from Map is Not Territory will be drawn on in each film analysis.

“Each [intersecting realm] had its own ordering and principles, rules of conduct, boundaries and relations of exclusivity and inclusivity.”

Smith elaborates further on this point by describing how a farmer he knew “sought to create, in both his home and farm, a microcosm in which everything had its place and was fulfilled by keeping its place.” Essentially, drawing certain boundaries, “guarantees meaning and value through structures of congruity and conformity.” Smith notes that different places have different ideas of rules and conduct following those core values of that religious doctrine is what allows an individual to obtain a sense of “belonging.” For example, in a religious setting perhaps certain attire must be worn. Smith’s description can stretch to all aspects of behaviour within religious institutions or non-religious spaces and behaviour (as with the farmer example). Smith argues that “world creation and world founding are not anthropological categories of human freedom. Rather they are to be understood as ontological (perhaps even

10 Ibid., 57.
11 Ibid., 56.
12 Ibid., 57. Imago mundi translates to image of the world.
13 Smith uses gender exclusive language, but whenever Smith uses “man” in the general sense, I interpret it to mean all of humanity, men and women.
15 Ibid.
theological) categories. Man’s fundamental mode is not freedom and creativity, but rather it is repetition. Or, perhaps more accurately, man’s creativity is repetition.”16

Expanding further on repetition, Smith argues, “repetition is the human mode of articulating absolute Reality.”17 This reality is “given to man, it is autonomous.” Essentially, repetition is the key to unlocking what is absolute reality from person to person. For the purposes of this film analysis, the seemingly contradictory statement Smith makes that “man’s creativity is repetition” is relevant. Something that is done repetitively is not creative. However, Smith suggests that humans find creativity through repetition. In a religious context, rituals can demonstrate this concept. People may go through a certain ritual and even though the ritual may be the same, the results or the affect that it has on people may be new and consequently creative. What we know to be reality is through repetition. What we repeatedly do is the way in which we know ourselves to be true.

“With some hesitation I have settled for the present on the dichotomy between a locative vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a utopian vision of the world (using the term in its strictest sense: the value of being in no place).”18

Here Smith refers to Eliade and poses the question as to whether “archaic” and “modern” are the best terms to categorize Eliade’s notion of the fundamental “archaic ontologies” in mythology.19 This attempt at categorization is rooted in understanding the importance of the “Center,” which Eliade describes as the ideal place for religious man, versus the cultures where an “open” view of the world is embraced.20 Smith appears to suggest the importance of the visible in contrast to the invisible. In terms of the physical location, perhaps it is what it takes for people to come together and feel like they have fulfilled their religious duties. On the other hand, some people might find the inherent, structural limitations of a place to be too constricting. They would rather settle for a utopian, indefinite view of the world in which they are not bound by rules governed in locations. In this case, the physical location does not garner an emotional or meaningful connection to those individuals. Thus, it is a more abstract and internal quest to fulfill their self-efficacy. Sometimes it can be a physical or an esoteric endeavor for people to reach the “sacred.”

16 Ibid., 92.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 101.
19 Ibid., 100.
20 Ibid., 101.
The inevitability of change and the constancy of sacred space in *Toy Story*

“Religious man thirsts for being. His terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness.”

*Toy Story*’s central message exhibits how change is inevitable and that dealing with it in a healthy manner can contribute to overall growth and stability in life. The idea that change causes uncertainty can drive people to search for constancy in a sacred space.

In the beginning of *Toy Story*, a six-year-old boy named Andy has his birthday party. His old toys, with the exception of Woody the Sheriff, panic because they think they will be replaced with new toys. A meeting is called, and Woody attempts to reassure them: “no one is getting replaced, this is Andy we’re talking about. It does not matter how much we’re played with. What matters is that we’re here when he needs us. That’s what we’re made for, right?” Here Woody reveals what he believes is the toys’ “purpose of life.” The toys exist to give Andy comfort whether they are played with or not, Woody argues, but the other toys believe they must be played with to fulfill their purpose and have worth to Andy. Woody is dishonest however, for what is most important to him is to be Andy’s favourite toy. This is indicated by his authoritarian demeanor towards Andy’s other toys. When a new toy named Buzz Lightyear arrives, Woody is upset because he is no longer Andy’s favourite toy. Both Woody and Buzz must struggle to realize the truth of what Woody says is their "purpose."

Later in the film, Woody and Buzz are trapped in a gas station, but have two completely different reactions to the situation. Woody gets on his knees and cries out that he is a lost toy: “does [Andy] not realize I’m not there?” Unable to connect with Andy, Woody feels the chaos that surrounds him. Woody feels dejected, tossed aside, terrified of his “nothingness.” Meanwhile, Buzz does not flinch and is calm and collected as he indicates that everything is under control, telling Woody: “Sheriff, this isn’t the time to panic.” Key to this scene is that Woody knows that he is a toy, but Buzz does not realize that he is also a toy. Instead, Buzz believes he is a space ranger, sent to planet Earth to protect the galaxy from the threat of invasion; each toys’ reaction to their situation stems from their own conception of themselves.

As Eliade suggests, human beings need to fill the void of identity. They need to define themselves and to see where they fit in the world. There are three different parts of the spectrum of “being” from Eliade’s quote. First, there is the concept of confidence based on delusion (Buzz as a Space Ranger). Second, there is despair (Woody feels total despair when he thinks Buzz will win Andy’s heart at playtime). Third, there is meaning with recognition of complexity. *Toy Story* suggests that the ideal is to strike a balance between the two extremes of hopeless mindfulness and utter delusion. Woody is personified as mindfulness and Buzz is personified as delusion. When Woody and Buzz fall into Sid’s hands, the main antagonist of *Toy Story*, they realize that they must work together in order to successfully escape. In relation to Eliade’s quote, this scene calls upon the willingness to seek for the sacred as it fulfills the void of one's identity. However, *Toy Story* portrays that a delicate level of awareness of oneself is required in

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21 Eliade, 64.
order to healthily pursue the sacred. Too much on one side of the scale can blind an individual and not quench their "thirst for being."

