



## **Quest Narratives: The Cinematic Experience, Filmic Space, and Transitional Phenomena**

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By taking a close look at two superficially different films, this essay outlines a fresh approach to psychoanalysis and film theory by exploring some ideas and approaches from object-relations psychoanalysis that offer potential for deepening our understanding of the 'subjective-objective' world of cinematic experience. It reframes some key analytical and theoretical issues and challenges for film studies, and hopefully yields new insights into interpreting films and understanding the cinematic experience.

This work had its beginnings many years ago. When starting out as a film studies specialist, I was brought face-to-face with a conundrum that set me on a path that led eventually to a series of inquiries into the relationship between cinematic experience, memory, and transitional phenomena: one day, in the course of preparing a class on British cinema, a recollection of seeing a particular film at the age of about six or seven burst into consciousness. The experience was almost bodily: in that moment I relived the powerful emotional response that the film produced in me when I first saw it. *Mandy*, the story of a deaf-mute little girl's struggle to learn to speak, was made at Ealing Studios in 1952 under the aegis of Alexander Mackendrick, the director also of *The Man in the White Suit* (1951) and *Sammy Going South* (1963).

I was quickly seized by a desire to reconcile this powerful remembered experience with the analytical stance towards films and cinema that I was identifying with and learning to adopt in my scholarly life—and to do it without letting go of the texture and the intensity of the child's response. The two states seemed worlds apart, though; and film studies then had no way of taking on board the child's, the affective, or the otherwise 'untutored', engagement with film in tandem with the detached, intellectual approaches to conceptualising and understanding film spectatorship that were being cultivated within film studies: the principal model for thinking the psychodynamics of film spectatorship at the time was 'apparatus theory' and theories of sexual difference and vision based on Freudian and Lacanian thought (Piotrowska, 2013).

This conundrum was, and in my view remains, a crucial one for film studies. For my part, it has prompted several return visits to the 'found object' (Wright 2009) that *Mandy* is for me—a rich, and seemingly fathomless, resource for thinking about films, cinema, and cinema-going. It has been instrumental, for instance, in pursuing insights into the ways in which films and other visual media can key into personal, collective, and cultural memory as both prompts for recollection and as 'memory texts' (Kuhn 2000; 2002; 2010b; Kuhn and McAllister 2006). This repeated return is itself, of course, both an expression of, and an inquiry into, the kind of intense attachment to particular films that many people espouse; and in that sense the inquiry stands to shed

light on the origins and nature and of that passionate love of films and of cinema in general that we call *cinophilia*.

Is there something special or distinctive about the medium of cinema or the textual organisation of films (of what I have elsewhere called the ‘world in the cinema’) that permits or promotes certain types of engagement (Kuhn 2004)? And if so (and since not everyone is a cinephile) what are the real-world conditions (‘cinema in the world’) of such engagement--bearing in mind that everyone’s choice of a favourite film feels like (but actually is arguably not, or not completely) a very personal matter?

Along with revisiting the writings of André Bazin, that most avidly cinephile of film critics, these questions led ultimately to an engagement with Donald Winnicott’s thoughts on everyday creativity and cultural experience, as well as to the writings of Marion Milner, Christopher Bollas, and Gilbert Rose on the object-relations dynamics of the ‘aesthetic experience’: the crucial thing about all this being the interplay between inner and outer worlds in these relations and attachments (Bazin 1971, Kuhn 2013). If Freudian and Lacanian metapsychologies of cinema were about what Freud (*pace* his analysis of the ‘hysteric’, Dora) called ‘a disturbance in the sphere of sexuality’, then, we might say that a Winnicottian approach would emphasise *attachments in the sphere of culture*.

