

Every individual is collective: how can we save cinema's future?

Todo individuo es colectivo: ¿cómo podemos salvar el futuro del cine?

<http://dx.doi.org/10.32870/Pk.a9n16.395>

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Received: November 5, 2018
Accepted: February 22, 2019

ABSTRACT

In today's audiovisual ecosystem, one of the recurring themes is drug use. The Congress (dir. Ari Folman, 2014) is a film that approaches this topic in a particular way, by offering a reflection from science-fiction on the relation between individual, drugs and society in a movie about the future of cinema. This text presents an analysis of this piece, taking categories from the psychoanalytic theory of cinema proposed by Slavoj Žižek (suture, Real, interface), reflections from futurologist Jacques Attali, and some ideas from Marxism and clinical psychoanalysis to establish the importance of saving the cinematographic process from collectivity instead of the exaltation of individual experience.

Keywords

Drugs; science-fiction;
Real; Futurology;
Collectivity

RESUMEN

En el ecosistema audiovisual contemporáneo, uno de los temas recurrentes es el uso de drogas. La película El Congreso (director Ari Folman, 2014) retrata este tema de un modo muy particular, al ofrecer una reflexión desde la ciencia ficción sobre la relación individuo-drogas-sociedad en un filme cuyo tema es el futuro del cine. Este texto presenta un análisis de la película, al retomar categorías propias del campo de la teoría psicoanalítica de cine planteada por Slavoj Žižek (sutura, real, interfaz), reflexiones del futurólogo Jacques Attali, así como algunas ideas propias del marxismo y el psicoanálisis clínico para establecer la importancia de salvar al proceso cinematográfico desde la colectividad antes que la exaltación de la experiencia individual.

Palabras clave

Drogas; ciencia ficción;
real; futurología;
colectividad

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Introduction: Death by Drug Overdose

In our liberal and postmodern societies where the threat of fascism is increasing and the way to deal with it is through one's own battle (of sexual, ethnic, racial identities, etc.), the way in which the subject expresses him/herself and states others, plays a crucial role. The collective process of action becomes a concept that will play an important role in the future if we want to save the planet from its most perverse of evils that bring it closer to total destruction.

It is within this panorama that drugs that were once considered as providers of freedom for the individual (or even emancipation) and which, in this sense, were seen as subversive, they have now been totally appropriated by the system by precisely *liberating the individual*, that is still pigeonholed there and does not achieve freeing themselves (or emancipating themselves) from the collectivity. As Slavoj Žižek summarized in a recent lecture:¹ “Drugs imply the euthanasia of public life and the artificial exaltation of our private life”.

Elisabeth Roudinesco had already been ahead of Žižek in a series of articles in which she advocates for the importance of psychoanalysis against psychopharmacology that tries to solve any psychic condition with pills. This euthanasia of public life seems to be an echo of what she had published: “Modern democratic society wants to erase from its horizon the reality of disgrace, death and violence, seeking to integrate differences and resistances in a sole system; and, in the name of globalization and economic success, it has tried to abolish the idea of social conflict” (Roudinesco, 2018, p. 17).

This “euthanasia of public life” (the negation of my role in the processes of political participation, and even worse, in not understanding that my indifference plays a fundamental role in political processes) and “artificial exaltation of private life” (New Age postmodern nihilism that promotes “holistic/integral” welfare of the individual, regardless of their subjugation to a specific economic system) find articulation in the topic of drugs in the contemporary audiovisual.

One of the first movies that popularized this topic is *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1997). The characters are in fact individuals surrendered to the exaltation of senses from the unbridled use of drugs. Since they could not find happiness anywhere, and wanting to feel euphoria and total detachment, they become addicted to all kinds of narcotics.

On the other hand, *Limitless* (Neil Burger, 2011) deals with the topic of drugs and their individual use in a different dimension. The leading man uses this secret drug that enables him to use the total capacity of his brain abilities to invest in the stock market without any problems, to become a millionaire and get the woman of his dreams. In this case, drugs are the trampoline (deceitful) to access great benefits of financial capitalism.

A movie that particularly highlights this topic, perhaps for having had less success than its director's previous film (*Waltz with Bashir*, 2006), or given the criticism of the system of studies or its experimental genre, is *The Congress*, directed by Ari Folman and lead by Robin Wright. In this movie, drugs operate as the subject's unbridled transition to pleasure. This pleasure, however, hides a real residue whose access must be paid.

