Introduction

Approaching Film with Nietzsche

Although Nietzsche's presence in American culture at the start of the twentieth century has been documented, his influence on early Hollywood cinema prior to the Second World War has gone entirely unnoticed.[1] One of the few mentions of Nietzsche in conjunction with classical Hollywood is the analysis of the films of Orson Welles offered by Deleuze. He calls Welles's work, which begins in 1941, a *precursor* to "a critique of veracity," which implies that the Nietzschean insight that "the ideal of the true was the most profound fiction, at the heart of the real, had not yet been discovered by cinema."[2] Similarly, when linking Nietzsche with director Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937), Cavell thinks the connection so unlikely that he wonders whether the connection might be mere chance and settles on the idea that they happened upon a shared idea because they are "each originals."[3] Many scholars have noted Nietzsche's explicit mention in *Baby Face* (1933), but it is often seen as an exceptional case that was heavily censored, because "1930s Hollywood just couldn't handle the philosophical overman, let alone the unashamedly promiscuous overwoman."[4] And so the conclusion that "Nietzsche's time had not yet come" is again reached.[5] The present work challenges this consensus.

Nietzsche's influence on film is suggested by Lea Jacobs's remarkable work *The Decline of Sentiment*, which details the turning of cinematic taste against the norms of "middle-class correctness and tact" and toward the naturalism of "explicit descriptions of sexual urges and encounters; an interest in the body and emphasis on the primacy of instincts; exploration

of the modern city or ugly industrial milieu that bore down and sometimes controlled the naturalistic protagonist."[6] It is telling that the people that Jacobs associates with this movement in culture—H. L. Mencken, Emma Goldman, Theodore Dreiser, Floyd Dell, Randolph Bourne, Carl Sandburg, Margaret Anderson, Ben Hecht, Van Wyck Brooks, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill, and Upton Sinclair—were all influenced by Nietzsche's challenge to traditional values. "The Nietzschean creed," Mencken claims, is essentially "a counterblast to sentimentality" that lies at the heart of this shift in taste.[7] Yet this move toward naturalism in film and culture that Jacobs details was consistent with the humanistic morals and progressive politics of the time, while Nietzsche's ideal of the *Übermensch* indicates a more radical opposition to the "moribund gods" of the Victorian Age.[8] His thought suggests a darker, anti-humanistic, and amoral tradition, which was often used as proof of the error of naturalism.[9] The cinematic expressions of this challenging idea are especially valuable, because they show that it is not actually a valorization of a hateful, racist, misogynistic, and fascistic life. I will interpret the *Übermensch* as being an open-ended idea about human possibility that does not point us to a specific end but indicates the superhuman task of embracing both the relentless process of transformation and the inescapable hands of fate. This figure points to a conception of time itself that Nietzsche names the eternal recurrence of the same, which is cinematically expressed via images of remarkable individuals that are committed to both the tragedy and comedy of fate. Through such images, this cinematic tradition can be thought of as engaged in philosophizing via its ability to visualize a form of life that philosophy itself has been unable to adequately picture.

This cinematic tradition precedes and stands in juxtaposition to the genres outlined by Cavell, the comedies of remarriage and the melodramas of the unknown woman. Both sets of films identified by Cavell are "working out the problematic of self-reliance and conformity."[10] They depict a pursuit of happiness and integrity via "a step into selfhood or into nationhood," as well as the task of becoming human through "the virtues that allow you to become at home in the world, to establish the world as a home," either through (re)marriage or through the achievement of self-esteem and selfhood.[11] In both sets of films, Cavell argues that the principal characters (who are women) demand a life that, "if it is to be shared," must be one of "equality, mutual education, transfiguration, [and] playfulness," a vision he describes as "Emersonian perfectionism."[12] The Nietzschean tradition of film that I will explore offers a more radical conception of "a singular life," by which I mean that the *Übermensch*

is an exception to morality, law, reason, and norms like equality and mutuality that define and make possible human society.[13] We can see the more egalitarian cinema that Cavell explores as a response to the cinema and philosophies of the earlier part of the century that led many poets, playwrights, and philosophers down a dark path toward futurism, nihilism, pessimism, eugenics, and fascism. While I do not believe that Nietzschean philosophy necessarily leads to those outcomes, the potential for them was dangerous enough that the *Übermensch* had to be either condemned, humanized, or entirely ignored in the films that followed the Nietzschean cinematic tradition that flourished in the early and mid-1930s. In other words, the genres that Cavell explores offer us accounts of how to marry again and be human again in the wake of the earlier cinematic tradition of the *Übermensch*.

