

Star Wars (1977) as an appealing fiction: the success and the gathering symbols of Americanness

Star Wars (1977) como uma ficção cativante: o seu sucesso e a conjunção de símbolos da *Americanness*

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Abstract: This paper orbits Star Wars (1977), Hollywood, and the usage of Americanness by the movie in a specific context and mode. It is argued that Star Wars fiction stems mostly from blending elements of democratic tradition, space exploration, Western frontier, and American Orientalism under a specific interpretation of Americanness. This fusion happened precisely after more or less a decade of New Hollywood Cinema, which, along with the usage of cultural symbols, produced the movie often considered as the one that reestablished Hollywood's substantial profit. Starting with definitions of Hollywood and Americanness, the paper then contextualizes movie theater dynamics to the 1960s and the rise of New Hollywood Cinema. Right after, it examines how these contextual elements contributed to an astonishing box office success, highlighting the potential for studying commercially successful films in a historical context where research is relatively scarce.

Keywords: Star Wars; History of Cinema; Americanness.

Resumo: Este artigo aborda Star Wars (1977), Hollywood e a utilização da Americanness pelo filme num contexto e modo específicos. Argumenta-se que a ficção do filme resulta sobretudo da fusão de elementos da tradição democrática, da exploração espacial, da fronteira ocidental e do orientalismo Estadunidense sob uma interpretação específica da Americanness. Esta fusão ocorreu precisamente após mais ou menos uma década de cinema da Nova Hollywood, que, juntamente com a utilização de símbolos culturais amalgamados, produziu o filme considerado por alguns como o restaurador de lucros altos de Hollywood. Começando com as definições de Hollywood e de Americanness, o artigo contextualiza a dinâmica das salas de cinema até a década de 1960 e a ascensão do cinema da Nova Hollywood. Logo a seguir, examina como estes elementos contextuais contribuíram para um espantoso sucesso de bilheteira, salientando o potencial de estudo de filmes de sucesso comercial num âmbito onde a investigação é relativamente escassa.

Palavras-chave: Star Wars; História do cinema; *Americanness*

Introduction

It is not a new fact that Star Wars (1977) is a fiction with a broad range of significance over the Western culture, especially the American one.⁹⁹ Be it for the aesthetics, be it for myth-based narrative, the variety of appreciators is enormous. Therefore, the whole fiction developed might be used as a cultural artifact to analyze its aspects and symbolism. Scholars not rarely undervalue pop culture objects related to ‘immature fictions’, mainly because, in a space where social and intellectual capitals are produced, the objects of study usually correspond to these capitals. Thus, fictions derived from pop culture like Star Wars are set aside to prioritize more consecrated things, as many scholars are often embarrassed by the presence of such ‘childish fiction’ (BROOKER, 2018, p. 8). Considering this point of view, I intend to use Star Wars fiction as an object of study.

This paper is part of a broad, ongoing (nonetheless in the early steps) research theme based on the fiction of Star Wars (1977) and the Cultural History of Cinema in the United States during the 20th Century. The frame introduced here aims to comprehend Star Wars as an appealing fiction due to its capacity to gather crucial elements amalgamated into American cultural life from 1900 until its official release. Therefore, the main hypothesis stated is that the fiction in matter was so popular when introduced in the Hollywood movie market because it combined, in its way, elements of democratic tradition, space exploration, Western frontier, and American Orientalism (all of them derived from a specific usage of Americanness, an important concept articulated here) in a specific momentum, which has been described as the fall of traditional Hollywood and the rise of the New Hollywood Cinema. Thus, the movie was a stunning box office and cultural success as specific, captivating cultural elements were incorporated into fiction after approximately one decade of movies with few appealing fictional elements for the average movie consumer. To structure this argument, the text starts by providing two definitions: Hollywood as a specific mode of movie business; and Americanness as an exploratory idea for the American symbolism. I use both in the meaning of a ‘cultural compendium’. Shortly after there will be a contextualizing stage for the dynamics of movie theaters starting in the 1920s, the fall of traditional movie dynamics in the 1960s, and the rise of New Hollywood Cinema in the same decade. This part is important to follow the hypothesis. Lastly, the text will navigate through the

⁹⁹ Despite the problems regarding use of “American” to refer to the United States of America in Central and Latin America, the paper will conserve the meaning of American as of belonging to the USA, as it is written in English.

