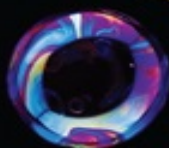
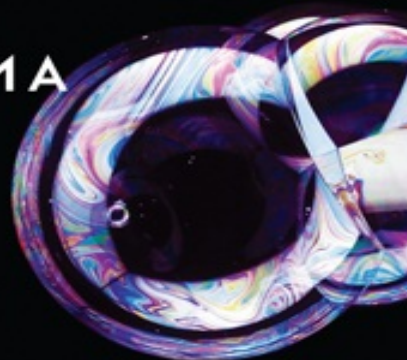


FILM WORLDS

A PHILOSOPHICAL
AESTHETICS OF CINEMA



DANIEL YACAVONE

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Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, worlds more different one from the other than those which revolve in infinite space.

—Marcel Proust

You see, once you start down a road to make a film you enter a certain world. And certain things can happen in that world, and certain things can't. . . . So you begin to know these rules for your world and you've got to be true to those rules.

—David Lynch

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INTRODUCTION

TO MAKE A FILM IS ALSO TO CONSTRUCT A WORLD. AS VIEWERS, WE are invited to enter into this world, to share it with its maker(s) and with other viewers. When made, experienced, and understood as art, the virtual worlds of films, including all narrative ones, not only provide a form of experience that approaches in many ways our actual, embodied life experience but also mediates it in aesthetic ways, sometimes to powerful cognitive and affective ends.

Taking the multifaceted concept of the *world* of an artwork as its starting point and principal focus throughout, this book explores the nature of cinematic art from both filmmaking and film-viewing perspectives. To the degree possible, given the complex and historically variable character of the cinema throughout its history, it attempts to provide an overarching theoretical framework that captures and expands on the insights of a number of notable film theorists, critics, and filmmakers regarding the world-like structures and experiences of narrative films, including Gilles Deleuze's contention that cinema "does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world."¹ Yet it will also consider the relevance to cinema of long-established views concerning the created worlds of art and literary works, such as, for instance, that espoused by the Shakespearean scholar A. C. Bradley, who in an oft-cited 1901 lecture proposed that "[an artwork's] nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world (as we commonly understand that phrase) but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must enter that world, conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims, and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality."²

I approach the subject of cinematic art by way of philosophical theories of the symbolic, phenomenological, and hermeneutic aspects of art in general, which all converge on important topics in classical and contemporary film theory. With reference to its goal to provide an alternative, general framework for reflecting on the artistic dimensions, and to some degree accomplishments, of film, much of this study may be described aptly as "metatheoretical." It is as much if not more concerned with analyzing and evaluating relevant theories of cinema, or certain of their major aspects (and philosophical approaches to art as related to these), than with analyzing and understanding specific works or the aims and achievements of particular filmmakers. I do hope, however, that some of the ideas, concepts, and terms introduced (or reintroduced, as the case may be) will be seen as worth taking up and applying in more detailed analyses of individual films, styles, and genres.

By way of introduction to the leading term and concept of this study, what I conceive of as a "film world," in the artistic and aesthetic senses to be explained and discussed, is a singular, holistic, relational, and fundamentally referential reality. Not strictly identical with the film *work* that on occasions and presents it, a film world possesses pronounced sensory, symbolic, and affective dimensions. It provides "virtual" and actual experiences that are at once cognitive *and* immersive *and* "sensuous." Both the creation and experiencing of film worlds are marked by complex and world-constitutive dynamics of transformation and immersion; these processes are not only relational and codependent but, via the anticipations of filmmakers and tacit understandings and expectations of audience members, mutually reinforcing. The transformation in question relies heavily on the given properties of the preexisting realities out of which a film is more or less creatively and skillfully made, while the viewer's immersion includes *but is not confined to* engaging with fictional characters and situations in a partly literally depicted, but still largely imagination-constructed, story-world. Taken to mean the full being or presence of a cinematic work of art as it is intentionally constructed, experienced, and interpreted, a film world also constitutes a historical, transsubjective event of artistic

and cinematic truth, as it concerns both cinematic and noncinematic life experience.

Apart from this specific film-as-world model, some readers may consider that a general inquiry into the aesthetic character of cinema exclusively is outmoded, for any variety of reasons. To speak of a given film as *art*, however, is not to deny its status as a historical document, a more or less accurate mirror or apt commentary on the society and culture in which it is made and seen, and as an intended or unintended vehicle for the communication of all manner of normative and ideological messages. Addressing the matter with pithy eloquence and a dose of irony, noted critic Andrew Sarris has written that the “nature of the film medium” means “you always get more for your money than mere art. Although other uses, forms, and values of cinema converge with specifically artistic or aesthetic ones, to understand the complex interactions among them as realized in any given work requires some understanding of any film’s most typical artistic features and functions.

In the venerable tradition of aesthetic inquiry, coupled, however, with due regard for contemporary skeptical arguments concerning the supposed autonomy of aesthetics (on “ontological” or similar grounds),⁵ I assume that cinematic art may be theoretically and philosophically explored not in total isolation from surrounding historical, institutional, psychological, ethical, and other, nonartistic realities but instead by achieving a certain separation and distance from any or all of these, which, borrow from the language of phenomenology, amounts to the attempt to “bracket them off,” even only temporarily or provisionally. Indeed, if we can no longer accept that studies pertaining to the nature and value of art stand in splendid isolation from all other departments of knowledge, possessors of their own metaphysical charter, so to speak, there is perhaps an equal and more immediate intellectual danger in various, current forms of reductionism across the humanities. I refer here to the failure to cede to artistic creation and aesthetic experience both independent cognitive status and value, and a fully unencumbered “cultural space,” in the fundamental sense that Joseph Margolis, for instance, has recently attempted to give to this phrase.⁶

Of course, there is always in practice some overlap between what Richard Dyer terms a “formalist aesthetic” approach to cinema, focused on the question of a film’s “intrinsic worth” as art, and a “socio-ideological” one, centered on any “film’s position as symptom or influence in social processes.”⁷ Since at least the early 1970s, however, and as tied to complex cultural, historical, and disciplinary developments (too many to be rehearsed here), the latter approach has predominated in film studies, not least (but also not only) as a result of its substantial convergence with cultural studies as an emerging academic discipline and many of its typical concerns.⁸

Concerning a notable deemphasis of the cinematic work qua artwork David Bordwell has suggested that as a result of the widespread academic focus on film as a means of conveying sociopolitical and cultural messages and values, the “artistic aspects of cinema” have “often been ignored” (together with the “particularity of how cinema works as a unique art”).⁹ While this is certainly true, the *film*’s artistic dimension of films (including what may be specific to cinema), as distinct, for instance, from the narrative, emotional, technical, or even specifically perceptual dimension, is likewise often neglected in other, differently oriented approaches to theorizing film. These include the more empirical, conceptual, and problem-solving (as well as so-called piecemeal) approaches of several prominent authors (sometimes including Bordwell),¹⁰ whose writings, I hasten to add, the present study draws on where relevant.

