**News and entertainment in the USA**

**Introduction :**

The title of this lecture is composed of two words which can be seen as totally different, but which will be here seen as depending on each other.

- news = 1-current events; important or interesting recent happenings (Collins) / = a report of recent events / - material reported in a newspaper, or news periodical, or on a newcast… (Webster)

2- information about events, as in the mass media.

- entertainment = an act, a production, etc., that entertains; diversion, amusement (Collins English dictionary)…and “to entertain” is defined as : to provide amusement for a person or audience. Also: entertainment = something diverting or engaging (Webster)

As we can realize , there are two distinct trends here, one for each word…

- the idea of reporting something important, something serious (with the word “news”) and - the idea of providing amusement, of having fun… (with entertainment)…

So we apparently have here two kinds of productions that are apparently opposed… if someone wants to know more about the world, he’ll get some “news”, if he wants to extract himself from the world, he will then get entertained by some escapist production (a novel, a film, a show….) …

BUT… obviously these two terms are not that opposed… and in fact they often merge to some extent, so as to be enjoyed even more. News can be given some sensational characteristics (in order not to bore those who want to know some facts)… and “entertainment” can also be given some educational features, so as to teach something while people are being amused…

What was first seen as two distinct and opposed concepts are now seen as the two sides of the same coin… (two main aspects of one concept that will be the core of that lecture … that is to say: the role of the media , of the mass media in the United States of America… Of course, I will not have the time to give an in-depth account of all that the mass media represent in the USA… But I will try to mention the main characteristics of these media…

- “mass media” = “the means of communication that reach a large number of people in a short time, such as newspapers, magazines, the radio, television (Collins English dictionary).

I feel like adding “films”… Of course, the cinema is rightly considered as “art” rather than “mass media”… but as I said before, some entertaining “products” may also have some “pedagogical” virtues… even to the extent that art can also assert and teach political ideas for instance… and then a film can become a way of spreading ideas… a way of developing some propaganda… (as is also the case with the other media who can, of course, also be biased (subjective) to the point of distorting facts and give a partial view of news.

It is because of this overlapping between the ideas of news and entertainment that I have preferred to keep the title as it is (“News and Entertainment in the USA”) rather than a more global title such as “the Media in the USA”…And besides , the idea of entertainment will allow me to talk more about the cinema in the USA in our last class together.

Here is the plan of what we will see together:

**1- Journalism in the USA (from the origins to 1945)**

**2- the radio and television**

**3- Hollywood and its different aspects** (its artistic nature, but also its political implications).

**I- Journalism in the USA (from the origins to 1945)**

Reporting news depends on where you are. The news media reflect the society in which they operate. Since America’s beginning, newspapers have been an essential agent for news presentation (for a very long time, it was THE main medium through which news was conveyed).

America’s press grew out of the tradition and patterns that existed in Britain (mainly) in the seventeenth century.

It started with the slim journals of colonial times then it developed (with more or less political control) and big business was quick to intervene so as to both contribute to and benefit from the growth of journalism.

**A- Journalism in the colonial period (1690-1776):**

The first newspaper was a small 3 page newspaper, printed in Boston (by Benjamin Harris, in 1690)... but there was only one issue, because the British authorities disliked what was written (and refused to give the journalist the required license).

Indeed, the spread of knowledge was seen as a threat to the people holding power, and the press was tolerated only as a servant in the interests of the government. So, the colonial governors (= the representatives of the British Crown) therefore strictly controlled the press and that slowed the growth of newspapers.

Only in 1704 was the first weekly created (on the colonies’ ground): It was the Boston News-Letter (whose editor was John Campbell)… on that paper, were printed ideas that corresponded to what the colonial authorities wanted (It even displayed “Published by Authority” at the top of the first page). The first criticism of the colonial Authority that really developed in the press took place in the New England Courant edited by James Franklin, the older brother of Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the USA (Benjamin Franklin also worked in that newspaper). The New England Courant gain some popular support, and even it the colonial authorities were displeased, the newspaper managed to survive.

The first colonial newspapers were usually published by the local postmaster or by local printers… they were small newspapers (merely extensions of community bulletin boards). They were mainly directed at an elite segment of the colonial society… those who could afford to buy papers, AND who were literate. These newspapers were published in port towns (on the East coast) and did not reach the majority of the population. The news was mainly about merchandising (trading… like the arrivals of some cargoes…) and there was also information re-printed from British newspapers (that were brought in by ship). Information was then taken from these British newspapers and “colored” so as to promote the interests of the publishers.

So, gradually, there was more and more protest against the impositions (the taxes) that came from London. Basically there were then two kinds of newspapers: those that opposed the British taxes (like the Stamp Act, or the Trades Acts) and those that sided with England. When the Revolutionary war started in 1775, there were more and more pro-Patriot fervor in the press. At the end of the war (in 1783), there were about 35 newspapers in the New World.

A popular journalistic device then was “pamphleteering” = writing pamphlets against some form of authority for example…. The most famous example being Thomas Paine’s pamphlet (against the King of England), Common Sense, which was first published in the Pennsylvania Journal in 1776. (that document is essential in the American revolution, for t did word out why the American colonists could no longer be subjected to the tyranny of the British King).

Another important event that contributed to the American anger against the British (and that directly concerned the newspapers in the colonies) was the tax called the “Stamp Act”. The Stamp Act created indeed a huge controversy (basically, it was aimed at making the colonists pay for the war of Britain against France. That tax was imposed on many things in general, and on newsprint (newspapers) in particular. What is noteworthy is the fact that, given the protest of the newspapers of the colonies (the publishers writing that the tax infringed on their freedom (it limited their freedom)… the British parliament eventually repealed that part of the Act (the part of the Stamp Act that applied to printers)… So, we can already see the importance that was given to the press (Britain trying to calm down American newspapers, probably hoping that they would be less opposed to the tax and therefore write less aggressive articles against the British Crown).

Another consequence of that “Stamp Act” was that it was responsible for what was to become the standard format of newspapers for the centuries to come…. Indeed, the tax was imposed on the basis of each page, regardless of the page size. As the earliest newspapers had pages that were the size of book pages, the publishers decided (on account of the new tax) to switch to large pages (thus, they could print more information at lower cost). As time went by, printed equipment was designed to accommodate these large pages (as is still the case today).

As for magazines… they were slower than the newspapers to develop. They dealt more with “entertainment” than “news” (they were about literature mainly)… Magazine reading was indeed a leisure-time activity for the Upper-Class. Besides, most of these magazines came from England, and so, only very few were published in the colonies (the first two ones being printed in 1741, and for just a few months only).

**B- The Party Press: 1776-1835**

First, let me remind you of the fact that once the American revolution was over (1775-1883: treaty of Paris), the founding fathers first wrote the Articles of the Confederation which are the first official document stating how the country was to be run. The first constitution did not give a lot of power to the federal state… and it was replaced by what has become known as THE constitution of the United States (which is still in use today).

To put it in a nutshell, the constitution was adopted in 1787, then ratified by the different states (in 1788 / 1789). With the Constitution, governing the country is divided in three main branches: the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches… Three “powers” that are supposed to control each other. Now, that constitution gave much more power to the federal State than to the small states (13 states) that composed the Nation then. So as to counterbalance this important federal power, another official document was added to the constitution. It is called the “Bill of Rights”. These are amendments to the constitution (now there are 27 amendments). At first there were ten amendments in the Bill of Rights, and I am only going to quote the first one, which is essential regarding journalism. Here is the first article of the Bill of rights: “**Congress shall make no law** respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or **abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press**; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances”. This amendment is essential because the freedom of the press is asserted… and it allows the Press to be considered as the 4th power in the country, the non-governmental power that can control what the three branches of the government do. And indeed, journalism played an essential part in some historical periods of the USA (think of the Watergate scandal that forced President Nixon to resign in 1974… but also, many other financial scandals involving the government were fought by journalists known as “muckrakers” at the beginning of the 19th century).

