Cinema and American Politics since 9/11:
The Democratic Paradox of Media

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The question of whether cinema is democratic is a vast one, which requires research limitations of time and place to actually find an answer for. In this study, the place will be the United States, because nowhere else is the industry of cinema so powerful and generates more elements of popular culture; where also the country is considered to be democratic and practicing freedom of speech. The time will be the period following 11th September 2001: a date after which American politics has been chaotic both inside and outside the country, consequently producing a very controversial subject matter to debate in films.

However, the question still remains huge as the answer might differentiate according to the varying scope different types of cinema productions may hold. Accordingly, we will limit our focus within the field of political alternative films; and apply and seek to verify Jürgen Habermas’ theory of the public sphere in analysing their content to reach inferences on democracy. Afterwards, enlarging our perspective to the American cinema industry by and large, we will argue that the economic value of a film and the subject it deals with undermine the democratic ideals of equal representation the public sphere carries, as capitalism enters the scene. Some other dilemmas will emerge on this path: are movies being imposed by a dominant class in order to make the audience passive towards their environment? Or is it the audience, the people themselves, who create the aspects of popular culture in cinema?

Finally, we are to put the first question in other terms: does cinema socially and democratically represent its viewers’ ideology? In the limit of our empirical means, giving responses to those questions will be the heart of this thesis.
## CONTENTS

### I- INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key notions and concepts</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The American foreign policy after 9/11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema and Democracy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Aims of the study                                           | 5 |

| Research questions and delimitations                        | 6 |

| Motivations                                                 | 6 |

| Structure of the paper                                      | 8 |

### II- GENERAL THEORETICAL APPROACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic theory: the Public Space</th>
<th>11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Etymology and definition of the public space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genealogy of the bourgeois public sphere</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity: consensus through discussion and counter power</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The transformation of public sphere in modern times</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The democratic concern</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marxist theories on popular culture</th>
<th>16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marxist foundation: Ideology as expression of class interest</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical theory of the Frankfurt School</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits of Critical theory</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cultural Studies</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III- METHODOLOGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative research method</th>
<th>23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content analysis for analysis and interpretation</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantages and Drawbacks</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collections</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research method</th>
<th>25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparative analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collections and base of comparison</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV- AMERICAN CINEMA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

THE CONTENT OF MOVIES

911 The Road to Tyranny 28
Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in our time 29
Uncovered: the truth on the Iraq war 31
Fire over Afghanistan 33
Fahrenheit 9/11 34
Gunner Palace 35
Celsius 41.11: the temperature at which the brain starts to die 36
Fahrenhype 38

THE DEMOCRATIC SPHERE IN AMERICAN CINEMA

The Public Sphere 40
The goal of the alternative cinema as a public sphere 41
Publicity 42

V- THE STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN CINEMA

INFORMATION ON THE MOVIES

Economic data 45
Cultural data 46

UNBALANCED REPRESENTATIONS INSIDE AMERICAN CINEMA

The economic structure 48
The ideological structure: American cinema and popular culture 49

VI- CONCLUSION

SUMMARY 54

THE COME-BACK OF POLITICAL CINEMA 56

APPENDIX 1 58
APPENDIX 2 60
APPENDIX 3 61
APPENDIX 4 62

BIBLIOGRAPHY 63
INTRODUCTION

When a few men can get possession of the moving pictures and shut me off that vast audience, while opening it up to the men who opposes me in public life, how can that man say there is freedom of speech as to that question?

Bennett Champ Clark

By studying the content of, and competition between certain selected movies, this thesis leans on two major aspects of cinema: the representation of ideas inside movies, and the representation of movies inside the industry; which will hopefully establish a connection between American cinema and democracy. It can be said, with this goal in mind, that American foreign policy since 9/11 has created very suitable conditions to observe that connection, as it entailed the expression of different and controversial political ideas through productions of cinema.

Consequently, the thesis includes two different analyses, each of which covering representation. Political American movies are chosen as materials for content analysis, to assess the extent to which they can be regarded as democratically representative. Concerning the representation of movies inside the American industry, the analysis will deal with economic figures and movies’ genre comparison. In expectation of reinforcing the arguments, the researcher will refer to different theories that will be exposed in the second part of the thesis.

However, first of all, this introduction will start by reminding the American foreign policy since 9/11 to the reader, and then present the paradox that resides inside the connection between cinema and democracy. It will also illustrate what has driven the author to come with this particular subject.
Key notions and concepts

The American foreign policy after 9/11

In March 2003, 250,000 American soldiers, helped by some British, were on their way to take over Baghdad. The decision to topple down the Iraqi regime, became the main strategic motivation of the American foreign policy run by the Bush administration, after the attacks of September 11th. In facing its new enemy, Washington clarified its understanding of international relations, and started of speaking of a much more divided world after President Bush announcing: “You are either with us or against us”. In September 2002, a document called “the National Security Strategy of the United States”, which included for the first time the notion of preventive war, confirmed the new orientation of the American power. Two years later, the attacks, and policies, still remain controversial.

It is today commonly accepted that terrorism has replaced Nazism and Communism as the new enemy of the United States. In the neoconservative way of thinking, the world is divided between good and evil: the American liberal-democratic values representing the Good, where the ones that do not follow those values represent the Evil. In this order, terrorism has become part of the Evil that must be destroyed for the goodness of the world. However terrorism is neither an ideology nor a strategic threat for it is not directly related to any state. Although we cannot deny the potential threat it represents, we can question the way it has been utilized as a scarecrow with changeable dimensions, especially when it is associated with weapons of mass destruction, or the ‘rogue states’. On the other hand, some hold that this war has also permitted justifying repressive policies of other states: like Russia in Chechnya, Israel in Palestine, India in Cashmere, etc.

According to President Bush, this “war against terrorism” is going to be long. It has started with the intervention to Afghanistan and the collapse of the Taliban regime and has been followed by the arrest of hundreds of organizations and individuals.

In 2003, in order to destruct potential weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the USA decided on an attack towards Saddam Hussein’s regime. At that time, the incapacity of global institutions to take any real international decisions revealed the inefficiency to reach a consensus or to

1Speech of the president of the United States George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People September 20th, 2001
3Speech of George W. Bush, Address to the Nation September 11th, 2001
5Chakraverty Clea, Alain Gresh, Maria Ierardi, Olivier Pironet et Philippe Rivière, Le Monde diplomatique, cahier “L'empire contre l'Irak”
7Ibid
make previous laws respected, especially when the United States went to war without the agreement of the international community and in a flagrant lack of proofs. This failure of the system was even more displeasing to realize when we finally had to reach the conclusion that Saddam Hussein’s regime did not possess any of those weapons of mass destruction.

Nowadays the vision of an Iraq that will be pacifist and democratic right after Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship seems to be kind of a dream more than reality. For a long time the Iraqi people have been enduring the bad consequences of a bloody dictatorship. Saddam Hussein’s regime, responsible for two wars, one against Iran and the other against Kuwait, was under severe control of the UN since 1991 including a powerful embargo. In this context, the war just caused the collapse of the remaining stable part of the Iraqi state, creating an uncontrolled chaos and several armed movements against the occupation and civilians.

The content of the political movies analysed in this thesis revolves around the controversial American foreign policy at this juncture. We will now discuss the connection those movies have with democracy.

Cinema and Democracy

The art of cinema is nowadays a very powerful and international media, and the United States largely dominate this industry, with 1,536 billions of viewers in the country in 2004 and 475 films launching the same year\(^8\).

- American Cinema as both Art and Media

The discipline is still an art, and by definition is made by artists who are more or less influenced by their society, their government and the hegemony of their country, as we speak about the U.S. in the contemporary world. Moreover, it is also an international mass media spread around the world (9.54 billions dollars of benefit in 2004\(^9\)) which diffuses content full of American way of life. Its commercial intentions make it, as an advertisement, a promoter of American values such as capitalism, democracy, nationalism, and military superiority, which influences a large number of people’s opinion and way of thinking. As many sociologists have said, American cinema is transformed in this way as a means of unconscious propaganda. This combines with its international dimension, which is unique on the cinema market, related to the role American cinema plays in the

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\(^8\) Institut de la statistique du Québec, *Statistiques sur l’industrie du film*, édition 2004, Chapitre 10 : Le cinéma dans le monde

\(^9\) Ibid.
globalisation of culture in the world\textsuperscript{10}. Hence, the result is a creation of harmonisation of a worldview based on an American model.

- Media and Democracy

Nobody puts into question the essential function of mass communication in a democracy, and we know that there is no good efficient democracy without a good network of communication and transparency. Although information makes the human being free, suspicion and criticism often revolve around its main disseminator: media\textsuperscript{11}.

There is a contradiction between media and democracy which stands as American cinema’s principal failure: the commercial and seducing side that can make it a fooling instrument\textsuperscript{12}. The issue is pointed out by some critical theorists and their criticism was based on the unilateralism of media communication that avoids any response from the receiver. In this case, media can involve a more or less hiding propaganda, an “ideological insidious beating of the mind”\textsuperscript{13}. Today, the media world is trying to diminish this unilateral side (the audience is now really involved in TV shows for example) but it has turned media into a type of entertainment, which implies an important and growing competition that forces it to be attractive. From this point of view, media is now a new sort of enemy of democracy by the limitation in the freedom of choice and diversity of thinking that it produces.

Besides, we have all felt at one time or another that we are manipulated or fooled by the media that keep us away from reality, condemning people to submission instead of action\textsuperscript{14}. Although the fundamental mission of the media is to enlighten and enrich the democratic debate, citizens dread an indiscernible conditioning of mentalities at the world level. They are waiting for the media to practice a sort of auto-critic in order to obtain some credibility\textsuperscript{15}. But one might not forget that highlighting media and democracy also permits to understand how media can be a counter-power: the freedom given to cinema through democracy can be used in a way that is not following what governments want to show or want their people to think.

For example, with the Vietnam conflict something has changed in Hollywood, and an important detail should remain: compared to the other two first Asian-American wars, there were no films that were supporting the American engagement in Indochina when the war was still going on. We can even say that during the most difficult part of the Vietnam War (1968-1972), the antimilitarist and antiwar films were surprisingly large in number\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{10} Ramonet Ignacio, \textit{La Tyrannie de la Communication}, Editions Galilé, 2\textsuperscript{nd} édition (2001)
\textsuperscript{14} Maigret Eric, \textit{Sociologie de la Communication et des Medias}, p65
\textsuperscript{15} Ramonet Ignacio, \textit{La Tyrannie de la Communication}, p40
\textsuperscript{16} Ramonet Ignacio, \textit{Propagandes Silencieuses : Masses, Télévision, Cinéma}, Galilé, 2\textsuperscript{nd} édition (2004) p156
Aims of the study

In this study I aim to explore American cinema with respect to the ideal of democracy. The question is whether or not such an ideal is actually fulfilled, for the problems related to the discussed economic and ideological reasons are suspected to undermine the democratic space. In short, the study aims at analysing the argument that, paradoxically, the democratic system makes cinema and improbable democratic tool.

It is commonly admitted that firstly cinema is a medium that implies no feed-back by its unilateral character, and secondly, that no other nation has nowadays the power to confront the monopoly of the American cinema. That implies that the world is supposed to be influenced by hegemonic American political ideas. The rest of the world has a small space to counter the system, and the ones who want to show something else are limited by the demagogy, the industry and the audience. With the growing importance of mass media as a unique source of information and entertainment, the world now sees politics through “one eye”. With these in mind, the unilateralist nature of cinema and the American hegemony, for cinema to be considered democratic, the conditions in which films are produced must be a free environment that respects freedom of speech.

Looking at American cinema, I argue here that the United States, in theory, hosts democratic conditions for the production of critical films that overtly confronts governments. The healthy implementation of freedom of speech in the country enables such an opportunity. Thus, through an overview of what is said through cinema on the foreign policy of the United States since 9/11, and specifically on the war in Iraq, the first part of the study is made in order to prove that this media is a democratic space where different political speech can take place.

However, the second part of the thesis will show that, in practice, American cinema is undemocratic at two levels:

- First, the ones who cannot financially compete with big corporations do not have an equal terrain of representation through cinema. In other words, with regards to cinema, only a certain privileged class practices freedom of speech since not every movie has the budget to be publicized and shown in big cinemas.

- Second, American cinema industry is run by a profit-driven supply-demand philosophy which means that in practice, the extreme commercialized fashion the American cinema industry operates, prevents alternative political material from being publicized. In this mechanism, media’s main issue stands in the audience rating submission. Besides, it is not likely that political positions will disengage too further from the mainstream ideology and that citizens have fewer chances to hear about and have access to these alternative small-budget films.

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Therefore, we can conclude that if American cinema—or cinema in general—is to be ‘ideally’
democratized, freedom of speech is insufficient. Equal surface of representation must accompany
freedom of speech in the first place. Moreover, if cinema has to fulfil its democratic vocation it should
then follow a certain deontological principles.

Research questions and delimitations

The main research question of this thesis can be formulated as follows: is American cinema a
democratic tool?
This is obviously a vast question that needs sub-questions to be answered on the basis of the result
received form the analysis of empirical research as following:
- Are there different ideas, different political messages, ideologies that can be found in movies
dealing with American foreign policy since 9/11? Is the American cinema giving space for
government critics or support? The answers to those questions will illustrate the level of
freedom of speech and democracy in American cinema. Other sub-questions such as:
- Do the films dealing with American policy since 9/11 have any chance to be seen by the
majority of people? This leads other questions:
  - What are their means of being sold, to be promoted?
  - What is the budget of the movies selected as empirical materials?
  - What is the audience rating of the movies?
The responses will hopefully illuminate the main paradox of democracy and visual media, the
supposed inefficiency of freedom of speech in a context dominated by the rules of commerce.

Motivations

With regards to the study of communication, the emphasis has largely been put on mass
media, due to its new effects as it entered in most individual daily life since the 19th century.
Furthermore, mass media actually represents an original new way of communicating and it has been
the most determinant in societies that are mainly democratic. It has permitted a rapid and permanent
way to correlate people and culture by means of image, sounds and text; in opposition to all other
means of communication of earlier political regimes. It is now one of the biggest issues of our time, and thinking of big changes in our days requires thinking of mass media\(^{18}\).

Yet, the question that we should answer here is: why is this topic relevant for politics? The answer will be in Bourdieu’s warning on television:

> I think in fact that television (...) puts into a very big danger the different spheres of cultural production, art, literature, science, philosophy, law; I also believe, contrarily to what think and say the most responsible conscious journalists, it puts into a non-less big danger the political life and democracy\(^{19}\).

There is in the ordinary use of the visual media a political inherent danger based on the fact that image has this particularity which can produce the “effect of real”\(^{20}\). In other words, media can show and make believe in what it shows. The effect of real possesses intrinsically the power of evocation, meaning that the visual media can create ideas and representation of groups. And there is here an important point developed by Bourdieu, since this effect is finally building a social construction of reality which is able to produce social effects of mobilisation. The social world is then described and prescribed by TV, cinema and internet which are becoming the referee between people and their social and political existence. In some other works, we can also find concerns on visual media modifying ideologies. The Frankfurt school and its followers constitutes an example to these ideas, such that the representation of media reduces people to mass, brings conformism and passivity; and finally people forget about their active world to replace with fiction\(^{21}\).

