Christoph Classen

# Enemies, Spies, and the Bomb

## Cold War Cinema in Comparison: Germany and the US, 1948–1970

"Without the Cold War, what's the point of being an American?"[1] It is the American novelist John Updike who puts this poignant leading question concerning the relationship between national identity and the bipolar world order in the second half of the 20th century into his protagonist's mouth. The man who asks this question – Harry Angstrom, the protagonist of Updike's famous "Rabbit" novels – grew up during the Cold War, and when its end is on the horizon in 1989 he indulges in nostalgia. "I miss it," he says. "The Cold War. It gave you a reason to get up in the morning."[2] It is hardly a coincidence that the historian Stephen Whitfield quotes Updike (or rather Angstrom) in one of his essays.[3] Whitfield is the author of an influential book about US-American culture during the Cold War. First published in 1991, it puts a special emphasis on the Hollywood film industry and the movies produced there during this period.[4] In a slightly exaggerated way, it is possible to say that, unlike Updike's timid hero, the now firmly established concept of a "Cold War culture" does not mourn the end of this global conflict, but equally recognizes its importance. Without the Cold War, everything is nothing. In the meantime this concept has grown beyond the American context and has transferred to Europe, although significantly in Europe the term is used in the plural – "Cold War cultures."[5]

Indeed, there is a strong case for a Cold War culture approach. The Cold War was more than just a confrontation of two international blocs under the leadership of the US and the Soviet Union as hegemonic powers. The ideological fault lines also ran visibly through the blocs themselves – at least in the West. In many cases they created a vast and enduring gulf within the nationally constituted soci-

---

**1** John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1990), 367.
**2** Ibid., 293.
**3** Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Culture of the Cold War," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*, ed. Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 256–274, here 272.
**4** Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991).
**5** Annette Vowinckel, Markus M. Payk and Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Cold War Cultures. Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2012).

eties. A more or less obvious "Cold Civil War" took place within these countries, but the structure of the "fronts" was not always bipolar. Left-wingers of different hues fought each other as well as liberals and conservatives, and endeavored to mobilize the population for their respective political views in varying constellations and alliances.[6]

For a socio-historical perspective an analysis of the mass media and its contents is essential. They are a key source for these internal conflicts within societies, suitable for a reconstruction of contemporary mentalities and sensitivities. In the media everyday life and political norms merged, often implicitly. When the media expounded topics such as gender roles or religion, education or social norms, they would make an implicit (and often explicit) statement targeted at the model of society they perceived as antagonistic during the Cold War.[7] The media were always more than just a "mirror" of general political and social discourses or objects used to exert political influence. They were major players and protagonists in these internal conflicts of society and have to be viewed and interpreted as such. During the first two decades of the Cold War, which we will explore further in this article, cinema undoubtedly played a key role despite the impending rise of television as an all-pervasive mass medium.

As hinted above, the "Cold War culture(s)" approach also seems to harbor an inherent problem: it bears the temptation to interpret culture and cultural change primarily from the perspective of an ideologically rooted global conflict and to attach less importance to other factors. It must be borne in mind, however, that the structural conditions – for instance in the film industry – dated back into the period before 1945 and their impact persisted in the postwar period. The advanced postwar industrial and consumer societies also experienced a significant social transformation that encompassed all areas of life. While the bipolar conflict formed the backdrop for this transformation, it was hardly its sole reason. An example: if the film industry in the US and its products changed fundamentally since the 1960s (New Hollywood), this transformation occurred primarily because of internal change processes within society which had a very limited relation to the Cold War.[8] In addition, the term "Cold War" alone tends to homog-

---

**6** See pars pro toto for the German case Patrick Major, *The Death of the KPD. Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany 1945–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

**7** Thomas Lindenberger, "Einleitung," in *Massenmedien im Kalten Krieg. Akteure, Bilder, Resonanzen*, ed. Idem (Cologne et al.: Böhlau, 2006), 9–23.

**8** See for example Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman and Stanley Rothman, *Hollywood's America. Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1996); Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood. From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower, 2005).

enize the topic. Without doubt it could have entirely different connotations in culture and film, depending on how, where and when it was used.

The following overview of the Cold War theme in the cinema will in no respect replace detailed empirical studies. Nevertheless, it should try to explore the problems of perspectivity and homogenization, and contribute to a differentiated view. To do this, I will use a comparative approach doing both: examine the impact of the Cold War on and representations of the conflict in US and European movies, focusing on West German productions in particular. Which shared patterns of perception can we reconstruct within the Western Bloc? How (and why) did they differ between individual countries? In addition to the movies themselves as cultural artefacts the comparison will also include an overview of the production structures in Hollywood and West Germany. While the aspect of political influence and censorship takes center stage, it may highlight the fact that, while film-making is always a political business, economic, technical, sector-specific and media-specific developments are also of great importance, whether they are global (for instance the challenge cinema faced during this period with the rise of television) or highly path dependent and national. How much was film production in the US and in West Germany really shaped by the Cold War?

## Hollywood and German "Handwerk." Profit and Politics in the Film Industry after 1945

At a first glance, the positions of the film industry in the US and in West Germany at the end of the 1940s could not have been more different. In the US a well-established system of large studios existed that had controlled the market almost exclusively in the last three decades. In the late 1940s they attracted an audience of 90 million people per week on average to domestic cinemas. In postwar Germany the film industry had come to a standstill: many production facilities were destroyed, the staff was discredited or dispersed, and all production activities were subject to approval by the occupying powers. It was only in the early 1950s that small to mid-size companies, specialized in the production or distribution of films, began the cumbersome process of producing films for the domestic market in West Germany (FRG).

In 1945 the Allies had reserved the right to control both the reorganization and the conceptual orientation of German film production and distribution. Structurally, this represented a clear break with tradition. The Western Allies pursued a twofold aim in breaking up the Nazi film production structures consolidated in the Ufa-Film GmbH (UFI): they wanted to prevent a new government-controlled

monopoly in the film industry like it existed in the Nazi era; alongside this political goal they also pursued economic interests in relation to their own film industries.[9] Only small production and distribution companies with limited capital were licensed in the British and American occupation zones. The fragmentation of the industry with medium-sized businesses contributed significantly to the enduring crisis of the West German film industry.[10]

The difficult financial situation, exacerbated by the breakthrough of television at the end of the 1950s, had direct consequences for film production. The undercapitalized production companies, distributors and cinema operators perforce targeted their activities at the domestic market and attempted to minimize entrepreneurial risks. As a consequence, they decided to stick with proven forms and formats. Rather than innovate, film-makers opted for a serial and rather unambitious production of genre movies. These productions were characterized by significant continuities to the escapist and ostensibly "unpolitical" movies of the Nazi era, not only with regard to actors, directors and cameramen.[11] As a result the production was hardly in line with the original aims of the re-education policy, but the difficult economic basis also made the industry – at least indirectly – vulnerable to political interventions.

