

THE ROLE OF FILMIC LANGUAGES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN COLLECTIVE CULTURAL MEMORIES - PRESENTING *COMUNICAR*, 35

Vítor Reia-Baptista

Professor Coordenador

Escola Superior de Educação e Comunicação,
Universidade do Algarve

vreia@ualg.pt

FILM LITERACY TO PREVENT A CULTURAL-OBLIVION-ACRITICAL-ALPHA-CASTE

If loss of memory results in damages of tragic consequences to the individual, albeit unconscious damage, which is often impossible to recover in terms of personal and cultural identity, the possible loss of collective memory in societies amounts to a level of damage that we cannot not even begin to imagine. For Cinema as for Art, various languages and certain technological supports have the ability to help us to simultaneously preserve a factual record of events and approach all these events and the phenomena that surround them in an inclusive and holistic way.

In this sense, the richness and diversity of the language, technique and technologies of film are seen as instruments of great importance, from the primitive films of Lumière and Méliès to the most sophisticated virtual inserts in YouTube. Their role as vehicles of artistic and documentary narratology, and as factors in authentic film literacy, acquires an absolutely unquestionable importance in any society that calls itself 'knowledge and information society'.

The conservation of the collective memory of sounds and images as a European cultural heritage means acknowledging the various evolutionary contexts of audiovisual communication in Europe as well as their relations with the cultures of the world at large, as these processes never take place in geographical or cultural isolation. The language of film takes on a vital role in these processes of communicative and educational evolution as a vehicle of collective communication and education, that is, as a factor for an in-depth learning of the most varied domains of human knowledge – i.e., multiple literacies, including media and film literacy (Reia-Baptista, 2010)

It is also important to examine the evolution of the pedagogical dimensions of audiovisual communication in general and cinematographic education in particular as the true starting point for an entire cultural repository that we cannot neglect or ignore; otherwise, we risk casting into oblivion some of the most important traces of our European cultural identity which, by their nature, are often so fragile. We are therefore obliged to delve into the media, channels, technologies and language we have developed for over a century to add clarity to the collective creativity and necessities of the artistic and documentary narration that represents us and which enables us to reflect on our own human condition. But strange as it may seem, the societies, sciences and technologies where these narratives develop can also suffer from memory loss, just as we as individuals are forgetful or get old and are unable to regenerate the hetero-recognition mechanisms, and sometimes not even self-recognition, or because we cannot distance ourselves sufficiently from our prevailing knowledge and narratives in order to gain a more holistic, universal and reflective perspective. It is not because artists, scientists or pedagogues, like other human beings, have a «short memory», but because the arts, sciences and technologies and their languages are closed off and isolated within their own particular spaces and sometimes separated from knowledge, application and even dissemination. This can happen with any branch of the arts or sciences, even when the fundamental principles of their languages belong to education or communication, which in itself is an enormous contradiction. Thus the technological and communicative supports of the records of the individual and collective production of knowledge turn inwards in their apparent self-sufficiency from the standpoint of the evolution of communication, taking into account the technological and linguistic development of the past century, which has shown itself to be fairly redundant as well as being a reducing agent that has erroneously and inefficiently preserved the procedural knowledge of construction and communication of scientific or cultural learning. Consequently, we

are now obliged to analyze the possible risks of the loss of this collective property, which is often incredibly insubstantial and for that reason all the more valuable. To do this, we must also preserve, articulate and systematize some of the main features of the processes of cultural communication as phenomena of collective memorization and learning. As so many scientists and researchers have stated over the years, in the exercise of their scientific irreverence and theoretical restlessness, the scientist is hardly ever able to take a step back and view science, in space and time, in such a way that he can see it move, «and yet, it moves».