For instance, postclassical accounts of film narrative in its cognitive aspects have substantially enriched our understanding of how film stories are put together and understood in a dynamic audiovisual medium.¹¹ They have opened up whole new avenues for film scholarship and brought a welcome level of conceptual and methodological rigor to thinking about stories told in cinematic form. In the process, however, and as a number of recent commentators have suggested, many such

narratological accounts of cinema, as rooted in concepts and methodologies originating in the study of literary forms, and adapted to the moving image (with varying degrees of plausibility), have risked losing sight of aspects of the concrete perceptual, affective, and experiential (or “phenomenological”) character of the film-viewing experience. But also and equally, it must be added, they have sometimes failed to acknowledge large domains of artistically relevant cognitive, symbolic, and inescapably “cultural” meaning, as I hope to make clear. While certainly not *denied* in the writings of theorists within this tradition, these areas of film art and experience, on which I will concentrate, are frequently sidelined, seemingly taken for granted, or assumed to fall within the provenance of film criticism exclusively.

Kristin Thompson’s and Bordwell’s shared conception of cinematic “excess,” for example, valuably identifies a class of nonnarrative, artistic features of films and perspicaciously describes important aspects of their apprehension alongside, and in attentional oscillation with, narrative ones. The conception of excess, however, appears to suggest that all that constitutes “meaning” in film is strictly confined to either items of narrative import or to items of an autonomous and self-referential “artistic” (here meaning formal) significance, existing “for their own sake,” as it were.¹² Such a theoretical premise risks neglecting what falls between (and outside of) these poles of creation and attention and that at the same time binds them together, and endows both story and cinematic form and technique with a work-defining, artistic meaning and value otherwise absent from each. I mean to refer here to what may be conceived as the expansive realm of “symbolic” import in cinematic art, its cognitive and expressive registers alike, and as cutting across any form-and-content dichotomy that may be usefully applied to cinema. On a related note, what Mark J. P. Wolf observes with reference to the imaginary worlds of narrative works of all kinds—that “what might appear to be ‘excess’ from a narrative-oriented point of view, may prove to be necessary from a world-oriented point of view”¹³—is equally, if not more true, of the artistic worlds of films as here conceived.

Bordwell has proposed four other sorts of art that, in addition to “narrative art,” the cinema may be seen to encompass: photographic, performing, pictorial, and audiovisual. In his view theoretical approaches may focus attention on one or more of these “conceptions of film art.” (Moreover, since cinema is also an “emotional art,” he also suggests that “it would be worthwhile to tease out the different sorts of emotion that each perspective tends to emphasize.”)¹⁴ While this all seems perfectly right, I believe emphasis should more squarely fall on the fact that every live-action narrative film, for instance, has all of these dimensions and interests simultaneously, even if some films may choose to foreground stylistic features relevant to one or more of these aspects, to the relative exclusion of others (as Bordwell also aptly notes). More generally, however, and as transcending these large *formal* or *medial* categories, in speaking throughout this book of cinematic art, I do not, as will become clear, mean to refer to only medial, formal, perceptual or technical aspects of films nor to film style as more narrowly conceived. The artistic dimension of cinema, as here explored, encompasses the whole domain of the types of meaning and expression (i.e., feeling and emotive contents), as well as created forms and structures, which are traditionally and still frequently associated with artworks of every form, type, and period, and their experience. In other words, my intended reference is to the whole of what is or can make cinematic works not only nominal but genuine instances of art, in certain accepted, relatively unproblematic, and descriptive senses of the term—as distinct, that is, from their natures as sensory spectacles, pure entertainments, and visually rendered narrative fictions (alone).

More specifically, the concept of cinematic art pursued in this book, and following the views of the principal thinkers cited and discussed, regards narrative films as both representational—in the most general sense of affording us with symbolically constructed models of experience and “ways

knowing”—and presentational, as inseparably connected to aesthetic perception and appreciation (for all that this latter notion entails). Correspondingly, whereas in much contemporary (analytical) philosophy of art, the “aesthetic” as a category is often taken to refer to the formal and sensorial properties of works as conceived and experienced apart from their represented and interpreted (and interpretable) “content,” here it will be understood more broadly as applying to potentially all of a film work’s distinctly artistic forms, meanings, experiences, and values, in contrast with its first-order nonartistic ones.¹⁵

In presenting the following account of the worlds of films as artworks, no attempt will be made to elucidate a theory of the aesthetic as such or on a priori grounds. I will assume, however, the general continuing viability of such concepts as “aesthetic experience,” the “aesthetic attitude,” “aesthetic judgment,” “aesthetic appreciation,” and so on, as these may continue to be subject to critical examination and revision.¹⁶ A somewhat more specific (although by no means exhaustive) notion of the aesthetic as a fundamental mode of human cultural experience and, to varying degrees, individual expression, with respect to cinema, will be developed and will emerge bit by bit, as it were, as we proceed. For the moment it is necessary to remind ourselves that the so-called aesthetic attitude is, properly speaking, a heterodox and complex affair in which a great deal of “cognitive” and “cultural” integration takes place and in which perception, intuition, imagination, reflection, and interpretation all play a part. As philosopher Alan Goldman has suggested, to be fully engaged with any artwork, including a film, is “not simply to pay close perceptual attention to formal detail and complex internal relations in the object’s structure, but also to bring to bear one’s cognitive grasp of those external and historical relations that inform one’s aesthetic experience, and to be receptive to the expressive qualities that emerge through this interaction. Knowledge that *can* inform one’s experience of a work includes that of the artist’s intentions, techniques, attitudes, problems overcome, and so on.”¹⁷

