THE FILMMAKER AS AN AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE: CINEMATOGRAPHIC ART AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIETY

AuthorErick Costa

Institution:Graduated filmmaker, Estácio de Sá University

Camera Operator for over 10 years at TV Globo (Second Largest Broadcaster in the World and the Largest in Latin America), as well as TV Record and Cinema.

SUMMARY

Cinema is one of the most impactful artistic expressions of modernity, capable of shaping perceptions, driving debates and promoting social transformations. The filmmaker, as creator and articulator of audiovisual discourses, assumes a crucial role in the construction of narratives that go beyond the screen, directly influencing critical thinking and the behavior of society. This article aims to analyze the influence of the filmmaker as an agent of social change, addressing the way in which his works raise awareness, denounce injustices and inspire concrete transformations. The research is based on a bibliographic review and analysis of film productions that have had a significant impact on historical and cultural contexts. The study discusses representation in cinema, activism through the seventh art and the challenges faced by filmmakers in a scenario of censorship, commercial pressures and technological advances. It is concluded that, despite the limitations imposed by the industry and cultural policies, cinema remains an essential tool for awareness and social change, consolidating the filmmaker as a fundamental actor in the construction of a more critical and reflective society.

Keywords:cinema, filmmaker, social transformation, representation, activism.

1 INTRODUCTION

Cinema, since its invention in the late 19th century, has evolved from mere entertainment to a powerful tool for expression and social change. Moving images not only document and reflect reality, but also influence behavior, question norms, and challenge power structures. The filmmaker, as the creator of this audiovisual narrative, bears the responsibility of deciding which stories to tell, how to tell them, and what impact they want to have on their audience.

Throughout history, cinema has played a fundamental role in various social transformations. In periods of oppression and censorship, it has become a voice of resistance. During movements fighting for civil rights, gender equality and environmental preservation, the seventh art has served as a channel for awareness and mobilization. Films such as*The Great Dictator*(1940), from

1

Charlie Chaplin, denounced totalitarian regimes, while *What Time Does She Come Back?* (2015), by Anna Muylaert, highlighted class inequalities in Brazil, provoking reflections on the role of domestic workers in society.

Thus, this article seeks to understand the relevance of the filmmaker as an agent of social change. To this end, we will address the ways in which cinema influences perceptions, the importance of representation in audiovisual productions, cinematic activism and the challenges faced by filmmakers who try to break with the status quo.

2 CINEMA AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Cinema, through audiovisual narrative, has the power to raise awareness, inform and provoke significant changes in society.

2.1 Cinema as a Reflection of Reality

Films often reflect the culture and social issues of their time. The way certain themes are addressed on screen can help to consolidate perceptions or challenge them. From Italian neorealism, which portrayed the hardships of the post-war period, to Brazilian national cinema, which denounces social inequalities, the seventh art has been a mirror of society.

2.2 Raising Awareness and Empathy Through Audiovisual Storytelling

Cinema allows viewers to experience different realities and points of view. Films that portray social injustices, wars or humanitarian crises create a sense of empathy and can encourage society to act for change.

2.3 The Role of Documentaries in Social Transformation

Documentaries play a fundamental role in exposing social problems. Films such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), by Davis Guggenheim, warned about the impacts of climate change and influenced environmental policies in different parts of the world.

3 THE FILMMAKER AS A CONSTRUCTOR OF DISCOURSES AND SOCIAL NARRATIVES

The filmmaker is not only a storyteller, but also an architect of discourses that shape society's perception of the world around it. Cinema has the power to reflect reality, question paradigms and provoke profound changes in the way certain topics are addressed in the public sphere. Through their works, directors and screenwriters have the ability to influence mentalities, destabilize dogmas and instigate social debates that often go beyond the limits of the screen and reverberate in real life.

Next, the different aspects of the filmmaker's role in the construction of social discourses will be analyzed, emphasizing representation, activism and the importance of cinema in the construction of collective memory.

