

# Entering the Twilight Zone: From the Dystopic Cineosis to Drama

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**Abstract:** I provide initial musings of a critique of film through thought's impasse in relation to film to stress the movement from a dystopic cineosis to drama. The twilight zone, the moment of questioning, is a critique of film in two ways. I first situate thought's impasse in relation to it, evident in the uncritical proliferation of the technical reproduction and commodification of films within the culture industry, the dire landscape of film's commodification as a dystopic condition of relentless entertainment, and secondly a moment of discontent and change through the capacity of dystopian films to serve as a theater spectacle of the eternal return. The dystopic tenor is then focused on the actual potential of such films yet in relation to what I try to tie as the relation between the tensions that arise in viewing such a film: the subjective import of lived experience, the film industry's commodification, and the violence of the subversive logic on the projected narrative.

**Keywords:** film, dystopia, cineosis, drama

The American TV series *The Twilight Zone* first aired in 1959 and was radical because of its immense existential impact.<sup>1</sup> The episodes were thought-provoking and disturbing in transgressing classical narration that allowed space for philosophical thinking in reconceptualizing reality.<sup>2</sup> *The Twilight Zone* was ahead of its time, and it paved the way for generations of filmmakers, animators, and enthusiasts to follow in its footsteps. My choice of the title of this essay banks on the two words that make up this TV series title. The word “twilight” signals a sense of ambiguity referring literally to the moment when the sun is below the horizon either before its rise or after its set, conveying a stillness between day and night, the shift between blue and golden hours, while figuratively it symbolizes “an advanced stage of decay” alongside a consciousness weary of its own values.<sup>3</sup> For the second word, Richard Harvey observes that the word “zone” may be spatial or figurative.<sup>4</sup> A zone is an event of reconceptualizing, repeating, and renewing everyday experiences vis-à-vis social consciousness as a place of indifference and confusion while perspectives change in reference to particular planes of immanence in which thought travails.<sup>5</sup> A twilight zone thus is the realm of one’s mind and of the imagination, an experience beyond time and space, between light and

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexander E. Hooke and Heather L. Rivera, “Dare to Enter the Zone,” in *The Twilight Zone and Philosophy: A Dangerous Dimension to Visit*, ed. by Alexander E. Hooke and Heather L. Rivera (Chicago: Open Court, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See Lester H. Hunt, Introduction to *Philosophy in the Twilight Zone*, ed. by Noël Carroll and Lester H. Hunt (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel W. Conway, *Nietzsche’s Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Harvey, “Where is the Twilight Zone?,” in *Philosophy in the Twilight Zone*, 77-78 and 91.

<sup>5</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume II: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, trans. by John Moore, in *Critique of Everyday Life: The One Volume Edition*, (London: Verso, 2014) and François Zourabichvili, *Deleuze: A Philosophy of the Event* together with *The Vocabulary of Deleuze*, ed. by Gregg Lambert and Daniel W. Smith, trans. by Kieran Aarons (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 90-91.

shadow, faith and science, thing and idea, and fear and enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> In the context of this paper, I use this phrase not in direct reference to the TV series but to the discomfort when values are reconsidered that possibly point to action. The twilight zone in this essay is a critique of film as I first situate thought's impasse in relation to it, evident in the uncritical proliferation of the technical reproduction and commodification of films within the culture industry, and secondly a moment of discontent and possible change through the capacity of dystopian films to serve as a theater spectacle of the eternal return. One enters the twilight zone upon realization of the dystopic film landscape on the one hand and the emancipatory potential of dystopic narratives on the other. This essay argues the connection between *cineosis* and *drama*, the former referring to the entirety of the "filmic" experience while the latter in reference to action. Both concepts are further developed in this paper in which I first gloss over dystopia as a whole and contextualize it to cineosis, eventually situating the dystopic narrative parallel to the challenge of the eternal return to push for a view of drama or action, arguing that such type of films serves as theater spectacles of the return.

I begin this work with a prelude for how one may situate oneself within the twilight zone. This is essential as it is what I seek to map within the film industry's commodification as a micronarrative that will later be supplemented by a micronarrative of dystopic films. My working definition of a dystopia is "an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives."<sup>7</sup> A dystopic work is an artistic presentation, fashioned through the imagination, that banks on a conceivable "death" of an objective morality or even a transcendental regulator. This may take the form of supposing how the rules of nature are applied with digressions, e.g., concepts such as goodness and justice reserved only for a few, and

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<sup>6</sup> Similar ideas are contained in all the different introductions of the various series of *The Twilight Zone*, available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ9nvkoAgY>.