The other major concern that makes this relation between media and politics an imperative discourse is that visual media has now become the number one source of information. It implies a monopoly on the “brain formation” of an important part of people. In this manner, there is a worry on the standardization, the “banalisation” of what is shown, which brings Bourdieu to speak of the concept of glasses: this invisible structure that organizes what is preserved and determines what we see and what we don’t\(^{22}\). Indeed, there is a selection of what is presented, and even more, there is a construction of the selection. This ends by producing only one type of glasses and, as a matter of fact, standardization and ‘symbolic oppression’. By symbolic oppression the author means a kind of violence which takes place with the tacit compliance of the ones who undergo it. Plus, given the contentment of the ones who exercise it, they both are unconscious of exercising or undergoing it. Moreover, this uniformity is surely maintained through media by the American schema of narration imposed to the


\(^{19}\) Bourdieu Pierre, *Sur la Télévision* (translated by the author from the original version in French) p5

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p 20

\(^{21}\) Ramonet Ignacio, *Propagandes Silencieuses*, p 8-9

\(^{22}\) Bourdieu Pierre, *Sur la Télévision*, p 18
whole world and contributes to an Americanisation against which no resistance is possible. As Ignacio Ramonet said “Americanisation comes to us through the eyes”23.

It is then radically important to make sure that visual media gives space to diverse political ideas and ideologies. In other words, those images of media must preserve their democratic skills by avoiding falling into economic censure and submission to populist passions.

Finally, as part of this media generation, I find it interesting to put into question what we have so far been used to. These current social debates on media should be now part of everyday life in order to improve our future. This is why the concern makes the topic relevant and deserves our attention.

Structure of the paper

CHAPTER 2. GENERAL THEORETICAL APPROACH

This chapter presents and broad theoretical framework of the study. Two main theories will be used: the democratic theory of the public sphere mostly developed by Jürgen Habermas and the cultural Marxist theory.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines first the methodology of the thesis, discusses its advantages and drawbacks, as well as its relevance for the aim of the research. Secondly, it will present the way in which empirical data will be collected and analyzed and justify the choice of the movies. The methodology will be both qualitative and quantitative:

- Qualitative to analyse the content of the movies: I will use content analysis and define the codes chosen for this particular method;
- Quantitative to analyse the empirical data around the movies, such as budget and audience rating

CHAPTER 4. AMERICAN CINEMA AS A PUBLIC SPHERE

The fourth chapter is the first part of the core of this study. The chosen materials, the movies, will be analysed through the content analysis method and Habermas’ democratic theory submitted in previous

23 Ramonet Ignacio, *Propagandes Silencieuses*, p 14
chapter. The main research questions will be approached by analysing the cinema discourse on American policy after 9/11.

CHAPTER 5. THE STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN CINEMA

The fifth chapter will complete the core of the study. Different empirical data concerning the chosen movies will be analysed and compared to other ones in order to understand the economic and ideological powers behind cinema. Through the Marxist cultural theories, the researcher will attempt to reveal the so called paradox between media and democracy.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents the final conclusions of the thesis. It addresses the research questions and attempts to answer them by providing a cross-analysis of the findings, and a summary of what the study has produced. Estimations on the future of American cinema and democracy will finally end our work.
II

GENERAL THEORETICAL APPROACH

Through the introduction we have seen that this thesis main focus is upon the relationship between mass media and democracy. In fact, why else will there be a growing research interest on media’s connection with politics, media bias on corporate ownership or state ownership, if not because of the worry that systematic distortion or monopoly control denies and threatens the capacity of citizens to judge and put into question the exercise of power?24

In this study, the theoretical framework is made in order to justify two main points. The first argument is that media is supposed to be a democratic element of the public sphere but is becoming rhetorically poor because of the commercial law playing on its value. In other words, the public sphere is biased by the private and commercial interests of those who are sponsoring the media, and specially the audiovisual media. By this way it has mostly destroyed the ability to criticize of the public opinion on the discourse on public affairs. This point is actually theorized by Habermas main view on the structural transformation of public sphere, which seeks to be purely democratic.

The second point will refer to how culture and fashion mainstream of what people see and hear through audiovisual media (AVM) is decided by another class of people. The interests of the media owners have been universalized and taken for granted as being what people want to see, or have to see. In the process, no chances have been left for small critical political films to be “popularized”. Following this view we are here entering Marxist theory on popular culture and asking the question: what makes the producers of cinema so demagogic? The Frankfurt school provides the first answer around capitalism itself, in the sense that it is able to prevent the formation of desires and, by producing a culture industry, it stunts the political imagination25: producing satisfaction, need of happiness but in the service of the status quo. There are no promises of a better future in contradiction with the unhappy present: culture now just confirms that what is lived here is the better future, and more importantly, that there are no alternatives. It also explains that there is a lack of interest in politics today, because we want people to believe that there is no possible changes to the system and, for the benefit of all, one should adapt instead of questioning.

However, it is obvious that a political contestation exists and that men are still using the reason Habermas is preaching us to judge the media information with. There is still a critic of the power and the system, yet this critical framework is minimized or denied, although its importance is still there and currently probably bigger than we think it is. Therefore, the search for profit and state influence in

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24 Street John, Mass Media, Politics and Democracy, New York, Palgrave (2001) p185
25 Marcuse Herbert, One Dimensional Man, Boston, Beacon press (1964)
media discourse and private realms make the mainstream of cinema content shift to a poor demagogic rhetoric imposed to the public sphere. In short, cinema, as Bourdieu says in *On Television*, although could have been a wonderful instrument of democracy, still looks like an industry trying desperately to sell films to an arguably critical public26.

**Democratic theory: the Public Space**

The core of the democratic idea is clearly expressed by Rousseau: the common political life must be organized in such a way that the one who receive the current law can also consider themselves as its authors27. However we should also know if this idea is not condemned to fail because of the complexity of societies. Though, the democratic idea must obviously stay in contact with reality if it wants to continue to inspire citizens and politicians’ practice. It also might integrate the influence of public opinion which has been constructed in an informal manner, to transform it in a communicational power and finally in an administrative power28.

**Etymology and definition of the public space**

Etymologically, the public space is an expression introduced by Jürgen Habermas in 1962 in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It refers to an old idea saying that the language, the logos, is already carrying a certain ethic. The public sphere refers to an unrestricted ideal of rational discussion of public affairs. Discussion is then seen as something that must be open to everyone and the result of such discussion will be public opinion as a consensus on the common good. According to Habermas, the full utopia potential of the public sphere has never been achieved in practice, neither are the exigencies of universal openness.

Following Kant and Hegel influences, Habermas argues that we must rehabilitate the critical model of the eighteen century and the bourgeoisie democracy which was stressing on the public utility of reason. Only with it comes the condition of having different opinions which is in itself the condition to the realization of democracy. He is using the same idea as Kant who says that the individual must get out of the soliloquy which leaves him in front of himself, to prefer the discussion on public affairs which takes him away from his particularities and helps him becoming more objective in his idea. This fruitful dynamism of the exchange is substance for an arena: the public sphere.

Genealogy of the bourgeois public sphere

Around the thirteenth century commercial and financial capitalism elements began what Habermas perceives as starters of a new system of exchanges. In fact, we observe during this time the extension of a vast network of economic dependencies that cannot be taken back to the feudal intercourses: with the transformation of the economy structure, the transformation endured by social relations reflects itself. Therefore, it is truly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the constructive elements of a bourgeois public sphere and its institutionalisation appeared.

Parallel to the birth of modern state, a new bourgeoisie has constructed itself around instructed people: royal administration, jurists, doctors, priests, professors. Inside this social class, the new political power acquired provoked a wake up call, which revealed to the public the nature of the bourgeoisie as a social opponent to the political authority in the frame of the growing “bourgeois public sphere”. Its development has been heavily helped by the great booming of the press. With a reader public generally composed of urban residents and bourgeois who adapt their reading habits to the new publications and notably the entrance of the critical analysis in the daily press, a thick network of public communication is emerging inside the private sphere.

Publicity: consensus through discussion and counter power

In this context new forms of sociability have been developed based on the discussion practice and the use of reason. Discussions are taking place and information given by newspapers are commented in places where everyone can express opinions and judgements. The principle of information publicity, in the sense accessible to everyone, is in fact the principle of control that the bourgeois public is opposing to the political power to put an end to the practice of secrecy inside the State.

Then appears the process that Habermas described in his book: “the process with which the public, constituted by individuals using their reason, takes over the public sphere controlled by the authority and transforms it in a sphere where the critic is used against the power of the State”29

This sphere places itself between the society and the state. When the old regime fell down under the pressure of the bourgeoisie and when the “social contract” replaces the divine Right as a philosophical base of society organisation, a public space of discussion was there necessary between the civil society (the group of private interest) and the State administration for the application of common rules. Here, born the bourgeoisie public sphere, « the sphere of the private people gathered in a public ». The medium of opposition between this sphere and the political power is “the use of public

reasoning” based on the individual logic and publicity which, by interpersonal exchanges, is assuring that the knowledge of points of view is generalized. The practical rationality of the dialogue opposes itself to the technical rationality. The dialogue attempts inter-subjectivity and universality instead of technique that looks for truth and efficiency. In this way, dialogue permits the consensus between men who are coming from a private area and slowly getting rid of their own interests for the profit of universality.

**The transformation of public sphere in modern times**

Habermas also mentions the places and bodies in which the public sphere appeared but deplores the existence of a regular degradation that the development of mass media has accompanied. In other terms the mass media have polluted the public space by transforming notably the publicity in advertising (commercial publicity) and invading the private lives instead of supporting the dialogue. The rise of the commercial character of publicity implies in the same time the rise of individualism, egoism and exhibitionism which corrupted what was accessible for the public. The media became only consumption and narcissist frivolity. With the commercialisation of the press, Publicity (with big P) has turn into an accumulation of behaviour-answers “directed by a passive approbation”, addressed to a “non-public opinion”. Few years before Habermas, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer were already writing:

> Nowadays, the free market is disappearing and publicity is a refuge for the one who organise and control the system. It ties the relations of the consumers to the big trusts.  

Furthermore, as we progress into the twentieth century, the free exchange of ideas among equals becomes transformed into less democratic communicative forms. Party politics and manipulation of the mass media lead to what Habermas calls a “refeudalization” of the public sphere, where representation and appearances unbalance rational debate. Inside the social State, the public sphere is then dispossessed of its critical functions and Habermas observes in parallel with it a depoliticization of the administrated. The public opinion loses its critical function by becoming the servant of interest groups which use the commercial technique for their private purpose. Then, and this is very important in Habermas critic of the modern society: to the critical publicity has been substituted a

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30 Habermas Jürgen, *the Structural Transformation of the public Sphere: an Inquirity into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, p.38  
31 Ibid., p.203  
32 Ibid., p.247  
34 Habermas Jürgen, *the Structural Transformation: an Inquirity into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, p.203
publicity of “demonstration and manipulation”. A drift appeared from a public space purely not feudalized to a political authority, where politics can become show and political marketing replaces rhetoric. In the time of manipulated commercials, it is not the public opinion which is the motor but the *built consensus* ready to be acclaimed. Habermas shares this idea of a public space decline related to a citizenship identity crisis. He is one of the thinkers who link best the question of “publicity” with the necessity of reintroducing the reason in the logic of a social action, particularly in communication.

Thus, Habermas is praising the linguistic reason opposed to the violence of the instrumental logic (of capitalism) and of those of any social movement which go in the sense of privacy (community, religion…). He suggests that something like the public sphere can be realized without resorting to the violent conquer of the existing social order and then contradicts Marx’ argument that only through a violent revolution will the classes be removed. In Marx’s view, the public sphere is simply an arena of conflict meaning that the consensus cannot be reached between men since the ideal conditions are imputed to the public sphere by bourgeois ideology within bourgeois society. The reach of consensus can only be done through the socialization of means of production which implies the destruction of the different categories of bourgeois and proletariat. The real question that the Marxist approach put on the table can be: is the public sphere able to hold its own premises without dissolving public society? As we have seen above, Marx finds the solution in the abolition of classes. However Habermas never really deals with the question directly, which does not signify that important, drastic changes are useless for unrestricted public debate to occur. Nevertheless, Habermas places greater faith in those potentially democratic forms that have developed in bourgeois society.

Though his bourgeois prototype of the public sphere began to decline during the course of the past century and Habermas devotes a large part of his last work to a discussion of its demise. What attracted Habermas to the notion of a public sphere then and now is its potential as a foundation for a critique of society based on democratic principles. Yet those principles correspond to equality and accessibility, the indispensable ingredients that promises democratic control and participation in the public sphere in contrasts to institutions that are controlled from without or determined by power relations. In other words, it implies that the public sphere is a realm in which individuals gather to participate in open discussion. Potentially everyone has access to it, no one enter into discourse in the public sphere with an advantage over another. The generic qualities of the public sphere are of course subject to particularization based both on historical context and on the topics that are admitted for discussion. In Habermas’ work, the bourgeois public sphere in its classical form originates in the private realm and is constituted by private citizens who deliberate on issues of politic concern. The philosopher is interested in the liberal model of the bourgeois democracy and finds in it a certain consensus.

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35 George Eric, *Du concept d’espace public à celui de relations publiques généralisées*, COMMposite 99.1
37 Ibid
38 Habermas Jürgen, *the Structural Transformation: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*
potential for emancipation but also a strong contradiction in the sense that public opinion is reprimanded and besides the expression of the general interest is largely based on the bourgeois social class.

The democratic concern

To conclude, we can finally say that it is convenient in a democracy like we conceive it, to encourage information exchanges. Relating to democracy we consider like Chantal Mouffe that:

“Instead of considering democracy as something natural and that goes by itself, it is important to perceive its improbable and uncertain character. It is something fragile and which is never definitely acquired since it exists no threshold of democracy that once reach, guarantee forever its permanency. It is then a conquest which is necessary to constantly defend”39

In other terms, democracy is a quest without any end. To escape the mean a little static of the term “democracy”, it might be preferable to speak of “democratization” like Jean Baechler is doing on purpose when he is opposing the totalitarist regime with the regime that he calls in “the way of democratization”. Thus it is definitely the case that we believe that a pure and perfect democracy does not exist and that democracy is always a process to reinforce40. Dealing with information and communication, we are thinking like Marc Raboy and Peter A. Bruck, that communication can be judged as an emancipator only if it favours the emergence of objective conditions in order to let the human beings build a vision more autonomic and comprehensive of reality.41

We can finish on concluding that the Radical democracy dreamed in Jürgen Habermas works failed mostly because of the economic structure defines by capitalism. As part of the Marxist school of thoughts, Habermas, whether some differences, basically joined the claim of his previous masters that ultimately political power derives from control over economic exchange. But this approach, which can be qualified as reductionist, has some limits and obvious critics that have been theorized by the Culturalist perspective.

