1. Introduction: purpose and limits of this research

The present research puts forward the main results of a large survey on cinema-going behavior, derived from 1785 personal interviews, taken of a representative sample of people who were born in 1934 or before. Thus, the results are referred to four different periods: firstly, 1931-1936 (Second Spanish Republic); secondly, 1936-1939 (Spanish Civil War); and thirdly, two stages within the Franquist period (also called either Franquism or Franco's regime): on the one hand, 1940-1960 (the boom of the cinema-attendance in Spain, during the first Franquism), and on the other hand, 1961-1982 (the beginning of the crisis in cinema, during the last Franquism and the Transition years). During all these years, films are the most popular form of entertainment in Spain.

The main interest of this research is rooted in its size and chronological order (1931-1982), the novelty of the subject, and the use of uncommon data collection techniques in historical studies, which made it possible to obtain previously unknown material about the social history of cinema in Spain. The aim was to study the Spanish popular memory on cinema-attendance (Sorlin, 1977: 115), in order to highlight the cinema-going behaviour in daily leisure routine in Spain, a matter scarcely documented at the present (Paz, 2003).

Although the research has a historical nature, it applies sociological procedures to avoid the lack of other sources. In this sense, interviewing people gave us the opportunity to get precious information, in present tense, about memories of a past behavior. In any case, our goal was to reconstruct an aspect of the memory of those polled. Therefore, what matters here is not the precise coincidence of their memories and the reality, but to point out which aspects regarding their leisure habits remain fixed in their memory. Of course, it is understood that 'going to the cinema' in those days (1931-1982) was a very different experience from nowadays. We consider that recovering this memory, and explaining it, is a challenging task for a communication historian.
1.1. Adaptation of the survey technique to the study of the past

The survey emerged as a methodology in the 40s under the influence of Positivism. Lazarsfeld & Berelson's (The People Choice, 1944) and A. Stouffer's (The American Soldier, 1949) researches were a turning point in the use of surveys. The complexity of the research design (use of diverse samples, panel design, and control groups) meant a relevant improvement in its quality, and its usefulness for private business to identify consumers' tastes and also to bring forward the vote intention, strengthened its value as an economic and political marketing tool (Cea D'Ancona, 1996: 19-42, Soetzel & Girard, 1973).

Since then, the survey is considered to be a valid procedure to study a particular population through the use of a representative sampling. As a technique, it consists on the feedback the interviewee gives to a questionnaire, basically made up of one-answer questions. The survey can be administered by different ways (Tarnai & Dillman, 1992; Biemer, 1992; Biemer, and others, 1988; Wert, and others 1993) with a higher or lower degree of validity and reliability (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

The practice of surveying is focused on the study of various attitudinal components, though the subjective elements (opinion or attitude) are the most significant items for this kind of research. Actually, the validity of a survey rests in the way it captures the changing, temporary and dynamic nature of the impressions and evaluations of a particular population in the moment it is administered. In this sense, surveys cannot be extrapolated to a past or a future time: any longitudinal study requires the administration of several questionnaires in different periods of time.

Although this is the most conventional use of the survey methodology, it is also a technique which allows other uses. Remarkably, it allows us to take into account objective and the subjective elements, and to distinguish the present from the past. For instance, the verbal expressions of the interviewee can help to clarify the information settled in the memory. In fact, individual or private behavior that is not reflected in secondary sources but has been part of the daily life of men and women of a particular time might be recovered by interviewing those who practiced them in the past.

This is the reason why this research, with a noteworthy historical and evolutive character, has resorted to surveys: we expected to derive some cinema-attendance patterns between 1930 and 1982 from the
memories of those polled. These are the years in which the modernization process that brought Spain nearer the Spanish social environment to that typical of the post-industrial societies took place. Globalization, processes of cultural uniformity, the new international division of labor, and the redefinition of social identities are some of the international dynamics that, in the 1980’s, affected a society which, soon after its industrialization, was involved in the peculiar interactions of the net society (Castells, 1997). This is why we feel that a diachronic study on the cinema-going behavior can also offer relevant clues on the mutations the Spanish society overcame. Somehow, the improvement of the economic conditions, the flexibility of mass society or the institutionalization of leisure have to be reflected at least in one of the dimensions of consumption, as is cinema-attendance through a lifetime.

In order to answer these questions, we have decided to collect first-hand material through field work in which our source of information is the cinema-goers themselves. To do this, they have had to recall their film-habits at different stages of their lives. Therefore, the population sample of this research is made up by Spaniards who have lived since the 1920’s and early 1930’s of the twentieth century. That is to say, the sample consists on individuals born in 1928 or before who can offer trustworthy cinematographic remembrances. In the case of the elder interviewees, they belong to the Second Spanish Republic.

This primary decision of research design also highlights the first limit of the research: the sample’s quality. We cannot assure if those who are presently alive went to the movies more than those who have died. In the same way, we cannot know if the cinema-going behavior of those who are still alive reflects the patterns and preferences typical of that period. There is a shadow cast over the sample, and it seems not feasible to detect the inaccuracies.