In this context it must be remembered that just as not all art is narrative, not all narratives are artistic in either intent or experience. Moreover, it is possible, and not uncommon, to engage with artworks that tell stories, including films, on a predominantly narrative level alone, which (whatever else) is clearly not to experience and appreciate their full meaning and values as artworks. From the descriptive, as distinct from evaluative or critical, standpoint that we will for the most part adopt, a fictional narrative film may be seen to have some artistic aspects, as cinema’s frequent designation as “popular *art*” or “mass *art*” implicitly assumes. Despite the suggestion of some past and present film theorists and philosophers of film, however, the easy or “natural” accessibility of the majority of films made today, or at any point in the past, to very large audiences, and their popular appeal, do not necessarily reflect some deep, fundamental truth about *all* cinematic art and the range of forms (relatively more or less demanding) it may take or allow for. Rather, as Noël Carroll has rightly stressed, it reflects on particular, relatively more accessible, *uses* of the medium and its now firmly established institutions.

Focused on films as artistically made and experienced “worlds,” many of the arguments I propose in this study may be taken to apply not only to both celluloid and digital productions but to potential all types of narrative films of all periods—from classical Hollywood westerns and musicals, European and Asian “art films,” from large-budget studio-backed films to small, independent productions. All may create and present worlds in the senses noted above insofar as they are aesthetically realized totalities possessed of sensory, expressive, thematic, and narrative dimensions (albeit, of course, with widely varying and unequal degrees of artistic ambition and success). Moreover, at least some of what is here maintained concerning cinematic world-making and experience is also applicable to nonnarrative and nonrepresentational films and cinevideo works as diverse as Norman McLaren’s *Dots*, Andy Warhol’s *Empire*, Stan Brakhage’s *Dog Star Man*, and

Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*. Documentary films, as well, can be readily seen to create worlds in our present sense (the fact that they attempt to show us aspects of the "real world notwithstanding). With respect to so many of the techniques, materials, constraints, and artistic potentials of filmmaking, the worlds of films of these disparate kinds are all part of the same extended family, sharing more than just a common medium or media. Moreover, the proposed model underscores the necessity of conceiving cinematic art in a way that is not exclusively tied to the distinct features of celluloid (or "analog") filmmaking—since, as will be shown, a cinematic work and its constructed world cannot be wholly assimilated to the pregiven properties of any specific moving image medium or format and its technological basis.

As the above comments and initial definitions suggest, the concept of a "film world" represents an attempt to bring together and to unify the full *cognitive-symbolic*, *affective*, and *hermeneutic* dimensions of a narrative cinematic work of art, as these work in, through, and beyond *perceptual* (audiovisual) and *fictional-narrative* features and structures. Correspondingly, my tripartite account of a film work and world proceeds through (1) various related theories of symbolization, particularly that developed by Nelson Goodman in his analytical conception of artistic "world making" and the full referential nature of artworks; (2) phenomenological aesthetics, in the form of Mikel Dufrenoy's to some extent Kantian account of artistic feeling and expression; and (3) the hermeneutical approach to art of Hans-Georg Gadamer, as rooted in Heidegger's critique of continental, post-Kantian sensationalism and formalism in aesthetics, and of a conception of art as an "event" of revealed truth.

Largely underrepresented in current film theory and the philosophy of film, these general approaches are by no means incompatible, as some readers familiar with one or more of them may assume. When taken together and to a degree synthesized with one another and related film theory and criticism, they aptly reflect film art's simultaneous appeal to our senses, emotions, and intellects. Thus said, this book does not undertake the task of *defending* the several, so-called analytic and continental aesthetic theories and philosophies of art discussed but, rather, seeks to *apply* relevant parts of them to cinema. And it seeks to do so in such a way that will not only better illuminate the artistic and aesthetic aspects of films and their worlds but serve to recommend and encourage greater interest in the use of these frameworks of ideas in a film theory and philosophy of film context. From a wider perspective, if it is accepted that cinematic works (and the worlds they construct) are complex, heterogeneous, and multimodal in terms of their address in consciousness, then their more successful theoretical understanding and discussion may actually *require* a certain conceptual and methodological pluralism and eclecticism, cutting across established analytic and continental lines, as well as "cognitive" and semiotic ones, for example.

Apart from the above-mentioned authors, there is another prominent intellectual debt to be acknowledged, which may also help to orient the reader. As well as a critic, filmmaker, and cofounder of Paris's renowned Cinémathèque française, Jean Mitry was one of the first scholars of film history and theory in a university context (teaching at the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques and the Université de Paris). His massively detailed *Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema* (published in 1963, only translated into English in 1997) is arguably the last great theoretical work devoted to cinema as art, prior to the pronounced shift toward the investigation of the specifically social and ideological nature and use of cinema that occurred in film theory and some serious film criticism in France and elsewhere very shortly after its publication.¹⁸ An attempt to understand film art against the background of general aesthetic theory, Mitry's book (which I have frequent occasion to cite) is also at least one (needed) bridge between and among symbol-centered and phenomenological accounts of art and film. Through its critical engagement with both classical formalist and realist film theory, and its balanced critique of mid-twentieth-century semiotic, structuralist, and poststructuralist approaches to cinema, it also clearly points forward to Deleuze's highly influential philosophy of film, with which

it has some clear and seldom-discussed affinities. Mitry is correct in a number of respects when he writes, for instance, that there is not just a gap but “a world between” the perceived space that actors and characters occupy on the screen and the space of viewers in watching it.¹⁹ Along with the cinematically created world structure and experience, I am interested in the nature and effects of the distance and separation in question, together with how (as Mitry also inquires) this is simultaneously closeness, an association, and a participation on the part of viewers.