As the press could not be prevented from expressing viewpoints, and as newspapers were more and more numerous, it so happened that journalists were trying to persuade their readership much more than to give them objective news. In those days, newspapers had therefore no qualms of conscience of giving inaccurate news, or of being largely financed by political subsidies. This led to a lot of propaganda.

The biggest topic was the centrality of power. On the one hand there were the journalists who were in favor of a strong federal state (these people were called the Federalists, and they were led by the politician Alexander Hamilton). On the other hand could be found newspapers that advocated more power to the states within the nation (they were known as the Anti-federalists … or the Republicans [be careful, this has nothing to do with the political party that exists today]; Thomas Jefferson was their spokesman). That difference needs to be mentioned for it explains a series of letters published in newspapers in those days, letters or articles known as “the Federalist papers”.

More globally in those days, the newly asserted freedom of the press implied a very aggressive kind of journalism made of open attacks, libels, and many lies… to such an extent that Thomas Jefferson even wrote to a friend: “The man who never looks into a paper is better informed than he who reads them”.

In those days, newspapers were weeklies mainly… only in 1783 the first daily was started: the Pennsylvania Evening Post (which was first a weekly) became a daily in 1783. Others followed quickly in main cities like New York, Baltimore or Charleston.

Then at the turn of the century, there was a surge of new newspapers (hundreds of weeklies, and 75 dailies only). Despite the increase in numbers, these papers were still for the elite (the big merchants and the politicians).

Gradually, what is called as the “party press” (very subjective press in favor of / or against a powerful Federal State) began to decline in the late 1830’s (after Andrew Jackson’s presidency). (It does not mean that pure objectivity was reached… but the attacks were less fierce than before). Also, advertising developed, and the money received thanks to advertising made the publishers less dependent on political (subsidies)… This relative financial independence was all the more increased as printing improved: it was faster and faster and it cost less and less money… And regarding the transmission of information, some great improvement occurred with the invention of the telegraph.

**C- The birth of modern newspaper history (1830s/1860s)**

Modern newspaper history began in the early 1830s. At that time, all that we saw about the evolution of the press (advertising, progress,…) led to cheaper newspapers AND more popular appeal. Indeed, as education also spread in the USA, and as newspapers were more and more affordable, publishers realized that important changes had to take place if they wanted to make more profit. Within just a few years, the press then went from small upper-class readership to mass readership. The development of the press was mainly an urban phenomenon.

There was a spectacular increase in number and in circulation (weeklies were still predominant, but there were more and more dailies… about 400 on the eve of the American civil war (in 1860). War also changed some habits in journalism. For instance, newsgathering implied the use of war correspondents (it had already been the case with the Crimean war, a few years before, in 1853).

The world of journalism also evolved with the arrival of journalistic moguls (giants), an economic evolution which reduced the direct influence of political parties (as the private control prevailed). Among these influential industrialists, one can find:

**- Benjamin H. Day** who was a young printer who successfully launched the New York Sun, in 1833. That newspaper was then sold for one penny… it was therefore much cheaper than most of the newspapers at the time (they sold for six cents). Benjamin H Day counted on a mass demand to get some financial return. As he wanted to give his newspaper some popular appeal, he reduced the dull (monotonous) political reports, and he concentrated on sensational news, on news directly related to the every day world of the common man (he focused on trials, murders, suicides…). His formula worked (and it still does!) and the New York Sun’s circulation soared immediately: it was the beginning of the “Penny Press”.

**-**Even more successful than Benjamin H Day is: **James Gordon Bennett**. He created the New York Herald in 1835. He asserted his belief in a factual kind of journalism.

This belief in factual journalism is crucial when comparing American journalism and French journalism, for instance. Indeed, it is often said (by scholars, by sociologists…) that, as a rule, American Journalism gives facts, while French journalism stresses opinions (with a preference for editorials, for example)… of course, reality is less clear-cut… but still, there is some truth in that statement.

James Gordon Bennett’s newspapers focused on sensationalized local news, that were written in a terse, blunt style. He developed the use of correspondents (for national or international news). He developed the concept of “getting the news first” (it was not as important before, because the press was less dealing with facts). The New York Herald was brutal in its attacks and it tended to side with the have-nots.

**- Horace Greeley** had a totally different point of view on the nature of journalism… Rather than emphasizing facts, he gave preference to opinions (and was therefore closer to the French kind of journalism). He created the New York Tribune in 1841. This newspaper was the prototype of “personal journalism” (in his newspaper, he liked expressing his opinions… against slavery, against capital punishment, in favor of the westward expansion (he is known for his phrase “go west, young man!... a phrase which is used in John Ford’s film on journalism: The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (1962).

Greeley’s newspaper was influential and was part of the political life of the nation. Not so surprisingly then, The New York Tribune was the first American paper to develop an editorial page.

**D- The rapid expansion of modern newspapers: 1870s-1900s**

With the end of the **reconstruction period (1865-1873**) (= the period that followed the **American Civil War (1860-1865**), there was a huge development of the country… on many levels: an increase in population, industrialization; a development of urbanization, of education… the economy was booming and turned the USA into the first power in the world (that period is known as the “**Gilded Age”; it goes from 1873 to 1901 approximately**). With the development of mass production and of consumer goods, there was a huge need for advertising… and all this contributed to the expansion of the press… Journalism became a capitalistic industry involving fierce competition for circulation. Huge newspaper empires were then created…Two men symbolize that period: Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst

**- Joseph Pulitzer** founded the St Louis Post Dispatch in 1878. The paper was successful. It was a mix of facts and opinions. News coverage was indeed given pride of place and very often, it included sensationalism to create even more mass appeal. As for the editorials (the part related to opinions), they were aggressive and liked to show that the paper was in favor of the working class. Part of his success was also due to the fact that he understood that the tastes of the increasing population of urban centers (like New York City), a population that was mainly from foreign origins (Pulitzer himself was an immigrant from Hungary)

Then Pulitzer bought another newspaper the New York World (in 1883). Efforts were made to be more attractive for the readers: the paper included: - the first sports section in those days, comics, illustrations (in bright colors), a lot of advertising. The success was rapid and the newspapers were published in the morning and in the evening (morning and night editions…there was a Sunday edition too).

**- William Randolph Hearst**:

William Randolph Hearst is known nowadays as one of the biggest magnates of the press. He is also portrayed by Orson Wells in his 1941 film Citizen Kane (Charles Forster Kane’s life is indeed shaped onto Hearst’s life. Hearst was upset about that negative portrait of himself… he tried to prevent the film from being released, but in vain.

William Randolph Hearst was the son of George Hearst, an industrial magnate of the Gilded Age (whose life can also be seen on the screen… in a television series called Deadwood, a series which shows how capitalism developed notably thanks to the mining industry). George Hearst bought The San Francisco Examiner, but it is William (Randolph Hearst) who made it truly successful by applying Pulitzer’s formula (aggressive editorials and reporting sensational facts). William Randolph Hearst then also bought other newspapers (like the New York Journal, in 1895). And so as to become successful, he hired some of the best reporters of Pulitzer’s paper the New York World, mainly.

In Hearst’s papers, there was an increased use of photography and color printing. These papers also increased the use of sensationalism…and they became the embodiment of **“Yellow Journalism”**. “Yellow journalism” is the term for sensationalism, often tinged with an excessive sort of patriotism (or jingoism). The term “Yellow Journalism” comes from a comic strip that was then created and whose main character was “the yellow kid”. This character was a street urchin, and he simply wore yellow clothes. The comic strip first appeared in a magazine (called Truth, in 1894-1895) but rapidly it was found in Pulitzer’s New York World, then in Hearst’s New York Journal American.

Despite the sensationalist aspect of many papers, that period (end of 19th century / beginning of 20th century) saw the rise of some objectivity in its articles.