aforementioned elements and how they are articulated into a successful Space Opera and then, head to the conclusion.¹⁰⁰

Concepts

Hollywood, beyond a simple geographic space where movies are produced, can be used as a concept related to a way of producing films. The American industries which were developed in California from the 1920s onwards were, mostly, developed under the conditions of a few major studios guiding and selecting special themes and ideas to produce feasible fiction capable of engaging consumers in movie theaters. It was, thus, an oligopoly situation – as can be observed with the 'block booking' practice (THOMPSON; BORDWELL, 2003, p. 335) –, which was driven by major studios – such as MGM and Paramount (SCOTT, 2004; JAY EPSTEIN, 2005, p. 4). The major studios had, under their cover, a specific range of possibilities to achieve an average American movie consumer. In such a context, Hollywood can also be understood as social and economic dynamics on the cultural pattern of American life (BORDWELL, 2005).

Considering this aforementioned idea, it is possible to argue that Hollywood, trying to produce feasible stories for American consumers, attempted to broadly use a concept to define what could be produced: the idea of Americanness. By this concept, I intend to understand a compendium of symbols that, gathered, produce the idea of what is to be an individual in the United States of America. Needless to say, it is virtually impossible to define this general idea into a few expressions and nouns, as this whole compendium covers a broad number of symbols (mostly relied upon values); however, it is frankly possible to cover some core elements.

As Bronner (2021, p. 1) points out, “Americanness represents ways of thinking and acting shaped by history, society, politics, and geography connected to the United States, and is associated with people identifying as Americans”. Albeit the intention of describing the Americanness, it is arduous to do it as the concept is hard to materialize. What is possible to catch, however, as the text follows, is precisely the general patterns that guide the sense of being born American and adopting

¹⁰⁰ There are discussions on how Star Wars is a post-modern pastiche; nevertheless, this paper does not aim for a text-literature-shaped discussion. The scope is precisely in the cultural patterns evoked in American life and how they are portrayed together to produce an appealing fiction. Some texts with these contents might be used as support. Nevertheless, the discussion orbits the cultural circulation used by the movie, not the reference to other prior fictions *per se*.

some key characteristics. The author provides three broad features articulated within the American culture: 1) space, which is understood by the presence of frontier in USA's national history; 2) time, that is, essentially the future-oriented, commercial perspective; 3) the winning culture, oriented to victory (therefore included in sports, social life, military, etc.).

If it is hard to materialize the core elements of Americanness, then does it happen to be an impossible task for the researcher to select core subjects and nouns? It might be either arduous or risky, but it is possible. For this paper, it is reasonably possible to catch up on some general subjects and describe them as significant to represent what is to be American. The intention, hence, is to provide some defined elements that have a fruitful connection with the cultural tendencies based on space, time, and winning culture as they are often understood as national traits in the USA. Some of them, important to this essay, are Christian morality, agonistic dualism, the faith in democracy, and the frontiers. These few elements happen to be understood here as traits of a living, large cultural compendium in the country's national history, which are normally shared and intertwined by industrial folklore – after all, the country has had in its historical development a solid industrial initiative, strands of Christianity from all over Europe (and especially the puritanism on its high political elites and administrators), democratic foundations opposed to the European aristocracy, and an expanding frontier in terms of land and business since its birth, all these elements normally blend as national traits.

Thus, by understanding the idea of Americanness, I intend to link it to the shown perception of Hollywood, immersed in the attempt to profit and explore always new consumers. In such a sense, Hollywood used frequently this broad cultural compendium as a manner to fully reach the audiences and, thus, create attractive stories with common themes making often references to Americanness. Star Wars, as it will be articulated, was a fiction capable of joining crucial symbolism of this cultural compendium during a specific context, which made it possible to catch up with the *momentum*.