Still on the subject of reference points and precedents: Dudley Andrew, an early champion and interpreter of Mitry in an English-language context (as well as of phenomenological approaches to cinema well before their current vogue), is one of the few scholars within disciplinary film studies who explicitly entertain the central idea of films as artistic worlds distinct from fictional story-worlds. He has done so with reference to some of the same theorists, philosophers, and traditions with whom I will engage, even if, as it must also be added, Andrew invokes these, together with the common backbone and unifying theoretical ground of our present study, in a comparatively brief and provisional way.²⁰

All that remains to complete this introduction is a brief summary of the book’s structure and the sequence of its main arguments, some of which are cumulative in nature. The first chapter covers a good deal of necessary philosophical and theoretical ground and, as the reader should be aware, possesses a certain density of detail and argument, as a result. It forwards a series of interconnected observations and arguments concerning the need to make a fundamental distinction between the fictional world “in” a cinematic work and the more than fictional and narrative world “of” it, including and enclosing the former (since, in aesthetic terms, worlds are not only the products of fiction and narratives in various media). This distinction, which is founded in recognition of both the representational and what may be termed “presentational” dimensions of films, is supported by critical consideration of significant philosophical and film-theoretical issues that cluster around existing logical and fictional, “heterocosmic,” narrative-diegetic, and phenomenological conceptions of films as created and experienced worlds. I will argue that these differently oriented world conceptions, as shared by some philosophers and literary and film theorists, are highly instructive and useful but also seriously incomplete in aesthetic terms. Thus, in pursuing a more holistic, less reductive model of the artistic world-character of a narrative film, it is necessary to move beyond them in certain specified directions.

[Chapter 2](#) focuses more directly on the term and concept of *world* itself. In any cultural context of reference, worlds (plural) are seen to necessarily entail forms of symbolic thought and representation. The discussion here relies on a post-Kantian tradition of thought on symbolization and experience that has been relatively neglected in aesthetics and the philosophy of art (from at least the second half of the twentieth century to the present), as well as being seldom discussed in contemporary film theory and the burgeoning philosophy of film. Insofar as certain ideas and relevant works of philosophers such as Ernst Cassirer and Susanne K. Langer have suffered decades of eclipse by other continental and analytic movements and schools of thought concerning symbolization, art, and expression that have been favored in aesthetics and film and art theory (and the humanities generally), the tradition in question may not be familiar to many contemporary readers. It is, however, one indispensable source and background to our present understandings of the full “cognitive” aspects of filmmaking and film viewing, together with at least some cinematic affect. This is indicated in Goodman’s powerful insight that “how an object or event functions as a work explains how, through certain modes of reference, what so functions may contribute to a vision of—and to the making of—a world.”²¹

In further making a case for the relevance of this general philosophical tradition to both cinematic art and film theory, [chapter 3](#) teases out the multifaceted relations between its basic positions and

Mitry's and Pier Paolo Pasolini's symbol-centered descriptions of (all) artistic filmmaking, as also overlapping with certain aspects of Deleuze's. At issue is how the materials of a cinematic work (celluloid or digital), drawn from "natural" and cultural sources alike, and in the form of images and sounds both captured and constructed, are transformed into aesthetic features (or elements) both symbolic (and "virtual"), as well as physical-material, ways. In this process the original meanings and affects of these materials are typically both retained and surpassed for intended artistic purposes, in a fashion specific to cinema in at least some significant respects.

Chapters 4 and 5 represent what is, as far as I am aware, the first more systematic and wide-ranging attempt to apply Goodman's symbolic account of art and world-making to cinema. In chapter 4 I propose to show how film theory and criticism may make productive use of the five distinct processes for consciously constructing new worlds out of older ones that are identified and described by the American philosopher, given how these processes map onto recognizable stylistic features of film and filmmaking techniques, that contribute to the creation of cinematic worlds. Goodman's related classification of types and functions of symbolic reference relations (assumed in his chronological later account of artworks as exercises in world-making) is the jumping-off point, in chapter 5, for consideration of the types of literal and, especially, figurative symbolization to be found in film art. Primary here is Goodman's groundbreaking recognition of the full and crucial role of symbolization—"exemplification" in art, as a form of targeted self-reference on the part of works in all forms. Properly understood (and with some additions and changes of emphases in comparison with Goodman's original account), exemplification is considered central to a film's artistic presence, meaning, and interpretation. I will also argue (although more provisionally) that it provides a basis for a new, alternative model of (self-)reflexivity, as a prominent feature of many artistically significant narrative films. Finally, this explication of multiple kinds of reference at work in art is brought to bear on the identification and classification of artistic styles in cinema. Here I offer in condensed fashion the ideas of what I term a film's constitutive "world-markers," together with the sort of stylistic categories of film worlds ("film-world types") that may be regarded as following from these.

Turning to the film-viewing experience, under the umbrella heading of cinematic affect and "expression," in chapter 6 I offer qualified support for certain models and theories of film-produced feeling and emotion that have been proposed recently, especially within cognitive film theory and the philosophy of film. These are presented, however, as but one important part of the total artistic picture with respect to the major affective dimension of films. In an attempt to sketch a more complete map of film "feeling," I propose a four-part typology of characteristic forms of cinematic expression consisting of what I call "local" *sensory-affective*, *cognitive-diegetic*, and *formal-artistic* types alongside a more "global" aesthetic one. Aspects of these forms of affective expression are argued to clearly correspond to ways in which the film viewer may be engaged with, and immersed in, cinematic work in pronounced fashion. The discussion here is in some ways a microcosm of this study as a whole. Insofar, that is to say, that it attempts to show that whereas no current, single theoretical or methodological approach or paradigm in film theory (or the philosophy of film) is a sufficient conceptual lens through which to view the entirety of a narrative film as a singular work of art— affectively or otherwise—a number of them appropriately put together and applied to it may facilitate our understandings of certain constitutive *levels* or *aspects* of it.

As discussed in more detail in chapter 7, which also addresses the topics of time and rhythm in film worlds, the several forms of cinematic expression and immersion include what can be seen as a distinctly aesthetic form of cinematic affect that I call a film work's total (or global) *cine aesthetic* world-feeling. In accordance with Dufrenne's more general arguments concerning all aesthetic objects (and with its Kantian reference points), this fourth category of cinematic affect, expression, and immersion, largely heretofore unrecognized (at least in any more detailed, theoretical fashion)

conceived as bound to the so-called lived or felt time of a film (as well as an overall cinematic rhythm). The particular connection between this complex aesthetic and experiential constellation of feeling and temporality, and the filmmaker in his or her role as artistic “world creator,” is explored through the critical juxtaposition of the concept of cinematic world-feeling with a number of well-known and overlapping *auteur* and expression-centered views of film art.