**E- The era of muckraking (1900s/1910s)**

The research for objectivity and truth of the period (mainly from 1900 to 1912) is also well embodied by a series of magazines that published very well documented articles by journalists who fought corruption and tried to show all kinds of scandals that afflicted the American society. The two main magazines were McClure’s or Munsey’s. There was an increase in a new trend of periodicals, known as “ ten-cent magazines”. They were cheap and the journalists saw themselves as activists, as defenders of the people’s interests. The main journalists of that type (= the main muckrakers) were Lincoln Stephens, Ida Tarbell, Upton Sinclair (who also wrote novels, like the Jungle” or Oil!), or Ambrose Bierce (also known for his short stories on the American Civil War).

But before going on with this kind of journalism, one may define the term “muckraking”. What is it? And where does it come from?

**Muckracking:** the term was first used by president Theodore Roosevelt (1900/1908). The term (“muckraker”) was first meant as something negative, but since then, it has lost that derogative flavour. Now it simply refers to some sort of investigative journalism.

When Theodore Roosevelt used that term, he meant it as an attack towards these journalists, but had quite a paradoxical love/hate relationship with this kind of journalism. So, when, in 1906, he was angry at these journalists who tried to find scoops in relation to the government’s activities. He used this term which was originally meant as something negative (to rake muck = to deal with mud and dirty matters)… Theodore Roosevelt took that name from an old and famous English book : Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan (in the 17th century, in 1678). In this Christian allegory (Pilgrim’s Progress is one of the most famous religious allegories in British literature), there is a character called “the Man with the Muck-Rake” and this man’s only activity is to take care of the filth, of the dirt, on earth, while he does not even enjoy the positive things of life. This is what Roosevelt reproached these journalists with: according to him, they insisted too much on what was negative in the American society.

But Roosevelt had an ambiguous relationship with this kind of journalism, because these magazines and newspapers also did help him fight the growth (the development) of huge all-powerful companies (indeed, muckraking was socially committed and fought against all the economic irregularities and scandals that took place during the “Gilded Age”). And, to some extent, President Theodore Roosevelt also tried to oppose the increasing power of big companies that became more and more powerful thanks to economic mergers, trusts, and all kinds of economic partnership, of economic “incorporation”. It is under Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency that some antitrust measures were taken, enforcing then the previously voted Sherman Antitrust Act (passed in 1890).

**Muckraking** would therefore be called today **“investigative journalism”**, “investigative reporting”. This kind of journalism exposed all the evils of the fast-growing capitalistic society (child exploitation, workers’ rights, women’s rights…). They had a huge impact on a readership that could not always be aware of the evils of the industrial society… Do not forget that there was no instant communication, no radio, no TV, and therefore all those living in rural or small town America heavily depended on that kind of press to get a better picture of what the growth of the nation implied in the lives of many Americans. So, this kind of journalism was very successful in the first decade of the 20th century, and as said before, many journalists turned their articles into books (2 examples):

- Upton Sinclair wrote the Jungle about how workers were crushed in the meatpacking industry in Chicago… it was first released in serial form in 1905, then published as a book in 1906. It was an immediate bestseller, and it is still read and studied today.

- Ida Tarbell wrote The History of the Standard Oil Company, published in 1904 (it was first released in the magazine McClure’s, in 19 parts… then it was published as a book). In that book, she shows how the Standard Oil Company (owned by oil tycoon John D Rockefeller) managed to gain monopolies, often in very debatable ways. The book had quite an impact on its readership and it contributed to the breakup of the company in 1911.

In those days, this kind of journalism did lead to some public pressure that helped the society evolve in a more humane way. Of course, some politicians and businessmen tried to have the freedom of that kind of press limited, but the judges (the judicial power) protected the notion of freedom of speech which is explicitly within the “Bill of Rights”, within the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Yet, progressively, from the 1910s onward, muckraking started to decline. First, big business managed to organize more and more efficient counterattacks thanks to ads, thanks to pressures onto journalists, some being even attacked or murdered (like David Graham Phillips, shot in 1911, by a man whose family had been criticized in some of the journalist’s writings). But also, and mainly, the First World War broke out in 1914. Historian John Tebbel gives a very harsh account of that period in his book (in: the Media in America). For him : “When war actually came, freedom in America was the first casualty” (294)… The first Amendment suffered most of the federal and state laws that were then passed. The USA entered the conflict in 1917, and some Acts that were passed then were very repressive indeed and they developed censorship in a much more severe way than in Britain for instance (the two most notorious acts were the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, both acts restricting the freedom of speech and of the press a lot). Again, historian John Tebbel does not hesitate to say that, in those days, “the atmosphere was like that of any totalitarian state, whether left or right, but it was all done in the name of liberty and freedom” (295). He also mentions the “emotional ‘binge’ of patriotism” that there was in those days.

This excess in patriotism and in the restriction of the media’s rights took place at a time when war was raging. But once the war was over, things did not radically changed… Of course, the press regained some freedom, but the idea of censorship was not just eradicated… rather, it went underground, and it continued to exist under various disguises as a means of protecting institutions and what is referred to as “the American way of life” (Tebbel, 295). So, World War One certainly took part in the end of the golden days of “muckraking”, which, fortunately, does **not** mean that it was the end of investigative journalism.

**F- The media between 1900 and 1945: the growth of “Big business Journalism”**

As we saw, muckrakers denounced the excesses of corporate America (the unfair methods that were sometimes used), but the development of capitalism also happened in the world of journalism. Indeed, it was expensive to run a big-city newspaper, and often some small periodicals would merge to be more competitive. Economic consolidation (= amalgamation, merger…) was indeed needed so as to increase the circulation of newspapers and face the growing costs due to more modern equipment). The number of newspapers in the USA reached a peak in 1916 (with 2460 papers) but then that number started to decline until the middle of the 20th century (then it levelled off). So “chain publishing” developed and was successful, one of the biggest press magnate being William Randoph Hearst (who owned 42 dailies in 1931).

The leading newspapers in those days were The New York Times, The Herald Tribune, The Post, The Daily News, The Daily Mirror(all were New York-based papers). In other major cities, one could also read: The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun, The Los Angeles Times, The Tribune(in Chicago)… to name but a few.

- Now, let’s focus on two last elements that were developed in that period… first, an element that improved the contents of the newspapers:

- Press Associations

As the demand for more national and international news kept increasing, Press Associations were developed. They had been created much before (in the mid-19th century, but they expanded only after 1900. First, there were three associations (they were also called “wire services” because they resorted to the telegraph to send news). These three associations were:

- **the Associated Press** (created in 1848 by New York city newspapers)

- **The United Press** (created in 1907 by EW Scripps, a newspaper magnate)

- **The International News Service** (created in 1909 by William R Hearst)

In 1958, United Press and International News Service merged into The United Press International. It became an essential tool to spread the news more quickly.

- News Magazines:

The proliferation of news in the first half of the century also led to the creation of weeklies. These magazines offered a mixture of news and opinions. Time was launched in 1923 (by Henry Luce). In the 1933, Newsweek was released. Then there were others that followed suit (U.S. Newsin 1933, andWorld Report in 1946… and the two magazines merged in 1948. Both were owned by press magnates EW Scripps and WR Hearst.

**2- the radio and television**

**A) The radio:**

Scientists started to work on radio waves a very long time ago, as early as the 1870s. Guglielmo Marconi, a young Italian scientist, made some practical applications that enabled him to build equipments that led to the creation a device to transmit voices. Rapidly enough, technical development took place. In 1906, Lee De Forest, for instance, created the “audion tube”, which made voice transmissions possible (and by 1910, an opera could be broadcasted). Paradoxically, technical developments for the radio just decreased with World War 1 (then, research was concentrated on other things, and work on the wireless was put off. After the war, Marconi’s patent (the rights to his invention) was bought (in 1919). Early mass programming was not long to develop (in the mid 1920s). At that time, stations went on and off the air and wandered from one frequency to another, very often interfering with each other. So as to fight against that chaotic situation, the Radio Act of 1927 was passed with the aim of alleviating (reducing) the chaos (it gave the federal government the power to regulate the number of broadcasting stations allowed. (then with the Communication Act of 1934, stations were given three-year licenses that had to be renewed)

At first (in the early 1920s), there were local stations that started to broadcast entertainment and news summaries. But there was some tension between radio channels and the newspapers. The newspapers tried to limit radio’s access to news from the press associations. That situation lasted till the late 1930s, but even then, radio stations could not do what they wanted regarding news. So in 1938, they created their own associate press (the CBS World News Roundup), with correspondents in Europe too. News summaries were broadcasted first, but there was also a keen interest for instantaneous, “on-the-spot” news-reports by dramatic topics like the trial of the men who had kidnapped and killed Charles Lindberg’s son. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the first president to use the radio to increase his popularity (thanks to his “Fireside Chats”, in the 1930s).

