

The Film Industry in Participatory Culture

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Abstract: *this article presents the context of transition between the Mass Culture and the Participatory Culture, as well as the difficulties of this process, by observing the behavior of the receptor. Through the analysis of how communication has been adapting to the late modernity, and curating the content spread in the cyberspace, provides an overview of the film universe within this context. At the end, the article presents suggestions for the hybridization of new social medias with cinema, as well as the integration of the Participatory Culture with the Film Industry.*

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INTRODUCTION

From TV to computer, society has watched, in a passive way, the advances of technology, making use of it without worrying with the process involved in the production and distribution of the content that is transmitted. As every history that is still being lived, the consequences of this changes could have been speculated, however, they only became clear when materialized. The dreams of a global connection, of democratic information and the free world were easier to be observed than its collateral damages.

It seemed like the blink of an eye, and then society was connected, across many different platforms, and buried in information and content distributed in an invisible environment: the cyberspace. Although the apparently democratic material and free

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connection were being disseminated in an organized, accessible and efficient way, the recipient had little knowledge of the process behind this free world.

It didn't take long to the collapse of the democratic global connection. It was found that much of the information and content available in the cyberspace, not only were of dubious quality, but often fake. Access to this material was no longer ideal, as platforms that were initially seen as free, were actually exchanging their services for users' personal information. Therefore, society was faced with the need to discuss unknown concepts until then, such as data privacy.

The evolution, however, is a path of no return, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. Despite the historical limits faced by those who currently live the facts, there is now a clearer and broader view of the globalization process. Therefore, it's possible to rethink the communication to seek the free world once again, observing the steps to avoid past mistakes. For this, it's important to listen to artists, communicators and users, since today they are an active part in building content and disseminating information.

FROM MASS TO PARTICIPATORY

The arrival of technologies such as TV, printed paper and radio, started the development context of what is called Mass Culture. Medias of communication were in charge of transmitting messages to a passive audience, that did not actively participate in the production and distribution process of the content. The studies presented by Humberto Eco, in his book "Apocalyptic and Integrated", understand that the main function of a Mass Culture vehicle is to attend a huge audience demand in a homogeneous way, to standardize its language so everyone receive contents in a similar format.

On the other hand, the mass media audience was placed in a situation of little activity, received widespread messages and spent much of their free time consuming content from homogeneous communication vehicles. Clay Shirky explains this relationship in his book "The Participatory Culture":

We watched "I love Lucy. We watched "Giligan's Island". We watched "Malcom in The Middle". We watched "Desperated Housewives". We

had so much free time to spend and so few attractive alternatives to occupy it, that all citizens of the developed world started watching television as if it were an obligation. Soon, TV took up the biggest chunk off our free time: a twenty-hour week average, worldwide.⁴(CLAY SHIRKY, 2019, P.10)

The change in the way receivers interact with the media is also presented by John B. Thompson in the article “The New Visibility”, in which he brings the concepts of “mediated interaction” and “semi-mediated interaction”. In the first case, Thompson explains that “(...) the context of the recipients and senders are generally spatially separated” (THOMPSON, 2008, p.18), while in the second case, “(...) the symbolic forms are generated targeting an indefinite number of potential recipients (...)” (THOMPSON, 2008, p. 18). Objectively, it can be said that the mediated interaction is the one made with phones or letters, which has only one targeted recipient, while the semi-mediated interactions are like TV, which proposes a dialogue with multiples recipients from different space and time.

With the accessibility enabled by the popularization of internet, the forms of relationship between medias, messages and recipients began to change. The vehicles presented can be considered technologically outdated, however, it is possible to observe their presence in the context of social media. Facebook, for example, is a platform that allows a mediated interaction, through private messages, as well as semi-mediated, such as open publication in feeds.

Platforms such as Instagram, Soundcloud, Medium and YouTube, can be considered examples of interactive media that have conquered different generations, from distinct cultures around the world. Those vehicles took globalization to a new level, giving to recipients not only the opportunity to receive the same message, regardless of time and space, but also to share, interact with it and interpret it in their own way.