The US film industry had suffered far less from the consequences of the war (and the depression). In the 1920s an oligopoly of eight studios had been established. By the end of the 1940s these eight studios obtained control over the entire exploitation chain from distribution to the cinemas. The crucial factor for the stability of this constellation was the financing the capital-intensive and high-risk film industry had received from Wall Street investors since the 1920s. These investors had no interest in independent productions that were exposed to incalculable risks.[12] This structure also resulted in risk prevention. As a matter of principle innovation, controversial topics and experiments were not in demand with investors and studio heads. These studio era films generally display conservative narratives and forms, confirm consensual norms and values, and show off

---

**9** Under American pressure the government of the Federal Republic decided not to impose import restrictions on movies in the context of a GATT agreement in 1949/50; cf. Friedrich P. Kahlenberg, "Film," in *Die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Kultur*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989), 464.

**10** Cf. Irmgard Wilharm, "Filmwirtschaft, Filmpolitik und "Publikumsgeschmack" im Westdeutschland der Nachkriegszeit," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002): 267–290.

**11** Knut Hickethier, "Das bundesdeutsche Kino der fünfziger Jahre. Zwischen Kulturindustrie und Handwerksbetrieb," in *Mediale Mobilmachung III. Das Kino der Bundesrepublik Deutschland als Kulturindustrie (1950–1962)*, ed. Harro Segeberg (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009), 33–60.

**12** Powers, Rothman and Rothman, *Hollywood's America*, 16.

their contractually bound star actors. Since the 1930s the underlying conservative trend of film production had been reinforced under the pressure of religious – particularly catholic – lobby groups. As a consequence the so-called *Production Code* (or *Hays Code*) was introduced in the 1930s. It proved an efficient basis for the suppression of scenes that involved violence or sexuality[13]

Against all appearances the US film industry was heading towards a crisis at the end of the 1940s. The oligopoly of studios came to an end, as the government threatened to break them up and trade unions exerted pressure on the companies. As a direct consequence the companies saw the need to raise their profile in competition and produced less, but more elaborate films.[14] They also placed great hopes in new sophisticated technologies. In the long-term the competition that arose with the emergence of television would prove even more decisive for the development of cinema. Not only was the number in cinema-goers in sharp decline from formerly 90 to 40 million per week by 1958,[15] but a shift in target audiences took place: television replaced cinema as mainstream family entertainment. The industry had to get used to an audience made up mostly of adolescents and young adults who had been socialized differently from the older generation and accordingly had different expectations with regard to movies and entertainment. While the large studios still maintained their influence particularly in the 1950s, the industry underwent a profound transformation. The usual business model established during Hollywood's infancy proved to be increasingly inefficient.

Overall the situation in Hollywood and West Germany were markedly different, but had more similarities than first it first seemed. The US had an established industry whose business model, although successful for many years, was in decline. The rise of television was the main cause for this decline and would create similar problems in Germany with a latency of about five years. In Germany the year 1945 marked a fundamental rupture. The new postwar cinema industry that was emerging under difficult circumstances struggled to consolidate. While this crisis was caused by entirely different circumstances – with the exception of the competition from television – on both sides of the Atlantic, industry reactions were curiously similar in many respects. Rather than striving for innovation and experiments, the major players turned to supposedly proven solutions and risk avoidance. Under these circumstances explicitly political themes were unpopular

---

**13** Ibid., 18–19.

**14**  The number of movies produced declined from 383 in 1950 to 154 only ten years later; cf. Terry Christensen, *Reel Politics. American Political Movies from "Birth of a Nation" to "Platoon"* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 85–86.

**15**  By 1970 the number had halved to 20 million visitors per week; ibid., 112.

both in Europe and in the US. In the 1950s the number of political films was negligible, let alone films with a critical undertone.[16]

## Political Interventions and Censorship

In political theory the relationship between politics and the media seems straightforward: in dictatorships the media are subject to the primacy of politics; in democracies they are able to work relatively independently. This applies in particular if they are privately organized and serve primarily their own economic interests. A closer look at Hollywood's history shows that reality is far more complex. In the early 1950s political interventions, anti-communist propaganda and prohibitions for supposed communists to exercise their profession reached a dimension in the US that is reminiscent of an authoritarian regime rather than a liberal democracy.

This includes above all the infamous activities of the "House Un-American Activities Committee" (HUAC) which amongst other groups also targeted Hollywood.[17] In 1947 HUAC opened an investigation due to suspected communist infiltration of the American film industry which continued until 1952. One of the reasons for their scrutiny was that Hollywood had produced several pro-Soviet films during the Second World War such as "Mission to Moscow"[18] at the express request of the Roosevelt administration. These films were intended to raise public support for the military alliance with the Soviet Union. The questioning of film industry employees by HUAC resulted in the denunciation of numerous supposed communists on the studios' pay roll. In the increasingly hysterical climate of fear and denunciation people totally lost sight of the distinction between liberals – and there would have been many in Hollywood –, former communist sympathizers and actual active members of the Communist Party (CPUSA). Hence it was possible to turn an initial suspicion that lacked substance into a successful case.

---

**16** Ibid., 71–72; the socially critical "Rubble films" created under Allied supervision did not go down particularly well in the Federal Republic. Compared to the so-called "Überläufer" films (literally: defector), superficially unpolitical movies dating from the Nazi era that were only shown in cinemas after the Second World War, the contemporary "Rubble films" that were in line with the re-education policy were unsuccessful at the box offices. The autonomous production in West Germany (FRG) followed the latter line of tradition; cf. Kahlenberg, 472.

