



# From Mimesis to Disclosure: A Deleuzian Reading of Truth in Dystopian Cinema

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**Abstract:** Focusing on the core issue of the fictionality of cinema and the possibility of approaching truth, this article reexamines the relationship between film and truth from a philosophical perspective. Employing literature analysis and philosophical interpretation as its primary research methods, the study reviews Plato's critique of mimesis and the theory of Ideas, Aristotle's notion of poetic truth, Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics, and Deleuze's philosophy of cinema. Through close textual analysis and case studies of *The Truman Show* and *The Giver*, the article argues that film is not opposed to truth; rather, it constitutes a mode of truth-disclosure that takes aesthetic experience and the revelation of existence as its pathways.

**Keywords:** art, philosophy, aesthetics, film, truth

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## 1. Introduction

Since its emergence, cinema as an art form has never escaped the dialectical tension between fiction and reality, constantly oscillating between the reproduction of the real and the construction of the imaginary, between illusion and truth. Faced with this paradox, philosophy has been unable to avoid the fundamental question: can a fictive medium such as film lead to truth? In *The Republic*, Plato famously characterizes art as “a copy of a copy[1],” arguing that artistic images are far removed from the world of Ideas and prone to arousing irrational emotions that imprison the soul within the realm of sensory illusion. From Plato's perspective, cinema—as a mimetic reproduction of appearances—would seem to be an illusory medium that distances human beings from truth. However, thinkers such as Aristotle and Gadamer have offered affirmative responses to fiction in art, contending that fiction does not necessarily equate to falsehood and that a form of truth may, in fact, emerge through the fictive. Thus, cinema, rather than being opposed to truth, may constitute a unique path toward it.

## 2. The Fictionality of Cinema

In expounding the Analogy of the Divided Line[1], Plato distinguishes between the “visible realm” and the “intelligible realm,” arguing that reality is divided into two levels of being: the world of sensory appearances and the world of Ideas. The intelligible realm, although invisible, contains essences such as “Beauty itself” and “Justice itself,” which serve as the ontological foundation of all things. In contrast, the sensory world is the world we perceive through our senses—mutable, unstable, and ontologically inferior. On the basis of this metaphysical distinction, Plato develops his “threefold structure of imitation.” Using the example of a bed, he explains that there are three modes of production: the god who creates the Idea of the bed, the carpenter who imitates this Idea in crafting a physical bed, and the painter who imitates the carpenter's product through representation. [2]By analogy, film records the sensory world through the camera, yet these sensory objects are themselves imitations of Forms. Consequently, cinema is, in Platonic terms, a copy of a copy, a mere reproduction of appearances rather than an access to truth.

Plato questions whether the imitator “has true knowledge of the things he represents through his art, or whether he merely holds opinions derived from experience and hearsay.”[1] Within Plato's philosophical system, film, by virtue of being unable to grasp the truth of the intelligible realm, merely presents the sensory appearance of “what seems to be,” and thus belongs to the lowest level of existence. This “imitation of an imitation” (mimesis of mimesis) is not only ontologically deficient but also epistemologically misleading and ethically dangerous. As Plato states: “Painting, and imitation in general, produce a work far removed from truth; they associate with the part of the soul that is remote from reason, and they do not aim at what is true or healthy, but at pleasure.” [1]Art, according to Plato, gratifies the senses and arouses emotion, yet it lacks the capacity to guide the soul toward truth. On the contrary, it leads individuals to become captivated by illusion and imprisoned within the deceptive realm of images. From this Platonic viewpoint, cinema—being fundamentally mimetic—is ontologically inferior and divorced from truth, constructing only a virtual reality. *The Truman Show* vividly illustrates this Platonic predicament, portraying a world built entirely upon illusion that conceals rather than reveals reality.

The film *The Truman Show* tells the story of Truman, who, without his knowledge, has lived since childhood inside

a massive man-made television set, where his entire life is broadcast 24 hours a day as a reality show. Truman's existence within a meticulously constructed artificial world constitutes a powerful response to Plato's theory of mimesis. From the very beginning of the film, Truman's life appears to follow a mechanical routine: every morning he greets his neighbors with the same line—"Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and good night!"—their dog jumps on him at the same spot, and he encounters the same pair of twins who repeatedly block his way in order to advertise a product. Everything seems realistic, yet the repetitive theatricality reveals a scripted world disguised as ordinary life. Truman's wife frequently turns unnaturally toward the camera to promote household products such as kitchen appliances or lawn mowers, making Truman's daily life resemble not genuine experience but a continuous commercial performance. This carefully manufactured sense of "reality" paradoxically exposes the profound fictionality of Truman's world—as well as that of cinema itself. Just as Plato critiques mimetic art for merely presenting appearances rather than truth, *The Truman Show* reveals how images can simulate reality so convincingly that they seduce individuals into passively accepting illusion. If one fails to remain critically aware, one risks being captivated by sensory pleasure and emotional manipulation, thereby becoming trapped in a fabricated world that obscures truth rather than discloses it.