In addition to the core elements aforementioned, Bronner also argues on the cultural patterns shown in the USA's national history. Elite, folk, and popular are ways and conditions in which culture *per se* flows through society. Despite the incompatibility between them at first glance, normally they can be together:

[...] I follow the convention of using adjectives of folk, popular, and elite to describe cultural processes. As processes of learning and production, they can be types of action that are not mutually exclusive. They should not be construed to be hierarchical divisions. Indeed, most people have combinations of folk, popular, and

elite ideas in their heads. The analytical terms are useful to draw attention to different modes of learning and transmitting culture and the social and environmental contexts associated with them. (*Ibidem*, p. 4)

Insofar he argues on folk as a matter of oral-based traditions and popular as a more commercial, standardized pattern, I shall use for this paper a derived conception: American industrial folklore. If folk is used by the author as previously explained, I shall use folklore as a collection of symbolism incorporated into some objects that are closely attached to Americanness (such as the cowboy, as it will be used ahead). Therefore, folklore refers, here, to a gathering of objects that are derived from elite, folk, and popular and are amalgamated in a melting pot of common symbols attached to Americanness and available to the average channels of cultural circulation.

New Hollywood Cinema and the Americanness

If Hollywood is, by the definition presented here, a dynamic with major studios selecting specific themes for movies, so the so-called 'Golden Age of Hollywood' can be considered as the peak of this specific dynamic. This period, usually defined by scholars as the time between 1920 and 1960, is a time in which Hollywood played a significant role in American political, economic, and social life. By this time, observing retrospectively, Hollywood obtained, as it went by, incomes from what was then called the blockbuster industry: mass productions based on merchandising and well-succeeded economically (HALL; NEALE, 2010, cap. 7).

As described by Thompson and Bordwell, the Golden Age, also called the Classical Hollywood Cinema, started its dynamics during the 1920s:

The Motion Picture Patents Company had dominated the American film industry between 1908 and 1911, but it lost much of its power after a 1912 court decision rendered the Latham-loop patent void (see p. 40). Independent firms soon regrouped and expanded into a studio system that would form the basis for American filmmaking for decades. Certain filmmaking roles -chiefly the role of the producer - became central. In addition, the star system gained full strength, as celebrities came to command enormous salaries and even began producing in their own right. (THOMPSON; BORDWELL, 2003, p. 68)

Since the 1920s, therefore, Hollywood started a characteristic process that has given the major studios a key role in movie production. Technologies such as the sound system, developed from the 1920s onwards, were innovative, and appealing, which contributed to the formation of Hollywood's dynamics (*Ibidem*, cap. 9). Furthermore, the themes were mostly strict in order to obtain high

commercial values for the major studios. These contextual elements, needless to say, were also imbibed in social pressure, cinematographic standards, and tensions amidst movie makers and movie entrepreneurs.

These dynamics, however, suffered a huge setback that started during the late 1960s, and, for a decade, they were affected and changed the ways that movie productions used to operate with. This specific process has its roots in three general situations that were happening according to the context: the social movements from the 1960s; the inflationary process started in the late 1960s; and the disbelief in the political narratives sustained by the United States Government (namely Nixon's presidency and McCarthyism).

To begin with, according to Boyler *et al* (2011, cap. 27), the domestic economic scenario after the Second World War was, in the United States, favorable to high economic development. With almost no land destroyed and victorious, the United States observed by that time continuous waves of economic production, creating what was called, for the first time, an affluent society, based on prominent levels of consumption. Between 1945 and the early 1970s, therefore, the United States was the head of what is called, by many, the golden age of capitalism:

In 1958, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith published *The Affluent Society*, a study of postwar America, whose title reflected the broad-based prosperity that made the 1950s seem the fulfillment of the American Dream. By the end of the decade, about 60 percent of American families owned homes; 75 percent, cars; and 87 percent, at least one TV. Government spending, a huge upsurge in productivity, and steadily increasing consumer demand pushed the gross national product (GNP) up 50 percent. The United States achieved the world's highest living standard ever. By 1960, the average worker's income, adjusted for inflation, was 35 percent higher than in 1945. With just 6 percent of the world's population, the United States produced and consumed nearly half of everything made and sold on Earth. (*Ibidem*, p. 826).

This general context had its end with the Oil Shock in 1973, even though the rates of production had been decreasing continuously a few years before. This stop on economic production produced elevated levels of inflation - 14% - and unemployment:

Disturbing economic developments forced millions of Americans in the 1970s to, according to a magazine, "Learn to Live with Less," less energy and jobs, less possibilities and power. Unemployment ranged between 6 and 10 percent, nearly twice the usual postwar level, and the federal deficit soared from \$8.7 billion in 1970 to \$72.7 billion in 1980. (*Ibidem*, p. 908).

