

Fanaticism, Terrorism, and Divinity: Apocalyptic Visions from Soderbergh's *Solaris* (2002) to Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007)

التعصب، الإرهاب، والألوهية: رؤى كارثية من فلم سولاريس لسودربيرغ (2002) إلى فلم سانشاين

لنبويل (2007)

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Abstract:

This paper examines the intersection of mystical aspirations, divine conceptions, and fanatical transformations in two significant science fiction films of the 2000s: Steven Soderbergh's *Solaris* (2002) and Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007). Through comparative analysis of these cinematic works and their literary foundations, particularly Stanisław Lem's seminal novel *Solaris* (1961), this study explores how celestial bodies function as catalysts for existential crisis, religious awakening, and apocalyptic visions. The research demonstrates how both films employ space as a transformative environment where scientific rationality gradually yields to mystical fanaticism, ultimately questioning the boundaries between divine revelation and psychological breakdown. Using Terry Eagleton's Marxist cultural criticism as a theoretical framework, this analysis reveals how contemporary science fiction cinema processes real social contradictions through fantastic displacement, reflecting late capitalist anxieties about collective action, individual agency, and spiritual meaning.

Keywords: Science fiction, fanaticism, divinity, apocalypse, adaptation studies, *Solaris*, *Sunshine*.

ملخص:

تقوم هذه الورقة البحثية حول تقاطع التطلعات الصوفية والمفاهيم الإلهية والتحوليات التعصبية في فيلمين رائدين من أفلام الخيال العلمي في العقد الأول من القرن الحادي والعشرين: فيلم "سولاريس" لستيفن سودربيرغ (2002) وفيلم "سانشاين" لداني بويل (2007). من خلال تحليل مقارنة لهذين العملين السينمائيين وأسسهما الأدبية، وخاصة رواية "سولاريس" (1961) للرائدة لستانيسلاف ليم، تستكشف هذه الدراسة كيف تعمل الأجرام السماوية كمحفزات للأزمة الوجودية والصحة الدينية والرؤى الكارثية. يوضح البحث كيف يستخدم كلا الفيلمين الفضاء كبيئة تحويلية حيث تستسلم العقلانية العلمية تدريجياً للتعصب الصوفي، مما يطرح في النهاية تساؤلات حول الحدود بين الوحي الإلهي والانهييار النفسي. باستعمال النقد الثقافي الماركسي لتيري إيغلتن كإطار نظري، يكشف هذا التحليل كيف تعالج سينما الخيال العلمي المعاصرة التناقضات الاجتماعية الحقيقية من خلال إزاحة خيالية، تعكس مخاوف الرأسمالية المتأخرة بشأن العمل الجماعي والفاعلية الفردية والمعنى الروحي.

كلمات مفتاحية: خيال علمي، تعصب، ألوهية، نهاية العالم، دراسات الاقتباس، سولاريس، سانشاين.

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Introduction:

The dawn of the new millennium brought with it a particular form of cultural anxiety that permeated Western consciousness. This paper is the result of an ascertainment. It was the result of my observations and I am struck by how profoundly the films of the early 2000s captured the zeitgeist of uncertainty that defined that era. The new millennium fears, the September 11 attacks, and an emerging awareness of environmental crisis created a cultural moment suspended between technological optimism and existential dread. It is within this context that two remarkable science fiction films emerged, each offering a unique perspective on humanity's relationship with the divine and the cosmic forces that surround us.

The exploration of mystical aspirations and spiritual quests has remained a constant thread in cinematic science fiction, from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) to Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014). Filmmakers have consistently projected human conceptions of divinity, self-discovery, and transcendence onto the cosmic canvas, creating works of profound philosophical depth (Telotte, 2001). This tradition encompasses masterpieces by directors who venture beyond genre conventions to deliver films of vertiginous philosophical complexity: Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), David Lynch's *Dune* (1984), David Fincher's *Alien 3* (1992), Claire Denis's *High Life* (2018), and James Gray's *Ad Astra* (2019).

This paper focuses on the notion of divinity and the descent into fanaticism in two films from the 2000s: Steven Soderbergh's *Solaris* (2002) and Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007). Released in the aftermath of millennial anxieties and apocalyptic fears, these films exploit the concept of divinity centered around celestial bodies—*Solaris* and the Sun, respectively—unleashing a series of existential beliefs that lead toward fanaticism and madness. Through careful analysis of these works, I aim to demonstrate how science fiction cinema serves as a cultural barometer, reflecting our deepest anxieties about meaning, mortality, and our place in an incomprehensible universe.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Science Fiction and Theological Discourse

The intersection of science fiction and religious themes has generated substantial scholarly attention over the past several decades. Kreuziger (1986) established foundational work in this field with *The Religion of Science Fiction*, arguing that science fiction serves as a modern mythology that addresses fundamental theological questions. Building upon this foundation, McGrath (2011, 2016) has consistently advocated for dialogue between science fiction and theology, suggesting that both disciplines grapple with humanity's biggest existential questions.