New media no longer assumes a passive audience, instead they feed on the interaction and production of their recipients. The principle of these platforms is to offer a space in which people can select and interact with the content they receive, in addition

⁴ Original: “Assistimos à *Ilha dos Birutas*. Assistimos a *Malcom in The Midle*. Assistimos a *Desperate Housewives*. Tínhamos tanto tempo livre para gastar e tão poucas alternativas atraentes com que ocupá-lo, que todos os cidadãos no mundo desenvolvido começaram a ver televisão como se fosse uma obrigação. A TV logo abocanhou a maior fatia do nosso tempo livre: uma média de mais de vinte horas por semana, em todo o mundo”.

to producing their own material and disseminating it on their network. In this context, Mass Culture begins its shift towards what Shirky calls Participatory Culture.

Although the internet is already forty years old, and the web is half of that age, some people are still perplexed by the fact that most individual members of society, who were previously happy to spend a part of their free time consuming, voluntarily start to produce and to share things. This produce and share are, without a doubt a surprise, compared to the previous behavior. (SHIRKY, 2010, p.19)⁵

Faced with the opportunity to produce and distribute, society entered a period of excesses, since all the material generated was available in cyberspace. The documentary, “Order and Disorder” (BBC, 2013), presented by Professor Jim Al-Khalili, shows that this new relationship with the media and messages had consequences for Communication Science, and Exact Science, specially with regard to organize this huge amount of content.

Engineering became responsible for mediating the flow of information, selecting and organizing the available content, in order to reach the recipient in the best possible way. The algorithms came as a solution to the problem of excesses, cataloging information according to the users’ previous behavior. To better understand the subject, here is the definition of the algorithm concept:

Generally, an algorithm can be defined as a set of procedures to perform a certain action, a type of specification for dealing with problems that consist of well-defined steps and applied as part of a computer program. (RAPOSO, 2017, p.154)⁶

Once the quantitative question was resolved, the problem related to the quality of the messages produced and disseminated entered the communication radar. In the context of Shared Culture, in which everyone is considered a content producer and distributor, the lack of care with this material can be seen as collateral damaged. The article “Disinformation due to the Overabundance of Information in the Digital Age”,

⁵ Original: “Embora a internet já tenha quarenta anos, e a web metade dessa idade, algumas pessoas ainda estão perplexas com o fato de que membros individuais da sociedade, antes felizes em passar a maior parte do tempo livre consumindo, comecem voluntariamente a fazer e a compartilhar coisas. Esse fazer e compartilhar é sem dúvida uma surpresa, comparado ao comportamento anterior”.

⁶ Original: “De modo geral, um algoritmo pode ser definido como um conjunto de etapas para se executar determinada ação, um tipo de especificação para lidar com os problemas que consiste em passos bem definidos e aplicados como parte de um programa de computador”.

written by Giovana Nogueira Prata Pilo, presents many examples of cases in which the recipient's excitement at being part of the production process, lead to a neglect of the steps that precede the distribution of content, such as: research, analysis, testing, among others.

The important media vehicles, slowly and gradually, started their migration to the online universe, finding it difficult to support themselves financially in a space where information and entertainment are free. The process becomes even more difficult, taking into account the definition of quality, an abstract and relative concept, in terms of media, recipients and messages.

In this context, advertising stands out, using the different interaction platforms to establish a new relationship with its costumers. In the article "Mememes, Immediacy and Organizational Communication: interaction of brands in real time", the authors Carolina Frazon Terra and Mariella Batarra Mian, present the strategies developed by companies in interacting with the public in social media, as well as to make them participate in the branding and distribution.

It doesn't matter just what the organization represents or says about itself, but also about how it is noticed, felt, experienced and communicated – specially through the digital platforms – by the network's public. (TERRA; MIAN; 2017, p.1893)⁷

Meanwhile, television has been experimenting with ways to adapt. Rede Globo, for example, created a social media for its brand, as well as for the characters in its soap operas. However, the broadcaster has also suffered from the algorithmic organization of the platforms, specially when Facebook "(...) decided to prioritize the content of people, instead of the content of brand and pages (...)" (TERRA, 2018, p.6). During this period, the station developed its own streaming platform, Globoplay, which contains exclusive audiovisual products for its subscribers.