**17** For a general review on the activities of HUAC see Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968).

**18** USA 1943, director: Michael Curtiz.

This was significant in view of the considerable public attention the scrutiny of prominent show business personalities such as Harry Belafonte, Charlie Chaplin and Orson Welles received. After the investigation they found their names together with several hundred other actors, screenwriters, directors and musicians on a blacklist prepared by producers under the enormous pressure exerted until the mid-1950s. Once blacklisted, people were often banned from working in the entertainment industry for years.[19] The first people summoned before HUAC, the famous "Hollywood Ten," who had refused to give evidence citing the 5th Amendment, were sentenced to imprisonment. Others left the country. Charlie Chaplin was refused re-entry in the US at the instigation of Edgar J. Hoover. This communist witch hunt was orchestrated by a flurry of brash anti-communist movies.[20]

A closer look illustrates that the postwar anti-communist paranoia was not spawned by the beginning of the Cold War. The fear of an impending communist revolution that had gripped the US dated back to the Russian October uprising in 1917. The first temporary investigating committees were established during this period of the "Red Scare." Founded during the Second World War under the presidency of the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt, the House Committee on Un-American Activities had targeted Hollywood for the first time in 1938, years before the Cold War began.[21] For obvious reasons at that time particularly fascist groups have been under observation. The term "un-American" – which has never been defined – indicates that the open confrontation of the superpowers from 1947 on fueled the fear of an existing threat to the American identity. Ultimately, however, it stems from a deeply ingrained insecurity in relation to the cohesion and foundations of America as an immigration society when put under pressure by social change processes.[22]

These fears were deeply rooted in society which indicates that the issue cannot be reduced to a simple antagonism between politics and Hollywood during this period. In many cases the studio managements showed themselves cooperative because they sympathized with the right-wing camp and not only because they feared political consequences or damage to their image which would have

---

**19** For a comprehensive portrayal of HUAC's activities in Hollywood see Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930–1960* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

**20** Cf. below in this article.

**21** Cf. Murray B. Levin, *Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

**22** Cf. Thomas Mergel, "'The Enemy in Our Midst'. Antikommunismus und Amerikanismus in der Ära McCarthy," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft (ZfG)* 51 (2003): 237–258.

negatively impacted their businesses. The generation of studio moguls active in the 1950s generally came from an immigration background. The experience of their own rise to power often resulted in an excessive patriotism.[23] Even among the creatives a fundamental agreement with anti-communist and anti-liberal attitudes was widespread. Under the impression of the war and Roosevelt's interventionist politics the "Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals" (MPAPAI) was formed in 1944, a conservative and influential Hollywood lobby group. Initially anti-totalitarian, the group committed itself increasingly to the fight against communism after the end of the Second World War. Among its members were numerous prominent actors, directors, managers and publicists including Walt Disney, John Wayne, Ronald Reagan and Ayn Rand. They managed to promote their stance prominently in the public sphere and to gain the necessary support for HUAC's investigations. A large number of films were found to contain allegedly implicit communist messages, and the group publicized a kind of "political supplement" to the Production Code written by Ayn Rand. The supplement suggested film-makers use a blatant glorification of right-wing political views such as "Don't smear wealth" or "Don't glorify failure."[24] The management of the studios that largely controlled film production at the time had no communist leanings whatsoever. Moreover, fear led many liberals or CPUSA sympathizers or supporters to cooperate with excessive zeal. Consequently, the anti-communist witch hunt encountered little resistance for a long time and the allegations seemed increasingly plausible.

While HUAC hearings and the ensuing blacklisting took anti-communist fervor to a new level, Hollywood traditionally had strong political ties, and censorship under the *Production Code* was part of the daily routine, albeit rarely for political reasons.[25] During the war much of Hollywood had been a willing contributor in the production of patriotic propaganda which – unlike in Germany – did not have a bad public image in the US after 1945.[26] In the postwar years multiple

---

**23** Powers, Rothman and Rothman, *Hollywood's America*, 18.

**24** The Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, ed., *Screen Guide for Americans* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1947).

**25** US legislation played a vital role in the enforcement of the Code and the industry's general vulnerability to political intervention. Initially the law did not recognize film as an artistic medium, refusing to afford it the protection provided by the constitutionally guaranteed right of freedom of speech under the First Amendment. This was only corrected by a 1952 landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court – the so-called "Miracle Decision."

**26** Cf. Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War. How Politics, Profits and Propaganda Shaped World War II Movies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

more or less informal "state-private networks" continued to shape the relation-ship between film producers and official organizations such as the State Depart-ment, the Pentagon, the CIA, the FBI and the USIA.[27] Building upon wartime predecessor organizations, a civil propaganda infrastructure began to emerge in 1947 whose responsibilities included the distribution of Hollywood productions abroad.[28] These organizations supported the production of a fair number of films and sometimes initiated film projects or intervened in shaping content. A prime example is the significant initiative and influence of the CIA and USIA on the British screen adaptations of George Orwell's novels "Animal Farm" (1954) and "1984" (1956) to achieve an expressly anti-communist interpretation.[29]

Postwar West Germany undoubtedly had a history of state-controlled film production, but it did not see any anti-communist campaigns comparable to HUAC's activities in Hollywood. Allegations of communist leanings could nev-ertheless be detrimental to film-makers. These negative consequences seem to have been limited to a few individual cases such as the director Wolfgang Staudte and the film producer Walter Koppel. Based in Hamburg, Koppel was the owner of the production company *Real-Film*. In the immediate postwar period he was indeed briefly an active supporter of the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (VVN), reputed as close to the KPD.[30] In Staudte's case his work for the East German state-owned film produc-tion company DEFA and his refusal, as a matter of principle, to publicly distance himself from communism was sufficient to cause professional difficulties.[31] An instrument used as leverage against "fellow travelers" were German federal guarantees (Bundesbürgschaften), granted in two waves to boost the ailing film industry between 1950 and 1955. The federal government underwrote deficit guarantees that enabled the notoriously cash-strapped film producers to take out bank loans to fund their projects. The project was then assessed by a guarantee committee (Bürgschaftsausschuss). In theory, the grants should have been made solely based on economic criteria, but the reality looked different: pressure from

---

**27** Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.

**28** Ibid, 24–26.

**29** Whitfield, "Culture," 261; Laurence Zuckerman, "How the Central Intelligence Agency Played Dirty Tricks With Our Culture," *New York Times*, March 18, 2000.

**30** Cf. "Gesinnungs-Prüfung – Ein süßer Stoff," *Der Spiegel* 33 (1951): 7–10.

**31** For Staudte cf. Ulrike Weckel, "Begrenzte Spielräume: Wolfgang Staudtes Filme und deren Rezeption im Kalten Krieg," in *Massenmedien im Kalten Krieg*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger (cf. foot-note 3), 25–47.

the ministry of the interior resulted in an amalgamation of political and economic criteria.[32]

The guarantee for a – totally unpolitical – natural history film was only granted once Staudte had withdrawn as a director.[33] In addition to the political past of the management team under Koppel, *Real-Film* – at the time one of the largest German production companies – was also reproached for its cooperation with DEFA. While the company was able to refute these allegations, it was excluded from receiving government subsidies for years.[34] A project featuring UFA actress Marika Rökk raised objections from the ministry of the interior because she had starred in a dance film shot in the Soviet-occupied zone of Austria. Before the film could go ahead, Rökk had to declare that she would not work for the communist East in the future.[35] The German film industry had neither a blacklist nor forced denunciations. Nevertheless, a rumor of communist sympathies could limit work opportunities significantly in 1950s Germany.