<sup>7</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. "dystopia" (2018), <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dystopia>.

particular (civil) laws or fundamental human rights are suspended. What is eerie in this is the serious ethical connotation when what is averse is accepted as the norm and develops into an event of dehumanization, fear, and even of thought's senselessness. It is wrong though to take dystopia as simply the opposite of a utopia or to talk about it as a utopic vision gone wrong.<sup>8</sup> Utopias and dystopias are not polar opposites but are rather determinations. A dystopia is a "dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare," that "beg for inclusion *together*."<sup>9</sup> This tension between them does not simply produce a delightful trance but uncovers a space that runs parallel to one's reality.<sup>10</sup> A dystopia banks on actual space references (such as countries, planets, or cultural locales), the latter implying a "fundamental materiality, a problematic social genealogy, a political practice impelled through an indissoluble link to production and reproduction of social life ... an essential connection between spatiality and being."<sup>11</sup> This locality provides grounds, even in the literal sense, for this current theorization for it is within the throngs of the actual space

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<sup>8</sup> See Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash, "Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time," introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, ed. by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis retained.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sigmund Freud, "Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" given at the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA on September 1909, *American Journal of Psychology* 21 (April 1910), Third Lecture, §13, <http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/h-freud-lectures.htm> and Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, trans. by Richard L. Collier, Jr. (New York: Continuum Press, 2002), 120. In Freud's theory, a person is characterized from three levels of consciousness (*id*, *ego*, and *superego*) realized through one's psychosexual development: The *id* maintains desires and impulses along with biological needs; the *ego* dominates with reasoning and is the conscious individual restricting carnal desires attained illogically; and the *superego* is formed through relations that conform the individual to society's standards. (See Freud, Second Lecture, §10) The familiarity of such a presented space may be a cause of delight in the sense of recognizing a familiar element, however, this may likewise be a peril since there is a lack of utmost wary for any hint of a repressive consciousness.

<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 119.

references that one may consider a social genealogy replete with pathological elements.

Arguably, dystopias stand as metaphors to aid us in interpreting how life could be. It would be a mistake, according to Nietzsche, to interpret these dream-like states as a reality devoid of the present.<sup>12</sup> The space in which a dystopia is presented supplies the topology of perhaps what Nietzsche figures as God's demise, not as a theological argument but a decial of a decadent, reactive life lived according to a dead morality.<sup>13</sup> It is a hyperbole, or perhaps even a parody, of our existence, yet is signified as a similar space between a dream and a nightmare. Nietzsche raises a critical thought experiment—What if God, or whatever idols in our mind, suddenly dies, how is life to be lived?—and conjures a dystopian episode following the transcendental's death: a demon chases each to one's loneliest loneliness and mockingly presents that life is to return.<sup>14</sup> Notice the kinetic import of the German "*nachschliche*" (from the infinitive *nachschleichen*) that Nietzsche uses, translated by Walter Kaufmann as "to steal after" or more intelligibly I would say "to creep after" or "to stalk" an individual into one's very own ownness (*einsamste Einsamkeit*).<sup>15</sup> And perhaps this scene is not all too foreign; to confront the death of this transcendental, one is brought to the very terrain of individuality—it is dark, and something or someone is running after you along a stretch of road. You try to outrun the prowler, but alas you find yourself cornered in a dark alley. You have to brace yourself as you turn to face the fiend. Nietzsche figures this demon stalking us into our respective twilight zones.

The foregoing two paragraphs formed my prelude for the dystopic terrain that I now map in a macro- and micronarrative of the film industry's

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<sup>12</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 107ff.

<sup>13</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.

<sup>14</sup> See *Ibid.*, 273-74.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000) §341.

commodification and dystopic films respectively. First, an introduction to film is necessary. A film historically belonged to the cinema, and *cinema* as a whole captures life and records movement, evident in similar words—a peak at life (*vitascopes*), at the reality of life (*animatography*), and the truth of movement (*Cinéma vérité*), yet “seems to thrive on privileged instants.”<sup>16</sup> These privileged instants, i.e., shots from selected angles, resulted in montages that compose an entire film, lasting the entire duration. Experiencing film entails a necessary immersion in its immanent logic: for the duration of the film, the subject must follow what is projected in that it is the viewing subjects themselves who connect the pictures.<sup>17</sup> A film is called a motion picture for this reason as “the determination of the whole” is made possible by the use of “cutting and false continuities” that follows Kant’s stress of causality as a concept of the mind.<sup>18</sup> This explains