- entertainment

In the meantime, radio also attracted a large audience with popular programmes (music, oral performances of poetry…). Popular culture was favored. Then, most stations were on the air at night only with music. Mass audience truly developed only in the 1930s. Drama series were introduced, (soap operas, murder stories, westerns….) and games (like quiz shows) were popular too, as well as advertising (which developed greatly.

The period of 1935/1945 was a period of very remarkable growth for radio in technology, in advertising revenues and in the number of stations.

In 1945, there were around 900 commercial stations, and a few hundreds still waiting for license approval.

At the same time, another invention was about to transform the organization of the media in the USA… television was indeed about to spread its influence all over the country (and the rest of the world)

**B) The television Age (1945/…):**

**a) The birth of TV and the way it is organized**

There had been some experimentation in the 1920s and 1930s, but television only appeared on a commercial basis in the end of the 1940s. A great deal of the military efforts in World War 2 enabled major technological improvements and opened the way for a proliferation of stations and transcontinental transmission. That technological growth was accompanied by an effort to have some programme planning for a national network. It was decided that all the American families should indeed be able to simultaneously receive the same programme. Thus, in order to help the commission that was in charge of organizing such a national structure (that commission was the FCC (= Federal Communications Commission). In order to help the FCC, the federal government imposed a “freeze” on the authorizations of TV channels in 1948. This decision enabled some kind of progressive (and controlled) development of the TV network all over the country, and when the freeze ended four years later (in 1952), the TV network developed all of a sudden. The “age of television” truly started then.

It is a well-known fact that there are hundreds of TV channels in the USA, and it would be a waste of time to go into details into the way these different channels function. One might however mention the main features of the American “TV-scape”:

From the early fifties onward, there have been 3 major national networks: ABC (American Broacasting Company), CBS (Columbia Broadcasting Company) and NBC (National Broadcasting Company). They are often referred to as “the Big Three”. Each of these three networks has around 200 affiliates. These affiliates are TV channels that carry the programs of the “Big Three” in specific parts of the country. In the fifties, a fourth network tried to compete with the “Big Three”: it was called “the Dumont Television”. In fact it was one of the earlier TV networks, but it stopped as soon as 1958.

Not that long ago, there have were some new developments, the biggest one being undoubtedly the growth of what could be now considered as a fourth network: Fox Television. In the 1980s, media baron Rupert Murdoch bought several stations and the 20th century Fox movie studio. Rupert Murdoch has had quite an aggressive way of developing his TV network, and he has managed to greatly increase the number of affiliates working for Fox Television. Nowadays, there are about 190 affiliates (almost the same number as that of one of the “Big Three”). Fox Television is known for its diehard conservatism and for its extreme chauvinism (remember how journalists on Fox News attacked France which did not want to intervene against Iraq in 2003), but note also that such a provocative cartoon as “The Simpsons” also comes from that network!

There was also a rather recent and small network that was launched in 1995: the Warner Brothers Television Network. It only had about 40 affiliates. It had to shut down in 2006. Then, this Warner Brothers Television Network, also called “the WB”, became included in a joint venture (and economic partnership) with CBS and United Paramount Corporation… This association created a brand new TV network called “the CW” (the CW Television Network) and it has a superior number of affiliates than what the WB had before (the CW has 200 affiliates approximately… yet it is not as powerful as the Big Three).

Al these network are private, and as a matter of fact, there is only ONE national noncommercial broadcasting system… only one public TV network… and it is called PBS (Public Broadcasting Service). It is mainly financed by public funding… and regularly; some staunch liberals assert that this public funding should not be used for a public TV network…

And last but not least, cable TV has been developing throughout all the nation from the mid-1970’s mainly. Cable television delivers pictures by wire… unlike over-air broadcasting. All kinds of TV channels can be found. One of the most famous cable channels is HBO (Home Box Office), which is a channel with a “pay-per-month service” that has been reproduced in France by a channel like “Canal Plus”. HBO shows mainly films and also produced very good quality TV series (nowadays TV series are often considered as real works of art, series like Deadwood, The Sopranos, Six Feet Under, The Wire…). Some cable channels can deal with a broad range of topics, others can also target very specific subjects, like CNN (Cable News Network) which deals with news only, and which was created in 1980 by media tycoon Ted Turner.

**b) A brief social and historical survey of the American TV programs**

As you may well imagine, television immediately caught the public imagination. The audience’s enthusiasm was immediate. Watching TV became some kind of “social” ritual, and the programme schedule helped determine the daily routines and lifestyles of millions of Americans. This change in the ways people lived was also made all the more important as the 1950s happened to be a period of economic prosperity. Indeed, with the end of World War 2, the USA had become a powerful superpower, and as the economy of the country kept expanding, the American society started to become what is now known as the “consumer society”.

I will not insist on the political and economic development of the country through that decade, but let it be simply said that the 1950s are known for their optimism, with a country developing “full steam”, and a president that was liked by the entire nation. President Dwight Eisenhower was a former officer in World War 2, and someone who was liked both by the Republicans and the Democrats (for the 1952 presidential election, he had joined the Republican Party, but he was not a staunch supporter of that Party before).

So, in the 1950s, many American families would buy new homes, new cars, and brand new TV sets. And once TV sets were within the house, life would never be the same anymore! Indeed, television would start a communications and information revolution that affected not just the American society. It is true, however, that TV was first and foremost considered as an entertainment medium.

- entertainment on TV:

At first, TV shows were TV versions of popular radio shows (mostly comedies, variety shows. Many of these programs were “live shows”. Early television drama had an on-stage quality, as they were very often broadcasted/broadcast live. One of the most famous variety shows in those days was “the Ed Sullivan Show”: the Ed Sullivan Show originally ran on CBS from 1948 to 1971. For more than 20 years, every Sunday nights (= an American “institution”), it was a variety show in which every kind of entertainment was shown: dance, extracts of plays, circus acts… and music of course. For the baby boom generation (those born just after World War 2), that show is mainly known for broadcasting big stars like Elvis Presley, the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, or the singers of the Motown (a record label with many talented African American singers like Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, The Supremes with Diana Ross…). You might have heard about something related to Elvis Presley and his TV appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show: it is often said that on those occasions, Presley was only filmed from the waist up, which implied that his dancing was not filmed (because is was judged as obscene)… but this is just some kind rumour, because Ed Sullivan spoke about it later on (and when Presley was first invited to the show, his whole body was filmed). Yet the anecdote is interesting because it does announce the rapid evolution in the American society (whether it be as far as sexuality is concerned, or even race (for Presley was influenced by the culture of the Blacks in the South of the USA).

Situation comedies also developed in the 1950s. The success of the programme “I Love Lucy” also shows the evolution of TV programmes: It used many cameras, and the filming was followed by some editing (in the cutting room). The fact that the show was not “live” also enabled TV to plan some rerunning. Finally, another reason for the shows to be referred to here, is that “I Love Lucy” was filmed in Los Angeles, even if it was produced in New York City. Gradually, most television production went west, to Hollywood.

Entertainment on TV has gone through phases: cow-boys programs in the 1950s, “cop shows” in the 1960s…Little by little, these phases made it clear that TV programmes were careful to go beyond the initial spontaneity that characterized early television.

* A survey of network news:

One remark first: here, I am here only dealing with the news on national TV networks (the Big Three: ABC, CBS and NBC)… this does not include 24-hour TV news networks like CNN (created in 1986) or Fox News Channel (created in 1996).