Beside individual "politically suspect" people, projects struggled to take off if the government considered them as harmful to the Federal Republic's image.[36] East-West German cooperation was also rejected. One production company requested support for a pan-German screen adaptation of Thomas Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks* because Mann had made the film rights conditional on an East-West cooperation. However, the relevant ministry advised that the East German DEFA was "a state-controlled film company" tasked with "propagating historical materialism as shaped by Marx, Lenin and Stalin, destroying civil order and preparing the dictatorship of the proletariat." A joint production was therefore out of the question.[37] In consequence of these constraints, production companies simply abstained from proposing politically controversial topics. The principle of the guarantees, states media researcher Stephan Buchloh, acted "like a prompt for self-censorship."[38] The same can be said for the *Wiesbadener Filmbewer-*

---

**32** Stephan Buchloh, *"Pervers, jugendgefährdend, staatsfeindlich". Zensur in der Ära Adenauer als Spiegel des gesellschaftlichen Klimas* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), 249–251.

**33** Ibid., 27–28.

**34** Ibid., 253–254.

**35** Ibid., 255–256.

**36** These cases mostly referred to critical appraisals of the Nazi past; cf. Knut Hickethier, "Kino," 38.

**37** Quoted from Walter Euchner, "Unterdrückte Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Motive der Filmpolitik in der Ära Adenauer," in *Gegen Barbarei. Essays – Robert M. W. Kempner zu Ehren*, ed. Rainer Eisfeld and Ingo Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1989), 346–359, here 352.

**38** Buchloh, *Zensur*, 261.

*tungsstelle*, the German board that evaluated and rated films. The quality ratings had a significant impact on marketing opportunities, entitling the production company to tax privileges until 1971.

The inherited state-authoritarian outlook of the German administration is also evident in censorship. Working more or less covertly and without a clear legal basis, an interdepartmental committee for East-West film matters (Interministerieller Ausschuß für Ost/West-Filmfragen)[39] controlled the import of any films from the East.[40] Until the cessation of its activities in 1966, the committee refused import licenses to 130 films, while others could only be shown if certain conditions were met.[41] The refused films included various prestigious East German propaganda projects but also Eastern European documentaries, children's and cultural films. The most prominent case is undoubtedly the screen adaptation of Heinrich Mann's novel *Der Untertan* (in English *The Kaiser's Lackey*, *Man of Straw* or *The Subject*) shot in 1951 by Wolfgang Staudte for DEFA. The film was shown in West German cinemas not before 1957 – and then only in a shortened version.[42] A large number of films were not admitted for public showings in the Federal Republic because the committee believed they "glorified communism" or styled their historical protagonists as spearheads of the proletariat.[43] It was not the topic of the films alone that determined whether an import license was granted or not; a refusal would for instance also be justified if an Eastern bank was involved in the funding.[44]

A comparison of political influences illustrates the strong impact of historically developed political cultures and practices. Both America and West Germany perceived communism as a significant danger, but governments and societies of

---

**39** This was the official name since 1956. Prior to this date correspondence refers to the interministerial committee for the appraisal of films produced in the Soviet Union or countries under Soviet influence, including the Eastern zone (Interministerieller Ausschuß für die Begutachtung von Filmen sowjetischer Produktion bzw. sowjetisch beeinflußter Staaten, einschl. der Ostzone).

**40** In 1955 the committee included representatives of the following federal institutions: the ministry of foreign affairs (Auswärtiges Amt), the ministry of the interior, the pan-German ministry and the ministry of economics as well as the press and information office and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

**41** Buchloh, *Zensur*, 225.

**42** Cf. Weckel, "Begrenzte Spielräume," 31–33; for the committee's motivations cf. also "Plädoyer für den Untertan," *Der Spiegel* 47 (1956): 59–61.

**43** This was the internal justification in the case of the DEFA film *Genesung* (in English "Recovery"), directed by Konrad Wolf, in 1954, and for refusing the commercial exploitation of the DEFA-produced film "Ludwig van Beethoven," directed by Max Jaap cf. Buchloh, *Zensur*, 226.

**44** Ibid.

both countries responded differently. After the historical rupture of 1945 political influence on the film industry in West Germany were perforce limited to indirect interventions. One of the most powerful instruments to exert influence was the granting or withdrawal of subsidies. Censorship in particular is also marked by an enduring state-authoritarian outlook: the government focused predominantly on the control of actual or alleged propaganda from the Eastern Bloc. The state cast itself in the role of a concerned patriarch, tasked with protecting its citizens from communist influences. The production of critical films was perceived as a danger for Germany's battered reputation abroad and had to be prevented whenever possible.

Hollywood had cultivated good relationships with political entities and government institutions even before the war in order to safeguard its business models. Political alignment stood therefore not necessarily in contrast to economic success, but was considered a prerequisite. The fear of a communist infiltration of film studios was widespread both in political circles and society as a whole. Under these circumstances there was no systematic resistance against the wide-ranging political impositions – quite the contrary: the US civil society approved of them, whether by conviction or opportunism. Unlike in Germany this approval was not based on a patriarchal authoritarian tradition, but rather on populist tendencies linking older scandalizations of the media-driven shift in values with uncertainties about the foundations of American identity. This resulted in an aggressive discourse that represented "communism" in stark opposition to "Americanism," creating a much stronger momentum than in Germany. The consequences for individual creatives suspected of communist leanings could nevertheless be similar in both countries: they would struggle to find work in the film industry, whether in Hollywood or in West Germany.

## Representations of the Cold War in Feature Films: Three Paradigms

Any attempt to obtain an overview over Cold War films in the US and West Germany reveals a major imbalance. In the Federal Republic hardly any cinema feature broaches the subject of the Cold War. In the US film industry the situation was different, but this cannot solely be attributed to the larger number of movies produced in Hollywood during the first two decades of the conflict. A more likely cause is that the resentments against political entertainment were (and still are) traditionally less pronounced in the US than in Germany. Until the mid-1960s the number of films that explicitly deal with Cold War themes remained in the low

double-digit range in Germany. Most of these films have been forgotten today. By contrast, the much vaster US film production during the same period included many films considered as classics today such as Stanley Kubrick's satire *Dr. Strangelove*, John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* or Billy Wilder's *One, Two, Three*.[45]

The following section will reconstruct some characteristic patterns in the way films dealt with the Cold War until the mid-1960s. The choice of films is neither representative nor complete, but is based on a pragmatic approach and includes some either very famous or successful productions. The patterns applied follow an ideal type and cannot always be considered exclusive: some films may equally well be classified differently.