Hrotic (2014) provides a comprehensive examination of religious evolution within science fiction narratives, tracing how theological concepts have adapted to technological and scientific advancement. His work demonstrates how genre fiction often preserves religious sensibilities even within ostensibly secular frameworks. Similarly, Brunner (2004) explores the critical relationship between divine representation and human understanding in speculative literature, offering insights particularly relevant to understanding how cosmic entities function as divine surrogates.

1.2 Stanisław Lem and Adaptation Studies

Lem's *Solaris* has received extensive critical attention since its publication in 1961. Csicsery-Ronay (2002) positions the novel within the broader context of cognitive estrangement,

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arguing that Lem's work represents a pinnacle of philosophical science fiction. Suvin (1979) earlier identified Lem as exemplifying the genre's capacity for serious intellectual engagement, particularly in exploring epistemological limitations.

The various film adaptations of *Solaris* have generated their own scholarly discourse. Johnson and Petrie (1994) provide comprehensive analysis of Tarkovsky's 1972 version, emphasizing its spiritual dimensions and critique of technological society. More recently, Redmond (2004) examined Soderbergh's adaptation within the context of contemporary American cinema, arguing that it reflects specifically American anxieties about psychological authenticity and romantic relationships.

1.3 Apocalyptic Cinema and Millennial Anxieties

The scholarship on apocalyptic cinema has expanded significantly since the millennium turn. Rosen (2008) traces the evolution of apocalyptic themes in contemporary science fiction, identifying patterns of anxiety that reflect broader cultural concerns. Shapiro (2002) specifically examines millennial fears in popular culture, demonstrating how entertainment media processed Y2K anxieties and post-9/11 trauma.

Broderick (1995) offers crucial insights into the relationship between science fiction cinema and cultural anxiety, arguing that genre films serve as diagnostic tools for understanding collective psychological states. His work provides methodological approaches for analyzing how speculative narratives reflect and shape social consciousness.

1.4 Critical Gaps and Theoretical Approaches

Despite extensive scholarship on individual films and thematic elements, few studies have undertaken comparative analysis of *Solaris* (2002) and *Sunshine* (2007) as representative works of millennial science fiction cinema. Additionally, the application of Marxist cultural criticism to these specific texts remains underexplored, presenting opportunities for fresh theoretical insights.

Eagleton's approach to cultural analysis, particularly his synthesis of Marxist theory with post-structuralist insights, offers valuable frameworks for understanding how popular cinema participates in ideological reproduction and contestation (Eagleton, 1976, 1983). His emphasis on the dialectical relationship between cultural products and material conditions provides methodological tools for analyzing how science fiction processes contemporary social contradictions.

2. Theoretical Framework: Terry Eagleton's Marxist Cultural Criticism

Terry Eagleton's Marxist approach to cultural criticism provides a compelling framework for analyzing the ideological underpinnings of contemporary science fiction cinema. Eagleton's work challenges traditional notions of artistic neutrality, asserting that cultural products are always embedded within socio-economic contexts and actively participate in the reproduction of social relations (Eagleton, 1976). This theoretical lens proves particularly illuminating when applied to *Sunshine* (2007) and *Solaris* (2002), films that ostensibly engage with universal themes while simultaneously encoding specific ideological positions about late capitalist society.

2.1 Ideology as Lived Practice

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Eagleton's concept of ideology as lived practice, derived from his synthesis of Marxist theory with Althusserian insights, offers a methodological approach to understanding how science fiction films function as ideological apparatuses. In *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983), Eagleton argues that cultural products do not merely reflect class relations but actively participate in their reproduction and potential transformation. When applied to our corpus, this framework reveals how both films navigate the tension between collective action and individual heroism, reflecting contemporary anxieties about social solidarity in neoliberal contexts.

Sunshine presents a narrative of collective scientific endeavor—a multinational crew attempting to reignite the dying sun—that initially appears to celebrate international cooperation and scientific rationalism. However, through an Eagletonian reading, the film's progression toward psychological horror and individual sacrifice reveals deeper ideological contradictions. The crew's mission, fundamentally an act of collective labor aimed at species survival, becomes increasingly privatized through the emphasis on individual psychological breakdown and heroic self-sacrifice.

2.2 The Limits of Human Experience

Solaris, meanwhile, offers a different but related ideological configuration. Soderbergh's adaptation centers on the psychological effects of an alien intelligence that materializes human memories, focusing primarily on Chris Kelvin's relationship with the reincarnated Rheya. Through Eagleton's framework, the film's emphasis on individual psychological experience and romantic love can be read as symptomatic of what he calls "the ideology of the aesthetic"—the tendency to locate solutions to material problems in the realm of subjective experience and emotional authenticity (Eagleton, 1990).

