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PARTICULARITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS ON AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY IN THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CLASSIC PERIOD

PARTICULARIDADES Y CONTRADICCIONES DEL CINE NORTEAMERICANO EN LOS INICIOS DEL PERIODO CLÁSICO

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ABSTRACT:

The beginning of American cinema known as "classic" period was also affected by the huge change that the United States would undergo at the dawning of the 1930s, which also affected social and cultural areas. In that hectic context of forced withdrawal, the Great Depression, the film industry was severely affected by the socio-economic crisis; but it is well known that in that period, new methods and forms of cinema were being favored, which were to achieve enormous success, with enormous influence on the production of the rest of the world. The intention of this study is precisely to research the particularities of the first North American classical cinema, which derived from open and almost inexplicable contradictions, which nevertheless resulted in the boom and consolidation of the seventh art, reaching even our days. For this paper, I have based myself on the comments of several well-known critics, economists and historians, as well as other lesser known scholars. Likewise, several films made at that time have clearly shown me about the reality of the country. All have contributed specific and very valuable notions that confirm the final result of grandeur and influence of the film industry, despite the special juncture of the United States at that time.

KEYWORDS: Contradictions-particularities-beginning-classic-boom-films.

RESUMEN

Los inicios del concebido como periodo "clásico" del cine norteamericano también se vieron sometidos, al igual que el resto de ámbitos sociales y culturales, al formidable cambio que experimentaría Estados Unidos al encarar la década de los años treinta. En ese agitado contexto de retraimiento obligado, la Gran Depresión, la industria del

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cine se vio severamente afectada por la crisis socioeconómica; pero de sobra conocido es que también, en ese periodo, se estaban favoreciendo unos nuevos métodos y formas de hacer cine que iban a lograr un éxito descomunal, con enorme influencia en la producción del resto del mundo. Es precisamente la intención de este estudio indagar en las particularidades del primer cine clásico norteamericano, derivadas de abiertas contradicciones casi inexplicables, que no obstante tuvieron como respuesta el auge y consolidación del séptimo arte, llegando hasta nuestros días. Para dicho trabajo me he basado en los comentarios de varios críticos, economistas e historiadores de gran reconocimiento, así como de otros estudiosos menos conocidos. Igualmente, varias películas realizadas en aquellos momentos me han ilustrado certeramente sobre la realidad del país. Todos han aportado unas nociones específicas y muy valiosas que confirman el resultado final de grandiosidad e influencia de la industria del cine, a pesar de la coyuntura especial de Estados Unidos en la época.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Contradicciones – particularidades – inicios – clásico - auge- películas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In addressing the various peculiarities that make up the first American cinema, one must establish, even with brevity, the historical situation that happened in the United States in the transition stage of the 1920s through the 1930s.

It should be noted that, in a few months, it would come to be the world's top economic power, through sectors such as the financial and the stock market, to become the germ of an unprecedented socioeconomic crisis, irretrievably affecting other countries, as is well known. Consequently, that prosperity and growth which had settled in the society of the "happy twenties" was to result in generalized scarcity in all layers of citizenry and rural America, because of the concatenation of several factors, such as the collapse of the productive sectors, the poor management of the Hoover government, and especially the stock market crash of 1929 that ruined millions of Americans. The subsequent Great Depression, which has been very well studied, caused a long and traumatic end to the crisis, with widespread poverty due to lack of expectations concerning employment, and with only the new reform program of the new Roosevelt government as a breath of hope. But, at the same

time that most of the productive sectors and the industry itself had collapsed without being able to place their products, a cultural and industrial phenomenon like that of Cinematography was not only consolidating its boom, but it was to be erected as the first source of income and growth. Therefore, this paper will seek to gather a rigorous piece of research, which can explain that great paradox that arose in a country in a state of shock, which bore witness at the same time to the strengthening of a cinema that facilitated the beginning of the classic period.