My interest in the psychodynamics of cinephilia can claim a second, and rather different, point of origin. In the 1990s I began work on a piece of empirical research on cinemagoing in Britain in the 1930s. This enduring project has turned out to be largely about *cinema memory*. For the men and women of the 1930s generation who were interviewed for the project, memories of childhood picturegoing were very much about processes of separating from home and learning to explore and become familiar with the spaces of the neighbourhood. In fact, the *places* people went to in order to see films were nearly always recalled more vividly than the actual films they saw. What is more, the journey—always, in memory, on foot—between home and the neighbourhood picture house was etched so firmly into informants’ minds that many could reel off, like some sort of incantation, the names of the streets they walked along, together with all the familiar landmarks on the way to the picture house. This attention in memory talk to ‘cinema in the world’ tells us something important about what cultural geographers call ‘children’s mobilities’; significantly, it also suggests an inner-world construction of space in relation to *home* that lies very much within the purview of object relations (I am thinking in particular of the work of Michael and Enid Balint and Margaret Mahler (Balint 1959, Mahler 1986)).

You could say that in the first place this was a puzzle about the particular nature of our engagement with films and cinema; and that, in a Winnicottian sort of way, I was discovering, all by myself (as it felt), that his writings were wonderfully illuminating in this regard. But alongside this, some intriguing findings from a piece of empirical research on memories of cinemagoing were, as it turned out, evidently also amenable to exploration, explanation, and understanding through Winnicottian and other object-relations concepts. Exploration began with the essays collected in Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* (Winnicott 1991), especially with what these have to say about playing, transitional phenomena, and cultural experience. In hindsight this

may look like an obvious path to have taken; but the point is that I had been led towards Winnicott and object-relations psychoanalysis in the first instance by issues in my own discipline of film studies that cried out for better explanation or understanding. I had certainly not asked myself how Winnicott's ideas could be 'applied' (how I dislike that idea) to films and cinema. Prompted initially by a film--by a treasured personal memory of a film--alongside a professional aspiration to understand the workings of films and cinema, this was a my quest for knowledge, and when it got underway I had little notion of where it might lead.

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The Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic film theory pioneered in the 1970s grew out of its practitioners' often uneasy fascination with classical Hollywood cinema—the cinephilia that was so wonderful and yet so (as the usage of the time had it) terribly *incorrect* (Kuhn 2019). Decades on, I want to take up some questions, old and new, for psychoanalytic film theory; but now in its object-relations--especially its Winnicottian--aspect, through taking a close look at two on the face of it quite different films: *The Searchers* (John Ford, US, 1956) and *Where is My Friend's House?* (Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 1987). This exercise does not merely permit, it *demand*s, an interrogation of the workings of cinephilia. *The Searchers*, a Hollywood western made at the tail end of the studio era, was directed by John Ford, starred John Wayne, and was set in Ford's beloved Monument Valley in Arizona. What could be more 'classical Hollywood'? Not only does it figure regularly in top ten movies of all time lists, *The Searchers* is also a film that has been among the most repeatedly and thoroughly engaged with by serious film critics and film theorists. There are entire books about it.

           *Where Is My Friend's House?* is somewhat less familiar. It is an early film by the Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami, the first of his Koker trilogy (the others are *And Life Goes On* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), all three set in the Northern Iran village of Koker). There seems to have been relatively little in-depth critical engagement with *Where Is My Friend's House?* which is in any event rarely seen.<sup>1</sup> Where the film has been discussed, emphasis tends to be on its place in Iran's national cinema or on its director--in relation to Kiarostami as *auteur*, his early films, or his photographic work; though exceptionally *Where Is My Friend's House?* is among the films referred to illuminatingly by Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn in an article on New Iranian Cinema (Chaudhuri and Finn 2003). Nonetheless, it is instructive to look at *The Searchers* and *Where Is My Friend's House?* side-by-side, because their plots and settings offer some surprising points of similarity. As with any close reading of a film, it is rewarding to start with plot breakdowns. (Figures 1 and 2)

Both films are quest narratives, both quests have (apparently) clear goals, and both are plotted around a thematic and formal opposition of--and movement between--a home base and the wide open spaces of an outside world. There is a mythic or fairytale quality to both plots, and this lends them to readings in, say, Proppian or Levi-Straussian terms:           not surprisingly, given its central wilderness-versus-civilisation topos, *The Searchers* was the subject of an early structuralist analysis

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<sup>1</sup> *Where Is My Friend's House?* is currently available to stream via the Criterion Channel.