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Sid from Pizza Planet captures Woody and Buzz. Sid puts them in his bag, skateboards his way home, and prepares an "operation" on his sister's toy. The next day when he sees an opening past Sid’s toys, Woody runs and exclaims, “there’s no place like home”. Woody cannot stay in Sid’s house for fear that he will end up disfigured by Sid’s “operations” and that Andy is transcendence for him. This scenario is analogous to Eliade’s statement in the sense that once an opportunity is presented that leads one to his or her definition of transcendence, then he or she must grab that opportunity.

However, if someone does not have a longing for “transcendence,” then it does not matter where they are positioned in the world. For instance, Buzz is feeling dejected when, after falling down the stairs, he finally realizes that he is a toy. Afterwards, he claims to be a doll named Mrs. Nesbit and has a mental breakdown. Even though Woody urges Buzz to leave Sid’s house with him, Buzz does not care at all since he no longer has a “transcendence” (his whole-hearted conviction of being a space ranger) to look forward to. Buzz can live in physical chaos (Sid’s room) because his internal state is also chaotic. Buzz says to Woody, "Andy's house. Sid's house. What's the difference?" Despite the clear torture that will ensue by Sid (strapping Buzz to a rocket ship), Buzz's internal dejection extinguishes any longing to return back to refuge at Andy's house.

Eliade argues that the transcendent is of paramount importance. In Toy Story, Andy takes on the role of the transcendent. The toys gravitate towards Andy and find meaning in being a toy through Andy. However, when he is in Sid’s room Buzz does not gravitate towards Andy because his sense of purpose has been blurred by his identity crisis. Thus, a flame of desire to search for the sacred is necessary in order for one to earn contentment and stability in life.

“Every construction and every inauguration of a new dwelling are in some measure equivalent to a new beginning, a new life. And every beginning repeats the primordial beginning when the universe first saw the light of day.”

Toy Story’s main locations are: Andy’s house, Dinoco gas station, Pizza Planet, Sid’s house, and later Andy's new home. Andy's house is Buzz's new dwelling and as such he is starting his new life. At the same time, Woody also experiences having to share the spotlight for the first time. When Woody and Buzz relocate to the Dinoco gas station, they still maintain their concept of who they are (Woody still tries to convince Buzz that he is a toy, while Buzz says that he’s a space ranger). Their identities still have not changed even when they make it to Pizza Planet, but when they are in Sid’s house Woody and Buzz really make progress with themselves by completing one another. Woody helps Buzz recognize his true

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22 Ibid., 34.
23 Ibid., 57.
identity and Buzz helps Woody recognize that Andy will always acknowledge Woody’s place in his heart. Thus, the events that unfold in Sid’s house lend themself to the rebirth of Woody and Buzz.

Once inside Sid’s house, Woody finally accepts his “defeat” that Buzz is a cooler toy than he and that Woody will not always be the favourite toy. The proof of Woody’s acceptance is shown when he says that he should be strapped to the rocket instead of Buzz. After giving some thought to Woody’s words, Buzz breaks through his delusional concept of being a space ranger. Buzz’s acceptance is reached when he helps Woody out of the crate and later when he returns to Andy rather than allowing himself to be blown up by Sid. Buzz is now aware of who he is and what he is meant to do: be Andy’s toy as “Andy” is inscribed on his foot.

A change in physical location can impact one’s concept of self. New dwellings cause change and also represent a new beginning like a symbolic rebirth. For instance, Buzz had to go to Sid’s house to realize that he is just a toy. A new level of awareness opened up to Buzz in Sid’s house. Similarly, Woody is also reborn in the sense that he understands that he had treated Buzz unfairly. Woody also comes to accept what he said at the start was his purpose; he accepts that he is a toy and truly understands what it means to be a toy, instead of just Andy’s favourite. Their experience in Sid’s house also makes Woody realize Buzz is his only friend, someone who he can connect on a deeper level as opposed to the other toys in Andy’s room. Woody finally relates to Buzz in terms of how easily replaced they can be. Buzz became Andy's favourite toy (Woody's replacement) and Buzz recognizing that he is a disposable toy (Buzz’s replacement). As a result, Toy Story illustrates how new circumstances in different locations can awaken the desire to attain the sacred.

“Each [intersecting realm] had its own ordering and principles, rules of conduct, boundaries and relations of exclusivity and inclusivity.”

Here Jonathan Smith talks about the invisible lines that are drawn by societal values to define certain stigmas and acceptable legislations of exclusivity (how an outcast is labeled) and inclusivity (“one of us” mentality) within a society. The function of these legislations is to create a sense of order and in doing so they create an anchoring point around which life revolves. In religion these lines could cause one associated with a particular religion to label oneself one thing in opposition to the “other.” One would feel out of place if they were with the “other.” Toy Story demonstrates this as little integration initially taking place with toys from different owners in certain locations (like Sid’s room).

Smith’s passage on boundaries is illustrated throughout the different locations of Toy Story. Andy’s room sets the tone for the movie: there Woody is the boss and the other toys follow him. At Pizza Planet, a claw machine is filled with green aliens that say that when one is chosen that they must go. This indicates a clearly established rule among the aliens: those who are chosen by the claw are no longer considered members of that community. Thus, for the aliens their sense of self and transcendence is confined to the claw machine. However, Woody and Buzz have their transcendence outside the machine, so they cannot remain in that place.