According to Rancière, Schopenhauer and Wagner influenced a tradition in late nineteenth-century literature, "the era of Ibsen, Strindberg, and Maupassant," where "beneath life's schemes" there "lies the nihilistic logic of illusion as the real truth of existence."[14] These Nietzschean films place this subterranean logic on the visual surface of the world. Even the self is shown to be an illusion, a consequence of what Jules de Gaultier called "Bovarysm" or the fact that "any living reality" exists only insofar as it conceives itself otherwise than it is and continually differentiates itself.[15] Rather than the search for selfhood and equality that Cavell details in films of the late 1930s and 1940s, the Nietzschean film tradition of the early 1930s points to a life of immoral passions and self-overcoming, where deception and illusion are how meaning, reality, and selfhood are created only to then be destroyed by the *Übermenschen* themselves and by fate. Scholars have been skeptical that such a tradition could find a footing in classical Hollywood cinema. According to Rancière, there is "a gap between literary nihilism and the straightforward faith of cinematic artifice," which kept the former from making its way onto film.[16] This is a strange remark given the tradition of German Expressionist filmmaking. My sense is that faith in cinematic realism is also disrupted by the American films that are my focus, because they offer a metaphysical challenge to the very distinction between reality and artifice.

Yet before delving deeply into the dialogue between Nietzschean philosophy and film philosophy, it should be noted that there is not a single thing called "Nietzschean philosophy." There are many different and conflicting accounts of what his texts mean. I will be using an interpretation of Nietzsche that makes the most sense of the Hollywood films that are my focus. This interpretation can be found among many public

intellectuals and artists during this era, and it is admittedly more cynical, inegalitarian, and more "metaphysical" than the academic interpretations of his thought that would follow the Second World War. Much of mid- to late-twentieth century Nietzsche interpretation is a response to the perceived dangers of this and other interpretations that dominated the early part of the century. While I will be discussing this iconoclastic interpretation of Nietzsche *as if* it were the truth of Nietzsche, this is not because I aim to defend it as the one and only true interpretation. Rather it is simply the one that is most historically relevant to the films that I will be discussing.

In presenting this vision of Nietzsche's thought, I am also not advocating for the philosophy of the *Übermensch* or for a rejection of morality and truth. My aim is descriptive and historical. These Nietzschean ideas aid us in better appreciating the depth of these works of art. By elaborating the "superhuman" visions in the films of this era, we are able to see how they challenge traditional moral and humanistic norms, and they will act as illustrations of a Nietzschean film aesthetics. I see Nietzschean film aesthetics as resisting, by showing it to be subjectively and "politically compromised," what Devereaux calls the "narrative illusionism" that places the viewer in a passive position to receive the truth revealed by the director and the camera.[17] While it is often held that classical Hollywood film is dominated by this narrative illusionism and, thus, fails to announce itself "as a fiction, a construct," I maintain that the Nietzschean films that are my focus adopt the aestheticist position that reality is the construction of fictions.[18] Furthermore, they avoid the passivity that results from "playing to our existing desires, fantasies and fears" by exposing the "human, all too human" elements of our impulses and ideals and by presenting us with inhuman and superhuman alternatives.[19] Cinema's artificial world allows it to explore socially destructive, contradictory, and illiberal value systems, to detach from the ordinary and the everyday in order to become farce and tragicomedy. It reveals and revels in its artificiality. Furthermore, during this time of monumental advances in cinematic technique and technology, I think it plausible that the widespread endorsement of Nietzsche as *the* philosopher of the age informed how these writers and directors thought of the artistic medium of film itself. Film, as illusionism par excellence that announces itself as such, could match Nietzsche's challenge to truth, morality, and the metaphysics of Being by creating a truly Dionysian art. Such art captures the human being's capacity to embrace the destructiveness of fate, the reliance of life on forgetting and deception, and the ceaselessness of

change. Thus, to expose this Nietzschean tradition in film is to offer a challenge to what, following Bordwell, is called the model of "classical Hollywood film."[20]