The [final chapter](#) reflects the aforementioned shift to a hermeneutic frame of reference. In full acknowledgment that a more detailed and comprehensive hermeneutics of film worlds must await further development, I argue that along with being objectively accessible symbolic and artistic objects (or, more precisely, proposed symbol schemes), and “private,” first-person aesthetic experiences, film worlds are also public, historical, and intersubjectively accessible *events*. As such, they may be conceived as the occasions for the disclosure of artistic truth that Gadamer (following Heidegger’s reflections on art) articulates in his major work *Truth and Method* and other writings, wherein he maintains that the very presence of the artwork places a demand to be understood on its beholder. This is a communicative demand that is only met and fulfilled in an active participation, negotiation, and “dialogue” with the work in the context of cultural and artistic (and here, cinematic) tradition. Building on this existential hermeneutic account of the character and function of the artwork transposed to cinema, and following in the hallowed critical footsteps of François Truffaut, I will maintain that film worlds possess, and are capable of conveying, two distinct, if also often overlapping, forms of knowledge and enlightenment, as pertaining, respectively, to “life” and “cinema” (i.e., as art). Such truth, as a product of both film form and content, and at once revealed (“disclosed”) and interpreted, is claimed to be a major aspect of a cinematic work’s interest and value both cognitive and aesthetic.

PART I

FILMS AND WORLDS

ONE

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

Fictions, Narrative, and Aesthetic Enclosure

REFERENCE TO THE CREATED AND EXPERIENCED WORLDS OF individual works is commonplace in the theory and criticism of literature, art, and film. Yet there is little consistency of meaning across disciplines and various critical and theoretical approaches, or even within them, with respect to this proposed description, or analogy. The numerous and varied senses of *world* in these contexts, as well as in general aesthetics and the philosophy of art, range from the clearly metaphorical (and often unanalyzed) to certain contemporary attempts to invest such “world talk” with more literal (and logical) meaning and precision.

Concerning any representational art form, there is an important but too often neglected difference between the world *of* a work and the represented or described world (or worlds) *within* a work. Understandably, from one perspective, most theoretical treatments of cinematic worlds are confined to the latter. They seek to describe and understand the nature and comprehension of fictional, narrated, or so-called diegetic worlds of represented places and events in a common space and time inhabited by characters, which are (in some manner or another) referenced and communicated through a filmic audiovisual form. These accounts are largely self-limited to what films are *about* in terms of a story rather than what they also *are*, as created, unified works—together with what they may *mean* in nonnarrative (or extranarrative) and nonfictional ways.

In the position I take throughout this book, by contrast, it is vital and necessary to distinguish between the more or less skillfully constructed fictional story-worlds present within narrative film and the larger, multidimensional, and aesthetically realized worlds of films as artworks. The viability of this distinction is integral to many of the arguments that follow. To fully appreciate this, we must first look at some of the principal ways in which what I will term the *world-in* (as distinct from the *world-of*) films and representational and narrative works more generally, have been theorized. We will begin with logical and fictional worlds theory, which for some good reasons may appear to be at the most abstract remove from cinema.

LOGICO-FICTIONAL AND “MAKE-BELIEVE” WORLDS

Inspired by the theories of meaning and reference in the modern philosophical traditions of logic, positivism and empiricism—associated with such figures as Gottlieb Frege, Bertrand Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, who asserted that “the facts in logical space are the world”²—one approach to the virtual and imaginary worlds presented by narrative works of all kinds regards them as built entirely out of certain kinds of abstract, quasi-semantic entities, or “propositions,” as expressed in language. This general view involves the adoption of what may be identified as the *world variance conception* of the meaning and truth status of the representational elements of works of (artistic) fiction.

Some references made by a work are factual (or ontologically grounded) as related to features of empirical reality, in the form of the corresponding, genuinely existing objects and properties that precede them. Others are said to be “objectless”; that is, they have no ontic counterparts or make no genuine references to anything that exists outside of human imagination and its many shared, cultural products. Thus, every work that communicates a story contains a kind of mixture or blend in terms

real and fictional persons, places, things, events, and so forth, as well as all their properties and relations as described by the work in words or perceived in its visual depictions.

For many thinkers who are committed to referential and causal theories of meaning and truth (and to so-called truth-conditional semantics), it has been thought necessary to identify or construct a domain of some kind in which objects of reference that are fictional maintain their special mode of existence. Fictional propositions are true, if at all, only in some sense within the cognitive domains—the discourses, or “semantic fields”—where the nonexistent is taken to exist, such as the story-world of an artistic fiction. This remains the case even when such fictions are present in primarily visual works, like films, since sequences of images also may be thought to instantiate cognitive messages that generate linguistic interpretations and construct story-worlds.

To speak, then, of worlds in the propositional sense as *within* narrative works, including fictional films, is to refer to numerous story-worlds, and these are basically variant and hybrid worlds of actuality and possibility, of reality and imagination.⁴ In every narrative fiction the true, factual, historical is intertwined with the “false” and the merely fancied. The basic intuition here is that narrative “world-making” consists essentially of making imaginary modifications to parts or aspects of genuinely existing reality in ways that are more or less partial and subtle or extensive and obvious. In this view empirical reality—that is, the “real” or “actual” world—always remains the standard for the comprehension of every fictional and imaginary world. Representative of this propositional world-variance position, Paul Bloom and Deena Skolnick defend what they refer to as the “intuitive cosmology of fictional worlds.” This entails that “every time we encounter a new fictional story, we create a new world. The default assumption is that this world contains everything that the real world contains. We then modify this representation based on several constraints: what the story tells us explicitly, what we can directly deduce from specific conventions of the fictional genre, and, most importantly, how similar to the real world the fictional world is described as being.”⁵

Not just philosophers, but a number of literary theorists have embraced this general paradigm. Marie-Laure Ryan, for instance, argues that the metaphor of “textual worlds,” grounded in relations of discourse-independent objects of reference, is indispensable, in offering a less relativist theory of meaning as existing outside of texts.⁶ David Herman, a fellow traveler in contemporary narratology, claims that the heady contemporary works of Ryan, Thomas G. Pavel, and Lubomir Dolezel “have sought to overturn the structuralist moratorium on referential issues, using tools from model-theoretic or possible-worlds semantics to characterize the world-creating properties of narrative discourse.”⁷