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24 Smith, 292.
Sid’s room is chaotic, dark, and messy. Woody and Buzz cannot call Sid’s room their home because of the way things operate in Sid’s room. Sid rips toys apart and puts them back together in a new way. Woody and Buzz are petrified that they are going to die. Woody says frightfully, “once we enter Sid’s house, we won’t be coming out.” However, Sid’s original toys (like the one-eyed baby scorpion toy) remain in Sid’s room despite their torture. Instead of trying to escape, they believe that they belong in Sid’s room because Sid is their owner, just as Andy is Woody’s owner. In Sid’s room, Woody and Buzz get along with Sid’s toys, but in the end, Woody and Buzz belong to Andy’s group and are separate from Sid’s toys. In this manner, *Toy Story* exhibits the importance of understanding your limits and that this might entail creating or understanding physical boundaries. When an individual is used to a certain norm and is placed in a different context with different rules, there can be incompatibility, which is a hindrance for finding the sacred.

A fourth location is the Dinoco gas station. When Buzz and Woody fight there, Buzz says “even though you tried to terminate me, revenge is not an idea we promote on my planet. But we’re not on my planet, are we?” Buzz believes that it is acceptable to enact revenge on Earth but not on his home planet. Thus, there are lines drawn by societal norms in which certain behaviours are allowed or not. By anchoring those guidelines, it serves as a litmus test to see whether individuals are falling out of line with their values and assist in searching for the sacred. Searching for the sacred involves transcending boundaries, and so identifying those boundaries is a crucial component to accomplishing that exploration.

“World creation and world founding are not anthropological categories of human freedom. Rather they are to be understood as ontological (perhaps even theological) categories. Man’s fundamental mode is not freedom and creativity, but rather it is repetition. Or, perhaps more accurately, man’s creativity is repetition.”

Woody has been Andy’s favourite toy since kindergarten and thus Woody was the leader of Andy’s toys. Andy’s room is a source of repetition for Woody as he is used being played with the most in the room. This repetition is not healthy for Woody because it enables him to put himself above the other toys and distracts him from his true calling which is simply to be there for Andy. The world Buzz lives in is clouded at first. He tells himself that he is a space ranger despite the numerous occasions when his gadgets fail him. He uses his laser beam against Sid’s toys but to no avail (it was just a light bulb that blinked). He also keeps calling Star Command on his wrist but never gets an answer. These two examples of Woody and Buzz highlight the disadvantageous nature of regular habitual activity. Without constantly critiquing and reflecting on their behaviour, it could lead to an echo-chambered effect, where their world become narrower and less open to refinement. Woody and Buzz need to transition from their old worlds into new ones by the end of the film. The way in which they do that is to replace their old routines with a new outlook on their life.

Sid also has a routine; his routine is torturing toys on a regular basis. At the beginning of the film when Sid is first introduced, he blows up a Combat Carl figure. Sid also tortures Woody and tries to blow up

\[25\text{Ibid., 92.}\]
Buzz with the rocket. For Sid being able to cause destruction and chaos on a regular basis helps create the world that allows him to experiment with toys. Perhaps the deeper meaning behind his calamitous behaviour is the feeling of control and dominance.

We find “home” in what we tell ourselves or in what we repeatedly do. Throughout the film, Woody says that he is Andy’s toy and that he needs to get back to his owner. Woody is always in a state of coming up with new ideas to get out of situations just so that he can return back to Andy. Buzz similarly tries to return home. He speaks to his wrist attempting to communicate with Star Command, tries to have his spaceship repaired, and thinks that Pizza Planet is a spaceship that will transport him home.

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The toys in Andy’s room come from physical places, which correspond to the locative vision of the world. Mr. Potato Head says he is from PlaySkool while Rex says he is from Mattel. Buzz says he is from the Gamma Quadrant of Sector 4. When asked about his origins he gives a dramatic answer about protecting the galaxy from the threat of invasion. Buzz’s answer illustrates a utopian vision that gives his life purpose.

Toy Story suggests that when you are too attached to one vision, it causes problems. Woody always focuses on the locative lens by insisting that he needs to return to Andy’s house, and although this is realistic, it does not allow him to grow and accept change when it occurs in life. On the other hand, Buzz represents the utopian lens and although it allows him to ease into other locations relatively well (like being accepted in Andy’s room), it is not realistic and ultimately causes him pain in the long run. Instead, using both locative and utopian visions is what seems to be the ideal. For the toys, it is important to know where their owner Andy is, which represents their locative vision. At the same time, Andy can be anywhere (he moved from his house at the end of the film) that highlights the importance of the utopian vision.

Woody and Buzz’s clash initially clouds their visions about their identity. However, after examining chaos, new dwellings, interactions in distinct environments (that run by a different set of rules), and investigating the effects of creative repetition, Toy Story reveals the intricacies of searching for the sacred. It is a journey that encompasses pushing the metaphysical horizons internally and externally.

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26 Ibid., 101.
The pursuit of transcendence in *A Bug's Life*

“Religious man thirsts for being. His terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness.”

*A Bug's Life* features Flik, a bumbling ant from Ant Island striving to push away the oppressive grasshoppers, led by their leader Hopper. Princess Atta, the love of Flik's life, sister of Dot and daughter of the Ant Island queen, sends Flik to find "warrior bugs," to drive off the grasshoppers from Ant Island. However, it turns out that Flik acquired “circus bugs” posing as warrior bugs. In the end, Flik's courage and support from Ant Island eventually ends the oppressive regime by the grasshoppers.

In *A Bug's Life*, the terror of the grasshoppers is what stops the ants from truly living life and cultivating their “being.” The queen of Ant Island summarizes the lives of the ants and their belief that they have been put on the earth to serve the grasshoppers: “it’s the same year after year, they come, they eat, they leave; that’s our lot in life. It’s not a lot, but it’s our life.” Hopper’s gang has instilled this belief in the ants through intimidation. Flik does not believe that this is the way ants are supposed to live. In an effort to make a difference in the colony, Flik goes out in search of warrior bugs to fend off the grasshoppers. Flik’s drive and motivation for making a difference corresponds to his need for “being” and his perceived lack of worth. He says: “my children's children will walk down the street and people will point and say, ‘Look, there goes the spawn of Flik the Loser!’” Flik need for worth and meaning spurs him on in spite of all the chaos that surrounds his life.

