

Cinema literacy and the need for a cinematic blended learning

Youssef Loumim 

Poly-Disciplinary Faculty of Nador, Mohammed 1st University, Morocco.

y.loumim@ump.ac.ma

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Abstract

The ubiquity of consumption films was conspicuously conducive to a consumerist society that deals with cinema only for amusement. This thought piece article sheds light on cinema as a two-fold art that can be both trivial and edifying at the same time. This paper, therefore, agitates all stakeholders in the realm of cinema in Morocco to help develop a constructive cinematic culture in Morocco through the inclusion of film studies in the Moroccan educational curricula. Cinema, without a doubt, can affect individuals both positively and negatively, and hence, being aware of how to select films and why has become a mandatory datum to cultivate the minds of film consumers in Morocco. As such, the reader of this article is supposed to find out why the formal learning of intellectual cinema from an early age is a fruitful decision.

Keywords: online learning, educational films, film consumption, documentaries.

1. Introduction

Cinema is an inevitable art, which many individuals revel in to escape life stressors or to liven up. In this regard, building a cinematic culture through education has become quite quintessential. Ergo, this paper focuses on the importance of adopting film studies in the Moroccan educational programs through in-person or online classes. Nevertheless, it highlights the very pejorative aftermaths of weak cinematic culture compared to a firm film knowledge among film consumers.

Most young people, mainly students, nowadays spend hours on the internet scrolling here and there for trivial or time-wasting content. For this reason, busying students with errands such as

watching educational films could be an adequate alternative to busy students in a constructive film consumption habit.

This thought pieces article presents the ample speculations of cinema critics and practitioners, who warn of the necessity of cinema literacy in Morocco and the inherent danger of constant exposure to consumerist and purely entertainment-driven cinema.

2. The Necessity of Film Studies in Moroccan Schools

Based on a statistical study I conducted on film consumption in Morocco in 2021, it appears that the Moroccan academic audience is devoid of an expanded cinematographic culture. This datum becomes apparent regarding the lacuna of film clubs and film studies syllabi in Moroccan schools. The scholar Kevin Dwyer, to this extent, exposes that “one of the major issues affecting the Moroccan film sector is how to construct a culture that values cinema as a special form of creative activity and that encourages its appreciation” (Dwyer 247). He focuses on the deficiency of actual movie clubs to disseminate film culture among film viewers. Dwyer presumes that the activities of film clubs have lately decreased, and even the ones in practice have to change their methods of work (ibid 248). Ahmed Boughaba, a Moroccan film critic, believes that cinema clubs are required to take advantage of newer technologies to spread filmic awareness effectively; he asserts that “film clubs have to look for another means of transmitting film culture” (ibid). Nowadays, the advanced and pervasive means of communication can be very practical for documentarians, in particular, to disseminate their works and share their attitudes with the Moroccan public.

Boughaba goes further to underline the importance of adding cinema literacy programs to the curricula of Moroccan secondary schools. He insists that “one must work with the youth in the primary and secondary schools” to allow film consumers to build analytical thinking about cinema (Dwyer 248). In the same vein, the Moroccan director Ali Essafi argues that we have to “have an education in the image much earlier than the baccalaureate”, and the director of *l'École Supérieure des Arts Visuels de Marrakech* evokes that even those who want to specialize in cinema need some apprenticeship before higher education (ibid 249).

Boughaba and Essafi's inclinations are commensurate with the research quantitative results. When the samples were asked if they had undergone prior education in cinema as a school subject at secondary schools, 100 % replied with a big 'No'. This datum pejoratively influences the cinematic culture and knowledge of audiences. This veracity was apparent when informants

demonstrated meager understanding of cinema, namely after being unable to identify the documentary film as a cinematic genre and arrayed it among reportage and TV programs categories.

Be that as it may, it looms that illiteracy in cinematic matters is conducive to random film consumption. The American scholar Sandra Carter affirmed in her interview in this dissertation that students in pre-university schools need to initially learn three aspects of cinema. The first of which lays focus on the technical methods of writing a film script; the second is understanding how ideology affects cinema, and thirdly, students ought to acquire an overview about the history of cinema. She writes:

The kind of cinema instruction that I personally would prefer in pre-university institutions would be three pronged: 1) teaching how to make video fiction and non-fiction stories themselves; 2) political economy that has in the past and present influenced what films and kinds of film have both been made and/or actually find an audience; and 3) the history of major milestones in film and documentary, a kind of film history. (Carter)

Carter explicates that these three areas in teaching cinema should be sprinkled through three levels of education. In the primary school, pupils need to be familiar with writing stories, both for fiction and documentaries to comprehend how the two genres differ in terms of structure and content. In middle schools, learners should study the history of cinema to grasp the prevailing movements that contributed to the construction of cinema as a diverse domain. In high schools, students can study ‘political economy’ to apprehend film objectives and how the success of movies depends on the community rather than individual talents (Carter). In so doing, Carter explains that studying cinema earlier results in generating active audiences capable of understanding numerous constituents about it.