### 3. Fiction Does Not Equal Falsehood

From the previous discussion, it is clear that Plato regarded film (and art in general) as an imitation of an imitation, thereby positioning it as something far removed from truth. However, Aristotle offers a fundamental rebuttal to Plato's mimetic critique in his *Poetics*. He argues: "The distinction between the historian and the poet is not that the one writes in prose and the other in verse. The true difference is that the historian relates what has happened, while the poet describes what may happen. Hence poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history; for poetry speaks more of universals, whereas history speaks of particulars." [3] In other words, Aristotle maintains that poetry is closer to truth than history because it conveys universality rather than mere factuality. Although cinema is a fictional medium, what it reveals is not accidental or contingent events, but rather the universal structures of human action, emotion, and causality. Therefore, fiction in art is not equivalent to falsehood; on the contrary, it can function as a higher form of cognition that discloses truth through representation.

In our ordinary understanding, truth is often equated with a faithful reproduction of reality, much like the documentary form which strives to record events as they actually occurred. However, Gilles Deleuze argues that such a conception of truth is no longer adequate for understanding modern cinema. In *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, he writes: "We are no longer faced with an indirect image of time derived from movement; rather, we are confronted with a direct time-image that gives rise to movement. We are no longer dealing with an ordered time that may be disturbed by irregular movements, but with a disordered and empty time that generates movements which are necessarily 'irregular' and essentially 'false'... Yet the meaning of falsity has changed: it no longer constructs movement-images by extracting indirect images of time, but dismantles the relation of the direct time-image by extracting all possible movements." [4] This marks a fundamental shift in the structure of images—from the organic regime to the crystalline regime (image-cristal). Within this regime, the boundary between the real and the fictional is no longer clearly demarcated; rather, it becomes intertwined through temporal layering, reflections, and fractures, producing a coexistence and mutual exchange of reality and fiction. On this basis, Deleuze introduces the pivotal concept of the "power of the false" (*puissance du faux*), emphasizing that fiction in modern cinema is no longer synonymous with deception or lies. It is no longer concerned with externally "representing reality," nor does it presuppose a single, pre-existing "true world" that serves as the standard for evaluating images. Instead, fiction becomes a generative force—a power capable of producing truth. Consequently, the traditional logical equivalence of "fiction = falsehood" is rendered obsolete.

### 4. Awakening Within Illusion

Having examined the fictional nature of cinema and clarified that fiction does not necessarily imply falsehood, this section proceeds to argue that cinema also carries the possibility of leading toward truth. In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato presents the famous "Allegory of the Cave", a metaphor for the soul's ascent from illusion to truth: "Imagine human beings living in an underground cave-like dwelling, with an entrance open to the light. They have been there since childhood, their legs and necks chained so that they are unable to move, and they can only see in front of them, forced to gaze upon the wall of the cave. Behind them burns a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners runs a low wall, along which other people carry various artifacts. These objects cast shadows on the wall before the prisoners, and since these shadows are all they have ever seen, they take them for reality. If one prisoner were freed and compelled to turn around and leave the cave, he would at first suffer greatly; for having become accustomed to the shadows, he would be dazzled and pained by the light of the world

outside. Yet as he gradually grew accustomed to the sight of things above, he would realize that what he once took to be real were mere shadows of true beings. If he were then to return to the cave and attempt to enlighten the others, they would refuse to believe him, insisting that the shadows on the wall remain the only reality.” [5]

The film *The Giver* may be regarded as a contemporary reenactment of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave within a modern social context. Although both *The Giver* and *The Truman Show* construct artificially fabricated social environments in which the protagonists gradually awaken and ultimately “escape,” *The Giver* presents a more comprehensive philosophical trajectory. Its protagonist, Jonas, undergoes a fuller process of development: from imprisonment within illusion to the awakening of individual consciousness, then to a direct encounter with truth, and finally to returning to society with the responsibility of transformation. For this reason, this section employs *The Giver* as a representative case for further analysis.