So, TV was not entertainment only. News programs appeared rapidly. In 1947, for instance, evening programs were on the air that used Associated Press dispatches to deal with the news. These TV programs also showed newsreels related to the topical news when they could. Little by little, reporting staffs were formed; on-scene reporters focused on public issues. Some News presenters became very famous. Walter Cronkite who ran a 30-minute newscasts was considered as the most trustworthy man in the country (in a 1981 survey). (Walter Cronkite was an anchorman on CBS, from 1962 to 1981, among other things, he is remembered for breaking the news to the American people that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, on November 22, 1963)

At first, news was a less profitable network activity (it was then called a “glorious burden”), but in the 1980s, news programs attracted larger audiences. But even before, it sometimes happened that TV programs had an investigative flavour that muckrackers would have liked). For instance, in 1951 on CBS, a weekly investigative program called “See It Now” exposed the false and hysterical charges of Senator McCarthy about Communist infiltration of federal agencies. “See It Now” contributed to the political downfall of McCarthy (in 1954). This program, was produced by Fred W. Friendly, and with reporter Edward R. Murrow. Much influenced by “See It Now” is another television news magazine called “60 minutes” (on CBS). It was created in 1968 and it still exists (it was created by producer Don Hewitt, and it is also good investigative journalism.

More generally, what could be added about news on TV is that quantity might have increased (with the development of the “information age”… yet quality might not have followed. Indeed, since the mid-1980s the major TV networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) have had to scale down (= to reduce) their global news-gathering systems, and so, newscasts have suffered most, especially as they lost coverage from abroad (dealing with news in the rest of the world was seen as too expensive). So, there might be a lot of newscasts, yet the desire for real investigative journalism is less strong than it was in the early years of TV journalism (and many critics even say that programmes that were known for their quality before (like “60 minutes”) now lack substance and sometimes even look like what could be found in the tabloids

(tabloids = newspapers dealing with sensational news, with spectacular crime stories, with gossip, scandals… like “Yellow journalism”. The term “tabloid” initially comes from a pharmaceutical company that invented compressed tablets at the end of the 19th century. The condensed aspect of the medicine echoes the compressed and simplified kind of journalism. Furthermore, those sensational newspapers also have a smaller format that echoes the idea of compression.

**3- Hollywood and its different aspects**

**A) The origins**

Fisrt, let it be said that the Frenchman Louis Lumière is credited as the inventor of the motion picture camera in 1895. His first film was the arrival of the express train at La Ciotat. Other subjects included workers leaving the factory gates, a child being fed by his parents, people enjoying a picnic along a river. The American Thomas Alva Edison was a competitor of Lumière's, and his invention predated Lumière's. But Edison's motion picture camera was bigger and not portable.

For the first twenty years of motion picture history, most silent films were short (they were only a few minutes in length). At first a novelty, and then increasingly an art form, these silent films reached greater complexity and length in the early 1910's.

The silent era ended in the late 1920s, when a means of recording sound that would be synchronous with the recorded image was discovered. The first film with synchronized dialogue sequences (the first “talky”) was The Jazz Singer, by Alan Grosland, with Al Jolson (in 1927). Then, few silent films were made in the 1930s.

**B) The studios**

The Studio System was quite powerful from 1934-1946, as they (the studios) had long-term contract with on stars and directors (actors or filmmakers “belonged” to one Studio, and thus, they could not do what they wanted to).

For instance, the 20th Century Fox “owned” actors like Marilyn Monroe, Henry Fonda, or Gregory Peck, and directors like Otto Preminger. The studio called Paramount had contracts with Gary Cooper, Burt Lancaster, or Kirk Douglas.

As for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM): some of their actresses were Greta Garbo, or Elizabeth Taylor. And lastly, comedians like, Bette Davis or Humphrey Bogart belonged to Warner Brothers.

Thus, stars weren't free to seek their own contracts during these years. Often stars would be "loaned" by one studio to another for a particular project with the expectation that such offers would be reimbursed in kind. Stars also worked on more than one picture at a time and often were expected to play in four or five pictures a year. For instance, Humphrey Bogart starred in 36 films between 1934 and 1942. Casablanca (directed by Michael Curtis, in 1942) was one of the four pictures he completed in 1942.

We might also add that a major source of revenue for these studios was their ownership of large theater chains. But in 1949 the studios were forced to separate from these theater empires because of their monopolistic practices (the federal government forced the studios to respect some “antitrust laws”). Indeed the eight largest Hollywood studios were accused of violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (an act passed in 1890) and five of them (the "Big Five": Warner Bros., MGM, Fox, RKO and Paramount) were forced to give up some of their economic privileges (their exclusivity rights were limited, and they could no longer decide which theatres would or would NOT show their films).1 This decision was reached by the United State Supreme Court in a legal case which is known as the “Paramount Case” or the “Hollywood Antitrust Case of 1948). Many historians see this decision as the end of the Old Hollywood studio system. It is only in the 1980s that studios were allowed again to own chains of movie theaters, thanks to the extreme kind of economic liberalism advocated by President Ronald Reagan.

Moreover, the advent of television in the 1950s, as well as the rise of the idea of the director as an auteur, and the ability of actors to become "free agents" led to the downfall of the old Studio System.

**C) A chronological view of the Hollywood production**

- The 1910s / 1920s

At first, in the very early days of the American film industry, New York City was the centre of film production (but there were other cities too, like Chicago, or places in Florida).

But one director made things change. David Wark Griffith was indeed sent to shoot films on the West coast (in 1910). With his crew, he found a location not far from Los Angeles: that was the beginning of Hollywood.

Griffith became very popular. He made many silent films, some of them becoming part of the legend of Hollywood. His films allowed actress Lilian Gish to become a star. His two most famous films are:

* The Birth of a Nation (1915): it is a long-feature film (more than 3 hours). It is technologically and artistically brilliant, but it is very controversial as it gives a positive image of the Ku Klux Klan (whose members save a white girl from Black men).
* Intolerance (1916). This film s very long too. It is as brilliant as the previous one and it uses monumental sets. The film was made to end the controversy of the previous film and to oppose World War One that was then taking place. (it is a film with pacifist ideas).

In the 1910s /1920s, Hollywood rapidly developed. Many short films were made and were shown in small and cheap theaters called “nickelodeons”.

Businessmen started to build huge studios. Directors came from Europe because of World War One (Ernst Lubitsch, then Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock…).

Quite rapidly, the talkies replaced the silent films.

- The golden age of Hollywood: the 1930s / 1940s

Many films of the “golden age” (the 1930s and the 1940s) were popular entertainments but they have become classics partly because they represent some of the best work done by some huge stars like Ingrid Bergman, Gary Cooper, John Wayne, Henry Fonda, Humphrey Bogart… These films are also classics because their directors managed to keep a consistent style and remained within a specific genre (Frank Capra and the sentimental comedy, Hitchcock and suspense, or John Ford and the American Western…). 1946 for instance is considered as the most profitable year in the history of Hollywood.

- A close-up on the 1950s:

As for the 1950s, they are less famous than the previous decades or the 1960s and 1970s. The 1950s is a blurred period between the efforts of the Americans to win World War II and the disappointments and growing cynicism of the 1960s, with the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the Vietnam War (early 60s till 1975), the problems faced by the Civil Rights Movement (the African-Americans fighting for their rights in the 60s), or the deaths of Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy, both in 1968.

The 1950s were an era of economic growth. With the 1950s, came the advent of television sets in every home, and so, cinemascope was then developed as a desperate attempt by studios to attract viewers back to theaters and drive-in movies. But all in all, the last vestiges of the Studio System dissolved because of the new ways of representing the real world in films, but also because of new directors, and new approaches to acting.