## Red or Dead: Anti-Communism & Identity

The first ever Hollywood movie that focused on the Cold War was released in May 1948, only a few months after the conflict between the two victorious Allied powers of the Second World War had evolved into an open conflict: *The Iron Curtain*.[46] The spy thriller produced by Twentieth Century Fox is based on a true story. It adapted the memoir of a Soviet defector who had fled to Canada in 1945, providing the authorities with comprehensive espionage and infiltration plans for the country. The film seemed a perfect fit at a time when the entire American public was gripped by anti-communist hysteria and HUAC wanted to uncover a similar strategy for the US. The form and contents of the film were modelled on previous comparatively successful anti-Nazi films produced by the studio during the war which had also used the themes of espionage and counter-intelligence.[47] The film delivered its anti-communist message in the guise of a spy thriller, but achieved a mixed response from both critics and audience. Contrary to the producer's high expectations, box office receipts only just covered production costs.[48]

---

**45** Tony Shaw's book *Hollywood's Cold War* lists roughly 340 productions until 1990. Although his list includes various productions without any direct link to the Cold War, we can still assume a low three-digit number of relevant films. Unlike *Dr. Strangelove* neither Frankenheimer's nor Wilder's films were popular with the audience when they premiered in the 1960s. Their significance is based on retrospective evaluations.

**46** U.S. 1948, director: William A. Wellman.

**47** Examples are *The House on 92nd Street* (1945) and *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939); cf. Daniel J. Leab, "The Iron Curtain (1948). Hollywood's First Cold War Movie," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 8, no.2 (1989): 162–176.

**48** Ibid.

With its lack of commercial success, the movie shared the fate of numerous other anti-communist films produced in Hollywood until the mid-1950s to impress on the audience the dangers of communism in their own country.[49] Many similar films such as Warner's low-budget production *I was a Communist for the FBI*[50] – also based on an autobiographical publication of a former communist – suffered from the extremely black and white depictions taken from the weaker gangster dramas of the *film noir* era: communists and trade unionists were widely portrayed as criminal and ruthless, as "gangsters whose sole purpose in life is to spend their days drinking champagne and eating caviar at the expense of trusting workers" commented a German newspaper in a scathing review.[51] Melodramatic elements used in films such as Howard Hughes' production *I Married a Communist*[52] – the said husband is blackmailed by his former comrades because of his communist past and finally murdered – had no effect on the whiff of blatant anti-communist propaganda around these films. Audiences were well aware of this despite attempts to market the movie as "action-sex melodrama."[53]

Later representatives of this genre did not fare any better in this respect, for instance the long forgotten movie *My Son John* produced in 1952 by the catholic director Leo McCarey. However, the depictions of communists gained an interesting new facet. The film portrays an average American family, the Jeffersons, with profoundly patriotic and religious parents and two brothers serving their country in Korea. The black sheep of the family is the eldest son John, an arrogant intellectual working for the government in Washington. He is also a mama's boy, and there are hints that he is homosexual. When the FBI exposes John as a communist spy, his mother suffers a health breakdown, leading him to renounce communism. Before he is able to openly announce his conversion, he is murdered by his former comrades. A statement recorded before his death survives as a stark warning against communism to the next generation.

---

**49** Depending on the sources, bibliographical references cite around 50 to 60 films which fit into this category.

**50** USA 1951, director: Gordon Douglas.

**51** Rudolf Thome, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 26, 1965; reprinted in Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, ed., *Kalter Krieg: 60 Filme aus Ost und West* (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1991), 261.

**52** USA 1949/50, director: Robert Stevenson.

**53** Hughes withdrew the movie after a negative response to the premiere in the fall 1949 and relaunched it the following year with the new title *The Women on Pier 13*, emphasizing the melodramatic rather than the political aspect. The movie was still no great success; cf. Daniel J. Leab, "Hollywood im Kalten Krieg," in *Kalter Krieg: 60 Filme aus Ost und West*, ed. Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1991), 204–226, here 212–214.

The most interesting aspect in this film is the construction of "being un-American" as an illegitimate part of the "good," patriotic, godly and upright-conservative America. Being un-American means a mixture of presumptuous intellectualism, atheism and infringement of the reputedly natural gender hierarchy opposing the traditional family values. Anti-modern, conservative and anti-liberal discourses that opposed social change culminated in a concept of the communist as the enemy. All of this had existed before the outbreak of the Cold War. Only a few years before, Hollywood had allocated the role of the latent homosexual intent on destroying the traditional American family to another enemy: the Nazi spy.[54]

In any case *My Son John* reveals that the "Red Scare" of the early 1950s in the US was simultaneously an anti-modern crisis discourse on the very heart of American identity. This indirectly also answers the controversial question whether these movies, none of which was a box office success, were only launched to prove the producers' politically unobjectionable convictions to HUAC's anti-communist inquisitors.[55] The examples mentioned here show little evidence of this. If anything, these films epitomize a broad social discourse, with the producers positioning themselves according to their own convictions and by all appearances hoping to make profits along the way.

It is difficult to find similar films in the West German context. The film that best fits the bill of communism as a threat to society from within is *Menschen im Netz* (in English *People in a Net* or *Unwilling Agent*).[56] It is a story about a husband released after years of imprisonment in communist East Germany who realizes that his wife has secured his freedom by giving in to blackmail and working as a communist agent. The film ends no less tragic than its American counterparts: the wife pays with her life for her communist entanglement. *Menschen im Netz* is very similar to many American films shot in the first half of the decade in insinuating the threat of clandestine communist diversion, in portraying communist agents as criminals and in highlighting the success of counter-espionage. Unlike in *My Son John*, however, the threat does not stem from the very heart of society, but from the machinations of a hostile intelligence service using criminal

---

**54** Cf. Ronny Loewy, "Der Lächerlichkeit preisgegeben. Nazis in den Anti-Nazi-Filmen Hollywoods," in *Lachen über Hitler – Auschwitz-Gelächter? Filmkomödie, Satire und Holocaust*, ed. Margit Fröhlich et al. (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2003), 125–132.

**55** This view is supported by older research, cf. Nora Sayre, *Running Time: Films of the Cold War* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), and was firmly rejected recently, among others by Tony Shaw.

**56** FRG 1957, director: Franz Peter Wirth. In the 1960s the film's theme was also used as a basis for a series of television dramas entitled *Die fünfte Kolonne* (FRG 1963–1968, in English *The Fifth Column*) created by the same authors and producers.

methods to abuse people's weaknesses. It was a reflection of the actual situation in divided Germany where Eastern and Western intelligence services antagonized each other, and a call for vigilance in the face of communism. However, the criminal and cynical machinations of Eastern intelligence services could hardly be considered as a serious ideological challenge for the social order of the West.