2. OBJECTIVES

It is therefore a matter of analyzing a set of particularities, including contradictions, which, despite having been studied exhaustively and separately from unquestionable data, does not prevent them from being set out together to achieve the main objective. It will be from an integrating perspective, therefore, where the contribution of this study is based, to highlight, therefore, the why of that unbeatable and paradoxical opportunity that the cinema had.

We know that the "American dream" was soon to come to an end with the outbreak of the New York Stock Exchange in late 1929, with dire socio-economic consequences in all areas, including internationally, over the next few years. However, in that long period of "Depression" lies the first contradiction, which will have to be analyzed in relation to the beginning of the heyday of the film industry.

On the other hand, there was a second very striking curiosity that was conditioning the reason for the existence of the cinema itself: the massive attendance of an impoverished society to movie theaters. Therefore, another crucial objective will be to examine the causes of the attendance of a citizenry faithful to the show, despite the general shortage.

We also have to analyze the importance of the renewal and crystallization of cinematographic genres, which fortunately grew in a context of crisis in the film industry itself, which seemed to be excellent compared to the other sectors. In addition, another clear contradiction was the blissful development of certain genres of relevance, such as the black or social cinema, as opposed to the work of vigilant censorship, which was often overwhelming for creators.

Not less remarkable was the response of the union forces involved in the film industry, which chose a collaborative scenario instead of the traditional protest. Therefore, the objective should be based on ascertaining the causes of the change of stance.

Thanks to the fortunate combination of the above factors, together with the new forms of production imposed by the so-called System of Studies and the discovery of new sound and film techniques, the beginning of the classic stage of American cinema would be established.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to approach this epigraph, it is necessary to mention the diverse methodological resources used, which have allowed us to clarify each one of the alluded particularities.

In the first place, with regard to the strictly historical context of the Great Depression, it is necessary to record certain social and political terminology raised at that time; in turn, they are definitions that are closely related to the economic evolution of the productive sectors and, of course, to that of the film industry. Thus, when speaking of "dollar diplomacy," a concept attributed to President Theodore Roosevelt and widespread among economists in the first decades of the century, one alluded to the capacity for total economic influence of the United States in other countries. Specifically, it referred to the US initiatives to manage loans, war debts, tariffs and monetary stabilization, to strengthen their interests abroad.

On the other hand, another latent notion is that of the well-known "American dream", as a slogan for a young country full of life expectancies. In his book *The Epic of America*, published in 1931, the American historian James Truslow Adams reflected on the foundations of the American Dream:

That dream of a land where life must be better and richer and fuller for all, with opportunities for everyone according to their abilities and deeds. It is not simply a dream of cars and high wages, but a dream of a social order in which every man and woman should be allowed to reach the highest quota of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of their origin or position (Truslow, 1931).

Let us recall also the prohibitionist and counterproductive Volstead Act, which was barely complied with rigorously given the climate of laxity with alcohol at that time, even though thousands of illegal distilleries were confiscated. This is a law that very negatively affected the citizenry of large cities, especially. And it has a lot to do with an unbearable climate of social instability, in addition to what was purely economic, as well as with the inspiration of a film genre of enormous success, such as "gangsterism." On the other hand, another crucial concept is the crack itself, which as economist Joseph Galbraith says, refers to:

The insane alienation of reason: behind the boom of speculation were the different forces - economic, cultural, psychological and political. There can be no reasonable doubt as to the fact that the collapse of stock prices, the collapse of the fortunes of those who played in the market, and consumer spending as well as for companies had a traumatic influence on production, income and employment. (Galbraith, 2000, p.15).

And as is well known, the reform program to try to get the United States forward was established in the "New Deal" of Franklin D. Roosevelt government. It had much to do with the recovery, to which it should be added that, under its political umbrella, the cinema was widely disseminated, indeed, both were mutually favored.