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<sup>16</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: Movement-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5. *Cinéma* is attributed to the Lumière brothers’ invention of the *cinématographe*, from the Greek, *kinema* (movement), *kinein* (to move) and *graphein* (to write, record). See Sarah Pruitt, “The Lumière Brothers, Pioneers of Cinema,” *History.com* (2014), <<https://www.history.com/news/the-lumiere-brothers-pioneers-of-cinema>>, Jade Cuttle, “How the French Lumière Brothers Invented Cinema,” *Culture Trip* (2018), <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/france/articles/how-the-french-lumiere-brothers-invented-cinema/>>, Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “cinema”; <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/cinema>>, and Dictionary.com, s.v. “cinema”, <<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/cinema>>.

<sup>17</sup> In watching a film, one enters its plane of immanence and thinks according to this logic of *becoming*: the audience *becomes* the actors, the actors *become* the director, and the director *becomes* the film. (See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: Time-Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 153.) These multiple privileged instances, moments of becoming, portray the immanence of the film experience. To use Deleuze’s words, this is when movement- and time-image replace concepts. Explaining this further, it is beneficial to consider how John Mullarkey contextualizes Deleuze’s thoughts following Bergson’s that image is consciousness and reality. See John Mullarkey, “Gilles Deleuze,” in *Film, Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Felicity Colman (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 180.)

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 29. Following Kant’s discussion of the categories of reason, one understands that every effect is *necessarily* linked to an action in both space and time. See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998), 93-128, 153-59, 286-305.

why we are bewildered when an action is suspended from cause or effect or, with respect to a film, when a scene abruptly ends without a resolution despite the logic of the film itself not requiring such an effect or a cause. Such is the captivation of this art form (film) that requires both space and time for an individual to engage in it; thus, we notice a transition of logic: from everyday sensibility to one that is immanent in the film.<sup>19</sup> We become subjected to the film's own progression, its determination made possible by individual frames per second.

However, what this shift of logic also entails is the capitalization of the movie-viewer. Now I proceed with the dire situation of the film industry is presented. Deleuze critically observes a pathological element in this regard: the crisis of cinema is the crisis of ideas. He argues that cinema today has exhausted image's possibility to the point of the formation of clichés, mere repetitions of the trivial, which I will return to later. What is essential for now is the formation of a view coming from Deleuze's critique that a cinema of parody is the probable sequel to images of life, analogous to Barry Langford's striking claim that "'Hollywood' is a myth" which "blurs or brackets the relationship" between the movie colony in colorful California and the financial overseers in gloomy New York.<sup>20</sup> The bankruptcy of cinema for Deleuze is the bankruptcy of thought, requiring a self-evaluation to "no longer ask ourselves, 'What is cinema?' but 'What is philosophy?'"<sup>21</sup> This highlights the close link between film and thought. The formation of cinema for Deleuze arises from a consideration of both movement- and time-images, and conversely, cinema's degeneration stems from the radical dissociation of the two that is evident in the culture

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<sup>19</sup> Through the selection of images that compose a film – slices of both time and space—causality is framed, and movement is bounded by a reel of 24 frames per second. It is the subject who is thus left in awe at projected life, something even more seamless today through digital content, despite the connections arise from this same subject's mind and not in the film itself.

<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, 214 and Barry Langford, *Post-Classical Hollywood: Film Industry, Style and Ideology since 1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 280.

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industry, a good example perhaps is the sheer prolongation of time devoid of action as found in movie franchises in which the desire to extend the audience's captivation precedes the actual movement and time (colloquially may be considered as the narrative or story) within (of) the film.

Yet, every frame, shot, sequence, film, cycle of movies will coalesce or disperse through the differentiation of the actual and the de-differentiation of the virtual. And such coalescences or ungroundings will order the signs of which every such frame, etc. is composed. A sign will arise, making an image, avatar and domain dominant. All other images will circulate and dissipate around this sign. We will—in this way—be able to discover how a sign becomes the principle of the film, and so be able to say this film accords with such a sign. 'A film', writes Deleuze, 'is never made up of a single kind of image ... Nevertheless a film, at least in its most simple characteristics, always has one type of image which is dominant ... a point of view on the whole of the film ... itself a "reading" of the whole film' (C1: 70). Every film is an ascendancy of a sign of the cineosis.<sup>22</sup>