Princess Atta also tries to fill the void of nothingness by trying to be the best leader she can possibly be, though she thinks that no one believes she will do a good job when queen. Much like Flik, her “being” is rooted in the acknowledgement and acceptance of the other ants. The circus bugs also have a need for “being.” Their entertaining acts, even though they are not hugely successful, provide meaning to their lives.

In the end of the film, Princess Atta tells the circus bugs that they have “given back our hope, our dignity and our lives” by their valiant efforts to stand up to the grasshoppers. Acknowledgement from people who care is what makes life meaningful for these characters. Otherwise, the paranoia of not being accepted eats away and eventually leaves the characters feeling like they are worth nothing. Flik wants the colony to thrive, and attempts to make a difference with his unsuccessful inventions. Flik's relentless ambitions translate into a search for meaning, striving to attain the status of being someone of value in the community. Princess Atta wants the colony to trust her, but she lacks strong leadership skills. She believes the other ants are waiting for her to mess up. Princess Atta wants to believe her efforts as a leader is meaningful, and the confirmation that this is true is through the acknowledgement of others. The circus troupe wants others to be entertained by their acts, but they are inept. When the ant children storm the meeting between Flik and the circus bugs, the circus bugs feel incredibly honoured and pleased when asked for their autographs. The acceptance from the children signals that the circus bugs are doing something meaningful with their lives, it gives them dignity and hope. These characters

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27 Eliade, 64.
mirror the quest to find the sacred, by going through the rigorous process of finding meaning in their own way. Once they find meaning, or the sacred, then they are at peace with themselves and the surroundings.

“Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent, in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos.”

Flik has had enough of the grasshoppers wreaking havoc on Ant Island. The grasshoppers treat the ants like slaves and give them no respect, dignity, or feelings of worthiness. They tell the ants: “you are mindless, soil-shoving losers, put on this Earth to serve us!” To combat the grasshoppers, Flik goes off to find warrior bugs. His search can be understood as a search for the transcendent. In fact, when Flik sees the circus bugs pose after they escape from fighting the flies, Flik bows down to them out of relief and reverence for them. For Flik, the circus bugs are the ticket out of the mess with the grasshoppers.

The circus bugs cannot hold a job with P.T. Flea, the circus owner. P.T. Flea considers their incompetence chaotic and so they are forced to leave the circus. When Flik arrives and tells them about his plan to bring them to Ant Island (“I have been scouting for bugs with your exact talents!”), it is the circus bugs that see Flik as the transcendent. They think he is providing them with the opportunity to perform. Later when they realize that they are to fight the grasshoppers, the circus bugs try to leave accusing Flik of “preying upon the hungry souls of hapless artistes.” Together, Flik and the circus bugs create the plan to build a bird that would ward off the grasshoppers. In this case, the constructed bird also acts as a transcendent figure. For a short time the fake bird ends the chaos on Ant Island. But the deception does not last for long when P.T. Flea lights it on fire. The failed bird was a layer that needed to be removed in order for the true source of change to be unearthed: the ants themselves. The ants always had the capability to remove the chaos by standing together and refusing to obey Hopper’s orders. Flik and the circus bugs each seek salvation in external sources, but the true transcendent is within them.

A Bug’s Life suggests that while we must rely on inner resources to fix the chaos, external agents are sometimes necessary to tap into those inner resources. The circus bugs find transcendence in the acceptance of the ant colony. The catalyst is the circus bugs’ own recognition that they contribute to the ant colony by simply being themselves. When a bird chases them, the circus bugs are not putting on a performance. They are simply helping each other simply because they are friends with Flik. However, the other ants from the colony did not realize the truth behind the encounter with the bird from a distance and interpreted the circus bugs as true warriors doing their duty. Since the warrior bugs are frauds as warriors, this demonstrates that the ants had the power within them all along to drive out the grasshoppers. For Princess Atta, Hopper is the external resource to tap into her “inner transcendence.” By standing up to him, Princess Atta becomes the leader she wants to be and she demonstrates the strength and willpower she had wanted others to acknowledge from the beginning. Just as the ants, along with Princess Atta, unlocked their potential through external forces, people reaching for the sacred can also be accomplished through extrinsic circumstances.

28 Ibid., 34.
“Every construction and every inauguration of a new dwelling are in some measure equivalent to a new beginning, a new life. And every beginning repeats the primordial beginning when the universe first saw the light of day.”

While in search of warrior bugs, Flik leaves his isolated colony for the hustle and bustle city life. He is desperate to find new hope for a bright, new future for Ant Island. He initially tells himself to “blend in” to hide the fact that he is a country bug. Temporarily, Flik needs to become a new individual prior to stepping foot into a new dwelling. Flik’s city life opens up possibilities of freedom for Ant Island.

On the other hand, the circus bugs see Ant Island as a new future for them, but this new beginning is based on a misunderstanding. When they first arrive, there is an inauguration process (celebration). In particular there is a presentation by the Blueberries (young ant club) that depicts how they thought the warrior bugs are going to defeat the grasshoppers. This welcoming is not such a pleasant experience for the circus bugs as they are not too thrilled with the idea of killing grasshoppers. The new beginning for the circus bugs is not initially positive because of the miscommunication with Flik. Once their façade is exposed, that is when the true new beginning begins.

Moving to a new location and reaping the benefits from that experience comes down to your intentions. The transformation of the lives of Flik and the circus bugs by the end of the film stem from the honesty in their intentions. Flik just wanted to make a difference in the colony and subsequently earn approval from others. At the end, he is rewarded with applause from the other ants. Similarly, the circus bugs want to be of value to society through entertainment, but their experience with the ants helps them arrive at their true value. The circus bug Manny says that Flik was able to “rekindle the long dormant embers of purpose.” Pretending to be warrior bugs enabled them to help others, which is part of their true nature. On the other hand, Hopper misused the ants for selfish reasons and did not think of others. Ultimately he got his comeuppance. In relation to searching for the sacred, sometimes it can involve moving to a new place. However, if the intention is not solely for noble means, it could eventually lead to recompense, as in the case of Hopper.

