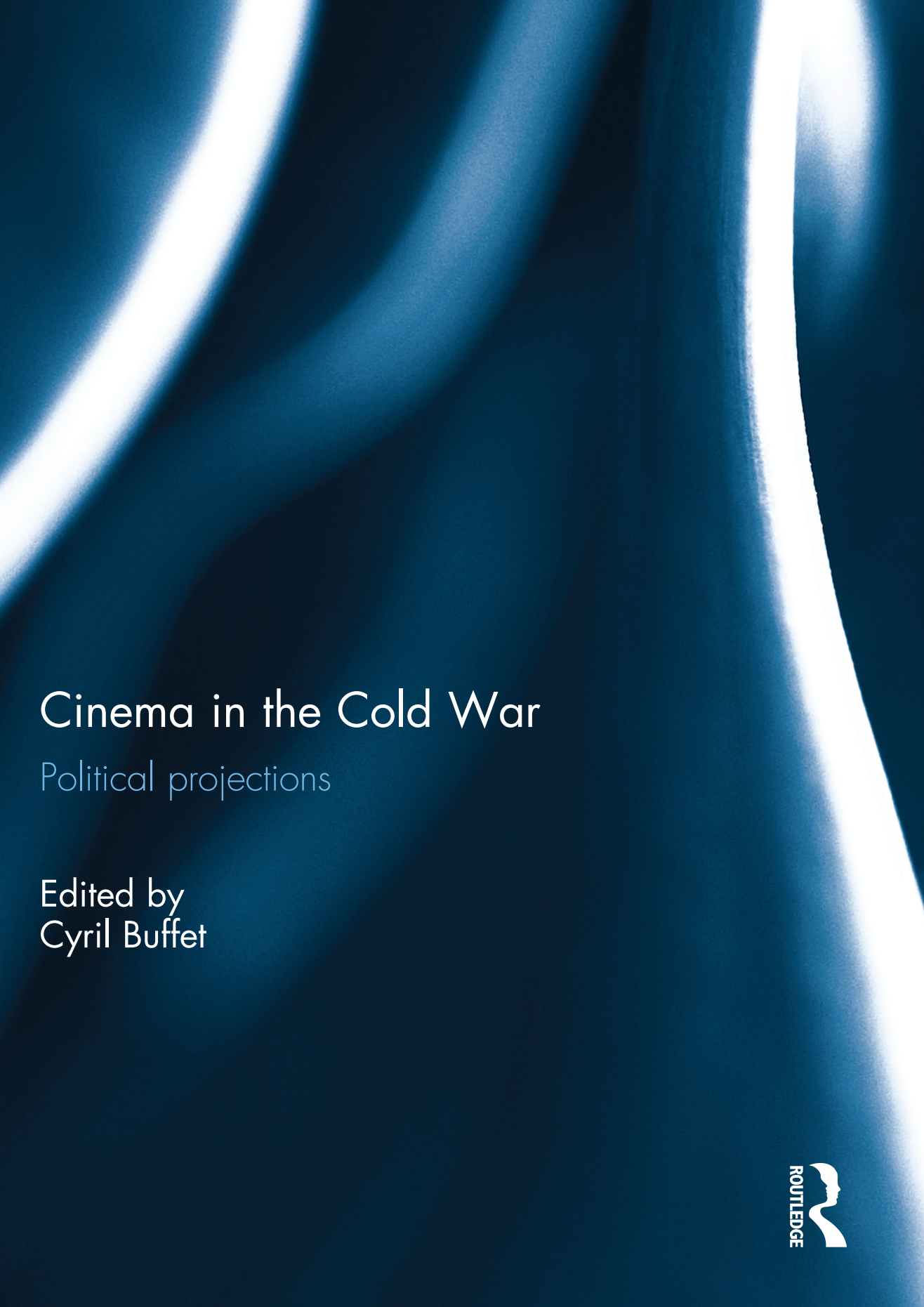
Cinema in the Cold War
Political projections
Edited by
Cyril Buffet
ROUTLEDGE

Cinema in the Cold War

The film industry was an important propaganda element during the Cold War. As with other conflicts, the Cold War was fought not just with weapons, but with words and images. Throughout the conflict, cinema was a reflection of the societies, the ideologies, and the political climates in which the films were produced. On both sides, great stars, major companies, famous scriptwriters, and filmmakers were enlisted to help the propaganda effort.

It was not only propaganda that was created by the cinema of the Cold War – it also articulated criticism, and the movie industries were centres of the fabrication of modern myths. The cinema was undoubtedly a place of Cold War confrontation and rivalry, and yet there were aesthetic, technical, narrative exchanges between West and East. All genres of film contributed to the Cold War: thrillers, westerns, comedies, musicals, espionage films, documentaries, cartoons, science fiction, historical dramas, war films, and many more. These films shaped popular culture and national identities, creating vivid characters like James Bond, Alec Leamas, Harry Palmer, and Rambo. While the United States and the Soviet Union were the two main protagonists in this on-screen duel, other countries, such as Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy, and Czechoslovakia, also played crucially important parts, and their prominent cinematographic contributions to the Cold War are all covered in this volume.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Cold War History*.