The Congress is an interesting film not only for the drugs topic but also because its topic is the future of filmmaking. Moreover, it draws sharp criticism of the contemporary liberal, politically correct and multicultural society. This position, in which most of the movements of the so-called left in the western world are embroiled, finds a limit (and it is this limit that genuinely establishes a distinction between the left and the liberal/democratic/capitalist lefts). In this movie, the most comprehensive diversity of individual struggles can coexist with the most brutal conditions of oppression.

In this paper, we will first present an analysis of the movie *The Congress*. This movie, in order to understand its implications in the history of filmmaking and how it will look in the future, must be understood from the split personality of the subject proposed by drugs. This split personality involves the capacity to play fictitiously and float symbolically to cover up what is real; these reflections constitute the next part.

Lastly, after having established a reading logic of the utopia and dystopia, we find that within any utopian project, there is a dystopia already operating. This can be avoided only if the utopia proposes a radical break with the symbolic system, something capitalism does not allow (even if it makes us believe so). This break, in the case of filmmaking, and to avoid what happens in *The Congress*, will occur by saving the notion of collectivity.

The Congress: the Exaltation (and suture) of the Otherness

The film begins with a close-up of Robin Wright crying, in the movie she plays herself in a discouraging future in which her career plummets into a hole from which she never recovered and now lives in a plane hangar, next to an airport with her teenage daughter Sarah and her youngest son Aaron, a child with a disease that, for the moment, is not clear.



Image 1. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 00:40

In the company of her former agent, Al, she visits the Miramount studios. The logo of the studios is a clear reference to the name and image of Paramount's, but there are also mountains and stars that form an eye that looks at the spectator. There, they meet with Jeff, the producer, a man that immediately flatters Robin and then raises his voice blaming her for the money she made them lose.

In order to avoid losing money and to save the little career Robin has left, Jeff offers her a new type of contract. His justification is that the studio (the Grand Capital) requires ending "all that structure"; ending all the actors and actresses' tantrums, sexual scandals, overdoses and paparazzi. It is about controlling the subject that tries to escape the logic of accumulation of earnings. The studio will make a digital copy of Robin that will be used as a digital avatar they can modify as they please (under the contract restrictions) to make computerized movies only.

Hence, this contract offers, with the imaginary copy of the individual, total freedom of the subject ("after making a copy of yourself, you can go and discover your true self", Jeff invites her to accept). As you will read further on, this imaginary copy is used as a floating signifier of commercial exchange: Robin may be at one point a secret robot agent, at another, a middle-class housewife, and at another, a mystical goddess.

While Robin is thinking, she visits Dr. Baker with Aaron. Aaron's hearing condition has decreased but Baker tries to be positive and explains that Aaron's disease spectrum could affect his hearing and sight definitely; while explaining this process, he confuses words and images, which presumes the future of movies: in a few decades, cinema will be a series of stimuli that will work directly on the subconscious. This is exactly what Alfred Hitchcock once declared regarding his movie *North by Northwest* (1959): in the future, filmmakers will simply connect our brain to keys on a keyboard that when pressed, they will make us feel a variety of emotions (quoted in Spoto, 1984).

It is strange to link the loss of Aaron's capacity to be stimulated by the cinema (as Baker predicts, Aaron will probably be deaf and blind by the age of 40) is just the next step for the cinema of the future. This is echoed in Jacques Attali's definition of cinema in his Dictionary of the 21st century:²

CINEMA

It will continue to be the main technological attraction, the first excuse to go out, travel, dream, to live by the powers of adventure, beauty, subversion. By having to withstand the competition of the new forms of virtual nomadism, it will be forced to offer increasingly disproportionate performances and tell stories, sensations and emotions of nomad heroes that use nomad instruments to live a nomad adventure. The cinema economy will be forever transformed by the work of two technological evolutions. On the one hand, the market of any film will be directly universal, since the automatic translation will be associated with the morphing of the actors' face: hence, a film made in any language will be immediately available in all the other languages. On the other hand, the production cost will be greatly reduced: there will be the possibility of integrating virtual actors and extras in group scenes.

Large studios, in competition with smaller producers, will assault technical progress to place the spectator in the center of the 3D spectacles. Afterwards, the cinema will become a spectacle offered in reality by virtual characters, holograms animated at first by actors, endowed with a voice, and after, even with the sense of touch and smell: true clone images. Thus, cinema, theater, painting and carnival will blend (2007, p. 77).

