

The end of cinema as we know it

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Abstract

This essay poses the theoretical possibility of the end of cinema (probably by the end of this century). With these words, it is meant that in the near future, the cinema, that is to say, the film industry, the films, the movie theatres, will disappear or will change in the way we know it. To support this thesis there are (at least) the following arguments and circumstances: the pseudo-hedonism in modern society, the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the alteration of neuronal structures and therefore, the alteration of human rhythms in perceiving reality, the political and environmental changes in the planet. This will, in turn, open to some new other possibilities such as new devices for viewing, new entertainment industries, and even, perhaps, a new society. So, one may ask if it will be just a transformation in the way we see movies or really the end of cinema as we know it?

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Society, Cinema, Institutional Art Theory, Singularity

1. Initial considerations

When we look at the film industry today, regardless of our taste, we see that it seems healthy and looks promising from the point of view of the use of new technologies. We even see a tremendous potential with these new technologies and so, we are far from admitting the strange (and embarrassing) possibility that the cinema as come to an end. But how strange could it be to think of this possibility? And what can be the implications for our society? Maybe the question isn't exactly as formulated and so the answer will be entirely different. So, the question may be what is happening at the core of our society that can lead to the end of cinema?

We are aware that we are presenting an undesirable thesis. For those who are already thinking about this uncanny scenario we must say: we are not defending the end of art and, in this particular case, the end of cinema (by itself). We do not want to make it, but what we can do or what we want to do and what reality might dictates are different things. So different that reality may not even be what we think it is, but of course this requires another agenda and would lead us to a difficult and endless discussion.

What we want to underline, what we are trying to do in this essay is to draw attention to a thesis, which is naturally debatable and controversial but which can and should be considered in a future scenario in which there will certainly be profound social (political and environmental) changes. So, what leads us to put this thesis?

We must begin by mentioning something that is self-evident: progress has never been so accelerated as in

the last three decades. From cars to smartphone's, from education to jobs, everything changed. With this things are rapidly and technologically evolving, changing our own perception of time and space (what we may call the alteration of neuronal structures) and therefore, changing the way we feel and think not only about art but also about life itself. It seems clear that one can see the rapid development of technology and specially in the field of artificial intelligence and the implications that this will produce (because it is already producing) in our systems, that is in the social, economic and political organization, in changing the environment and natural resources (for instance, the production of lithium batteries not only is changing our own habitat and of several other species but also created new forms of exploitation of work or even slavery). And it seems that it will be just as quick as a flash light. Note how everything seems to escape in front of your eyes. Take for instance the way in which we incorporate in our daily lives artificial intelligence, all those algorithms, in our credit card, in our computer, in our Smartphone, in our GPS, in the way we drive, etc., changing the way we could think and act. Like Yuval Harari points out, the more scientists understand the way humans make decisions, the greater the temptation to resort to algorithms, and thus to reprogram that human decision and behavior, making *Big Data* more reliable and human feelings less (Harari, 2018: 79).

In fact, your daily life is conducted mostly by decisions that you do not take (even that you have that illusion), it seems that people are acting like they were, already, androids or zombies. So, adding to all of this, there are scientists and researchers who, as we all know, are concerned in using some new devices with artificial intelligence to produce art, like poems or paintings, and we must say, they allow them to create what they call art. By doing this, they are generating, we could say, a new concept of art (remember that according to Nigel Warburton, art cannot be conceptually defined), but they are also already closing the door to put an end to art. Of course, this is a very critical point and we will come back to this later. Questions now may be: what will happen in cinema industry in few decades with all this changes? What will be the future for movies in a probably dystopian society?

2. Artificial Intelligence and the future dystopian society

We are aware that we are not – yet – telling anything new. If we recall some major figures of our contemporary culture we see that the diagnosis is already traced. Since industrial revolution many authors have write about it and in some cases give birth to major political movements and lines of thought and philosophy.

As Baumann would say, we live today in a kind of

liquid modernity in which, the spectacular society born in the neoliberal model of hyper consumption and pseudo-hedonistic illusion (Baudrillard, 1991; Debord, 1971; Lipovetsky 2007, 2011) led to an unprecedented and vertiginous way of life, that is led to a certain technologization of life, our if you prefer, led into the mechanization of the feelings and thoughts, to the simultaneity speed of everything in all (Eagleton, 1998; Virilio, 2000). Social ties had become diluted and communication weakened (increasing the social feeling of insecurity and in most cases of loneliness), which is a interesting paradox of modern times: never man could be so close to each other and never felt so lonely. With these new realities come new forms of living and new pathologies, such as the internet addiction (Carr, 2012). The strange obligation of continuous online presence that the social network encourages to do, as if it were a form of affirmation of existence, replacing the omnipresence of (an absent) God, create new challenges of what it means to be modern, of what it means to be human in a virtual world. But it is not only that. In 1997, George Steiner was already aware of the upcoming revolution, he wrote: "Silences, the art of concentration and memorization, the luxury of the time necessary for great reading, are already greatly compromised" (Steiner, 1997).