This general depreciation in the economy had a significant impact on the movie in Hollywood. Postwar cinema had a few problems with television and other forms of entertainment, but the major studios found a way to overcome such problems by adapting their products and defending the investments in the oligopolies. The transition between the 1960s and 1970s, however, impacted the whole country's economy and brought bigger problems to Hollywood. The general inflation resulted in a long-term recession in the movie industry, which impacted directly the budgets for blockbusters, as well as the box offices since the consumers had less consumption power.

As well clarified by *Variety*, "Until the over-production boom of 1966–68 the film industry, by accident or design, had kept feature film inventory levels at sensible proportions commensurate with the likely return from theatrical and free-tv markets. But Hollywood got caught up in its own blockbuster fantasy which, combined with a national inflationary boom, saw fiscal discipline disintegrate." (*VARIETY*, 1973, p.4 *apud* HALL; NEALE, 2010, p. 194).

Neil and Hall add:

The bubble finally burst in 1969, when virtually all the major studios began declaring corporate losses that over the next three years totaled over \$500 million. [...] Thus a combination of overproduction, overspending, and overestimation of the market's value, along with the accumulation of hidden costs and the maintenance of production and release policies committed to making the most expensive items, most of them distributed in the slowest and most risky release patterns, for the smallest and least reliable audience sector, had led to what was perceived at the time as the downfall of the traditional studio system (or what little remained of it). Paramount executive Martin S. Davis commented, "the era of the majors, as we knew it in the so-called golden age of Hollywood, is over." (HALL; NEALE, 2010, p. 194, 195).

Secondly, the social movements, needless to say, had a crucial impact on the USA's domestic politics and social relations. Be it for the counterculture, be it for second-wave feminism based on the Feminine Mystique, be it for anti-war movements, be it for racial equality, the social movements from the 1960s had a deep impact on transforming American culture; what affected the artistic productions (KIRSHNER, 2012, cap. 1). Movies such as *Easy Rider* (1969) or *Chinatown* (1974) had, respectively, themes of drugs with liberty and open ends, with no constricted narratives.

The political narratives, by their time, also had a considerable influence. The Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal, as well as other problems on a smaller scale, disrupted the political narratives (KIRSHNER, 2012, cap. 3). For the first time in decades, it was possible to observe a broader disbelief/mistrust (from both political perspectives) related to political statements. What was done did not correspond to what was being stated by head politicians.

Therefore, these specific contexts, gathering political, economic, and social factors, made Hollywood shift and open space to a new generation of moviemakers from 1968 onwards, which were preoccupied with bringing new ways to produce movies, based mostly on the new waves of French and Italian cinemas. This new generation, composed of young producers with the permission to have their own authorial role, since Hollywood was passing through the aforementioned problems, had the possibility to insert taboo-based themes, a situation unlikely to happen in Hollywood and its own use of Americanness.

Thus, as Kirscher summarizes,

The end of censorship, the passing of the old guard of the studio system, and economic and demographic changes in both the industry and its audience created unprecedented uncertainty and a crisis of confidence that afforded an opportunity for a new type of commercial film. At the same time, the content of those new films, especially (but not exclusively) those created by a new generation of filmmakers, could not help but be shaped by the omnipresent social and political upheavals of the era: the civil rights movement, the domestic consequences of the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, women's liberation, the end of the long postwar economic boom, and the traumatic Shakespearean saga of the Nixon presidency. (*Ibidem*, p. 4).

In such a context, this new generation grew to be known as the New Hollywood or the American Wave. Directors like Francis Ford Coppola and actors like Jack Nicholson and Al Pacino became famous precisely for this context in movies like *Chinatown* (1974) or *The Godfather* (1972). This definition, incidentally, is not retrospective: during the early years of the movement, scholars were already describing it as something rather new (KIRSHNER, 2012, p. 5).

What needs to be analyzed here is precisely the themes covered by these new directors. They were trying to define new ways to observe what the United States by getting in touch with new perspectives brought by the social movements back then – a constant dialogue between society (especially youth society, in this context) and this new group of directors. Taboos were incorporated because new subjects needed to be discussed and presented to the public. It was, therefore, a movement that stood, in general, against the idea of *Americanness* (surrounded by morality, dualisms, and the defense of American democracy). The movies had no attachment to conscripted narratives with a predictable end, with a duel between good and bad, or tyranny vs democracy.