“Each [intersecting realm] had its own ordering and principles, rules of conduct, boundaries and relations of exclusivity and inclusivity.”

Hopper describes the grasshoppers’ rule of Ant Island in this way: “the sun grows the food, the ants pick the food, the grasshoppers eat the food.” When presenting the food to the grasshoppers, the ants form a single line and deliver the food in an “offering.” The grasshoppers are a false transcendence because the act of giving food to the grasshoppers is not an act of a genuine nature; it’s based on the shackles of slavery. It has become such an ordered, habitual system that when a leaf falls and breaks up the line, the ants find it difficult to recover and return to the line. The ants do not think about what they are doing; serving the grasshoppers has become part of their “nature” and so when it comes time to think for themselves or to work around problems, the ants freeze. Hearkening back to Smith’s quote, an

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29 Ibid., 57.
30 Smith, 292.
established system that is in place appears to be more influential in terms of the ant's behaviour, irrespective of the legitimacy of that system.

Though life in the ant colony is structured and orderly, it is not meaningful for the ants. They have surrendered their freedom to the grasshoppers. Flik breaks the order and goes to the bug city, which is chaotic. But this act restores and rejuvenates Ant Island. The ants are happier at the end, they relax and they pick food for themselves. Had Flik not done anything, the ants would have continued to be oppressed by the grasshoppers. Likewise, if the circus bug did not try to help Flik, they would continue to drown in the misery of their existence. For Flik and the circus bugs, stepping outside their physical zones is where the serenity they truly desire lie. Likewise, pursuing the sacred may propel an individual to step outside their physical dwelling in order to succeed in cultivating inner and outer peace.

“World creation and world founding are not anthropological categories of human freedom. Rather they are to be understood as ontological (perhaps even theological) categories. Man’s fundamental mode is not freedom and creativity, but rather it is repetition. Or, perhaps more accurately, man’s creativity is repetition.”

“They come, they eat, they leave,” Princess Atta repeats this phrase nervously as she anticipates the grasshoppers’ arrival to Ant Island. This repetition mirrors the static nature of the ant mentality. The ants do not think, they just do what they are told in a mindless fashion. Obeying the grasshoppers is repetitive and formulates the stagnant world in which the ants live. Life in Ant Island is ordered but not meaningful. Flik is different; he comes up with innovative ways to better the community to break the repetition and mindless order. His will to succeed and to invent are also a form of repetition. In addition, Dot continuously supports Flik. Flik is important to Dot and when he leaves after the community finds out that Flik lied to them about the circus bugs being warrior bugs: chaos ensues in Ant Island. The grasshoppers instigate harsher treatment towards the ants so Dot flies back to Flik and repeatedly tries to convince him to come back. For Dot, continuously supporting Flik is creating her world (in reference to the quote). Dot finds complacency when she encourages Flik, which parallels the feelings that one aspires when searching for the sacred.

In A Bug’s Life, the characters undergo repetition but for different reasons. The level of creativity associated with the repetition corresponds to the world they are constructing. Flik repeatedly builds on new ideas, whereas Hopper relies on the same formula every year to keep his status. Flik’s world is more far-reaching and unlimited in comparison to Hopper’s limited outlook on life. For the circus bugs, doing regular performances under P.T. Flea is what gives them meaning. By the end of the film, it is not clear if they are going to keep doing the “Flaming Death” routine, P.T. says that they have a schedule to keep. If the performances are the same, the performances are repetitive in that sense; however, if the performances are different, it creates a world that makes room for new opportunities for “meaning” within their comfortable framework of performing.

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31 Ibid., 92.
“With some hesitation I have settled for the present on the dichotomy between a locative vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a utopian vision of the world (using the term in its strictest sense: the value of being in no place).”\(^{32}\)

Flik is grounded on Ant Island. At the end of the film, he says that he belongs there solidifying the locative vision Flik has of the world. The tree on Ant Island serves as a metaphor for Flik. Flik realizes that everything that the giant tree needs is in a small seed. The seed represents the ideas Flik has and once they come to fruition, he reaps great benefits. Thus, for Flik an actual place (locative vision) is his preferred lens to view the world in some respects. However, Flik also desperately searches elsewhere for someone to help the ants. In that sense, Flik is also tied into the utopian vision of the world.

Hopper also sets his sights on Ant Island but simply for his leverage. Ant Island produces fresh food and so Hopper’s locative vision is twofold. One, to get the food for the grasshoppers and two, to push down the ants. However, Hopper’s brother, Molt, does not share the same view. Molt argues that there is no need to go to Ant Island because Hopper does not like grain. Molt does not mind staying in the grasshopper’s home. Thus, Molt expresses his locative vision of the world. For Molt, the grasshopper’s hideout is sufficient for him to be at peace.

As they are essentially nomads, the circus bugs have a utopian vision of the world. Once P.T. Flea fires them, they have no physical home to go to and they do not know what to do. Once they gain the acceptance and accolades of the ants, the circus bugs shift to a locative vision of the world. Ant Island is the place in which the circus bugs can express their purpose in life. Thus, the circus bugs had an altered mindset throughout the film: place only matters to them if they can fulfill their purpose. Similarly, finding the sacred can be either locative or utopian. For some individuals, the place matters most because it brings them a sense of physical reassurance by the environmental cues. For others, it might be an internal feeling to reach for the sacred, so place does not matter.