Cyril Buffet is a historian specialising in international relations and German history. He is Director of Studies at SFiB (Berlin), Germany. He has taught at universities in France, Germany, and the UK, and has curated historical exhibitions and authored TV documentaries on a variety of cultural topics.

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Preface: Visual reflection of the Cold War

Cyril Buffet[1]

Like other conflicts, the Cold War was not only fought with arms, but also with words and images, even more so, once the two superpowers reached nuclear parity, a military confrontation would have become mutually suicidal. For this reason, the cinema had a prominent role in the Cold War, and the Cold War was implicitly or explicitly a theme in many movies. Films produced between 1947 and 1991 mirrored – realistically, fantastically, metaphorically, tragically, satirically, comically – the societies, the ideologies, the cultures in which they were created. But they not only reflected the Cold War; they also projected it. In that sense, they decisively contributed to mould and establish a widespread Cold War culture, by inventing and reiterating stereotypes, by promoting policies, by conveying fears, as Lori Maguire explains about the American films dealing with the 'destruction of New York City'. The cinema was in part the lecture theatre, the agitprop classroom, the party rally of the Cold War. Some would even claim that the Cold War was above all a war of images. This is hyperbole as it neglects the millions of casualties in Korea and the many peripheral conflicts, in Africa or in Latin America, but the Cold War was definitely a spectre that haunted the movie theatres.

Since Lenin and Trotsky, we know that cinema is "the best propaganda instrument" because it is "open to all and catches the imagination". Film is also the modern vehicle of myths as interpretation of the past and present, and justification of policies. Thus the Polish communist regime exploited the holocaust documentary *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann: 1985) to legitimize General Jaruzelski's government, as Ewa Ochman argues in her article.

Up to the 1960s, the night out at the cinema represented the principal popular distraction, the most influential mass medium, the main propaganda tool. The cinema's predominance lasted until the television invaded all homes. For forty years, the bipolar system divided the screens where the United States and the USSR competed.

Just as there are debates about the beginning of the Cold War – was it 1917, 1944, 1947 or 1948? – there is also no agreement on which film was the first to evoke it. But by 1948 at the latest, we see it in the cinemas: that year, the East asked *The Russian Question* (Mikhail Romm) and the West already tried to penetrate *The Iron Curtain* (William Wellman). The Soviet Union sank into an anti-Western hysteria, merging the stereotypes of the all-devouring capitalist, the Nazi criminal and the American imperialist. Like Stalin towards the end of his life, Russia was carried away by an existential anguish of being completely surrounded by enemies or the victim of an international conspiracy. Several films expressed this paranoia (Mikhail Romm: *Secret Mission*, 1950; Mikhaïl Kalatozov: *Plot of the Doomed*, 1950). Isabelle de Keghel explores the most important Soviet film of that period, *Meeting on the Elbe* (Grigori

Aleksandrov: 1949) which attributed the full responsibility of the Cold War to the militaristic strategy of the United States.

Obsessed in turn by a Red Scare, the Americans also developed an over-simplified approach and an anti-Communist hysteria that revealed the 'Maltz Affair' analysed by John Sbardellati in this volume.

Between 1948 and 1962, the United States produced about a hundred anti-Communist films. In 1952 alone, twelve such films were released. The major companies took part with enthusiasm in this campaign because they wanted to avoid the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) which had drawn a "black list" of so-called subversive cinema people: about 300 of them were victims of this new witch hunt. This is why each film studio wanted to produce its own anti-Communist film: after Fox, which had set the fashion with *The Iron Curtain*, it was MGM's turn (George Sidney: *The Red Danube*, 1949; Victor Saville: *Conspirator*, 1949), then Republic (R.G. Springsteen: *The Red Menace*, 1949), RKO bought by Howard Hughes (Robert Stevenson: *The Woman on Pier 13*, 1949), Warner Bros. (Gordon Douglas: *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, 1951) and finally Paramount (Leo Mac Carey: *My Son John*, 1952). The dream factory became the nightmare factory. These blatantly anti-Communist propaganda films did not attract a large audience, however. Even John Wayne did not convince the public by playing the role of *Big Jim McLain* (Edward Ludwig, 1952), a HUAC agent in charge of cracking a Communist network operating in Hawaii.