39 Mouffe Chantal, Le politique et ses enjeux. Pour une Démocratie Plurielle, éditions La Découverte/MAUSS, Paris (1994) p.16 (Translated from the French version by the author)
Marxist theories on popular culture

Marxist foundation: Ideology as expression of class interest

The revolutionary class of capitalism, the bourgeoisie, which Habermas describes in his work to illustrate the public sphere, is also utilized by Marx and Engels as an example to illustrate their account of ideology in terms of the “economic base” and “ideological structure”42. In other terms, the authors believe that a “person’s class position is determined by his/her economic position in relation to the mode of production, then the individual will share an ideology representing the economic interests of the class they belong to.”43 In Marx and Engels’ example, the bourgeoisie of the 19th century had to overthrow the feudal order to win power for itself. Since, “the tradition of all the dead generation weights like a nightmare on the brain of the living”44, the bourgeoisie needed to win a battle of ideas and did so by first representing its own sectarian, class interest as universal and of democratic value; and second by stepping aside from the religious ideology of the feudal epoch. In this example, two things are depicted strongly: that ideology consists of ideas in the service of class interest and that ideology is a gigantic masquerade (false consciousness)45. In The German Ideology, the authors say that:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. (…) The individuals composing the ruling class (…) rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.46

Besides, as opposed to realizing its own powers and capacities, the working class is encouraged to believe in the superhuman achievements of stars and celebrities, to believe in the false promise of the lottery rather than the emancipatory promise of the revolution47. Their attitude “to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves”48.

43 Ibid
44 Marx Karl and Engels Friedrich, Selected Works, two volumes, London, Lawrence and Wishart (1950), volume 1 p 225
45 Easthope Anthony and McGowan Kate, A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader, p 34
46 Marx Karl and Engels Friedrich, The German Ideology (1846), Collected Works, two volumes, London, Lawrence and Wishart (1975), volume 1 p 59
47 Street John, Mass Media, Politics and Democracy, New York, Palgrave (2001) p 242
48 Marx Karl and Engels Friedrich, The German Ideology, p 60
Deriving from this account of ideology, there are many different Marxist readings of the power of mass media. They differ principally on the autonomy and role attributed to the political and cultural areas that coexist with the interests of the capital. For some, politics and culture act only to legitimize or mask economic reality, by providing distracting entertainment or by propagating democratic myths. However, according to other Marxists, like the members of the Frankfurt school, politics and culture are themselves producers of the relations and practices of capitalism, inscribing to an ideology which suppresses the will to revolt against the injustices of capitalism. Instead of fostering the power to challenge capitalism, culture accommodates people to it.

**Critical theory of the Frankfurt School**

Created in 1923, the Frankfurt school is composed of among German Jews who were forced by the Nazi repression to exile to Geneva and New York from 1933 to 1950. This exile period constitutes the so-called “second period” of the school when the distinctive ideas of a neo-Hegelian critical theory were firmly implanted as the guiding principle of the Institute’s activity. The reorientation was influenced by the appointment of Horkheimer as a director in 1930 who, from then, gave to philosophy, rather than history and economy, a pre-eminent place in the School’s work. During the forties, the members of the School built the great lines of a critical vision of the mass culture (an expression that became commonly pejorative). Critical theory was then born from evolutionist and conservative authors that joined together in a perspective, mostly nostalgic, that denounce a pathologic drift, founded on hostility toward the cultural and economic democratisation phenomena, which integrates originally itself in a Marxist reflection.

For the members of the Frankfurt school, the industrialised societies’ populations are exposed to psychological pain and are particularly vulnerable from an ideological point of view. Besides, they can no longer relate to important social institutions like family, which have burst under the work pressure and the competition spirit. In this, the supposed fragility, the critical theorists are linked to the philosopher Hannah Arendt who suggests in her work that the absolute despotism can take place by profiting of the social uproot and absence of collective norms. According to Arendt, what she calls the “mass man” is before all characterised by his lack of social intercourses. In this discourse, men give up on themselves and are strangers to each other; thus, in this context are potentially easy to be manipulated by new society governing forces, like the media. The (media) manipulation takes place through two important means: seduction and flattery.

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49 Street John, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, p 242
51 Ibid. p 13
52 Maigret Eric, *Sociologie de la Communication et des Medias* p 66
With Adorno the mass culture has become the “cultural industry”, -name given in order to highlight its mechanical, technical aspect-, and is affecting the judgement of people and putting asleep their reason54. In other terms, the mass media as an industry are exercising a permanent seduction on people by making them relaxed, released, dreaming and hoping: popular culture provides escaping fantasies. The stereotypes used through media give the world less complexity and produce identification models that close up individuals in an unlimited passive state55. This mass culture creates the illusion of freedom, and of choice, while actually providing uniformity of thoughts and actions. In the critical Marxist view, popular culture leaves reality behind. It reinforces the status quo and disguises this exploitative reality of capitalism in the benefit of the class who possesses the domains of media, and economic and political apparatus. Accordingly, media and entertainment, as products of the state and corporations, are tied to the interests of capitalism that turns them into weapons diminishing the ambitions of those who want to reform it56. Critical theory shows there its link to Marxist theory by projecting the idea of economic and social domination on the cultural world, which extends the Marxist idea of economic reductionism. Moreover, media in the Frankfurt school have replaced the Marxist concept of religion, in terms of being the ‘opium of the people’. As Horkheimer and Adorno said: “pleasure favours the resignation that it is supposed to make disappear”57.

In summary, the Frankfurt school’s discourse on popular culture purports that the products of the culture industry are marked by two features: first, cultural homogeneity; and second, predictability. The members thought that it maintains social authority by expressing conformity. It has worked to depoliticize the working class by discouraging the “mass” to think beyond present and limited their political and economic goal that could be realized within the oppressive and exploitative framework of capitalist society. Those fundamental needs have been supplied by the needs "of the moment"58.

Limits of Critical theory

Two major critiques have been made to the Frankfurt School. The first is concerned with its lack of historical research, and second, with its lack of economic analysis that separates its theory very sharply from Marxism. The Frankfurt School doctrine has been described as a ‘philosophical conciliation’ among the members of the school, to conceptualize the defeats sustained by the working class in the twentieth century59. The claim for a revolution that should free the world of capitalism

54 Adorno Theodor W., « L’Industrie Culturelle », in Communication, n° 3 (1963)
55 Maigret Eric, Sociologie de la Communication et des Medias, p 67
56 Street John, Mass Media, Politics and Democracy, p 243
57 Horkheimer Max et Adorno Theodor W., La Dialectique de la Raison (1947), Gallimard, 1974. [Translated by the author]
58 Storey John, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, p 107
59 Bottomore Tom, The Frankfurt School and it’s Critics, p 74
hesitates between a naive Utopianism and a reactionary existentialism. However, one should not forget the historical context. The ambient pessimism of the members of the Frankfurt School has been irremediably marked by World War II and the Holocaust. On the other hand, the preoccupation with culture which characterised the work of Horkheimer and Adorno has been severely criticized.

The main problem of Critical theory, and especially when it comes to cultural studies and media, is that it gives no empirical attention to the realities it denounces. The production of media is considered as being homogeneous in its effects on population. In fact, the question of reception is only apprehended with presupposed hypotheses where no room is given to the opinion of the public. Moreover, critical-theoretical inferences on the passiveness of the receivers are only derived from psychoanalysis, where again, the agency of the public is completely ignored. Taking into account those critiques, we actually consider in this paper that audience is not passive, and we also reject the economist reductionism of the Marxist approach. Then, having scrutinized the account of the Frankfurt School on popular culture, let us continue with the ‘culturalist approach’, which revolves around the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

The Cultural Studies

The Cultural Studies is a British and American movement which has developed mainly between the seventies and the nineties, and resumed the efforts made in sociology around mass culture. It suggests a new theory for the problem residing between power and culture by bringing a critical view on cultural domination, and maintaining a comprehensive perspective on the use of culture through media. The great revolution initiated by this process is that it does not consider any longer the absolute superiority of a certain form of culture upon some other, -unlike the Frankfurt School, which speaks of the affirmative culture superiority upon the others’ form of culture-, and opens itself to public practices. Despite some judgements that describe it as a post-modernist and populist movement, the Cultural Studies are a major step in the sociologic reflection.

The origin of the Cultural Studies comes mostly from Richard Hoggart and his book The Culture of the Poor. This British who belonged to the working class, followed a social ascension which allowed him to detach from his native environment. However, his interest for the industrial world to which he kept being related to, forced him to examine this class of people, usually considered as influenced by the media and unable to generate any proper culture. Hoggart’s research brought him to this first fundamental observation that the press, which was read a lot at that time and was full of extraordinary and sensational stories, is welcomed with a certain distance by the public –as what the author calls “the oblique attention”. There is no strong adhesion to the content but irony, defiance: some to take and some to leave. People attach themselves to a world that brings pleasure without, even
though, being real. This analysis precedes the big entrance of television in common life, but we now know the extent to which it helps to understand the popular use made of this media: in workers’ home, the screen light is always on, with no real care, a support for exchanges which is not followed intensely but eventually mocked. Hoggart created in 1964 the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies, which would give the direction to Stuart Hall to carry out the expected theoretical revolution inside the British Marxist.

Stuart Hall has been largely influenced by the work of Gramsci, and in this sense, the whole Cultural Studies has been as well. According to Gramsci, ideology is a system of signification expressing the values of a social group. The interests of this group, i.e. the powerful section of society, have been “universalized” as the interest of society as a whole. It explains why, since the collapse of the USSR, capitalism has become internationally hegemonic. Until the nineteenth century, what seems nowadays natural was actually not: capitalism was still uncertain and its hegemony is in fact quite new. People composing this particular powerful class are called the “organic intellectuals” in Gramsci’s words. He defined them as class organizers that systematize and determine the reforms of moral and intellectual life. Each class can actually creates its own intellectuals, which means that everybody has the capacity to be one, but only some achieves it and they are usually distinguished by their social functions. In Gramsci’s opinion, the organic intellectuals are individuals, where this concept has been extended by Althusser who thought of them in terms of collective organic intellectuals that he famously named the “ideological state apparatuses”. By this way, the world of media is only the echo of the dominant class and like in any other class, the organic intellectuals are the one who organize the Hegemony.

Hegemony, the main concept of the neo-Gramscian view, is at first a political concept that explains the absence of socialist revolution in the western capitalist democracies; but it has also been used to refer to the condition in process. The conditions are defined by a dominant class that “doesn’t rule but leads” a society through the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership. The new idea brought by Gramsci’s work is that there is a high consensus in society which makes the subordinate classes support common values, culture, ideals, etc. This consensus is the key that incorporates those classes in the structure of power. In this sense, Hegemony is maintained by dominant groups and classes “negotiating” with subordinate classes. However, the dominant ideology is not unified but conflictual and historically changeable: there is hegemonic struggle between the top and the bottom, which means resistances and incorporations from the subordinate classes. In other words, people both accept part of the ideology pushed from above and partly resists with their own subordinate

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63 Gramsci Antonio, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*
64 Storey John, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, p 125
ideology. Yet in this struggle there are limits to negotiations and concessions, which appear especially when the economic fundamentals and priorities of the powerful class are challenged. Then, negotiations stop to be allowed.

If the ideology of the dominants seeks to present itself as the natural and universal one to impose itself under the form of hegemony, it is nevertheless crossed by contradictions and resting on “compromise equilibrium”\textsuperscript{65} -a contradictory mix of competing values and interests. With this equilibrium, the hegemony theory allows to think popular culture as a “negotiated” mix of intention vs. counter-intention, from below and above, both commercial and authentic. According to neo-Gramscianism, popular culture is a product of the culture industry but it is not an imposed culture of political manipulation like the classical Marxists used to think. There are no cultural practices that have a meaning once and for all; they are the result of articulation\textsuperscript{66}, -a key term of the Cultural Studies, employed by Hall mainly to define the process of ideological struggle. To resume the idea, we can actually use Hall’s own words: “meaning is a social production”\textsuperscript{67}. With the concept of compromise equilibrium, what we have here is the Culturalist explanation for this huge paradox that makes anti-capitalism culture profiting to capitalism: it is the perfect example of the process of Hegemony\textsuperscript{68}.

The second major step in Cultural Studies is that their theorists completely reject the belief that people who consume the product of the cultural industry, the major site of ideological production, are cultural dupes: they believe that people are making the popular culture. Directly from Hall, we understand that “Ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely passive, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective.”\textsuperscript{69} On the other hand, not being dupes does not mean that culture industry does not seek to manipulate, it means that there is no passivity of consumption but a consumption that is passive\textsuperscript{70}. Culturalist theorists are still convinced that media are tied to the dominant class of society and that the values of the dominant group inform all media representations. Even if the audience is not passive but it interprets media representation and makes sense of it, according to cultural studies there are limits to this interpretation: the capacity to interpret depends on resources and experience of the readers/viewers\textsuperscript{71}. Besides, media are not apart from social reality but a part of it\textsuperscript{72} and give a particular view of reality which is a matter of representation. They can give images and ideas that constitute reality and it makes them really powerful, on the other hand media are less powerful since

\textsuperscript{65} Gramsci Antonio, « la Question des Intellectuels, l’Hégémonie » (1931), dans Textes, Editions Sociales, 1983
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid, ‘The rediscovery of ideology: the return of the repressed in media studies’, p34
\textsuperscript{68} Storey John, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, p 128
\textsuperscript{70} Storey John, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, p 129
\textsuperscript{71} Street John, Mass Media, Politics and Democracy, p 244
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
the meanings and interpretations to which these images are subject to are not determined by their
formal content\textsuperscript{73}.

In this context we must give back its dignity of an actor belonging to the working class, as
Hoggart and Thompson did. However it is also necessary to not forget any other class since every
social division that is dominant are participating to the cultural game by expressing themselves
through, or with help of, the mass media.\textsuperscript{74} The cultural studies have completely made the Frankfurt
school’s view obsolete; the view of popular culture as a degraded landscape of communication and as
ideology manipulation imposed from above in order to make profit. The “popularized” culture or
“mass” culture is not an artistic expression free from the class constraints, neither the pure effect of
domination: it is a negotiating intercourse to the advantage of the dominant area\textsuperscript{75}.

\textsuperscript{73} Street John, \textit{Mass Media, Politics and Democracy}, p 245
\textsuperscript{74} Maigret Eric, \textit{Sociologie de la Communication et des Medias}, p 149
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p 151
III
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method

Content analysis for analysis and interpretation

The topic of this thesis requires research methods utilized in the field of communication, since it is concerned with mass media. Taking this into account, the most adequate method seems to be content analysis. Content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories in a systematic and replicable manner. This approach is flexible and can be applied to different types of media. However, in this work we are not going to quantify the content of the material but ‘qualify’ them. In this sense, the type of analysis method used by the researcher implies a use of codes, a basis of common item that characterises the movies, which will provide a combination of the replicable and systematic aspects of the content analysis with a qualitative analysis of the content of the chosen films.

