

# Introduction

## *A “Still” New “Moving” Image of Skepticism?*

The term “cinematic skepticism” speaks of films that deal in audiovisual ways with the problem of skepticism: How does one cope with a sense of distance to the world? “Dealing with” the skeptical problem is different from illustrating a philosophical argument: it rather indicates a manner of struggling or of finding and inventing ways through a problem, using the tools and means specific to the medium. But films do deal (cope, struggle) with a problem philosophy also deals with, using different means (as does literature). What is this problem?

In philosophy, the skeptic is usually taken to occupy a radical epistemological position by undermining not a specific knowledge claim, but the very possibility of knowing as such; not this or that belief, but the power to believe at all. The skeptic asks such questions as: How can we exclude the possibility that we are dreaming when we believe we are awake? Or how can we be certain that what we take to be real won’t turn out to be a simulation? Under the weight of the skeptic’s hyperbolic doubt, the very ground of reality is called into question, just as the foundations of language and rationality may be found to crack. Indeed, it may drive a wedge between mind and world, thus severing our sense of presentness and connectedness to the world. As a consequence of these radical skeptical conclusions, we may feel inclined to either withdraw in isolation or be willing to violate the limitations of the human condition, if that is what it takes to overcome the skeptic’s assault. This, then, constitutes the problem of skepticism: given the absence of ground as well as our sense of being at a distance, (how) can we establish new connections to a world without recourse to violence?

Because of its own enigmatic way of relating to the world, film has a privileged relation to the problem of skepticism. Be it in fiction or documentary, the medium's use of automatically captured audiovisual recordings of the world has from the outset provoked ontological and epistemological questions. If early film theorists celebrate the cinema for overcoming skeptical doubt about the power of human vision, recent film philosophers argue that our postphotographic, digital cinema is heading toward a general acceptance of skepticism, as though nothing on screen has anything to do with reality any longer. Without denying relevant changes and variations throughout film history and theory, my take on cinematic skepticism challenges both these views, hence also the idea of a linear historical development from one to the other.

The formal qualities of film constitute a second, if related, reason to conceive cinema as helping us deal with the problems of skepticism and of finding ways to relate to the world. If photographic images, being *of* the world, already evoke anxieties of an ontological nature, their organization *into* a film world puts further pressure on questions of relations among (sounds and) images themselves and of their relations to the viewer. That is, aesthetic choices concerning cinematic techniques such as perspective or focalization, and especially formal experimentation with montage, can be used to express or inspire ways of creating or crossing gaps.

Taking the problem of skepticism beyond an epistemological concern of knowledge and challenging the inside-outside dichotomy it assumes, this study turns skepticism into an ethical concern instead and argues for its pervasiveness throughout film history. It shows how films deal, in their specifically cinematic manner, with this problem of skepticism by bringing together formal invention, creative modes of storytelling, and reflections on the medium. It also discusses the will to manipulate stories and images as a new tendency or dimension within this prevailing problem of how cinema thinks and invents ways of dis/connecting to the world.

My take on cinematic skepticism emerges from the interaction between Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze's film philosophies. The former, in particular, is well known for drawing out the relation between film and skepticism. Let me introduce his take on the issue by elaborating on the following statement from a text entitled "What Photography Calls Thinking": "The name skepticism speaks, as I use it, of some new, or new realization of, human distance from the world, or some withdrawal of the world" (Cavell and Rothman 2005, 117). Both the title of this text and the quote I am pulling from it are, I take it, meant to provoke.

Cavell's title itself alludes to a title of one of Heidegger's later texts—*What Is Called Thinking?* (1952)—which in the German original (*Was heißt Denken?*) also evokes the idea that thinking is called *for*. As Heidegger explains in these collected lectures, thinking is called *into* being (say: provoked) as a response to a call issued *from* Being, or the nature of things. Hence the way Cavell names (*heißt*) his essay suggests that *photography* has the capacity to issue this call, to call forth or provoke thinking, and by extension has a privileged relation to Being. Yet the title equally suggests that what *photography* calls thinking may not be the same as what others (read: what philosophy) calls it.