According to Sijilmassi, the curricula of educational institutions in Morocco, from kindergarten to university, lack subjects of ‘art education’, including ‘image education’ and the culture associated with it- cinema as a case in point (Sijilmassi). He reckons that the absence of art education in the field of academia is one of the critical factors that decrease demand for the consumption of valuable artistic products. Therefore, raising the artistic knowledge of the child should be reinforced at school before the media. In this way, young people become accustomed, consciously, to consuming intrinsic artworks because education is potent to indoctrinate

individuals with strategies to choose and analyze works of art, treat information, and participate in artistic activities (ibid)

Valentina Vitali (2005) opines in her article, “Why study cinema? Serial Visions of the Culture Industry and the Future of Film Studies”, that cinema ought to be conceived as a continuum of the everlasting modes of reproduction (Vitali 288). As such, Vitali’s standpoint evokes that cinema and the history of reproduction are inextricable. In reaction, Sue Harper (2008) capitalizes on cinema studies as an accurate niche to become active thinkers and bypass the first level of perception, which is pleasure and entertainment (Harper 2). She argues that the aesthetic level of movies is secondary compared to their content and historical or industrial contexts (ibid). That is why, modules or subjects on cinema will allow students to “think through how film culture responds critically to social and political issues”; in this way, learnt viewers become able to absorb the implicit and explicit impetuses of those in charge of making cinematic meanings (ibid).

Teaching cinema in the Moroccan public schools will foster to profound understanding of cinema to students. Learners, who are at the same time film viewers, will come to terms with cinema critically and analytically. They will account for many criteria that shape the production of cinematography, such as film genres, film theories, and the history of cinema. Put differently, viewers who acquire film culture can decipher the ideology of the filmmaker, the historical background of the film, and the social context in which it is made. Thus, cinema literacy programs in Morocco will contribute to constructing awakened and clairvoyant audiences driven by their sheer intellect instead of being manipulated and flocked around propaganda or mediocracy.

3. Stardom and Fandom

Celebrities are decidedly decisive determinants that attract viewers’ interest. This fact was salient in participants’ replies, where they did not hide their firm passion towards film stars. 72 %53 of responses admitted that the presence of their beloved celebrities in films is the preliminary impetus behind their choices to watch films. The American author, Sandra Carter, agrees upon this fact in her interview with the researcher and voices that “audiences are more likely to choose to watch a film whose actor they recognize and like over a film with either an actor they don’t like or don’t know” (Carter). This consequence can be very expressive in explaining up why fiction films supersede documentary films in Morocco. In plain words,

documentaries do not rely on film icons and stars, and thus sundry consumers avoid them. As a repercussion, films within the era of the culture industry bank on famous actors and actresses to elevate revenues and maximize observation.

The rise of celebrity culture is achieved through noticeability in virtue of communication advancement. Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (2006) relate stardom to culture by stressing that “the star or celebrity is not just a desired object but also an intimate doorway for connecting people” (Holmes and Redmond 3). The idea of connection, they jotted down, can be explained as a process of standardizing tastes and interests. This notion denotes that celebrities are potent to amass individuals around them, disregarding distance or boundaries. They additionally illustrate that fandom is the corollary of the culture of stardom. Meaning, audiences do not confine themselves to celebrity observation, but they further become their fans, and hence the stages of simulation start to take place (ibid 4). Emulation is conducive to consumerism because stars as an allegory of success, are dominating every single venue on media outlets and “affecting many areas of social life” (ibid). Andrew Tudor takes on this matter in *Image and Influence* and suggests four areas of influence between celebrities and their fans. He reinforces that film stars can cause emotional affinity, self-identification, imitation, and projection (R. Dyer 18).