- The evolution of films and of acting in the 1950s:

Indeed, what begins to happen during the 1950s is a movement away from the big Studio Films to little films about believable characters whose conflicts are more inward than outward. Introspection becomes important and, in some respects the best films of the 1950s are the ones that announce the great films on the 1960s (Elia Kazan’s On the Waterfront (1954), or Sydney Lumet’s 12 Angry Men (1957). These films have in common two important qualities: on the one hand, directors interested in telling small but important stories and, on the other hand, young actors who bring new dimensions to characterization and emotional intensity (the icons of the period being Marlon Brando, James Dean… both using the “method acting approach”, which was taught in what was to become a very famous school of acting: “the Actor’s Studio” (created in 1947 by Elia Kazan, among others).

- Hollywood and politics in the 1950s:

In the 1950s, politics was also to brutally invade the world of cinema, with the great “Red-hunts” that happened with the “Cold War” (between the USA and the USSR, the Soviet Union). In those days, the USA was afraid of the spread of communism in Europe and they actively fought all that could be considered as communist on the American soil. Thes were the days of the “Red Scare” and of the Witch-hunt organized mainly by one man: Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Red Scare started in 1947, but it mainly altered the temper of American society in the 1950s. Its was characterized as an anti-intellectual policy, which violently hit Hollywood. Indeed, as soon as 1947, there was the first “Hollywood Blacklist”.

The “Hollywood Blacklist” was a list of screenwriters, actors, directors, musicians, and other U.S. entertainment professionals who were denied employment because of their political beliefs or associations, real or suspected. These artists could not work because of their membership or simply because of their sympathy toward the American Communist Party, or toward merely humanitarian political causes. There was a special committee in the American House of Representatives, and the goal of that committee was to fight all the activities that were not judged “American”… which means that this committee hunted any communist-related activities. The name of the committee was the HUAC (= House on Unamerican Activities Committee).2 As a matter of fact, that committee existed from 1938 to 1975, but it was mainly active during the Cold War, and in the fifties especially. Very often the activities of that committee are confused with the investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy… who indeed had the same goal in mind, but who did NOT belong to that committee (he was the chairman of another committee fighting non-American activities, but in the American Senate, not in the House of Representatives).

All those who simply refused to help the investigations of the HUAC were also blacklisted. Very often, there was not an official black list. but these lists existed, and the results were very concrete: many American artists had their career destroyed because of them. Some artists were forced to give names of supposedly communist comrades. The atmosphere was obviously very tense and unpleasant in Hollywood at that time.

There was a real black list with the names of ten artists (directors or writers) who were accused of refusing to give testimony to the HUAC. These artists refused to answer the question "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?", and they justified their refusal by referring to the First Amendment of the Constitution, the amendment which gives the Americans the right to freedom of speech and assembly. The “Hollywood Ten” (as they were then called) were eventually accused of “Contempt of Congress”, in 1947. They were also fired from their jobs in Hollywood. Despite their appeals to the Supreme Court, they went to jail for one year (in 1950), and when they were released from jail, they still could not find any work in Hollywood.

In the late 1940s, early 1950s, the hearings began. Several Hollywood professionals, including Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan, testified that the threat of Communism in the film industry was a serious one. In contrast, some Hollywood stars, including director John Huston and actors Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, opposed the witch hunt and organized the “Committee for the First Amendment” in order to oppose the government’s will to control the movie industry.

As for the “Witch Hunt”, it went on for a few years (with a peak in intensity from 1952 to 1956). Dozens of artists were prevented from working… and it took quite some time for the blacklist to be broken. Only in 1960, was the list broken, as Dalton Trumbo, one of the “Hollywood Ten”, was allowed to sign the scripts of films like Spartacus (by Stanley Kubrick) or Exodus (by Otto Preminger). Now, Dalton Trumbo is mainly known for the film he directed later: Johnny Got his Gun (in 1971, a superb anti-war film).

-The subjects of the films in the 1950s:

So Hollywood was tightly controlled during the 1950s, and that control obviously affected the themes of the films made by the industry. Hollywood then openly promoted ideological censorship across the entire industry. There were many films based on stories of anti-communist espionage (like: My Son John, by Leo McCarey, in 1952), but also many science fiction films in which the Red Scare was translated into the Scare caused by evil Aliens that wanted to infiltrate the American society so as to destroy Uncle Sam’s country. (The Thing From Another World, by Howard Hawks and Christian Nyby, in 1951; or Invasion of the Body Snatchers, by Don Siegel, in 1956).

But globally speaking, under such unfriendly circumstances (and with the development of TV), Hollywood production dropped by over one third (and the audience dropped by half (by 50%) over a period of ten years (from 1946 to 1956).

* Hollywood in the 1960s: the end of a cycle

Owing to the Paramount Case in 1948 (which reorganized the movie industry by preventing the studios from being all-powerful), the 1960s were years characterized by some economic restructuring of the Hollywood studios (there were many corporate takeover bids (= when a company buys the shares of another company, gets the majority of shares and therefore controls that company), but all these economic decisions did not stop the process of decline within the industry of Hollywood.

It may sound paradoxical, as the 1960s was a period full of change and dynamism in many eras. But as far as Hollywood was concerned, the 1960s was NOT a thriving decade. People went much less to the cinema than in the 1940s or 1950s (in the 1960s, half as many people went to the cinema as in the 1950s, and much fewer films were produced (only 182 films produced in 1963… , while there were almost 400 films produced in 1946… and about 1600 in 2009!).

The “majors” restricted their productions to big conventional subjects (and they mainly produced films that were disconnected from the social context of the time (they produced many musicals (like West Side Story by Robert Wise, in 1961), or historical films… like Spartacus by Stanley Kubrick (in 1959), or Cleopatra by Joseph Mankiewicz in 1963). Hollywood was indeed not prepared for the huge changes that swept the American society throughout the 1960s. At first, in the early 60s and in the mid 60s, Hollywood ignored many hot topics, like the Viet Nam War, the issue of the Civil Rights (even if at that very same time, the African Americans were fighting for their rights).

What makes the situation all the more striking is the fact that, at the same time, journalism and especially TV journalists, were much more concerned by key social problems (like the Civil Rights Movement, or the American involvement in the affairs of the <world and the Vietnam War. Indeed, television was much more “liberal-minded” than was Hollywood. The news bulletins on TV showed scenes of violence in Vietnam (reporters being indeed allowed to film scenes of carnage, unlike what took place in following wars). TV bulletins also reported the urban violence “at home” (with riots in major American cities or the repression of protests movements as in Kent State University where 4 students were killed by the Ohio National Guard)

Also, Hollywood ignored the evolution of the American youth (the development of rock music was not translated into Hollywood films, at first). Of course, the issue of race could not be totally ignored, but the films that were first released on that topic were very “non-committal” (and this was mainly meant not to offend the audience of the Southern states in America). Actor Sidney Poitier then became THE Afro-American actor of the time, and the films in which he played did convey a positive message of tolerance. But it is only in 1967 that he played in a truly controversial film in which racism was debunked. That film was: In the Heat of the Night, by Norman Jewison (Poitier plays the part of a detective from the North who must investigate in the South of the USA, and who is faced with racism and hatred, even within the police.)

One should not however give here an absolutely bleak description of the cinema in Hollywood in the 1960s, because there were also major directors who made excellent films that were not only excellent but which also questioned the conservative mould just mentioned. Alfred Hitchcock thus played with censorship (and the Hays code) in Psycho (1960) and he also introduced the feeling of anxiety in The Birds (1963) by refusing any rational (logical) explanation to the attacks of those birds (this lack of certainty is one essential feature of the Fantastic as a genre). Stanley Kubrick should also be mentioned… Of course, he took part in the mainstream kind of cinema by directing Spartacus in 1959 (one should add, however, that this film was not his project… Kubrick replaced director Antony Mann in this film, which was more Kirk Douglas’s project)… but some of Kubrick’s best films belong to the 60s (Lolita, in 1962; Doctor Strangelove, in 1964, with Peter Sellers in the part of a mad scientist, the film being a very caustic satire of the Cold War). Last but not least, we could simply mention that the mythical view of the Frontier, of the creation of the United States, started to be questioned in some westerns made by one of the most “conventional” directors: John Ford. John Ford is known for his westerns with John Wayne, and his very simplified view of the west (with the Indians as the “bad guys”, and it is true that this can be felt in the first part of his career (in films like Stagecoach in 1939). But in the 1960s, he made much darker films, much more pessimistic about the part played by the white man in America (Sergeant Rutledge, in 1960 (= le sergent noir), Two Rode Together, in 1961 (= les deux cavaliers), The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, in 1962; or Cheyenne Autumn, in 1964, (= Les Cheyennes).3 Of course, the open condemnation of the atrocities committed by the Whites towards the Indians was to be much more explicit in the 1970s (with films like Little Big Man in 1970, by Arthur Penn, or Soldier Blue, in 1970 by Ralph Nelson).