Many readers will still be surprised by the idea that Nietzsche had a pervasive influence on Hollywood film prior to 1938. Part of that surprise can be traced to the opinion that Cavell continually resists. "Philosophy and Hollywood movies occupy separate cultural intentions, with nothing to say across their border, indeed with not so much as a border between them."[21] The preconception that Hollywood films are little more than escapes from serious philosophical reflection on our existential predicament has been weakened by Cavell's texts and other more recent studies, but it still persists. We would not see the same incredulity if my thesis were that Nietzsche's philosophy infused German films from the same era. After all, what Eisner calls the core of Expressionist film-making obviously has deep affinities with Nietzschean thought: "Human life, transcending the individual, participates in the life of the universe; our hearts bear with the rhythm of the world itself and are linked with everything that happens: the cosmos is our lung. Man has ceased to be an individual tied to concepts of duty, morality, family and society: the Expressionist's life breaks the bounds of petty logic and causality. Free from all bourgeois petty remorse, admitting nothing but the prodigious barometer of his sensibility, he commits himself to his impulses."[22] It is actually surprising that no book-length study of Nietzsche's influence on German film has yet to emerge.[23] If I were to argue that the popularity of Nietzsche's philosophy in France had a profound influence on its traditions of *Lebensphilosophie* and avant-garde aesthetics, which inspired both cinema and cinematic criticism in that country, then there would be little resistance.[24] Again, it is more remarkable that no one has actually argued for this in significant detail.

Skeptics of the merits of forging this connection between Nietzsche and major Hollywood films of the era are perhaps unaware of how widespread Nietzsche's ideas were and how central they were to a series of debates in international politics, psychology, sociology, education, biology, and the arts. German-language magazines and newspapers in America began transmitting Nietzsche's thought to the over two million German immigrants in America in the 1890s, a group that remained the largest population of non-English immigrants through the 1910s, nearly equal to the number of immigrants from the whole of the British Isles. Nietzsche's works began being translated into English as early as 1896, and several volumes appeared before this initial translation project was abandoned.

It was then taken up again by Oscar Levy, who oversaw a complete eighteen-volume edition that was published by 1913. As Levy notes in the opening essay of the eighteenth volume of this edition, this was "the most complete and voluminous translation of any foreign philosopher into the English language."[25] The first monograph on Nietzsche published in America was by Grace Neal Dolson in 1901. She justified her study by the rather hesitant remark that "in some way Nietzsche appeals to the thought of the time."[26] What she did not say was that Nietzsche was already the most widely read philosopher in Germany, a full-blown "public event."[27] Several years earlier English authors were already speaking of a "Nietzsche vogue," and not long after Dolson's book there was a full-scale "Nietzsche revival" taking place in the English-speaking world.[28] In 1913, Paul Elmer More remarked that "if the number of books written about a subject is any proof of interest in it, Nietzsche must have become one of the most popular of authors among Englishmen and Americans."[29] Nietzsche's influence was not halted by World War I, leading Dolson to remark in 1918 that some of his ideas had "permeated every civilized country and greet one at every turn."[30] Yet Nietzsche's influence did wane in England and France after the First World War, while it continued to flourish in America and in Hollywood until around 1938, when the dangers of German aggression, anti-Semitism, and talk of supermen were recognized as existential threats to the world. Not even the Leopold and Loeb murder case of 1924, with its well-publicized arguments equating Nietzsche's philosophy with murder, was able to staunch the appeal of his thought.[31] Ultimately, this "cult of Nietzsche" was associated with a diverse and influential collection of writers that would inspire, directly and indirectly, many significant Hollywood films.[32]