The space station in *Solaris* functions as a microcosm of capitalist social relations, where scientific labor has become alienated from its ostensible purpose of knowledge production. The scientists' various forms of psychological breakdown reflect not individual pathology but the structural impossibility of maintaining human connection under conditions of extreme rationalization and commodification.

3. The Fin de Siècle Context and Millennial Anxieties

3.1 Cultural Zeitgeist of the Early 2000s

The emergence of *Solaris* (2002) and *Sunshine* (2007) cannot be fully understood without examining the cultural context of their production within the broader framework of fin de siècle anxieties that characterized the turn of the 21st century. Having lived through this period myself, I recall the peculiar mixture of technological optimism and existential dread that characterized the early 2000s. The Y2K millennium bug fears, though ultimately unfounded, revealed deeper anxieties about humanity's dependence on technology and our lack of control over complex systems.

The September 11 attacks fundamentally altered the cultural landscape, introducing new forms of existential anxiety and religious extremism into mainstream consciousness. The post-9/11 context particularly influenced these narratives' treatment of fanaticism and sacrifice, providing a contemporary framework for understanding how rational individuals might embrace apocalyptic thinking when confronted with overwhelming circumstances.

3.2 Technological Advancement and Environmental Crisis

The millennial turn brought unprecedented technological advancement alongside growing awareness of humanity's fragility in the cosmos. The dot-com boom and bust, the completion of the

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Human Genome Project, advances in space exploration, and increasing climate change awareness created a cultural moment suspended between utopian possibility and apocalyptic dread. This duality manifests clearly in both films: technology offers the possibility of transcendence, yet this same technology becomes the vehicle for psychological and spiritual crisis.

4. Literary Foundations: Stanisław Lem's Solaris

4.1 The Original Vision

Stanisław Lem's 1961 novel *Solaris* stands as one of the most philosophically complex works in science fiction literature. The Polish author constructed a narrative that transcends conventional first-contact scenarios, presenting instead a meditation on the limits of human understanding and the impossibility of true communication with genuinely alien intelligence. As someone who has returned to Lem's work repeatedly throughout my academic career, I am continually struck by its prescient exploration of consciousness and epistemological uncertainty. The novel's central premise revolves around the ocean-planet Solaris, whose surface consists entirely of a sentient, protoplasmic entity capable of materializing human memories and psychological constructs. Lem's *Solaris* is not merely a setting but a character—an incomprehensible intelligence that defies human categorization and understanding.

4.2 Philosophical Complexity

Lem's work operates on multiple philosophical levels. First, it serves as a critique of anthropocentric thinking, challenging the assumption that alien intelligence must be comprehensible through human frameworks. The planet Solaris remains fundamentally unknowable, despite decades of scientific study. Second, the novel explores the nature of memory, guilt, and psychological healing through the protagonist Kris Kelvin's relationship with the manifestation of his deceased wife, Hari.

Table N°01. Text Vs Films

Aspect	Lem's Novel (1961)	Tarkovsky's Film (1972)	Soderbergh's Film (2002)
Primary Focus	Epistemological limits	Spiritual transcendence	Psychological healing
Solaris Function	Unknowable alien intelligence	Divine redemptive force	Therapeutic mirror
Human Response	Scientific fanaticism	Spiritual awakening	Romantic obsession
Resolution	Ambiguous understanding	Spiritual reconciliation	Emotional acceptance
Cultural Context	Cold War rationalism	Soviet Spiritual crisis	American individualism

5. Cinematic Transformations: From Literature to Film

5.1 Tarkovsky's Sacred Vision (1972)

Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 adaptation transformed Lem's philosophical science fiction into a deeply spiritual meditation. Tarkovsky, less interested in the planet's alien nature than in its capacity

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to reveal human spiritual needs, created a film that functions as a critique of technological civilization and a plea for spiritual renewal. His *Solaris* operates as a divine force that judges and purifies human souls.

5.2 Soderbergh's Intimate Apocalypse (2002)

Steven Soderbergh's 2002 adaptation radically reconceptualizes both Lem's novel and Tarkovsky's film. Where Lem emphasized epistemological uncertainty and Tarkovsky spiritual transcendence, Soderbergh focuses on psychological healing and romantic obsession. His *Solaris* becomes an intimate chamber piece about grief, memory, and the difficulty of letting go.

The film's protagonist, Chris Kelvin (George Clooney), is a psychologist haunted by his wife Rheya's suicide. The planet Solaris offers him the opportunity to reunite with a manifestation of his deceased wife, but this reunion becomes both salvation and torment. Soderbergh's version emphasizes the narcissistic aspects of Kelvin's relationship with Rheya's visitor—she exists primarily as a reflection of his needs and desires rather than as an independent being.