David Deamer provides here a succinct account of Deleuze's take on the entire movement within the film, the creation of a thought atmosphere that allows for the engagement of the two separate disciplines of film studies and philosophy. He employs the term "cineosis" to refer to "the taxonomic system, as a series and as a serial filmic encounter" and a semiotic of signs where "a univocal cinema diverging into two regimes of images explicated through serial multiplicity" can be located.<sup>23</sup> Images must be critically

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<sup>22</sup> David Deamer, *Deleuze's Cinema Books: Three Introductions to the Taxonomy of Images* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 173.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xxix and xxx.



engaged with lest we recognize a shift from movement- to time-image, not to signal a hierarchy of values between the two but to be wary of the wrong semiotic exchange, making the former image the content of the latter, subjecting pure movement to a commodified take on duration.

To misconstrue cineosis would therefore be to simply focus on the actual image rather than the dynamicity of the entire film experience. A good illustration of this is found in the film industry's commercialization in which the dystopic geography of this form of art may be found. Deleuze remarks that movement-images are unable to fully address the problems of the post-1945 world as they are marketed under the brand of "Hollywood." What initially began as a housing project named "Hollywoodland" during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eventually became the brand of the film industry.<sup>24</sup> Despite television's emergence after the Second World War, Hollywood dominated network broadcasting by supplying a great chunk of programs and primetime schedules that the post-1945 media landscape was dominated by the close link between the movie and the television.<sup>25</sup> Though film companies fought earnestly during the pre-war period, the advent of television and today's digital streaming fueled and continues to fuel the competition for viewers' attention. Film transitioned from Hollywood's Golden Age of the notable film studios of the Big Five (Loew's, Radio-Keith-Orpheum [RKO], Paramount, Warner Bros., and Fox/Twentieth Century-Fox) and the Little Three (Universal, Columbia and United Artists) to today's media conglomerates of ViacomCBS, Time Warner, Walt Disney Company, Sony, NBC Universal.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the majority of the world's media content—film companies, animation studios,

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<sup>24</sup> See Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2008), 3 and Julie Kuhlken, "Theodor Adorno," in *Film, Theory and Philosophy*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> See Langford, *Post-Classical Hollywood*, 30-32.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ibid.*, 3.

news outlets, magazines, radio stations, and streaming services—are controlled by just six or seven companies.<sup>27</sup>

A pious devotion to the screen paved the way for the dawn of a new specter that haunts the modern world. God has died, and in the divine wake, Capital assumed religious reverence;<sup>28</sup> the film does not meander far from Capital's leash for life on-screen is regulated by the market dictate, plagued by ideology. The reduction of the dynamicity of the cineosis within the film to simply a singular narrative, a singular repeating image is the bastardization of film; the movement-image is reduced to a cliché that is fetishized in the culture industry with film at its center, that throughout the whole film process—perspective, projection, narrative, editing—is ideology located.<sup>29</sup> Theodor Adorno provides a point of reference for the cliché as that which is able to provide some sense of ordering to what may be totally taken as irrational and unintelligible.<sup>30</sup> Clichés are repetitive characteristics or traits of scenes in particular or films at large that subconsciously provide a semblance of continuity among films or even from the physical to the virtual. The cliché in this sense may simply refer to an overused image within the film yet may be understood deeper as “‘economic interests’, our ‘ideological beliefs’ and our ‘psychological demands’.”<sup>31</sup> The reduction of cineosis simply to this is to eradicate the

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<sup>27</sup> See Ashley Lutz, “These 6 Corporations Control 90% Of The Media In America,” *Business Insider* (Jun 14, 2012), <https://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6>, and WebFX Team, “The 6 Companies That Own (Almost) All Media” (January 30, 2020), <https://www.webfx.com/blog/internet/the-6-companies-that-own-almost-all-media-infographic/>.

<sup>28</sup> See Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. by Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 1 and Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1: 1913-1926*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press, 1996), 288-291.

<sup>29</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), 100 and Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving-Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 274.

<sup>30</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, “How to Look at Television,” in *The Culture Industry*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Helen A. Fielding, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” in *Film, Theory and Philosophy*, 86.

tensions that may be formed on the multiple dimensions of which a film is created, not simply a single ideology or psychological leaning. This presents the dystopic landscape of film's topology: the brand "Hollywood" thrives on humanity's reverence for Capital, evident in today's fetish for the brand over the content, for more additions to a franchise or a longer plot. These are the idols in our religious devotion to Capital's films which Adorno and Horkheimer explain create a mirage of freedom within the industrialized culture.<sup>32</sup> The formation of a singular vision in a film is not what earns their ire, but the consolidation of culture and industry on the one hand and the people's lukewarm if not cordial reception of it on the other found in the fetish for more: the latest blockbuster trend in a film series, more gore and violence, and a bigger budget for special effects and the top stars. This reduction to mere economic terms, or simply the priority thereof, surfaces as an ideological reverence for a singular narrative of experiences, emotions, and desires.