Secondly, opinions and evaluations are not analyzed, but another kind of subjective elements is: remembrances. Memory is understood here as the indicator of past behavioral patterns. The cinema-attendance memories (always distorted by the passing of time) will be used as a valuable knowledge through which an objective fact, such as the cinema-attendance, can be measured. This implies that the collection of memories is always tied to an unavoidable margin of error, the consequence of the passing of time. Nevertheless, the association of these two elements (memory and past behavior) is not always identifiable. Memory sometimes magnifies, and sometimes ignores, the event which it attempts to register. It might distort the phenomenon we
want to measure. However, it is still a significant source of information in spite of the error margin.

Despite these difficulties, the use of memories in this research has had unexpected benefits. In fact, it has enabled us to detect and measure several variables which were not taken into account at the beginning of the research. Actually, the fact that this research encourages the interviewee to remember his behavior as a cinema-goer, also gives him the opportunity to recall those remembrances alive in his memory with a great deal of intensity. That is to say, the interaction with the interviewee allows us to associate the symbols of a particular time with film titles, actors and actresses: signifiers that, tied to the past, can activate emotions and feelings in those who evoke them. This way we tackle the complex arena of collective memory, due to the fact that what we really measure is the endurance and the impact of characters and topics which already have a mythic nature.

Some clarifications are necessary to explain the organization and goals of this research. Firstly, we have to mention the fact that its design, based on a quantitative study, is remarkably open. Many researches that use surveys have a closed conception of themselves: surveys are here advanced research lines in which the aim is to confirm a previous hypothesis. This is why they take an explanatory logic or limited themselves to collect some descriptive information. However, the present research starts from a broader assumption. Its goal is not to clarify a general hypothesis, but to collect a great deal of information in order to formulate new assumptions. That is the reason why the questionnaire has a noteworthy amount of open, semi-open and multiple-choice questions. This fact has enabled us to obtain a great deal of information on topics scarcely studied before. Moreover, it has forced us to add some ignored and non-expected analysis categories. Hence, the emergent character of this research: it has constantly been redefined throughout the data collection process. This procedure fits qualitative research patterns, which paradoxically, are defined by the small impact of the survey techniques on them, as the grounded theory demonstrates (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Valles, 1997: 89-96).

Secondly, it is important to emphasize that this flexible and adaptable research method is consistent with the goals of the research itself. We sought to study the leisure behavior patterns concerning cinema-going during the Spanish process of modernization. Thus, as many qualitative researches, it is not only a great representational value what is sought here. On the contrary, it is more important to discover
and understand the internal mechanisms of consumption than to make assertions based on numerical data type variables.

1.2. Field work: data collection tools and questionnaire administration

The questionnaire was focused on variables such as frequency, company, or kind of films the interviewees attended; audience preferences in terms of genre; the recollection of actors, actresses and films; and even the lack of interest in films. All of them carefully ordered (Ayidiya and McClendon, 1990). These variables crossed with four chronological periods: the Second Spanish Republic, the Civil War, the 1940’s and 1950’s, and the period which goes from the 1960’s to the earliest 1980’s. Hence the results have a serial nature: we obtained information on all these variables in the diverse periods of the recent Spanish history.

The questionnaire was given only after passing a rigorous exam called pre-test. Thanks to it, some problems with the wording and the adaptation to the interviewees were detected at this stage. The fact that these problems could lead to mistaken answers (Cea de Arcona, 1988; Rodriguez Osuna, 1991, 1993; Hague and Jackson, 1994; Wimmer and Dominick, 1996) made us adapt some of the terms (Deacon and others, 1999); overall the pronunciation of foreign actors and actresses’ names, which were given a Spanish form in order to help the interviewee to understand them. Moreover, the historical periods were presented to those polled by using some significant events as a reference to locate them in their memories.

Besides, the pre-test discovered a particular dynamic generated by the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer. It was the fact that the interviewee did not limit himself to answer to the questionnaire. In some way, the interview resulted in a fluent interaction which also ended in a conversation about “cinema and associated life experiences.” The interviewee retrieved some of his personal memories through film images, which effectively had an associated emotional significance for him. That is why a great deal of the success of the interview rested on the skills of the interviewer, who had to encourage the interviewee’s spontaneous speech and, at the same time, to bring it back to the registered variables. The main gratification the interviewee received was a pleasant conversation. Only with this logic -together with some patience and warmth-, the questionnaire was properly filled in by
the interviewer.

The questionnaire length and the characteristics of the interviewees required a face-to-face interview. Thus, the sample selection process was remarkably complex. Due to the high mortality index of this population segment, there was not a stable and reliable sampling framework. Furthermore, the difficulty to find a population group with a certain geographical mobility was a second limit to our ideal sampling. Along with these problems, there were the inevitable economic and infrastructural obstacles. They made it difficult to carry out the random sampling required for study -as it was intended- the entire national territory.