By acknowledging that cinema will transform into a 3D spectacle, at first with virtual characters backed from behind by actors, doesn't this establish a very clear precedent of the film? Hence, of course, this is not intended to say that *The Congress* is an adaptation or inspiration of this definition or any other, but it shows that, in the collective imaginary of virtuality, there is the possibility of the split of the subject into another virtual figure that does everything for me. This process is what Slavoj Žižek

(2008b) knows as *interpassivity*, but according to Attali's terms, it already includes its own concept, that of the virtual copy that will do everything for me: *clone image*. His definition is:

CLONE IMAGE

A digital double that anyone will be able to launch into network spaces to make it live, work, consumed through powers, with digital doubles created by others.

Soon it will be transformed into a hologram endowed with the sense of touch, a voice and a certain form of intelligence, capable of intervening in everyday life. In addition to being children's playmate, it could be used to simulate a worker's behavior in front of a machine, a customer in a shop, or the crowd in a stadium, all of it in full size. The clone image, first actor and singer, will also be able to participate later on in a live show. It will represent the greatest change and it will produce a great mental commotion in man's everyday environment (Attali, 2007, p. 87).

At first, it seems that the subject will achieve creating a double of himself, not to say clone himself in a clone image that will do everything for them. In *The Congress*, it is not that simple: the subject splitting is possible only within the subject himself.

Robin agrees to being scanned. In her last performance, within the sphere that registers every gesture of her face and body movement, her agent AI makes her laugh, cry, get excited, acting as her last director. This ends the first part of the film. Twenty years later, an older Robin is driving on the highway. She reaches a Miramount security checkpoint where the guard informs her that it is an exclusive animation zone and that the animation will end only until they meet again. He gives her a vial that she inhales and, sure enough, she enters an animation world.

The first thing she sees as animation in the film, is herself in the rearview mirror since in order for the world to become a drawing, first, there must be a retroactive process in which one sees themselves as a drawing.



Image 2. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 47:41

The second part of the film is almost entirely an animation inspired by Disney's first drawings, characterized by characters with pronounced curves, bulging eyes and the aesthetics from the forties. This is how the lobby of the hotel where Robin will stay looks like; everything is animated to the exception of the trailer that is playing in loop on the screens (starring her digital double). Here, the relation is reversed; it is on the screens that something closer to the human essence can be found.



Image 3. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 50:24

This is a hypersexualized animated world (like the animals in the fish tank of the hotel lobby, shaped as penises, vaginas and in intense copulation), where its

inhabitants change shapes at will, and robots are the administrators. The design of the hotel itself is not the same for everyone: it takes on the design as manifested by the subconscious of every subject that inhabits it. As an example, Ralph, the waiter, when asked if the room is dark or if it is only the result of the imagination, responds: “If you see darkness, it is because you have chosen darkness”.

Before the big announcement, the reason to have been convened to this congress, Jeff meets Robin again. Jeff, once again, as the Grand Capital, tells Robin that the hotel will no longer exist since now the story writers are a problem (they continue being subjects that do not fully collaborate to the reproduction of capital and profits), the option was to enter the “era of free choice”: actors will be substances that viewers will be able to take and make whatever they want with them.

It is time for the announcement. The presenter, dressed in an ecclesiastic robe and applauded by thousands of attendees as an idol, announces with pomp and grandeur the latest technological advance, so ominously similar to the way Steve Jobs, Tim Cook and Elon Musk were or are revered when appearing in public.

The presenter promises that, with this new substance, one can be anything, lead a full and happy life, without any frustrations. He invites us to “be our own dream”, as a book on self-improvement would do. He is welcomed with shouts of joy, interrupted by a sniper that shoots him.

Here is where Dylan’s character, an animator that worked with Robin’s digital double for years, intervenes to rescue her at the hotel. After confusing dreams and awakenings, Robin regains consciousness in a hospital where she learns that her case is impossible to be treated at the moment, hence, she is going to be frozen in liquid nitrogen to be preserved and be studied in the future. The operator that puts her into the nitrogen to preserve her strangely resembles the photographer that recorded the images for her digital double 20 years ago.