As for the methodology to research the special characteristics of the film industry itself, this paper has been aimed at rescuing several enlightening ideas from highly recognized experts, in the proper direction of synthesizing the conclusions that are pursued. Among others, the most relevant American historians are Janet Staiger, an invaluable collaborator of the *General History of Cinema* of Cátedra publishing house, in Volume VI (1995), where she provides accurate numerical data on box office receipts and audience attendance to movie theaters; or Giuliana Muscio in the *World History of Cinema* of Akal publishing house (2011), where she explains the details of strikes of writers and screenwriters in the face of a rigid studio-system that restrained their creativity; or David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson who, with their contributions in their unquestionable reference manual, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* of Paidós publishing house (5th Ed. 1997) offer some highly valuable reflections that deepen in the capacity of the financial and stock market (JP Morgan Chase, National City Bank, New York Stock Exchange ...) to influence the decisions of the cinematographic companies; or Douglas Gomery, who in the *Theory and practice of the history of cinema*, also of Paidós publishing house (1985) has researched the dynamics of administrative and economic management of the Majors themselves.

Likewise, the approach provided by other Spanish writers and historians of cinema has been in the same line of presenting these peculiarities. In this sense, the methodology has been based on picking up some very notable and illustrative articles. Thus, in issue 116 of the journal *Directed by*, the article "Hollywood in silence. The arrival of the talking pictures" (1994), José Enrique Monterde has examined the repercussion of the sound system in the cinematographic structure of that time, where a revolutionary and almost definitive method was to be institutionalized, thanks to the role of the large studios in the expensive expenses of reconversion. In addition, Carmen Mainer, with the study "American cinema during the Great Depression (1929-1939)" in the journal *Fotocinema* issue 6 of 2013, delves into the cultural policy of the Roosevelt era and its determined support to filmmakers such as Frank Capra or King Vidor who, in addition to filming the ravages of the crisis without beating about the bush, were able to inspire hope and self-esteem in memorable works. And more specifically, Miguel Marías with "William Wellman, a mysterious filmmaker" published in the 146th issue of *Revista Filmoteca Generalitat Valenciana* (1994), deals with the transcendence of an emblematic director who, from a typology of social cinema, knew how to tackle the less kind face of America in the 1930s, far from the sweet-smelling, evasive Hollywood productions.

As it could not be less, another essential procedure has been the brief analysis of certain films which, thanks to their artistic quality, have already become properly classics and deserved cultural recognition. And they also involve large-scale models for a vast number of films made in the following decades, regardless of their excellence. With them, we witness the cinematographic variety that was germinating in the thirties (with many previous roots), with new genres and approaches, from the goal of pure entertainment to the search for citizen reflection.

Considering that this methodology has proved sufficient and useful, it is also necessary to mention the resources of the other bibliographical references, or other

cinematographic works that, in a similar way, would have contributed solvency to the final result.

4. DISCUSSION

In order to delve into this idea of great paradox in the Depression cinema, one must resort to the circumstances already outlined, as a reliable and objective explanation of this special situation.

4.1 A hectic historical context

First, to explain the circumstances of the already outlined historical support of a country like the United States, one must go back to the first factors of sociopolitical incoherence in the late 1920s: contempt for the League of Nations, short-term tariffs, non-stimulation of an economic program of draft, no forecast of unemployment growth, tooth-and-nail deregulated liberalism, or brutal speculation on the Stock Exchange, where banks lent citizenship with an interest of around 12%, to place them in shares sometimes to 50%. And we should add the fragile banking system: thousands of regional and independent banks with very limited assets. Historians have clearly seen that, the Stock Exchange having rapidly changed, the result of speculative tension in October 1929, thousands of savers began to liquidate their belongings, driven by panic: more than 13 million non-listed securities found no buyers. The consequences of economic and financial chaos were not long in coming, and the United States began a very different decade from the previous one: massive closure of industrial and agricultural companies, declining consumption, accumulation of surpluses, bankruptcy of more than 600 banks without reserve reinsurance by the Federal Reserve, millionaire defaults, etc.