To show whether or not cinema is a democratic tool, the question that we mainly have to answer by using this method is “Are movies talking about the post-9/11 American foreign policy giving different political messages to the audience?”

Advantages and Drawbacks

Content analysis possesses a major positive quality, which is objectivity. The procedure used is transparent in the sense that the analyst’s personal biases are not interfering in the process. This advantage and the systematic nature of the approach permit, in theory, to obtain the same results even if the method is used by different persons. In other words, content analysis does not take the researcher into account, it is an unobtrusive method, though its advantage can be subject to discussion. One can actually ask: to what extent does the need for interpretation codes undermine content analysis? If it is true that the method allows transparency, it is nevertheless impossible to plan coding manuals that do

76 Bryman Alan, Social Research Methods, Oxford University Press (2001) p117-195
not entail some interpretation on the part of coders. Obviously, coding the political message of a movie is not an easy task, given that movies are made of an artistic combination of images and sounds: what seems naturally a right wing political message can also be really difficult to transmit by code. Besides, there is also a space for personal interpretation in the film that will influence the analysis method.

Data collections

As it has been demonstrated, cinema is an important media due to its great power of persuasion through images and sounds, the large amount of people it reaches at the internal and external American level, and also because of the conditions in which the movies are seen that create an environment for full attention. Moreover, as we know, nowadays the American foreign policy is really subject to controversies that produce an important political debate. Because of this phenomena and the new implication of cinema in political life, the material of this study will be based on American movies dealing with the post-9/11 American foreign politics; that is to say from 2002 (after the attacks of 9/11) to 2004. The movies have been chosen carefully for the different political aspects they show, which can be listed as follows:

2002
- *911: the Road to Tyranny*, Alex Jones
- *Power of Terror: Noam Chomsky in our Time*, John Junkerman

2003
- *Uncovered: the Whole Truth on the War in Iraq*, Robert Greenwald
- *Fire over Afghanistan*, Terence H. Winkless

2004
- *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore
- *Fahrenhype 9/11*, Alan Peterson
- *Gunner Palace*, Petra Epperlein, Michael Tucker
- *Celsius 41.11: The Temperature at Which the Brain... Begins to Die*, Kevin Knoblock,

Coding

The elements of coding represent the most important part of the content analysis. To be able to judge the political message given by a movie, I have first listed the different political elements by categories that might have constituted an American debate from 2002 to 2004 and I have grouped
them. After that I elaborated a range of judgements, with adjectives, that can qualify these political
elements. However, after watching some of the movies it appeared that my codes were even too vast
or forgetting some arguments of the movies. Besides, trying to put an adjective (like tolerant,
intolerant…) representing the view of the movies on a particular issue, was not appropriated and made
difficult to obtain at the end an easy reading common base. Then, I have changed the categories
according to what the movies were speaking about and to make the comparison easier, I choose to
qualify the arguments by their acceptance or deny by the movies.

Finally, with this new frame we can easily list the movies in terms of their particular political
positions. Moreover, the table is able to give us a brief summary of the political view of a movie by
giving its opinion on all the arguments. The basis of comparison with all the arguments is presented in
the four appendices at the end of the thesis.

Quantitative research method

Quantitative methods are not primarily about complicated statistics but simply about a concern
for quantity. While alternative approaches to the study of politics pose their own fundamental
questions, quantitative methods are based upon the fundamental question “How many?” So the main
advantage of this method is that it allows to measure data and an important emphasis on causality: the
method permits not only to describe things but also to say why they are the way they are, examine the
cause of a phenomena. Quantitative method can fulfil the desire on the part of the researchers to
improve their ability to generate findings that permit a causal interpretation. To be able to measure
phenomenon and understand their causes leads the researcher to usually be concerned by being able to
say that his/her findings can be generalized. The method implies sampling but it must be as
representative as possible in order to say that the results are not unique to the particular group. In that
sense, quantitative method tolerates generalization of the findings beyond the case. Consequently, and
as a final goal, the method directs the researcher to be able to replicate the research in question.

However, as in any social research method, there are many risks associated to quantitative
method and it is mainly related to the ability of researchers to fail to distinguish people and social
institutions from “the world of nature”. It should not be forgotten that the social world is different
from the natural order so one should employ a natural science model carefully.

78 Marsh David and Stoker Gerry, Theory and Methods in Political Science, Palgrave, NYC, 1995, p154
Comparative analysis

According to Ragin\textsuperscript{79}, comparative knowledge “provides the key to understanding, explaining and interpreting”. In the words of Hague and Harrop\textsuperscript{80} “the comparative method allows us to go beyond description (what? when? how?) towards the more fundamental goal of explanation (why?).”

In the "lens" comparison, in which you weight A less heavily than B, you use A as a lens through which to view B and using A as a framework for understanding B changes the way you see B. Lens comparisons are useful for illuminating, critiquing, or challenging the stability of a thing that, before the analysis, seemed perfectly understood\textsuperscript{81}.

However, faced with a daunting list of seemingly unrelated similarities and differences, there is a confusion about how to construct a paper that isn't just a mechanical exercise in which one states all the features that A and B have in common in a part, and all the differences in another. Predictably, the thesis of such a paper is usually an assertion that A and B are very similar yet not so similar after all.

Finally, the key problem with comparative research is the key problem with social research more generally. It is difficult to solve basic epistemological problems, however they must be recognised. Crass positivism is untenable, and any comparative researcher must identify that the meanings and understanding of concepts is affected by the cultural context of both the researcher and the item studied\textsuperscript{82}.

Data collections and base of comparison

The frame of reference, that is to say the context within which I will place the two groups of movies I plan to compare and contrast, is the umbrella under which I have grouped them. The frame of reference consists of an idea, a theme and neo-Gramscian Cultural Studies insist that to analyse popular culture, this frame requires vigilance and attention to the details of production, distribution and consumption of culture\textsuperscript{83}. In this study we will then focused on production by according importance to the budget of the movies and to consumption of culture by concentrating on the subject of the movies (the fashion mainstream).

Then, I have decided to sample the two top American movies of the years 2002, 2003 and 2004, since they are the years of launch of the previously sampled political films. Given that we are

\textsuperscript{79} Ragin, Charles C., \textit{The Comparative Method: Moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies}, Berkeley: University of California (1987)
\textsuperscript{81} Walk, Kerry, \textit{How to Write a Comparative Analysis}, for the Writing Center at Harvard University (1998)
\textsuperscript{83} Storey John, \textit{An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture}, p129
dealing with popular culture, it is coherent to take in comparison the previous alternative movies selected with the most popular movies in the market. The films selected for the analysis will be as follows:

**2002**
- *Spider-man*, Sam Raimi
- *Star Wars episode II: the attack of the clones*, George Lucas

**2003**
- *Finding Nemo*, Andrew Stanton
- *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, Gore Verbinski

**2004**
- *Shrek 2*, Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury
- *Spiderman 2*, Sam Raimi
This analysis will consist first of studying the movies’ content and the message they transmit on American foreign policy after the attacks of 9/11. Second, it will provide an overview of that message in regard to the theory of democratic public sphere and reach certain conclusions on whether American cinema can be applied or not to the definition provided by Habermas.

The content of movies

911 The Road to Tyranny

This documentary, directed by Alex Jones, is built around the director’s main political concern which is the « new world order ». For almost three hours, Alex Jones exposes to the audience the fundamentals of the New World Order (NWO) conspiracy theory and how it is related to 9/11 events.

For the author, people composing governments, royal families and any kind of international institutions are part of a conspiracy that seek to establish a global government. Their goal is tyranny: they aim to reduce the world’s population by eighty percent and, with technology advancements that prolong life, to enslave humanity. To achieve their ambition, the elites are ready to carry out terrorist attacks to create crises that will assure the dominance of their corrupt world and, more importantly, that will make people give up their liberties in exchange of “security”.

To illustrate his argument, Jones takes historical examples (Nero or Hitler). In the film’s view, the Oklahoma City and 9/11 attacks are parts of the same strategy. The first one was perpetrated by the FBI itself and helped Clinton pass some laws. The Oklahoma City example is argued extensively in the movie with many details. The movie also speaks of Pearl Harbour, the Cuban missile crisis or even the first attack on the WTC in 1993 as examples of attacks that were planned and created to produce fright among society. 9/11 attacks do not escape the rule: as said by Jones, Al Qaeda was shaped, trained and created by the CIA which knew that one day they would attack the US but, obsessed by control, the NWO needs to manufacture its enemy to gain more.

Some arguments are presented to enrich the theory, like Clinton letting Bin Laden survive and escape Sudan, the relation between the Bin Laden family and the Bush family, the link between Oklahoma City attack and the Middle East and the inconceivable fact that none of the intelligence agencies could prevent the 9/11 attacks. As it is shown in the movie, the NWO had everything to gain
from 9/11 and especially George W. Bush: apart from a new national id card and other controls, he also made a lot of money through the Carlyle Group, a company specialised in defence and in which Bin Laden is supposed to take part.

With no surprise the movie stands against the Patriot Act, saying that it violates constitutional rights. It shows that people already gave up their rights but also that it is a mistake to believe that it will help stopping terrorism: attacks will actually increase, followed by an escalation of terrorism, since governments are so eager to gain more power, more control over our lives and more money. The movie shows the Patriot Act as a law permitting the federal forces to enter basically anywhere, anytime and without even having to justify it. Besides, the new definition of ‘domestic terrorists’ issued by the Act is very broad and includes many people, from right wing defenders of the Constitution (“Super Patriot”) to gun owners which the director, as a Christian patriot, keeps on violently criticizing.

911 the Road to Tyranny tells us that the politics of terror is rising to shape up the population, and implement high level of control. In the US, they are doing so by first allowing the army “invade” the country, practicing in the town, militarizing the police, preaching in the schools, etc. Second, they control the population by increasing thumb print identification, tracking cellular phones, putting microchips under people’s skin and some other means, the movie wants us to believe in the “Big Brother” theory.

To conclude, 911 the Road to Tyranny is a documentary that considers things happening in the US as to make the country a “Nazi twilight zone” and its population the property of a global super state. The New World Order is creating a “fire storm, a hysterical fear” to achieve domestic crackdowns and military invasions of countries that don’t belong to their order. This fear allows the elites to make money out of oil that needs to be controlled, opium and defence budget which are the aims behind 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan, and that will make them attempt a fascist enslavement of the population.

Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in our time

This documentary is composed of different speeches Noam Chomsky gave in different American universities and a personal interview made by the movie director. Whether Noam Chomsky, the MIT linguist and political philosopher, is the most important intellectual alive, as the New York Time once called him, is open to debate. Yet without a doubt, Chomsky is one of the most straight-talking and committed dissident in our time. In general, Chomsky places the terrorist attacks in the context of the United States foreign intervention throughout the post-war decade. Beginning with the fundamental principle that the exercise of violence against civilian populations is terror, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a well-organized band of Muslim extremists, or the most powerful state in the world,
Chomsky, in stark and uncompromising terms, challenges the US to apply to its own actions the moral standards it demands from others.

9/11
In a meeting in California, Chomsky speaks about the threat of terrorism that has been emphasized after 9/11 in order, according to the professor, to make the leaders use this as an opportunity to follow their own agenda in different ways depending on who they are. In this sense, programs were pushed forwards to use this moment of fear as a patriotic stimulus. Considering 9/11 WTC attacks, the professor explains to his audience that those attacks were considered as atrocities because of the nature of the victims, but what Chomsky also adds is that such phenomenon is not new, but what should be important are the reasons behind the act. Going deeper in his analysis, he tries to open his audience to what he calls a problem of perception: the ones who hate the American foreign policy cannot see it supporting brutal regimes and blocking the process of democracy and development by following its own interests and controlling the oil reserves. On the other hand, Chomsky also described the post-9/11 among the Americans as a healthy trend: the attacks produced a “wake-up call”, allowing the American people to open up to the rest of the world, trying to know what is happening elsewhere and how America is perceived.

Axis of Evil
In one of the conferences shown in the film, Noam Chomsky discussed the Axis of evil. As a linguist, he first argues the choice of words aimed at the “domestic audience”, aimed at keeping people quiet and submissive by controlling them by fear. To maintain this “monster tale”, the “axis” is a perfect word in the sense that it brings the connotation to the fascist axis of the Second World War. Talking about countries involved in this axis, Chomsky speaks about North Korea which has, in his words, “less to do with them than France does”. He explains the choice of North Korea as an enemy for two main reasons: first it permits to increase the threat in the Asian region, second the country is not Muslim; since it could be dangerous to make the “axis” look like referring to the Muslim world. For Iraq, and this high hypocrisies he is always evoking, Chomsky speaks about how Blair and Bush, judging Saddam Hussein’s crimes as reasons for a planned attack, justifying it because he is a man that can use chemical weapons on his own people, do not say that this man in question was far more dangerous, criminal and powerful when he was under the United States and the United Kingdom protection. Even more, they do not say that the weapons used were with their countries’ complete approval.

War on terrorism
In a meeting in Berkeley, we can see Noam Chomsky explaining his carefulness in using the word ‘terrorism’ and the expression “war on terrorism”. For the linguist, war on terrorism should be used as
a quote expression since it is impossible to have such a thing as a concrete military war against something as vast and undefined as terrorism. For him, it actually cannot be used without ridicule especially by the US. Using American own definition of terrorism, Chomsky reports on the American operations in Panama and Guatemala which perfectly correspond to it. Noam Chomsky’s main argument, and that is to say the main argument of the movie, is that “if you want to stop terrorism, then stop participating to it”. Starting from this point, he talks very strongly about the American way of thinking on foreign politics that reaches the judgment that “doing things to other is normal but doing something to [the US]… the world is coming to an end”. Furthermore, the movie transmits the historical background given by Chomsky at a certain lecture, on events in South America or in Asia, that could be qualified as “terror” as well, and the professor concludes by his famous argument: “the criticism should be put first on ourselves”.

Finally, he also softens his argument by a comparison with England: a country ruling the world is tempted to use violence. And the use of violence, according to Chomsky, is exactly what the United States current leadership is openly and frankly committed to. Ending on a more cheerful note, he says that the United States became more civilized, so even if it is not a pretty world: it can be improved.

Uncovered: the truth on the Iraq war

In this documentary produced by Robert Greewald, a large range of members of, mostly, the CIA, but also from the American government and embassies, even some members of the US army are interviewed. It is mainly focused on the pretended reasons to go to war in Iraq, WMD and Saddam Hussein’s links with the terrorists, and demonstrates how built, fake and inconvenient they are. It blames the president and his administration as a whole but never attempts to provide the real reasons behind the war.

The members of the CIA revealed here how it was clear since September 2001 that the Bush administration had decided to go to war in Iraq and how, since then, they were trying to find justifications for it. There was, according to them, no clear threat and no prominent danger, no real causes that allowed them to go to war. The document also explains how the information was distorted and selectively used and how old information was used to bring up new conclusions.