Therefore, the actual administration of the questionnaire was finally an accidental sampling, also called ‘snowball’. In this case, the choice of sampling units is not probabilistic, so that the size of the sample progressively increases thanks to the references the interviewees make on other individuals. In spite of the fact that this formula does not allow to work out a margin of error, and that it makes it difficult to generalize the results beyond those polled, it has many advantages: it is an economic technique; it does not require a sampling framework; and it is of great usefulness when working with scattered collectives which are hard to find.

On this basis, the field work began on November 2003 and finished on March 2004. The result of this long process was 1785 valid interviews done with a similar number of interviewees or ‘survivors’ who came from diverse socio-demographic spheres (as can be expected, there were some questions in the questionnaire tied to this point). The questionnaires were administered in almost all the Autonomic regions in the Spanish territory, with the exceptions of Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Ceuta and Melilla.

Once the information was collected, the process of encoding and making the tabulation of the open and semi-open questions made evident the relevance of considering some unexpected answer categories. As a consequence, a detailed process of re-codification began: many of the assertions we worked with from the beginning of the research, and that were reflected in the answer categories, were then re-defined while we were still far from finishing the research.

It has to be admitted that there are two main reasons why this study cannot be extrapolated to the whole Spanish population who lived during the historical period examined here: the difficulty to analyze a material such as the collective memory, the characteristics of the studied
population, or the sampling choices. In this sense, this research does not reach the ideal criteria of representation. That said, this present research helps to register some significant patterns which are probably a distinct behavior of the studied society. To sum up, these are the goals of a research of an exploratory nature, which only aims to points out what might become a line of research.

To tackle the text, it has to be clarified that the terms ‘survivor’, ‘polled’ and ‘interviewee’ are used as synonyms here.


Those polled understand that frequent cinema-attendance is to go to the movies approximately once a week. Those who state they went ‘very often’ or ‘quite often’ to the cinema were: 17.2 per cent of those who lived in the Second Republic; 8.6 per cent who went during the war; 36.1 per cent who remember the first Franquism; and 26.7 per cent who went from 1961 to 1982 (Chart 1). The data highlight a constant increasing line in cinema-going, and also a progressive interest in this leisure behavior, only interrupted by the Civil War and ending with the exhibition crisis of the 1980’s (Camporesi, 1993: 71-94; Pérez y Pelaz, 2002: 217-222). Everything points out that the spread of television and the subsequent use of videos at home, as well as the emergence of multi-screen theatres changed the traditional ways of film viewing.

The great impact of the exhibition crisis is not a surprising effect, since 36.9 per cent of the theatres were in the provincial capitals of Spain, while only 20.3 per cent of the population corresponded to them. Through this data, it can also be understood why this leisure activity succeeded in cities during the 1930’s: it was the most typical entertainment of modern societies (Montero and Paz, 2002, 133-135). However, the lack of theatres in rural areas, as well as their isolated character -at least in comparison to the urban centers-, worsened by the defective transport methods explains the lack of interest in these places.

2.1. Cinema attendance and ways of life

During the first years of the Republic, cinema-going becomes an important past time in our cities -at least, the most relevant regarding the amount of movie-goers. However, its success was limited to one particular consideration: the poverty of a large social class in the urban centers, especially patent in the biggest cities. Whilst in the rural areas
villagers do not go to the cinema because of the lack of theatres, in the cities the economic condition of the audience limits the possibility to go to the cinema (Ansola, 2002: 222-274). Nonetheless, this is also a reality in many areas of the rural Spain: the southern half of the Peninsula, Galicia, Aragón, León, etc.

Also significant is the low percentage of the interviewees who claim to have hardly gone to the cinema. It is remarkable, too, that they are people who had the possibility of going to the cinema: the fact that they go sometimes points out that they could afford going to the movies more often. Therefore, they are the new potential market: they constitute 27 per cent of those polled who lived during the Second Republic (Chart I).

Maybe, the process of social erosion during that difficult decade, as well as the economic effect of the Depression, had to do with the narrowing of the leisure possibilities of a wide portion of the Spanish urban population. The drop in cinema-attendance during the civil war does not require a detailed explanation (Cañada, 2005: 210). The war was overwhelming enough to diminish the frequency in cinema-attendance percentages. Actually, it is cut in half. The percentages demonstrate that, on the one hand, there is a fall among those who do not go a lot to the cinema, and on the other, there is a noticeable increase (70 per cent, almost three quarters of those polled) among those who never go (Chart I). However, there was not homogeneity among the latter. During those years there are not many who continue going to the cinema, but those who attend are enthusiastic: one half (51 per cent) of the cinema-goers acknowledge having attended more than once a month. Even 22.5 per cent of them claim that they went more than twice a month.