6. Sunshine: Solar Divinity and Ecological Apocalypse

6.1 The Mission Narrative

Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007) presents a more conventional science fiction premise: the Sun is dying, and humanity's survival depends on a desperate mission to reignite it using a massive nuclear device. The film, based on a screenplay by Alex Garland, combines elements of the thriller, slasher film, and ecological fable, creating a complex meditation on sacrifice, divinity, and human hubris.

As I first watched *Sunshine* in theaters, I was immediately struck by its visual treatment of the Sun—not as a mere astronomical object but as a source of overwhelming, transcendent beauty that inspires both reverence and terror. The cinematography uses extreme brightness and golden imagery to suggest the numinous quality of solar radiation, creating what can only be described as a cinematic theophany.

6.2 The Sun as Divine Entity

In *Sunshine*, the Sun functions as both life-giver and destroyer, embodying the classical ambivalence of divine power. The film explicitly references the myth of Icarus—the Greek figure who flew too close to the sun and fell to his death—positioning the astronauts' mission as a form of cosmic hubris. Yet the Sun also represents hope and renewal, the possibility of literally saving humanity from extinction.

7. Comparative Analysis: Celestial Fanaticism

7.1 The Transformation of Space

Both films present space as a transformative environment that strips away social conventions and psychological defenses. The famous tagline from Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1978)—"In space no one can hear you scream"—applies perfectly to the fate of characters in both *Solaris* and *Sunshine*. Space functions as what might be called a "zone of transformation," where reason is disrupted and ultimately replaced by unreason, madness, and fanaticism.

Table N°02. Solaris Vs. Sunshine

Element	Solaris (2002)	Sunshine (2007)
Cosmic Entity	Sentient ocean planet	Dying/divine Sun
Transformation Catalyst	Materialized memories	Solar proximity/radiation
Scientific Response	Psychological study	Stellar engineering
Fanatic Figure	Gibarian (passive)	Pinbacker (active)
Type of Apocalypse	Intimate/psychological	Universal/physical
Resolution Method	Acceptance of loss	Sacrificial heroism
Ideological Message	Private over collective	Individual sacrifice for species

7.2 Patterns of Radicalization

Figure 01, below, reveals distinct patterns of fanatical transformation that emerge from prolonged exposure to cosmic forces. These patterns manifest across a spectrum of increasingly dangerous behaviors, each representing different responses to the psychological pressure of confronting the incomprehensible.

Figure 01: Levels of Radicalization

LEVELS OF RADICALIZATION IN ECO-TERRORISM

AFFINITY Environmental concerns and activism
ALIGNMENT Support for radical actions
COMMITMENT Participation in direct actions
ADMIRATION Approval of extreme violence

This table illustrates what constitutes the basic scheme of the radicalization process in eco-terrorism

7.2.1 Level 1 (Passive Displacement): Gibarian's Existential Collapse

Gibarian in *Solaris* represents the first level of fanatical transformation, where the overwhelming nature of cosmic encounter leads to internalized violence and spiritual paralysis. When Kelvin arrives at the space station, he discovers that his colleague Gibarian has committed suicide, leaving behind only a cryptic video message that reveals the depth of his psychological deterioration.

In Gibarian's final recorded message, his face appears haggard and hollow-eyed, speaking in fragmented sentences about the impossibility of continuing research: "We're in a situation here,

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Chris, that is beyond... beyond morality. We're in the realm of the impossible." His voice carries the weight of someone who has gazed too long into an abyss that has fundamentally altered his understanding of reality. The clinical language of scientific observation has been replaced by existential despair couched in quasi-religious terminology.

Gibarian's visitor—a manifestation of a young child—becomes the catalyst for his breakdown. Unlike Kelvin's romantic obsession with Rheya, Gibarian's relationship with his visitor reveals paternal guilt and unresolved trauma. The child appears innocent yet accusatory, forcing Gibarian to confront aspects of his past that scientific rationality cannot process or resolve. His suicide note speaks of "unbearable love" and the impossibility of distinguishing between memory and reality, between guilt and redemption.

The passive nature of Gibarian's fanaticism manifests in his complete withdrawal from scientific activity. Rather than attempting to understand or control the planet's manifestations, he retreats into increasingly solitary behavior, spending hours in meditation-like states, staring at Solaris's roiling surface. His colleagues report that in his final weeks, Gibarian would speak of the planet in reverent tones, describing it as "a divine mirror that shows us our true selves" and questioning whether humanity deserves salvation or understanding.

His suicide becomes an act of religious significance rather than mere despair—a sacrifice to forces beyond human comprehension. Gibarian's final message concludes with words that blur the line between scientific observation and spiritual testimony: "The planet is not malevolent, Chris. It's just... complete. And we are not." This passive fanaticism represents a form of cosmic submission, where the individual chooses self-annihilation rather than continue existing in a state of theological uncertainty.