A locative or a utopian vision of the world can each bestow benefits that are determined by an individual’s worldview. Those who act out of selfishness tend to be locked into one way of seeing the world; however, those whose purpose involves helping others combine both locative and utopian visions. In the case of Flik, Ant Island is where he lives (locative vision) but is driven elsewhere to help his community (utopian vision). Hopper also has locative vision, but it involves getting materialistic perks and an intangible feeling of authority. In the end, both Flik and Hopper reap their rewards based on why they have their locative views of the world. Flik saves Ant Island and Hopper meets his demise. In addition, the circus bugs reap their rewards through the locative and utopian visions of the world. They are tied to specific places for a while (as long as the audience is entertained) but then move on.

A Bug’s Life explores the sacred through different facets of experiences. By having the characters search for their identity, navigate through chaos; undergoing creative repetitions; acknowledging the boundaries of different realms; and owning perspectives on the importance of location: it mirrors the various stages that an individual goes through to obtain the sacred.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 101
Finding transcendence and security in *Finding Nemo*

“Religious man thirsts for being. His terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness.”33

*Finding Nemo* is a tale about Marlin, a clownfish, trying to find his son Nemo after a dentist snatches Nemo from a reef to give as a present to his niece Darla. Marlin gets help from unlikely comrades: Dory, a forgetful fish, Crush, a laidback sea turtle, and the aquarium fish.

*Finding Nemo* is an ironic title for the film. “Nemo” is Latin for “nobody.” However, the entire film is a story about Marlin trying to find his son. This title, like Eliade, reflecting on the concept of identity: “religious man thirsts for being.” Marlin’s thirst for being manifests itself in protecting his only son, and the terror of losing his only son influences how he handles chaos. *Finding Nemo* illustrates the intricacy of handling the terror of chaos.

From the start of the film, Marlin finds himself in a chaotic environment. A key part of *Finding Nemo* is illustrating the balance between extremes. In Marlin’s case it means balancing his desire to protect his son with Nemo’s need to for independence. Paranoid Marlin does not feel that Nemo is safe on the first day of school; however, by the end of the film, Marlin recognizes that danger will always exist and anxiety inhibits joy, freedom and creativity. Marlin comes to understand that it is necessary to let go of things that are beyond his control and accept the existence of a certain degree of chaos.

Though their initial encounter, a head-on collision, is chaotic, Dory feels worthwhile with Marlin. Near the end of the film, after their adventures, Dory pleads with Marlin to stay with her. Dory expresses her terror of nothingness to Marlin and says that when she looks at him, her short-term memory loss is better, and she is “home.” Despite her plea, Marlin decides to leave her. Afterwards, she’s in a state of despair and chaos. She swims around in circles and forgets things. Dory desperately wants to prove to herself that she is useful. She has trouble remembering the location of the dentist’s office (where Nemo was) to Marlin when she tries to convince him to stay with her near the end of the film. Without Marlin, Dory feels terrified about going back to who she was before: nobody. She does not appear to have a home, but that is not her source of chaos. In Dory’s case, the individuals in her life are what matter to her. Being abandoned is the source of her terror, which ultimately leads her to feel that she has nothing in her life.

“Life is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent, in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos.”34

In *Finding Nemo* Eliade’s concept of the transcendent manifests itself as an environmental phenomenon. Even though the ocean can be perceived as chaotic due to its sheer size and unknown dwellings of other aquatic species, the aquarium fish in the dentist’s office feel the need to go to the ocean. For the aquarium fish, the transcendent is the ocean. Gill, the fish who comes up with an escape

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33 Eliade, 64.
34 Ibid., 34.
plan, tells Nemo that staying in an aquarium “does things to you.” In this case, the ocean is chaotic but meaningful and transcendent; the aquarium is ordered but lacking the sacred aspect. All the fish in the aquarium seek refuge in the ocean, as it is perceived to be the one true place for them to reside. In addition, the gang perceives the dentist’s aquarium as chaotic because Darla kills fish although she does not seem to do it for vindictive reasons. She calls out for Nemo (calling him "fishy") when he gets flushed down the dentist’s drain. Nemo is originally from the ocean, so he cannot continue living in the aquarium with all its chaotic elements. He desires reuniting with his father in their home, with peace and serenity. Thus, chaotic environments are a roadblock to achieving the sacred.

An interesting comparison can be drawn between Marlin’s efforts at raising Nemo to Gill’s description of the aquarium as a “box.” Although Marlin’s tries to keep Nemo safe in the “box” of the anemone trying to keep Nemo from taking risks in life, Marlin does more harm than good. On the other hand Gill tried to escape his "box" (the aquarium) in an earlier attempt by going through the toilet drain because “all drains lead to the ocean.” The drains are analogous to the "opening" Eliade speaks about. In both cases, a physical box can represent trapping themselves, deprived from the sacred.

In addition, to a certain extent the EAC (East Australian Current) also serves as the opening towards the transcendent for the fish. The EAC is chaotic by its very nature, with all the twists and turns along with the fast-paced moments. However, it was required for Marlin and Dory to go through that experience in order to advance one step closer to finding Nemo. In particular, the exit from the EAC also illustrates Eliade’s argument for the need to have a certain level of chaos in the environment. The EAC is chaotic by its very nature so when Marlin and Dory take the “swirling vortex of terror” it is an opening towards the transcendent. Consequently, Marlin is able to have fun and actually laugh for the first time since the traumatizing event of Nemo being taken away. Going through the EAC figuratively chipped a part of his heart to let go of his overprotective, paranoid nature towards life.

The transcendent can also include a physical location. For the aquarium fish, the ocean is that ideal place and they believe that all drains lead to the ocean. Instead the aquarium fish gang manages to reach the ocean by rolling out the window in the plastic bags the dentist puts them in by the end of the film. Nevertheless, they do not know what to do next. It is not enough just thinking that getting to the ocean will solve their problems (give them “being”). Rather, an internal transformation is also necessary to access the true feeling of “being.” Marlin initially thinks that just finding Nemo and keeping him safe is enough. However, Marlin becomes a new fish by the end of the film and understands his lesson about letting things go. It’s not where you are, but who you are.

