Gianluca Sposito

King Kong
The Untold Story

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Mysteria Series

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Introduction

That of King Kong is one of the most classic and disturbing stories: a subject of dreamlike violence, not without a soft poetic quality, which has captivated millions of viewers and readers over the years. A superb creature in which the myth of Beauty and the Beast is revived in modern terms: an emblem of the brutal and irrepressible, yet fundamentally vital, force of nature. But also a metaphor, perhaps, for that instinctive part of the human soul, radicalized by civilization. As in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*, here too a monstrous being destroys and succumbs in the attempt to fulfill his desires; but if there was a creature of science, here the protagonist is the brutal and irrepressible force of nature and instincts, which civilization nevertheless seeks to dominate.

Cinematically, King Kong has experienced three milestones: in 1933, with the first film produced and directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack; in 1976, with the version directed by John Guillermin and produced by Dino De Laurentiis; and finally, in 2005, with the remake directed, produced, and co-written by Peter Jackson.

In 90 years of history, very different generations have thus been introduced to and thrilled by the legendary Kong. The technologies used in those three films were just as different: the technologies used by Jackson were predominantly and predictably digital (above all, the motion capture system); the others were naturally 'analog' - although the special effects and visual tricks of the 1933

edition, in fact revolutionary at the time (such as the combination of stop-motion, rear projection, matte painting and miniatures), still prove fascinating.

But in these two albeit extraordinary films from 1933 and 2005, a real giant gorilla never existed: neither trained nor mechanically animated. Perhaps viewers of the 1930s and 1940s, in their technological simplicity, might have been deluded that this was not the case by those never-before-seen effects; but certainly not those of the third millennium, well aware that digital technology was long ago capable of reproducing anything.

A separate discussion deserves, however, the 1976 film for which the producer wanted a real mechanized giant gorilla to be built: he had to be the undisputed star. Forget all other fictions, miniatures and so on: the giant gorilla had to be there. It was indeed there, it is true, but things did not turn out exactly as they thought and as we are still led to believe.

Therefore, this is the sad story of what was supposed to be an absolute giant protagonist, but whose true glory on screen was very short-lived.