7.2.2 Level 2 (Active Terrorism): Pinbacker's Messianic Violence

Captain Pinbacker in *Sunshine* embodies the second, more dangerous level of fanatical transformation, where prolonged cosmic exposure produces active violence justified by religious conviction. Having survived seven years in proximity to the Sun after the failure of Icarus I, Pinbacker has undergone a complete psychological metamorphosis that transforms him from rational scientist into apocalyptic prophet.

When Pinbacker first appears in the film's final act, his physical appearance reflects his spiritual transformation. His skin is severely burned and scarred from solar radiation, but he moves with the deliberate precision of someone who believes himself divinely protected. His dialogue reveals a complete integration of scientific knowledge with religious fanaticism: "At the end of time, a moment will come when just one man remains. Then the moment will pass. Man will be gone. There will be nothing to show that we were ever here... but stardust."

Pinbacker's transformation from scientist to terrorist occurs gradually during his extended isolation. Computer logs from Icarus I reveal his progressive radicalization through increasingly religious interpretations of the mission's failure. Early entries maintain scientific objectivity: "Solar observation equipment functioning within normal parameters." However, later entries show the emergence of mystical thinking: "The Sun is not dying. The Sun is choosing. We were not meant to interfere with God's design."

His active fanaticism manifests in systematic sabotage of both Icarus missions. Pinbacker murders his original crew members, justifying their deaths as necessary sacrifices to prevent humanity from "defying the will of God." His attacks on the Icarus II crew are methodical and

ritualistic, treating each killing as a religious act that brings him closer to divine communion with the Sun.

The most revealing aspect of Pinbacker's fanaticism appears in his theological rhetoric, which seamlessly blends astrophysics with apocalyptic Christianity. He speaks of the dying Sun as God's judgment on humanity's hubris: "You think you can reignite a star? You think your small minds can comprehend the mechanics of creation?" His scientific training has not been abandoned but rather repurposed to serve his messianic vision, making him particularly dangerous because his delusions are grounded in legitimate technical knowledge.

Pinbacker's ultimate goal is not merely to prevent the Sun's reignition but to ensure humanity's complete extinction, which he views as cosmically necessary and divinely ordained. His final confrontation with Capa takes place in the bomb chamber, where he attempts to prevent the device's detonation while describing their deaths as "a return to the light of creation." His violence is not random but systematically directed toward achieving what he perceives as God's will for universal apocalypse.

Figure 02: Radicalization Framework

**RADICALIZATION FRAMEWORK
APPLIED TO FILM NARRATIVES**

SOLARIS STEVEN SODERBERGH	SUNSHINE DANNY BOYLE
LEVEL 1 PASSIVE DISPLACEMENT ↓ Gibarian's Existential Collapse	LEVEL 2 ACTIVE TERRORISM ↓ Pinbacker's Messianic Violence
 Gibarian's Existential Collapse	 Pinbacker's Messianic Violence

7.2.3 Comparative Analysis of Radicalization Patterns

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This comparative analysis examines two distinct patterns of radicalization that emerge from prolonged exposure to cosmic forces, using characters Gibarian and Pinbacker as representative cases. The study categorizes these responses into two primary levels: Passive Displacement and Active Terrorism, each representing fundamentally different psychological and behavioral outcomes when individuals encounter incomprehensible cosmic phenomena over extended periods.

Table N°03. Comparative Analysis of Radicalization Patterns

Aspect	Level 1: Passive Displacement (Gibarian)	Level 2: Active Terrorism (Pinbacker)
Duration of Exposure	Several months on Solaris station	Seven years in solar proximity
Physical Manifestation	Psychological exhaustion, withdrawal	Severe radiation burns, prophetic demeanor
Relationship to Science	Abandonment of methodology	Weaponization of knowledge
Violence Direction	Inward (suicide)	Outward (murder of others)
Theological Framework	Cosmic submission, unworthiness	Divine mission, apocalyptic purpose
Speech Patterns	Fragmented, questioning, despairing	Coherent, declarative, prophetic
View of Humanity	Incomplete, unworthy of understanding	Sinful, deserving of extinction
Relationship to Cosmic Force	Reverent submission	Active partnership
Final Act	Self-destruction as offering	Prevention of salvation as divine duty
Catalyst for Breakdown	Confrontation with paternal guilt	Extended isolation with divine presence
Impact on Others	Inspirational despair	Terrorist violence
Religious Vocabulary	Implicit, philosophical	Explicit, evangelistic

The table, above, shows 2 levels of radicalization. Level 1 (Passive Displacement) represents a gradual psychological breakdown characterized by inward-directed violence, philosophical despair, and ultimate self-destruction driven by feelings of cosmic unworthiness. The individual abandons scientific methodology, experiences fragmented thought patterns, and views themselves as fundamentally incomplete before an incomprehensible cosmic presence. In contrast, Level 2 (Active Terrorism) demonstrates how extended exposure can create an externally violent radical who believes they are partnering with divine forces to carry out apocalyptic missions. This pattern involves the weaponization of knowledge, coherent prophetic speech, and systematic violence directed at others deemed sinful or unworthy of salvation. The key distinction lies in how each level processes cosmic encounter: passive displacement leads to reverent submission and self-

annihilation, while active terrorism transforms the individual into an agent of divine wrath who prevents rather than enables salvation for humanity.