(Lehman 1977).<sup>2</sup> Although there are resolutions of the quest plots of both films, in neither is the apparent quest neatly rounded off. In *The Searchers*, the quest is for a person, Debbie (Natalie Wood), a white settler girl abducted by Comanche Indians in the 19th-century American West—the searchers of the title being her uncle, Ethan Edwards (Wayne) and her adoptive brother, Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter). In the Kiarostami film, as its title suggests, the search is for a *place*, the friend's house: here the searcher/ protagonist is a young boy called Ahmad. The film opens in a school classroom. Ahmad's friend is rebuked by the teacher for being late—he has forgotten his exercise book and has had to go back to his house to fetch it. At home that evening, Ahmad starts doing his homework and realizes that he has taken his friend's exercise book by mistake. The rest of the film traces Ahmad's quest to return the book to his friend, who lives in another village at an unknown address.

In both films the quests are elliptical and, in plot terms, repetitive, even circular; and both are full of retardations and redundancies. Both, too, are structured around forth and back movements between a 'home' base and an outside world; and in both cases the outside world is an expanse that is, or appears to be, a desert. I have written elsewhere about the idea of home versus outside world in relation to films, with the conclusion that film is capable--through its organization of space, liminality and motion--of creating a phenomenology of home versus not-home, internal versus external, and familiar worlds versus unfamiliar worlds (Kuhn 2010a). In fact the plots of both *The Searchers* and *Where Is My Friend's House?* can be usefully summarised in terms of their narrativisation of home and not-home.

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<sup>2</sup> See 'structuralism' in Kuhn and Westwell 2020: 469.

Segment /setting	Sequences	Details
1. Home 1: Ethan's return <i>Edwards homestead</i>	1-4	1868. Aaron and Martha's homestead in the desert; one son and daughters Debbie and Lucy. Ethan (Aaron's brother) arrives in Confederate uniform after years away—Civil War ended 3 years before. Adopted son Martin, part Cherokee. Lucy's suitor Brad Jorgensen.
2. The raid and kidnap <i>Desert, Edwards homestead</i>	5-12	Posse of men (under the Rev), inc Ethan, go off into desert in pursuit of cattle rustlers. Meanwhile a murder raid on homestead by Comanche. Ethan returns to find all dead except Lucy, and Debbie kidnapped. Funeral.
3. Search 1 <i>Desert</i>	13-19	Rev's posse goes out; attack by Indians. Ethan goes on alone with Martin and Brad. Brad thinks he saw Lucy, but Ethan had found her body. Brad rides off and is shot. Ethan and Martin carry on through snow.
4. Home 2 <i>Jorgensens' homestead</i>	20-24	Approx 1 year later. Ethan and Martin arrive at Jorgensens'. Martin and Laurie's courtship. Letter for Ethan with scrap of Debbie's apron. Next day, Ethan and Martin set off again. Futterman's information and death.
5. Search 2/Home 3 <i>Desert, Jorgensens' homestead</i>	25-36	Some time later. Charlie delivers letter to Laurie, with news of the quest. Laurie reads out letter, intercut scenes of events on the search: Ethan and Martin trading, 'Mrs Pawley', buffalo in snow; arrival of cavalry; finding Comanche camp trashed by soldiers; checking out white women whom soldiers have rescued from Comanche. They will set out and won't be back for Christmas.
6. Search 3 <i>Desert</i>	37-40	Mexican man offers to lead them to Scar 'for a price'. Ethan and Scar meet in Scar's tepee; Scar's scalps. Debbie is one of Scar's wives. She runs after them; Ethan threatens to kill her. Indians attack, Ethan wounded. Ethan's bequest to Martin.
7. Home 4 <i>Jorgensens' homestead</i>	41-43	Five years later. Hoedown at Jorgensens' homestead: Laurie and Charlie about to wed. Ethan and Martin arrive. Martin and Charlie fight over Laurie and there is no wedding. Yankee soldier arrives wanting posse to hunt down Scar. Ethan and Martin will go.
8. Search 4 <i>Desert</i>	44-47	Martin goes into Comanche camp to rescue Debbie. Rest of posse attacks; Ethan scalps Scar (offscreen) in tepee. Debbie runs off, pursued by Ethan, to mouth of cave. Lifts her up: 'let's go home, Debbie'.
9. Home 5 <i>Jorgensens' homestead</i>	48	Ethan and Martin return to Jorgensens, with Debbie. All go into house except Ethan, who turns away and walks off into the desert.