At the same time, the American citizenry was dangerously undergoing a growing decay after the golden age of the 1920s: corruption in high political and business spheres (friends of President Harding himself, the so-called "Ohio Band"), complicity among gangsters, politicians, policemen and judges, (rise of figures like Al Capone), scarcely exemplary Volstead Law, by "virtue" of which certain social elites promoted parties sprinkled with alcohol in their mansions, second-generation migratory phenomena that had their easier exit in the organized crime, progressive gap among social classes, putting millions of unemployed people from all over North America in the overcrowded and squalid urban outskirts ... In short, those adverse factors that were predicting the crisis materialized in a decisive way. In addition, population movements in search of work (from 4 million unemployed in April 1930 to 15 million in July 1932), or "hunger wages". A genuine generalized anguish would shake the country for a long period, and as Pedro Schwartz says:

We usually speak of three years of crisis in the USA, those that stretch from 1929 to 1933, when in fact they were ten. To the country, the decade of 1930 was a lost decade. If, over just eleven months from 1930 to 1931, the last years of Hoover, the amount of money in the American economy decreased by 26%, it is now accepted that this sudden disappearance of payment resources aggravated the recession and prolonged it unnecessarily. (Schwartz, 2009, p.455).

Collective malaise was openly reflected in the results of the November 1932 presidential election, by giving confidence to Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt and his hopeful "New Deal" reform program, as we well know. At the international level, the crisis provoked greater impoverishment of the coffers of the old continent, which observed how its stocks had no exit.

4.2 Heyday of the film industry in an adverse socio-economic context

.Irremediably, the historical transformation that was so harsh with previous events affected the evolution of the film industry. In fact, the influence of the crisis on the structures of such a young art seemed to make it head for its rapid disappearance. As Galbraith (2000) has studied, cinema suffered in such a way that many medium-sized companies disappeared, they were unable to assume production costs due to lack of economic circulation, distrust of investors and other advertising companies.

However, in a paradoxical way, in such an adverse historical scenario, the consolidation of the cinema in the beginning of the classic era was an incontestable fact. In the first place, it should be noted that its survival was largely due to the fact that it was the sector that last suffered the consequences of economic chaos, with the result that the progressive strengthening of Hollywood seemed to be becoming a constant, mostly since the arrival of political change. The reform program involved in the New Deal was going to become a priceless companion for the movies. In this regard, as Carmen Mainer (2013, pp. 1971) summarizes, already as Governor of the State of New York, Roosevelt had carried out in the early years of the crisis a package of socioeconomic reforms aimed at overcoming it, trying to stop the uncontrolled ruleless economic liberalism; from all this, it is clear that, despite the ravages of the crisis, an excellent opportunity for recovery began to be generated in various sectors, especially in cinematography, which was much appreciated by the structures of political power, due to its economic and sociological potential. However, it should also be noted that the strength of the Hollywood Majors did not become effective until the mid-1930s, after many swings, failed projects, frequent suspension of payments, having to choose the least damaging solution: absorption or merging among the less powerful.

Another oddity of total non-disappearance of the cinema was based on the irony that some of the factors that negatively affected the industry would be those that would also intervene in slowing down its hypothetical collapse, even in its renewal soon after. It has been sufficiently verified how, at first, the film industry was seriously affected by the decisions of big businessmen, which caused a first drop in attendance: according to data provided by *Standard Trade and Securities* collected by Janet Staiger (1995, p.143), 1,100 million dollars of box office receipts in 1929 came to be 625 millions in 1932, and also, the cuts in personnel in the various trades attached to the seventh art affected equally directors, performers or operators, and even the disappearance of subsidiary companies of makeup, costumes, decorations, etc. But, faced with the decline, resurged the resolute commitment of those responsible who, from the economic risk, continued to restructure the business vehemently. In this respect, the film industry had been closely linked to the world of

finance, in the hands of producers who had also participated in stock market speculation and who, in the early stages of the Depression, were still willing to support profitable initiatives, from their connection with Wall Street. As George Sadoul sums it up: "The great crisis that opened the bankruptcy of the New York Stock Exchange resulted in a renewal - often fecund - of the creators, as well as an effort by Wall Street to dominate art and the film industry" (Sadoul, 1991, p.205). A similar thesis is that of David Bordwell (1997, p. 350): the fact that certain securities of the film industry had to withstand the volatility of instability did not prevent the high spheres near the Morgans and Rockefellers from controlling, through large sums of money, the adaptation to the new sound equipment, patenting or imposing key executives on the boards of directors. Likewise, Bordwell comments on the important differentiation between "the interest of executives in the global growth of the company, instead of achieving short-term high dividends, a habitual practice of owners" Bordwell et al. (1997), pp. 352,353).