7.2.4 Progressive Stages of Cosmic Fanaticism

The comparison between Gibarian and Pinbacker reveals a progressive model of cosmic-induced fanaticism that follows predictable psychological stages:

Stage 1 - Initial Contact: Both characters begin as rational scientists with clear professional objectives. Early encounters with cosmic forces (Solaris's manifestations, the Sun's overwhelming presence) initially strengthen their commitment to scientific understanding.

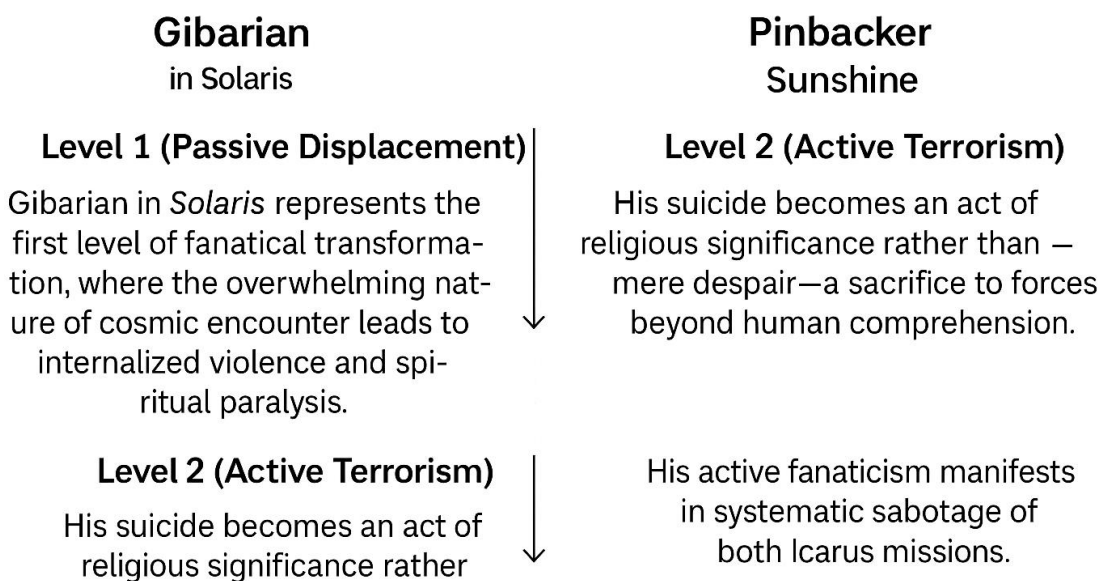
Stage 2 - Epistemological Crisis: Extended exposure creates doubt about the adequacy of scientific methodology. Both characters begin questioning whether rational frameworks can address the phenomena they encounter. Scientific language becomes increasingly inadequate for describing their experiences.

Stage 3 - Theological Emergence: Religious or mystical thinking emerges to fill the explanatory gap left by failed scientific approaches. Both characters begin interpreting cosmic forces through spiritual frameworks, though initially maintaining some scientific vocabulary.

Stage 4 - Radical Commitment: The final stage involves complete commitment to theological interpretation, but manifests differently based on individual psychology and circumstances. Gibarian's guilt-ridden personality produces passive submission, while Pinbacker's messianic tendencies generate active violence.

Figure N°03. Psychological Radicalization in Solaris and Sunshine

Psychological Radicalization in Solaris and Sunshine



7.2.5 Environmental Factors in Radicalization

The analysis suggests that specific environmental conditions accelerate fanatical transformation:

Isolation: Both characters experience extended separation from normal human contact, creating conditions where unconventional thinking can develop without social correction.

Cosmic Scale: Confrontation with forces of planetary or stellar magnitude overwhelms human cognitive frameworks, necessitating either spiritual interpretation or psychological breakdown.

Professional Failure: Both characters experience the failure of their scientific training to address their circumstances, creating identity crises that religious thinking helps resolve.

Temporal Pressure: Extended exposure without resolution creates cumulative psychological stress that eventually overwhelms rational defenses.