Blatantly anti-communist films were rarely successful with the audience in West Germany. It is therefore not surprising that producers were reluctant to make films focused on these themes. The few exceptions were realized by independent producers such as the openly anti-communist Gerhard T. Buchholz who, by his own admission, made his films to promote a free and democratic reunification of Germany.[57] In the early 1950s he produced two films focusing on the "conversion" of convinced communists and their subsequent flight to the West: *Postlagernd Turteltaube*[58] and *Weg ohne Umkehr*[59].

In the satire *Postlagernd Turteltaube* (literally "Poste restante: Turtle Dove") a convinced communist bets his sister, who is living across the border in the West, that the citizens of the young GDR have a rock-solid confidence in their state. He loses his bet when all the residents of his apartment building flee to the West for trivial reasons. Their flight causes him to lose confidence in the system. Completed in 1953, *Weg ohne Umkehr* (in English *No Way Back*) has a similar construction, but with a tragic plot. Here it is the continual harassment and the cynical activities of the Soviet intelligence services that persuade a Russian engineer and his German girlfriend to flee to West Berlin. Their successful flight has no happy ending: no one is safe from the persecution of the communist intelligence services, not even in the West, is the gloomy message at the end of the film. Any interpretation of Buchholz' films needs to take into account the historic backdrop of two German states vying for the "better" system. The outcome of this struggle only became more obvious a few years later. In addition to Buchholz' strong support for the West and against the conditions under communist regimes, his films openly argue against the pacifist attitudes and ideas about neutrality popular in West Germany at the time and expressed strongly in the nascent debates around rearmament. While some critics commented Buchholz' films favorably, the audience's response was lukewarm.

---

**57** Cf. "Komödie gegen die Angst," *Der Spiegel* 24 (1952): 30–31; Buchholz (1898–1970) who was working as a screenwriter from 1937 and contributed to the screenplay of *Die Rothschilds* (D 1940, director: Erich Waschneck) was rumored to have a close relationship to the Pan-German Ministry (Gesamtdeutsches Ministerium (BMG)); cf. ibid. and: "Gesinnungs-Prüfung – Ein süßer Stoff," 7–10.

**58** FRG 1952, Director: Gerhard T. Buchholz.

**59** FRG 1953, Director: Victor Vicas.

The screen adaptation of Heinz G. Konsalik's melodramatic bestselling novel *Der Arzt von Stalingrad* (in English *The Doctor of Stalingrad*) was an altogether different case. The film was an immediate box office hit in Germany.[60] The film's topic – German prisoners of war in Soviet captivity – proved very popular at the time. Just a few years earlier, in 1955, the last German soldiers returned from the Soviet Union after the German Chancellor Adenauer had successfully negotiated their release during a state visit to Moscow. The film consistently portrayed German prisoners of war as victims of communist cruelty and despotism, accompanied by a multitude of entrenched racist and anti-Slavic stereotypes.[61] The steadfast humanism of the German soldiers and, consequently, their intellectual and moral superiority over the totalitarian tyranny of their communist guards was presumed as a fact. The film alludes to the widespread need in the German population to retrospectively give a meaning to the war and to overcome the defeat. The differentiation from communism was also accompanied by an old concept of German identity based on a reputedly superior race.

## Beyond Anti-Communism: Overcoming the Conflict or Nuclear Armageddon?

By the 1960s the different and often unsubtle varieties of anti-communism were spiraling out of control in films produced in both countries. The reasons for this were different and can be attributed both to the political level and to the two countries' societies and film industries. Politically, the policy of detente initiated in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis undoubtedly had a considerable impact, because it encouraged understanding rather than confrontation. In Hollywood, the explicitly anti-communist phase had ended in the mid-1950s, both because the "Red Scare" had largely fizzled out by this time and because these films were just not popular. The decline of the studio system also increased opportunities for independent productions. In Germany blatantly anti-communist films had been the exception rather than the rule and the film industry showed other clear signs of change. The wave of extremely popular and unpolitical "Heimatfilme" –

---

**60** FRG 1958, director: Géza von Radvanyi.
**61** Cf. also Georg Wurzer, "Antikommunismus und Russlandfeindschaft vor und nach 1945. Die Romane der Bestsellerautoren Erich Dwinger und Heinz G. Konsalik," *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung* 24 (2011), 49–60.

a genre of feel-good films that feature rural settings, unspoiled nature, and firm values – came to an end.[62]

The theory of archetypal forms of narration makes a basic distinction between comedy and tragedy.[63] Both are visible in films shot in the 1960s that focus on the nuclear threat. The first form is characterized by an optimistic telos: in the end the protagonists will overcome all obstacles and head towards a promising future. Other films have a tragic narrative: the protagonists are doomed to fail because of the political circumstances in the nuclear era and their consequences.

A prominent example of optimistic comedy is the satire *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming* produced in 1966.[64] The movie tells the story of a Soviet submarine that stranded off the coast of Massachusetts as a result of an accident. The situation escalates due to misunderstandings and stupidity on both sides, and the Soviet captain threatens to destroy the nearby coastal town. In this tense situation a child from the town runs into trouble and is saved by the joint effort of Americans and Russians. The conflict is overcome, and both parties depart on friendly terms. The film was a great success both with critics and at the box office. With box office takings of $ 7.75 million the film was the second most successful Cold War film after *Green Berets*, John Wayne's notorious justification of the Vietnam War.[65] Today the film is still considered as proof that Hollywood had a political change of heart in the 1960s about confronting communism.[66] In *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming* de-escalation occurred because the film did not address communism, but de-politicized the conflict: the situation is resolved on a purely human level.[67]

The trend to de-politicize is also visible in many other comedies produced during this period, some even before the Cuban Missile Crisis. Top of the list is Billy Wilder's screwball comedy *One, Two, Three*[68] in which communists and capitalists, Americans, Soviets and Germans are indiscriminately made the butt of derision. People nevertheless found it hard to laugh about this fast-paced story

---

**62** Cf. Johannes von Moltke, *No Place Like Home. Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (= Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism, 36) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

**63** Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," in *Criticism: The Major Statements*, ed. Charles Kaplan and William Anderson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 500–514.

**64** USA 1966, director: Norman Jewison.

**65** USA 1968, directors: John Wayne and Ray Kellogg.

**66** Cf. review by Tony Shaw, "The Russians Are Coming The Russians Are Coming (1966): Considering Hollywood's Cold War "Turn" of the 1960s," *Film History* 22 (2010): 235–250.

**67** Ibid, 244–245.

**68** USA 1961.

that jumps between East and West in the period just after the wall was built in Berlin. The success of the six-part French-Italian coproduction *Don Camillo und Peppone*[69] across Western Europe can also basically be attributed to a trend to de-politicize. The shift of the global conflict to an Italian provincial town and to a slapstick confrontation between a catholic priest and a communist mayor makes the conflict palatable for the cinema audience. To achieve this, the conflict had to be harmonized and banalized as a purely human conflict of two both clever and headstrong (and therefore very similar) protagonists.