Some of the interviewees expressed that they actually began to go to the cinema during the Civil War: several because they became old enough, and others, because they enjoyed it whilst they were on a leave in the rearguard, in both factions (Langa, 2002: 163-171). In fact, some of those polled assert that they began to go to the cinema during the war precisely because they had money thanks to their salary as soldiers: actually, the republican soldier was one of the best paid in the world. In spite of the fact that this phenomenon (the soldier movie-goer) has no effect on the study, it can serve to illustrate the poverty in which large sections of the Spanish population lived during the Republican period, just before the Civil War.

The golden years of cinema attendance -according to the
interviewees' answers - were the two decades that go from 1940 to 1960. On the one hand, they were years of social and economic difficulties, but on the other hand, they were also years of progressive improvement in cinema attendance. The increase of theatres reached both the rural and the urban areas, though it was a more evident phenomenon in the cities, due to the fact that the population began a progressive process of immigration to the cities. The growth of theatres, the improvement in the economic condition (the 50s were years of multiple-job shifts), and even the lack of mod cons in homes translated into effects on cinema-attendance percentage.

Thus, the number of those who never went to the cinema dropped drastically during this period to 22.2 per cent, having a remarkable effect on a general increase of the movie-goers. On the other hand, those who remember having gone quite often or often increase to 36.1 per cent. That is to say, the percentage doubled with respect to the years of the Republic. However, it has to be underlined that the remaining low percentage of people who barely go to the cinema constitutes another important aspect. Paradoxically, it points out that, despite the general improvement, there was a great unexploited potential for cinema attendance. Actually, the people who go to the cinema increases from 27 per cent in the Second Republic years to 41.6 per cent. From all these data we can deduce that, in spite of the fact that there are still deficiencies in the supply -lack of theatres-, there was also a shortage of resources of those who might go (Chart I). However, the movie-goers' frequency also increases: 62.8 per cent assert to go once a month, and 34.5 per cent of them who report that they went more than twice a month.

Those were years in which cinema has no direct competitor as mass entertainment. Dances and soccer were the only alternatives, but nothing compared to cinema’s appeal. To understand this, it is important to recall the economic improvement of the middle-classes and the working-classes -especially in big cities- promoted regular cinema attendance. Due to the fact that, as a rule, their flats were very small, even hardly equipped cinemas -especially those of the important urban centers- were the most suitable places for relaxing and fun. However, small-town theatres barely offer any comfort conditions. For example, in places with really cold winters, the majority of the theatres did not even have central heating (Roman and Blanco, 2002: 120); not to mention that air conditioning appeared and its use generalized very late in the Spanish theatres. The conditions typical of small-town theatres were similar in
the slums of the big cities.

Even television was not a competitor for three decades. According to *The national survey on radio and television* (La encuesta nacional de radio y television) carried out by the National Institute on Public Opinion (Instituto de Opinión Pública), television was in its beginnings a distinct urban privilege. A proof of this, only 5 per cent of the rural population had a television in 1966, while 51 per cent of the families in the cities had one. Owning a television was a sign of distinction which suggested some structural differences in the social class system (Rueda and Chicharro, 2005: 415-18). That is to say, particular means of entertainment cannot be derived from the sole fact of owning a television.

The vast majority of the interviewees remember having watched television for the first time during the 1960’s (Chart II). This was also the period that historiography identifies with the improvement of the Spanish economy, and the increase of consumer indexes. However, even in this case, the experience of watching television for the first time cannot be compared to the fact of actually owning it (Chart III). The fact of considering television as a class distinction influences the way the Spaniards watched it for the first time, since it happened in the context of a group. Therefore, watching television had a transcendental and modernizing meaning, beyond the fact of being an entertainment which “brought together the people in front of a screen,” (Callejo, 1995: 80-91) as only the cinema had done before.

As things changed, cinema-going lost importance from the mid 1960’s on. Firstly, the general improvement of the *per capita* income had a great effect on middle and middle-working urban families. Secondly, home construction speeded up, with a noteworthy effect on living conditions. Thirdly, not only the environment improved, but also people’s expectations: bigger and more comfortable homes were affordable now, and they did not necessarily mean longer shifts and tedious trips from bedroom communities to work centers. As a consequence of the growth of the cities, cinemas began to spread. Of course there were many theatres in the new populated areas, but not all of them caught on. In part, it was the consequence of the construction planning of the neighborhoods itself that did not define the shopping centre area. There was a second group, not that large, but important as cinema-goers: those who were second-home owners, and bought their houses in the near cities.

During the period 1967-1982, data on monthly cinema attendance
also reflects this pattern change. Actually, cinema-going attendance even grew until 1965 (Pérez and Pelaez, 2002: 220-221). In general, the percentage of those who went and remember having gone more than once a month decreases to 55 per cent. That is to say, almost eight points less than the previous period. The difference is even bigger if we pay attention to those who went more than twice: only 21.4 per cent, which means a drop of thirteen points over the years of first Franquism.