When she awakes, Dylan appears once more. Despite understanding that many years have gone by, neither of them seems to have aged, not even one day. Dylan explains to Robin that Miramont has successfully distributed those pills so everyone could “be their own dream”. He informs her that the chemistry has put an end to violence, war and individual ego: “We are all what we are. All are what they want to be”.



Image 4. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:38:08

Therefore, with the distribution of the pill, the entire planet has become a dream costume party. Everywhere sexual, ethnic, racial identities, movie preferences, music or art, activists of all struggles, followers of all creeds, copies of all characters of all types of fictions, wander. Everyone lives in their own fantasy created by their desires. The entire city is a place filled with peace and hallucinogenic happiness.

This fulfills the dream of all the particular struggles that seek their own welfare. The whole world is a *safe space*, in which every particular identity can achieve its “maximum potential”, since everyone is the entire owner of their appearance and presentation before the otherness. The maximum respect for the different worldviews finds its Eden in the world thanks to the Miramont pill.

Robin, however, is still looking for Aaron. At a dinner with Dylan, he explains to her that Aaron is probably “on the other side”: he might not have taken the pill and he is outside the world of animation. In the words of Dylan, Aaron is “on the side of the truth” where those that failed to pass and those who operate the fantasy live.

Robin begs him to escape, and Dylan accepts to give her the pill provided she goes away and does not try to find him once she escapes the animation. She takes the pill and bids Dylan farewell, and she exits the restaurant. On the one hand, the security guard appears behind the bar, the one who had told her that she would run into him again when she would exit animation.

Here, the animation begins to darken and ends halfway of a traveling shot when different imaginary and symbolic identities vanish revealing reality: the world is a dump, where dirty people in rags, in an inhospitable, destroyed and gray open space assemble to continue the collective fantasy. Every subject is immersed in an individual and singular experience, and this is precisely what makes them identical to one another. It is

thanks to these enormous “differences” that all the subjects are the same: what they share is sharing nothing, to the exception of their real (hidden) position in the social fabric.



Image 5. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:42:52



Image 6. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:42:53

Robin runs into a woman with Miramont clothing who can barely breathe. She tells her she can find a doctor upstairs. She arrives at the airport, but it is no longer the dream space with pastel colors she visited with Dylan, but a gray place with a balloon that leads to a zeppelin. Robin gets on board, crosses a room where men and women in military and scientific clothing look at her in disgust. She pushes the door marked Dr. Baker and there she finds him but much older.



Image 7. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:43:08



Image 8. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:47:35

Baker tells her that he insisted many times on Aaron taking the pill and “cross over to the other side”, but the youngster always waited for his mother to wake up from the liquid nitrogen, until he finally gave up and decided to cross. Robin understands that

there was not benefit in coming back: she will never find her son again, wherever (and whatever) he is.

The doctor has one last solution: Robin will not be able to get together with her son, but he can make her return to that world, that will be created with whatever she brings back to her subconscious mind. She accepts and thus begins to see, from her own son's standpoints, memories of his growth, childhood and adult life.

These memories are of course apocryphal. Robin cannot "remember" the things Aaron saw from his own standpoint, hence, what is seen is Robin's split: she imagines remembering what Aaron would remember. This is the statute of the *gaze qua object*, pointed out by Žižek (1991): it is not about being fascinated by the object but rather by the gaze the object is being seen.

This split is explicit in one of the shots that, to finish off with the topic of the film itself, takes place during the filming in which he sees his mother on the screen: "Aaron" (actually as Robin imagines Aaron), stands at a film set and walks towards his mother who is also there but on the monitor on the left where Aaron's reflection appears spectrally.