There are also, however, a host of objections to various versions of the world-variance doctrine and what philosopher Kendall Walton calls the “Reality Principle” that it assumes.⁸ In terms of our actual engagement with fictions, Walton is among those who have rightly recognized that truth in the discursive and rationalist sense (appealed to in standard propositional conceptions of work-worlds) is inadequate to account for the sort of imaginative commitments that we regularly make in our encounters with representational artworks. In his important book *Mimesis as Make-Believe* he accepts the existence of fictional or story-worlds that, when analyzed, are found to contain large sets of descriptive propositions.⁹ Drawing on speech-act theories of language and meaning, Walton goes on to argue, however, that these are copresent with socially instituted “game worlds,” which appreciators of representational artworks create by intentionally playing, in their imaginations, self-aware games of make-believe. In these activities works (or parts of them) function as guiding props. The theory of tacit game-playing in relation to the representational arts enables Walton to make a general distinction between all matters of reader or viewer engagement with fictional characters, and the situations in which they are placed, and the actual *truth status*, if any, of assertions concerning such characters and their various attributes and actions. (Consistent with this general view, in seeking

better understand fictionality in cinema, Noël Carroll has adopted a speech-act framework and a “~~intention-response model of communication~~” inspired by the work of Paul Grice.)¹⁰

Other philosophers of art, such as Joseph Margolis and Nelson Goodman, go much further still raising fundamental doubts about propositional conceptions of fictional worlds within works. Margolis also questions key aspects of the games of make-believe thesis as Walton’s proposed alternative. Arguing against the views of Walton, John Searle, and others that the “imaginative world of the novel and pictorial representation” count as “fiction and make-believe,” Margolis draws a distinction between what is “imaginative” and merely “imaginary”: “simply put the imaginative is hardly limited to the imaginary.”¹² In fact, in separating these concepts, he points to the “power of modern cinema,” and to the “grand liberties in this respect afforded by filmic imagination,” showing how “the play of imagination is subtler and freer than propositional commitments.”¹³ Both Margolis’s and Goodman’s positions are motivated in part by a wish to steer well clear of an age-old Platonic legacy: the pejorative sense of both the imagined and the fictional as equivalent to falsehood and a corresponding diminishment of the full cognitive status and function of representational art.

CINEMA AND THE HETEROCOSMIC MODEL OF THE ARTWORK

Where does fictional-worlds theory and the different versions and objections to it, here only very briefly sketched, leave us with respect to cinematic worlds? Walton acknowledges that representational works are more than sets of propositions *and* more than imaginary (“make-believe” realities. In what must appear to be both a truism and a very substantial understatement, he writes that the “critic or appreciator needs to be sensitive to a work’s features—the look of a painting, the sound of a poem—apart from their contributions to the generation of fictional truths.”¹⁴ It is quite clear that the complex sensory-perceptual, cognitive, and affective reality of any work of art, especially one as heterodox and composite as a film, cannot be reduced to fictional objects, representational propositions, or a series of invitations to engage in acts of imaginative making-believe—if, that is, we are to be left with anything resembling *Citizen Kane*, *Chinatown*, *Éloge de l’amour*, or any other cinematic work as purposefully created and actually experienced in its full range of cognitive and expressive contents. From an aesthetic perspective a film, including its presented world, is not only simply made (and intended) to refer viewers to aspects of common experience, as modified by creative imagination (freed from any burden of literal truth-telling). Rather, it is also something to be experienced “for itself.”

When many critics and theorists (as well as filmmakers) discuss the worlds of individual films by directors—for example, the “world of *8-1/2*” or “Fellini’s world”—they often do not limit themselves to literal contents, in the form of discrete camera-given representations, or, as Dudley Andrew argues in this context, to “a catalog of things appearing on screen.”¹⁵ Nor do they apparently mean to refer to fictional characters, places, and actions alone, or even the stories containing them, but also and more generally to a “mode of experience” (Andrew) that these films create.¹⁶ The implicit concept of world appealed to thus often extends beyond the fictional reality or story-world abstracted from a film’s formal and medial presentation; it also includes that presentation itself, making use of the properties and possibilities of cinema—entailing camera movements, color schemes, rhythms, editing styles, music, production design, performance registers, soundscapes, and so on—as all contributing to the creation and experience of a readily identifiable cinematic world as a perceptual-imaginative and affective whole. To borrow philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff’s phrase, while film works do indeed “project worlds” of a fictional nature, they do so in their concrete, perceptual presence, as enabled by a medium that is capable of communicating audiovisually.¹⁷

In a cinematic work sensory and affective features are closely integrated with representational and semantic content in a way that is, moreover, far more pronounced than in any literary narrative. No matter how much films share in narrative and fiction-making processes to be found in other arts and media (and no doubt they share much), they are also fundamentally unlike any founded entirely (or primarily) in discourse. In and of themselves the worlds posited by logico-fictional and speech-act (or make-believe) conceptions of representational and fictional works are neither sufficiently “cinematic” (in the above senses) nor sufficiently *aesthetic* to be the basis of a world-model or mapping that more fully reflects the experience of film works and accounts for more, rather than less, significant artistic features of them.

Stepping back from philosophical and theoretical conceptions of work-worlds rooted in logical and linguistic paradigms, it is important to recognize that these have been preceded by another tradition of reflection on literature and the arts. Unlike the views I have mentioned thus far, this older scholarly tradition rejects the idea that created works are (or should be) primarily experienced, understood, and judged in close conjunction with the real world, and to logical and empirical truth, as a standard of reference. The long-standing position in question is associated with what has been called the “heterocosmic” model of art and artworks. It is anchored in a sharply drawn distinction between the abstract truths of logic and reason (or didacticism) and more concrete “ways of knowing” afforded by artistic perception and imagination. The noted literary theorist and scholar M. H. Abrams has traced the long and fascinating history of this general conception of art as entailing the creation of new worlds of experience, fashioned from sensuous and imagistic, as well as semantic elements.