The citation I pulled from this text speaks of a name that speaks of something *new*, yet what it names—skepticism—is about as old as (Western) philosophy itself; just consider the importance of the Phyrro-nian and Academic schools of skepticism in ancient Greece. And Cavell himself has frequently argued that the foregrounding of skepticism as the central preoccupation of philosophical inquiry marks the advent of *modern* philosophy in the Renaissance. Descartes and, later, Kant *acknowledge* the skeptical impetus in the very act of trying to overcome this “scandal of philosophy” (a point I discuss in the next chapter). So what, we may wonder, is *new* about skepticism? And what does photography—or film as a photographic medium—have to do with this?

In the essay, Cavell offers the following suggestion, which he brings up in the course of arguing against the idea that photography has changed the way we see—a statement that strikes him as equally untrue as the one that asserts that photographs always lie (“To say that photographs lie implies that they might tell the truth; but the beauty of their nature is exactly to say nothing, neither to lie nor not to”):

People who say that photography has changed the way we see, typically, in my experience, find this a good thing . . . But . . . photography could not have impressed itself so immediately and pervasively on the European (including the American) mind unless that mind had at once recognized in photography something that had already happened to itself. What happened to this mind, as the events are registered in philosophy, is its fall into skepticism, together with its efforts to recover itself, events recorded variously in Descartes and Hume and Kant and Emerson and Nietzsche and Heidegger and Wittgenstein . . . Since for me philosophy is still . . . finding

its way in the question of skepticism, and since for me the question of photography is bound up with the question of skepticism, I am not likely to regard any proposal as illuminating the one that does not illuminate the other. (Cavell and Rothman 2005, 117)

On the relatively slow-moving time-scale of philosophy, Cavell suggests here, the fall into skepticism is *still* new: philosophy has not yet recovered from it since Descartes. Indeed, it is “still” trying to find its way in its “question”—which is worse, in a way, than being at loss for an answer. But one of Cavell’s major philosophical contributions to the question of skepticism precisely consists in his insistence that such a final answer, or a full recovery, is not to be expected. Even the desire for it, while human, is undesirable if it requires the overcoming of the human (and its limited forms of knowing). Such a “drive to the inhuman,” as Cavell calls it elsewhere, may well cause another fall, requiring a recovery of its own (Cavell 1988, 26).

Even though the mind’s fall into skepticism has “already happened,” it is not a particular historical event situated in the past. To Cavell, it is intrinsically related to the very condition of being human. In that sense, it is not unlike the fall the Bible speaks of—the one into sin—which has always already happened and yet happens again to each one of us: we continue to struggle for a recovery from that discovery. Likewise, the peculiar lineage of thinkers Cavell mentions in the passage above (which, beyond Descartes and Kant, includes Hume, Emerson, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, though Cavell discusses many more candidates throughout his oeuvre) *do not overcome* skepticism as much as work their ways through a recovery from their own fall into it. Skepticism, we could say, is a self-renewing struggle, one that continues to be new every time it gets at us. Even if we recognize it as having already happened, skepticism continues to be new (or provokes “a new realization”).

Then again, when Cavell interrupts himself, saying that skepticism speaks “of some new, *or new realization of*, human distance from the world,” we may also take him to suggest that there are perhaps new or other *ways* of realizing this distance. Photography, in particular, seems to provide such a new realization, as the longer passage I quote above suggests. “Since for me the question of photography is bound up with the question of skepticism,” Cavell writes there, “I am not likely to regard any proposal as illuminating the one that does not illuminate

the other.” That photography is *bound up* with skepticism just is a new realization of it. That is, photography establishes our distance to the world *automatically*. This is a temporal, or even metaphysical (rather than spatial), distance, as I will elaborate in the first chapter, and it is one of the crucial reasons for Cavell to call the cinema (as a photographic medium in movement) a *moving image of skepticism*; its privileged relation to ontological questions and anxieties is another one.