However, the issue of the quality of the content available in cyberspace has not been resolved. Despite the traditional media's effort to adapt to the Participatory Culture, the content produced with discernment, care and professionalism has a small

⁷ Original: "Não importa apenas o que a organização representa ou diz sobre si própria, mas também como é percebida, sentida, experienciada e comunicada — sobretudo pelas plataformas digitais — pelos públicos da rede".

reach, considering the extent of online network. In addition, by restricting quality production to major media, the culture ceases to be participatory, and return to the original molds of Thompson's semi-mediated interaction, as well as to the Mass Culture of Eco.

Looking at the history of humanity and social behavior, it is possible to notice a tendency to mix. According to Mauro Gaguetti and Maria Helena Saldanha Barbosa, in the article "The issue of Cultural Hybridization in Néstor Garcia Canclíni", the concept, of hybridization, in this context, can be understood as "(...) the socio-cultural process in which structures or practices, that exists in separate forms, combine to generate new structures, objects or practices"⁸(GAGUETTI; BARBOSA, 2007, P.3).

Participatory Culture is a hybridization that begins with Mass Culture, new forms of interaction were established by combining past forms. The cell phone itself, or smartphone, is a telephone, computer, television, which aggregates technologies improved by humans over time. Therefore, I propose that we think about the quality of the content produced in the era of late modernity, also in a hybrid way.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC IMMERSION

The cinematographic history has as its starting point the film "The Arrival of the Train at the Station", by the Lumière brothers. Since it was shown in 1896, cinema could already be understood as an interactive media, since the moving images, presented on the screen, provoked reactions in the audience that watched the scene. According to the story, people, frightened by the train that was arriving, got up from their chairs and ran out of the showroom. With the arrival of new technological resources, the cinematographic language has been trying to reinvent itself, looking for ways to add this technology to its traditional format.

As one of the main principles of cinema is fidelity to routine reality, this adaption aimed to make the audience's experience fantastic and credible, in the same proportion. In his article "Digital Medias Languages", Manovich mentions the film "Star Wars – Ep I", by George Lucas, as the first film made entirely in digital format, highlighting the

⁸ Original: "(...) o processo sócio-cultural em que estruturas ou práticas, que existiam em formas separadas, combinam-se para gerar novas estruturas, objetos ou práticas"

special effects that involve all frames of cinematographic composition. Lucas used technology to hide the green screen used as a backdrop for the captured images, creating an unreal universe that is credible to the viewer.

Over the years, new language formats have been tried out by cinema. The 3D universe, for example, gained strength, having as pioneer experience the film “Avatar”, by James Cameron, and becoming an almost mandatory format with the arrival of superhero’s franchises. In all cases, technology and its advancement are used to help maintain the film’s realism, immersing the audience in a scenario that, although fantastic, is quite credible.

From the principle of immersion, constant during the evolution of cinematographic history, it is possible to realize that, when immersed in the narrative, through the imagination or the 3D technology, the viewer naturally interacts with the media. In this sense, cinema is a new media, despite being born before the internet phenomenon, with public participation being a culture from the beginning. Therefore, in this new context, it is important to think about how interaction can transcend cinema screens.

The fandom culture already presents new possibilities of relationships between the receiver and the message, when it comes to cinema. The “Avengers” franchise, for example, became a brand in the last ten years, with pages on all types of social medias, in addition to the content created and fed by its loyal audience. The website “Marvel Legacy”, for example, brings thousands of theories related to the possible development of the narrative of the heroes of the franchise, which were produced and disseminated by active users, after each movie premiere.

On the other hand, J.K. Rowling, the creator of Harry Potter, used a different approach. The author developed a website, based on the franchise, called “Wizarding World”. It consists in a web page on which, after registering, the user can participate in the virtual world of Harry Potter, going through the selection of houses at Hogwarts School, practicing spells in magic classes, in addition to having access to unprecedented information about the wizarding universe.