Figure 1: *The Searchers* (1956): a plot breakdown

Segment	Sequence(s)	Details
1	1-3	Day 1. Initial situation. Classroom.
2	4	After school. Ahmad at home.
3	5-6	Later <i>that</i> afternoon. Ahmad's quest, stage 1--Koker to Poshteh.
4	7	Ahmad's quest stage 2--Poshteh back to Koker.
5	8-10	Evening/night. Ahmad's quest stage 3--to Poshteh.
6	11	That night. Ahmad back home.
7	12	Day 2. Denouement. Classroom.

Figure 2: *Where Is My Friend's House?* (1987): a plot breakdown

On the question of what an object-relations approach might bring to psychoanalytic film theory, a closer look at these two films can help reframe some key analytical and theoretical issues and challenges. Looked at afresh, these questions yield new insights into interpreting films and understanding the cinematic experience. There are, of course, key distinctive aspects both to the film medium's formal attributes and also to the cinematic experience, and I want to suggest that we can productively entertain anew the notion of cinematic specificity.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the most significant feature of cinema's distinctiveness as a medium has to be *filmic space*—how the virtual space of 'the world in the cinema' is constructed within, and bounded by, the film frame, both within and across shots. To quote from Ira Konigsberg on transitional phenomena and film spectatorship, '...by focusing on the quality of the images and sound we are able to understand the basic power of film and our fascination with all of cinema' (Konigsberg 1996: 883).

It is also worth restating that a distinctive and defining feature of the cinematic experience is the viewer's *engagement with filmic space*. There is a great deal more still to be understood about the metapsychology of cinema, about the interaction—at the level of the psyche—between viewer and film, about the psychodynamics of the film-viewer encounter. We might usefully, for instance, revisit the metapsychological project of the phenomenological-psychoanalytic film theorist Christian Metz and see what, if anything, new might emerge in his writings from an attention to the spatial aspects of spectatorial engagement (Metz 1982). Relevant here, however, is another point advanced by Konigsberg: the attention he draws to Winnicott's 'spatial configurations' and the suggestion that 'the images on the screen and the emanating sounds put us into a state that makes us feel as if we were responding to transitional phenomena, a subjective--objective world, half real and half dream, half apart from us and half containing us'. This world, Konigsberg adds, 'exists out there but...is invested with a subjective overlay--one that we seem to project outside of ourselves but at the same time seems to exist apart from us...' (Konigsberg 1996: 874).

An object-relations approach clearly has something to offer in understanding this 'subjective-objective world', and for me the key concepts have to be Winnicott's

<sup>3</sup> See 'medium specificity' in Kuhn and Westwell 2020: 306.

transitional phenomena and potential space. Here we might also bear in mind Michael Balint's concepts of philobatism and ocnophilia as contrasting modes of engagement with psychical and physical space. To quote Balint, 'Whereas the ocnophilic world is structured by physical proximity and touch, the philobatic world is structured by safe distance and sight' (Balint 1959: 34). This applies to both internal and external worlds, and also (adopting Balint's coinage) to the 'mixup' of the two. The issue I want to draw attention to, then, is the *geographies* of the virtual spaces and environments set up in films, and viewers' mental and bodily engagements with them.