While the appearance of several key concepts from Nietzsche's philosophy will be explored in this work, the one that dominated his early reception was the *Übermensch*. Early in the first wave of his reception in America, many argued that he offered no philosophical system. "The superman is the crowning stone in the whole fabric of Nietzsche's beliefs and teachings," which reduced simply to a "a kind of titanism, which has had a very broad sway in art."[33] One might immediately worry whether it is a specifically Nietzschean concept of the *Übermensch* in these films, rather than an idea inspired simply by mythic heroes, the cult of genius and Romantic hero worship, or Emerson's praise of "representative men." Walter Kaufmann argues that Nietzsche gets the concept from Goethe,[34] while others have found the idea to be an anodyne restatement of the Aristotelian notion of the *meglopsychia*.[35] Leo Berg's 1897 book *Der Über-*

mensch in der modernen Litteratur spends more time discussing the sources of the idea in Kierkegaard, Carlyle, Emerson, Goethe, and Renan than in Nietzsche.[36] Yet it was Nietzsche's thought that refined the idea from mere vagaries about geniuses and heroes into something that challenged the very notion of what it means to be human. One of the reasons it is the specifically *Nietzschean* superhumanity found in these films is that what one finds is not a hero or genius who, for example, redeems civilization, culture, selfhood, the truth, beauty, morality, or the community. Instead, we find a character capable of a previously unimaginable undermining of traditional values associated with human society and culture. This seems to be Nietzsche's unique contribution, which, in Derrida's words, is a "stepping outside the human" and which is expressed in a form of art "that would be *unheimlich* [uncanny] because in this art one would find at home (*zuhause*) these apparently inhuman things" that challenge our notion of the self and the oppositional limits that sustain it.[37] The ways in which these Nietzschean films present us, both formally and narratively, with *unheimlich* and *unmenschlich* images will be central to understanding this cinematic tradition and the aesthetic that governs it.

What is the *Übermensch*? For many scholars, this idea is less about overcoming *the human* and more about overcoming the beast or the herd. Kaufmann argues for a conception of the *Übermensch* as simply "the man who has overcome himself" and achieved "unique individuality."[38] It is reassuring and non-threatening to think that this ideal refers to just "our true self" acquired through "self-integration, self-creation and self-mastery."[39] To be "beyond-humanity" apparently means simply to be a person who has organized their passions and given their character style. This view is not much different from the view of Danto, who argues that about all that can be said about the *Übermensch* is that it is "a joyous, guiltless, free human being, in possession of instinctual drives which do not overpower him."[40] Do such ideas really do justice to the idea that "Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping. . . . he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an *overture* and a *going under*" (*Z* Prologue §4, emphasis in original)? The idea of the joyous human is given a more exhaustive treatment by Richard Schacht, who sees the *Übermensch* as a person who is highly cultivated and who brings about a higher level of culture through their creativity: "Overflowing vitality and great health; powerful affects and the ability to control and direct them; high spirituality and refinement of sensibility and manners; inde-

pendence of mind and action; the capacity to befriend and to respect and disdain and deal justly with others as they warrant; intellectual honesty and astuteness; the strength to be undaunted by suffering and disillusionment; persistence in self-overcoming; the resources to undertake and follow through on the most demanding of tasks; and the ability to love and esteem, and above all to create—this configuration of qualities well warrants identification as the consummation of human existence."[41] Undoubtedly these notions can be found being praised at different times in Nietzsche's works, but such a description is strangely compatible with a variety of humanistic ethical programs. It certainly does not suggest a radical rejection of the entire Western moral tradition. For Schacht, this figure transcends the "merely animal" and the "all-too-human."[42] But one might wonder: Why did Nietzsche call it the *Übermensch* rather than the *Übertier*, the beyond-animal? The picture of Nietzsche's ideal that I will be utilizing is one that refuses to offer a prescriptive, general ethics, to support traditional pro-social values, or to simply endorse a list of human virtues. What is beyond the human is also beyond comprehension through such mundane concepts. It remains the idea of a limit and a gesture to something beyond it. Perhaps our reflections on this idea will lead us toward the humanistic virtues that Schacht describes, but that outcome is not equivalent to the *Übermensch*.