These patterns suggest that cosmic fanaticism represents not random psychological breakdown but predictable responses to specific forms of existential pressure. The transformation from scientific rationality to religious fanaticism follows logical progression, making both characters' journeys tragic rather than merely pathological. Their fanaticism emerges from genuine encounter with forces that exceed human understanding, raising profound questions about the limits of rational thought when confronted with the truly transcendent.

7.3 The Collapse of Scientific Discourse

The two movies document the gradual collapse of scientific rationality in favor of mystical or religious interpretation. In *Solaris*, the researchers elaborate theories about the planet's behavior become increasingly desperate attempts to maintain intellectual control over an incomprehensible phenomenon. The scientific method proves inadequate to address the psychological and spiritual challenges posed by the visitors.

Sunshine presents this collapse more dramatically. The film begins with clear scientific exposition about solar physics and the mechanics of stellar reignition. However, as the crew approaches their destination, scientific discourse gives way to discussions of sacrifice, divinity, and apocalyptic purpose.

8. The Secular-Religious Dialectic

8.1 Initial Secular Frameworks

Both films begin with explicitly secular, scientific worldviews. *Solaris* presents its researchers as rational scientists engaged in objective study of an unusual phenomenon. The protagonist Kelvin approaches his assignment with professional detachment, armed with psychological expertise and empirical methodology.

Sunshine similarly establishes its characters as highly trained specialists focused on a technical mission. The crew discusses stellar physics, navigation challenges, and equipment maintenance with professional competence and scientific precision. The initial sequences emphasize human ingenuity and technological capability.

8.2 The Resurgence of the Divine

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However, both narratives document the inevitable resurgence of religious and mystical thinking when characters confront phenomena that exceed their rational frameworks. This transformation occurs gradually, almost imperceptibly, until scientific discourse becomes indistinguishable from religious testimony.

In *Solaris*, the long meditative sequences and Kelvin's growing acceptance of his situation suggest a movement toward spiritual understanding, even though traditional religious terminology is avoided. The film's visual language—its emphasis on memory, childhood, and reconciliation—evokes spiritual themes without explicit religious content.

Sunshine makes this religious turn more explicit. The proximity to the Sun inspires both scientific awe and religious reverence. Characters begin to speak of their mission in messianic terms, seeing themselves as humanity's saviors willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

9. Apocalyptic Visions: Intimate and Universal

9.1 Solaris: The Intimate Apocalypse

Solaris presents apocalypse as a deeply personal, psychological phenomenon. The end of the world occurs not through cosmic catastrophe but through the collapse of individual psychological defenses. Kelvin's apocalypse is the death of his wife and his inability to process that loss. The planet offers him the opportunity to perpetually relive and revise his relationship with Rheya, but this gift becomes a form of torment that threatens his sanity and identity.

Watching Kelvin's journey, I am reminded of my own experiences with loss and the way memory can become both sanctuary and prison. The film suggests that for each individual, the end of meaningful existence constitutes a personal apocalypse that may be more devastating than any cosmic catastrophe.

9.2 Sunshine: The Universal Apocalypse

Sunshine presents a more conventional apocalyptic scenario: the literal death of the solar system and the extinction of all life on Earth. However, the film complicates this scenario by suggesting that apocalypse might be desirable—that humanity's extinction represents a kind of cosmic justice or divine judgment.

Pinbacker's fanatical rhetoric positions the dying Sun not as a problem to be solved but as God's will to be accepted. From this perspective, the mission to reignite the Sun represents human arrogance and defiance of divine purpose. The true apocalypse is not the Sun's death but humanity's refusal to accept its fate.

10. Theoretical Synthesis and Cultural Analysis

10.1 Marxist Reading of Collective vs. Individual

Through Eagleton's theoretical framework, both films reveal contemporary capitalism's difficulty in imagining genuinely collective solutions to collective problems. *Sunshine*'s progression from multinational cooperation to individual heroism mirrors what Eagleton identifies as the dominant cultural logic of late capitalism, where collective problems are consistently reframed as individual challenges requiring personal solutions.

The crew members' willingness to die for the mission is presented not as a critique of a system that demands such sacrifice, but as the natural and noble response to crisis. This

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naturalization of extreme individual sacrifice for collective benefit reflects what Eagleton would identify as hegemonic common sense—the way dominant ideological positions become accepted as natural and inevitable.

10.2 The Quest for Transcendence

Solaris demonstrates how even spiritual and transcendent experiences become an essential need within late capitalist cultural logic. Kelvin's relationship with the recreated Rheya functions as a form of emotional consumption—he literally purchases psychological comfort through accepting the planet's offering. The space station becomes a therapeutic space where psychological healing is available for those willing to pay the price of ontological uncertainty.