As it was said before, the role of Cinema and Film Languages as vehicles of artistic and documentary narratives, in a comprehensive and holistic perspective, acquires an absolutely unquestionable importance as a factor of authentic media and film literacy. It was to underline the importance of this role and to contribute to a greater and deeper understanding of it that we planned the current issue of *Comunicar* 35, which includes the following important contributions to the understanding and preservation of our collective, cultural and filmic memory:

THE ANALOGUE SUNSET

We decided to open the thematic dossier with a contribution from one of the most active authors and educators within the fields of film and media literacy, Cary Bazalgette, since her long experience within the British Film Institute (BFI) bears the institutional landmark of the important role played by film languages which was previously mentioned.

Cary Bazalgette was the head of the BFI's department of Film Education for many years and her intellectual authority is recognized by many other authors when she refers to the vital, leading role of the BFI in this field, by presenting the main pedagogical approaches to film language, especially in what we call film pedagogy, as developed within the broader activities of the BFI. This institution pioneered an educational perspective for the media as a process that resulted in broader interest in media literacy and film literacy in particular. Her article '*Analogue Sunset, The educational role of the British Film Institute, 1979-2007*', traces the main lines of activity of the BFI in this field over the last 25 years, its continuous educational approaches clearly demonstrating that the study of cinema and films is absolutely essential for understanding the world and times we live in.

The BFI was founded in 1933 following the publication of a report, “The Film in National Life” (Commission on Educational and Cultural Films, 1932), put together by a group of educators from the British Institute of Adult Education... In the 1930s it had established the magazine *Sight and Sound* and set up the National Film Library (later National Film and Television Archive); in 1952 it set up the National Film Theatre in London and the Experimental Film Fund (later the BFI Production Board); in 1957 it launched the London Film Festival... It ran summer schools for adults interested in film, published pamphlets about film appreciation and, during World War II... Film viewing – especially of documentaries – was encouraged as a way of raising awareness of important social issues, but it was also seen as a way of educating audiences to make more adventurous choices in the films they watched. The BFI was also involved in debates about the potential ill-effects cinema-going might have on children, although it could not, of course, advocate abstinence as a solution: the answer had to lie in the development of children’s critical skills and their discernment in choosing to see films of higher quality, avoiding the vulgar and the meretricious (Bazalgette, 2010)

This excerpt is a good example of the critical dimension that characterizes this approach, a dimension which, along with the cultural context of the media narratives and the creative capacity of the media senders is well known, by this time, as one of the most important dimensions within all media literacy approaches.

MEMORY AND HERITAGE

From a different film educational and cultural, but complementary, perspective, Michel Clarembeaux, director of the Audiovisual Centre (CAV) of Liège, Belgium, develops a reflection on the theme ‘*Film Education: memory and heritage*’, within which film education is identified, especially in these times of transition and migration in digital environments, as an urgent need to construct a profound literacy media, given that the importance of film language cannot be underestimated in the development of the capacity to analyze contemporary media, in which cinema stands out in its various forms and supports as the «supreme art form of memory», be it individual or collective. The author also suggests we can and should bring about a convergence between some kind of «pedagogy of film education» and a desire on the part of the public to preserve the collective memory of a broader and more varied cultural heritage, pointing with concrete examples of specific films and authors to support this hypothesis, but also remembering the importance of film clubs in this context.

The last 50 years have seen a dramatic change in film education. More accurately, film education is now the education of the animated image, since the cinematographic image has become isolated, just as it was before the first half of the last century. In terms of its codes, references, everyday landscape and what we can learn from it, the film image is virtually inseparable from the TV image, the video image, the digital image found on the Web, images captured by mobile phones or those viewed on a laptop computer or any of the numerous screens that crowd our days and nights. The film image is mixed up with all the others, indistinguishable in a universe of sounds and images that populate the daily lives of young people who we have to educate in the concept and practice of the cinematographic image (Clarembeaux, 2010).

This very inclusive perspective, bridging the old and new media vehicles that support the film works, shows how important it is to open the possibility of research around those film vehicles but also around the different ways of film reception, either in a collective and collaborative educational context, or in a more personal and individual formative media context.