The conception of the "beyond human" that I will be utilizing is seen when, for example, A. R. Orage states that the *Übermensch* is the "earthly end" to replace all "other-worldly ends," which has "never existed on earth."[43] He argues that if the *Übermensch* is to the human what the human is to the tiger, then using human traits to speculate on that future state is as absurd as understanding the human to be "a tiger writ large."[44] The *Übermensch* is an ideal that contains multiple visions of how life may "become ever and ever more moving, more splendid, more Dionysian" and may strive toward a self- and species-overcoming, thus making "life more tragic" by enlarging "the will of man" to the point that it engages in "conflict with gods."[45] The beyond-human is a symbol of an unknown future to which we have to remain continually open. It is a promissory note of a new culture and a new set of values.[46] The *Übermensch* is a goal, an ever-becoming but never-being future to which we are directed but that is always deferred (*WP* §1001). This is not a goal that we as individuals can hope to achieve. All humanity will ever be is a "bridge" or a "herald of the lightning" (*Z* Prologue §4). The *Übermensch* is a "metaphor" intended to replace the concept of god or any other organizing principle of human life

and society that has had the enervating result of "an overall diminution, a value diminution of the type man" (*WP* §866). The superhuman is one who unifies with creative, cosmic becoming and not with a reductive notion of nature thought as a return to animal impulses. This non-prescriptive idea of a form of life is committed to the pursuit of great things, to remarkable transformations of morals, society, and selfhood, often with tragic outcomes.[47] Nietzsche thinks that we as a species require such an aim, which he identifies through a trifecta of ideas: eternal recurrence of the same, the love of fate (*amor fati*), and the *Übermensch*.[48] This approach to the *Übermensch* is expressed on film, I maintain, via inhuman worlds where the individual is subsumed (even rushes headlong) into and embraces the impersonal forces of fate. *Fate* is just another word for time, understood as the fact that "everything becomes and recurs eternally" (*WP* §1058). Such a view necessarily challenges classical conceptions of Hollywood filmmaking, which supposedly gained "full formulation in 1917" and stabilized in the 1920s.[49] That classical model relies on a common-sense causal structure, understandable characters with rational psychologies, and a humanistic and realistic worldview that results in passive spectatorship. Yet the ordinary assumptions that underlie these components are notoriously challenged by Nietzsche's philosophy.

Placing Nietzsche alongside Hollywood film requires us to confront the fact that Nietzsche himself thought poorly of the theater and surely would have thought the same about cinema.

> What is the theater to me? What, the convulsions of [Wagner's] "moral" ecstasies which give the people—and who is not "people"?—satisfaction? What, the whole gesture hocus-pocus of the actor? It is plain that I am essentially anti-theatrical: confronted with the theater, this mass art par excellence, I feel that profound scorn at the bottom of my soul which every artist today feels. . . .
>
> No one brings along the finest senses of his art to the theater, least of all the artist who works for the theater—solitude is lacking; whatever is perfect suffers no witnesses. In the theater one becomes people, herd, female, Pharisee, voting cattle, patron, idiot—Wagnerian: even the most personal conscience is vanquished by the leveling magic of the great number; the neighbor reigns, one becomes a mere neighbor. (*NCW* "Where I Offer Objections"; *GS* §368)