*The Giver* portrays a seemingly utopian society in which war, pain, emotional fluctuation, personal memory, and even color have been eradicated in the name of achieving absolute order and social harmony. Within this community, every aspect of human life is subject to strict regulation: occupations, spouses, and even children are uniformly assigned by a governing body known as the Council of Elders. The protagonist, Jonas, is chosen to become the “Receiver of Memory,” a role through which he begins to inherit memories of the world before emotional suppression. Through the transmission of memory, Jonas experiences love, sorrow, color, music, and the full range of human emotion—experiences that awaken his consciousness and allow him to perceive the epistemological closure and latent cruelty underlying the so-called utopia. Realizing that the community’s order is maintained through the elimination of freedom and the concealment of truth, Jonas ultimately decides to escape, taking with him an infant who has been condemned to “release” (a euphemism for execution). His escape triggers the restoration of collective memory in the community, enabling people to once again perceive color and emotion.

The majority of the film is presented in monochrome, visually symbolizing a world devoid of emotional depth. The residents suppress their emotions through mandatory daily injections and live under rigidly standardized language and social regulations, creating the illusion of a perfectly stable community. Much like the prisoners in Plato’s cave, who are chained from childhood and can only see shadows cast on the wall—mistaking them for reality—the citizens in *The Giver* accept their constrained existence as the only possible world. It is not until Jonas begins receiving memories that he first experiences sensations beyond the limits of his conditioned perception: he sees color for the first time, feels the cold of snow, and confronts the brutal realities of war and death. These unprecedented experiences both astonish and unsettle him, producing confusion as well as existential awakening. As Plato describes: “If one of them were released and compelled suddenly to stand up, turn his head, walk, and look toward the firelight, he would suffer pain, and being dazzled, he would be unable to discern the objects whose shadows he formerly saw.” [1] “And if someone were to drag him forcibly out of the cave into the sunlight, preventing him from turning back, he would be distressed and resentful.” [1] Similarly, Jonas initially struggles to accept these overwhelming truths, yet the Giver—the elder who transmits the memories—assures him that what he sees is the world as it truly once was.

After receiving the memories, Jonas’s life undergoes a radical transformation. He begins to question the supposed reality of the community and attempts to reveal the truth to his friends, but he is met only with suspicion and incomprehension. When he tries to prevent the infant from being subjected to so-called “release,” he becomes a target of systematic pursuit. Like the freed prisoner in Plato’s cave who returns to share the truth with those still chained, Jonas’s awakening is met not with acceptance but with hostility. By crossing the boundary of memory at the end of the film, Jonas restores color, emotion, music, and memory to the community, symbolically returning authentic human experience to a society imprisoned by illusion. His journey—from perception to understanding, from escape to responsibility, and from illusion to truth—constitutes a complete process of anabasis, or the soul’s ascent. In this transformation, we witness what Plato calls the “turning of the soul” , which signifies the reorientation from the sensory world toward the realm of intelligible truth. Thus, the fictional image does not necessarily degenerate into sensory deception; instead, it can function as a philosophical medium—a path through which viewers move beyond appearances and approach the truth of Ideas. Cinema, therefore, is indeed fictional, but fiction does not entail falsehood; within fiction, truth may still be revealed.

## 5. Conclusion

Beginning with Plato’s theory of mimesis, this article has discussed why film, as an imitation of the sensible world—which is itself an imitation of the world of Ideas—was regarded by Plato as the lowest form of existence and as something far removed from truth. Aristotle, however, fundamentally reoriented this perspective by affirming the cognitive value of art. He argued that although artistic works are fictional, they reveal universal truths about human action and experience that transcend empirical contingency. Deleuze further advanced this reversal of Platonic hierarchy by asserting that modern cinema does not conceal truth through illusion; rather, the fictional image becomes a generator of truth, giving rise to new

modes of thought and perception.

Hans-Georg Gadamer also offers crucial insight into the relationship between art and truth. In *Truth and Method*, he writes: “The experience of a work of art always fundamentally exceeds any subjective horizon of interpretation, whether it be that of the artist or of the recipient. The author’s intention is by no means a definitive measure of meaning, and even to speak of a work in isolation from the ever-renewed reality of its interpretation is itself an abstraction.” [6] For Gadamer, whether in film or poetry, every act of representation is an ongoing mode of being of the artwork. The truth of art is not a static entity to be extracted, but something that emerges through the infinite process of interpretation. Meaning is not located behind the work but unfolds through its historical *Wirkungsgeschichte*—the continuous dialogue between the artwork and its interpreters. In conclusion, film, as a fictional art form, does not equate to falsehood. On the contrary, it is precisely through fiction that cinema attains philosophical depth and reaches into the core of human experience. Fiction opens a pathway through which film can reveal Ideas, provoke thought, and orient viewers toward truth—a truth that, as philosophy reminds us, is inexhaustible.

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