THRILLS IN THE DARK

Trespassing the open door between old and new media and glancing at old and new narrative genres, Andrew Burn, professor of Media Education at London University's Institute of Education, contributes with his article, '*Thrills in the dark: young people's moving image cultures and media education*', in which he discusses the role of film language in this era of transition between media, channels and cultural environments, taking horror movies as an object of study. He takes cinema and videogames as an example, and emphasizes the hybridization of the genre and the transmutation of forms of interaction among young people and the media, film channels, and real and virtual videos; he shows how a particular love for horror and disaster movie genres in North American cinema, but also in Europe, still persists among the young, whose influence extends to other audiovisual forms, genres and products to the desperation of many an anguished teacher who is more inclined towards prohibition than towards the more complicated option of studying and analyzing these terrifying objects that are so attractive to youngsters.

My argument here is that, in constructing a formal curriculum for the study of film as a great contemporary art-form, we need to be aware of children's moving image culture. While we may wish to introduce them to the heritage of national film (and it is a legitimate goal to widen their experience of different genres of film), we must pay attention to the experiences of children ... whose filmic pleasures are not untypical of children of their age across Europe... Media educators... have legitimate goals of developing the critical faculties of their students, of teaching them to analyse film texts, of equipping them with the skills to creatively produce their own moving image work. But unless these enterprises begin from, and constantly return to, the rich and complex popular pleasures which characterise children's film preferences, experiences, and playful transformations, the work of the classroom will become elitist, formalist exercises (Burn, 2010)

This contribution concentrates its main focus not only on the possibility of a different way of dealing with curricular approaches to media and film literacy, but also deals with the necessity of contextualizing the genre narrative values within a broad cultural perspective from Kantian ethical structures to the new post-modern vanguards of different aesthetical media usages and of global media understanding concerning the new cultural landscapes of film literacy.

AVANT-GARDE AND HETERODOXY IN GAMES AND IDENTITY, AS IN BUÑUEL

Completing the thematic dossier, we chose the works of four different approaches that offer their perspectives within the cross-roads of these key concepts towards a possible renewed film literacy.

1. Mirian Tavares, a Professor of Visual Arts at the University of the Algarve, emphasizes in her article '*Understanding cinema: the avant-gardes and the construction of film discourse*' the huge importance of the historic avant-gardes in the construction of film discourse and how they were essential in gaining recognition for cinema as an art form.

Cinema arrives when the avant-gardes, in their iconoclastic desperation, were looking for different media to express the new world that emerged at the start of the 20th century. The old forms of representation, the old sensibility, were being questioned. The First World War brought in its wake the irrepressible desire to show the horror of an era that had begun so

brutally. More than a contemporary of the avant-gardes of the start of the 20th century, cinema actively participates in the process of creating a form to present the world. This new medium enables the notion of space and time and the man-machine relationship to take on new meanings. Machines fascinated the young artists of the time. If Expressionists saw technology was the evil to be combated, for others, like the Futurists, it expressed the innovative potential of creation that should be incorporated into art. According to Umbro Apollonio, when Marinetti says that «a roaring motor car is more beautiful than the Victoria of Samothrace», he is reflecting on the need for a complete change in the statutes of contemporary art (Tavares, 2010)

2. Enrique Martínez-Salanova, author of the «Creative Classroom of Cinema and Education», writes about '*Educational Systems in the Heterodox History of the European Cinema*', proposing a network of analyses that link specific films to traditionally difficult educational topics like violence, exclusion, marginalization and neglect.

Few film documents remain of the world of education from the early years, except snippets of classrooms, children at play, etc. Nevertheless instruction and education, despite their link to political propaganda, were never far from the minds of directors like Eisenstein, who was clear about the instructional nature of his films, whose scripts contained a very obvious didactic approach. Teachers have always figured on film. We recall the odd teacher in *Der Blaue Angel* (Germany, 1930) directed by Josef von Sternberg, and its English version with cuts, *Blue Angel* (1931), in which the demanding and sexually repressed Immanuel Rath, played by Emil Jannings, is seduced by Lola the singer (Marlene Dietrich). The film was based on the novel by Heinrich Mann. It deals with the repression and strictness at a secondary school that are conquered by the emotions and sentiments of students and teacher, which end up making him look a fool and lead to his downfall (Martínez-Salanova, 2010).