While this foreshadows well-known criticisms of Hollywood films as mere entertainment, Nietzsche does not give us a reason to think that theater or film *must* give rise to this "leveling magic." By being comforting rather than challenging, the theater gives rise to passivity and ease. Such art is in the service of "declining life," but there certainly is art, even theater and cinema, that is in the service of "growing" life or the Dionysian "*overfullness* of life" (*NCW* "We Antipodes," emphasis in original). Cinema, to the extent that it is able, must, as Nietzsche once said of history, "stand in the service of life," which means to stand "in the service of an unhistorical power" and, we might add, of an uncinematic, impersonal, and unethical power that is called fate (*UM* 2 §1).[50] Life for Nietzsche is "existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: '*the eternal recurrence*'" (*WP* §55, emphasis in original). He would agree with Devereaux's call for cinematic art that creates a "critical spectator," who is "less likely to be victimized by the text."[51] Yet cinema in the service of life is more than merely critical. It imagines the possibility of embracing the cosmic course of our lives and, thereby, becoming absorbed in grand, dangerous, and revolutionary tasks. If cinema is capable of this, then we must say that the films themselves, through their "use of images, sounds, montage, narration, the conversion of bodies and words into forms, the regulation of duration," are able "to fashion our reception, to mould our perception" and, thereby, arm us with tools to actively and critically turn life itself into artifice, masquerade, dangerous experimentation, and joyous playing with fate.[52]

Nietzsche was aligned with the modernist idea that the very foundation of life is the creative urge. In the scholarship of the day, it was recognized that Nietzsche adopts a philosophy of masks that holds that the "only thing certain . . . is Life itself," which implies that one ought to be "continuously experimenting with life, with ideas, with himself."[53] When Nietzsche describes an aesthetic model of life, it is through the recognition that "the superficiality of existence is its essence" and that everything profound is just a "veil" (*GS* §64). "Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us; we simply can do no other" (*GS* P §3). The application of this idea to film is striking. Film quite literally transforms life into light. Cinematic realism is here reversed. Rather than being the mere appearance of real life, "real" life is nothing but the cinematization of existence, the conversion of our Being into light and appearance. If we call our construction of meanings, images, and self-interpretations "appearances" or "veils," then we should also say that they are both a

phantasmagoric revelation of "truth" and the continual denial of truth for the sake of deceptions that we can call self-invention. The self mirrors what Comolli calls the "*fictional fatality*" of cinema, its deep ambiguity, and its placing us into "an endless tourniquet where 'true' and 'false,' nature and artifice, spontaneity and preparation, freedom and work are brought together without ceasing to be opposed to each other" (emphasis in original):[54] "The screen is not a window, and if the cinema shows, it also hides. It opens and shuts. It inscribes a dissemblance within resemblance, and this is why it constitutes a lure. The screen is ambiguous. Outside-inside. Front-back. Bright-dark. Surface-depth."[55] When we think of the metaphor of converting life to light and flame, we must recognize that this conversion is not the creation of a representation that captures some pre-existing reality. Rather, as Nietzsche says, it is a transformation of *all that we* are, without remainder, because all that we are is the creative process of becoming.

Given this aesthetic conception of life and Nietzsche's famous criticisms of the illusoriness of traditional metaphysical and epistemological categories, one might well think that if classical Hollywood contains such a Nietzschean vision, then it would align rather well with Cavell's notion that film is "a moving image of skepticism."[56] According to Cavell, the "photographic basis of movies" results in "an artistically unheard of relation between the presence and absence of its objects"; that is, film and photography "transcribe" the existence of things, but those things do not actually exist before us, and yet our senses are satisfied with what is given.[57] The modern mind is plagued by skepticism, in which we are (or at least take ourselves to be) distanced from what is real, and modern philosophy and art can be thought of as our efforts to recover ourselves and the world from this situation.[58]

> At some point the unhinging of our consciousness from the world interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world. Then our subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation. The route to conviction in reality was through the acknowledgment of that endless presence of self. What is called expressionism is one possibility of representing this acknowledgement. But it would, I think, be truer to think of expressionism as a representation of our *response* to this new fact of our condition—our terror of ourselves in isolation—rather than as a representation of the world from within the condition of isolation itself. It

> would, to that extent, not be a new mastery of fate by creating selfhood against no matter what the odds; it would be the sealing of the self's fate by theatricalizing it. Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneously granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art. Apart from this wish and its achievement, art is exhibition.[59]

Cavell explicitly says that "what we wish to see . . . is the world itself—that is to say, everything" and that modern philosophy, Nietzsche included, says that this is "beyond our reach metaphysically."[60] Modern skepticism is a "new realization of . . . human distance from the world, or some withdrawal of the world, which philosophy interprets as a limitation in our capacity for knowing the world."[61]

