


The ingredients of black cinema

ARTICLE

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Abstract

In front of the oppressions that mark Brazilian society e that reproduce themselves, as in so many other instances, in the medium of creative audiovisual production, Black Cinema is a potentially transformative proposition, which is geared towards the widening, the education of audiences e the reconfiguration of structures that support a chain of systemic injustices. We acknowledge here the importance of communication, its relationship with culture and, above all else, the nature of the anti-racist pedagogical commitment needed to rethink Brazilian cinema. To do so, it is necessary to face the challenge of confronting globalizing hegemonic forms of mass cinema and assume the responsibility to the images that one is willing to render visible and the creativity to capture spectators attention and establishing to them an intimate, affectionate and consequential dialogue.

Keywords: Black Cinema. Brazilian cinema. Anti-racism. Education.

Os ingredientes do Cinema Negro

Resumo

Diante das opressões que marcam a sociedade brasileira e que se reproduzem, como em tantas outras instâncias, no meio da produção criativa audiovisual o Cinema Negro é uma proposta potencialmente transformadora, que se dirige para a abertura de olhares, para a educação dos públicos e para a reconfiguração das estruturas que dão suporte a uma cadeia de injustiças sistêmicas. Reconhece-se aqui a importância da comunicação, sua relação com a cultura e, sobretudo, a natureza do compromisso pedagógico antirracista para que se repense o cinema brasileiro. Impõe-se para tal, o desafio de enfrentar as formas globalizantes e hegemônicas do cinema de massa e a responsabilidade com as imagens que dispõem a visibilizar e a criatividade para capturar a atenção do expectador e estabelecer com ele um diálogo de cumplicidade, afetuoso e consequente.

Palavras-chave: Cinema Negro. Cinema brasileiro. Antirracismo. Educação.

1 Introduction

The starting point for this text is the assumed position of the autonomous but inseparable relationship between education and culture and communication. The ideas expressed in the creativity we appreciate are not confined to specific commemorative dates, celebrated spaces such as stages and exhibition halls or the devices we use to access them. Nor do they exist as an abstract layer above human relationships, disconnected from everyday life. On the contrary, they tend to persist, especially when they are powerful, unfolding into catharses, questionings and discussions that become important components in the development of identities. The arts represent, disturb, change perspectives and affect.

Black Cinema, as a field of cinematic art production, therefore carries the potential to be transformative and liberating, assuming a commitment to artistic creation, to the existential world, in other words, to lives. To give shape to this commitment, as opposed to the mass cinema forged in the wake of the culture industry, a culture of solidarity, ethical and citizen communication, and full and responsible education are the vital ingredients. This is a chain of creative efforts that understands art and material life as inextricably connected.

The discussion about Black Cinema as a cinematographic form of raising awareness among the population about the conditions of neglect, racism, violence and exclusion to which the majority of blacks in Brazil are subjected is fruitful and goes back to the questioning and confrontations seen in Cinema Novo in the 1960s. Judith Butler, in the introductory text to the Brazilian edition of Georg Lukács' book of essays "The Soul and Forms", points out that, according to Lukács, "in order to be capable of communicative expression, which relates the authentic creative impulse to the social conditions in which man has to act, it is necessary to create and find the appropriate form" (LUKÁCS, 2017, p.12). Forms of expression, such as cinema, do not exist outside the physical universe in which we live and the experiences lived and the fruits of filmed language are instances that constantly interpenetrate, reinforce and fill each other with meaning.

Thus, the historical understanding of forms requires knowing "under what conditions they arise and how they promote, communicate and modify the very social and individual conditions of their emergence" (LUKÁCS, 2017, p. 15). In this sense, Black Cinema thought of as a portrait of a time is not just the technical materialization of an idea, it is the referential and critical expression of a model of subordination, submission and obedience to which blacks were and still are subjected since the occupation of the Americas by the colonizers. It is where "tensions are codified and expressed" (LUKÁCS, 2017, p. 17).

Thus, Black Cinema, like any artistic expression, encompasses lives and the steps taken by humanity to qualify them and examine symbolic relationships and social experiences. In this process, Black Cinema is able to build a relationship of otherness, respect and recognition. While the monumental marketing demands of hegemonic cinemas encourage the transformation of the world, time frames, life and experiences into products.