Although both previous cases were related to social media and Participatory Culture, none of them worked the language of cinema directly with these medias. While the first one is an autonomous initiative of the fans and, therefore, has no connection

with the creators of the franchise, the second conveys the quality of the wizarding world developed by its writer, but does not allow the viewers to create something of their own. That way, it's possible to notice that cinema still sees new medias as a second screen, ignoring the possibility of them becoming a hybrid, participatory screen.

Manovich defends the computer as an instrument that would allow cinema to tell its stories in different ways, however, the author also problematizes this view, since the computer actually redefines cinema's identity. Through the aforementioned cases, it is possible to observe that the way technology is viewed within cinematography does not aim at structural changes, but at strengthening the bases.

When presenting a film made entirely with special effects, it is important to keep in mind that the audience already aware of the technology used. This does not mean that the public will not be impressed with the content presented on the screen, but the concept of reality is lost, since there is awareness about the means to get the message across. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink this structure, so that the desired effect can be changed or achieved again.

The concept of hybridization by Néstor Garcia Canclíni's refers to the identity formation process of Latin American cultures. I propose that we use it, in the context of this article, to think social media not only as an instrument of advertising and interaction in its simplest form, but as an element to compose the process of hybridization of cinema with the new medias in context of Participatory Culture.

CONCLUSION

Using as reference the social and cultural scenario presented in this article and considering it as the responsibility of communicators to value the quality of the content disseminated in cyberspace, I propose a reflection on the hybridization of cinema with social media in the form of an essay. For that, the Cinema Festivals, artistic and cultural events, which take place periodical, present themselves as an appropriate space to start this experience.

The São Paulo International Short Film Festival is an event that, in 2019, completed thirty years. It is an initiative of the Kinoforum Cultural Association to promote the short film format and present it to the Brazilian audiovisual market. Over

the eleven days of the festival, films lasting up to twenty-minute are available, in several cinemas in the city of São Paulo, free of charge. These films are selected by a curatorship composed of active professionals in the audiovisual market, nationally and internationally. In 2019, 3D film sessions, immersive documentaries and production of Brazilian games were incorporated into the program

The Short Film Festival is an event of interaction and participation, whose topic of debate is quality content. The audience is invited, not only to vote for the films they have watched, but also to participate in debates with the directors of these films, in addition to the happy hours with the production of the event and the audiovisual industry in general. The director of the festival, Zita Carvalhosa, presents the event as a meeting point of audiovisual activities, as well as a way of society to be seen on screen.

What Kinoforum proposes is not far from the virtual advertising relationship that companies and brands have been doing with their clients, since public opinion is not only requested, but also considered in the event's awards. Like Globo's streaming platforms, the films available during the festival are selected and organized by active professionals of the market.

Unlike the major Hollywoodian productions, the short film festival understands that the audience already knows the media, therefore it places them in contact with the production through workshops, so that, in this way, they have a technical basis to produce their own content. In addition, the event is understood as an experiment space, both for independent directors and for the audiovisual industry and, therefore, seeks to add, in each edition, the technological news and what they have been producing.

Projects like these are a way of rethinking the communication in the age of Late Modernity and Participatory Culture, as they offer quality content, available for the public to interact and participate. However, when it comes to the use of social media in the process, the Festival still lacks certainty, making use of its social network as an advertising tool, and understanding the online universe as a second screen.

Events such as the São Paulo International Short Film Festival are quite interesting to experience the hybridization between cinema and social media. For example, sessions composed of Instagram stories could be incorporated into the program, working with the curation of this material to ensure quality. Another idea

would be the coverage of the event by digital influencers, as a way to expand the audience that frequents the space.

These are some examples of possible hybridization processes between cinema and social media, however, considering that the culture is of participation, another way to understand how to improve the use of network in this creative process, would be to ask the audience. That way, it is possible to expand cinema to a format in which society becomes an active part of what is being produced and disseminated in the professional circuit, within the concept of quality in the audiovisual industry. After all, these are new times, we no longer want to just see ourselves in the projected images, we want to be a part of these screens.

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