As Nicholas Carr points out and according to several studies in the area (DeStefano & LeFevre, 2007; Rockwell & Singleton, 2007), hypermedia (using hypertexts with multimedia) limits us more than it stimulates us to learn: "the division of attention motivated by multimedia requires the maximum of our cognitive skills, weakening our learning and our understanding". (Carr, 2012: 162; see also Hembrooke, 2003).

The author is clear in saying that "the internet may well be the most powerful technology of mental change" (Carr, 2012: 146). In fact, many studies show that intensive use of the internet has neurological consequences (Small, 2008). Put it in different words, people "know" the way to information but doesn't know the information which means to "know" nothing. Well, if we think about this seriously we can see the proximity with the experience of enjoying a film: people see a movie without knowing anything about the production of it.

So, if this is already a terrible scenario for our society, how is changing and how will it change with the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence?

As it is known, Raymond Kurzweil (2006) suggested the brilliant notion of "Singularity" to refer to the point at which artificial intelligence (AI) has surpassed human intelligence, and Nick Bostrom (2014) poses the possibility of this superintelligence to escape human control. We must not think that this is science fiction. The well-known "brain emulation" hypothesis puts the hypothesis of mind-building scenario as real. Of course, with this challenging framework there are also extraordinary hypothesis, for instance, from the point of view of the philosophy of mind, like "artificial *qualia*" (individual instances of subjective, conscious experience) that were not felt by humans but *qualia*

only felt by robots with artificial consciousness. Like we all know, Hiroshi Ishiguro has created in his laboratory androids similar to humans – which he calls "Geminoids" – but create them with an emotional responsiveness and therefore, with adequate response to the simulation of consciousness (see also advances in Boston Dynamics owned by Google). Of course one could argue that "artificial *qualia*" are not *qualia* at all, but that is another agenda and requires other approaches.

The characteristic attributed for centuries to human beings – intelligence –, came to be attributed very easily to any instrument. So it is legitimate to conceive of the appearance of an "artificial consciousness" as one might think of "artificial life", or even the possibility of this vocabulary disappear, since terms like artificial, life, mind can become other "things", can assume different meanings, that we cannot conceive now (it is possible that we do not have cognitive abilities to conceive such concepts).

So we can imagine an optimistic scenario, a scenario that exist a perfect world where there are no wars, racism, sorrows or diseases, and in which humans do not need to use his brain or mind, like in the movies *Gattaca* (1997), *The Giver* (2014), or even in *The Matrix* (1999) reinventing, more than Orwell, the paradoxical society of Huxley. Why paradoxical? Like Yuval Harari suggests, as we read the brave new world, we find it difficult to identify what the nightmare can be, whether the world is peaceful and prosperous, and everyone lives satisfied all the time, what is wrong with this? Aldous Huxley knew the answer and gave it to the character of the savage (even if Huxley doubted anyone could escape the matrix of this civilized world) when he questions the world government (through the character Mustafa Mond) about the disappearance of truth and beauty. In this scenario everything seems perfect and artificial intelligence through some sort of entity rules everything. Unfortunately there is the opposite scenario which can be dramatic for humans, a kind of singularity scenario where humans can be submitted to slavery or even a scenario where there is no need for humans to exist.

3. A (possible) new theory of Art and the future of cinema

So, taking the optimistic scenario (OS), that is a world where an Artificial Intelligence Entity (AIE) would serve humankind, one would have a world full of androids and human zombies (if we prefer to see this dystopian society as a zombie world) but as we could guess, there will be no place for artists. One can argue that this is not a necessary condition, since they are free from obligations and so they could dedicate their free time to create (producing films, paintings, sculptures, poems, etc.). But we must recall that humans no longer need to use their abilities (and so, their cognitive and intellectual capacities, and even as we seen in *The Giver*, the absence of feelings).

So in the OS we can see that:

1. everything seems to be planned according to what AIE consider important to develop;
2. all human activities would be reduced to essential functions, and therefore, reducing brain/ mind activity;
3. according to 1) and 2) there will be no space for creative actions, since “art” is now produced by AIE, that is, standardized art by some kind of government world laws (produced by AIE).

If taking the dramatic scenario of “Singularity” (DSS), humans can become an inferior species, can become slaves of AIE or even disappear. Of course, there is yet another possibility: that AI can produce the ultimate deceitful activity as providing the illusion of us living a normal daily life. This would be the matrix hypothesis, that is, living as an illusion. But even if we are in one right now, we do not yet (or ever will) have cognitive ability to perceive if we are already living, somehow, in that kind of matrix (another difficult subject).

Assuming the OS, we would have another theory of institutional art, but quite different from George Dickie’s and Arthur Danto’s theories, not so much for the premises expressed in their content but especially for the creators and the way they determined what can be called art – if we can at all call creation or artists to these Artificial Intelligence’s productions. But in fact, one can think that it is absolutely natural that all artifacts produced by AIE would be called art, since

- a) AIE can determine what is art and what is not – the new institutional art theory (and they can determine if cinema can exist as art or as a form of viewing possible worlds);
- b) humans will not have the intellectual ability to consider what can be called art;
- c) through the years humans assume that AIE wants the best for them and so what they determined is always the best and the correct;
- d) humans began, before AIE takes control, to create art integrating artificial intelligence devices.