Capital's repetition disallows differences; in encountering film, "we are already seized by something else," by the same, and its end does not constitute its event.<sup>33</sup> Capital assumes power over the imaginary space provided by the film, yet what "Hollywood" celebrates, I emphasize once again, is a fetish for more entertainment and at times distraction. Through this branding, we celebrate our own social and political cynicism but even worse, the inability to become critical through film's blurring of the demarcation between art and life.<sup>34</sup> Against the backdrop of the current topology of film, we situate ourselves in a twilight zone in our current capacity to reevaluate this type of ideologized relationship—in Capital, we recognize the fatigue of modernity: "the affect that paradoxically leaves us without affect, disaffected, disarmed in the face of elementary situations,

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<sup>32</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Concept of Enlightenment," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>33</sup> Zourabichvili, *Deleuze*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> See Kuhlken, "Theodor Adorno," 54-55.

powerless in the face of the universal rise of *clichés*.”<sup>35</sup> Our devotion to the film industry has made us cynical film spectators, weary of life and anesthetized by the *same*. We might see ourselves as nihilistic, exhausted from being human, rejuvenated only with the latest pompous surprise or the willingness to waste time even on a boring film.<sup>36</sup> Rather playfully, one now notices how the montage has achieved its purpose—the smoothness of transition has forged a singular perspective and consolidated understanding.<sup>37</sup> We witness this shift from the film’s immanent logic to a Capital’s blockbuster logic: “Hollywood” fetishized the need for each film to surpass its predecessor and be bombastic in both spending and humanity and thought have tolerated if not endorsed this arrival perhaps supplemented by film festivals, which either provide space for independent makers or simply fuels the brand’s fame.

Moving away from localizing film within Capital, we may turn our gaze to how film can represent both real and ideal, as simple or complex of both the ordinary and the exceptional.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps it is on this point that we may better understand Deleuze when he says that film-thought confronts its adversary: non-thought, non-sense, neither true nor false, lukewarm and apathetic.<sup>39</sup> Film emerges within the dialectic struggle of the theater and Capital, and its internal movement is comprised of the movement of images (*movement-image*) and its overcoming (*time-image*). Films present not just space (painting, photography, sculpture) or time (music, poetry) but employ the two. Though “Hollywood” is impressive both

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<sup>35</sup> Zourabichvili, *Deleuze*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, in *The Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, ed. by Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>37</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), 56-57.

<sup>38</sup> See Robert Stecker, “Film as Art,” *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, ed. by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (London: Routledge, 2009), 125.

<sup>39</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 1994), 153.

figurative and literally, *time-image* redirects our attention from the content to the failure of form. We are brought to reconsider the transference of subjectivity as our identification of the brand “Hollywood” as a mask of Capital, in hope of subjectivity’s assertion in the imagined space after the idol’s unmasking.

Through these attempts, we might understand Deleuze’s connotation of the film becoming conscious of itself against the backdrop of a dystopic landscape. The film contains in itself the possibility for thought to once more encounter the clichés yet with resistance to be numbed by them.<sup>40</sup> This becomes possible if the dynamicity of cineosis is recognized. Nietzsche’s reminder seems vital here: “only *peripatetic* thoughts have any value”<sup>41</sup> yet alongside a comment that “thought is action.”<sup>42</sup> Only thoughts in motion or conversely dynamic films signify our entry into the twilight zone, as possible events for a revaluation of the values pontificated by Capital. Against Capital’s dystopic backdrop is the movement of thoughts, wandering from concept to concept, event to event, within the film’s immanence.

I have so far sought to outline a seemingly dystopic film landscape with the aim of sharpening a critical insight into the possibility of resuscitating an emancipatory potential within such a dystopic event. From earlier presenting the dystopic landscape of film’s commodification, I now turn my attention to a micronarrative of a seemingly immanent movement within (specifically dystopic) films in order to bring closer cineosis and drama.

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<sup>40</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 160.

<sup>42</sup> ar vold., “transitioning from theater to film - ar vold CONVERSATION,” September 29, 2015, YouTube video, 10:30, September 8, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=9&v=3VVou\\_Y4TvU&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=9&v=3VVou_Y4TvU&feature=emb_title).

