

Examining the Transformation of Film in the Digital Age through the Lens of Post-Classical Film Theory

Jieting Chen

Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ, United Kingdom

Abstract: *With the development of science and technology, the traditional cinema is being redefined and expanded, while at the same time facing many challenges. Against this backdrop, the 'death of cinema' argument has aroused widespread concern and discussion. From the perspective of post-classical film theory, this paper focuses on the transformation of cinema in the digital age and offers a dialectical critique of the 'death of cinema' argument. The paper argues that cinema is not dead in the digital age and that it still exists as a living art form. However, the impact and difficulties that cinema will face as a result of digital change are enormous, and the 'death of cinema' argument does reflect part of the crisis facing cinema. This is a warning that we should face up to the dilemma of film development in the digital age and take concrete action to promote the sustainable development of the film industry.*

Keywords: *Post-classical film theory; Digital transformation; Film industry; Death of cinema; Cinematic creativity*

1. Introduction

It is critical to reconsider what a film is in this era of digital transformation since new technologies like streaming media, digital effects, and virtual reality are posing challenges to the movie business. Every change to film since its origin has sparked extensive discussion of the idea, and in the current digital era, cinema is undergoing a new change as new technologies influence its production, distribution, and viewing practices. Amid this change, there has been a lot of doomsday talk about the "death of cinema," with supporters claiming that the effects of digital technology, the shifting media landscape, and the drop in moviegoing are all signs of the cinema's quick demise as a distinctive medium and cultural form.^[i] The 'death of cinema' thesis is not generally accepted, and for tens of thousands of fans, films remain a significant source of cultural amusement. We still need to talk about how to grasp the concept of "death" in depth, even though the "death of cinema" seems to be an unavoidable tendency due to the impact of old and new media. The "death of cinema" refers to a new method in which film is emerging from its cocoon and combining and reforming itself with digitalization, not to the actual death of cinema.

Post-classical film theory provides us with a critical perspective that helps us better understand cinema's transformation and cinephile's position in the digital age. Post-classical film theory breaks with traditional classical film representations and presents a more diverse aesthetic experience of cinema for contemporary audiences, while its paradigm is closely related to cultural and technological changes, offering more possibilities for the development of cinema in the digital age.^[ii] According to post-classical cinema theory, cinema is a very inclusive art form that may develop with new technical and visual tools to adapt to shifting social and cultural conditions. In this regard, post-classical theories contest the notion that cinema is extinct and offer a hopeful outlook for the medium's future, arguing that the digital age will provide more opportunities for the advancement of cinematic creativity and that audiences and fans will be able to "recreate" and participate in the making and judging of films in a variety of ways.

The first part of the essay will briefly introduce classical film theory's background and main ideas, then analyze and criticize the idea that "cinema is dead", and argue for its truth and validity. In the second part of the essay, the culture and behavior of film fans in the digital age will be analyzed and their status and influence summarized. The third part of the paper will focus on the links between cinephiles and the film industry, based on the previous analysis, and discuss the future trends and prospects of film and cinephiles. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the previous section and a look at the development of cinema in the digital age.

2. An analysis and critique of the "cinema is dead" thesis

2.1. *The rise of postmodernist theory*

A profound change in culture, notably in the area of cinema, began in the late 1970s. The idea of cinema as a popular entertainment form that flourished alongside television, rock 'n' roll fashion magazines, etc., rather than as an isolated media, was one of the most significant transformations.^[iii] During this period, many film critics, literary artists, and scholars began to question the traditional theoretical framework of cinema, arguing that it was too concerned with the aesthetic value of cinema and neglected the social and economic significance of cinema as a cultural product. In addition to critiquing the limitations of traditional film theory, theorists have also proposed several new film theories that can explain the complexity and diversity of contemporary cinema, including postmodernist film theory (also known as post-classical film theory). The term "postmodernism" refers to the artistic trend that followed modernism, which began in the visual arts and was accompanied by the Pop movement of the 1960s.^[iv] While postmodernist theorists have asserted that the hegemony of transnational capital and the resulting fragmentation of experience characterizes contemporary life, they have also argued for the significance of cinema as a commercial product and cultural phenomenon, as well as its value as a mass medium for the production of endless entertainment spectacles.^[v] The emergence of post-classical film theory emphasizes the plurality of film as a cultural and social phenomenon and the intersection and interaction between film and other art forms.