Within this framework, the movies were mostly appealing to the young generations, especially the individuals influenced by the social movements' themes. To the more conservative groups, which were still the majority in the USA, the themes were a menace: a feasible threat to the core values of

being American. And what was a new artistic exploration for some groups, was also a period of decadence and crisis in movie-making for Hollywood.

Star Wars enters the scene

If the New Hollywood was, up to some point, a considerable threat to the idea of *Americanness* and a decrease in profit margins if compared to Hollywood at its peak, I argue here that *Star Wars* (1977) was a remarkable and extremely successful fiction due to its capacity to gather crucial elements of *Americanness* into one single fiction and, therefore, with the momentum (*i.e.* after a decade of generally unsavory fictions from the New Hollywood to the average movie consumer), produced the biggest box office of its time. Needless to say, moreover, the essay analyzes the movie until its release; *Star Wars*, however, has had long-term impacts on pop culture.

Within this framework, I intend to analyze the following aspects of *Americanness* incorporated into the fiction: the frontier (in its majority with the cowboy-based character); Orientalism; space exploration; and the democratic tradition.

The cowboy-based role and the frontier are represented together in the movie based on the character Han Solo. Regarding the idea shown by Frederick J. Turner (1996) about the frontier in American History, I intend to use one of the most symbolic characters of this expansion, which has a long tradition in movie representations: the cowboy. The frontier, according to Turner, was, for the American people, the space where the civilized had to deal with the wilderness in a progressive conquer of nature. It stopped European means of expansion and created a new, purely American perspective towards the unexplored land, which settled for American democracy and individualism. This frontier situation might have the best example in the American cowboy in popular culture: an individual who comes from an urban, civilized place but has to act according to the situations in wilderness based on his sense of inner rightness in the moving frontier. There is, therefore, no theorist of peace and democracy in the frontier, only the sense of rightness and violence whenever it is necessary to prevail fair distribution.

As Slotkin (1998, cap. 2) argues, the Frontier Myth is perhaps the most enduring myth in American culture, even if it is not the only ideological myth to shape the nation's values. As a myth in essence, the Frontier Myth acts as part of the language, containing essential elements of worldview, which have been incorporated into the national mentality, even in a modern, industrialized society. They portray regenerative violence (either personal or social) as a legitimate act where no other means

are available to solve eventual problems. In terms of popular mass culture, the myth continued to gain significant ground during the 19th century.

Hollywood used this myth several times during the 20th century, up to the point where the American cowboy is still a living thing in American life. As Langford (2005, p. 55) points out, "Western illustrates the use of genre as a means of mapping historical experience onto popular media texts through an analysis of shifts in genre conventions. The exceptionally high degree of codification and conventionality to be found in Westerns makes tracing this process unusually transparent." In this context, the Western has condensed narrative patterns that have remained stable over time. Beginning in the Silent Era in 1905, the film genre reached its peak of popularity between the 1930s and 1950s, signaling its importance to the Hollywood industry. Such relevance has brought constant themes, which are, in a sense, incorporated by Star Wars.

The traditional perspective, developed especially in the early 1930s onwards, is of a character brought to the wild, where he has to deal with perilous situations without abandoning his sense of morality. Frontier, therefore, in this context, is attached to personal, regenerative justice (not necessarily by law, as the West is a frontier ground, where law *per se* is still being consolidated) amidst adventures.

In such a situation, Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford, is this symbolic character incorporated into fiction, portrayed as a space cowboy who, despite his selfishness, still engages in fighting against evil (represented by the empire). A lot of factors can be analyzed, like the discourses, the clothing, the morality, and the occupation: a character wearing something similar to a cowboy vest, the way to use a gun, the occupation in cargo transportation, and the discourse attached to rightness in a space surrounded by scammers and gangsters.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, if solitude, self-sufficiency, and pragmatism are core traits of an ideal Western hero (BIDERMAN, 2010; DEN UYL, 2010; CSAKI, 2010), one can argue that Han Solo's character incorporates those traits in the first movie.