Through those interviews, the director illustrates the state of mind of the American presidency and this remark from a government member is probably one of the most important in the film: “the real reason behind the Iraq war is a kind of philosophical and geopolitical vision of the neo-conservatives, who dominated [the American] foreign policy today, and that is the belief that the US does dominate the world as the world super power, must then assert its power globally and anyone who resist this, [and] defies the American power, is unacceptable and becomes automatically very
much the enemy”. The film also speaks about the illegitimacy of pre-emptive war since Westphalia as an interesting point, and finally a US ambassador openly criticized the school of thoughts about foreign affairs used by America nowadays saying that “it failed everywhere it has been tried”.

The first big argument made by the documentary concerns Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime and declares that they have nothing to do with the attacks of 9/11. The Intelligence service staff explains that the regime of Saddam Hussein and his own personality contradict with the idea that he could have given some of his power to terrorist groups. It is actually proved that Al-Qaeda did not support Saddam Hussein, since him and Osama Bin Laden were enemies, the later qualifying the former as a “socialist infidel”. The two men were competing for power in different ways and Saddam Hussein made always sure that Al-Qaeda did not have too much power in Iraq, and the American secret service knew this. However, the movie reminds us that the trauma of 9/11 has been associated to Iraq very easily in American mind and the presidency successfully and unethically exploited it.

The second argument, which takes most of the film, is related to the WMD in Iraq, their inexistence and the American discredit at trying to justify them in front of the international community. The Intelligence service claims that it did its job, and a good job, by making clear that there were no hard evidence of WMD in Iraq but only “a convenient way of tricking the Congress to give the president the legitimacy to go to war”. Obviously what worked for the American Congress did not for the majority of the rest of the world. Nevertheless, the CIA definitely knew that all the weapons of Saddam Hussein were destructed in 1996 and furthermore that since the 1990s, it has been very clear that there were no nuclear bombs in Iraq, despite the emphasis of Bush and his administration on the “mushroom cloud” to scare their country. However Mr Powell went to the UN to prove the existence of those weapons which, despite his amazing presentation, failed to be convincing. In the documentary, his arguments on photos, communications, and drawings are one by one criticized by CIA analysts themselves.

Giving place to the cost of the war the documentary intends to give an approximate figure (around 87 billions dollars) but it also speaks of the human cost and especially by relating the story of the fake Nigerian documents that cost Mr. Wilson’s wife, Mrs. Plame, secret identity to be divulged (the Wilson affair).

Finally the movie ends by a certain message, given mostly by the interviewed people when they justify, in a way, why they are revealing their information to the public on the Iraq War. As they said, by going to war without justifications and invading a country, the USA became imperialist, colonialist and such action does not make it easier to get the help of the locals that will probably never let the American rule. The military force, as the only powerful tool, is not working since it creates more terror and did not even solve the problem in Afghanistan. The people interviewed blame their leaders for not remembering what happened in Vietnam and the lessons they should have learned with that experience. They point the finger at the use of distorted information which first makes the administration not honest on its goal and philosophy, second because it damages the image of the US
as a model in the rest of the world by violating its own principles. To conclude, the documentary lets each of the persons give their definition of patriotism. It comes out that most of them consider that being a proud American is not by supporting the current leaders for the simple reason that they do not help the United States but put it in a terrible situation. So being patriotic is actually standing against those leaders.

**Fire over Afghanistan**

In this fiction we follow the story of an American helicopter pilot in Afghanistan, a man traumatised by the loss of his son in a terrorist attack. He is very close to an Afghan named Massoud who wants to unify his country and help the US get rid of the warlords splitting the country. During some raids against his village, however, Massoud is killed. It brings an American journalist, a woman that was trying to cover on this particular Afghan, to participate to the mission, including the pilot, to eliminate the man responsible of his death. Unfortunately the Blackhawk is shot down and crashed undamaging the journalist and the soldier in the mountains. Both hunt by some Afghan, the soldier is shot and forced to hide in a cave where, the next morning, the woman is kidnapped. The soldier pursues the kidnappers in the mountains, and ends up by penetrating the warlord’s basement where they keep the journalist. He finally saves her and they are rescued by some American soldiers after blowing up the basement. This event brings the pilot to finally quit the army and bring Massoud’s son back to his family; in the process he has faced some of his demons.

*Fire over Afghanistan* is a war movie, an American fiction among many others. However without going deeply, the movie certainly gives a message. First there is a clear demonstration of the US military power in the beginning of the film by showing some images of the real war. The concept of war is described here by the military authority as “a science, clinical and cruel that must be applied without feelings if it wants to be won”. A soldier is alone, and if he wants to survive he doesn’t have to be too personally involved. If not, he can get crazy by the guilt, since as it is said in the film “taking lives is fundamentally inhuman”. Moreover the journalist and the soldier personify war or attack traumatism by having dreams, being “haunted” and feeling unable to go back to a normal life.

The Muslims in this movie are shown under two major sides. First, their morality with the importance of loyalty and the archaic punishment (in the movie an Afghan’s hand is cut because he has stolen, probably a sort of reference to Islamic law). The other important characteristic, which is well transmit in the film, is the Afghan perception of women: they are completely covered up, considered as evil and especially the Christian women who are demons. It illustrates how radical Muslims see women as sinful, a source of distraction for men from his real duties. However, there is a distinction between the “good” Afghan Muslim and the bad one, distinction that takes place in the
difference between the one who is helping the American and the one who is not (it is also noticeable that the good Afghan is named Massoud that could be a deliberate reference to Commander Massoud).

The fiction being in Afghanistan, during the war it was normal to hear about 9/11. The allusion is happening in an interesting way when the kidnapped woman is having an argument with the Afghan warlord who is trying to tape her saying things against America invading Afghanistan. She is refusing, speaking about “thousand innocent Americans killed” to which the Afghan answers “we didn’t do it”. As an argument, the journalist replies that it might be true but they helped the “evil one” who did it. However the soldier also says that nothing should be judges as black and white in Afghanistan because reality is not like that, and the only way of solving issues will be by sticking people together, implying better cooperation between American and Afghan and between Afghan themselves.

**Fahrenheit 9/11**

*Fahrenheit 9/11* is a movie that turns its eye to George W. Bush and his war on terrorism agenda. The director, Michael Moore, sharply criticizes the president of the United States by first suggesting about this businessman’s deep connections to the royal house of Saudi Arabia and the Bin Laden family. This movie illustrates how George W. Bush got elected on fraudulent circumstances by several mistakes made during the Florida Election Day and how the legitimacy of the new president is controversial. It shows how the president proceeded to blunder through his duties while ignoring warnings of the looming betrayal by his foreign partners.

Moore explains in his movie that with the 9/11 attacks, Bush failed to take immediate action to defend his nation, only to cynically manipulate it later to serve his wealthy ambitions. Through facts, footage and interviews, the director also mends to prove that for economic reasons, mainly based on oil business, the war in Afghanistan was representing a huge opportunity as much as the war in Iraq that he qualifies as “planned before”. Pointing out the fear campaign of the president, Moore speaks about Iraq in terms of a country “that has never attacked the United States, that has never threaten to attack the United States and that has never murdered any Americans”.

*Fahrenheit 9/11* shows also the social perspective of the war against Iraq. The movie gives room to the disillusioned American soldiers involved in Iraq and how the media in the United States were not always relating their stories, how they don’t show image of bodies or injuries. Going further the director commented on how and where the army is actually recruiting, we have the chance to understand that the people are taken in poorer areas, in difficult economic regions with usually a high unemployment rate.

The final message of the film is in fact quite related to this social analysis of the Iraq war by saying that it is always the poorest ones that go first to war and that “they served, they give up their
lives so that we can be free, it is their gift”, and most important that “if we have to send them, it must be absolutely necessary”. Concerning the reasons and the legitimacy of the war, the film does not clearly consider that it is absolutely necessary and concerning those who are sent to it, the question will be “will they ever trust us again?” With a certain leftist approach to the problem, Michael Moore finally speaks about high hierarchy based on poverty and ignorance that need to “keep the structure of the society intact”.

Gunner Palace

In Gunner Palace, American soldiers of the 2/3 field artillery, a group known as the « Gunners », presents their experience in Baghdad during the Iraq war. Holed up in a bombed out pleasure palace built by Saddam Hussein, the soldiers endured hostile situations some four months after G.W. Bush declared the end of major combat operations in the country: end of major combats but not “minor” combats, not machinegun fire, demonstrations, bomb attacks, rocket shots, etc. By considering most of his mission done in Iraq, President Bush is making a terrible mistake because for some “the war is not finished but starts now, right in the streets of Baghdad”.

The Palace was a weekend party palace where the soldiers would sometimes relax, however, apart from that, their lives are separated between dangerous raids and risky routines in the town. Those routines consist of some rounds in Baghdad, and taking kids making troubles, checking people’s car, distributing flyers, sticking posters and trying to talk to people to make them understand that they are trying to help them and also to prevent them from falling into some radical movements.

Unfortunately soldiers’ everyday life is also mostly composed of defence from attacks or gun shots directed to them. So when there is a plastic bag in the middle of the street, the Gunners are stopping the traffic for fifteen minutes on both sides and are extra careful. There might be some Iraqi laughing at them when it turns out to be nothing more than a plastic bag, but bomb attacks in bags or other things are common in Baghdad and can be very destructive. This attention laid on safety, that some can see as paranoia, helps the soldiers to survive in this unfriendly environment.

In the documentary we can also follow some raids, where soldiers enter people’s house without further explanations. In what we see, they are looking for an old man who is a formal person for chemical weapons for the ministry of defence and can eventually bring them a lot of information. We also see raids for suspected bomb builders, or for Sheik Majid, an Iraqi weapon trafficker. The raids are determined by the tips the soldiers can obtain from a previous prisoner or local civilians. Even if sometimes they don’t find the evidence of the crime, most of the time there is illegal money, weapons, etc., and in every case they arrested everybody. Moreover, the Gunner palace being right next to a hot spot, the Abu Hanifa Mosque which is the most important Sunni Mosque in Baghdad,
soldiers are also confronted to terrorist bombs put on the Mosque. Regrettably the crowd is usually getting angry not because of the bomb but because the Americans are there, trying to find answers.

The movie illustrates the help the soldiers try to give to the Iraqi people. It goes from the orphanage of the US army, to keep the abandoned kids and babies they find, to the District Advisor Council where an American lieutenant has difficulties to calm Iraqis down and explain that they need information on who is threatening who if they want to bring peace in the town. It is flagrant in the movie that the first thing the American soldiers need is cooperation, help from the locals, and that without it, it is almost impossible for them to find and arrest the “troublemakers”.

Finally, the whole film being based on the soldiers’ lives in Baghdad, it is normal that most of it is composed of their interviews. Most of them are really young, have not finished high school and are coming from the “forgotten America” where there were no other opportunities for them. They are confronted by Iraqi people who do not really appreciate them and by the ignorance of the people at home who don’t really care: “for them it is entertainment, twenty four hours of real action, they are really interested only when someone dies”. The “Gunners” sometimes feel like they are not there for defending their country, which is at first their reason to engage in the army, and that they must work on themselves to not take some events too personally.

However we can imagine how it can be difficult especially when soldiers are wounded, or worst, dead. How it can be difficult hearing the news saying that “the situation in Iraq is changing in favour of the Iraqis, the coalition is making remarkable progress” when you are “not fighting for a better Iraq, but just to stay alive” at nineteen years old.

Celsius 41.11: the temperature at which the brain starts to die

The documentary of Celsius 41.11 is openly a pro-George W. Bush film and based its table of contents around defensive arguments of the American president. The movie is also an open counter-attack of Fahrenheit 9/11, by its title which is a pure reference to it, with the intention of contradicting it right away.

The movie starts by asking why President Bush has been compared to a dictator since he was fighting for freedom and against terrorists who want to destroy the U.S? It sets up a list of arguments that are made against Bush and his politics, and point by point tries to prove that they are mistaken.

First, the movie starts on the issue of the Florida election and tells that the idea of a fraud is totally constructed. George W. Bush is the legitimate President and there is nothing in the procedure to contradict this.

Second, a small part of the movie attempts to respond against the idea that Bush did not do enough to stop 9/11 by actually reporting the faults on Clinton and his administration: he could have caught Bin Laden but failed to do it at the right moment. In another way, the documentary speaks
about the lack of information and blame the Congress, at Clinton’s time, for its “major responsibility in the deliberate blindness”.

The third counter argument concerns Bush stealing American civil liberties. The film shows here how, in fact, laws and safety have been reinforced by the Bush administration since 9/11. There is also a clear defence of the Patriotic Act (which was condemned by Michael Moore) by saying how it is an important law that allows the sharing of information about terrorists. Organisations, if they are peaceful, have nothing to worry about: the Patriotic Act does not stand against civil rights.

As a fourth, and major, demented point, the movie completely defends the President statement of WMD existence in Iraq. The main row is as follows: everybody, meaning the USA and the rest of the world, knew that there were WMD in Iraq and all the Intelligence services have reached the same conclusions. For the people interviewed in the movie, the opposition rose not because of Bush taking actions but because the war was not going so well, problems occurred and questions emerged giving room to the opposition of criticizing the leader. The film also disapproves the fact that people see the UN refusal of backing the American decision of going to war as making the war illegitimate; it says that this kind of refusal is normal and that “it is a way of doing it”. Russia, Germany ad France rejections to participate are a “demagogic nonsense” and unfortunately the absence of allies is creating a paranoiac environment, a Big Lie, which is wrongly influencing the people. The UN is criticized for being corrupted and not able to, anyway, achieve satisfactory results in Afghanistan. The French are accused of having hidden national interests, a strategic alliance with Saddam Hussein for oil that they did not want to lose because of US military intervention. The Intelligence community is declared as “always pressured” when it comes to seriousness of problems and urgency, so they sometimes feel pushed in a certain way, that they have been told to say…but “no serious person in the domain can confirm this”. Finally, there is also a Joe Wilson’s theory condemnation because some reports, according to the movie, were supporting the idea of uranium sells to Niger by Saddam Hussein as true. So the argument is that there is WMD in Iraq, but even if there were not: “violence is necessary to solve the problem of the Evil”.

The last argument held by the film is that Bush’s doctrine inflames Islamists. This part of the movie starts by comments saying that Middle East and terrorists have been murdering American for at least 30 years. Right after it shows a list of Islamic terrorist attacks from around the world with images of those events at the background. The interviewed pretend that during 30 years, the US has been very passive answering terrorism but the foreign policy of Clinton with Israel and Palestine has embraced deception in the region. The movie proclaims that before 9/11, American thought that fighting against “those crazy people” hating them, will make them more angry and dangerous so the best thing to do was not being too rough. However, it has now changed, the US understanding that against the terrorists, no compromise should be made: the right mentality to adopt is “go get them before they get you”. Also, the important thing revealed is that Saddam Hussein did have a linkage with Al-Qaeda,
that he had embassies in western countries and information that were transiting to Bin Laden and that as a Muslim he shared the same hate of the West as Al-Qaeda.

