

PREFACE

The story of this book somehow begins more than 15 years ago when I first entered the Film and Art Department at the University of Turin. Coming from my studies in philosophy, cinema seemed to me to be an immense and fascinating territory in which philosophy could freely exercise all its power. With the presumption of those who erroneously believe themselves to be on the right side, those characters and stories on the screen represented for me the raw materials to be subjected to the illuminated and critical scrutiny of philosophical thought. Considered as the fertile ground on which to exercise such an alleged supremacy, film satisfied two basic needs of philosophy. On the one hand, it was easily the subject of cuts and selections in order to illustrate some philosophical concepts elaborated elsewhere and outside the film. At the same time, it also rejuvenated the archaic and dusty severity of philosophical language with the seductive charm of moving images. There seemed to be a happy synthesis between aesthetic pleasure and analytic virtue. Consequently, film interpretation concentrated on finding the most effective and intriguing images to express external ideas and concepts. Founded as it was on the subjugation of film as a simple object of philosophy, it was a naïve and methodologically weak approach, but it was not entirely vain. Even from that limited perspective, in fact, the philosophical nature of film found its expression, though it was forced into the rigid limits of a predefined and external conceptual system.

While it is true that the passage of time somehow softens difficulties and failures, and leaves that only the positive aspects of the past emerge, that way of philosophically using the film has to be recalled now, not to offer nostalgic praise of the good old days, but rather to try to keep alive alternative paths that are intentionally left out here. On the other hand, if film philosophy has changed very much in recent years and the traditional question on which film's scholars have repeatedly wondered in the past, 'What is film?', is out of date is because another question now appears to be most urgent and challenging: 'What does film do?' This question does not concern, or at least does not primarily concern, the technical and artistic making of the film, but rather it refers to the more crucial relationship between film and filmgoer. It is in this relationship and through a dynamic construction of meaning based on an ambivalent dialectics of expression and perception that film is made and gives expression to its philosophy. Thus, the film *does* philosophy, and this book will deal with *film as philosophy*. I wish to point out that with the term 'doing philosophy', I do not just contend that film is able to trigger, albeit in a vague and ambiguous way, some form of philosophical reflection. Instead, I argue that any film (whether it is an author's film or a b-movie) brings in itself the expression of a philosophical thought to be embraced. If it is in this acceptance that the film comes to being, it is because any image begins to exist only when someone looks at it and interprets it. No philosophy *of* cinema is here in question. Rather, this book is an encounter with film and its becoming thought.

The thought is an immediate relationship with the world. Each movie is a world, and a film world is the expression of its own philosophy of being. I want to emphasize here that the film world, to which this book is dedicated, is not, or at least not just, the world represented and narrated on the screen. Rather, in a broader and deeper sense, the film world identifies the hermeneutic horizon within which the filmgoer meets and rediscovers her/himself. Thus, the film world is not only perceived and interpreted but also participated by the filmgoer, since it offers the filmgoer, in a Ricoeurian way, his/her own possibilities of being. Consequently, the film world is not a purely theoretical notion, but rather a practical concept that identifies the unique nature of film experience, offering us a concrete, real ground in which this hermeneutics of film interpretation can take place. For this reason, it will not be very important in the pages that follow for me to argue for or against a realistic perspective on the film, but rather to recognize the nature

of film experience with the actuality of its perceptions and interpretations. What is real about the film world is that it offers itself through film experience which is, from the very beginning, an existential hermeneutics of perceiving and interpreting. Through this hermeneutics of film interpretation, the film world will emerge with its history and within its inherent temporality that, from the present of film experience and being-interpreted, presupposes the past of being-originated and being-already-interpreted, and implies the future of new and always possible being-reinterpreted.

After losing the metaphysical certainty of the universal philosophy of being, the answer from the film philosophy can only be a constant and radical search which, following the long Ricœurian path and through the inexhaustible dialectics of understanding and explanation, strives to construct possible meanings, a search for meaning that is constantly open as an ever-renewed and never-ending project.

Torino, Italy

Alberto Baracco

Hermeneutics of the Film World
A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation
Baracco, A.
2017, XXVII, 321 p. 57 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-65399-0