The second possibility is the Orientalist perspective developed along the fiction, which represented inhabitants of Tatooine similarly to Orientalist representations of the Middle East and North Africa. Said, in his seminal book *Orientalism* (SAID, 1990), did not pay much attention to popular culture, especially in the United States. This was expected from a scholar who researching high

¹⁰¹ Therefore: a space where the written law is not totally applied, like the western frontier, but the character remains morally positive.

culture-based poetry and painting. Other studies, however, based on the idea of Orientalism used by Said, intended to study this representation in the United States.¹⁰²

According to Teo (TEO, 2014), Orientalism in the United States has been developed in a whole variety of modes, with a broad range of possibilities. The most common, developed at the beginning of the 20th century, was mostly about consumption and extravagant sexual fantasies about the Middle East and North Africa (*Ibidem*, p. 7), especially the ones involving harem dancers. This one was sexually based; however, by any means, the Muslim influence in the Middle East was already sometimes observed as decadent (and, consequently, stereotyped), since they were disrupting the ways of living used by the Hebrews and Christians in Jerusalem (MCALISTER, 2001, pt. Introduction) – a treat to a nation based on the protestant puritanism.

As argued by McAlister, “The disjuncture between expectation and experience was sometimes itself a proof of the superiority of Christianity, since the failures of the local population to live up to the biblically inspired romantic hopes of Americans was generally explained as evidence of a general “regression and decrepitude” that were connected both to the “weakness and vices of the Ottoman rule” and to “elements of the Mussulman character.” (*Ibidem*, p. 20).

This discussion is placed here precisely to evoke the continuous Orientalism developed in *Star Wars* (1977). Tatooine, a remote, fictional planet where Luke Skywalker was born, is largely inspired by landscapes in Tunisia (SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE, 2024). The planet, a desolate place with no capacity for law and a lack of civilization, is related to the Muslim Berbers living in North Africa. A place where the State’s law based on bureaucracy is impossible to implant and robbers and raiders have plenty of room to rob and sell stolen merchandise. These raiders, also called the Sand People in the movie, wear stereotyped vests and use rudimentary weapons, just as the plenty of descriptions commonly reproduced by the Orientalist perspectives. Also, the way Sand People and Jawas are portrayed in scamming, trash-trade activities, and stealing are shown as a natural, common behavior, which could be used, as argued by Senanayake (2021, p. 65), as a way to provoke a strong reaction to the movie consumer and, at the same time, confirm the Western values.

Another appealing symbol is contained in the movie’s title itself: space exploration. From the late 1950s onwards, space exploration related to the Cold War was a common element in American

¹⁰² These interpretations are called Post-Saidian Orientalism since they try to positively criticize the seminal work and readjust it to new perspectives.

life,¹⁰³ and it was well-represented in the movie plenty of times. Navigating through space is one of the most remarkable situations portrayed in fiction. It possibly demonstrates, as the movie was released in 1977, the effervescence of winning culture in the USA as the Cold War had its heat moments.

Lastly, the democratic tradition is, also needless to say, an essential element of the American experience, as already explored by Turner and many other scholars in plenty of possibilities and has its representation in the scenario. The whole plot developed, together with the use of The Force, is precisely between the republican rebels and the empire. Along with this concept, republic vs empire is linked mostly to a dualistic morality: while the rebels fight the empire, it is also the good fighting against the evil. The way the movie targets good and evil in the agonistic scenario might be confusing, especially if seen by the right-wing potentialities (BROOKER, 2007; WOOD, 2003, cap. 8); however, the movie well done separates the spontaneous will of the Rebels in keeping the regional differences, which collect Luke and Han Solo to the cause, from the Empire-based initiative of shaping “the world in its own likeness” (BROOKER, 2007, p. 304). Furthermore, as the rebels have political meetings, they happen to be conference-room-liked, meanwhile, the Empire engages in ceremonies and strict hierarchies (*Ibidem*, p. 305).

All these elements are, more or less, participants in the perception of Americanness, which, by its time-orientated perspective, winning culture, and space-driven mythology, shape the elements shown in the story. Frontier, Orientalism, space exploration, and democratic tradition are living traits of those concepts and, thus, are living objects incorporated into the fiction.