The movie emphasises the comparison of those groups with Nazism, Communism and put them in opposition to the “American exceptionalism” that is to say the country being an “example to the rest of the world”. The film and its participants give complete allegiance to pre-emptive war, justifying that it could have saved the world from the Second World War and that in our context of nuclear weapons, no risk should be taken with enemies. In an absolute neoconservative approach, the important thing is portrayed as democracy that has to survive and be spread in the Middle East: it is a battle “between the force of orders and disorders”.

To conclude, we must precise that Bush has the bright image of the strong leader in this movie in which a large part is devoted to only criticize John Kerry on every piece; where being openly republican puts the film’s objectivity into question.

Fahrenhype

Fahrenhype is another complete counter-movie to Fahrenheit 9/11 and based itself on contradicting every argument of Michael Moore’s documentary and especially Michael Moore himself in the same way the latter does in his movie with G.W. Bush.

It debates on Michael Moore’s argument against the legitimacy of the president and his election, saying that even the Supreme Court had stated that Bush was the president and that “Michael Moore should accept this, even if he was on Gore’s side”.

When it came to the attacks of 9/11, the teacher who was with Bush at this moment confirms that he was really presidential and that there was nothing else that he could have done. In the movie, the accusation for the attacks is mostly put on the Clinton administration: the president at this time was doing nothing against terror, even after the previous attack on the WTC, and the US was almost “sending an invitation” to terrorist attacks. The terrorists are described as fascist and intolerant, the real threat of the USA, as they have been committing attacks since twenty years. Again, when Bin Laden was in Sudan, the country asked the US what to do, and the Clinton administration instead of capturing him, let him go to Afghanistan, a friendly regime. On the Afghan pipeline project that Michael Moore described in Fahrenheit 9/11, it is said in the movie that the director was basically deforming the information. Bush did not have something to do with the Taliban when they came into Texas. Actually, the project was an idea of Clinton and he is also responsible for the lack of safety at American airports to allow 9/11. One of the persons interviewed says that it is not a question on who we should vote for, nevertheless it also says that Bush is a great president, the one who set the rules whereas nobody was taking terrorism seriously before him.
In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, we want us to believe that Bush is always on vacation, hanging with his friends from oil business. The movie is committed to show that it is not true first by putting the figure of Moore into question and then by pretending that the time the president spent in Camp David or in his ranch in Texas was in fact working time, especially when he was receiving important politicians.

Concerning the Carlyle Group, the company by which the Bush family and the Saudis are linked, some say that what Michael Moore shows is only a branch of the group that has been solved before Bush senior ran the whole group. The argument of *Fahrenheit 9/11* is simply invalid since the group is also mostly composed of democrats.

As the film goes on, more of Moore protestations are disclaimed like the Saudi family possessing 860$ billion which represent 7/8% of the USA. Those figures don’t first represent the truth (860 being not equal to 7/8%) but even more, there is no reference to them, it is mentioned nowhere. Beside, G.W. Bush standing with the Saudis is not unusual, every American president did so, even received gifts and it doesn’t mean that every president was corrupted, but that it is only basic diplomacy.

Going further, what M. Moore calls “as un-American as *Mein Kampf*”, the Patriot Act, is strongly defended in this movie. First it blames ex-president Clinton for not having established it before and second it says that it has been created against terrorism, it helps fighting against it, and nothing has changed in the civil rights.

As probably the most important point, the movie talks about Bush engagement in Iraq and denies completely that he could have been enthusiastic going to war and taking the attacks of 9/11 as an opportunity for it. “Incredibly stupid” is how the argument that Bush could make money out of the Iraq war by exploiting its oil, is qualified in the film. To prove this the movie has several arguments: the American support Israel against the Arabs who all have oil, it is the only country boycotting Iran’s oil, for fifteen years they ask Iraq to not pump its oil and they want Iraq to be free to run its own oil. There should have been an easier way than making war to get cheap oil.

It is also said in the movie that Saddam Hussein has been attacking the US over and over again despite what M. Moore says and that G.W. Bush had to take some pre-emptive actions because, for the safety of the country, the strategy of waiting for an enemy to hit first has proved to be irresponsible.

Finally, the way recruitment and soldiers are shown in *Fahrenheit 9/11* is not the truth and some of the soldiers find it disrespectful, degrading. Moore is portrayed as unpatriotic and *Fahrenheit 9/11* not as a documentary but as a lie, that should not separated the country on such an important issue as war: the people should stand together, “peace outside starts by peace inside”. However the final message is “don’t believe *Fahrenheit 9/11*, don’t lose faith in the US. We are not the Roman Empire but the only good in the world. We don’t do that for oil and money.”
Watching eight movies on American foreign policy since 9/11 provides a perfect opportunity to test American democracy in such a context of strong political debate. The major feeling that remains after all the screenings is that there is probably not a single objective version of History; nevertheless, it is important to give place to those many versions as each of them may possess a different interpretation of ‘truth’. In this way, the following analysis does not aim to find the ‘real’ stories behind the events, or their absolute explanations, but seeks to determine if, in the same area, everyone is allowed to give their stories and their explanations.

The Public Sphere

The ‘public sphere’, in Jürgen Habermas’ definition, represents a group of people that are gathered together in order to discuss questions of common interest. In our case, this particular group of people can be identified as the ones who made the movies -from the writers, the directors, to the producers-, and their common interest obviously revolves around contemporary American politics. As we have seen in the appendices, there are many different items related to this same theme: American presidency, enemies (Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, the “Axis of Evil”), wars (in Afghanistan, in Iraq, against terrorism), the Patriot Act, oil resources, the legitimacy of pre-emptive war, credibility of intelligence, etc; are all visible in the content of most of the movies studied. There are definitely crossing-subjects between the movies which, whatever the position of the arguments may be, link them together.

In its democratic ideal, the public is supposed to integrate the influence of public opinion. Habermas, in his definition, insists on the importance to give room to public opinion if society wants to transform its communicational power into administrative power. Regarding the movies, and that they are all, except for one, documentaries; it is very common to watch interviews. Actually, some movies -notably Gunner Palace, Undercover and Fahrenheit- are predominantly based on live interviews with certain figures. Through the movies, people of high authority (CIA, government members, ambassadors, etc.), highly specialized (professors, researchers, authors) and middle-low class people (workers, soldiers, soldier’s families, students) have been given the privilege to express themselves on certain common issues: in other words, we can consider that the content of the movies feature public opinion very largely.

Besides, the democratic public sphere, in the proper conception of Habermas, is a space that everyone can access without any real advantage over another. It will be wrong to say that the movies scrutinized are all playing the game on an equal step. However, if we take apart Fahrenheit 9/11
whose success for a political documentary is a history record as much as its budget and marketing promotion; the rest of the movies have low budgets, small promotion and distribution chances, and; in the context of American cinema, there is not one movie that is superior to the others in terms of these criteria. Moreover, today, making a documentary is not difficult, especially in the US: technologies are no longer hard to find and to utilize. Even for promotion, the use of the Internet where things can be broadcasted, commercialized and render available to millions of citizens; makes it easier for independent movies to be realised. Thus, anybody determined to make a movie can get a chance of accessing the public space, though this so-called access can be questioned due to existing barriers (like funds) around the cinema industry.

Finally, the definition of the public sphere refers to democratic principles, equality and accessibility; which create the conditions of possibility for a critique of society. As we have discussed for our case, those conditions can be observed under two different frameworks: first, the level of alternative American political documentary films, which is our concern in this part of the thesis; and second, the level of American cinema by and large, which will be the study of the second analysis. By concentrating on the first level and considering the eight movies and their arguments; it seems like there is no particular type of evidence to suggest that one movie is more advantaged than the other with regards to access to the public sphere. Since pro-Bush and anti-Bush movies stand together on the market at the same level, it means that we can find a movie with its ‘counter-movie’ which symbolizes the democratic principles in question.

The goal of the alternative cinema as a public sphere

In Habermas’ theory, the Public sphere is originally controlled by the bourgeoisie and aims at counterbalancing the absolute power of the State. In our time, in the western modern societies, the ones who are to control the public sphere should be the middle class, as the equivalent of the old bourgeoisie class. In this study, the public sphere, as we have defined it in the previous paragraphs, represents the group of people that made the movies, who are actually mostly among the socioeconomic middle class. Besides, this group of people stands against the political authority in half of the movies studied: Fahrenheit 9/11, Undercover, Power and Terror, 911 the Road to Tyranny and even some part of Gunner Palace. In this set of movies, and as it is presented in the codes, Bush presidency is put into question, its action are not supported (whether internal -like the Patriot Act-, or external -like the military actions), and American politics is considered as illegitimate. In other words, and following Habermas’ words, there is a clear opposition to the State power by the middle class in the United States.

So, the public sphere is making the State, President Bush and his administration accountable to society: they are blaming the American government for all their troubles: soldiers under attack around
the globe, the loss of soldiers, the soldiers’ families’ pain and anger, the disgrace of the United States in front of other countries, and the feeling of rejection coming from some parts of the world. Considering the events of the last four years in the United States, the country has been torn apart and the population has been criticizing the State more than usual.

In many of the movies, the purpose of revealing the ‘truth’ is generally presented as justifications for State criticism. People making the movies are introducing their information as such, that is to say, to inform their audience; but they also easily turn that revealed information in a way that it looks like a divulgation of data or facts that the public ignores, but should know. In a sense, the movie becomes an insider within the State’s secret businesses which are not accessible to everyone, and especially not reported by the media controlled by the State. This phenomenon is really interesting if we put it under the umbrella of Habermas’ theory which characterizes the role of the public sphere as the State’s opponent with the intention of putting an end to political secrecy. As opposed the middle Ages where secrecy was common for the State and under feudalism people were unable to know any of the decisions taken by the authority; the bourgeoisie of the modern time and its use of publicity through the press have diminished state power by making public the information collected on it. It is important to see the parallel with the current situation, of course, “secrecy” is probably not as important as it was, but there is –and will probably always- still some remain in State business. In this way, some movies use words as ‘conspiracy’ or sometimes refer to ‘Intelligence services’ (aka secret services); and by exposing pieces of information that were until then hidden from the public, the directors try to depict the State as an institution ‘acting in the dark’ with full of unknown objectives.

Finally, the public sphere as a purely democratic structure should place itself between the State and society as a mediator and should criticize both the State and society by allowing rational discussions on public affairs. In our case, the movies are certainly mediators between the public, -their audience-, and the State on which they reveal information. Moreover, they certainly contain debates on public matters as they are all based on particular political themes; although concerning the rationality of their arguments, their objectivity can be put into question.

**Publicity**

The main characteristic of the public sphere is its use of publicity i.e. the means by which it disseminates information and opinion on the State to the different members of its groups and to the population in general. As it has been elucidated in the theory chapter, Habermas is bases his theory on a study of the thirteen century, on the transition from the feudalist system to the modern state. If we apply this characteristic to the present time, what the philosopher calls publicity corresponds to the contemporary media. Besides, we know that, as a democratic tool working for its population and with the support of the population, publicity should examine and criticize the State in relevance to public
opinion. Thus, according to the theory, we can qualify the movies as part of the publicity of the American political public sphere, and we can also say that, with the several different interviews made, they are giving room to the voice of people, i.e. to the public opinion. We must not forget that the unilateral nature of cinema does not allow people to talk to each other, since there is only one point of view that cannot be discussed during the movie. In that sense, the notion of interpersonal exchanges and the importance of the *logos* that Habermas insists on, -which he has taken from Kant-, is in this context undermined, and not available. However, the fact that some movies *answer* some others – *Fahrenheit 9/11* is for example a counter-attack towards *Fahrenheit 9/11* - and that a person interviewed can precisely argue the opposite of what the other person interviewed in the counter-movie defends, create a quasi-environment of discussion. After watching the eight movies consecutively, this discussion through media, “from film to film”, seems indeed like interpersonal exchanges with different points of view on common subject matters.

Once the movies were interpreted with the codes, there appeared mostly three sorts of arguments. First, arguments that are unique, a vision expressed in a movie and that is neither defended nor attacked in any other one. For example, *9/11 the Road to Tyranny* is the only movie talking about the “New order conspiracy” theory to accuse G.W. Bush, the American government and international power-holders of standing behind the terrorist attacks; and to argue that every perpetration in Western countries have been planned by them in order to manipulate the masses. This claim is probably extravagant but also reflects a part of public opinion.

There is also a second category of arguments that is defended by certain types of movies usually intertwined with the same political view; which that are neither discussed nor contradicted. For instance, some neoconservative movies blame the Clinton administration for 9/11, due to its general lack of concern toward terrorism. The Clinton presidency, however, is not mentioned elsewhere, even not defended. On the other hand, those movies are generally avoiding the question of Iraq when it comes to speak about what is really happening on the field. In the same way, they never mention the constant attacks against US soldiers, the lack of budget consented to the military in Iraq and the lack of help from the Iraqis, although those issues are carefully pointed out and reported in nearly half of the other movies. When three movies out of eight narrate the need of help from the Iraqis and on the difficulties to get some; no other film is opposing to this argument. Then, the audience does not put the statement into question, and this argument is taken as a valid *truth*. Consequently, this effect is producing a certain range of arguments, coming from any political side, which will be considered as true, since they are not debated. By looking deeply at the codes it becomes visible that half of the movies claim that the attacks of 9/11 have been wrongly attributed to Iraq who had nothing to do with them; and the same movies also qualify the US as a terrorist country who should not give lessons (specially not with military action and violence) about problems that it causes, or had caused, itself. However, the other half of the movies pretends that if you are a that if you are a patriotic American that loves his/her country, then you, as an American citizen, should stand behind your president
whatever his decisions may be, accept the war and go for it. Moreover, approximately the same group of movies declares and believes that the US soldiers are fighting for a better Iraq. For each of these arguments, there is no opposition. In real, it appears that those arguments are not completely opposing each other: on the war in Iraq, some will speak about the difficulties, the lack of means and results, when some other will speak about the glorious aim of this war. Indeed, both arguments are actually true in their own reasoning, which represents the different perceptions people have on the same matter.

Thirdly, if we look at the codes, we also figure out that on same points no truth can emerge, since an equal group of movies stands against and for it. For example, the question of whether or not there are -or there were- WMD in Iraq is still unsolved in the US public debate. Furthermore, the country shows its division on other issues: is the Patriot Act democratic? Has G.W. Bush been fraudulently elected? Is the war in Iraq necessary? On all of these matters, the numbers of films standing for and against are equivalent, and demonstrate people’s inability to decide. Concerning WMD, -probably the most important problem among the others-, it is really interesting and important to realize that American people cannot really converge on one answer. Although in some movies the idea of pre-emptive war is approved irrespective of the debated existence of WMD; this notion, since Westphalia, has not been recognized. Therefore, the question of WMD is central in the debate in order to render the war in Iraq legitimate in the eyes of the American people and the rest of the world. As the key American justification to go to war, it has then an important symbolic value and must be recognized as true by the majority of the public. Yet, if we base ourselves on the information given by the publicity on the State, there is no consensus on this question. Even if consensus, as Habermas conceptualizes it, should be the result of the discussion in the public space, in this context, even if some arguments are admitted as true, some opinions on main issues remain divided.