Staying at home was a more attractive plan for those whose goal of life was to own a house, and they were many. Moreover, the improvement in household amenities led to the acquisition of a new form of entertainment: television. Thus, years of crisis began for the film industry. The new ways of life required restructuring of business, especially with new ways of time use. Variations in the ways of life affected as well the demands of the new audience, who asked for a greater variety in programming, among other things. Perhaps, it was due to the fact that television there began to be shaped a new sense of audio-visual entertainment, which imposed a faster pace of innovation.

Franco’s death unleashed a period of political demonstrations that favored, together with other factors and the action of the new institutional protagonists -the King, the Head of the Government, and the leaders of the main political parties- the declaration of the Constitution. The arrival to the government of the labor party (PSOE, Partido Socialista), in 1982, is usually considered the end of this period.

For the first time, cinema-attendance data drop (Pérez and Pelaez, 2002: 218-22) during this long period of twenty years (1961-1982). Firstly and most importantly, the percentage of those who never go to the cinema increases from 22.2 per cent to 27.1 per cent. It is a noteworthy rise, though less radical than that which took place during the years of the Republic. Cinema was already an important and established way of leisure, and there was no reason to renounce to it. This is reflected in the percentage of those polled who consider that during these years- they barely went to the theatres: 45.9 per cent, almost half of the interviewees (Chart I). Therefore, cinema attendance had begun to have other related meanings and especially, to adopt other forms. To put it another way, there are fewer people who frequently go to the cinema, but they constitute a constant base which guarantees a minimum of attendance. Besides, almost the three quarters of those polled state that they cannot imagine not going to the cinema, even if it were not so often.

The consequence of all this was logical: theatres progressively
closed. First of all, the outlying theatres placed in the suburbs, and those located in the villages which suffered form a process of depopulation. Immediately afterward, theatres which were located in the small towns closed, though in this case we must take on account the specific mechanisms -adapted to the particular circumstances of each case- of the scaled economies. Emigration, of course, reduced the market in these towns, but other factors were of great importance, too, i.e. the change in young people’s entertainment behavior due to an improvement in their living conditions, particularly owning a car. Among other things, they spent their time of leisure in travelling to nearby bigger towns which had discotheques. At the same time, the closure of the small-town cinemas allowed others located in bigger towns to survive. Thus, cinema audiences stopped being local and became regional (Roman and Blanco, 2002:120).

2.2 Those that did not go to the cinema: reasons for absence

The majority of the interviewees who admit that they did not go to the cinema, state that it was impossible for them to find a theatre. In fact, they are not many who deliberately decided not to participate in this leisure activity.

The most meaningful data on the unavoidable imposition of this external obstacle cinema attendance are reflected in two possible answers of the questionnaire. Questioning the reasons why people did not go to the cinema -because they were short of money or because there was a lack of theatres-, the most repeated answer is the last one. Thus, the limitation of a cinema network was the main obstacle. However, the lack of theatres can be interpreted differently; for example, nearby cinemas can be far from the real possibilities of those who lived in a town but had a narrow cultural view, or those who have to bear the effects of a bad distribution system, or those who were simply poor. In fact, the second impediment to attend cinema was the lack of economic resources.

Between 1931 and 1936 64.3 per cent of the absences are due to these two reasons; however, between 1961 and 1982, only 23.6 per cent. Therefore, films seem to attract almost half of the Spanish population, even if they could not enjoy it.

Nevertheless, this overview requires nuances of meaning. The first one underlines the fact that the theatre network improves as time goes by, according to the answers of this section. Therefore, the number
of those who did not go because of the lack of theatres progressively and intensively drop: from 43.3 per cent in the Republican period to 14.5 per cent between 1961 and 1982 (Chart IV). Paradoxically, the reduction of the interviewees who did not go because of the lack of theatres does not mean that the number of theatres always increased. They did for several years, but particularly many theatres closed in Spain during the last analyzed period.

Throughout the first years -more or less from 1931 to 1960- the number of theatres increased considerably, with a noticeable boom from 1940 onwards, due to the fact that the Civil War was a break in this process. Obviously, the number of theatres increased faster in big cities than in towns, which nonetheless, enjoyed a significant increase of theatres, as well. A good example is the mountainous area of Palencia, where theatres progressively increased to reach the number of 15 in 11 towns, a maximum which took place in 1959. Ten years later, there were only 11 theatres in 7 villages, and between 1969 and 1972, the numbers dropped spectacularly: 5 theatres in 4 towns (Roman and Blanco, 2002:132).

The exhibition sector first closed the theatres on the verge of bankruptcy; and closures continued. In fact, this process led to a better distribution of audiences in the theatres, due to the reduction of the cinema demand. Apparently, this drop has a prelude: the change in entertainment behavior of part of the Spanish population. It does not seem that television accelerated this process (Camporesi, 2007), though it was noteworthy as a new means of enjoying leisure time. In the same way, we have to underline the emergence of some specific past times in the rural areas: by the end of the 1960's, large discos were built in every important town of every region. Thus, the improvement in public transport, as well as the use of cars, changed entertainment patterns of young people in the rural areas (Roman and Blanco, 2002:132). Suddenly, the week-end nights -precisely when the films were released in the past- were full of other plans, and the towns' theatres closed. As a consequence, the rest of the population that would have gone to the cinema, had they been open, could not. From all this, it can be derived that events intensively affected the cities, as well.