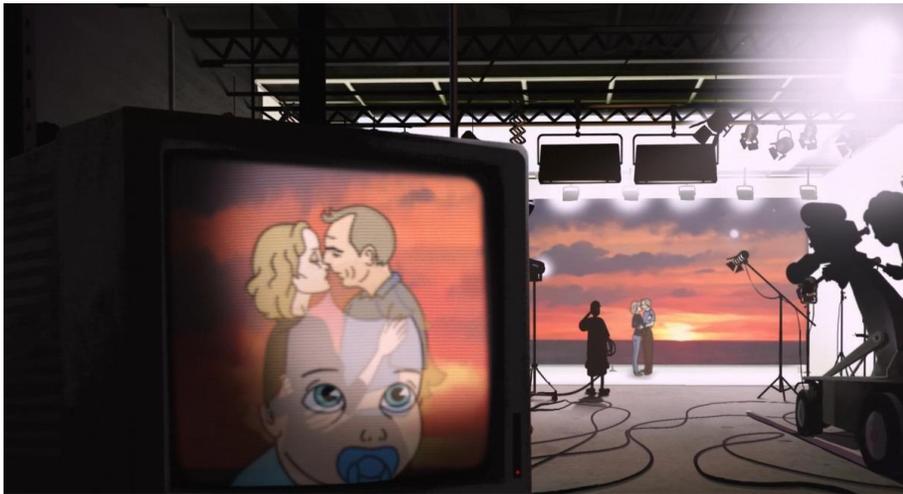


Image 9. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:54:00

This spectral appearance is based on the assumption that this shot has an interface; the concept Žižek (2001) uses for the most complex suture mechanism. In this case, the appearance of baby Aaron seeing his mother hides the position of the enunciation of this hallucination (it is not baby Aaron but his mother). Hence, the memories that are established, which are also ours, correspond to the film previous scenes (in Baker's office, Robin getting into the sports car that will take her to the Congress, getting on board the zeppelin, until appearing again in old Baker's office).

Lastly, in the last scene, Aaron (that is, Robin), arrives at a place in the middle of the desert, with a character repairing a small plane.³ Aaron is reflected in the trailer. And, the subject repairing the small plane is in fact Aaron himself, who is, of course, a manifestation of Robin's unconscious. It is with this shot of Aaron smiling (Aaron who is actually his mother) that the movie ends, closing the circle with which it started.

In this sense, the most radical suture is that of the subject with the otherness, which is what occurs in the last scene where Robin sutures with her own son, with the appearance of her son. Hence, at the end of *The Congress*, the subject splits with the other, the mother is no longer the other (there is no m(o)ther), since the mother becomes one with the subject. The purpose of the pill, which was also accomplished, is that our lead lady succumbs to it, it is the artificial cancellation of the otherness.