With regard to the latter, we must recall that we have already new devices in use to produce what we dare to call “art” (for instance the use of Smartphone’s to produce shorts films, the 3D printers for sculptures, computer programs to create paintings, etc.).

In a DSS it is possible that the question about art can simple have no reason to exist. Of course we can imagine in the DSS some AIE discussing the importance of art or what can be called art, but this would be nonsense. Nonsense or paradoxical in the way that if they can have sensibility and those “artificial *qualia*” as we mentioned, why they do not respect humans as a specie?). Well, history can give us a lesson: in the Nazi regime was established the rights for animals (and yet not so much respect for humans lives).

Returning to our main question, will cinema industries suffer a change in a dystopian scenario? Will movies change, not only in content but in the means of production? What can be the future of cinema? It seems plausible to say that cinema will no

longer exist, at least in the way we see it now. There will be a profound paradigmatic change in everything and the main differences will be the existence of films without cinema theaters, without filmmakers, even without screenwriters or actors, that is, without any kind of the traditional means. We can guess that movies will be other thing, much different from now at least in the OS: some kind of “imagery” lived by the beholder (human) provided in his own mind by AIE or in a unthinkable (for now) cybernetic cloud. Some device (with multiple algorithms) that can generate characters, plot, scenarios, etc., and so there is no need for the traditional means of production. With this kind of experiences, movies or similar may even have a different name. The same can be applied to particular words such as spectator, viewer, filmmaker, screen, special effects, and many others. The cinema and the world around cinema will be transfigured in some unnatural imagery setting (everything will be in a different order of reality, in a different level of imagery).

It is natural to ask: these scenarios have some plausibility, can they be admitted? Or in other words: these scenarios have some plausibility, can they be admitted? Well, they can. So, what can be done to save us from DSS (or even of OS)? Can art itself be the solution? Can artists provide a different view? Well, they should and one must recall the importance of the artist (from painters to philosophers) in the construction of society (please note and just to be clear, we are not making any political statement or admitting any kind of politicization of art).

There are two ways of seeing the problem and possibly two ways of building the future avoiding the two scenarios (the DSS and the OS since also in the OS humans seem to be living in a zombie dream).

We should remember for this question, Nietzsche or Heidegger. If the first one reminds us of the importance of our primordial instincts and the importance of overcoming the mediocre existence of the man who lives as in a flock of sheep (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), changing the way humans live, that is, living art and giving value to life itself as a work of art (2004), Heidegger urges us to think to the opening of worlds that art provides, in the way that art can be the fusion of horizons between creator and beholder, giving meaning to life itself (2002). To say it in different words art makes your mind work in human terms, makes your mind active, and therefore, can provide meanings to life experiences. A famous painter, Hundertwasser, says almost the same thing when states that we have the right to be creative (Restany, 2004) that only art can save us from ourselves (from our own condition and nature). But we can also recall another artist, Louise Bourgeois, that says something very important: “Art makes people civilized. More civilized, otherwise they would eat each other and beat each other – it has a civilizing influence. It makes them think and, I think, it makes them better, it makes them richer. It enlarges their possibility of liking people” (Mennick, 2003: 187). She says something which we think is even more important, that is the connection of life and art: “Art comes from life. Art comes from the problem you have

in seducing birds, men, snakes – anything you want. It is like a Corneille tragedy, where everybody is pursuing somebody else” (Bourgeois, 1998: 227).

The other way of seeing the problem (DSS and OS) is the demand to move forward with the construction of a friendly artificial intelligence, as suggested by Armstrong (2014) and Bostrom (2014), among many others. This could be fundamental to save us from ourselves and from our ambitions of a brave new world. If it is possible to combine these two, maybe the cinema can still have a future.

4. In Conclusion

Many questions still remaining open and this sort of questions shore are challenging and require attention. And they require attention not just by filmmakers, artists and philosophers; they demand above all responsibility and in that sense governments must engage in the same way that scientists and creators are engaged. Only with a serious and dedicated regulation we will be able to try to withdraw from the point where we are, also looking for new forms of brain/mind stimulation that may ultimately be in artistic activities. As we seen before, all sort of artists must drove attention to in the same way that Armstrong and Bostrom drove attention to the possibility of building a friendly artificial intelligence. This can and should be the desirable artificial intelligence and can be the solution to maintain, even in a world already inhabited by zombies (remember for instance Charles Chaplin movie *Modern Times*, 1936) and in the future by androids, creativity and cinema as a place of choice to express what the existence of humanity in the world means. This is the desirable scenario, but we must keep in mind that if nothing is done – and cinema industries as a particular way of showing it as it has been done through his work – the end of cinema will be a reality, at least in the way we know it.

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