The implicit idea to use "humanity" to make the challenges of the Cold War surmountable or at least bearable is opposed by a number of dystopian films which focus on the failure of the atomic balance. The first of these films was *On the Beach*, produced by independent director and producer Stanley Kramer before the Cuban Missile Crisis.[70] It tells the story of the fruitless attempts of a submarine crew to find a permanently inhabitable living space on earth after a nuclear war. The initial scenario of a recent nuclear catastrophe is reminiscent of the later and even more successful production *Planet of the Apes*. This film was deliberately marketed as a science fiction adventure as Twentieth Century Fox feared the movie would flop with the audience if it was interpreted as a political statement.[71]

Two other equally dystopian US productions focused on the potential risk of a nuclear war triggered "by accident." Sidney Lumet's classic movie *Fail Safe* (1964) and Stanley Kubrick's black satire *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (also 1964) were released almost simultaneously and featured variations on the same theme: a technical or human failure triggers a US bombing raid which cannot be stopped even by desperate measures. The combination of technological "safeguards" meant to prevent the outbreak of a war and human narrow-mindedness leads irreversibly into a catastrophe. Both movies were obviously inspired by the dynamics of the Cuban Missile Crisis. They were much applauded by critics, but only Kubrick's parody (which was released first) was also a box office success.

Future scenarios of a nuclear catastrophe were not evoked in West German movies of the 1950s and 1960s. One possible reason is that, unlike the US, Germany had no nuclear arms. There are, however, other dystopian visions of humankind without a human future. The most impressive representative of this genre is probably Helmut Käutner's 1955 border drama *Himmel ohne Sterne* (in

---

**69** F/I 1952–1971.
**70** USA 1959.
**71** USA 1968, director: Franklin J. Schaffner.

English *Sky without Stars*).[72] The plot focuses on the fate of a young mother torn between her responsibility for her frail parents in East Germany and for her young son living with the parents of her lover who died in the war. A new love for a border guard from West Germany complicates the plot. All attempts of the protagonists to escape this situation between the fronts of the Cold War lead to further entanglement. In the end only no man's land, an area which has not yet been blocked off and is only controlled sporadically, is the lovers' sole refuge. When the border between the two German countries is sealed off for good, even this refuge is lost. During an attempt to cross the border into the West the lovers are shot and the son is orphaned.

The film's protagonists are victims of the political situation which leaves them with no way out. Like a noose the small border area tightens around them and leaves no room for a shared future. It is conspicuous that the discourse creates an antagonism between "politics" and "human beings." The border becomes a *factum brutum*, an inhuman principle for which apparently no one is responsible. By contrast, the protagonists epitomize love, humanity and solidarity. Their failure symbolizes the lack of hope for both these principles and the young generation of Germans. The film concludes with the resigned prediction that in the end all will be victims.

Käutner's film is therefore far more than just a maudlin lament for the lost national unity. Consistent with the national sensitivities after the lost war, it portrayed all Germans as victims of policies outside of their control. History seems to repeat itself here. "Good" people are again the victims of "evil" politics just like in the Nazi era. The theme of rejecting responsibility for the past leaves a visible imprint on the present.

*Himmel ohne Sterne* was not the only film that portrayed the man on the street as a victim of politics. The ostensibly contrasting comedy *Genosse Münchhausen* (literally "Comrade Münchhausen") produced by the comedian Wolfgang Neuss[73] conveys a very similar message: Farmer Puste is literally catapulted between East and West, a pawn of the competing superpowers. The essence of the story is that the man on the street is not only reduced to an object of an absurd and totally exaggerated competition between two systems by "higher powers," but he is also paying the bill.

---

**72** FRG 1955; cf. on this film Michael Schaudig, "Vom Pathos im Niemandsland. *Himmel ohne Sterne* (BRD 1955): Helmut Käutners 'filmsemiotische Diskussion' des geteilten Deutschland," in *Mediale Mobilmachung III. Das Kino der Bundesrepublik Deutschland als Kulturindustrie (1950–1962)*, ed. Harro Segeberg, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2009), 305–336.
**73** FRG 1962, director: Wolfgang Neuss.

# The Cold War as a Thrill: Spies and Escapes

One last and important category of films needs to be included here: the spy and escape thrillers which came to the cinemas in the 1960s. Many of them – the Bond movies in particular – were elaborately staged action films. They used the technical capabilities of cinema to distinguish themselves from television which was not able to visually match them at the time. Unlike the previous category, most of these films had no ambition to take a critical view on society. They exploited the fact that the audience was obviously fascinated by the aura of the clandestine, of secret meetings and deceptive appearances which characterized the intelligence services during the Cold War. It was a perfect choice for the commercial media which targeted the widest possible audience.[74]

Ironically one of the most famous spy thrillers, the British classic *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*[75] only fits this bill to a limited extent. While the screen adaptation of John le Carré's novel uses classic suspense elements, it could equally be defined as a tragic dystopia. The hero – British agent Alec Leamas played by Richard Burton – is exposed to a cynical play around a double agent that defies all notions of moral superiority the West claimed during the Cold War. The film conveys the message that the end does not justify the means, and the intelligence services' activities show that both East and West operated on the same low level with regard to the moral values they put into practice.

This primarily self-critical message is the exception rather than the rule in this subgenre. More typical movies are Hitchcock's classics *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Torn Curtain* (1966). Hitchcock was primarily interested in creating a sophisticated suspense, while the political level was significantly less important. The audience would have been aware that the Soviet intelligence services were behind the spy ring at the heart of *North by Northwest*, but this fact is never explicitly mentioned. Unlike *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, both films leave no doubt that those who support the West are on the good side, but that is the extent of Hitchcock's political message. The Cold War mutated essentially into a backdrop whose main purpose was to create suspense as well as a clandestine and realistic aura.