The historically postmodernist theory has been seen as an anomaly in the history of art theory, as it was born almost as an antithesis to the emphasis of modern aesthetics, emphasizing the political rather than the aesthetic value of art.^[5] The postmodernists saw art as a primary form of political rhetoric, and this unique concept and its anti-aesthetic offshoot distinguished it from all other forms of art.^[5]

Postmodernist film theory rejects single meanings and solidified truths, emphasizing the plurality and complexity of individuals and contexts. Its focus on the construction and domination of rights and discourses by works of art also makes postmodern film theory inextricably linked to political, social, and cultural related issues.^[vi] The film industry has shifted from relying on the steady and sustained output of the studios to relying on the enormous profits of the occasional blockbuster to drive economic expansion, according to Williams, who also highlights the globalized economic changes in the industry. The rise of the blockbuster has marked the increasing dependence of cinema on multimedia pairings, with the rise of computer game soundtrack CDs, music v.^[6] The evolution of blockbusters' visual forms was influenced by their global marketing, and the emphasis on spectacle and special effects was a result of attempts to reach global markets across linguistic and cultural divides. Williams contends that the rise of a new art form and this globalized capitalism together represent a fresh manifestation of Jameson's third phase.^[6] The "spectacle" that Williams' theory refers to is based on Baudrillard's postmodern idea, which interprets the "spectacle" as the false and unreal images presented in consumer culture, often constructed through the internet and deceptively sought after.^[vii]

Some have argued that "spectacle" is a sign of the demise of the human aesthetic, that it is viewed in film studies as an absurd and empty rhetorical form that exists only to satisfy the viewer's desires and lacks real meaning, and value, and that blockbuster made for "spectacle" and special effects lack characters with a strong psychological foundation and a storyline that follows a moral compass.^[7] As a result of the spectacle phenomenon, the film can no longer be considered a medium that "represents the real" from this perspective. Several academics and critics have also noted that modern cinema has lost its creativity and artistry as a result of its mechanical and commercial tendencies and that it may even be on the verge of extinction. In light of this theoretical backdrop, the idea that film is dead has received a lot of attention.

2.2. *The decline of cinema and the transition to a new media age*

Susan Sontag's discussion of the "death of cinema" had a very wide impact on the academic community at the time. In her 1996 article "The Decline of Cinema" in the New York Times Magazine, Susan Sontag cited Baudrillard's "theory of the spectacle", arguing that cinema had become a form of spectacle entertainment, content with bloated, derivative film policies that no longer provide the deep cultural experience that audiences need. The proliferation of television, the internet, and digital media has hastened the demise of cinema in addition to the commercialization and profit-driven nature of the movie business. Susan Sontag contends that aggressive and unprincipled image manipulation has reduced cinema to impersonal, lightweight films and that the prevalence of these films has eroded the standards

that people traditionally had for cinema as art and popular entertainment.

However, it is important to analyze whether the "death of cinema" actually refers to the cessation of cinematic activity. The effects of the digital age on the movie business have made cinema actively look for new directions in development. While the extinction of classic forms does, in some ways, deny spectators the right to nostalgia, clinging to the past is no longer an option in the modern era, and films need to be revived to assure their ongoing vitality and competitiveness. The forecast of "death" in the context of digital change is better understood as the decline of media in the media chorus and the end of the period of cinematic dominance.^[viii] British filmmaker Peter Greenaway understands cinema as the death of traditional film forms (i.e. traditional structures and conventions in terms of story, perspective, emotion, theme, etc.), while he points out that cinema needs to adapt to new circumstances and audiences and find new forms and content to seek further development. Philippe Dubois adds to Greenaway's argument by emphasizing the importance of cinema as a medium: that is, thanks to new media cinema can now be viewed on a variety of new platforms and new screens, and can be shown in new spaces. This means that cinema as a medium has not disappeared, but with its increasingly infinite diversity of forms and practices, it has shown itself to be more active and positive than ever before.^[9] Although Philippe Dubois' argument does not directly refute the idea that cinema is dead, it does confirm that it is still active and strong in the digital age and that it is still a multifaceted and expressive medium, indicating that the idea of cinema's demise may be overly pessimistic and one-sided. Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece also voices her criticism of the end of cinema, contending that it should be reinterpreted and rethought rather than merely perceived as its demise or replacement.^[ix] From these claims, we can see that anxiety about the decline of cinema had shackled the development of cinema in a new era, with an over-reliance on traditional film forms and techniques resulting in the potential contribution of emerging technologies and forms to cinema being overlooked. However, the debate on the death of cinema is moving in a positive direction, with many beginning to realize that while the forms and methods of cinema are changing, the core of cinema as a form of artistic expression has not disappeared. At the same time, new technologies and media have opened up more possibilities and opportunities for cinema to evolve, and in this sense, the much-touted death of cinema is not a death, but part of the life cycle of conventional technology.

