

Kevin Kelly: State of Cinema Address

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May 3rd, 2008 @ 2:35 PM [Film](#),[Movies](#),[Technology](#)



At 1:00 tomorrow at the [Clay Theater](#), [Kevin Kelly](#) (Senior Maverick of WIRED Magazine) will give the [State of Cinema Address at the SF International Film Festival](#). The address is titled “Beyond Moving Pictures: Possibilities for the Future of Film.” It promises to be very interesting. I got him on the phone yesterday, and he revealed some of the ideas he plans to explore in his talk. The Q&A begins below and continues after the jump.

You’ve said that your book in progress is about “what technology wants.” What might this mean for the future of film?

Well, that’s the subject of this talk on Sunday, which is “Listen to the Technology.” Because what does technology want film to be? One of the metaphors I may use, is that technology wants film to be a *newlanguage*. It wants to be something similar to writing.

To give you an example of what I mean by that: right now I’m sure, no matter where you’re sitting, if you looked around, you could probably identify 15, 20, maybe hundreds or thousands of examples of *text* in your environment. It’s actually very hard for us, in our *built* environment, to escape from text, from *words*. They’re printed on everything we make, they’re on walls, we carry it around. The technology is ubiquitous, and it has kind of permeated our entire culture. In fact, it’s impossible to imagine our culture without text. It has shaped the very foundation of our culture and our identity.

There is a certain declivity to this, in that we can both read all this stuff and also write, and we have many different ways of writing, and we have many different tools, or I would say, “messenger techniques.” Of course computers have made this a lot easier, but we can annotate things, we can cut and paste, we can alphabetize, we can spell-check, we have dictionaries, we have search engines—we have all kinds of things we can do with text. Now imagine the world of cinema, moving pictures, video, film—whatever you want to call it—well, that’s going in the same direction.

Right now most people, when they think about filmmaking, they think about—well, in the world of text, there are Pulitzer Prize-winning novels. Most of text is *not* that. Most of text is directions for opening something, or it’s fine print, or it’s “Made in China.” Most of the text in our lives is not prize-winning literature: it’s everything else.

Well, that’s where the world of cinema is. There is this pyramid, of which there is, at the top, 600 feature films; and then there is a gazillion other things. That bottom is getting bigger and bigger, faster and faster. I mean, it’s just expanding so fast that the proportion of the few feature films made to total video in the world is going to be similar to the proportion of prize-winning literature to total text in the world. So when we talk about *filmmaking*, most of the films made are not going to be feature films, they’re going to be other *stuff*.

YouTube is just the beginning. I literally mean that—it’s the beginning in the sense that we’ll have tools that help make it as easy to make film as it is right now to make a sentence.

Don’t we almost have that right now, with the video capabilities of cell phones?

Exactly. And it’s going to go further. I just heard that in two years, Nokia plans to offer a *high definition* video phone camera. So you’ll have hi-def.

What we lack right now are some basic tools: the equivalents of cut and paste, and annotation, and editing. The tools for generating and manipulating and editing video aren’t here yet, but they’re coming. And that’s probably what I’ll talk about, a little bit about what some of those tools are and what they look like.

I think what the world implied by that is, is a world in which there is this *vernacular*. Not orality, not literacy, but what I call “visuality”: a vernacular of communicating in moving pictures. Right now our mind boggles a little bit about that,

but remember the *Daily Prophet*, in the Harry Potter movie? It's a moving picture in the newspaper. Imagine if every surface could carry a picture that moves. We're just beginning to develop techniques that will help us to be "literate" in that medium.

When you say that, I picture a world that looks like Times Square.

Right. Start with Times Square, and then move to *Minority Report*, or *Blade Runner*.

But even then, those are just buildings. Now imagine every surface in your room, or in your office, having the capability to display a moving image. And then imagine that the differences between moving images and text are also blurred.

Right now we have a great separation, a gulf, a kind of *allergy* between the two, but there's no reason why. We used to have no text on films or on TVs because you couldn't read it, so of course film had sort of an interruption in that regard. But once you get to these table displays and wall displays where the resolution of the text is perfectly readable, there is no reason to divorce the two media. We'll have TV that you read.

Anything you'd like to add?

I'd say we're in the Gutenberg shift; that is, a shift of a similar scale as was the transfer from oral culture to a literate culture based around text, and now we're going from *that* to this culture based around moving images. Which has been happening for a while, but now it has been accelerated with new levels of tools. We're going from being the People of the Book to being the People of the Screen. It's kind of a West Coast/ East Coast thing, because the West Coast right now is the tribe of the People of the Screen. LA is the Big Screen, San Francisco is the Medium Screen – although with cell phones I guess it would be the Tiny screen. And soon, I think, the global culture will be the People of the Screen.