3.1 Representation and Inclusion in Cinema: Reflections and Impacts

Representation in cinema goes beyond the simple presence of minority groups in narratives

2

audiovisual media. This is a fundamental process for deconstructing stereotypes, validating historically marginalized identities, and creating new perspectives on relevant social issues. The lack of diversity on screens contributes to the perpetuation of prejudices, while a more inclusive approach can transform worldviews and promote significant cultural change.

3.1.1 Racial and Ethnic Representation

Historically, the Western film industry has been dominated by a Eurocentric narrative, excluding or reducing the participation of racial and ethnic groups. Films that portray the black, indigenous or Asian experience, for example, are fundamental to breaking the invisibility of these populations and bringing their stories to the center of social debate. Productions such as *Black Panther* (2018), from Marvel, represented a milestone by placing black heroes in prominent roles, strengthening the self-esteem and identification of millions of viewers around the world.

3.1.2 Gender Representation and the Role of Women in Cinema

Women have always had a prominent presence in the history of cinema, but often in secondary or hypersexualized roles. The feminist movement within the film industry has called for greater female participation in film direction, screenwriting and production, allowing for the construction of narratives that break away from traditional archetypes. Directors such as Kathryn Bigelow and Greta Gerwig have demonstrated that a female perspective on different themes can revolutionize cinematic language and bring new reflections to society.

3.1.3 LGBTQIA+ Representation and Paradigm Shifting

The inclusion of LGBTQIA+ characters and stories in cinema has been one of the most significant advances in recent decades. Previously, LGBTQIA+ characters were portrayed as caricatures or villains, reinforcing negative stereotypes. Currently, works such as *Moonlight* (2016) and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) have explored issues of identity and sexuality in a more sensitive and realistic way, contributing to the acceptance and understanding of diversity.

3.2 The Role of the Filmmaker in Social and Political Activism

A filmmaker can be considered an activist when he uses his art as a means of protest and social transformation. Cinema, as a tool of denunciation, has the potential to expose inequalities, injustices and oppression, amplifying voices that are often silenced in society.

3.2.1 Cinema as Denunciation and Resistance

Social denunciation films are essential to highlight structural problems that often go unnoticed by the general public. In Brazil, productions such as *Bus 174* (2002) and *City of God* (2002) expose police violence, inequality and the criminalization of poverty, generating debates on public policies and human rights.

3

Internationally, filmmakers such as Ken Loach and Michael Moore have used their films to question the capitalist system, wars and political corruption, expanding the social consciousness of their viewers.

3.2.2 The Filmmaker as a Mediator of Social Reflections

Filmmakers have the power to mediate debates, bringing to light issues that are not addressed in sufficient depth in conventional media. Addressing issues such as climate change, gender inequality and minority rights in audiovisual productions creates a space for reflection and fosters audience engagement.

Movies like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) directly impacted environmental discussions, influencing public policies and society's behavior in relation to the environment.

3.2.3 The Aesthetics of Revolt: The Use of Cinematic Language in Activism

The way a film is produced and structured can also convey political discourse. The use of framing, abrupt cuts, fast editing and dissonant soundtracks can make the viewer feel uncomfortable and convey messages of revolt and protest.

Brazilian marginal cinema, for example, used rudimentary filming techniques to criticize society and highlight social exclusion, while Sergei Eisenstein's Soviet cinema explored dialectical editing to intensify the ideological impact of his works.

3.3 Cinema as a Preservation of Memory and Formation of Collective Identity

Cinema is a powerful tool for building and preserving social memory. It has the power to immortalize historical events, retell forgotten narratives and record moments that are fundamental to understanding a people's identity.

3.3.1 Cinema as a Reinterpretation of History

Historical films not only retell facts, but also reinterpret them, offering new perspectives on the past. Productions such as *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008) help educate new generations about issues such as slavery and the Holocaust, ensuring that these events are not forgotten.