Expressive forms, whatever they may be, are created and anchored in what is understood as reality, but reality is also anchored in the images created by these expressive forms. In the same way that art relies on reality to fill itself with meaning and reach audiences, audiences base many of their tastes, ideological horizons and political, economic and social demands on art.

The black population, subjected to a regime characterized by various and successive layers of oppression and exclusion, shows two relevant points at this moment in history. The first is that the process of abolition that began on May 13, 1888 is not over, but has taken on new forms. Secondly, the power that sustains this type of situation does not lie in this or that ruler, but in the group of voters that supports them. As Arendt (2008) understands, power does not belong to an individual, but to the group that sustains it. In other words, the racist problem in Brazil, like all other social problems, is not the sole responsibility of this or that group, but rather the people here choose who will represent them.

Black Cinema stands as an interpreter of the achievements and sufferings of the black population. The social invisibility of black people, despite the accusations of racism

and violence to which they are subjected, in an apparent peace and harmony, is embedded in culture, in mass communication practices and in the absence of a public policy in schools aimed at anti-racism.

The greatest challenge for the practice of Black Cinema is not to look through just one lens, be it communication, culture or education. Each of these areas has its own assumptions, theories, concepts and schemes. The question arises because understanding the presence of black people in the media, and in cinema in particular, requires a look at the historical context, cultural practices and social and educational relationships interwoven into everyday life. We accept here the thesis that communication products, including cinema, guide and influence what we think of ourselves, the group we are immersed in, and the vision we have of the world.

In the cultural sphere, Geertz's (1989) idea of weaving webs of meaning takes place in relationships between people, including educational relationships. Of course, in this context, the concepts of interculture and multiculturalism are important not only in global societies, but also in social groups belonging to the same complex society" (Cuche, 1999, p. 14). If there is a power struggle in politics and the economy, there is also one in education and communication, and it manifests itself in culture.

As a cultural product, the challenges faced by Black Cinema are diverse and unequal: concentrated in exhibitions and film clubs, it faces the exhibition halls of major productions, television and streaming platforms. It's worth remembering that society's demands are predominantly mediated by the mainstream media and social networks, especially influencers, whose interests are often neither expressed nor transparent.

A cultural meaning "is a product of sociability" (MANNHEIM, 2012, p. 45). For this author, in addition to thought, "emotions, states of mind and any other 'exit' filter from the closed circuit of singular experiences" are objectified (Ibid., p. 45). In other words, socialization does not lie in the objects of culture but "in meanings, in common meanings". In other words, collective life drives communication and culture, just as, in this genesis, lives intertwine in the collective, and it is up to education to understand and point out ways towards a more ethical and just society.

James Carey (2009) looks at the phenomena surrounding culture and communication and classifies them in two ways. For him, the transmissive view is the most common way of understanding communication; it has the meaning of transmitting, sending, spreading. The basic idea of this transmissive model lies in the expansion of the space that information can reach, as well as the control that can be exercised as the holder of the source from which transmissions emanate. The other model is the ritualistic vision, close to the ideas of sharing, participating, associating. In short, "a common faith" (p. 13). The direction in this vision is not the conquest of space, but the maintenance of a given society in its time. It is communication as a way of representing shared beliefs.

Communication and culture form an "odd couple", i.e.: "One cannot walk or explain itself without the other" (CAUNE, 2014 p. 8), not as phenomena dependent on each other, "fitted together". For Caune (2014), it is a type of "reciprocal inclusion, which means that a phenomenon of culture also functions as a process of communication; or that a mode of communication is also a manifestation of culture". Looking at this shuffling of communication and culture in a film is certainly a task for learning, reflection and criticism, for Education par excellence.

The defense of a Black Cinema that is stronger and more present in society, especially in schools, can be based on the idea defended by Raymond Williams (1968, p. 19), for whom it is a mistake to see communication as a "secondary" process: What we call society is not only a network of political and economic agreements, but also a process of learning and communication."