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Elsewhere I have looked at the way spatial—and relatedly kinetic and liminal—metaphors abound in Winnicott's dynamic model of the psyche, with transitional phenomena characterised by back and forth movements across the intermediate space between our inner and our outer worlds (Kuhn 2013). This psychical movement back and forth across boundaries or frontiers, entering and leaving different spaces, has an embodied quality to it. This embodiment can be literal-physical as well as metaphorical-psychical; and this is especially apparent in processes of separation-individuation. The child's psychical emergence from a state of fusion with the mother, according to Winnicott, is facilitated by the transitional phenomena of the third, intermediate, or potential, space. It is extended in the process of physical separation as the toddler experiments with moving out of the mother's sight, and is continued as the older child ventures forth outside the home to explore new places, perhaps indulging in some risk-taking.

From a phenomenological standpoint, this emergence also describes a bodily, virtual-bodily, and mental-psychical relationship with 'home'—home as both a real place and a symbol of security. In the philosopher Gaston Bachelard's words, home is 'the site of the to-ing and fro-ing of inside and outside' (Bachelard 1971, quoted in Silverstone 1999:89). The emphasis on psychical-physical movement serves as a reminder of the real or imagined activity of the *body* in these processes. The earliest experienced boundary, for Winnicott, is that between 'me' and 'not-me'—and this of course is a bodily experience, with the infant's skin serving as the first boundary between inside/'me' and outside/'not-me' (Bick 1968). Other negotiations of inner and outer worlds—playing, perhaps, above all—may involve the body in different, but likewise physical-psychical, ways. The body gives us a sensorium: we engage with the external world through sight, sound, smell, taste, touch; and such sensing may also be perceived as something *inner*.

The inner-outer quality of sensing has a particular meaning in relation to the sense-experience of bodily movement—what is called, in the psychology of perception, *proprioception*. The psychical movement back-and-forth that marks potential-space activity is proprioceptive. A person can sense, invoke, and recall bodily movement even when not actually moving her body: this type of proprioception is called 'ecological perception'. Ecological perception is an embodied kind of perception that is formed in relation to the environment: there is a 'porousness between one's self, one's body, and the objects *or images* of the world' (Rutherford 2003:10, emphasis added; see also Sobchack 2004). Ecological perception can be experienced across a range of activities—including watching films. There is a

proprioceptively embodied virtual movement across and into the virtual spaces laid out on the cinema screen, within the film frame, an illusory space of apparently three dimensions into which one may imaginatively enter—or which invites you in. This is a distinctively object-relations take on the metapsychology of cinema.

The attractiveness of the invitation is governed by the specifics of the 'world in the cinema' and its filmic construction and organisation. For example, a zoom or a track in from a wide establishing shot to an initially remote or even invisible detail—the opening shot of *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) comes to mind—is a classical, and highly persuasive, invitation into the world of the film. It is achieved very concretely through a certain kind of image composition and framing in combination with a particular variant of mobile framing. André Bazin's preference for long takes and deep focus cinematography underpins and concretises his phenomenological take on the world that these lay out on the cinema screen, and also on their invitation to us to contemplate it, enter it, be part of it (Bazin 1971: 35-6). Bazin's favoured film aesthetic is summed up in what has been called the *open image*; and in their article on New Iranian Cinema, Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn adopt a somewhat Bazinian turn of phrase in noting that the open image offers the spectator a space for 'creative interpretation and critical reflection' (Chaudhuri and Finn 2003: 57). In general, Chaudhuri and Finn note, the open image implies an absence of closure and lack of fixed meanings, and thus embodies a kind of opening up or opening out.