There was thus a reinforcement of the structural change where economists controlled the whole process of work and almost the design of the film product, under a central supervision in management that was much harder than before, which entailed another great contradiction regarding the work of filmmakers and screenwriters, in short, to the cultural essence of cinema. Obviously, in the early 1930s, those most involved in defending the sector from any perspective, either economic or cultural, were not aware that a universal long and fruitful period began to serve as an artistic model for later creativity. Under this integral system of production sponsored by Hollywood, to work with maximum coordination among its parts, fruits were achieved that have passed into the history of cinema as outstanding and eternal, the origin of which started from a situation of galloping crisis.

4.3 Consolidation of the System of Studies in the face of the film crisis.

Since the close of 1931, large companies such as Columbia, Fox, and Paramount had begun to resort to a highly successful economic production system, in order to regulate and manage the print run and to specialize companies in certain genres. On the contrary, the administration and private investors built up lack of protection and a precariousness that affected the most modest. The security of the big ones lay in the control of a real capitalist oligopoly. The processes of concentration, then, constituted the fundamental mercantile premise to be able to make films requiring a huge budget and acceptance by a mass public. The newly conceived Studio System was the protagonist of the hegemony of the North American film industry. To hoard in more than 90%, such a sector meant that one could hardly enter to compete, which was building up the definitive character of a quasi totalitarian Hollywood.

Faced with the limitations of the national economy, an iniquitous industry such as that of cinema triumphed according to its hierarchical system of organization, which never ceased to be striking. In the hardships of the Great Depression, even for many sectors of the seventh art, the growth of large companies flourished incessantly. In addition, they kept federal government provisions at bay for decades, facing some antitrust breaches that sought to curb the industry's hawkish exploitation, such as

the National Industrial Recovery Act, which eventually garnered meager results, since the state itself needed the business pull to relaunch the economy. The real result of the lawsuits thus resulted in another particularity: the control of industry by the big ones came to such extremes because the benefit also had repercussions on the Democratic government. The new dealers did not want to consider the trust of sufficient size to determine a strict monopoly.

On the other hand, another well-contrasted singularity tells us that the power source of the majors resided in the extensive network of distribution that they had in their own country and in the world, rather than in an exorbitant number of films. As a thriving industry, cinema was concerned to continue to produce abundantly in an environment of socioeconomic depression, with films of all quality and genre, but its real boom was the ability to reach any corner of the planet. In this regard, Douglas Gomery summarizes that "The power of the five big companies and the three small ones in the distribution sector meant that the proceeds from abroad were about half of the income from an average feature film" (Allen and Gomery, 1985, p.33).

4.4 The union response of collaboration.

In principle, the union response to the management of Hollywood, especially with the advent of talking pictures, increased the tension in all professional profiles. Labor restructurings were seriously felt, from ordinary workers to the same filmmakers. The history of cinema tells us that many technicians, screenwriters and directors, grouped in the so-called creative unions like the Screen Writers Guild or the Screen Directors Guild, "were very affected by the economic drift and the social problems, as well as the sense of frustration before the primacy of the rigid and hierarchical studio-system and the commercial question" (Muscio, 2011, p. 503). And the first workers' pressures were felt after October 1929: the conflicts of workers with the Warner were intense, the less grateful side of which was evident as it laid off 900 employees and lowered the wages of the rest.