The same can be said for the James Bond series. It is remarkable how much the films tone down Cold War references in comparison to Ian Fleming's original

---

**74** Cf. Eva Horn, *The Secret War. Treason, Espionage, and Modern Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013).
**75** UK 1965, director: Martin Ritt.

novels. Of the Bond movies produced in the 1960s, *From Russia with Love*[76] is the one that focuses most on the conflict between East and West. Even in this case Bond's opponent is a *former* KGB agent. She works for the terrorist organization S.P.E.C.T.R.E., which often challenges both East and West in the films, while Bond collaborates with a young KGB agent. The plots of the 1960s Bond films are never based directly on the conflict between the two political camps. It is likely that the film-makers de-politicized the movies to avoid controversy and related economic risks. Their objective was to earn money with good entertainment, and political issues were obviously still considered as an obstacle to profit. The Bond films nevertheless propagated subliminal messages relating to the superiority of the West and the blessings of capitalist consumer markets in particular.[77]

In Germany individual producers endeavored to jump the bandwagon to benefit from the enthusiasm for the successful spy films. More common, however, was another type of action film relating directly to the situation in the divided Germany: escape films. One of the first films about an escape attempt from the GDR was the low-budget production *Flucht nach Berlin* (literally "Flight to Berlin") in 1960.[78] After the Wall had been built a further three action films came into the cinemas simultaneously, all of them based on true stories: the German-American co-production *Tunnel 28*[79] was a film about the escape of 28 GDR citizens to West Berlin through a tunnel they had dug themselves.[80] The film also included a love story, adding drama by keeping the audience in suspense on whether the meticulously prepared escape is going to fail through treachery at the last minute. Produced in 1963, *Durchbruch Lok 234* (in English *The Breakthrough*) recounts the spectacular escape of an engine driver on his train shortly after the wall was built.[81] Lastly, *Verspätung in Marienborn* (in English *Stop Train 349*) also focused

---

**76** UK 1963, director: Terence Young.

**77** Cf. Bodo Mrozek, "Im Geheimdienst Seiner Majestät, des Kapitalismus. Helden der Popkultur: Spione und Agenten im Kalten Krieg," in *Heldengedenken. Über das heroische Phantasma (Merkur Special Volume 724/725)*, ed. Karl-Heinz Bohrer and Kurt Scheel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2009), 982–988.

**78** FRG 1960, director: Will Tremper. This was based on the serialized novel *Komm mit nach Berlin – Geschichte einer Flucht*, published in the German magazine *Stern* between May and October 1959; cf. Tremper's autobiography Will Tremper, *Meine wilden Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1993), 522–524.

**79** FRG/USA 1962, director: Robert Siodmak.

**80** The story was based on the escape of 28 people from Glienicke/Nordbahn to Berlin-Frohnau on January 24, 1962; cf. Marion Detjen, *Ein Loch in der Mauer. Die Geschichte der Fluchthilfe im geteilten Deutschland 1961–1989* (München: Siedler Verlag, 2005), 442–443.

**81** FRG 1963, director: Frank Wisbar.

on an escape attempt: a US military duty train is held by Soviet soldiers until the Americans hand over an East German refugee who had slipped aboard the train.[82]

Most of these films follow the same pattern as prison films. The Eastern Bloc is portrayed like a prison, and the plot focuses largely on the tension-filled preparation and execution of the escape.[83] There is little room for the exploration of different motives or the "cost" of the decision. All stories are consistently told from a Western perspective. Any reasonable and courageous individual would naturally want to escape from a communist regime. Against this backdrop an in-depth appreciation of the social reality in "real socialism" seemed obviously obsolete.

# Cold War Cinema in Comparison: A Conclusion

Overall this brief overview of film production in the US and West Germany or Europe respectively confirms our initial hypothesis that Cold War culture was subject to considerable change and differed significantly between the two countries.

While the structural prerequisites in the film industry were very different in both countries after 1945, the fundamental issue encountered by producers – the high level of investment required and the incalculable risks – seems to have promoted similar risk prevention strategies: avoiding controversial topics and sticking to proven solutions. Nevertheless, the number of movies dedicated to aspects of the Cold War theme differs considerably. Very few West German films addressed the topic explicitly. Those who did were in most cases initiated and funded by independent film-makers. In Hollywood, Cold War films also formed a minor part of the overall production, but the number of films produced was much higher, both generally and proportionally in terms of the annual output. The fact that the relationship between politics and entertainment was traditionally established before the Cold War would have been of some importance. By contrast, Germany had – even in the Nazi era – mostly produced "unpolitical" entertainment films. For a long time politics was a "no go" in German postwar films; in the

---

**82** *Verspätung in Marienborn*, FRG/F/I 1963, director: Rolf Hädrich; cf. on the background Will Tremper, *Große Klappe. Meine Filmjahre* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1998), 93–102.
**83** Cf. Rainer Rother, "Feindliche Brüder: Der Kalte Krieg und der deutsche Film," in *Deutschland im Kalten Krieg 1945–1963*, ed. Dieter Vorsteher et al. (Berlin: Argon Verlag GmbH, 1992), 101–112.

US political themes were possible, at least if the presentation was in alignment with the consensual mainstream.

Political influence and censorship motivated by an anti-communist stance affected film-making in both countries. Assuming a straightforward antagonism between politics and the film industry would be naive; Hollywood in particular maintained a close relationship to the political arena. The scope and type of interventions differed significantly. In the US society and the media contributed to, evoked and supported a paranoid atmosphere which created considerable pressure to act and to make a mark, causing significant repressions. In Germany interventions were limited to individual measures which occurred more or less clandestinely. They clearly reflected an inherited state-authoritarian outlook.

Anti-communist policies in the US and in West Germany were only similar at a first glance. The fear of a communist infiltration and of a serious challenge to national identity reflected in the anti-communist movies of the early 1950s only surfaces rarely in German films. West German cinema production tended to focus on the challenge posed by the country's division or to process the Second World War defeat against the Soviet Union. Entrenched racist and anti-Slavic prejudices amalgamated with the anti-communist concept of the enemy.

In the 1960s different perceptions of the Cold War began to emerge. Especially in the US film-makers questioned the simple geographical or ideological attributions of "good" and "evil." US and British movies critically addressed the policy of nuclear deterrence and the Western self-image. The blatant anti-communism of movies such as John Wayne's "Green Berets" was the exception rather than the rule. This was contrasted by a marked trend to de-politicize films. The spy thriller genre in particular reduced the Cold War to a captivating backdrop. The shift to commercially motivated action movies can also be observed in 1960s West Germany, but the escape theme linked to the division of Germany was much more prominent than espionage stories. Specific experiences also structured plots in other respects. Marked by the war and the Nazi era, the German past shaped a pessimist view on the Cold War, for instance in Helmut Käutner's films.

While detente clearly influenced many movies such as *The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming*, attributing this change solely or primarily to the changed political circumstances would be too simplistic. The competition emerging with the rise of television was a decisive factor which resulted in a liberalization and reorientation of cinema production. It also contributed to the evolution of the spy thriller to action films laden with special effects such as the Bond movies. The different Cold War cultures were closely linked with other social developments such as mediatization and seem to reveal as much about the historical experiences and sensitivities of the respective societies as about their perception of the political situation during the Cold War. Not only did the climate of the Cold

War influence film and culture but also different national political-cultural traditions and social experiences were significant when it comes to the perception of and even understanding what Cold War actually meant.