In a film, the cineosis emerges as a totality of the entire film experience, an amalgamation of the taxonomic features that comprise the duration of the reel. Expanding this further, cineosis thus bridges life on screen from that in reality. Rather than simply being a spectacle of enjoyment, a film garners the capacity to mirror reality to the extent of being an alternative or even a reprobate narrative. Here enters my treatment of the dystopian image that mirrors a possible sensibility (space and time), e.g., a dystopian film evokes events that happen in a detailed city or country within a specific timeframe. The ease a viewer has in identifying with what is projected on the screen comes from the affinities the space-time references have with one's very own. This drawing of affinities between the projected or, to use Deamer's employment of the adjectival term, filmic space and the current reference (the actual one) produces an overlap concerning its logical existence; a dystopic narrative is anthropomorphic in the sense that it banks on a nuance of living, a decadent or pathological aspect that is normalized and universalized, which may result in a shockingly uncanny inverse of the present.

Once more, I emphasize that a dystopia is not simply the inverse of a utopia for these two should rather be understood in terms of gradations as becoming-utopia or -dystopia without clear delineations; the utopic illustration of a highly technologized society can simply be an elaborate mask for the desire to eliminate what is real, living, and sentient.<sup>43</sup> Simply put the inverse of such conditions perhaps may be considered what is concurrent to the individual. This points to the violence latent within a dystopic narrative for life is projected to be lived on a single plane, i.e., a life of an exacerbated social pathology.<sup>44</sup> Dystopias resemble a society parallel to the present yet is violent thereof in amplifying certain decadent

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<sup>43</sup> See Daniel Cojocaru, *Violence and Dystopia: Mimesis and Sacrifice in Contemporary Western Dystopian Narratives* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 4-6.

<sup>44</sup> See J. M. Berger, "Mayhem Before Metaphor," *Let the Game Do Its Work: A Brief History of Dystopian Spectacles* (2020), Kindle.

conditions or situating life to the extreme of the absence of a specific ontological pre-given. Take for example, a person who starts burning books would only be considered by society as a deviant, however, when Guy Montag decides *not* to burn (all) books, *he* is considered that social deviant.<sup>45</sup> The disconcerting angst of following Montag's race for survival is quite parallel to the chilling state-sponsored 12-hour window in which society purges their extreme discontent in utmost violence.<sup>46</sup> In dystopian films, we have glimpses of a ruined world: a genetic disorder causes a near zombie apocalypse;<sup>47</sup> a world devastated because of unsustainable production and consumption;<sup>48</sup> or even Artificial Intelligence overtakes humanity and challenges us for life on earth.<sup>49</sup> These are but slices of how society may continue to exist following an inverse set of values, parallel to totalitarian regimes that suppress even the slightest deviancy (*1984*, *The Running Man*, *The Trial*, *Equilibrium*, *Strange Days*, and *V for Vendetta*); or even alternative stories to historical events (*The Soviet Story*, *The Man in the High Castle*, *Er ist wieder da*); technological advancement gone wrong, a race against the machine, the inability to address climate concerns that forces humanity to the brink of obliteration (*Blade Runner*, *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, *Waterworld*, *The Colony*); or research that causes our own downfall through the catastrophic mutations and even nuclear disruptions (*28 Days Later*, *Æon Flux*, *The Omega Man*, *Ultraviolet*, *Twelve Monkeys*).<sup>50</sup> The cineosis thus emerges as an interplay between

<sup>45</sup> Ramin Bahrani, dir., *Fahrenheit 451*, based on the novel by Ray Bradbury (1966).

<sup>46</sup> James DeMonaco, dir. *The Purge* (2013-2021).

<sup>47</sup> Paul W. S. Anderson, Alexander Witt, Russell Mulcahy, dir., *Resident Evil*, based on *Resident Evil* by Capcom (2002-2017).

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Stanton, dir., *WALL-E* (United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, dir., *The Matrix* (1999).

<sup>50</sup> See the following films, Michael Radford, dir., *1984*, based on the novel by George Orwell (1984), Paul Michael Glaser, dir., *The Running Man* (1987), Orson Welles, dir., *The Trial* (1962), Kurt Wimmer, dir., *Equilibrium* (2002), Kathryn Bigelow, dir., *Strange Days* (1995), James McTeigue, dir., *V for Vendetta* (2006), Edvins Snore, dir., *The Soviet Story* (2008), Frank Spotnitz, *The Man in the High Castle*, Amazon Prime Video (2015-2019),

one's own current condition and an image of life set tugged between a commercialized image within the culture industry and a projected violence against reality.