2.3. The Impact of Digital Technology on Cinema

The majority of the theories discussed above explain the changes in cinema in the digital age from a macro perspective, but they fall short of covering all points of view on those changes and their abstract notions are difficult for us to comprehend. We need to investigate the effects of digital technology on film creation, distribution, and consumption to better comprehend the changes in cinema in the digital age.

The cinematic story has always played a significant role in its evolution, and it has undergone some new developments in the digital age. Eleftheria Thanouli builds a paradigm of precise principles controlling post-classical narrative through the examination and study of several film texts from various countries, based on the concepts and methods of historical poetics, and contrasts it with another long-standing narrative. Other well-established narrative models are contrasted with the paradigm. According to him, the introduction of digital logic and new techniques for spatial construction, which are crucial to the transformation of post-classical space from a technical standpoint, distinguish the post-classical narrative paradigm from other narrative paradigms, particularly the classic Hollywood narrative tradition. More freedom and expressiveness was possible in cinema story thanks to these novel approaches, and post-classical film narrative, in particular, placed a different emphasis on the character of the picture. It breaks the conventional boundaries of in-frame/out-of-frame space and allows the viewer to access more information in one frame at a time thanks to the continuity editing and spatial montage techniques it uses (movies like *Requiem for a Dream* and *Moulin Rouge* are characterized by these features).

The emergence and development of post-classical narratives rely on advances in digital technology. The films created under this approach can provide viewers with richer and more diverse visual effects, while this hypermedia visual space also helps film creators to express more complex and profound themes and emotions through the combination, transformation, and presentation of visual elements, enhancing the ideology and artistry of film as an art form. In an era of media mixing, the boundaries between different media are becoming increasingly indistinguishable. In this context, film as a medium is forced to share the same screens and platforms as other media. How films are made and seen has also evolved in reaction to this transformation. The term "cinematic anti-popularity" was created by Francisco Casavettes. Traditional filmmaking and viewing practices can be viewed as a type of global system in which a select few studios and theatres control the creation and release of films, and audiences can only learn about these films by visiting the theatre.^[x] And the antipodean system of cinema has broken the monopoly of film production companies and cinemas on the production and distribution of films, and the explosion of

screens has enabled audiences to watch films on a variety of media, anytime and anywhere. Francisco Casavettes also draws attention to the connections between film and contemporary media, arguing that film shares characteristics with contemporary new media in terms of filtering, masking, spatial division, and camouflage. This confirms the relevance and influence of cinema in a time of media mingling and suggests that its full potential may be seen in new media installations.

In conclusion, the development and impact of new media are the key topics of discussion in the argument that cinema is dying. The quick development of digital and internet technology has created many changes and challenges for the film industry. Cinema, as a unique art form and cultural phenomenon, provides benefits and attractions that other media cannot match. The evolution of cinema has been hampered by the digital age, but it has also opened up new possibilities and development prospects for it. The claim that "cinema is dead" has to be examined more critically as a result.

3. Cinephiles in the Digital Age

3.1. *Fandom culture and collective emotional experience*

In her discussion of the decline of cinema, Susan Sontag links the disappearance of the social significance of cinema to the disappearance of cinephiles, and it is clear that the fanaticism of the fans is brought into the discussion of the "death of cinema".^[xi] In Sontag's view, the disappearance of fan culture has turned cinema into an empty and decadent medium, and even if cinema is ever 'reborn', it will be through the love inspired by fans' fervor for it. Susan Sontag's argument demonstrates the importance of cinephiles to the cinema, but it also needs to be refuted that cinephile culture in the digital age has not completely declined, as Sontag suggests, has instead developed and grown further with contemporary technology. The existence of contemporary cinephiles and the flourishing of fandom culture is another way of confirming that cinema is still widely alive and influential in this new era. It is worth noting that with the increasing development of digital platforms and social media, the experience and emotional perception of fandom are very different from that of the past, and when we explore fandom and its culture from this perspective, we need to introduce the concept of 'intermediate presence'. The massive spread of mobile phones, portable devices, and wireless internet connections has greatly increased the importance of 'intermediate presence', which refers to the electronic medium through which viewers in different locations can directly contact each other and watch and exchange films together. The "intermediate presence" refers to the electronic medium through which viewers in different locations can reach each other directly and watch films together and exchange emotions.^[xii]