One last remark about the cinema in the first part of the 60s: some other voices could also be heard for those who were willing to pay attention to them (these voices were not mainstream, they did not come from Hollywood’s majors). Some artists indeed used the cinema as a medium to create quite personal, non-commercial works. Thus, some filmmakers decided to resort to documentary films to echo the mood of the times (Arthur Pennebaker made a now famous documentary film on Bob Dylan, called Don’t Look Back (in 1967).4 Many of these artists preferred living in New York City (rather than Los Angeles). Some small budget fiction films were also made there (in New York City). These films echoed what was being made in France notably with the “Nouvelle Vague” (and artists like Godard, Truffaut, Rohmer… among others). There was some sort of American equivalent to that “Nouvelle Vague”. It is sometimes called “The New York School”, but that movement was limited and did not know the success of the French movement. One might however mention here John Cassavetes’s filmography. Cassavetes’s first film (called Shadows (in 1960) is the epitome (= is representative) of that kind of intimist cinema (with a great part being given to improvisation). John Cassavetes managed to make very personal films that he would finance thanks to his playing in major feature films in Hollywood.5

To conclude on the artistic life in New York City in the 1960s, one must not forget one of the most famous artists of the time: Andy Warhol, the leader of the “Pop Art” movement, and the charismatic leader of the New York Underground scene. Among many other projects, Warhol also made films. These films are miles away from Hollywood blockbusters. They are often referred to as abstract expressionism, and they require some effort to be watched (in his film called Sleep, Warhol films someone sleeping, in a silent black and white film, for more than 5 hours!).

But no matter how demanding these films are, they do reflect some aspect of the American society of the times, an aspect that was covered up (that was repressed by Hollywood), and that it took some time for Hollywood to release. But when it did, it did it in the most flamboyant manner, the 1970s being most probably one of the richest periods of the American cinema.

* The 1970s and the “New Hollywood”

As we said before, some huge part of the American society thought that Hollywood was ignoring the problems faced by many Americans (the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War…). By tackling these problems, Television was therefore instrumental in Hollywood's decline throughout the sixties.

But things radically changed in the late sixties for a couple of reasons:

* As dissatisfaction kept growing and films were losing money by not facing the situation, Hollywood producers realized that they had to change their ways of making films and face topical issues. Besides, it became much easier thanks to an evolution into the codes that structured the Hollywood production:
* Indeed, throughout decades, the American cinema had been submitted to

censorship guidelines that prevented directors from showing what they wanted. These rules had been instituted in 1930 (after many scandals in Hollywood the industry. Then, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was forced to create a code: the “Motion Picture Production Code” (also known as the “Production Code Administration” (PCA). This code existed from 1930 to 1968, and since it was created by Will H. Hays, it is often simply referred to as “the Hays Code” (it was created in 1930, but began to be enforced in 1934). This code was very strict and forced the studios to act as their own censors. Studios were asked to edit themselves all the scenes that were too openly sexy or violent. But the Hays Code was abandoned in 1968, and it was replaced by a much less strict code: “the Code and Rating Administration” (or CRA). That code allowed directors to use much more graphic scenes (whether it be sexual scenes or violent ones).

* The first films to be seen as not corresponding to the Hays Code were Arthur Penn’s Bonny and Clyde (1967), in which the two main characters are eventually killed by dozens of bullets in a very bloody scene. Even more bloody is Sam Peckinpah’s The Wild Bunch (in 1968). That western opens and ends with two scenes of carnage. The last example is a key film for a genre that expanded a lot in the early seventies : horror films. In 1968, George Romero managed to shock the United States with Night of the Living Dead, a film in which the hero is a black man, who is eventually killed “by mistake” by white hunters who then burn him as they might have lynched a Black man in those days. It is interesting to note here that, throughout that period, horror films were not only a way for the American directors to exorcise all the violence of their society, but also to commit themselves politically and show what was wrong within the American society.
* Some other films also dealt with contemporary topics, and showed an aspect of the American youth that had been avoided so far (like drugs, homosexuality, homelessness…) with films like Easy Rider by Dennis Hopper (in 1969), or Macadam Cowboy by John Schlesinger (in 1969).
* So, the themes were quite new and so was the way to deal with them on the screen (it was more direct and more explicitly graphic).
* But the change was not simply concerning what was filmed. In those days, there was also a major restructuring in the way films were released (how they were shown to the public). Hollywood drastically changed its marketing strategies:before the 1970s, films were released progressively and fewer copies of the films were made (one film would therefore be shown in some places, then a few weeks later in other places… and so on and so forth for months…). In the seventies however, more copies of the films were made and one film was released everywhere at the same time, while there was more and more advertising on TV.
* Hollywood also decided to trust a new series of young directors on whom the industry bet huge sums of money… These directors were young, very talented… They had just graduated from renowned cinema schools, but their names were still unknown… Among these young men, there were people like Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Brian De Palma, George Lucas… to quote only those who became the most famous directors of what was called “the New Hollywood”.

- The New Hollywood:

Roughly speaking, the New Hollywood goes from the late 60s to the early 80s. The directors that were part of it were not independent filmmakers. They belonged to the powerful studios, but these artists did impose their wills and their ways of considering the cinema. They were part of the counterculture that was spreading in those years, and they therefore reached the youth. A new energy swept over Hollywood and there was the feeling that everything was possible, no matter how crazy the projects appeared at first (for example Francis Ford Coppola’s Apocalypse Now (in 1979) or One From the Heart (in 1980) were quite original and costly, very costly too was Michael Cimino superb epic film about the making of the USA: Heaven’s Gate, in 1980). It was also a time when horror films were finally accepted as important films within the systems of the “Majors”. Indeed, it had started with Rosemary’s Baby, by Roman Polanski (distributed by Paramount in 1968), and it went on with the Exorcist by William Friedkin (in 1973) for the Warner Studios. That film received two Oscars (best sound and best adapted screenplay. It had 10 award nominations). It was very successful and it is part of the mood of the 70s, a period in which a major part of Hollywood liked to question all the certainties of the American society. Indeed, the American society faced many problems, and the cinema avoided none of these: thus,

* political scandals were directly referred to with All the Presidents’ Men by Alan J Pakula (in 1976), with Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman (the film directly referring to the illegal activities that forced President Nixon to resign in 1974, because of the Watergate scandal)
* The Vietnam War was criticized more or less directly in many films of that period (The Deer Hunterby Michael Cimino in 1978, but also Taxi Driver by Martin Scorcese in 1976) M.A.S.H. by Robert Altman in1970….
* The making of the USA was also questioned in very violent westerns that showed the violence of the West (in westerns like Soldier Blue by Ralph Nelson (in 1970), or the Wild Bunch by Sam Peckinpah (in 1968). We might add here that criticism of the Vietnam War could be felt in films that, at first sight, were not dealing with that war. Thus, Soldier Blue caused a great controversy because it showed how the US troops had massacred a defenseless Indian village… and the film was released soon after the Americans had learnt about the My Lai massacre in Vietnam (where around 400 villagers, mainly civilians, women and children included had been tortured, raped and killed by American soldiers. The parallel was obvious, and the film was one more film criticizing the role of the USA in that war.
* The evils of the consumer society was also denounced in many films, even in horror films like George Romero’s Dawn of the Dead (in 1976), where zombies are assimilated to customers in a shopping centre.
* To conclude with this series of films, one can say that pessimism was felt in many mainstream films in which realism prevailed (there were no super hero, no heroic soldier, no belief in noble ideals…(on the contrary, many films brilliantly focused on the lives of “losers”, of some outcasts from the society who appeared very human, and very moving… I already mentioned films like Macadam Cowboy or Easy Riders, but I could also add films like The Panic in Needle Park, by Jerry Schatzberg (with Al Pacino, in 1971), Dog Day Afternoon, by Sidney Lumet (in 1975), One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, by Milos Forman (with Jack Nicholson, in 1975)… the list is endless.
* The second kind of films that define the New Hollywood

But while this pessimistic tendency and the desire to make purely artistic films within Hollywood could be felt in the seventies, another tendency also developed in those years: some of these very talented young filmmakers managed to be very successful and their success triggered a new mentality, a new way of considering the film industry. Indeed Steven Spielberg’s Jaws (in 1975) and George Lucas’s Star Wars (in 1977) were tremendously popular and they started the “blockbuster” mentality. With this mentality, the studios were more than ever devoted to make money, and massive merchandising was then developed so as to boost commercial success.