Emotional affinity, according to Tudor, is the feeling of empathy that leads to identification with heroes and heroines (R. Dyer 18). This datum can hold devastating pursuits as it gives warrants to protagonists to gain sympathy from film observers, no matter what their roles within the plot are. In movies such as *Joker* (2019) and *The Mechanic* (2011) Joaquin Phoenix and Jason Statham are respectively perpetuating crime, murder, and rape, but they are, simultaneously, having the pathos of viewers who either cry and feel sorry for their tragic fate at the end of the film or sense delighted for their illegal triumph⁵⁴. By emotional affinity, cinema substantiates its ability to invert reality and normalize the abnormal. The phase of self-Identification is the time in which the audience member places himself in the same situation and persona of the star (Tudor 81). This seems partly congruent to Baudrillard’s conceptualizations of the ecstasy of communication that results from hyperreality. Hence, films allow audiences to live in imaginary situations that contradict their real state of affairs.

Freud ties identification to psychoanalytic theory and underlines that identity construction stems from the contact of individuals with external objects. In his theories of instincts and ego identification, Freud presents the ‘oedipal scenario’ as a process through which the male child

identifies with his father as an ideal emblem of likeness and his mother as an object of sexuality (Carter and Seifert 510). Using Freud's hypothesis, Judith Mayne proposes that film stars who are always mediatized as distinguished and idealistic personas are likely to be the first people with whom the 'self' identifies (Mayne 23). What is more, Laura Mulvey presumes, in her feminist perspective, that cinema is made to meet the desires of males. In her reflections on fetishism and voyeurism, she proclaims that spectators are invited "to act out a unique combination of voyeurism and fetishism" to satisfy the male gaze (ibid). Mulvey denounces the role of female characters who sign contracts to pacify the sexual whims of male actors and male spectators, resulting in a distorted representation of females as sexual objects.

Moreover, Jean-Louis Baudry hinges on Lacan's mirror stage and avows that the mirror for the child and the screens for spectators are quite analogous (Rushton and Bettinson 38). He reveals that cinema, using montage and editing, is capable of mirroring an ideological reality that affects viewers psychologically, and this cinematic impact is embodied in how cinema provides the viewer with a fragmentary world that transmits an illusory unity (ibid). However, Baudry takes on identification in cinema as a fraud, since cinema transforms the 'objective reality' into a "unity which is not typically found in reality" (ibid). This suggests that any identification process in cinema is deceptive and contributes to negative psychoanalytical aftermaths. Baudrillard merges with Baudry's stance, since he sees that fictitious films resemble cartoons, insofar as they pepper "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (Holmes and Redmond 232)

Imitation and projection are the furthest scopes of influence between film stars and spectators, as Tudor opines (R. Dyer 18). Imitation is the stage when spectators overtly take movie stars as their idols. The imitation of stars betokens that the celebrity/audience rapport transcends the screen and resumes to emerge in the ordinary life of viewers (Tudor 81; 82). Jackie Stacey (1991) defines this type of imitation as a reproduction of the celebrities' conduct; she adds that this process initially targets the commodification of stars in markets (Stacey 161). By imitating actors, people will consume what stars possess or imbibe what they believe in. Tudor correlates with Stacey and quotes one of Deanna Durbin's fans who states:

I adored her & my adoration influenced my life a great deal. I wanted to be as much like her as possible, both in my manners & clothes. Whenever I was to get a new dress, I would find from my collection a particularly nice picture

of Deanna & ask for a dress like she was wearing. I did my hair as much like her as I could manage. (Tudor 82)

Copying is an elaborated phase of emulation according to Stacey (Stacey 160). In that stage, fans turn to renounce their identities to be exactly like their stars. Thereby, spectators start to change their physical appearance, language, and living style (ibid). Equally, Tudor confirms that projection (Stacey's copying) leads fans to act as their stars in reality (Tudor 82). Richard Dyer (1998) also elaborates on the phenomenon of star projection in his notion of 'charisma and society'. Charisma as an unbeatable personality is, according to Dyer, the idiosyncrasy ascribed to most of stars on screens. On this subject, Dyer links stars' supremacy with their socio-political functions; he asserts that they are always depicted intellectually, emotionally, and morally powerful to intentionally serve for certain ideological undertakings (Dyer 16;31;41;54). The changelessness of celebrities over time is, as a corollary, the faculty that renders them social icons imitated and copied by ordinary consumers.

4. Discussion

In *What is Cinema?* (1964), Bazin assumes that films are capable of taking viewers into a universe where they can identify with characters that they dream to be like or stories they are inept to experience in the real world (Bazin 99). A similar precept is partaken by Estanislao Carter who reveals that "entertainment [in cinema] derives from our own need to experience life indirectly or vicariously. To learn from the benefit of others without all the pain or bloodshed" (E. Carter 21). Hence, cinema represents a shelter in which audiences amass to indirectly feed their souls with others. In this way, cinema becomes undeniably a fount of entertainment. Sergi Gianluca and Lovell Alan, experts on film studies at Nottingham University, state that "Hollywood, invariably, describes itself as providing entertainment: audiences, when questioned, regularly say they go to the cinema for entertainment" (Sergi and Lovell 2). Amusement is therefore amongst the giant criteria that allure audiences to consume films extravagantly.