As Abrams points out, Joseph Addison, Karl Philipp Moritz, Alexander Baumgarten, Kant, and other early and mid-eighteenth-century writers argued in various ways that a representational work of art is not in essence a replication or alternative version of reality as it is familiarly known but a “unique, coherent, and autonomous world unto itself.”¹⁸ Artistic creation involves the construction of domains of experience that are very largely self-sufficient and self-referential. Departing from earlier conceptions of art as in one way or another anchored in the traditional Western *mimetic* doctrine of the imitation of nature, and instead drawing inspiration from the Judeo-Christian theological notion of the Creation as an autonomous, spiritual act, the work of art in this tradition is not as much a reflection or imitation as a human-scale *analogue* of the natural world freely created by God (in the form of a world created “second nature”).¹⁹

It is noteworthy that the most developed early articulation of these ideas comes with the very birth of philosophical reflection on art (and beauty) in its more modern guise. More specifically, it occurs in the writings of Baumgarten, who is generally credited with founding aesthetics as a distinct branch of philosophical inquiry. In claiming for art a more autonomous status within human activity and reflective thought than had traditionally been granted, Baumgarten defends the idea of a work as a veritable world of its own with reference to Leibniz’s logical and metaphysical conception of “compossibility” (i.e., the principle of internal coherence) as applied to poetic works: especially those Baumgarten calls “heterocosmic fictions,” which frequently violate the known laws of nature and establish their own unique relations among phenomena (Abrams 177). As Abrams discusses, Baumgarten contrasts logic, which is abstract and general and signifies essences, with poetry, which is “determinatively particular, individual, specific” (174). A poem is considered to be a matter of representation that is “qualitatively rich, abundant, imagistic” and constitutes a “concrete whole” with a pronounced “sensuous appeal.” Unlike the discourse of reason, poetry and imaginative literature convey a distinct poetic knowledge, which, in his *Aesthetica* of 1750, Baumgarten also describes as “aesthetico-logic” (the logic of “sensuous thinking”) and contrasts with rational thought and argument (Abrams 178).

Abrams aptly summarizes Baumgarten’s subsequently highly influential position: “a poem provides

sensuous knowledge of its own poetic world—a world governed by causal laws analogous to causal laws in our world but specific to itself; a world whose ‘poetic’ truth and probability does not consist in correspondence to the actual world but in the internal coherence of its elements; and a world that is not ordered to an end external to itself but by an internal finality whereby all its elements are subordinate to the progressive revelation of its particular theme” (178). Although often articulated in different idioms, and in relation to different art forms, this basic view of the artwork qua self-contained and singular world was widespread, even commonplace, by the early twentieth century. It may be found expressed in the critical and theoretical writings of figures as diverse as György Lukács, Wassily Kandinsky, John Crowe-Ransom (as also representative of literary New Criticism), J. M. Foster, and Vladimir Nabokov. It survives, as well, with compelling force, in J. R. R. Tolkien’s theorization of the form of literary fantasy as always involving an act of “sub-creation” and the construction of a “secondary world.”²⁰

What is of primary interest to us is the heterocosmic view’s more extensive taking into account of the fact that works not only refer to aspects of the real world, creating hybrid real-fictional alternatives to it, but also more actively transform reality via such borrowings. Thus they transcend “merely” logical or factual truth (or falsity) such as also prompts Gadamer, for instance, to write that the artwork’s world appears *not* to permit “comparison with reality as the secret measure of a verisimilitude.” Instead, “it is raised above all such comparisons—and hence also above the question of whether it is all real, because a superior truth speaks from it.”²¹ In other words, it becomes (also) sui-generis reality, one that in some ways, at least, sets its own standards for its own experience and meaning, beyond all questions and putative problems of empirical fact and justified belief.

Although originally developed with reference to poetry (and offered in explanation of the creative genius of the poet), in its stressing of the sensuous and formal dimensions of works, this particular understanding of artistically created worlds and their experience was already in the eighteenth century also being applied to painting and music. In addition to carrying with it significant lessons for reflections on film as art, this doctrine of world-creation in and through art, going back to the very beginnings of philosophical aesthetics, also has substantial echoes in some contemporary, experience-based accounts of cinema. However, by way of phenomenology (in its post-Husserlian form) combined with a (problematic) anti-intentionalism, and a rejection of narratological, cognitive, and auteurist approaches to cinema, some of the theories in question may be seen to take central aspects of the heterocosmic idea to an untenable extreme. In relation to theorizing films and their worlds, in certain respects they tend to confirm Abrams’s critical conclusion that the claim that “a work is to be contemplated for its own sake as a self-sufficient entity, severed from all relations to its human author, to its human audience, and to the world of human life and concerns . . . accords only with selective aspects of our full experience of great works of art” (Abrams 187).

FILM MINDS, SUBJECTS, AND A WORLD APART?

In his book *Filmosophy* Daniel Frampton attempts to synthesize the insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and Vivian Sobchack’s cinema-focused interpretations of it with Hugo Münsterberg’s now classic, proposed analogies between film viewing and the elemental processes of visual perception and thought. In notable respects, however, Frampton’s theoretical construct is also a contemporary cinematic version of the heterocosmic view, possessing some of its strengths, as well as some of its weaknesses. The latter pertain to the limitations of a conception of an artwork world, cinematic or otherwise, as an entirely self-sufficient perceptual experience, with perception, in this instance, extending to “lived” or “embodied” perception conceived in phenomenological terms.

Frampton agrees with Sobchack that a film not only presents objects and a world but also, and partly through the aegis of the camera-lens apparatus (and its movement), a cinematic seeing of those objects and that world, amounting to intentions and attitudes toward them. However, he replaces his radical model of a film as (for this reason) an “embodied” and perceiving subjectivity with that of a film as a disembodied and thinking “transsubjective” agency.²² Thus, in one of his many neologisms, Frampton posits the experiential existence of a “filmind.” It is described as a creating and organizing form of distinctly cinematic consciousness governing films and taking up, purportedly, something like the awareness and perspective on phenomena of a conscious being or mind. Considered experientially distinct from the presence of the director as creator, or any implicit (or “invisible”) narrating agency within the world of a film (seeming to present it), the filmind—sometimes also simply equated with the film “itself”—engages in creative formal and stylistic “film-thinking” about characters and situations. This serves to transform, to intentionally redesign, what is automatically captured by the camera in the form of perceptually recognizable objects and features into a virtual “filmworld,” something over and above such basic, mimetic representation; this process today extends to what Frampton regards as the particularly “fluid” and global transformations enabled by CGI technology. As it unfolds in a film’s viewing, this filmworld is concretely experienced as one perpetually created and intended, and maintained by the filmind (akin in this respect to the reality-creating and maintaining dream of Lewis Carroll’s Red King).