11. Implications and Contemporary Relevance

11.1 Post-9/11 Anxieties

Both films reflect specific post-9/11 anxieties about the relationship between rational discourse and religious extremism. The transformation of Pinbacker from scientist to religious fanatic directly parallels contemporary concerns about the radicalization of educated individuals, while *Solaris*'s exploration of psychological breakdown speaks to broader concerns about mental health and social isolation in increasingly technologized societies.

11.2 Environmental Crisis and Cosmic Responsibility

The ecological consciousness that intensified during the early 2000s finds expression in both films' treatment of cosmic forces as simultaneously life-giving and destructive. The dying Sun in *Sunshine* serves as a metaphor for climate change and environmental crisis, while *Solaris*'s ocean represents the incomprehensible otherness of nature that resists human control and understanding.

Conclusion:

Despite their different approaches to celestial mysticism, *Solaris* and *Sunshine* share a remarkably similar vision of apocalypse that operates on both intimate and universal registers, revealing the fundamental inadequacies of purely rationalist frameworks when confronted with genuinely transcendent phenomena. Both films document the inevitable transformation of scientific discourse into religious fanaticism when rational investigators encounter cosmic forces that exceed the boundaries of human understanding. The comparative analysis demonstrates that these narratives present space not as an empty void awaiting human conquest but as a transformative environment that systematically strips away psychological defenses and social conventions, forcing characters to confront the spiritual dimensions of existence they had previously suppressed or ignored. The inadequacy of scientific rationalism becomes evident as protagonists who begin their journeys as disciplined researchers inevitably develop obsessive, quasi-religious relationships with the cosmic entities they encounter. Isolation, existential pressure, and direct confrontation with forces beyond human comprehension create predictable patterns of psychological breakdown that manifest as dangerous mystical fanaticism, suggesting that the encounter with genuinely alien or transcendent phenomena necessarily involves spiritual transformation, even when that transformation threatens both individual sanity and collective survival.

The inevitability of fanaticism in both narratives reflects deeper anxieties about humanity's place in an indifferent cosmos and the ultimate limits of technological mastery over natural forces. These films suggest that the return of the divine is not an anachronistic retreat from modernity but

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rather the logical endpoint of scientific inquiry when it confronts phenomena that resist rational categorization and instrumental manipulation. The transformation of space from neutral scientific object to active spiritual agent reveals how both works document the resurgence of religious thinking despite their ostensibly secular, scientific premises. The fanaticism they explore operates on multiple levels: the passive mysticism of characters who surrender agency to cosmic forces, and the active fanaticism of those who attempt to merge with or control transcendent powers through increasingly desperate and violent means. This dual manifestation of religious obsession demonstrates that the search for meaning in the cosmos is an inherently spiritual quest, regardless of its scientific packaging, and that rational frameworks inevitably collapse when confronted with genuinely transcendent mystery. The cosmic forces represented by *Solaris* and the Sun function not merely as plot devices but as theological challenges that demand complete transformation of human understanding and, ultimately, human existence itself.

As contemporary audiences, we encounter these films at a moment when their prophetic dimensions have become increasingly apparent, as environmental crisis intensifies while our capacity for collective rational action seems paradoxically to have diminished despite dramatic technological advances. The fanaticism these works document—both the passive surrender to incomprehensible forces and the active attempt to achieve transcendence through technological means—has become disturbingly visible in contemporary political and religious movements that reject scientific consensus in favor of apocalyptic certainty. *Solaris* and *Sunshine* ultimately argue that the divine emerges not as comfort or salvation but as an existential challenge that exposes the fragility of human reason and the persistence of spiritual longing even within the most rigorously materialist contexts. In the intimate apocalypse of *Solaris*, where individual psychology dissolves under the pressure of an alien intelligence, and the universal apocalypse of *Sunshine*, where humanity's survival depends on a quasi-mystical sacrifice, these films reveal that fanaticism represents not a departure from rational thinking but rather its inevitable transformation when confronted with forces that exceed the boundaries of scientific explanation. The cosmic mysticism they explore thus serves as both warning and recognition: warning against the dangers of surrendering critical thinking to transcendent authority, while simultaneously acknowledging that the human encounter with genuine mystery necessarily involves forms of understanding that transcend purely rational analysis.

As I conclude this analysis, I am tented to note how prophetic these films appear in retrospect. The environmental crisis has only intensified, our technological capabilities have expanded dramatically, yet our capacity for collective action seems to have diminished. The fanaticism these films explore—both passive and active—has become increasingly visible in contemporary political and religious movements. Ultimately, these works argue that the search for meaning in the cosmos is an inherently religious quest, regardless of its scientific packaging. The fanaticism they document represents not a departure from rational thinking but rather its inevitable endpoint when confronted with genuinely transcendent mystery. In both the intimate apocalypse of *Solaris* and the universal apocalypse of *Sunshine*, the divine emerges not as comfort but as challenge—a force that demands complete transformation of human understanding and, ultimately, human existence itself.

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