I do not actually think that Nietzsche is overly concerned with this skeptical problem nor subject to it. Nietzsche's perspectivism holds that truths are relative to forms of life and that what we call *ultimate truths* are simply "*irrefutable* errors" (*GS* §265, emphasis in original).[62] Beneath all truth claims are value systems. "Truths" began as metaphors and illusions in the service of life, but this has been forgotten (*PT* p. 84). Thus, any number of conflicting "truths" are "*applicable* to life," resulting in a sort of "skepticism," which he calls a "noble and frivolous tolerance" of different truths (*GS* §100; *BGE* §46; see also *GS* §358, emphasis in original). Nietzsche would agree with Merleau-Ponty that "ambiguity is of the essence of human existence."[63] This is not a concession to skepticism as it does not deny that such irrefutable errors do not get at some aspect of reality that is relevant to that value system. But this is but one view on the world among many. The screen reflects this ambiguity, the multiplicity of perspectives, which is a feature of all expression, perception, and the human body itself. Contrary to Nietzsche's noble perspectivism, an ignoble and intolerant skepticism comes about as a pessimistic reaction to this multiplicity and partiality of truth. Rather than acknowledging perspectivism as the very foundation of meaning, ignoble skepticism maintains that there can be no meaning among this plurality, ambiguity, and partiality. Perspectivism exists not because of some separation from reality but because of the multiplicity within reality of which we are a part (and not apart). What Cavell calls skepticism is a dissatisfaction with finitude, contingency, and perspectivism. It dwells still in the shadow of god according to Nietzsche. It is a result of the failure to recognize the creative course of life that adheres to no rational system and admits of a multitude of truths and perspectives. Cavell believes that the foundation of the problem is a "natural or inevitable presentment of

the human mind" that manifests as "the human denial of the conditions of humanity," the motive and result of which he calls "the horror of being human itself."[64] This horror is a response to "human vulnerability, or, say, finitude," and Cavell would hold that the doctrine of the *Übermensch*, or beyond-human, perpetuates it.[65] But the beyond-human does not strive to overcome vulnerability or finitude. Instead, it is a superhuman embrace of these features of all life.

Cavell calls film a "moving image of skepticism" because it recreates that skeptical distance from the real world. It is not without reason that the metaphor for this distance is called the Cartesian Theater (or, we might say, Cartesian Cinema). By contrast, a more Nietzschean approach sees film as a *moving image of perspectivism*. Rather than entreating us with a philosophical error, Nietzschean aesthetics looks to how film disrupts the metaphysical, epistemological, and moral distinctions that enforce static notions of reality, selfhood, and humanity. Nietzsche's perspectivism has been described as the idea that "*all* doctrines and opinions are only partial and limited by a particular point of view" (emphasis in original), which also recognizes itself as opinion or assertation of a particular perspective that cannot be made absolute or definitive.[66] Famously, Nietzsche argues that the notion of a "true" or "real" world can be done away with and recognized as a sort of fable (*TI* IV). What that means, in the domain of art, is that we cannot devalue the things on film as unreal, nonexistent, or appearance. Nor is there any value in contrasting them to the more real and existent things outside of film, at least from an affective and value perspective. Art and its objects as embodiments of meaning can be as real and true as the world outside of art. Merleau-Ponty's conception of art and meaning has striking similarities with Nietzsche, and he argues that "a movie has meaning in the same way that a thing does," because both the film-world and the non-film-world present us with "that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know."[67] This aestheticization of "the real" is not due to the fact we are trapped in our own perceptual prison and isolated from others or from meaning. Quite the opposite is the case for Nietzsche.

In the following chapters, this brief description of Nietzschean film aesthetics will act as a foundation for my analysis of what these films do. And what they do, in addition to their explicit thematic intersection with the concepts of the *Übermensch*, the love of fate, and eternal recurrence of the same, is allow us to see them as constituting a sequence of multidimensional Nietzschean art objects.