So, what relationships can be established between cinema and education? For Xavier (2008), regardless of any educational intentions, "cinema incorporates that formative dimension that is characteristic of the various art forms that play a decisive role in education (informal and everyday); on the other hand, it can be inscribed in a more systematic way in the educational process" (XAVIER, 2008, p. 14-15). In addition to exhibitions and film clubs, considering the advance of digital technologies and the presence of young people on social networks, the school is a space for cinema, particularly Black Cinema.

For Xavier (2008), educating means making people think, not just "passing on content". It means reflecting, questioning, relating contexts, life experiences meeting art and reflection. Discussing opinions that are taken for granted and definitive is an educational stance; seeking out the new means facing up to re-reading something that is taken for granted. On racist issues, this seems to be a fact. In everyday life, when you look, you barely look and you've already defined what it is. This is the battleground for an anti-racist pedagogical stance.

The process of knowledge doesn't come about if not for the new, which doesn't present itself, but which looks at us and provokes us to think. The role of the mediating educator is there, since cinema "serves to think. Or it is a way of thinking" (AUMONT, 2008, p. 23). In other words, "more modestly": cinema "is an effective means of transmitting or even elaborating thought" (AUMONT, 2008, p. 24). In short, cinema is not just about entertainment and/or alienation, but an art that helps us to open our eyes. In fact, Galeano (1995) tells us that a father once took his son to see the sea for the first time. Faced with such magnitude, the boy asked: "Dad, help me look". This is, of course, the primary mission of education: to help us see and not to direct our gaze.

In popular knowledge, to open one's eyes is to be alert, to gain awareness, to be smart. Or a "more critical, emancipated, liberated vision" (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p.36). Helping to "open their eyes" is the role of parents, more enlightened friends, teachers and those who inhabit the Zones of Proximal Development, especially children and adolescents (Vygotsky, 2002). In other words, to open one's eyes is to look at the whole, to realize "how one's own gaze is tied to a specific perspective and position" (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p.36).

2 Opening eyes

Like any communication product, cinema is realized as a totality in reception, where communication really takes place (SOUSA, 1995). The attentive receiver who directs their gaze is in possession of a power that cannot be renounced (CORREA, 2021). A power so intense that, for Arnheim (2002), directing the gaze is like touching the object being looked

at with your fingers. Samsonow (2007), on the armed senses in the Renaissance, given the importance of the eye, tries to show that the hand is the hand of the eye, which directs action. In this sense, it should be noted that looking is never a neutral action, an objective and impartial capture of reality. On the contrary, every gaze is a cut-out, a frame, a possible apprehension of a fraction of reality from our point of view.

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The visual arts, in general, exemplify how human beings use their eyes to shape the world, but the camera, more than other devices, makes this evident. When we look at a painting, there's no denying that it has been composed with colors and textures by the hands of artists using a series of well-established techniques. When it comes to the filmed image, on the other hand, it is common to think of it as a mere record or faithful capture of reality, without realizing that the people who handle cameras are, like those who use a brush or a pen, creating an image and not just collecting it from the world as it is, exact, precise and irreproachably honest. Like any creative act, filming is a way of communicating and making people feel, and if an entire community is excluded from the possibility of looking and being looked at, then this form of expression is exclusionary and creates invisibilities.

As Correa (2021) puts it, to look is "to show oneself, to expose oneself, to attract the gaze of the other". For him, much of black people's invisibility is to avoid attracting the attention of the police and racists. In this sense, they are deprived of seeing, among many other things. On the other hand, the author believes that Black Cinema is growing because the audience is also growing: "There are more black filmmakers and black insurgents because there are more black spectators and vice versa". In the end, those who witness their existence recognized and celebrated in relevant expressive forms encourage more creative efforts that embrace their humanity before the eyes of the world.

With eyes wide open, it's like keeping all your senses armed. Masschelein (2008) thinks of educating the gaze "not in the sense of educare (to teach), but of e-ducere, as to lead out, to direct outwards, to take outwards. E-ducating the gaze does not mean acquiring a critical or liberated vision, but rather liberating our vision" (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p.36). In other words, every educational process demands an incursion into what is external to

the subject's immediate understanding of themselves and their surroundings. A space in which there is no room for the diversification of voices, for difference, for the presence of different cultural infusions is not conducive to the development of an educational process.