3. Nelson Zagalo, Professor at the University of Minho, develops in his article '*Creative Game Literacy*' a study of interactive media based on film literacy and experience, relating the forms and narratives of the new media and channels to film drama and objects, especially those based on the virtual environment of videogames.

In literature, the main goal of the writer is to tell the narrative in the greatest detail in order to develop a strong fabula or mental story in the receptor's mind. In film, the narration gains new media terrain by making it possible to show instead of tell (Mamet, 1992). Film does not need to spend time explaining details because they are shown. The story

world comes ready-built to the receptor, proposing direct perception of the visual world that enhances perceptive emotions and so, learning. With games, storytelling activates a complete new set of cognitive activities and learning possibilities. The story is no longer an act of telling, or showing but an integrated set of active participations, of doing. Games media open a new space (virtual) for the mediation of knowledge, for the enhancement of knowledge construction in the receptor, through the well-known mode of learning by doing. (Zagalo, 2010)

4. Finally, Francisco Javier Ruiz del Olmo, Professor at the University of Málaga, contributes with an article titled '*Language and collective identity in Luis Buñuel*', in which he discusses the pivotal role of one of the most important filmmakers within the film cultural identity universe of Spain, Europe and Ibero-America, revealing one of his least known facets – the (heretical, I would say) propagandist.

Buñuel was in Madrid when civil war broke out in mid-1936, and his attitude towards the resulting popular disturbances was ambivalent. On the one hand, he was carried along by the emotion surrounding the outbreak of war: the propositions for the breakdown of the social order that he had advocated, first in Surrealism and later in Communism, were materializing before his eyes. But he was soon shocked by the excesses. At the end of September 1936, he was summoned by Minister Álvarez del Vayo to Geneva, from where he was to travel to Paris to work at the Spanish embassy under ambassador Luis Araquistain (Pérez and Colina, 1933: 41). He was to take charge of Republican film propaganda aimed at the French, although his other tasks at the embassy have remained a mystery. Buñuel already knew several filmmakers in Paris through the French director Jean Grémillon and Juan Piqueras, who had edited the left-wing film journal *Nuestro Cinema* (Paris, 1932-35) and procured films for Buñuel to show in Madrid, at the Cine club Proa-Filmófono, a cinema forum for leftist intellectuals and secular liberals. Thanks to Piqueras, films like *Entr'acte* by René Clair, *La Chienne* by Renoir and Eisenstein's *October* were first shown in Spain (Ruiz del Olmo, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I can only hope that the reader of this issue of *Comunicar* will find it a serious contribution to a more assertive and constructive way to the acquisition of the Film and Media Literacies that we all aim at, although they may be developed within different media contexts and bear different cultural markers taken from historical, aesthetical, technological or educational approaches.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BAZALGETTE, C. (2010) Analogue Sunset. The Educational role of the British Film Institute, 1979-2007' in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 15-24.

CLAREMBAUX, M. (2010) Film Education: Memory and Heritage, in *Comunicar*, 35, 25-32, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 25-32.

BURN, A. (2010) Thrills in the Dark: young people's moving image cultures and media education, in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 33-42.

MARTÍNEZ-SALANOVA, E. (2010) Educational Systems in the Heterodox History of the European Cinema, in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, 2010, pp. 53-60.

OLMO, J.R. (2010) Language and collective identity in Luis Buñuel, in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 69-77.

REIA-BAPTISTA, V. (coord.) (2010) Film Languages in the European Collective Memory, *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 10-82.

TAVARES, M. (2010) Understanding cinema: the avant-gardes and the construction of film discourse, in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 43-51.

ZAGALO, N. (2010) Creative Game Literacy, in *Comunicar*, 35, Huelva: Grupo Comunicar / CIAC, pp. 61-68.