Among the defining formal features of the open image are *obsessive framing* (for example, a long-held 'still' shot of an object); *autonomy of image*--'pure optics and sound'; *stasis*--arrested images, fixed long shot, long take, empty spaces; *dedramatisation*--muted performances from actors, absence of identification with characters, facilitating attention to other aspects of the onscreen world; and *disconnected spaces*--spatial indeterminacy, labyrinthine pathways, liminal spaces (such as wastelands), circuitous quests, and meandering journeys. As an 'exemplary open image' Chaudhuri and Finn cite the zigzag path between Poshteh and Koker that is seen several times in *Where Is My Friend's House?* (Figure 3)



Figure 3: *Where Is My Friend's House?*: the zigzag path

There is a passage in *Where Is My Friend's House?* that shows the first of the three occasions during the same evening that Ahmad goes on foot to Poshteh from his



home village of Koker in search of his friend's house (segment 3 in the plot breakdown). It feels as if a considerable amount of screen time is devoted to the journey, in which the topographical relation of the two villages and of the (emphasised) space between them is 'explained': the diegetic space and time of the journey feel extended. This 'expanse' of time and space is set out in the image in a particular way through composition, mobile framing, and editing. It is done slightly differently each time Ahmad makes the trip—but not all that differently. The only ellipsis in terms of these quests comes after Ahmad's third visit to Poshteh, when we are not shown his journey home. The endpoint of his outward journey is always clear, and always the same—Poshteh; as is that of his return—home. The geography of these places is made abundantly clear through the film's organisation of its spaces: the long takes and mobile framing in the repeated shots of Ahmad running to Poshteh and back; the editing joining together the diegetic spaces and making clear their relationship; the camera's exploration of village alleyways; and so on.

In *The Searchers*, on the other hand, the film's spaces are less clearly sutured, and we are led on a circuitous, elliptical and meandering journey. Edward Buscombe notes that the geography of the desert, as it comes across in the film, is vague: 'diegetic space is much vaster than the actual space of the location(s)' (Buscombe 2000: 31). In a passage towards the end of the first phase of the search (segment 3 of the plot breakdown), Brad, who was initially one of the search party, has been shot, leaving just Ethan and Martin to carry on the search. The passage concludes with one of the film's five or six 'returns' home (segment 4). In less than two minutes of screen time we see four separate 'expanses' or 'desert' locations, and they seem spatially unconnected with each other: perhaps a year has passed. Notwithstanding the somewhat anomalous snow scene--suggesting the passage of seasons ('sure as the earth turns' as Ethan says)--this spatial disconnect combines with the film's vagueness as to time, producing a kind of unanchored ellipsis.

If plot breakdowns of the two films bring out their structural similarities as quest narratives, attention to their respective filmic spaces complicates the matter considerably. This raises questions about viewer engagement and filmic space that must nuance, challenge, or even trump, issues of plot, theme, and content. This needs pursuing further in terms of cinematic experience, and perhaps we might venture that *The Searchers* (with its disconnects of space and time) offers a philobatic kind of engagement whereas *Where Is My Friend's House?* (with its anchored repetitions of space and time) offers an ocnophilic one.

In his structuralist analysis of *The Searchers*, Peter Lehman argues that thematic matters in the film are best understood through attention to the film image, its formal attributes, and its repeated visual motifs. He identifies three key motifs in *The Searchers*: doorways, dissolves, and interior/exterior mises-en-scene.