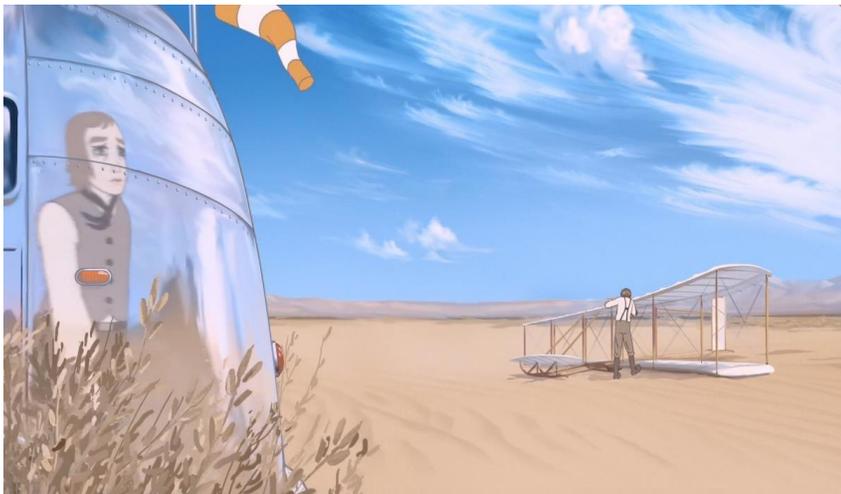


Image 10. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:56:36

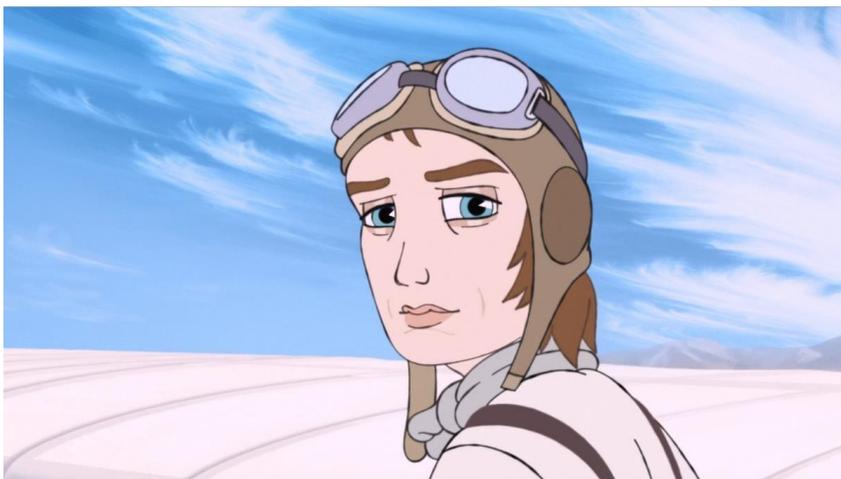


Image 11. Scene from the movie *The Congress*, minute 1:56:44

(Not) Every Future is Happy: Drugs as a Supposed Escape

The revelation is that “the other side of the truth” to which Dylan was referring is not somewhere else but right here: the symbolic fabric itself is split within; the subject is divided between their imaginary toy (the physical appearance chosen), their symbolic floatation (the position of alleged equality between other subjects that has been achieved with this new social structure) and the immovable *real* weight of their relevance for the economic system.

The Congress supposes a very harsh criticism of the postmodern optimism that believes that the emancipation of the individual will lead to a fairer world. It reminds us that the greatest diversity of individuals can be very functional for the most terrible oppression and inequality.

In terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis and its use to explain political and ideological processes, the *real* is not a kind of gap that is filled with symbolic construction. The *real* is a gap that opens together with the symbolic construction. There is no such thing as opposition, but the *real* is the gap that opens up in the residue left by the binary process of opposition. As Žižek (2006, p. 800), points out, in Lacanian mathematics, $1+1=3$: no opposition is divided simply between one element and another; there is always a residue to deal with, a residue that is only visible thanks to the inability of the symbolic structure to explain it, and this residue inhabits the *real*.

Hence, the appearance of the *real* implies that of the limit of the symbolic, but not only in the sense of “that which cannot be symbolized” but also in the sense of “that which is within the *symbolic*, fails to function”. The dimension of the *real* is, in contemporary postmodern liberal democracies, the place where economic inequality hides. That is why drugs, once considered the instruments to escape from oppression, while they are floating signifiers, can serve as a point for the economic machinery that hides within the *real*: today they are the spaces where one, far from escaping oppression, is the well-lubricated gear for the economic machinery.

We should remind ourselves that Roudinesco also shared this idea that the successful future of drugs is the successful future of the “free” market to phagocyte them: “Emancipated from the prohibitions for equal rights and the leveling of conditions, the depressed [individual] of the end of the century has inherited an addictive dependence to the world” (2018, p.20).

When Roudinesco points out that drugs seek to substitute the subject for the individual (2018, p. 16), this change is to be understood in the psychoanalytical sense of the subject: that which appears in dreams, *lapsus linguae*, twitches, obsessions. The subject emerges where it stops being an individual trapped by the *symbolic* order; it emerges at the glimpses of the *real*.

The lesson we can learn from a movie such as *The Congress* is that drugs try to cancel this possibility and bring the subject to the position of an individual of the economic exchange. What makes the private spectacle, the cancelation of the public spectacle so dangerous, is the control that could be taken over dreams, and, in this sense, over the subject that lies beyond the individual. Attali (2007) offers a definition of dreams for the 21st century.

DREAMS

The frenzied hyperworld is a major conundrum that could one day cover up the most terrible threat to humanity's mental health.

If understanding is to control, when the mechanisms, brain location and the dreams functions will have been understood, then, attempts will be made to shape them. It will then perhaps be possible to eliminate dreams, divert them and customize them. The entire structure of consciousness will be disrupted. *There will be nothing to impede the market to manipulate dreams, offer new trips, a nomadism with sleepwalking visions, sleepless meandering, tablets for dreams in the shape of sleeping pills.* There will be nothing to ensure that this freedom does not lead to dementia, the same as in Shakespeare, for who lucidity is not more than the prelude to madness (Attali, 2007, p. 324).

The market thus offers dreams in shape of sleeping pills. It will show the possibility that dreams are also on their way to fulfilling the market interests and thus, cancel subjectivity.