In the contemporary parlance of digital technologies, it's about breaking the bubble, an act that doesn't happen from the outside in, but from the inside out, because it's up to the subject to decide to allow themselves a new way of seeing. It's not about bringing awareness, but about promoting attention:

It doesn't mean becoming conscious or awake, but rather becoming attentive, it means paying attention. Consciousness is the mental state (state of mind) of the subject that has or constitutes an object/objective) and aims at knowledge. Attention is the state of mind in which subject and object are at stake (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p.36).

Looking, for example, at the homeless people on the sidewalks of Brazilian cities and not seeing them as excluded, abandoned to their fate, or more seriously, not seeing situations like this and so many others faced by black people as the result of social inequalities, is a problem of attention. Masschelein's defense is that acute attention opens up spaces for self-transformation. In fact, as children we went to school with the following recommendations: open your eyes, pay attention to the road, don't cross the street without looking everywhere. It wasn't our parents who looked after us, they just taught us the importance of attention, of knowing how to look. For Masschelein, "e-gazing is walking", allowing oneself to leave one's "comfort zone".

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The effort made by Celso Prudente and other filmmakers in the uncompromising defense of Black Cinema as a pedagogical space makes a difference, since the commercial film exhibition space is open to profit, to spectacular productions. On the other hand, Black Cinema exhibitions, film clubs and even streaming channels are potentially open to anti-racism educational proposals.

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Cinema is an "enunciation device" (Bennati and Teruya, 2022). Films, like all enunciations, reflect a communicative intention that is inseparable from culture, and contain an ideological charge that is precisely directed at the social environment. For this reason, they point to ways of being and acting. The Nazi and Hollywood propaganda films produced during the Second World War show how important cinema was at that historical moment (PEREIRA, 2012). The images projected onto screens implied the display and multiplication of dominant narratives which, in turn, became part of the public's repertoire, encouraging them to see the world from a certain frame, from a certain angle, under a certain light, through a certain filter. Cinema, due to its popularity and its potential for spectacle, has proved, throughout its short history, to be a very effective way of constructing, feeding, destroying and reversing imaginaries. It is worth noting that this extraordinary power has been used both to fuel hatred and justify cruelty, and to reinforce identities and dignify existences.

In this sense, there is the pedagogy of Cinema Negro, that of educating to be and to act. Attentive eyes capture other looks, not as a voyeur trapped by the image, but as a flaneur in search of the new. It's about experiencing what the road is showing (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p. 39). Listening to a text without copying it is not traveling the road, but being hooked by words and getting lost:

Walking the road and copying the text are ways of exploring and relating to the present, which are, above all, e-educational; they are forms of critical educational research ("critical" here being, in my view, identical to "e-educational") (MASSCHELEIN, 2008, p.39).

The pedagogical factor of Black Cinema is precisely that it makes visible a world that jumps out at you, yet remains ignored by the quadrilaterals of screens and monitors. Pedagogical Black Cinema offers itself on the road, not to raise awareness, but to capture

the gaze, attract attention, liberate and emancipate. It's the educational force of what looks at us, what provokes us, what makes the bubbles that surround us implode (from the inside out). Being conscious is a task that falls to the subject themselves.

Still in this direction, the images on a screen, as in other artistic manifestations, are not just there to inform, but above all to provoke sensations, in a mixture, in Gallo's (2016) words, of "affection, feeling (pathos) and thought (logos)". The observation is that, whether we like a film or not, we don't remain apathetic: in this affection, "the powers of thought" are mobilized. In other words, there is a confrontation in the globalized world over the power of cultural values.

On opposite sides, the managers of homogenization and diversity find the path of affection in communication (WULF, 2013), creating attractors capable of bringing people together around the cultural ideas generated. Black Cinema is increasingly present in this arena, multiplying visions and meanings in a creative sphere in which diversity of angles is not the norm. For Wulf, alterity has three major adversaries: "logocentrism, egocentrism and ethnocentrism" (WULF, 2013. p.18). In other words, what commonly stands in the way between the dominant scenario and a richer panorama is a chain of biases that go beyond individual attitudes - although they are certainly a part of the problematic conjuncture. It has to be considered that large sectors of politics, the academic world and the economy, which includes creative activities, perpetuate biases. After all, prejudices exist, persist and grow because they are institutionalized. Deconstructing them, in turn, is an effort that needs to be collective and comprehensive.