I will develop or derive my take on cinematic skepticism in that first chapter not only from the Cavellian idea of a “moving” image of skepticism, but from Deleuze’s account of the time-image as well. Like Cavell, Deleuze perceives cinema as being bound up with a broken link between humans and the world. It thus addresses the same distance or gap of which the name skepticism speaks, albeit with the important qualification that cinema, for Deleuze, does not do so *automatically*: it is only with the crisis of the movement image that he finds the broken sensory-motor links of the modern cinema’s protagonists to correlate on a higher level with a break between humans and the world. Or perhaps we could argue that the movement image seeks to cover or cross the break, whereas the time image rather insists on it (with the gap notably changing its name from *the interval* in the first volume to *the interstice* in the second). Deleuze calls on modern cinema to film, “not the world, but belief in this world” in order to restore this link (Deleuze 1989, 272).

This at once provides the most interesting and the most challenging connection between Cavell and Deleuze. Reading their works on cinema together has the crucial benefit of framing the concept of cinematic skepticism as an ethical or moral problem rather than an epistemological one. If Cavell holds that the world on screen is present to us while we are not present to it (which points at the moral responsibilities we bear in our ordinary lives to establish our “presentness” or our connections to the world), Deleuze extends the responsibility for establishing new connections to the cinema itself. To him, viewers of modern film are not merely outside of the world on screen; they are connected through it to an outside “more distant than any external world” (Deleuze 1989, 178). I will explain that this new connection to the outside implies a new sense of subjectivity and a new image of thought, an image that includes the unthought, or the impower of thought. As is the case for Cavell, at any rate, (photographic) film thus has a privileged relationship with thought generally, and with skepticism in particular.

At the same time, many commentators have interpreted Deleuze's call for belief as an attempt to *overcome* skepticism. In the third chapter of this study, I discuss several such interpretations in order to make the case that Deleuze rather acknowledges the standing threat of the skeptical impetus, even while trying to avoid the skeptical conclusion (as Cavell does in his philosophical works).

My Cavello-Deleuzian inflected take on cinematic skepticism is thus crucially based on Cavell's distinction between three positions: the *skeptical impetus* (which acknowledges the *de jure* limitations of human subjectivity and its ways of knowing, hence the world's "stand-offishness"); the radical *skeptical conclusion* (which infers from the impetus the idea that we have *no* way of knowing the world—it may just as well not exist at all—which implies our complete isolation from it); and the ultimate *defeat of skepticism* (which requires that we ground certain knowledge of the world by overcoming the limitations of human subjectivity, thus implying violence). These latter two radical positions on skepticism—its conclusion and its defeat—are intrinsic to the medium of analog film. However, the name cinematic skepticism, as I use it, speaks of those films that deal with the continuous negotiation between or struggle with these positions as it is played out on the level of the film's narrative and in the use of specific cinematic techniques.

Given this general idea, I feel compelled to add a disclaimer: I will not focus on the many films emerging since the 1990s that center on the discovery by their protagonists that what they took to be their world turns out to be an illusion, a simulation, or different in nature from some hardcore reality. I will explain why, for example, *The Matrix* (1999), *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999), or *The Truman Show* (1998)—films that feature in Philipp Schmerheim's recent book *Skepticism Films* (2016), which I discuss in chapter 4—do not constitute convincing candidates for my take on cinematic skepticism, despite their apparently explicit staging of the skeptical problem.

Instead of these seemingly obvious candidates for a case study in cinematic skepticism, I present comparative analyses of four contemporary films that will, I hope, not immediately strike one as being *about* skepticism at all. Rather, these films *are* cinematic renditions of it. Before introducing these films, let me briefly return to the relation between photography/film and philosophy, which has been picked up with renewed vigor in recent scholarship.