This co-presence of electronic media is described as a state of human coexistence, a form of co-presence that, although outside of bare perception, assumes increasing importance in the digital age: increasing the collectivity and connectedness between viewers or cinephiles. The virtual experience of intermediate presence has greatly improved the moviegoing experience for fandom, who are no longer passive recipients of the film's content and are not confined to a specific location but can participate in the creation and dissemination of the film interactively and communicatively, anytime and anywhere. With the support of media technology, fandom can communicate and interact instantly, and this new experience of mutual creation emphasizes the presence of collective emotions. Co-presence connects individual isolated emotions into a shared emotional experience, which Christian von Scheve and Sven Ismer refer to as collective emotion and define as "the simultaneous convergence of individual emotional responses to a particular event or object" - meaning that when individuals within a group of people are involved in the creation and distribution of a film, they are able to share their emotions. -- This means that when members of a group have an emotional reaction to something or an object, this reaction is synchronized within the group.

Collective emotions can be seen as a combination of parts or as something more or something else, which can be understood as an extension of individual emotions. The importance of individual emotions in the context of cinema is therefore significant, as they profoundly influence collective emotions and have a profound impact on the production, cultural impact and market value of films, as the success of a film is largely dependent on the audience's reaction to the emotional experience of the film. The importance of the collective emotional response of audiences and cinephiles has also led filmmakers to improve the quality of their films, in an attempt to produce work that is more emotionally resonant.

3.2. *The evolution of the movie-going experience for fans*

As cinema has changed in the digital age, the role and behavior of the fandom have changed

accordingly. In his lamentation that fandom is dead, Sontag specifically mourns the passing of a condition necessary for the fandom experience, namely the demise of the cinema.^[xiii] With the decline of single-screen cinemas and the emergence of new viewing options such as small-screen cinemas and 'multiplexes' and 'mega-screenings', as well as the decline of art houses and repertory cycle cinemas, audiences in outside of metropolitan areas may be difficult to find a cinema venue to suit their tastes, making it much less likely that fandom will be able to enjoy their preferred location in a cinema. Against this backdrop, film festivals have become a 'sanctuary' for film fans, and visiting them has become one of the most iconic acts of contemporary cinema. Although fandom is spending less time in art house cinemas, they still devote considerable time and energy to watching and discussing films through attending film festivals, watching films on media software, and participating in film communities on the internet, a phenomenon that is a strong indication that fandom is far from extinct.

We can call the fans of the digital age video lovers. The new cinema lovers are closely linked to the technological devices that have developed and spread to provide them with a more personal and individual viewing experience, allowing them to enjoy films at home. It can be said that the new generation of film fans is intellectually fulfilled through internet technology, which not only provides them with a vast source of information but also a space to gather and exchange ideas, which is part of the tradition of film lovers.^[xiv] New cinephiles can meet people with similar cinematic tastes more easily through the internet than traditional fans. While some argue that there is a lack of a real sense of community on the internet, these online communities offer a level of comradeship that fans have never experienced before, and this can lead to the evolution of online communities into something more than 'soundtrack discussions' (i.e. discussions about the surface content of films).

Through the Internet and technology, film fans can share and communicate in-depth, expanding their interests in a wider range of areas and forming deeper social relationships with other members of the community. At the same time, such exchanges and discussions have made it possible for more people to learn about different styles and genres of cinema, enhancing the cultural literacy and aesthetics of the film audience and further expanding its reach. Today's cinephiles embrace new technologies while maintaining the memory and attention of outdated media formats. Fans' practices encompass not only different technological forms and platforms but also different subject positions and emotional encounters. This plurality suggests that cinephiles are experiencing a rapid resurgence of enthusiasm for cinema and are demonstrating the power of change and the energy of renewal. So we can say that cinema is not dead and that cinephiles have not disappeared, they are still active in all forms of cinematic activity.

4. Reflections on the future of fandom and cinema

With the above arguments, it seems that we can already foresee a bright future for cinema in the digital age, yet it is very dangerous to be prematurely positive about the future of cinema and its fans. The crisis that the digital age has brought to the cinema is unlike any other crisis that has occurred in the past; it is long-term. The development process of digital media is much longer than that of sound film, and its transformation is continuing. For the film industry, digital transformation is an inevitable trend at present, rather than a temporary trend. Only by adapting to this trend and constantly adjusting and planning, can the film industry achieve better development. In this regard, I will discuss some of the problems that exist in the film industry and hope that they will be taken into account in the digitalization of cinema.