An incumbent question was given to ask participants about the genre they watch more at movie-theaters. They were asked whether they have ever seen a documentary film or fiction film at cinema halls or not. Shockingly enough, 0 %48 said that they have never ever found a documentary film exhibited in the movie auditoriums they go to. In truth, the interview instrument was capable of proffering different answers to this result. In the interviews with the

Moroccan filmmakers Azlarabe Alaoui and Rachid Kasemi, both interviewees revealed that film producers avoid budgeting documentaries because they believe that this type is unprofitable, and they have faith that audiences in Morocco favor fiction films as sort of entertainment. A similar attitude is held by the CCM. The latter shows an enormous bias to support fictitious movies. From 1988 up to 2019, only 29 documentary films made profit of the CCM's finance while hundreds of fiction films were the overt beneficiaries (Devision de Production).

It seems salient that the documentary genre in Morocco is ideologically discarded. Ideology according to Louis Althusser gains power from the ISAs that overrun cultural productions (Althusser 241). Conceiving it this way, Althusser's visions are unarguably prominent to analyze the previous finding. A documentary film seems to be derogated into a secondary position because nearly all practitioners of cinema in Morocco do not deal with it seriously.

Therefore, the French critic affirms that art is inseparable from ideology. That is, any work of art brings about ideological effects, and these outcomes become normalized as integral parts of culture. In reference to ideology, Althusser points fingers at the capitalist system that hegemonized art within both modernity and postmodernity. Carle Freedman, an adroit art gallerist, is in line with Althusser as he professes that art during the modern times was characterized by the 'monopoly of capitalism', and in the postmodernist era this monopoly has become prolonged into the 'multinationalization' of capitalism (Parris Springer 45). In so doing, Moroccan cinema, that occurs in a liberal State, sounds unimmune to the vehement impact of the market system.

Cinema Literacy to that extent is vital to cope against the ideological domination of capitalism that enhances trivial whims to the detriment of serious concerns. By teaching Moroccan students an intellectual cinematic paradigm, they will be active viewers who are wary of the slippery messages of consumption and ideology films.

5. Conclusion

The abovementioned discussion explains why the Moroccan audience could only acknowledge Moroccan fiction films and Moroccan fiction filmmakers. The quantitative results revealed that fiction filmmakers were identified by more than 85 % of the interrogated Moroccan film consumers, and the lion's share of respondents recognized Moroccan fiction films in comparison with documentary films. The fact that fiction filmmakers count on celebrities to render their films blockbusters, many viewers tend to consume this category. Sandra Carter

agrees with this idea and outlines that “big budget films always have several well-known stars, to appeal to diverse audience preferences, while even independent films or low-budget films try very hard to include at least one well-known star” (Carter). She confirms that feature films are highly promoted, and producers spend exorbitant capital on the aesthetic qualities that entice the eye of viewers.

Conversely, documentaries are derogated in favor of fiction because the nature of documentaries does not lean on celebrity projection; hence, most production companies discard it as it will not gather a public around. Feature films and fiction filmmakers are the major beneficiaries of these relations of production because sponsors afford many privileges to guarantee them fame and recognition. In the Moroccan context, Ahmed Sijilmassi sees eye to eye with Carter because he confirms that TV channels, which take over film production, prioritize drama and fiction for their lucrative peculiarities and findability at movie theaters or TV screens. Concerning the concepts of stardom and fandom, Sijilmassi differs from Carter; he suggests that documentaries do not need celebrities to attract audiences, yet they are in want of clairvoyant viewers who hold film culture and appreciate this film category. Sijilmassi’s idea connotes that documentary films can shine and act competitively when they are made for a large mass of intellectuals.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes on Contributors

Youssef Loumim is a qualified Moroccan EFL and ESL teacher. He holds certifications from The CRMEF (Morocco) and The American Association, TESOL. After serving as an English teacher in public secondary education from 2017 to 2021, he was promoted to serve in tertiary education in 2022. Currently, he is an English Professor at The Poly-Disciplinary Faculty of Nador.

y.loumim@ump.ac.ma

ORCID

Youssef Loumim  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8153-2759>

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