Thomas Elsaesser acknowledged Deleuze's cinema books (along with the simultaneous advent of digitization and Bordwell and Carroll's attack

on “grand theory”), as important catalysts for the “philosophical turn” in film studies (Elsaesser 2009a; Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, 216).<sup>1</sup> The recent publications of John Mullarkey, Stephen Mulhall, D. N. Rodowick, Robert Sinnerbrink, and others have in various ways addressed the importance of Cavell in this context, and some (the latter two, notably) explore a connection to Deleuze as well.<sup>2</sup> All of these studies at once reject the idea of a general theory of cinema that does not take the specificity of particular films into account *and* philosophical approaches that reduce films to mere illustrations of pre-existing, abstract ideas. Deleuze has been particularly explicit about this, claiming that film itself thinks, as does philosophy. But whereas the latter does so by creating concepts, film thinks by way of audiovisual creation. Or better still, through its specific images and signs, the cinema does generate concepts, but, as Deleuze writes, “Cinema’s concepts are not given in cinema. And yet they are cinema’s concepts, not theories about cinema . . . Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice” (1989, 280). In other words, it is up to the philosopher to distill the concepts of cinema from it and to render them in a conceptual rather than audiovisual form and framework. Film philosophy, in short, does not impose ideas, but it emerges from the films.

It thus follows that the name “cinematic skepticism” does not speak of a different kind of skepticism than the one philosophical skepticism speaks of. But it knows, expresses, and responds to skepticism differently, just as literature would know and express it in *its* own way. Cavell indeed writes about his take on this relation between philosophy and literature:

I am not here going to make a move toward deriving the skeptical threat philosophically. My idea is that what in philosophy is known as skepticism (for example as in Descartes and Hume and Kant) is a relation to the world, and to others, and to myself, and to language, that is known to what you might call literature, or anyway responded to in literature. (Cavell 1988, 155)

Like philosophy, then, literature knows skepticism (or it knows what is known as skepticism in philosophy), but Cavell’s point here is that, in discussing literature, he is not going to *derive* it philosophically. For literature has its own, literary way of responding to the distance implied in the skeptical conception of our relation to the world, and the same could be said of film.<sup>3</sup> In fact, we have already discussed that *more* should

be said when it comes to that medium because unlike literature (and other traditional arts), Cavell argues that film, as a photographic medium, is *intrinsically* bound to address skeptical dilemmas. Yet it remains up to the filmmaker, the critic, and the philosopher to turn images (“whose nature,” we recall, “is exactly to say nothing”) into *moving* images—that is, into images that move us, speak to us, call upon us, make us respond to their call.<sup>4</sup>



My study in cinematic skepticism, including the choice of films selected for close analysis, is inspired by two interrelated challenges to a Cavello-Deleuzian take on cinema. First, if the philosophical turn in film studies coincided with the digital turn, as Elsaesser suggested above, an important question remains whether or not a “moving” image of skepticism is “still” new. For digitization attenuates the automatic analogical causation that ties photographic media to their subjects (or objects), as D. N. Rodowick has argued. If analog film is bound up with skepticism because it “withholds reality before us” (to use one of Cavell’s powerful phrases I will unpack later), the digital either undermines or doubles down on its force, as we no longer know the nature of what is at once screened for and from us. I will argue in chapter 5 that the *ontological turn*, which Elsaesser takes to be a trademark of contemporary (world) cinema, had in fact already taken place before the digital turn.

Yet I am not merely claiming that cinema continues with business as usual. Based on a combined reading of D. N. Rodowick and Thomas Elsaesser’s interpretations of the “virtual life of film” as well as my own experiences in viewing, researching, and teaching contemporary world cinema, I will suggest that “post-photographic” or “post-epistemological film” (the phrases are Elsaesser’s) provides a different—say new—expression to a fall that has already happened.

The second challenge has already surfaced in my response to the first. Along with the philosophical/ontological/digital turn, world cinema added another turn of the screw in the 1990s. Until then, world cinema had primarily been conceived as either an international third (world) cinema or a succession of national cinemas and new waves (a second cinema as counted by the third), each of which self-identified over and against Hollywood. The global turn has led to a more transnationally organized film world, which does not conceive of itself over



and against Hollywood as such; indeed, it includes many films from its more mainstream directors (and not only its renegades, as in the case of the Hollywood Renaissance). Or perhaps the dichotomy between mainstream popular movies and independent art films (or between a first, second and third cinema) is no longer the most pertinent one to draw (though Cavell already suggested as much in the 1970s).<sup>5</sup>