One of the ways to avoid cancelling dreams would be with a setback of the binary logic that was Jacques Lanca's effort with the study of formulae of sexuation in the 19th and 20th seminars. A table of formulae of sexuation could be established based on the reading of the future proposed by *The Congress*, which would be as follows:

Male side	Female side
<p><i>All future is happy</i> (The universal statement incarnated in the world with individuals heavy on pills, living their individuality)</p> <p><i>There is an unhappy future</i> (the position that is hiding and thanks to which the universal is based)</p>	<p><i>There is no future that is not happy</i> (the subject's hysterical quest to achieve full happiness; any future can be happy if the subject reaches their own potential)</p> <p><i>Not all future is happy</i> (within the future there is unhappiness; there is a gap within all future where the possibility of an unhappy future lies)</p>

Therefore, in an intelligent setback, *The Congress* is not a common science-fiction movie, where utopia becomes dystopia, or where the limits of “good” space and “bad” space are clear: the lesson is that within all utopias lies the potential for dystopia; however, not both sides can be attained. We have the option of living on pills in the apparent utopia or be condemned to dystopia, it is so impossible to get both that our lead woman prefers to deny this forced choice and suture herself to the otherness (this as the end of the movie).

To ignore the complex social relations as utopia being dystopia is possible only through an interested gaze, a twisted gaze (another Žižek’s posture, 1991) of the symbolic fabric. This *twisted* gaze is interested in finding the nucleus of the *real* immanent in every symbolic project, and in the case of economic inequality, this was already provided in the beginning of its beginnings, Marxism.

All Consumption is Production

Grundrisse is the first draft for (The Capital), Karl Marx’s culminating work, written between 1857 and 1858. In the introduction, Marx already aims at the need of not separating the economic fabric processes: all production is also consumption, and all consumption is also production, hence, a specific logic of consumption is produced and all consumption aims at nothing more than the need to continue producing: “Thus production, distribution, exchange and consumption form a regular syllogism; production is the generality, distribution and exchange the particularity, and consumption the singularity in which the whole is joined together” (Marx, 1939, p. 89).³

Hence, all consumption, when presented isolated of the production chain, hides the dimension of its usefulness for the continuous capitalist production scheme. Marx claims: “Consumption produces production in a double way, (1) because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed. [...] (2) because consumption creates the need for *new* production, that it is creates the ideal, internally impelling cause for production, which is its presupposition” (1939, p. 91).⁴

The quite interesting investment made by Marx is that there is no common sense in capitalism that would promulgate “I produce to consume”: the system creates, invents its own consumption, hence, capitalism is rather a system in which “I consume to produce”: I need an eternal and on-going circuit and discursive apparatus that compels me to compete with other individuals to be satisfied.⁵

Therefore, capitalist production can only have one distribution, exchange and capitalist consumptions (hence, it needs to feed its production). This is why the degree of “liberation” an individual can have at the singular level of drug consumption does not matter: they will always be trapped in the capitalist economic machinery. This is why it does not matter how *eco-friendly*, *gay-friendly*, *pet-friendly*, etcetera, a business is (i.e.,

how much is the business committed to a specific cause): by complying with some of the capitalist processes (whether in the production of its raw material to be able to operate, the distribution of its products or the consumption that establishes capital gains), this is a business that, first and foremost, and the most important of all, is *capitalist-friendly*, and thus, it is a friend of economic inequality, which is the most important driving force that allows capitalism to evolve.

Hollywood is supposedly an excellent place to find the coordinates that allow understanding the process of calmness before the great problems of humanity, protecting us in our particularity, our clone image and digital double. *Ready Player One* (2018), from Steven Spielberg, is a movie on the dystopian future in which the vast majority of the population is connected to a videogame, to a digital world where everybody can choose, again and again, their imaginary appearance.

Ready Player One becomes problematic when our lead actor, at the end of the game, wins the chance to reign over the digital world, by beating the transnational corporation that wanted to take over the throne to brutally increase its profits; the lead actor is given a button that could make this world dominance disappear: pressing the button involves the irreversible encryption of the whole game. Since it is a Hollywood film, our character decides to reject the decision; i.e., he faces the possibility that with only pressing a button he would change the coordinates of the entire world economic system, but he decides not to do so and he only cancels this universe twice a week: we will play that the financial capitalism in which we are trapped does not exist on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The ingenuity that *Ready Player One* opts for is that of a utopia that can be saved provided the dystopian elements are “removed” (“All future is happy”). As for *The Congress*, it denounces the dystopian project the core of any utopia that does not seek a radical change in the symbolic coordinates of the subjects (“Not all future is happy”). The key to this change is to be found in the different statutes of the subject: of believing that the individual must attain their full potential and, as a consequence, their future will be happy; and understanding that an individual can reach their full potential, and yet, not have a happy future. Hence, the idea of collectivity is the key to save the subject, and by doing so, save the cinema.