Parallel to that trend, some major companies that had nothing to do with the cinema at first sight, eventually decided to buy up some Hollywood Studios, with high hopes of making huge profits by channeling the energy of the New Hollywood.

Eventually, the end of the eccentricity and of artistic freedom, which were characteristic of the New Hollywood, was accelerated by a series of very costly films that ended in commercial failures and influenced the Hollywood businessmen to put a harsher control on the costly creativity of some of the most talented directors. The story of Heaven’s Gate is a case in point. This beautiful epic made by Michael Cimino (in 1980) has become notorious for being one of the biggest “flops” of all times, a commercial failure that caused the bankruptcy of United Artist, one of Hollywood’s most famous studios (United Artist was then sold to MGM). When shooting Heaven’s Gate, Cimino could do all he wanted (thanks to his previous commercial success with The Deer Hunter, in 1978), and even if his film is now (rightly) considered as one of the most beautiful films of the period, it was then badly received, probably because it showed a very dark aspect of the history of the United States (The Johnson County war, in the 1890s, during which the land barons had many European killed because they did not want to share the land).

Among other commercial failures of the New Hollywood directors, we may mention Scorsese’s New York New York (1977), William Friedkin’s Sorcerer (in 1977) (Sorcerer is the remake of the 1953 French film Le salaire de la Peur by Henri-George Clouzot), or Francis Ford Coppola’s One from the Heart (in 1982).

Thus, in the 1980s, Hollywood producers were to change their way of financing and controlling films. And parallel to that change, the United States was entering into a new optimistic (and patriotic) mood with the election of President Ronald Reagan (elected in 1980)

* Hollywood in the 1980s

The 1980s were the times of the “Reaganomics”, that is to say a period during which the economy of the country became less and less controlled by the government (this is known as the “Laissez faire” kind of policy, a policy which is advocated by neoliberalism). In the Western world, in the 1980s, there was indeed quite a move towards this radical kind of capitalism, in which the State intervenes as little as possible, and allows deregulation of the market so as to help big business.

This economic trend also influenced the way Hollywood functioned, because it allowed the Major studios to act as they wished, whereas, in the 1940s, there had been antitrust regulations that prevented Hollywood studios from controlling everything in the world of entertainment. Thus, antitrust regulations were abandoned, and it allowed Hollywood studios to become all-powerful again.

So, in the1980s, businessmen took control over the studios, and the time of the “New Hollywood” was over. More than ever, Hollywood was meant to create products that would make as much money as possible.

In this new perspective, some directors like Spielberg or Lucas were successful, while others like Cimino or Friedkin (almost) disappeared. The efforts made to create some kind of optimistic and profitable films succeeded, and it led to the age of the “blockbuster films”.

Then, everything was made for the American audience and all the audiences in the world to forget the negative image of the American society in the films of the 70s. The losers of the 70s were replaced by the winners of the 80s. Indeed, the film industry produced many films which showed heroes whose courage and beliefs in their country was faultless: think of Top Gun (Tony Scott, 1986), think of the films with Rambo and Rocky Balboa (both characters played by Sylvester Stallone6 (mainly Rambo 2 (George P. Cosmatos, 1985) and Rambo 3 (Peter McDonald, 1988),), as for the “Rockies”: mainly Rocky 2 (1979, Sylvester Stallone), 3 (Stallone, 1982) and 4 (stallone, 1985), or think of all the films with Chuck Norris, in which the trauma of the Vietnam war was solved (Missing in Action by Joseph Zito, in 1984).

It might be interesting to note that both characters played by Stallone, Rambo and Rocky, belong to the 1970s (Rocky was made in 1976, and First Blood in 1982). Both characters are indeed some sorts of losers, unable to live happily in the American society. In both cases, the first film of the series was successful, but was not a blockbuster. Yet, as time went by, and with the new positive spirit of Hollywood in the 1980s, producers managed to turn these losers into winners, and that enabled them to earn millions of dollars.

Speaking of the “Rambo” or “Rocky” series, we can say that, of course Hollywood has always been an industry, but its systematic efforts to mass-produce blockbusters could really be felt in the 1980s onwards, when each and every major success was almost sure to have sequels, until the product stop making enough money.

Merchandising developed in the 1980s, and Hollywood also made more and more money with the development of a new kind of business: the exploitation of films, first thanks to videotapes, then now thanks to DVDs. This part of the industry is indeed quite important, and many films are now making more money thanks to the sale of DVDs than by being released in movie theaters.

Last but not least, Hollywood studios now also have some kind of control on what is known as « independent films ». As the name implies, these films do not depend on Hollywood (not entirely at least). They are often small budget films which differ from mass marketed blockbusters. However, it is also frequent that these films are partly produced by major companies thanks to some of their subsidiaries. For example, Fox Studios have created in 1994 a subsidiary which is called Fox Searchlight Pictures and which has helped produce many independent films lately (The Full Monty, Juno, Sideways, Little Miss Sunshine…7). As Michael Moore (a committed filmmaker who likes showing what is wrong in the Western world8) once said in an interview in Cannes, Hollywood and the capitalistic system will not hesitate to finance something that runs counter to the system which makes them prosper… as long as this enables them to make even more money.

But, to end on a more cheerful note, we might say that the independent cinema and the cinema in general were lately given some new energy thanks to very bright and talented artists who know how to use the constraints of Hollywood without losing too much of their creativity (directors like Steven Soderbergh, Quentin Tarantino, PT Anderson, or George Clooney who is much more than just a good-looking actor and who produces and even makes some very challenging films). Let us therefore end this class by hoping that Hollywood will remain a place where creativity and art still have an important part to play for all the years to come.

 1 The other three studios were referred to as « the little Three ». They were : Universal Pictures, Columbia Pictures, and United Artist.

2 One can also find another name for the same committee: the HCUA – House Committee on Unamerican Activities

3 John Ford was not the first director to give a more contrasted view of the West. Very early indeed, Indians were not always considered as evil… one film which is then often referred to is Delmer Dave’s Broken Arrow (made in 1950).

4 This film must not be mixed up with Don’t Look Now, a great fantastic film by Nicolas Roeg, with Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie (in 1973). The confusion is all the easier as the French title for Roeg’s film is: Ne vous retournez pas.

5 He also made : Faces (1968), Husbands (1970), Minnie and Moskowitz (1971), A Woman Under Influence(1974)…

6 The first film with the character of John Rambo is called First Blood (1982, by Ted Kotcheff). As for Rocky, it was made by John G. Avildsen, in 1976.

7 Juno (by Jason Reitman, 2007), Sideways (by Alexander Payne, 2004), The Full Monty (by Peter Cattaneo, 1997), Little Miss Sunshine (by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, 2006)

8 Michael Moore made documentaries like : Bowling for Columbine in 2002, Farenheit 9/11 in 2004, Capitalism, a Love Story in 2009)