The lack of economic resources is a subjective indicator, since it does not reflect a particular income situation, but the personal considerations on the expensiveness of this past time. In this sense, the drop of those who did not go for income reasons means an economic improvement in the country. However, it also reflects a subjective
perception: cinema is considered to be a more affordable past time than in the past. As a consequence, other reasons seem to be more significant to explain the drop in attendance—simple lack of interest, or the family and daily responsibilities;—while before the war and during the first Franquism both lack of theatres and economic reasons are of the same importance, the economic justification drastically lost its significance between 1961 and 1982.

We could say that, paradoxically, the improvement in the Spanish economy put an end to the golden age of the cinema attendance in Spain. New past times emerged for the middle and working classes, taking the traditional place of the cinema. In addition, the film industry tried to find other alternatives in production, distribution and exhibition. Theatres, re-releases and local theatres were on the verge of disappearing (Gubern et al, 2004: 367) while première theatres and short exhibition cycles were alternatives. In this context, the appearance of video also opened new leisure possibilities.

Old theatres became multi-screen auditoriums, and the new ones were located in shopping centers. In villages, some theatres were reconverted to new blocks of flats. Others, however, are still closed as a memorial to another era. Many theatres were demolished in the poor areas, while they still remain on the main streets of cities in accordance with law: they were historical landmarks. They brought to a close a silent revolution of the leisure behavior in Spain.

3. Most popular films

It could be said that the Spaniard’s cinematographic taste, reflected on our interviewees, had not changed a lot between 1931 and 1982. Among the eleven film categories considered, only four of them are mentioned by 51.9 per cent of the interviewees during the period which goes from 1931 to 1936: comedies —*laughter*— get 14.4 per cent of the answers; folk films—which include an extended number of the typically Spanish movies, popularly called *españoladas*—13 per cent (Camporesi, 1993: 29-65); adventure films (12.5 per cent); and romantic films, also called love stories, reached 12 per cent.

If we could describe the survivors according to their tastes and favorite films, we would have to state that they had a great sense of humor, and that they enjoyed laughing. They were true-blue Spaniards and they love their traditions, maybe because they could understand it
better or they felt themselves linked to them. They were also romantic, and women accepted unlikely affairs with easy and sentimentalist plots as credible. Men got enthused about adventure films -as romantic as the previous ones, but respecting the canon imposed by the time-. Manly, brave, and daring characters populated the historical sets Hollywood recreated. They carried out good deeds -even although they had to impose them by force-. They carried out justice without mercy, and punished villains. It was even possible to see the villain matching the hero's faction if he was not too depraved, though. Even Spanish films fit this description, with the only exception of the typical American genres (Gubern et alli, 2004: 230).

3.1 Laughs and sighs (of love)

During the war years, comedies (13.5 per cent), folk films (12.1 per cent), romantic films (11.4 per cent) and adventure films (12.1 per cent), amounted to 50.1 per cent of the references. These figures are predictable to some extent: there were barely any premières, and audiences constantly watched the same films. After the Civil War there is a slow decline of the inclination towards these majority genres. Thus, although they keep on receiving nearly half of the preferences (46.2 per cent during the first Franquism, from 1940 to 1960), it never surpasses this figure, and gradually moves away: actually, to 44.6 per cent in the period within 1961 and 1982.

In the intermediate audience rating, there are some films that we might label as “genre films:” westerns, musicals and horror films. In percentages, they are seen as less favorite in comparison with the four genres already mentioned, with the only exception being the western. In general, westerns were always praised, but during the Second Republic years, they occupied a position immediately under the four big fictional genres (10.4 per cent of the references). During the three years of the Civil War they remained in this position, but according to the memories of those polled, their audience increased -11 per cent of the references-.

However, soon after the war, the western reaches fourth place, overcoming the adventure genre (the 10.8 per cent of the references). The last Franquism presents a very similar situation: again, adventure films, with 10.6 per cent of the answers of those polled, overlap the western (10.1 per cent). It is probable that circumstances in Hollywood itself had an influence on this result.

In any case, tastes began to diversify, in spite of the fact that the
four big categories remained the same in the overall position. Thus, from 1940 to 1960 comedies (11.6 per cent), folk films (11 per cent), romantic films (11.4 per cent), adventure films (10.6 per cent) and westerns had an overall pre-eminence lower than 50 per cent. This centralization in tastes got damaged between 1961 and 1982: they register 44.6 per cent of the answers.