Although the “new cinemas” that have appeared with the global turn are still often identified by country—such as the New Argentine Cinema and the New Turkish Cinema, from which I discuss examples in the last chapter—the filmmakers associated with them actively pursue transnational forms of production, exhibition, and distribution. More important, perhaps, are the various shared or overlapping aesthetic, theoretical, and thematic concerns that traverse these new cinemas. These tend to be self-reflective: films aiming at a global (niche) audience often feature themes such as migration, physical and metaphysical border crossing, queer sexuality, and other tropes that undermine dichotomies in various ways. Digitization and the idea of simulated minds and worlds also prevail. In line with this, world cinema has, since the 1990s, explored new or newly reconceived subgenres such as the following:

- Border- and genre-crossing road movies (*Leningrad Cowboys Go America*, dir. Aki Kaurismäki, 1989; *Happy Together*, dir. Wong Kar-wai, 1997; *Y Tu Mamá También*, dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2001)
- Mafia and gangster movies centering on transnationally organized crime and human trafficking (*Gomorra*, dir. Matteo Garrone, 2008; *Sin Nombre*, dir. Cary Jôji Fukunaga 2009; *Dheepan*, dir. Jacques Audiard, 2015)
- Home-invasion films (*Funny Games*, dir. Michael Haneke, 1997, USA remake 2007; *Lost Highway* (dir. David Lynch, 1997; *3-Iron*, dir. Kim Ki-duk, 2004)

While such genres in world cinema thus tend to undermine dichotomies, the simultaneous digital turn could also be said to reintroduce a new one. For, on the one hand, we find big-budget movies that excel in spectacular, CGI-enhanced, 3D special effects—call it a cinema of simulation. On the other hand, the digital ushered a tendency toward a *new realism*. It acknowledges that the digital image may have attenuated

analogical causation, yet this, to put it in the words of Lúcia Nagib, “has not prevented filmmakers across the globe from resorting to the digital for realistic ends” (2011, 7). Nagib perceives a current “resistance to simulation,” not by avoiding but by embracing digital technology. Digital technology facilitates amateur or independent filmmakers in terms of both cost efficiency and bulky, cumbersome equipment, and thus it has “enabled the shooting of films on locations and among populations which would otherwise be inaccessible to audiovisual reproduction, as eloquently illustrated by the Inuit film *Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001)” (ibid.).

The global turn might be seen as a challenge to a Cavello-Deleuzian approach to cinema, given Cavell’s qualification, in the longer passage I cited above, of the mind on which photography impressed itself immediately and pervasively: it concerned “the European (including the American) mind.” I do not know whether other than European minds managed to avoid the fall into skepticism, although David Martin-Jones appears to imply as much in his discussion of the “masala-image.” Martin-Jones, to be sure, does not write about Cavell, but he applies the challenge of world cinemas to Deleuze, writing:

Approaching world cinemas, using Deleuze, requires care. To attempt to validate Deleuze’s ideas through their application to films from around the world would run the risk of imposing already Eurocentric conclusions onto cinemas that belong to very different, context-specific cultures and aesthetic traditions . . . Thus it is not the aim of this book to homogenize world cinemas, grouping together, for example, Argentine films with popular Indian movies as though they were all peas from the same pod. (2011, 2)

Even if I am yet to be convinced by Martin-Jones’s claim that Deleuze indeed draws “Eurocentric conclusions” (as well as by his suggestion that the categories he proposes to add to the movement and time image, such as the “attraction image” or the “masala image,” effectively call into question the “totalizing conclusions of Deleuze’s taxonomy”), I take his lead in warning (myself) against a homogenization of world cinemas (Martin-Jones 2011, 43). If I still group together, for example, an Argentine film with a Turkish one (chapter 6) “as though they were peas from the same pod,” it is precisely because they provide *locally specific expressions of global concerns*, as my allegorical reading of the films will show.

If cinema is not a homogenous phenomenon, and if the task of the film philosopher consists in drawing out concepts from the films themselves, as Cavell and Deleuze suggested and recent film scholarship is affirming, then the questions of selection and categorization of course become all the more important.