Dystopian films provide an image of a not-too-distant world gone wrong. Leaving the cinema, one is left to contemplate how these fictional appropriations of reality may indeed be tomorrow's outcome if a change is not done. The forgoing dovetails with Friedrich Nietzsche's own thought experiment that I presented in the previous section. The eternal return is humanity's greatest weight as one's idols have passed and life is to return in the exact same way—would you will it?<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche knows that this is a difficult task, nearly a “deadly poison for the herd,”<sup>52</sup> and the terror that awaits us in this twilight zone is our ambiguity of being our own splendor and destruction—humanity is the overture of existence but at the same time its eventual ruin.<sup>53</sup> In a better sense, Nietzsche presents us with another image: humanity as a rope between *Übermensch* and animal,<sup>54</sup> the dialectic between greatness and destruction, and the violence of this amalgamation. This in itself is a violent portrayal in that it goes contrary to accustomed epistemic frameworks and in a communal sense against social and even political order.<sup>55</sup> One may therefore say that dystopian films serve as a

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David Wnendt, dir., *Er ist wieder da*, based on the novel of David Wnendt (2015),\* Ridley Scott, dir., *Blade Runner* (1982), Joseph Sargent, dir., *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), Kevin Reynolds, dir., *Waterworld* (1995), Jeff Renfroe, dir., *The Colony* (2013), Danny Boyle, dir., *28 Days Later* (2002), Karyn Kusama, dir., *Æon Flux* (2005), Boris Sagal, dir., *The Omega Man*, based on the novel Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (1971), Kurt Wimmer, dir., *Ultraviolet* (2006), Terry Gilliam, dir., *Twelve Monkeys* (1996). \**Er ist wieder da* is not entirely considered a dystopian film, yet I include it for obvious political references with Hitler's acceptance in German media.

<sup>51</sup> See Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 273-274.

<sup>52</sup> Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. by Peter Palmer (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1981), 391.

<sup>53</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Prologue §4.

<sup>54</sup> See *Ibid.*, 8ff.

<sup>55</sup> See Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 122.



theater-spectacle of the eternal return through the tension that the cineosis is able to create in bringing closer to each other one's own interiority, as each individual carries the baggage of one's own lived experiences, and the oscillation within the dystopic film between pure commercialization and a projected violence against reality.

My use of the theater-spectacle trope comes from Nietzsche's admiration of the Dionysian ones in the Greek world. Through their terraced construction in concentric arcs, every attendee had the opportunity "quite literally to *overlook* the entire cultural world around him, and to imagine, as he looked with sated gaze, that he was a member of the chorus."<sup>56</sup> I emphasize the Greek root *theatron* that connotes both the seating area and the viewers themselves, originating in the need for a public meeting space alongside religious ceremonies.<sup>57</sup> What composes a theater is not merely the physical space but also the imagined one by those viewing what is on stage, especially as it assumes a cultic or religious overtone. In Nietzsche's context, the theater links the spaces between reality and imaginary and, tangibly, the observer to the actor. Here we already see a glimpse of the link between cineosis and drama (or literally, action) as a leap from spectator to actor (during the Bacchanalia), a self-mirroring of the Dionysiac. Nietzsche provides an account of this transition: The "Dionysiac excitement" transmits to the viewers the artistic ability to identify themselves immediately with the spirit of the area.<sup>58</sup> It is a cultic approach to *drama*, the Greek word literally meaning movement or action.<sup>59</sup> Dionysus becomes present through the imagined space, and the

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<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, trans. by Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>57</sup> See Kathryn Boshier, "To Dance in the Orchestra: A Circular Argument," in *Illinois Classical Studies* 33-34 (2008-2009): 2, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/illiclasstud.33-34.0001>.

<sup>58</sup> See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> *Drama* stems from *drāo* (Gk.), meaning "to do, make, act, perform." See Etymology Dictionary, s.v. "drama"; <https://www.etymonline.com/word/drama>.

artistic spectator mirrors this by conceiving to be part of the chorus in praise of the deity. It is a spectacle because it is presented before an individual yet eventually involves a deeper dimension that lures the spectator to become an (imagined) actor. Looking closer, we see that “the strength of this vision” of Dionysus’ imagined space “is great enough to render the spectator’s gaze insensitive and unresponsive to the impression of ‘reality’.”<sup>60</sup> One is lost in the bacchanalian frenzy through his perception of the on-stage tragedy and is brought to *drama*, a transference of roles, a test of one’s very character and will.