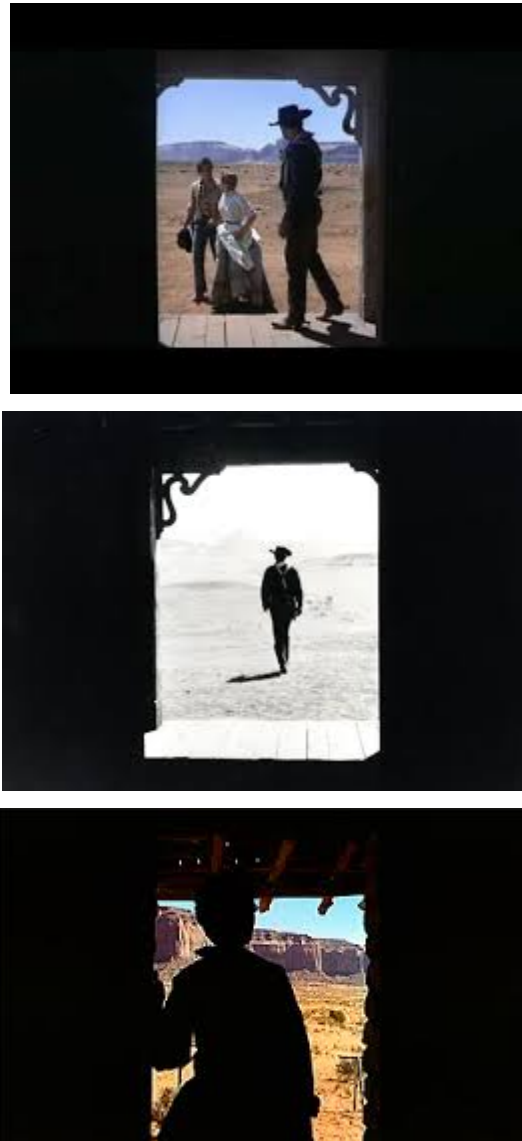


Figure 4: The doorway/threshold motif in *The Searchers*

**Doorways** (Figure 4) constitute the most prominent motif: 'Nine central shots...establish this pattern', Lehman notes, pointing to the predominance of 'visible sides of portals' shot from indoors (Lehman 1977: 100, 101). There is an example of this at the conclusion of the passage discussed above. Lehman's attention to the contrast between the *mises en scene* of interior and exterior scenes adds weight to his observation about the predominance of the doorway motif, suggesting that, spatially speaking, the film sets up a particular investment in the 'skin' that divides inside from outside, the enclosed spaces of home from the exposed spaces of the desert, in the relationship—the *threshold*, that is--between inside and outside. Not unrelated to this in terms of the juxtaposition of spaces is Lehman's further observation that in *The Searchers*, unusually, **dissolves** between and within scenes predominate over cuts and fades. Lehman also notes that nearly all of these dissolves 'include *motion* both in the

frame of the previous scene and in the frame of the scene beginning', adding that this particular dissociative pattern of dissolves 'counterpoints the very strong sense of purposeful motion in the individual scenes', an observation that would support Buscombe's point about the film's 'vague' geography (Lehman 1977: 110, 111). Thus all three motifs, significantly, are in one way or another about *liminality*.

Significantly, there is a doorways/thresholds issue in *Where Is My Friend's House?* as well. In the course of his quest, Ahmad has three encounters with old men: in Proppian terms, these figures might be seen as functioning narratively as 'donors' or 'helpers'--and perhaps as retardation devices, too.<sup>4</sup> In the first two encounters the boy is chided and patronised. The third encounter takes place during Ahmad's third visit to Poshteh, as darkness is falling, when he asks another old man the way to his friend's house (segment 5 of the plot breakdown). A lengthy sequence follows in which Ahmad is led through the labyrinthine alleyways of Poshteh as the old man talks to him about the beautiful wooden windows and doors he has made for houses in the village, and how people are getting rid of them and replacing them with metal ones. Prominently visible throughout this 'meandering journey' are the closed doors of the houses and the light shining through the latticework in doors and windows. At the end of the sequence, a cut conveys Ahmad back to his house in Koker: he still has his friend's exercise book, but he has received a gift from the old man that he will pass on in the morning.

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A close look at two films with plots that revolve around quests of outwardly different kinds itself enacts a quest for knowledge, producing a quest narrative of another sort. A treasured memory of, and an enduring personal attachment to, a particular film sparks a lasting obsession: an aspiration and a desire to understand from the inside--and, crucially, also to express in words--the peculiarities of the cinematic experience. Launching the quest with a loved film affords a slight, but perhaps momentous, shift in angle of view on the question of how films engage viewers' attention and involvement; how, in an encounter that partakes of the qualities of transitional phenomena, film engages the inner world and the inner world engages film. An object-relations approach, I would contend, has much to offer in understanding this subjective-objective encounter.

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<sup>4</sup> For a note on Vladimir Propp and film studies, see 'Russian Formalism' in Kuhn and Westwell 2020: 413.

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