The key elements explored in the movie are part of the director’s creative potential. The aim of this paper is not to elucidate the creativity of George Lucas. The aim is precisely to illustrate how this super blockbuster got an astonishing box office success due to its capacity to gather core symbols, according to the hypothesis stated previously. The special effects had a clear impact because the movie had innovative technologies to make use of. However, films with plenty of special effects do not insinuate a satisfactory box office – firstly it has to be fictionally appealing to the movie consumer. How Star Wars fiction did it is precisely the explanation required for what it considered the savior

¹⁰³ The elements are vast but can be seen, for instance, in the common designs of American cars and toys. Largely inspired by the “Atomic Age” design, futuristic cars like the 1957 Chevrolet were popular with designs inspired by space rockets and aviation. In terms of cultural production, more in KURTZ, Malisa. *Utopia ... : Science Fiction in the 1950s and 1960s*. Em: *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction*. Cambridge Histories - Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. p. 201–217; RYAN BELLAMY, Brent. *... or Bust: Science Fiction and the Bomb, 1945–1960*. Em: *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction*. Cambridge Histories - Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. p. 218–231.

(including Spielberg's *Jaws*) of Hollywood. The 'materialized' elements used here to explain the phenomena - that is, frontier, American Orientalism, space exploration, and democratic tradition - articulate themselves with the cultural circulation within Americanness in its average channels of flowing. Moreover, ideas such as the cowboy-based character, American Orientalism, etc. are not monolithic pieces playing a determined role in the fiction, they do amalgamate themselves during the whole time, which catalyzes the story's appealing potential, after all, in a general overview, *Star Wars* portrays the struggle of rebels against the authoritarian Empire, what includes Luke's personal life in Tatooine (a location with inspirations from Tunisia), the presence of a space cowboy, who decides to engage, despite his initial selfishness and according to his inner sense of rightness, in Princess Leia's rescue in space, and the human presence in space amidst extraterrestrials (although mankind is still the dominant species). Frontier, American Orientalism, space exploration, and democratic tradition (other elements are possible, nonetheless they do not fit in one paper) blend themselves in order to generate the story based on general American perceptions of space, time, and winning culture.

Additionally, besides the fact that *Star Wars* got crucial symbolism to the cultural life in the United States, it was also released during a specific time which merged fictional, attractive elements to the *momentum* (considering that for a long time, this use of Americanness was not being fully made by movie-makers, in general) to achieve the biggest box office by its time. As already described, New Hollywood tended to produce unpopular movies for the average consumer, with taboos and open ends. *Star Wars*, released in 1977, is considered a movie that, along with Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), helped to rescue Hollywood from its multiple crises and reestablished substantial profit for the major studios (ELSAESSER; HORWATH; KING, 2004, p. 9-73). This happened, then, according to the hypothesis, due to the incorporation of Americanness in a specific context, after a long time of unpopular fictions - to the average consumer -, a cure for a one-decade-long hangover in Hollywood, so to speak.

Star Wars, in such a context, helped to establish the basis of a 'super blockbuster' industry (with movies made for multi-purpose entertainment and, as a result, multiple sources of profit), with the biggest box office by its time, profiting 775 million USD (THE NUMBERS, 2024). The elements of Americanness gathered to produce such fiction, along with the contextual momentum, were essential to captivate the mass consumers. The movie could produce a mishmash with core elements, placing Western, frontier, democratic tradition, Orientalism, and space exploration elements into one single

story, and thus the fiction has shown its potential to join all of them and operate a well-succeeded business in the movie industry.

Conclusion

Therefore, in general, the essay intended to argue that Star Wars (1977) was a fiction capable of gathering core symbolism of American cultural life over the 20th century and, along with the contextual possibilities, produced an enormous success with large impacts over the culture. For this purpose, a few elements of the cultural life incorporated into the movie were brought as evidence to analyze the potentialities and reasons for such an attractive fiction to the mass consumers. The fictional elements selected can be used, thus, to partially (but substantially) explain the reason for such astonishing success, up to the point that restored the profits from Hollywood and placed profitable productions again in the center of the movie-making industry in the USA with the 'super blockbusters'. New materialized elements of cultural life can – and shall - be used to improve the argument in the future, as other possibilities are available to move towards a better, broader understating of the phenomena. For the time being, this general frame is already part of the research issue, and it intends to include highly profitable movies as possible study objects.

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