“Every construction and every inauguration of a new dwelling are in some measure equivalent to a new beginning, a new life. And every beginning repeats the primordial beginning when the universe first saw the light of day.”

For Nemo, his new dwelling in the aquarium sparks a change in his life. Nemo becomes more of a risk taker. When Nigel brings the news about Marlin’s ambitious efforts to rescue Nemo, it inspires Nemo to take the risk of escaping the aquarium by jamming the water filter with a pebble. Nemo had to relocate

35 Ibid., 57.
to the aquarium, thousands of miles away, in order to appreciate his father’s love and dedication to protecting him. This new dwelling was the start of a transformative experience for Nemo, in the sense that he understood on a deeper level how much his father loved him and that if they were ever to be united once again, then Nemo would keep this in mind when building their relationship.

For Dory, Eliade’s quote has a different meaning, with a different angle of approach. For her, it is not about a new dwelling in the physical sense that ignites a new beginning in her life. Rather, for Dory it is about being with someone she cares about and with whom she feels at “home.” Prior to meeting Marlin, Dory does not know where her family is or her home. Location does not matter to Dory and in every instance of danger Dory does not change her attitude in life. She keeps the same motto throughout the film: “just keep swimming.” When the dentist’s scuba mask drops into the deep dark abyss in the beginning of the film, Marlin panics while Dory maintains a cheery tone and willingly swims into the darkness. The same reactions happen when they face the sharks, the jellyfish, EAC current, and ultimately being swallowed by a whale. Nevertheless, at the end of the film, we see that she now lives in the same neighbourhood as Marlin and also joined the shark club. Dory’s new life is characterized by being with other fish who care about her, and that takes precedence to a physical location.

Every new beginning we make in life can be a step closer to actualizing who we are. Had Marlin, Nemo and Dory not gone through the whirlwind adventure they experienced, getting out of their comfort zones and being challenged physically and mentally, they would not have grown in character as we see at the end of the film. Marlin is able to let go of the overprotective care of Nemo, Nemo is able to understand his father’s caring nature, and Dory finds meaning in her life based on her new relationships with fish that care about her. In relation to the sacred, sometimes an adventure that takes one outside their comfort zone can allow them to gain a deeper appreciation for what benefits the sacred brings them. It could be inner peace, an answer to their meaning of life or serve another kind of function in their life. The sacred and chaos cannot be concurrent.

“Each [intersecting realm] had its own ordering and principles, rules of conduct, boundaries and relations of exclusivity and inclusivity.”36

This quote shines brightly when Nemo is first introduced to the gang in the aquarium. Initially, Nemo tells them that he is from the ocean and Gurgles is appalled. He is alarmed about Nemo coming from the ocean (considers him “impure”) so he tells Jacques to de-contaminate Nemo. His behaviour indicates that the sacredness of the transcendence (the ocean) cannot mix with the aquarium. For the aquarium fish, those two realms need to be separate. There is also an initiation process for Nemo to join their club: Nemo has to swim through the “ring of fire.” After Nemo successfully completes that task, Gill names Nemo “Sharkbait.” Thus, the process by which Nemo needed to be accepted into the gang could represent the first step to getting closer to the sacred. An acceptance stage, which could be on an individual or group level, is required in order for one to reach the sacred.

This quote is also illustrated with Marlin’s own rules and regulations. For the first day of Nemo’s school, prior to exiting the anemone where Marlin and Nemo live, Marlin says to Nemo to swim out and then

36 Smith, 292.
back in, repeatedly. This corresponds to Marlin’s paranoia after a traumatic incident with the barracuda. In addition, Mr. Ray, the science teacher, assures Marlin that his class stays together as a group. It is a rule that is soon broken once Nemo and the three other kids go swim out to the “Dropoff” an area of open water. The open water is considered dangerous and so fish are told not to swim there. Thus, breaking the principles established in a particular community does help to attain the sacred under certain circumstances. For Nemo, stepping outside the boundaries of what his father laid out ultimately makes their relationship stronger and helps to reciprocate the peace between the two.

The different rules and regulations that occur in one area are often based on previous experiences and principles of sufficient reason in philosophy (“for every law there is a reason and for every reason there is a law”). Referring to previous experiences allows one to find what works or does not work in terms of determining “meaning” or the “transcendent.” If a certain ritual performed in the past gave a person meaning or an opening to the transcendent, then the person will likely repeat that ritual. If the rituals are on a communal scale, society can make it an established rule for that area. Marlin’s ritual of going in and out of his home is a byproduct of the devastating experience he had with a barracuda. By undergoing that ritual, Marlin attains transcendence or the sacred. In order for Nemo to be considered one of the aquarium fish, he has to go through the “ring of fire” ritual. The aquarium fish have established the ritual, but the origins of that ritual are unknown to the viewers. Perhaps it could serve as a way for them to bond tightly and be a part of something greater as opposed to being individuals. Perchance it could be a group trying to search out the sacred together, banded as friends to make meaning in their lives.

“World creation and world founding are not anthropological categories of human freedom. Rather they are to be understood as ontological (perhaps even theological) categories. Man’s fundamental mode is not freedom and creativity, but rather it is repetition. Or, perhaps more accurately, man’s creativity is repetition.” 37

In the world of Finding Nemo, characters conceive their perspective on the world by constantly doing certain actions. Marlin repeatedly tells different characters that he needs to find his son Nemo. Marlin is straightforward and maintains a consistent message throughout the film whenever he asks for help to find Nemo. To Marlin, Nemo is the whole world to him and so he will stop at nothing to save his son. Nemo repeatedly tries to get out of the aquarium to reunite with his father. The only world Nemo knows is with his father, and his self-image is one of disappointment. Marlin had repeatedly told Nemo that he cannot swim because of his fin. Nemo desires to break Marlin’s criticisms by putting his life at risk, touching the boat of the dentist, which ultimately leads to Nemo’s capture. Marlin repeats these sentiments to Dory when they are trapped inside the whale. Marlin tells Dory: “you think you can do these things but you just cannot.” Nemo feels that he cannot attain the sacred by conforming to Marlin’s beliefs about what is and isn’t possible. Marlin feels safe by constantly being overprotective of his son.