3.3.2 The Importance of National Cinema in the Construction of Cultural Identity

Each country has its own cinematography that reflects its culture, values and social challenges. National cinema is an essential instrument for valuing the identity of a people, serving as a counterpoint to the hegemony of Hollywood productions.

In Brazil, the new cinema was a cinematic movement that sought to portray social inequalities and the lives of the Brazilian people, consolidating its own cinematic identity. Contemporary films, such as *Nightjar* (2019), continue this tradition, using cinema as a form of social criticism and cultural resistance.

3.4 Cinematic Aesthetics as an Element of Transformation

In addition to the script and narrative, the aesthetics of cinema influence the way a message is absorbed. The use of certain colors, camera angles, editing and soundtrack can enhance the emotional impact of the work. Films such as *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), by Guillermo

4

del Toro, use visual elements to symbolize political and social issues, making the cinematic experience even more powerful. This item can and should become another study document, given its scope and importance, but this is not the case with this instrument today.

4 THE CHALLENGES OF THE FILMMAKER AS A SOCIAL AGENT

While cinema has great potential to create change, filmmakers face significant challenges when addressing sensitive topics and promoting transformative discourses.

4.1 Censorship and State Control

Censorship has been a constant barrier to filmmakers who dare to challenge official narratives and denounce injustices. Authoritarian regimes often impose restrictions on the production and exhibition of films that question the status quo. In Brazil, during the military dictatorship, filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha and Eduardo Coutinho faced persecution and difficulties in releasing their works.

4.2 Commercial Pressures and the Entertainment Industry

The film industry is dominated by large studios that prioritize commercially appealing films, reducing the space for productions with a strong social impact. Independent filmmakers often face difficulties in obtaining financing and distribution, which limits the reach of their works.

4.3 The Impact of New Technologies

New technologies and streaming platforms have brought opportunities and challenges for filmmakers. While access to cinema has become more democratic, the saturation of content can make it difficult for independent productions to gain visibility. In addition, the rise of artificial intelligence and recommendation algorithms directly influences which films reach audiences.

4.4 The Ethical Responsibility of the Filmmaker

Filmmakers have a great responsibility for the impact of their work. Films that romanticize violence or reinforce prejudices can negatively influence society. The balance between artistic freedom and ethical responsibility is a constant challenge for directors and screenwriters.

5 CONCLUSION

Cinema transcends its role as entertainment and consolidates itself as one of the most powerful tools for social transformation. The filmmaker, as the architect of this art, assumes a fundamental role in the construction of discourses that impact society, promoting reflection, debate and behavioral changes.

Throughout history, the seventh art has been an instrument of resistance, denunciation and awareness. Films that address social and political themes provoke reactions that go beyond

5

movie theaters, inspiring cultural manifestations, academic debates and even legislative changes. Representation and inclusion are essential aspects for cinema to continue being a democratic, accessible and transformative space.

However, the challenges are numerous. Censorship, commercial pressure and competition from large productions limit the scope of filmmakers who want to promote meaningful change. Even so, the digital revolution and new forms of distribution have expanded the reach of independent productions, allowing previously marginalized voices to gain space in the film industry.

Therefore, the role of the filmmaker as an agent of social change is not restricted to the act of filming, but extends to the responsibility of using their art in a conscious and transformative way. Cinema will continue to be a powerful tool for questioning, reflecting and inspiring, consolidating itself as a key piece in the construction of a more critical, empathetic and fair world.

REFERENCES

BAUDRY, J. *The ideological effect of the film machine*. In: XAVIER, I. *Cinematographic discourse: opacity and transparency*. Rio de Janeiro: Peace and Land, 2005. MACHADO, A. *Cinema and society: a critical analysis*. New York: Routledge, 2009. *Cinema and social transformation: how films shape the contemporary world*. Porto Alegre: Sulina, 2018.

ZANIN, L. *Cinema as a Tool for Political Awareness*. New York: Routledge, 2021.