Watching the movies and studying their content brings out a crucial point: there is definitely a democratic freedom of speech residing in American cinema and it makes the arena of alternative political documentary films to be regarded as a public space. However, when we locate this arena within the entire framework of American cinema, freedom of speech appears to be insufficient to maintain a democratic space against commercial struggles. This can be theorized by Habermas’ understanding of ‘public sphere transformation’ by commercial publicity, to corrupt the purely democratic atmosphere in the capitalist cycle of production.

For the second main argument of this thesis, we will first analyse the economic data related to the alternative political movies we have discussed, and compare those indicators to those of big-budget movies on the market in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the American cinema industry.
V

THE STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN CINEMA

Information on the movies

This chapter is divided in two paragraphs: one for economic data analysis and one for cultural data analysis. Each of those sections is referring to a table presented at the end of the chapter.

Economic data

Table n°1 contains two important ranges of figures. The first one concerns the production budget, in other words the amount of money spent to make the movie. The second one is the amount that represents the profits made by the movies in theatres since they came out. The gross income of the movies permits to measure the audience of a movie. Since the price of a cinema ticket is –more or less- the same for every movie, we presume that the profit of a movie is proportional to the amount of viewers. In the first table we can see that *Fahrenheit 9/11* is an exception among the rest of the films in its category with its budget of six millions dollars and its two hundreds and twenty millions of gross. The rest of the movies have small budgets (between one hundred and fifty thousand dollars and one million) and none of their gross surpass a million dollars. Actually, it should also be mentioned that on eight movies studied, three of them did not reach theatres and came out directly on DVD. Those movies –*Fahrenheit 9/11, Fire over Afghanistan* and *911 the Road to Tyranny* - are then not part of the comparison; yet already prove that without a consistent budget, movies cannot be shown in theatres and lack audience.

It is interesting to see that the movies follow a certain order according to the figures. In terms of budget, as we have said, *Fahrenheit 9/11* is far ahead, then comes *Celsius 41.11, Gunner Palace, Uncovered* and *Power and Terror*. In fact, the movies have exactly the same order for gross and the amount of theatres they have been screened. Thus, the analysis suggests that the budget of a film determines its audience. Furthermore, according to the information, *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Celsius 41.11*, were the only movies to have some marketing costs –since they are the biggest budget films-, which can explain why they also reach the highest score in terms of audience.

84 Information collected on www.imdb.com, www.boxofficemojo.com and completed with answers from the different production companies to personal email
Unlike the table on political movies, figures concerning the most popular movies show less relevancy between the budget and the gross. However, the audience ratio and the numbers of theatres in which the movies have been shown seem proportional. In terms of budgets, the two Spiderman films are sharing the top three with *Pirates of Caribbean*. When it comes to audience, though, the figures reveal that *Shrek 2* is at the top, which has the smallest budget among the six films; where *Spiderman* and *Spiderman 2* are respectively sharing the second and third place. *Finding Nemo* and *Star Wars* are staying in the second half of the movie’s highest budget and keep the same range in terms of audience ratio.

If we now compare the two sets of movies, the differences are enormous. On the average, the most popular movies reach around three thousand five hundred theatres which bring them audience equivalent to three hundred millions dollars. To bring this audience and attract the distribution, the movies engaged some fifty million dollars in marketing. This sum is not even close to the six millions of budget of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. When the audience ratio is counted in hundreds of thousand dollars for the documentaries, it is in hundreds of millions for the most popular films. However, two things remain common for the two tables and will be the outcomes of this analysis. First, the budget production is proportional to the audience of a movie, and second, the marketing budget is also proportional to audience (the more spent in marketing, the more audience it gets, even if the budget is lower than other movies).

**Cultural data**

If we look at the subjects explored in the two groups of movies, we can realize that the first one, as we already describe, is composed of documentaries on politics, with one exception. The most popular subjects on the other hand, turn around superhero stories, comic adaptation and adventure. All the films contain special effects and they are all, to different extents, fantasy movies: from completely created galaxies (*Star Wars*) to improbable adventures (*Pirates of the Caribbean*). Incredible stories, extraordinary characters and virtual digital images are creating the new tales of today, and are audience magnets in cinema.
### Table n°1.a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Production budget</th>
<th>Marketing cost</th>
<th>Gross (US)</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit 9/11</td>
<td>$6 million</td>
<td>$15 million</td>
<td>$220 million</td>
<td>2 011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celsius 41.11: the temperature at which the brain dies</td>
<td>$1 million</td>
<td>$250 000</td>
<td>$750 000</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunner Palace</td>
<td>$1 million</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$607 502</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncovered: the whole truth</td>
<td>$250 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>($350 000)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Terror</td>
<td>$155 000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$288 000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table n°1.b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Production budget</th>
<th>Marketing cost</th>
<th>Gross (US)</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shrek 2</td>
<td>$70 million</td>
<td>$50 million</td>
<td>$441 226 247</td>
<td>4,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiderman 2</td>
<td>$200 million</td>
<td>$50 million</td>
<td>$373 585 825</td>
<td>4,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiderman</td>
<td>$139 million</td>
<td>$50 million</td>
<td>$403 706 375</td>
<td>3,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding Nemo</td>
<td>$94 million</td>
<td>$40 million</td>
<td>$339 714 978</td>
<td>3,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirates of the Caribbean</td>
<td>$140 million</td>
<td>$40 million</td>
<td>$305 413 918</td>
<td>3,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star wars 2</td>
<td>$115 million</td>
<td>$25 million</td>
<td>$302 191 252</td>
<td>3,161</td>
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### Table n°2

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit 9/11</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>911: the Road to Tyranny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit 9/11</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and Terror</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncovered: the whole truth</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire over Afghanistan</td>
<td>War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahrenheit 9/11: the temperature at which the brain dies</td>
<td>Documentary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The economic structure

According to the figures concerning the budget and the audience, an important resolution can be reached. We conclude that without enough budget and marketing expenditures, it is nearly impossible to get the audience to cinema. Then, if a movie cannot have the proper financial means, it cannot compete on the American cinema market. This conclusion seems obvious, but it has to be clear and empirically proven to let the other arguments follow. When looking at the tables, it occurs that a movie needs around ten million dollars to reach a level of great audience, be known, and disseminate ideas; but what is even more obvious is that, among the movies who have the biggest budget, after a certain degree, what makes the real difference to achieve great audience rating, is the marketing budget. When we speak about marketing in cinema industry, it refers to means of promotion (commercials, press relation, public relation) and merchandising; which also, at the end of the day, is the way to run the market.

Let us rephrase these inferences and reach some further conclusions. In the American cinema context, nowadays, if a movie cannot financially compete with big corporations and blockbusters producers, then the movie has few chances to be seen; which implies that there is no equal representation of movies. It then prevents the American cinema to be a democratic public sphere and joins the argument of Habermas that the corruption of publicity leads to a transformation of the public space. What we had earlier defined as publicity -the movies; are turned into commercial sources created by huge sums involved in marketing, and spread through mass-media to self-promote in every private life. Who could have escaped the release of Spiderman? It was shown on TV, in magazines, newspapers, in toy stores, common partnership with fast foods, etc. Commercials that promote a movie in particular, with a big difference comparatively to others, are working against the diversity of dialogue. In this sense; they infected the public sphere by giving an advantage on one movie upon others. The principle of equality, on which the whole concept of democratic environment is based, is definitely not respected when it comes to American cinema as a whole; and its absence unbalances the discourse on public affairs on the national soil, since what is really accessible to people is not really representative but is certainly related to consumption. This unequal representation in the field of cinema produces an undemocratic national debate. If we go back to theory, the American cinema is then inclined to the phenomena of refeudalization. In other words, the amount of money put in a movie, its economic value, determines a structure where the movies with the highest budgets are dominating.
By this means, the American cinema has become the servant of the big production companies which only follow their own interests in the business. Cinema in the United States dominates the public space, ruled by capitalism, which makes it the slave of interest groups, and lose its capacity of criticism in the process. The rise of commercialization has entailed depoliticization for profit, which has accelerated the dispossession of the public sphere of its critical function, -its “raison d’être”. The means of publicity, -which are the movies in our case-, worked as a publicity of manipulation; manipulation that stands in the hands of the ones dominating the structure.

**The ideological structure: American cinema and popular culture**

In the American society, cinema is considered as an industry, a business. Since those two economic terms relate cinema as part of the capitalist system, the philosophy driving cinema is the search for profit (which could have been different since cinema is also an art). Considering this, the logic of economy wants the industry of cinema to answer its demand in order to gain money. However, it is hard to say how this demand is identified: who is exactly recognizing it? What is it asking for? Answers can be seen differently, depending on the definition one chooses for popular culture. To be simple, we should say first of all that the demand for cinema corresponds to what people want to see in theatres. The problem residing in this view is that they can only decide what they want to see among the films proposed.

Somewhere upper in the process, a selection is already made by some people who constitute the dominant class of cinema. This class creates the demand, and the movies that apply to this demand: in this sense, the organizers of cinema industry decided what people want to see and provide a fake mirage of choice. Let us take the example of a successful comic book transformed into a movie within a colossal production. The comic being a well-known hit for decades and a component of popular culture, the expectation of audience has small chances not to be fulfilled. Finally, when the movie comes out and breaks all the audience ratio records and makes a lot of money; the branch of “comic book super heroes” adapted to the white screen is born again and becomes fashion.

The leaders of cinema industry interpret this rush to the movie as a response to a need for this type of motion picture; although, on the other side, the audience cannot escape those movies if they are interested in going to cinema. Furthermore, influenced by marketing buzz, commercials and the new publicity; there are little chance that you won’t develop the will and the curiosity to see a movie that everyone around the globe speaks about. Concretely, what we obtained is the record of Spiderman at the box office ($403 706 375 of benefit) and the phenomena engenders other fictions of the same kind with other records (Spiderman 2, Shrek 2). Here is the example of the adaptation of a “superhero comic book” stories, whereas “computer animations” and “fantasy/SF” films are also branches that have developed in the same manner. Those three categories of movies have generated the trends; -the
mainstream of contemporary in cinema;- and through those movies, all elements of popular culture by and large has been influenced: music, way of dressing up, language, etc. Consequently, the dominant class of cinema is building a popular culture that mostly sticks to fantasies –like Shrek, Star Wars, Spiderman as we have observed in the analysis of movies’ genres- and they create worlds which authorize the viewers to escape their own, as well as the rest of the injustices committed elsewhere, and capitalism’s unfairness they are living in.

According to the Frankfurt School, this created mass-culture permits to manipulate people, especially at times of weakness, or ideological fragility, like the US faced after the 9/11 attacks. This period has reinforced the patriotic feelings of some Americans, but it also shook the basis of the culture, since the terrorist attacks have suggested that the culture was not accepted, and even hated, by some groups elsewhere. In this context, people are happy to be entertained, to not feel bad about their condition by seeing either fantasies unrelated to something already existing, -tales with happy ending (children computer animations)-, or stories where super powers allow surpassing this reality in question. However, the mainstream also keeps intact the American values: good vs. evil, there is always someone to fight and the character is always the good one. If we look closely at the most popular films of the last three years, it appears that four subjects out of six turn around war and just fights; where some other values like individualism, are also very observable. Besides, we can find in those films several valuable feelings like love for instance: from sentimental, romantic stories to parental love like in Finding Nemo; love is in every movie like some sort of medicine and true power showing that there are still good winning forces in humanity.

Good feelings, happy ending, a “good” and a “bad” and no self-consideration: the popular culture that we maintain does not help to face some facts, to open to the rest of the world and realize how unequal the system can be. It is then difficult in this framework to make small alternative political movies reach the theatres. Beyond the lack of budget, beyond the ridiculous -if not inexistent- marketing costs of those movies, their main problem is to deal with the mainstream style of cinema and catch people’s attention. Pushed by the government in a period of crisis to emphasize on good American values, the cinema productions have turned to some softened fictions. Trying to open people minds on politics becomes the highest barrier for alternative films, since the large production companies’ lack of interest puts them in a vicious circle of no financial supports. As a matter of fact, the cultural cinematographic fashion that is created plays against equal democratic representation of movies.

For the Frankfurt School Marxists, as a consequence, American people has been pacified to become indifferent to the environment in which they accommodate, and this is due to the will of the

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85 “[A]t the beginning of November 2001, there was a series of meetings between White House advisors and senior Hollywood executives with the aim of co-ordinating the war effort and establishing how Hollywood could help in the ‘war against terrorism’ by getting the ideological message across not only to Americans, but also to the Hollywood public around the globe –the ultimate empirical proof that Hollywood does in fact function as an ‘ideological state apparatus’”, in Žižek, Slavoj. Welcome to the Desert of the Real. London: Verso, 2002, p. 16.
industry dominant class who wants to keep its position. The structure of cinema, which firmly corresponds to any other structure produced by the capitalist system, has to be preserved and has to be efficiently controlled by the one who compose the dominancy. This dominance relates power to culture, since without power there is no class and no dominance. Thus, the one at the top of the structure actually determines what we are allowed to see in cinemas and have the economic power to impose it on the whole industry. As we have already settled in the previous analysis, the financial means implemented in a movie are determining its success and the largeness of its audience which illustrates this relation between power and culture.

If we follow the Culturalist approach, the dominant class of the cinema industry can be interpreted as Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses, which here represent the state, the production companies, the big distributors and even sub-related companies (such as special effects companies that are now major actors of the industry), and organic intellectuals (powerful producers, well-known directors, famous actors, CEOs of the different firms involved, critics, etc.). They organize the class and the hegemony, for instance through choosing who can enter the circle of intellectuals, and who should get out -by financially supporting some, rewarding others (Oscar, Golden Globe, etc.), accepting, refusing or imposing scripts, etc. In other words, those personalities are conducting an intellectual leadership that enforces a certain set of ethics, in practices of Hegemony.

By still sticking to the Culturalist point of view, and taking the box office into account; we consider that even if people attach themselves to fantasy worlds that bring pleasure, -which means that they accept this hegemony-, they are still not passive and certainly not losing their political ideas and consciousness. Indeed, Gramsci’s high consensus of people toward dominant class productions, -i.e. seeing blockbusters and being influenced by marketing-, represents the incorporation of the structure of power but also contradicts with the large audience of a documentary film like Fahrenheit 9/11. It therefore proves that the ideology transmitted through cinema is nothing more then a compromise between the forces from above (super production movies) and from below (political alternative films) that allows Fahrenheit 9/11 to be so popular. Paradoxically it is also this compromise that makes Michael’s Moore’s movie both a complete counter-cultural film and a successful one: it is anti-capitalist, but then again works for this system. This example of Hegemony as conceptualized by the Culturalists can be found in other ironic examples of social forces that help to stabilize the forces of power it seeks to overthrow. For instance, the music of the West coast during the seventies has inspired people to resist and organize against the war in Vietnam; yet, at the same time, it made profits over which it had no control and that could be used to support the war effort: the Jefferson Airplane’s anti-capitalist politics increased the profit of their capitalist record company. The process of hegemony is illustrated here as the way in which dominant groups in society attempt to ‘negotiate’ with oppositional voices on a terrain which secures the continuation of their position of leadership86. This is

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86 Storey, p128
an overt paradox where the anti-capitalist politics are being “articulated” in the economic interests of capitalism.