Capitalism’s pathological element is not the content but its form that allows the impasse in thinking that is evident when one’s thoughts cease to be peripatetic, i.e., becomes as immobile as one’s own body throughout and even after the film experience. The impasse occurs when one is not brought closer to confront the tensions that arise between the dystopic cineosis and the violence of the dystopic image. Deleuze assimilates the religious with the cinema: film reconnects humanity with the world.<sup>61</sup> In a playful manner, as the Dionysian enthuses the spectator so too does the latest blockbuster invigorate the annals of cinema. Besides the religious connotation of the Great Dionysia, what we must be critical of is the movements between actor and spectator and the shift from passivity to activity as one’s religiosity to Capital accompanies one’s action against the backdrop of Hollywood; experiencing Capital’s strong grasp of film forms part of realizing certain pathological elements in our life. thought must once again reign hold instead of a pseudo-cult of blind religious fanaticism that merely consumes Capital’s commodities. Thought must remain true to the world.<sup>62</sup> He posits this for humanity to think for ourselves how we may live life without the idols of space—physical or

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<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 43.

<sup>61</sup> See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 171-72.

<sup>62</sup> See Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 5-7, and *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. by Rüdiger Bittner, trans. by Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 38.

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imaginary. In a similar vein, we may declare “*Hollywood*” is dead, and we have killed it.

Returning to my earlier presentation of the kinetic import of the challenge of the eternal return, one notices the movement found in the experience of the twilight zone, yet the movement is not limited to simply the plunge toward a deeper experience of nihilism but a step toward a revaluation and its overcoming. I use the metaphor of the theater-spectacle and link it to dystopic films for the former evokes the topology of a movie viewer in relation to that which are part of historical narratives in projecting reality laden “with conceptual anchors that fix them to specific space-time coordinates”<sup>63</sup> that “place us directly in a terrifying world to alert us of the danger that the future holds if we do not recognize its symptoms in the present.”<sup>64</sup> These are what Nietzsche may consider *Versuchungen*—possibilities, tests, temptations—for us to consider how life may return and for us to reevaluate our existence for although our physical bodies are immobile in the film experience, one’s thoughts meander with the film’s own logic: a dystopic film serves as a theater-spectacle in subjecting the individual to its own tragic logic, and as emotions are heightened within the viewing experience, one becomes lost in the narrative. However, the *drama* does not end there, for as the film stops the viewer is immediately released from the film’s logic; proper logic then allows such questioning of what was viewed to occur: Is that real? Is it truly possible? The eternal return embraces the nihilistic experience of the death of this fetish, in the hope that thoughts become peripatetic.

To conclude this piece, I seek to emphasize this link between the dystopic cineosis and the drama which may come after. Once more, Nietzsche admonishes us that only peripatetic thoughts have value. It is due to this that I have sought in this paper to illustrate a double dystopic landscape, the first being the commodified film industry and the second

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<sup>63</sup> Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, “Utopia and Dystopia beyond Space and Time,” 4.

<sup>64</sup> Prakash, “Imaging the Modern City, Darkly,” 2.

being actual dystopic narratives projected onscreen, with the former serving as a macronarrative to film's emancipatory impulse that I tried to make evident through the situation of dystopic films as theater-spectacles. On the emergence of film from the violence between Capital and the theater, we ought to notice that the theater of presence is the theater of sacrament for the entire rite of life is projected.<sup>65</sup> Movement arises from mimesis to transformation in that from a film that merely mimics life, we apprehend its capacity for us to reconsider, transform, and even overcome (potentially decadent aspects of) life. It is a test of the mysterious idols that pontificate over these imagined spaces, formed through a dialectic between virtual and actual between past and present.<sup>66</sup> Dystopian films in this regard are capable of producing necessary illusions that the viewers, as they *overlook* similar to the Greek theaters, may take to their advantage, and we may parody Nietzsche's eternal return at this point: "What if some day or night a dystopian film were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness, and present to you: 'This is your life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more.'" Entering the twilight zone ought to be an event for affirmation—and affirmation of film's emancipatory potential within the industry at large and dystopian ones in relation to possible decadent forms of living. As a dystopian reality in the film is affirmed as a possibility, then life lived after watching is conversely revaluated—one enters the twilight zone and is brought from cineosis to drama.

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<sup>65</sup> See Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>66</sup> See Mullarkey, "Gilles Deleuze," 186.

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