On the other hand, under the circumstances, the union power was later to become an opportunity for collaboration. In fact, the conflicts in the labor bargain did not prevent specialization of labor in the time of crisis from happening. In other words, in order to deal with the unfortunate socioeconomic status, "unionization practices confronted the securing of the subdivision of labor rather than the production system" (Bordwell, et al, 1997, p. 348). There were even clashes between unions themselves in their dispute over certain jobs, which the state had to pay. From this, another apparent contradiction emerges: from the theoretical and eternal clash between companies and unions, a system of forced equilibrium was to be established. In the face of the traditional protest stance of grassroots workers, a kind of collaboration was frequently carried out as a lesser evil. And despite certain fluctuations in the labor dispute, it was hoped that companies could develop their tasks in order not to lose jobs. It was an attitude that the cinema itself represented:

"The growing union force meant an evolution in the treatment of the figure of the worker in the films made in Hollywood from 1932 to 1940, passing from referring to the actions of workers' protest as a result of resentment or ambition to

understanding the organized working class as a positive force to be involved in the enterprise of national reconstruction "(Monterde, 1997: 138).

4.5 Social poverty versus massive attendance to the movie theaters.

With regard to the citizens' attendance to "post-crisis" films, we have several versions that corroborate another great paradox: the mass popular follow-up. Ángel Luis Hueso (1988) shows us how striking was the fidelity of the spectator given to his idols on the screen (in addition to escaping from the daily frustration inflicted by socioeconomic discomfort), or the highly prized novelty of the newly discovered sound format, or the collective taste for new and different genres. For his part, Edward Epstein tells us that "no form of centrally produced entertainment had ever captivated such a large proportion of the population" (Epstein, 2007, p.331). On the other hand, the opinion of Guliana Muscio is very different, who suggests that much attention must be paid to mass attendance of that cinema-devout society, so equaled by the crisis, since it was attendance promoted by the government itself, even with political change:

During the Great Depression, everyone went to movie theaters. Cinema was a necessity for the Hoover administration, which, in the midst of the crisis of the first years, distributed food, clothes, and tickets to the movie theaters; tickets to keep people out of the street, offering them shelter and comfort; if we want to put it this way: 'panem et circenses' (Muscio, 1996, p.25).

Even as it has been studied very well, movie theaters themselves made sweepstakes and different gifts for the public. In fact, the political and social response to a crisis of such caliber, over and unforeseeable for those who directed the destiny of the country, was not to alarm their subjects even more with negative auguries. It was about offering them products of evasion, of moral simplicity in the face of the hard and complex daily life (again another irony): most of the time Hollywood movies were tied to their definitive conventional narratives.

Which of them were the result of the structure of big studio commerce. As such, the movies expressed a fairly consistent aesthetic and ideological viewpoint. The complex and often contradictory nature of certain issues were reduced to an easily contained dramatic conflict between good and evil forces, necessarily resolved in the Happy Ending. With few exceptions, such oversimplification of social problems tended to provide a rather reactionary political message (Roffman and Purdy, 1981, p. 8).

It should also be pointed out that "this vast American middle class still had records and resources that were by no means so abundant in other countries" (Lacolla, 2008: 165), so it is easy to imagine that despite the number of spectators decreased by a third from 1930 to 1933, the people did not want to dispense with a relatively cheap entertainment. The general conclusion must lead us to believe that, either due to idolatry towards the cinema and its world, either due to the support of the government or because the companies facilitated access to movie theaters, the attendance of the American spectator did not fall too much. In this sense, it is very

enlightening to remember that the fact of "going to the movies" did not per se imply "seeing a movie". Entertainment consisted of a kind of cultural leisure package that included a theatrical show, a newsreel, several short films and the announced film, as years ago, where "it was very possible that, for many of the clients, what film was projected was not very important" (Allen and Gomery, 1985, p. 203).

Finally, it should be remembered that with the appearance of the Oscars, since its first edition of 1929, the influx of public would increase greatly in the following years.