We can talk about steady tendencies through this latter period. Film appraisals are more varied, but it does not exactly mean a broadening of tastes. Probably, it was not tastes but movies themselves what changed, as well as the education of a significant audience group. This last consideration is more difficult to prove, so that it is only a hypothesis which has to be studied. In any case, there is a newly set cinematographic style from the 1970’s on.

It is probable that the decline of Hollywood’s classic film narrative influenced this fall in the appraisal of prevailing film types. In fact, *Jaws*, *The Godfather*, *Star Wars*, *Apocalypse Now*, etc. were released in Spain during these years, putting an end to the worn-out classic genres. People felt that they were ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘overexposed.’ The revitalization of American narrative itself was very well-received, as figures reveal: the mention of other kinds of film suggests it. Thus, historical films (9.5 per cent) approach westerns (10.1 per cent), and musicals are now more present (7.6 per cent).

The Spanish version of this evolution is adequately reflected in the evolution of the most typical Spanish cinematographic genre, the folk film, which decreased in importance throughout these critical years: from second to third place. However, even while in comparative terms folklore film was less popular, its consumption -in absolute terms- seems to increase through the studied period, especially during the last two stages (Chart V). With regard to films, the Franquism seemed to encourage the representation of the ‘typically Spanish’ in film.

Love films went through a similar process with some different features. As the questionnaires suggest, they were gradually appreciated, climbing from fourth place to second. Therefore, picking the answers of those who assert remembering them, the transformation curve is clear: they reflect a continuous and upward curve. It culminates between 1961 and 1982, the period in which love films are remembered by 80.8 per cent of those polled.

In short, laugh and love sighs seem to frame the cinematographic tastes of Spanish audiences, which also looked to adventures and all other features with which they could empathize. The appreciation for the
typically Spanish had many forms, like flounced dresses, highly emotional singers, or stereotyped characters inherited from Spanish classical theater: from *La Celestina* to nineteenth Romanticism (Camporesi, 1993: 37-60).

### 3.2 NO-DO: typically Spanish

Due to the fact that fictional films constituted form of mass entertainment, newsreels and documentaries were also watched and even praised. Both constitute 10.8 per cent of the answers reported on the Second Spanish Republic. Nonetheless, documentaries on their own contribute only 3.6 per cent. The scant significance of the documentary in the memories of those polled is amazing, and even more so if we consider that the press gave great importance to it at this time.

Allegedly, two factors might explain this divergence. The first one has a historical character: as documentaries lost importance throughout the succeeding decades, their memory blurred, too. At the very moment of answering this survey, the majority of the interviewees had forgotten a genre of great importance in the 1930’s. However, it should be pointed out that the majority of those polled were either children or very young at the time. Thus, attendance to documentaries might be hidden because of their age. They probably went to ‘children’s animated days’ (Cañada, 2005: 96-177) where documentaries were inserted in programming which also showed cartoons and newsreels.

Secondly, highlighted should be the importance that the NO-DO had during the Franquism (Rodriguez and Sánchez, 2002: 96-177). Their importance is such that, probably by absorption and merging of memory, the NO-DO has blurred both memories of previous newsreels and documentaries. In fact, to make the answer easier, we asked the interviewees to remember the *NODOS* which preceded the NO-DO, referring thus to the newsreels and documentaries of the Second Republic. The conclusion is that, in the mind of many of those polled, documentaries and newsreels were the same (Mataud, 2007: 535).

In any case, cinematographic newsreels were always important in Spain, though figures show an amazing increase in the memory of NO-DO concerning its emergence (1943) and its height. In part, this is due to the monopoly of this kind of newsreel, which lost part of its significance with the spread of mass television broadcasting in Spain (*Chart VI*). At that time, television news replaced the NO-DO's informative function.
With reference to the number of times that a newsreel is mentioned in the questionnaires, the percentage is 7.2 per cent for the years of the Second Republic, increasing to 8.5 per cent during the Civil War. This growth seems natural since people were interested in the course of the war. The interest increased even more due to the fact that these images were described as ‘impossible to be deceptive’. However, both factions were overflowing with propaganda, and audiences knew it. The governments of the two Spains were interested in releasing their own newsreels, and the efforts were not pointless: 50.2 per cent of those who, by that time, watched films state remembering this genre and such productions. Nonetheless, the answers of the interviewees perhaps reflect more the deep impression of their parents and relatives than their own memories themselves.

Putting aside the matter of its propagandistic effectiveness, the permanence of the NO-DO in the memory of Spaniards who lived in the years when it was exclusively and mandatorily shown cannot be denied (Paz, 2003). The resulting figures of this survey show it clearly and conclusively. Thus, between 1941 and 1961, its consumption reaches the highest modal value, becoming the most viewed film of its period, including the fictional ones mentioned above. In fact, Franquist newsreel emerged shortly after the beginning of the period January, 1943. From then on, any competition it might have had was eliminated: in its creation decree, NO-DO was declared the only newsreel to be shown in Spain. Therefore, the ones existing until then were suspended. Because of its pre-eminence, referring to it seems mandatory among those polled.