All Universal is Individual, All Individual is Collective

The political criticism of *The Congress* is difficult to assimilate for those who believe that all societies and groups can reach “their full potential” and live in peaceful tolerance with each other. This has a clear limit: the economic struggle. By disguising the economic struggle, replacing it by multiple struggles, is how the elites remained in the same place.

This brings us to question ourselves once more on how much power to change the current conditions of injustice do multicultural struggles have for sexual rights, women's rights, the environment, ethnicities, races, immigrants and any other minority group. We have to be very clear: all these struggles are totally fair and important and they are not going to end today; however, all of them will end in the contingency if the economic struggle is not resolved.

Why? Because the construction of a universal truth that operates under specific conditions of fight is required: it requires the construction of a universal fight that is universal not only because it is a primal fight but rather because the particularity at which one is does not matter, since it is always possible to join it. According to this new meaning, universality is not the end of particularities, but rather the articulation of particularities to a specific universality: one stipulated from the particularity.

The end of the comforting nihilism to which drugs invite us (and their consumption of the "free" market economy) will only achieve saving the idea of collectivity, and this is the only way to save the cinema from the sad future foreseen in *The Congress*. Francesco Casetti (2011) proposes rewriting the history of cinema based on the spectator's experience. He identified the stages of attendance, authorship subjectivity and performance. *The Congress* proposes a new stage that Casetti could add: individualization of the experience.

The problem at this stage, as Žižek pointed out at the beginning of this text, is that it privileges the individual by sacrificing public life, and since no individual aesthetic experience is detached from a specific political experience (as no consumption mode is detached from a production mode), we live in total obfuscation of the meaningful political production process.

As usual, throughout its history, pornography stands out here as a pivotal point to which the production and consumption of the cinema of the future will be oriented. As pornography is available on free sites, and with the multiplication of screens and devices to access such sites, we see a concealment of the pornographic phenomenon that was once supposed to be a collective experience (from the first pornographic performances to the exchange of magazines and DVDs from years ago). Ironically, pornography is the most conservative and coy genre in cinema, as it is the genre that most obfuscates its own experience of collective participation. The individualization of the experience of consuming pornography is ominously similar to the first steps of those taking the drugs in *The Congress*. Therefore, the way to save us from that disaster is by saving the collective experience: only collectively will we be able to save each other, and in this urgent task, cinema can play an essential role.

In a last contemporary reference, *Maniac* (2018), Netflix series, deals, once more, with the power of pharmaceutical drugs to "change" the individual, to cut the subject's interruption in the symbolic fabric with their desires, manias, unhappiness,

psychic disorders and, within reach of “total happiness”. The plot of the series becomes complicated when the computer fails and mixed the dreams of two characters, i.e., when the symbolic fabric is fragile and allows that two subjects – in the psychoanalytical use of the term – enter into conflict. Hence, the encounter with the otherness is what can ensure the continuity of subjectivity, what can save us from dying from overdose. We can save ourselves from living a congress, but not because we cancel the individual in benefit of an imaginative collectivity, but because we commit to the reading that the subject, from their particularity, makes the universe whole.

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¹ Retrieved on November 3rd 2018 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADpVQKbMoJA>.

² In this definition and all the others of the Attali's dictionary that appear in italics in this text are mine.

³ Other possible paths of interpretation are the idea Al said in one of the first scenes, on whether Aaron is not the third Wright brother, in reference to Wilbur and Orville Wright, who piloted the first powered flight in history. Isn't Aaron the third Wright brother given his obsession with aircrafts, but also the third Lumière brother, other two pioneers of cinema, since he represents the next step to the evolution of the invention?

⁴ Author's translation: Consumption produces production in two ways, 1) since a product becomes a real product only by being consumed [...] 2) since consumption creates the need of a new production, i.e., creates the ideal cause, internally promoting production, which is its presupposition.

⁵ Regarding the relation between discourse and capitalism and plus enjoyment, I recommend reading the first chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Žižek, 2008b) and *Psychoanalysis and Capitalism* (Ed. Gibrán Larrauri, 2016).