Overall cinema in the digital age is diverse, interactive and customizable, and cross-media.^[xv] In the digital age, cinema can use digital technologies such as digital effects, virtual reality, and cloud computing to make film production more flexible and to achieve more creative visual effects, thus providing audiences with more personalized and interactive viewing experience. At the same time, however, digital technology poses a challenge to the preservation of film culture. The digitization and online distribution of contemporary cinema have accelerated the consumption and obsolescence of cinema, as audiences have diverse and easy access to new film resources, and the appeal and demand for classic films have diminished. At the same time, the production and preservation techniques of some classic films may become obsolete as film technology rapidly changes, making it impossible to restore and re-promote classic films. While digital technology has opened up more possibilities for the film industry, the quality and cultural value of cinema remain at the heart of the industry, and preserving the history of cinema is therefore an indispensable part of ensuring that cinema moves steadily into the future.

Another noteworthy issue is that with advances in science and technology, increased demand in the global film market, and trade liberalization, the trend towards transnational collaboration and globalization in the film industry has grown and film production is fast becoming a ubiquitous activity

on a global scale.^[xvi] But despite the fervent globalization of the film industry, little is known about it. We cannot be sure of the role of minimum market size, demand uncertainty, and economies of scale in the specialization and internationalization of the film industry, and because of the success of the Hollywood film industry, little is known about the international film market outside of Hollywood. At the same time, language and cultural differences are also major obstacles and challenges in the process of globalizing cinema. We need to look at the globalization of the film industry more objectively and rationally and test it to see how these factors might change and to explore whether new distribution and projection technology techniques might have an impact on the business of film distributors in different countries.

In our research on fan behavior in the digital age, we discuss the current role of film festivals. Film festivals serve as a forum for cultural and cross-cultural interaction, facilitating deeper engagement between fans and filmmakers from all over the world. They also serve as a good market for international cinema, enabling for wider marketing of films. cinema festivals, as keepers of cinema history and culture, allow modern filmgoers to see great films while also encouraging the study and transmission of film culture. But while we are pleased with the positive aspects of the festival's existence, there are also some issues surrounding the festival that need to be taken more seriously. North American film festivals European film festivals have always emphasized their fan image and the serious nature of their screenings. However, with the increasing involvement of celebrities and internet celebrities, the festival has gradually moved in the direction of commercialization and entertainment, which has led to a shift in the core values and objectives of the festival away from a focus on the art of cinema itself, and towards a focus on celebrity and social events. Genuine film lovers and fans are marginalized, and this trend could also weaken the status and influence of film festivals to the detriment of the continued development of cinema in the digital age. Under the influence of the star system cinema is no longer a surviving art form, but a part of social culture, so creating the conditions for the fan experience is not the only consideration for film festivals. The commercialization and entertainment of festivals, within reason, can attract more people to the discussion and study of cinema, but the point is how festivals and the film industry can recognize these changes and balance the needs and interests of their audiences, and to achieve this balance, it is important to address the primary role of film fans in festivals.

5. Conclusion

In discussing the transformation of the film industry in the digital age, this paper has introduced the concept of post-classical film theory. Post-classical film theory emphasizes the diversity of film as a cultural and social phenomenon and the intersection and interaction between film and other art forms. Compared to traditional film theory, post-classical film theory offers a more flexible and diverse perspective to help us understand the cultural and economic transformation of film in the digital age.

This paper discusses the notion that "cinema is dead" in the digital age and concludes that cinema is not dead, but that the continuous development and advancement of digital technology has opened up more possibilities for the film industry, and has driven a comprehensive change in the production, distribution, and viewing of cinema. The film industry is not dead. In critiquing the idea that cinema is dead, this article also focuses on the importance of the film fan in the industry and provides a reasonable critique of the disappearance of the fan and the decadence of the cinema. The impact and challenges that digitalization has brought to cinema are enormous, but it is too pessimistic and hasty to simply attribute changes in the old traditions and forms of cinema as evidence of its demise. In this day and age, cinema is still a living and vibrant art form, and we need to be more tolerant and open-minded to the changes that cinema is undergoing in this new era. However, it is worth noting that the digital development of cinema is not always smooth. Even though the essay criticizes the notion that "cinema is dead," there are some lessons to be drawn from the fears that "cinema is dead". The digital age's change of film will be a long-term process, and the crisis it faces is far more severe than at any previous moment in history. So, in the face of such changes, we must be more practical in our efforts to overcome these problems and better encourage the development and progress of the film industry, in addition to remaining hopeful and tolerant.

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