A PHILOSOPHY OF CINEMATIC ART

A Philosophy of Cinematic Art is a systematic study of cinema as an art form, showing how the medium conditions fundamental features of cinematic artworks. It discusses the status of cinema as an art form, whether there is a language of film, realism in cinema, cinematic authorship, intentionalist and constructivist theories of interpretation, cinematic narration, the role of emotions in responses to films, the possibility of identification with characters, and the nature of the cinematic medium. Groundbreaking in its coverage of a wide range of contemporary cinematic media, it analyses not only traditional photographic films, but also digital cinema, and a variety of interactive cinematic works, including videogames. Written in a clear and accessible style, the book examines the work of leading film theorists and philosophers of film, and develops a powerful framework with which to think about cinema as an art.

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For Morag

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Preface

In 1987 I was working towards my PhD at Princeton and was surprised to discover that the Department of Philosophy was offering a course on the philosophy of film. I had no idea that such a subject existed. I was interested in the philosophy of art and had a passing interest in film, so I decided to sit in on the lectures. The course was a revelation: one could actually do philosophy about film and moreover do it in a way that was both intellectually rigorous and also acutely sensitive to the aesthetic qualities of individual films. The visiting professor who taught that course was George Wilson, who has been a friend and something of a mentor ever since. My greatest intellectual debts in the philosophy of film are to him. Had he not taught that course, this book would probably never have been written.

Having been inspired by George's course, I attended several film courses run by P. Adams Sitney and Tony Pipolo at Princeton. I sat well back in a large lecture theatre, and I suspect that they never knew I was there. But their lectures showed me, along with George's wonderful interpretations of films, how powerful and interesting films could be and that films were capable of far greater depth than I had previously imagined. My debts to these two scholars are considerable.

On moving to St Andrews in 1990, I was delighted to discover that my new colleagues encouraged me to start a philosophy of film course, and they have been unfailingly supportive of my endeavours since then. I also owe a great deal to several generations of St Andrews undergraduates and postgraduates, who have attended the various philosophy of film courses I have taught. Most of the material in this book has been, in various versions, road tested on them. They no doubt suffered through early drafts of this material, but several of them, as well as some of my erstwhile colleagues who taught the course when I was on leave, have gone on to teach philosophy of film courses since then, so I suppose that I must have been doing something right. Roy Cook, Brandon Cooke, Matthew Kieran, Kathleen Stock, Hamish Thompson and Kate Thomson-Jones were among my victims.

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I would also like to thank the many philosophers and film theorists who have over the years given me comments on papers or talks, material from which has been incorporated into this book. These include Noël Carroll, Diarmuid Costello, Greg Currie, Julian Dodd, Jonathan Friday, Peter Goldie, John Hyman, Andrew Kania, Jerry Levinson, Paisley Livingston, Dom Lopes, Patrick Maynard, Bence Nanay, Alex Neill, Michael Newall, Carl Plantinga, Greg Smith, Murray Smith and Kendall Walton. I am particularly grateful to Richard Allen and David Davies, who read a draft of the entire manuscript and provided many helpful comments on it. I am also grateful for the comments on the book by members of my M.Litt. seminar on the philosophy of film in 2008. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to Noël Carroll, whose work on the philosophy of film played a critical role in convincing me early on that the subject is one that can support serious philosophical endeavours, and whose writings and friendship have been of great importance to me in helping me to develop my own philosophy of cinema.

Finally, as always, my thanks go to my parents, and to Morag, Suzanne and Robert. The dedication of the book speaks for itself.