Based on what we have established thus far, this theory has some clear merits. To begin with, it recognizes that a film brings into existence a unique, creatively constructed world. This world consists of something more than representational and fictional contents alone and is also more than a simple sum or aggregation of such contents, since it also includes their highly formed artistic presentation. Such a world, within which viewers find themselves experientially immersed, is rightly seen to encompass the full formal and sensuous dimensions of films (falling under the heading of what Frampton terms “cinematics”), dimensions that, as Frampton notes with some justification, have tended to be neglected or at least deemphasized in a good deal of philosophy of film (at least to the time of his writing), as well as, we might add, in some semiotic, cognitive, and narratological film theory (Frampton 9). He persuasively insists that a better understanding of cinematic art necessitates a more comprehensive study of these created worlds from the viewer’s perspective, as in some sense temporally emergent perceptual and cognitive realities. In their fundamental character as interpretative and “transfigurative” (rather than simply imitating our direct perceptions) film worlds may, in turn, have a “transfiguring effect” on “our understanding and perception of reality” (Frampton 5–6). Yet there are also problems with Frampton’s account, ones that are highly instructive in terms of our larger concerns in this chapter and those following. Some of these pertain to issues surrounding the viewer’s experience of the “filmworld” in question and the creative intentionality behind it.

Frampton is surely correct in maintaining that the actual perceptual and affective experience of films as audiovisual works and the meanings that they manifest in such powerful fashion, as rooted in this experience, always exceed the actual intentions and (fore-)knowledge of the filmmaker, as well as the cognitive resources of any individual viewer. His conclusion, however—that, from the perspective of the viewer, “internal” to its concrete experience, the filmmaker cannot rightly or adequately be regarded (or actually experienced as) the source or agency responsible for a film work and world’s perceptual and artistic form, meaning, and creative transformations of reality—appears highly unwarranted. Moreover, as ingenious and ostensibly appealing, in some ways, as the suggested alternative may be, in the form of a transsubjective “filmind,” it is inadequate and to a degree self-defeating.

Making room for this distinctly cinematic mode of sensation, “thought,” and creative intentionality in which films and viewers participate entails pushing the filmmaker and his or her collaborators o

of the frame (almost literally), as it were. One of the motivations for conceiving of a film (at least to certain metaphorical extent) either as a conscious entity (or mind) or as a perceiving self or subject (in Sobchack's phenomenology of film, where a film is regarded as not only a "visible object" but also a "viewing" subject) appears to be a desire to preserve the self-sufficiency and experiential autonomy of a cinematic world as one wholly given to perception.²⁵ This enables this world to be seen and heard (as well as theorized) as the concrete result, or object, of the "thought," "perception," and "vision" of both the *film* and the *viewer* existing in a purported relation of immediate intersubjective communication—without, that is, any necessary reference to the *filmmaker* (including as a self-expressing "auteur" and his or her subjectivity, intentions, actions, and so forth. The supposed advantage of this strategy is, in Frampton's words, to avoid "watching a film with the idea that the film's actions are directly the result of an external historical person [which] removes the filmgoer from the film. Each action reminds them of the director making decisions and the mechanics of filmmaking" (31). Films and their worlds are thus seen to be safeguarded as self-enclosed perceptual and affective realities generally free from extraperceptual biographical, historical, and personal-intentional mediations and distractions. It is difficult to accept, however, that a viewer's being aware before seeing a film, or being "reminded" while watching it, of directorial decisions, of the mechanics of filmmaking, or of the actual creator(s) responsible for its existence (and for at least *some* of its meaning content) necessarily removes him or her from its created world—especially when this world is defined (as in Frampton's account) as somehow *more than* a fictional (and imaginary) one. To assume this last is to court the dubious notion that engaging with, caring about, and taking seriously the presented world of a cinematic work during its experience requires a naive "belief" in its actual existence (or an active global suspension of disbelief concerning it) as supported by a film's creation and maintenance of so-called diegetic illusion.

Moreover, at least some major portions of the reality-based cognitive background of film viewing experience, culture, and context are not somehow optional to a film world's "concrete" perceptual and affective being and to its characteristically cinematic experience but are partly constitutive of the very being and experience. For instance, the inescapable fact, which withstands any phenomenological, or indeed, "perceptualist" reduction of films, is that salient aspects of a film world as experienced are to varying degrees reliant on viewer awareness not only of the existence of the filmmaker (as the cinematic "world creator") in the abstract but also, often, of the authorial actions, intentions, and experienced "presence" of a *particular* director in his or her film. In other words, we must accommodate in theory as well as film viewing experience the real individual qua intending artist who may be appropriately considered chiefly responsible for a film world's singular existence and many of the artistic features (in some cases self-reflexive and autobiographical) it possesses (not *wholly* responsible for these, of course, given that cinema is also a collaborative enterprise and art).

Whatever position one adopts on notoriously difficult issues surrounding artistic intentionality, and whatever distinctions one wishes to suggest between cinema and other, more traditional, art forms concerning these, there is, at least, no contradiction or insurmountable difficulty in holding a position of what has been referred to as "moderate actual intentionalism."²⁶ This would entail, in this context, that (a) the filmmaker (or makers, to include the collaborators working under his or her artistic direction) is the true and full creator of a film's cinematic and artistic world (as a full perceptual and narrative-fictional reality), and yet (b) that the significance, meaning, and truth of any and every film world (and its parts) always, and necessarily—and for reasons that we will trace—exceeds the filmmaker's (or filmmakers') life (or lives), intentions, and activities. Indeed, to appropriately recognize and accept a filmmaker's actual artistic and expressive intentions is not necessarily to engage in any form of psychology that compromises either the objective status of a film work and its world or the immediacy of its perceptual-affective experience on the part of viewers.

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