Once the information alternatives disappeared, the NO-DO's screening became compulsory, so that its importance and the production company itself did not stop growing. Then, it can be supposed that neither did its influence. It was really difficult to avoid something so present, even though its propagandistic nature was well-known. That, for other reasons, was impossible to hide.

Its subsequent decline is only relative, since questionnaire figures continue to be very high. In any case, television's penetration into the Spanish society was fast and successful from the mid 1960's on, as well as was the drop in cinema-attendance. Besides this fall in the audience, the obligation to show the NO-DO was abolished (August, 1975) not long before Franco’s death, only to be eliminated (January 1980). In a way, its disappearance from the screens would justify the fact that NO-DO is minimized in the memory of those polled as we get closer to the present.
4. Conclusion

Going to the cinema does not turn the audience into a new social group, not even in the case of those who go regularly. In this sense, we can not even talk about a historical date in which we are able to identify the emergence of a new social movement.

Nonetheless, through cinema-attendance percentages we can study one of the most interesting social processes western countries have lived through: a silent revolution in entertainment patterns. It is a way of behaving with no specific characteristics, but citizens adopt ways of life increasingly linked to the importance of leisure, play activities, and the spare time.

The praise of an individualistic work, typical of the middle class and characteristic of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth centuries, found its counter-balance in some high culture representations: theatre, opera, quality literature, gatherings and celebrations -more or less luxurious-. Taken together these activities formed a means of entertainment, though it required a basic intellectual education to enjoy them.

This intellectual training made it impossible for the craftsmen to enjoy this leisure, which was also impracticable for him because he needed to rest from his work. However, an entertainment for the working class was absolutely necessary in a world in which -little by little- periods of free time were progressively longer.

In this process of a slow increase of spare time, cinema played an important role. It also had a remarkable financial effect for the salaried worker as well as for the future middle classes. Only a spectacle which was able to multiply almost without limit its supply, could meet this increase in the demand of free-time activities. And that was cinema: all the reproductions of the movies the market required could be made. In this sense, cinema was profoundly democratic: poor and rich, educated and ignorant, men and women, even children and adults were able to enjoy the same product. Cinema reversed the circus strategy of doubling its skits in order to cover the whole range of ages: with only one act, films managed to attract everybody in the industrialized societies. Film could offer what theatres, opera houses and even the circus could not. It seemed the most important invention of the twentieth century, and it was advertised as if it were.

This way, film emerged as an archetypical product within the mass culture framework. On the one hand, it favored a process of
entertainment standardization and popularization; but on the other hand, it caused many unfavorable reactions among those who considered that the cinema had to be a means for participating in the public arena. Thereby, the first mass communication theoreticians (Le Bon, Tarde, Tocqueville, etc.) were worried about the rise of majorities. They thought that they would result in a situation in which the potential audience would be unable to understand the messages, using their reason and critical sense for it.

Payne Foundation studies endeavored to point out the psychological and physical symptoms linked to the cinematographic consumption. The debate was between those who had an apocalyptic vision and those who felt “integrated” with the new medium, or the Frankfurt School theorists’ discourse about entertainment products, stressing the allegedly ‘degraded’ and alienated nature of ‘culture for everybody’. Eventually, this critical viewpoint has been inherited nowadays by academics who study the effects of television. Among others, there are the cases of the ‘cultivation theory’, or Noelle Neunmann’s ‘silence spiral’ (Saperas, 1998; McQuail, 1985). In other words, presently the critical understanding of mass culture has moved from the cinematographic production to television. The latter is seen as a popular and barbarian medium par excellence.

In this article, we have tackled the significance of cinema as a popular media throughout some key years in Spanish history of the twentieth century. To do this, we have tried to measure the memory of many movie-goers who went to the cinema in these years, taking into account their nostalgic tales in order to reconstruct a lost record of cinema-attendance. We have done this in order to recover certain features of this leisure behavior that would have been impossible to study any other way. However, the obvious limitation of working with memory and nostalgia has defined analysis possibilities. We have worked hard to avoid forcing the figures and data.

We have offered an initial overview presentation in previous pages. Nevertheless, it is convenient to remind the reader that history is also made up of interpretations of the past: what the facts were, and the different perceptions of them. That is the best way to have explanations take on the diversity of reactions to the same events.

In general, people go to the cinema looking for entertainment. Paradoxically, we have observed that those with more education are more conscious of this aspect (always in indirect and non-definitive nuances). This fact occurs with almost every film. However, there are
other possible approaches to film reality, as well: from the standpoint of an organized type of persuasion; from the conviction of witnessing a cultural or educational representation, etc. Nonetheless, we have to remind the reader that these approaches are possible only because film is almost exclusively a means of entertainment which is focused on business. This key idea is essential to allow us to keep in mind –at least up to the present– a complex structure of production, distribution and exhibition. Its analysis highlights the importance of entertainment and spare time in our societies.

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