Thus, there is obviously an “articulation” inside cinema industry since the dominant class does not have a monolithic ideology, just like in any other parts of popular culture there is negotiation/compromise between the governing ideology and other forces.

Inside American cinema, as *Fahrenheit 9/11* demonstrates it, some anti-Bush, anti-government and anti-war movies are broadcasted, stimulating people’s reactionary feelings. Cinema spectators are composed of people that demand fantasies and entertainment with original, unusual characters; but who also need “counter-strike” movies to satisfy their sentiments of resistance. Occasionally the government and the system have to be put into question, which recalls the need of criticism from the public sphere. People may enjoy fantasy worlds, but this does not mean that they forget their actual conditions. Ironically, we have to realize that those critical messages and ideas are issued by those who financially benefit the system. Anti-system works will be incorporated as long as they produce political material that will be famous, make money or even win awards; where actually *Fahrenheit 9/11* is the formal proof of this compromise equilibrium of American cinema. Naturally, some other films had already opened this way: *Doctor Strangelove*, *Full Metal Jacket*, or more recently *The Constant Gardener* can also be considered as the results of this compromise equilibrium. Therefore, the organic intellectuals decide that movies that should be seen must allow benefits and correspond to the “uncontroversial and dreamy” trend that still keeps intact the values of the structure (capitalism, liberalism, individualism) as much as their dominancy. However, they also don’t escape the production of movies contradicting their principles.

Finally, there is no real effective imposition of ideas, or effective political manipulation. There are ongoing cultural practices. What people will choose to see in cinema is not pre-identified and fixed. Instead, cultural practices are evidently influenced by different spheres, and they are always subject to changes. The popular culture that truly drives cinema market is due to articulations between those variable practices. Instead of arguing that people are consuming products of media that are fully tied to the dominant class’ interests, and they enjoy and be manipulated by what is offered to them; one should judge the process through recalling that there is a reflection on what is seen, and viewers are not totally passive.

It can be speculated that cinema’s first priority is entertainment -it has always been and will probably stay this way-. In this sense, cinema is made to provide delight and dreams which means creating magical worlds, nice characters, and incredible stories. If it causes passiveness, then it is probably fulfilling its primary goal, where most people are conscious of this and looking for enjoyment when they sit in front of the big screen. However, it doesn’t entirely consume people’s capability of judgement concerning information and politics. When films lean down on those subjects, they are accepted as counter-balancers of the dominant ideology, and they must reflect social reality.
Ultimately and as a reflection of this mixture generating popular culture, the proper definition of cinema should be: an entertaining media of social reality.
VI
CONCLUSION

Summary

After analysing certain aspects of American cinema since 9/11, we should be able to answer the research question we have formulated in the beginning: is cinema democratic? Unfortunately, the answer to this question cannot be firm and definitive, since the media world is evolving and is neither black nor white.

If we speak in terms of content, we can state that American cinema represents a democratic environment. It applies freedom of speech to its movies, allowing them, as we saw in chapter four, to criticize the political power and put it into question. Many different opinions related to internal politics are shown, representing different views between individuals. The relative equality and accessibility of the alternative political movies signify that this milieu corresponds to a public sphere. However, the democratic principles are not respected when we look at the entire range of movies produced by the American cinema. To be broadcasted and to be seen, movies need to be big productions: a film with a high budget and especially with high expenses in marketing. This especially undermines the equality principle that might drive a public sphere, since the publicity given to a film depends on the sum of money producers and distributors decide to invest. This commercial factor is challenging the democratic value of cinema, ruled by private interests.

Besides, as we have settled in chapter five, the industry of cinema is completely submitted to the popular culture mainstream that fell into fantasy movies and consequently moving away the audience from its concrete political environment. Full of good values and childish plots, cinema attracts people with fake stories. We first thought, for the sake of the argument, this fashion was imposed by organic intellectuals, -the ones who direct the cinema industry. It occurs that this statement is not valid, as we follow the Culturalist approach, since although popular culture may be imposed from above; it is as well pushed from below by people’s ideology. As a result, we obtain Fahrenheit 9/11, a counter-government documentary with a big budget, high marketing costs and with a big audience in a moment of political and identity crisis in the US. In a sense, Fahrenheit 9/11 was also answering a cinematographic demand, the group representing the “anti-Bush”, and one might not forget that we are still in the capitalist philosophy where even anti-capitalist groups are potential demanders to satisfy and to make money out of. Popular culture is composed of big productions that people legitimately accept,-since they like to see them-, but also of controversial documentaries.
produced by independent directors that fill the blank of opposition; and which is also part of “popular ideology”.

Finally, we should conclude that cinema is a democratic tool in an undemocratic environment, which is based on a structure into which the few dominants direct the whole system, but where they have to struggle with the other classes and incorporate some popular ideas and customs if they still want to sell. As we observed in chapter five, it is a negotiated mixture. Plus, we discussed that cinema is also part of social reality and, in fact, it should then transmit this reality as it is, without serving certain groups.

In order to picture the outcomes of the thesis, we can summarize by the following graph:

The most popular films, as suggested in this graph, are not politically engaged, but financially sponsored. On the other hand, alternative political documentaries seem not to enjoy high funds and consequentially not much audience; although they cover the all space on the pendulum; from being highly critical/controversial, to highly supportive of the government. This graphic presents very well the paradox related to media in general: we want media to benefit from freedom of speech, which is theoretically applied, but remains to be not enough democratic to reach people in our system at the practical level, caused by capitalist relations explained.
The come-back of political cinema

Interestingly, it seems like 2006 will formulate some suggestions to our democracy-cinema dilemma, by being a year with a different cinematographic context toward politics.

First, the environment has changed: five years have passed since 9/11, and the Iraq war’s unpopularity made the government let some troops come back; where one can argue that relatively awakened political consciousness and political debate have started to show some results.

In fact, “Hollywood”, the American cinema industry, has been for long time under the traumatic effect of the attacks of 9/11, which has projected itself on the whole American culture, as the industry has been pointed out as guilty since the attacks. After the events, Hollywood felt culpable, the whole industry thought that its action movies had a responsible part in what happened and that the violence and technology of the blockbusters could have given some ideas to terrorists. In this context, Hollywood’s scenarios became softened, respectful of some dogmas where you can feel that guilt and auto-censorship were complementing each other. It explains why this last year we have seen the multiplication of family films and comedies, working clearly for a return to Puritanism and frivolity.

In regard to the events, this is no real surprise. The cinema industry, -who always defined itself in a democratic way-, then signed to be completely republican and driven by the government: senior executives have been actually contacted by the White House to produce some scenarios, as we showed in the previous sections. As a way to pay back the damages they believe they have done, US cinema accepted the right away and found its means to expel its sins by helping the moral reconstruction of the country.

Losing itself in culpability, Hollywood had forgotten its other main rights and responsibilities as an influential means of media: its purpose of looking upon the government and its privilege of criticism and opposition. By working closer with the CIA and the Pentagon, the cinema industry has based its ideology on neoconservative ideas, where this association ended by offering some blockbusters looking like caricatures of patriotic clichés (for instance: We Were Soldiers).

Hopefully, one man, Michael Moore, started to shake the industry by popping up in front of this patriotism. Whatever we though about the man and his movie Fahrenheit 9/11, it has brought back the American cinema in the battlefield of ideas, a battlefield that was left for a while and recalled to many people that being a citizen does not mean always agreeing on the politics of its country.

The movement of contestation went bigger in the cinema world when some actors joined it and made it a sort of mediatic show of “political business”. Cinema industry is back in what it is the best at doing: incorporate the world as it is or as it sees it. This wave looks definitely like what happened at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies when people were able to see in theatres big
productions for large audiences that also carried political consciousness. However, two main factors may prevent American cinema from returning to another truly counter-culture movement that will be recognized as such: first there is a lack of a real villain. If Nixon at his time was considered as a mean figure, Bush represents a character without any consistence; to turn criticism towards him into ridicule, more than anger and serious antagonism. Second, and most importantly, the cinema economy has changed a lot since 1960s, as much as the range of films’ types, engendering an absence of popular forms of movies that can support this antagonism.

Nevertheless, in nearly a month (December 2005-January 2006), around six movies with serious political echoes or social concerns are broadcasted in the US. Right now, you can see a sombre drama about a platoon of Marines bogged down in Middle East (Jarhead takes place during Desert Storm, not the current conflict, but close enough). Or you can watch a movie about another period in American history — the McCarthy era of the 1950s — when dissent was considered unpatriotic. Earlier this year, there was a movie about American arms sales to African dictators (Lord of War) and another about drug companies dumping dangerous pills in Third World countries (The Constant Gardener). More are on the way, including Steven Spielberg's drama about the aftermath of the 1972 terrorist attack at the Munich Olympics, as well as several movies about the attacks on 9/11. Many of the movies mentioned above began their production cycles well over a year ago, some much longer, but their arrival in theaters now does seem to point to a swing in cultural attitudes towards politics, or at least in Hollywood's. In any case, there is no arguing that these films will be part of the ongoing national discussion over terrorism and the war in Iraq, which, in a sense, can be interpreted as the coming back of the publicity in the public sphere.

Two years ago, there was a man who thought he would change the outcome of the elections in his country. Michael Moore has failed, but his Fahrenheit 9/11 has proved that cinema viewers could still discover political consciousness for themselves. At the same time, it has provided a perfect empirical proof to support the Culturalist refusal of people’s passiveness in front of media. The provocative director made some followers in politically engaged movies and now politics don’t even stay in the documentary field anymore: fiction movies are also coming. In Hollywood, some directors show what television does not: hypocrisies of power spheres or the consequences of imperialism. The representation of power, and its derivatives, feed the scenarios of many movies. In this line of thinking, we can say that the political cinema is coming back: it’s good news for democratic debate, and even better for cinema.

87 Rédaction, “Politiques F(r)ictions”, Première, January 2006
### POLITICAL CONCEPTS

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### PRESIDENT CLINTON

- The Clinton administration should be blame for 9/11
- The Clinton administration did not fight against terrorism
- The Clinton administration precipitated attacks on the US

### PRESIDENT BUSH

- Bush is always on vacation
- Bush's fraudulent election
- Bush didn't do enough to prevent 9/11
- Bush's doctrine inflame Islamists
- The Bush administration took 9/11 as an opportunity to go to Iraq

### REASON INVOLVE TO GO TO WAR

- Afghanistan deserved war for 9/11 and helping Ben Laden
- Saddam Hussein had WMD
- Saddam Hussein was linked to Al-Qaeda and Ben Laden
- The war against Iraq was decided before
- American soldiers are fighting for a better Iraq
- Muslims radical are intolerant, fascist, archaic

### ECONOMY

- The Afghan pipeline project
- Bush has connexion with the Saudi family
- Bush is interested in oil
- The Saudis possess a part of the US
- France, Germany and Russia had financial national interests of not going to war
- The cost of the war is huge in dollar

### THE US ARMY IN IRAQ

- Being patriotic is going to war and support the president action
- Uneducated soldiers from the "forgotten America"
- Unnecessary send of troops
- Constant attack of soldiers in Iraq
- Lack of budget in Iraq
- Lack of help from the Iraqis
- Need of help from the Iraqis
- Anger of dead soldiers family

### INFORMATION MANIPULATION

- CIA information were distorted
- 9/11 has been wrongly attributed to Iraq
- American discredited themselves at the UN
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## APPENDIX 2

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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PRESIDENT CLINTON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Celsius 41.11</th>
<th>Fahrenheit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Clinton administration should be blame for 9/11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Clinton administration did not fight against terrorism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Clinton administration precipitated attacks on the US</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PRESIDENT BUSH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Celsius 41.11</th>
<th>Fahrenheit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bush is always on vacation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush's fraudulent election</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush didn't do enough to prevent 9/11</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush's doctrine inflame Islamists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bush administration took 9/11 as an opportunity to go to Iraq</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REASON INVOLVED TO GO TO WAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan deserved war for 9/11 and helping Ben Laden</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam Hussein had WMD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddam Hussein was linked to Al-Qaeda and Ben Laden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The war against Iraq was decided before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American soldiers are fighting for a better Iraq</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims radical are intolerant, fascist, archaic</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ECONOMY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Celsius 41.11</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Afghan pipeline project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush has connexion with the Saudi family</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush is interested in oil</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Saudis possess a part of the US</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France, Germany and Russia had financial national interests of not going to war</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of the war is huge in dollar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### THE US ARMY IN IRAQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Celsius 41.11</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being patriotic is going to war and support the president action</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneducated soldiers from the &quot;forgotten America&quot;</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary send of troops</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant attack of soldiers in Iraq</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of budget in Iraq</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of help from the Iraqis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need of help from the Iraqis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger of dead soldiers family</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### INFORMATION MANIPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CIA information were distorted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11 has been wrongly attributed to Iraq</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American discredited themselves at the UN</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UN knew Iraq didn't have the capacity to build a nuclear bomb</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wilson affair: there were no uranium from Niger bought by Iraq</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Speeches

Speech of the president of the United States George W. Bush, Address to the Nation September 11th, 2001: “Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.”

Speech of the president of the United States George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People September 20th, 2001: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”

Speech of the president of the United States George W. Bush, Address the United States Capitol Washington, D.C. January 29, 2002: “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world”.

Speech of the president of the United States George W. Bush, Address the United States Capitol Washington, D.C. January 29, 2002: “Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun.”

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Arendt Hannah, Le Système Totalitaire (1951), French version : Seuil, 1972


Bryman Alan, Social Research Methods, Oxford University Press (2001)

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Rédaction, “Politiques F(r)ictions”, *Première*, January 2006


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www.allocine.fr

Imdb (Internet Movie Database): the most important and recognized website on cinema, providing every type of information on movies
www.imdb.com

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www.boxofficemojo.com
Official Document:


Institut de la statistique du Québec, Statistiques sur l’industrie du film, édition 2004, Chapitre 10 : Le cinéma dans le monde

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911: the Road to Tyranny, Alex Jones (2002)

Celsius 41.11: The Temperature at Which the Brain... Begins to Die, Kevin Knoblock, (2004)


Shrek 2, Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury (2004)

Spiderman, Sam Raimi (2002)

Spiderman 2, Sam Raimi (2004)

Star Wars episode II: the attack of the clones, George Lucas (2002)