3 Final considerations

Thus, the efforts involved in building a Black Cinema are manifold. We still need to look at black representation in national film production that corresponds to the proportions of black influence in the composition of Brazilian society in more ways than one. There is still little space for black directors and for narratives focused on black lives, which implies less space for black actors and actresses - a situation which, in turn, results in a severe

lack of both stories and figures in front of the camera who relate more directly to the demands for visibility of black audiences. Seeing yourself on screen, feeling immersed in a narrative with which you have various levels of familiarity is an important and visceral part of the cinematic experience.

This is clearly not an easy task. Filmmaking doesn't happen in a vacuum. Filmmakers have to deal with a creative industry that has its own preferences, which relate directly to the most hegemonic views within a society. Actors, in turn, often have to play roles written and directed by white people, reinforcing stereotypes that satisfy racist and classist taste demands, naturalized by centuries of institutionalized oppression in Portuguese America and contemporary Brazil. Within this creative scope, which perpetuates deep-rooted prejudices, clichés proliferated and, of the little space available for black professionals to act, much was reserved for caricatures, simulacra of blackness that clearly reflected elitist and highly exclusionary worldviews.

In 2000, during the 11th São Paulo International Short Film Festival, filmmaker Jeferson De made public his manifesto, *Dogma Feijoada*, in reference to the notorious manifesto of Danish filmmakers, *Dogma 95*, which preached guidelines for the creation of a more technically restrained and, consequently, less artificial cinema. But, reference aside, the "commandments" of *Dogma Feijoada* were not restricted to the search for films composed in a more technically essentialist manner, aiming as a major objective to encourage the configuration of a Black Cinema (CARVALHO; DOMINGUES, 2018). For Jeferson De, this configuration demands a production in the following terms:

- (1) the film must be directed by a black Brazilian director;
- (2) the protagonist must be black;
- (3) the theme of the film must be related to black Brazilian culture;
- (4) the film must have a feasible schedule. Urgent films;
- (5) stereotypical black characters (or not) are forbidden;
- (6) the script should focus on ordinary black Brazilians;
- (7) superheroes or bad guys should be avoided (CARVALHO; DOMINGUES, 2018, p. 4).

From the perspective expressed in the manifesto, therefore, we see a comprehensive demand that seeks to question the nature of various structures inherent in film production. In our view, this is not about excluding the non-black. On the contrary, it's about bringing them closer. Jeferson De has presented questions of a technical, artistic

and ideological nature. When it comes to directors and protagonists, he draws attention to the low black representation in scriptwriting, directing, important technical positions and acting. When it comes to the presence of black women in the same activities, representation is even lower.

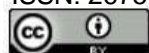
The need to deal with themes dear to Afro-Brazilian experiences without incurring in racial stereotypes is a demand for a thoughtful and respectful representation that is truly inclusive and that is not reduced to easy, repetitive characters and situations that fundamentally do not understand real circumstances. This idea is reinforced in the strong suggestion of the 7th "commandment": to flee from representations of superheroes and villains, potentially essentialist and Manichean versions of the individual, which can neutralize the richness of the nuances of humanity situated before the eyes of viewers.

Above all, by citing the need to meet feasible deadlines, creating "emerging films", the author highlights the urgent need to introduce these discussions into the field of filmmaking as soon as possible. It is increasingly pertinent for Black Cinema to make its way into the Brazilian imagination. Although the expressive incursions of names such as Zózimo Bulbul, Jeferson De, Sabrina Fidalgo, Lázaro Ramos, Yasmin Thayná, Juliana Vicente, Joel Zito Araújo, Celso Prudente and many others are not uncommon, the calls expressed in the Dogma Feijoada manifesto, two decades after it was published, are still alive and kicking.

Any attempt to make predictions is risky, but it is always possible to detect trends and encourage them to remain in the public debate, so that they don't lose steam and continue to echo. It's safe to assume that Brazilian audiences are increasingly assertive in demanding that the quadrilaterals of smartphones, TVs and movie screens translate the black presence in our country with dignity, and there are no signs that the demands for a Black Cinema that represents and affects our audiences will cease, much less that new directors will stop facing challenges in their quest to build new representations and instigate new affections.

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