I selected four contemporary films for discussion, which I present in two comparative analyses (chapters 4 and 6), each pairing two films. Needless to say, these four films are not going to represent the whole of world cinema in the digital age, yet they work to bring together a matrix of concerns. Let me, by way of concluding this introduction, account for my choices.



The first comparative analysis, entitled “A Seem-less Digital Skepticism” (chapter 4), connects Jean-Pierre Jeunet’s *Amélie* (*Le fabuleux destin d’Amélie Poulain* 2001) to Werner Herzog’s *Grizzly Man* (2005). These films can be associated, respectively, with the two opposing tendencies in cinema ushered by the digital turn, discussed above. Whereas *Amélie* takes us in the direction of a fantasy world augmented through digital special effects, *Grizzly Man* exploits the new realism instigated by relatively manageable and affordable digital technologies. The protagonists of the respective films, Amélie Poulain (Audrey Tautou) and Timothy Treadwell, would seem to be antipodal characters as well, as can be gathered anecdotally by the brunette and blond renderings of the same striking coiffure (see figs. I.1 and I.2): one being a shy female waitress in Paris and the other a bold male adventurer in Alaska.



Figures I.1, I.2. Antipodal characters.

Both go a long way to support or protect others whom they perceive as particularly vulnerable or threatened. In so doing, however, one is withdrawing herself into privacy in the middle of a global capital, while the other reaches out for intimacy by isolating himself in a remote corner of the planet. Indeed, their “fabulous destinies,” and hence the tones of the films, could hardly lie further apart. Jeunet’s feel-good movie ends on such an excessively charming and romantic note—it is, as a *New York Times* critic wrote, such a sweet “cinematic bon-bon”—that “some people are going to insist on spitting it out” (Zalewski 2001). By contrast, Herzog’s film, which documents the actual life and death of a man eaten alive by one of the bears he set out to record and protect, reaches a point so gruesome that the filmmaker feels compelled to intervene. Yet what interests me in both *Amélie Poulain* and *Timothy Treadwell* is their shared tendency to conflate the fantastic and the real to the point of indiscernibility. I take this as a specific continuation—and variation—of cinematic skepticism, whose significance I will relate to the switch from analogue to digital exploited in both films: *Amélie* invites reflections on analog film in a crucially digital production, whereas *Grizzly Man* takes digital footage to heart in a docufiction shot in analog. Beyond mere material justifications, my analyses of the films serve to explore the political, ethical, and ontological ramifications of cinematic skepticism in light of this digital turn.

In that context, the pun of words in the title of this chapter indicates a dual concern. Both films, I argue, engage (or play with) the digital aesthetics of seamlessness, with a plasticity of the image replacing the cut. I then connect this seamless aesthetic to ideas associated with seeming or appearing. Both *Amélie* and *Grizzly Man* entertain such associations in specific ways. *Amélie*, for example, gives a Cavellian spin on Kant’s noumenal-phenomenal distinction when it toys with the idea that a photographic subject is neither a “thing-in-itself” (*Amélie* in the flesh) nor a mere appearance, which is given an additional spin by comparing the photograph to her appearance on an allegorical digital screen. The film also features the idea of seeming in the sense of make-believe, that is: of simulating, manipulating, directing, and controlling the manifestation of things. I will argue that the more *Amélie* engages in such efforts, the more she struggles with her sense of being screened from the world.

Herzog approaches such ideas from the opposite direction. The filmmaker is known for his career-long search for “authentic images” that go beyond the world of appearances. In relation to *Grizzly Man* specifically,

I will interpret Timothy Treadwell's effort to transcend the distinction between the animal and human worlds as an instantiation of a more generic desire for seamless border crossing, which is further expressed in efforts to blur lines between the worlds in front of and behind the camera, between a persona and a true self, between the staged world and the world as a stage. Yet Herzog, I further argue, gives Treadwell's efforts another spin and shows how we can interpret them in terms of drawing a skeptical conclusion rather than attempts at defeating the skeptic by transcending the limitations of the human.

Together, then, *Amélie* and *Grizzly Man* display a variety of efforts to tear down barriers that make the world—and our relation to it—seem more seamless.