4.6 Crystallization of escapist genres despite censorship.

It has already been shown how those preambles of classical cinema were subject to some productive disciplines which, together with the prominence of the new techniques of sound, implied a strengthening of new forms of expression. And "those companies that did not understand that it was necessary to invest in heavy investments in artifacts and infrastructures, as talking pictures demanded, disappeared or were relegated to the film market" (Monterde 1994, p.17). Therefore, the particularity is that in this decade new forms will be born or mature, cinematographic genres that a voracious public would consume thanks to the attraction of listening to dialogues or music. As Monterde reminds us:

The irruption of talking pictures completed the institutionalization of a dominant mode of representation throughout the world. This propelled the definitive dominance of large corporations, which were the only ones able to face the costly expenses of reconversion of filming studios (1997, p. 132).

On the other hand, thanks to the genres, the public knew what they were going to see and the producer gave the public what they expected to be given, despite the limitations imposed by censorship. In this sense, it should be noted that, prior to the official censorship of 1934, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) with the Puritan Will Hays at the head, in response to public outrage at the Hollywood scandals, had already been applying to the cinema some very strict rules of morality after the beginning of the crisis of 1929. Some sectors of society thought that Hollywood "excesses" had been impregnating the collective imaginarieness, a reason why "a moral order was instituted and, with it, a frequently hypocritical view that tended to ignore some of the most fundamental realities of life" (Coursodon, 1996, p.231). The contradiction, in this sense, must be focused on the fact that, as stipulated in the agreements between the industry, pressure groups and the financial world, it ordered a close watch on the films, some genres flourished precisely thanks to concrete achievements that circumvented the prohibitions. Let us look briefly at some of the prominent genres of the 1930s, with some films susceptible to control, or rather, destined to escapism and evasion fostered in the Great Depression.

From silent comedy cinema set in pantomime and gesture, the film industry passed to the comedy of verbal excess that the screwball comedy involved, with delirious dialogues among problems and disagreements of couples. This would lead to an adherence of the public who valued a kind of cinema with a very refined humor. It was about creating quirky situations with careful planning, where the guidelines of the censor team were often shunned, especially with the figure of women at times

somewhat compromised. Directors as important as Frank Capra or Ernst Lubitsch, and actresses like Katharine Hepburn or Myrna Loy dazzled the viewer. *My man Godfrey* (Gregory LaCava 1934), *It happened one night*, (Frank Capra, 1934), or *Bringing up baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), were very recognized, arising a conscious evasion in the spectator. But also, another curiosity to be highlighted was the sense of fantasy and luxury that distilled by certain movies with wealthy characters ... more often for a poor audience. Thus, Stanley Cavell already explained:

There are comedies of the period which might better fit the description of fairy tales for the Depression. But this seems less of a reflection of particular economic realities or fantasies, than of the ancient theme of fairy tales of having wishes granted, call this the fantasy of escaping the realm of economy altogether ... We honor the rich because they have externally the freedom, power, and grace which we feel to be proper to us (1999, pp.5-7).

On the other hand, the musical genre was also part of this contrast between a world of glamour and a poor and enraptured audience. Its completeness is well established, and the fact that, in the first years of the talking pictures, an overproduction of mediocre musicals was contemplated was not an impediment to a very receptive renewal. There were very remarkable works, with actors and actresses who filled the dreams of the public, momentarily escaping from the hard reality thanks to the fabulous numbers of music and choreography, as in *42nd Street* (Lloyd Bacon, 1933). In this regard, the couple formed by Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire in memorable musical pieces, always in a state of grace, in films such as *Top Hat* (Mark Sandrich 1935) should be mentioned. For her part, an outstanding young actress like Judy Garland, with *Broadway Melody* (Roy Del Ruth, 1937) would mark another milestone.

The western movies of the thirties were also prolific with the intention of pure amusement, with the incipient sound in march. Pure action, persecutions, dangers and confrontations, good and evil, the mythology and the epic were well defined parameters that filled the leisure of citizens eager to remove the daily hardships. Some highly prized western movies were *The Big Trail* (Raoul Walsh, 1930), *Billy the Kid* (King Vidor, 1930) and *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles, 1931).