On the other hand, Dory, because of her short-term memory loss, creatively repeats sayings. For instance, she refers to Nemo as Chico, Fabio, Bingo, Harpo, and Elmo. She creates a world for herself as

37 Ibid., 92
Marlin’s sidekick and helper. Dory’s actions have meaning for her and Marlin, even though she does not remember them (as evident from the variations of Nemo’s name). Dory finds meaning for herself, that she is useful and for Marlin, Dory plays a huge role in finding Nemo. By continually exerting great efforts to remember facts, Dory was able to create a meaningful world for herself. Perhaps one way to attain the sacred is to persist through the same adversity without caving under pressure internally or externally.

Unhealthy repetitive habits create an unstable world that makes it difficult to adapt to new situations. For Marlin, his overprotective behaviour towards Nemo does not allow Nemo to become independent. Marlin has to break his old routine and start a new pattern in order to create a new world, which involves his new relationship with Nemo at the end of the film. For Dory, she is used to other fish not being with her. As a result, she creates that world of loneliness (a world with no friends). However, at the end of the film, she establishes new routines and a new world with Nemo and Marlin.

“With some hesitation I have settled for the present on the dichotomy between a locative vision of the world (which emphasizes place) and a utopian vision of the world (using the term in its strictest sense: the value of being in no place).”

Marlin epitomizes the locative vision of the world from the beginning of the film. Marlin boasts to Coral about how “her man delivered” [meaning Marlin] on finding the right spot for his family. At the end of the film, Marlin and Nemo return to their old home even though they have been thousands of miles away. They hold the actual, physical anemone in high esteem.

Gill’s insistence on being in the ocean also mirrors Marlin’s desperate efforts to get Nemo back to his physical home. For Gill, devising plans to go to the ocean helps him to escape the mental stress that builds up for the fish in the aquarium. For example, Flo says that she has a twin sister, but it is actually her reflection. The yellow fish is obsessed with bubbles and Gurgie is obsessive compulsive when it comes to germs. Gill firmly believes that getting out of that tank is the best thing to do. When asked how many times he has tried to escape, he replies: “I’ve lost count.”

On the other hand, Dory has a utopian vision of the world at first. From the beginning of the film, Dory started off alone in the hustle and bustle with the fish without any apparent aim or purpose to where she was going. Prior to her commitment to go with Marlin all the way to Australia so, Dory did not have a place to go. Dory does not allow any situation to affect the way she expresses bliss. For instance, down in the depths of the darkness where the anglerfish resides, Dory sings cheerfully. In another instance, Dory does not seem to mind getting swallowed by a whale and is obedient when she hears the whale tell her to let go of the tongue. Instead of being fearful for her life, she swims happily. Dory helps Marlin realize the importance of the utopian vision by showing him how to let things go and Marlin helps Dory become more locative at the end of the film. By then she is bound to a specific place and living a more meaningful life. As a result, Marlin and Dory reach a middle ground that includes elements of both locative and utopian ways of seeing things. In addition, Crush’s attitude of not knowing what the future holds makes him not limited to the locative vision of the world. Crush says that once the eggs of his kids

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38 Ibid., 101
hatch, they find their own way back to the ocean (opposite of Marlin’s mindset). When asked when he will know if his kid is ready, Crush replies: “you never really know, but when they know, you’ll know, you know?” As a result, Crush can also be seen as a character that lives in both the locative and utopian modes since he still sees the ocean as an important location.

Having someone focus entirely on the physical location of the world, or entirely focusing on the value of being in no place is deprived of the benefits of striking a balance between these two dimensions. Marlin and Gill along with Dory and Crush (although Crush is more grounded than Dory) represent opposite ends of the spectrum. In a religious sense, striking a balance between understanding the value of a place and the value of no place will provide a more holistic understanding of what life is all about.

Overall, Finding Nemo portrays an underwater exploration that metaphorically achieves the sacred. All of the characters struggle with chaos, creating their own worlds through repetitive actions, and have to deal with the hardships of adapting to different areas that deal with rules disparately. These various facets, point to the necessity of the sacred in one's life. Despite all the challenges that accompany the pursuit of the sacred, it is worthwhile in the end to attain that peace and meaning for one's life.

Toy Story, A Bug’s Life and Finding Nemo when viewed through the theories of Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z. Smith illustrate one key theme: discovering where you belong with the sacred. There are several pieces to this theme and includes the notion of “home,” the importance of relationship building, accepting reality, and growing from the negative turmoil in life. Once you figure out where you belong, you can live an authentic life in which you feel truly secure, as if you are "home." In a way, religion can provide that feeling of security by being a part of a community with shared beliefs. In Toy Story, Andy's toys all come together, A Bug's Life has the ants in Ant Island, and Finding Nemo has Marlin, Nemo within their community. In addition, understanding your sense of belonging will allow you to recognize whether the bonds you make with others are beneficial or toxic. Learning from other people's faiths can strengthen and help shape your understanding of what is meaningful to you. Moreover, the major element to discovering where you belong is to maintain a clear vision of reality, and not allow it to be clouded with delusion. Having blind faith in a particular religion can hurt in the long run, so it is necessary to keep an open mind towards other perspectives. For instance, Buzz Lightyear was internally crushed when he did not listen to Woody about him being a toy, instead of a space ranger. Also, the pain of going through a crisis can force someone to grow and unveil things about themselves that they did not know they have within. This is demonstrated with Woody and Buzz having to work together to return to Andy's house, Flik dealing with the repercussions with his lie to Ant Island, and Marlin losing Nemo in the vast ocean. As a result, religion can assist in contextualizing trials and tribulations in order to overcome them successfully.