The second case study concerns a comparative analysis of two films, both released in 2008, that start off with a hit-and-run accident. Traffic collisions are, of course, a staple in chase scenes and action films. Yet, for all their spectacular effects, most of these barely impact the lives of the people involved, least of all when interchangeable, numerical entities such as “cops” turn dozens of death-proof cars into heaps of scrap metal (as epitomized in *The Blues Brothers* (USA 1980) and its sequel *Blues Brothers 2000* (USA 2000), both directed by John Landis).

The opposite is the case with the films I single out for discussion, as indeed with so many contemporary films that we might well discover another subgenre of world cinema in what we could call the “collision film.” Accidents in these films have been stripped almost entirely of their spectacular value, focusing instead on the long aftermath of the seemingly minor event.<sup>6</sup> I find these accidents emblematic of contemporary experience. Even minor collisions raise questions about individual agents and their personal responsibility within complex networks of traffic systems. Far from being an expected consequence of a heroic escape from the law, the significance of the collision lies rather in the radical unpredictability and high degree of chance and randomness, combined with the sudden loss of control, not only over the car, but—survival permitting—over one's life. It opens up deeper fissures in family ties and touches on profound sociopolitical pressure points. The accidents in such films thus reach well beyond the significance of their own (literal and figurative) impact: they all-but-instantaneously reshuffle the premises

and promises of one's quotidian existence against the daunting scale of a global politics, calling for a reevaluation of the moral conditions under which it had been lived.<sup>7</sup>

Such is indeed the case with the films I single out for discussion: Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* (*La mujer sin cabeza* 2008) and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Three Monkeys* (*Üç Maymun* 2008). These films lend themselves particularly well for a comparative case study, as they share interesting formal qualities and unfold according to remarkably analogous plot developments. The respective car accidents themselves take place during the prologue of each film, though their exact nature is in both cases withheld from view. After this initial event, the main characters in both films lose their ability to act purposefully and seem withdrawn from the world. They find themselves caught, moreover, in a claustrophobic atmosphere surrounding their families, especially when their situations get further complicated by adulterous affairs and the mysterious presence of a drowned boy, while potentially incriminating traces are gradually being erased.

Focusing on their ethical implications, I aim to show that the films present *the threat of skepticism* in a specifically cinematographic manner. Both films significantly rely on what I will introduce as the *virtual point of view*, which at once expresses and challenges a sense of distance to the world. Yet *Three Monkeys* and *The Headless Woman* crucially differ in their use of narrative strategies and the ways in which they implicate the viewer (who, like the respective protagonists, becomes subject to manipulation). I will try to distill a new expression of cinematic skepticism from these stories and techniques.



A floor plan for this book, then, is as follows: After laying out how my concept of cinematic skepticism emerges from the interaction between Cavell and Deleuze's respective takes on film, and demonstrating how these takes in turn relate to the larger contexts of their philosophical oeuvres (chapter 1), I will present Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (*La règle du jeu*, 1939) as interpreted, respectively, by each of the film philosophers (chapter 2). Taken together, their analyses enable me to posit the film as holding the key to postphotographic developments in cinematic skepticism. Before looking more specifically at those developments through the comparative analysis of *Grizzly Man* and *Amélie* (chapter 4), I will insist

that Deleuze's call upon cinema to film *belief in this world* amounts to an embrace of the skeptical impetus rather than its defeat, an argument I will develop in conversation with film scholars claiming the contrary (chapter 3). The reason for my insistence will become apparent when I turn to recent work by Thomas Elsaesser and D. N. Rodowick (chapter 5), as it helps to counter their arguments that the digital and global turns bring about an ontological turn and an acceptance of skepticism. This is where I put forth my basic assumption, namely, that cinematic skepticism is refracted rather than replaced by the digital-global turn. In particular, the digital will to control information, intervene in narratives, and manipulate minds will provide additional turns of the skeptical screw. The digital dominance of culture is so profound that it impacts films that do not necessarily take digital (post)production to heart. In the final chapter (6), my second comparative analysis (of *The Headless Woman* and *Three Monkeys*) aims to show just how deep the digital rabbit hole goes and speculates on and where it leads—or perhaps fails to lead.