Another creation of the talking pictures was the North American cinema of terror, which in the end housed the same particularity as the rest of genres. There was technological progress in the fear produced by the lugubrious sounds, and movie companies would exploit and monetize the entire prototypical cast of monsters, vampires, and zombies to the viewer's morbidity, but under censorship supervision. And after the success of *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1930) or *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), horror movies became a most visited popular movie novelty, despite social hardship. Two years later, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932) and *Freaks* (Tom Browning, 1932) would be released with great success.

Censorship would also be responsible for setting limits to certain films or film sequences of two categories that were certainly scabrous, which showed, without a shade, the regrettable reality of the United States: social cinema and gangsters cinema, still with the Hoover government. "But the existence of censorship does not

minimize the value of cinema as a testimony, but even increases it because, like any other source, cinema can be so revealing both by what it says explicitly and by what it does not say or is not allowed to say "(Ibars R. and López I., 2006, p.11). These categories recreated a perspective committed to the real problems of a country in shock. Nevertheless, until Roosevelt did not accede to the presidency at the end of 1932, a great particularity was being raised in the first government of the Depression, because if, on one hand, it was prone to mask the painful social reality, on the other hand, it could not stop documentary filmmaking of non-professional filmmakers, very alert with what happened every day.

The Hoover Administration consistently minimized the suffering and hardship brought on by the economic crisis; The commercial cinema followed suit. Outraged by such neglect, amateur filmmakers throughout the country sought to document social conditions; supported by funds from the Workers International Relief, Film and Photo League were formed in Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. It completed a series of short films and silent motion pictures on the hungry, the unemployed, the demonstrations, the breadlines, the evictions and others in their daily existence and activities (Davidson, 1993, pp.69-88).

However, some films did come to light thanks to their more than deserved artistic recognition and the social concern they distilled. For example, William Wellman's early *Beggars of Life* (1928) was already showing the unfortunate plight of certain layers of citizens, somehow anticipating the brutal disaster. In this sense, "Wellman preferred to be frank and surly in his films, which are provocative, challenging and expeditious" (Marias, 1994, p.23). As well as, in the midst of crisis, *Our Daily Bread* (King Vidor, 1934) or *Sullivan's Travels* (Preston Sturges, 1939) were a ferocious and authentic portrait of an evicted US. As for the gangster genre, remarkable for their violence were *Scarface* (Howard Hawks, 1932) and *I am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn Le Roy, 1933), where the unfortunate conditions of prisoners was denounced, something the censorship of the Hays Code did not like very much. The essence of all of them consisted, at the same time, of their playfulness and in raising the spectator's awareness, paradoxically.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The notions presented in this article are intrinsically related to the intention proposed in the introduction, the objectives and the discussion. Therefore, the primordial synthesis that must remain is the constancy of some particularities that favored the consolidation, splendor and world influence of the first American classic cinema. This conclusion is mainly based on the fact that, despite a difficult socio-economic context with no signs of recovery, a cultural and commercial industry of enormous impact was beginning a golden age. To this end, each of the previous sections results in results that together form that great paradox of the grandiosity of cinema in the Great Depression of the United States. Concisely, let us recall these specific, often contradictory, traits:

1. The crisis affected the film industry, but far from declining like the rest of the sectors, it was re-impelled by certain business, financial and political elites.

2. The economic management of the Hollywood System of Studies made it possible to alleviate production, sometimes to the detriment of the author's creativity.
3. In an unusual way, an impoverished society continued to go to movie theaters, despite a few years of fall of box office receipts.
4. Cinematographic models, some pre-existent, were generated for the accomplishment of infinity of works that had repercussions on production and commercialization at international level.
5. The cinema illuminated brilliant works framed in genres, considered to be the first classics of cinema, sometimes despite censorship.
6. The union response was in the direction of collaborating to keep the activity booming, almost far from the traditional workers' claim.
7. The new reform program of the New Deal was ingratiated with the film industry as a sociological revulsive of hope and encouragement.

These are issues that were inexorably fed back, showing the reality of the beginning of the more universal and imperishable cinema. These were very important factors that managed to overcome the tremendous socio-economic ups and downs of that uncertain period.

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