The American and Soviet film industries undoubtedly dominated the genre, but others were also concerned by the East–West conflict and made their cinematographic contributions. Between 1945 and 1965, Great Britain produced at least 130 films dealing with the Cold War.[2] This general phenomenon is probably explained by the fact that the Cold War was not a conflict between only *two* political, economic, and ideological systems; the West especially was not a homogeneous bloc at the bidding of the United States. Moreover, the Cold War took place *within* each country, each society, creating long-lasting divisions. This is why so many films were particularly interested in the "interior enemy" who could be a dangerous Communist, a double agent, an insane officer, a diabolical scientist, a neighbour haunted by an extra-terrestrial creature, or even a brother as in the East-German film *And also your Love* (Frank Vogel, 1962) which unsuccessfully tried to convince the GDR's population of the vital necessity to build the Berlin Wall as a rampart against a Western aggression.

Very often, the characters, the arguments, the clichés were the same on both sides. The Cold War tended to impose the same message, the same narrative, the same aesthetics. This is why the Cold War must be seen as a global phenomenon, understood better through national and crossed comparisons, as well as through the exchanges and the transfers between East and West. For example, Marko Dumančić explains that the figure of the "angry young man" was shared by British and Soviet cinema. And Sergei Zhuk shows the influence of American cinema on Soviet spectators.

Moreover, this approach of comparisons and of the *histoire croisée* also deepens our understanding of this specific historical period and the films that flew from it. The representation of the Cold War matched fluctuations of the relationships between the two antagonistic sides, from the international crises (Berlin, Korea, Cuba, Euromissiles…) until the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, including Peaceful Coexistence, the Thaw and the Détente. The shorts films produced by NATO between 1949 and 1969 illustrate these changes, as Linda Risso demonstrates.

The simplistic propaganda of the early Cold War years was then replaced by a more sophisticated and nuanced vision.

Cold War hysteria was initially denounced in the genre of *film noir* (Fritz Lang: *The Big Heat*, 1953) and the Western (Fred Zinnemann: *High Noon*, 1954). But it is above all the spy films, of which James Bond became the emblematic figure, which introduced doubt and criticism of one's own side. Like *The Spy who came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965), the films from now on gave greater prominence to disillusioned characters who were manipulated by the secret services whose principles and methods did not differ from those of the other side (e.g. Sydney Pollack: *The Three Days of the Condor*, 1975; David Drury: *Defence of the Realm*, 1985). Cold War hysteria was also blamed, indirectly, for the doomed Western military engagements from Indochina to Vietnam that were interpreted by Western governments as part of the supposed global East–West confrontation (from Pierre Schoendoerffer: *La 317e Section*, 1965, to the many Vietnam War films).

This volume is a contribution to the study of the cultural aspects of the Cold War. Hopefully it will be an encouragement for other scholars to further explore topics, films, companies, directors, or countries not discussed in this volume.

Notes

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to all reviewers, particularly Professors Tony Shaw and Patrick Major, for their many helpful suggestions and their constructive advice, and the competent editorial teams of *Cold War History* and Taylor & Francis.

[2] Tony Shaw: *British Cinema and the Cold War*, (London: Tauris, 2001), p. 195.

Meeting on the Elbe (*Vstrecha na El'be*): A visual representation of the incipient Cold War from a Soviet perspective

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The article explores the most important Soviet film covering the incipient Cold War, Meeting on the Elbe. *The production involved prominent Soviet filmmakers and actors. By juxtaposing the occupation policies of both superpowers in post-war Germany, the film makes crucial assumptions concerning the Soviet self and the US-American other. It attributes the full responsibility for the outbreak of the Cold War to the US-American political and military elites and argues the USSR has won the trust and support of the Germans due to its superior 'soft power'.*

'Soft power' (Joseph Nye) has always been a tool of politics and diplomacy, and nothing would be further from the truth than to think this is or was exclusively an American forte because of America's widespread consumer culture and popular culture.[1] As a civilization priding itself on its progressiveness, the USSR was keen to harness new tools to its propaganda, especially in the incipient Cold War.[2] Successive Soviet regimes were well aware of the instrument of projecting soft power that the cinema represented.[3] As for the arts in general, Soviet film since 1934 was ruled by the

requirements of Socialist Realism,[4] whether or not this would always be adhered to strictly in practice.[5]

The Soviet-produced film *Meeting on the Elbe* (*Vstrecha na El'be*)[6] of 1949 reflects the official Soviet view of the origins of the Cold War and the competition of the systems. It shows how the USSR wanted to depict its policy towards Germany. The film was realised by one of the most distinguished film directors of the Stalin era, Grigorii Aleksandrov. He had worked as an assistant and scriptwriter alongside Sergei Eizenshtein,[7] and in the 1930s accompanied him on a long journey to the USA, where he became acquainted with Hollywood, the dream factory. Since then, he has made films in which he has tried to beat the USA entertainment industry at its own game.[8] In particular his musical comedy films, aimed at the masses, became legendary and still have a cult status today.[9] Another long-term colleague of Eizenshtein was involved in the production of *Meeting on the Elbe*, namely Eduard Tissé, a prominent cameraman.[10] The soundtrack to the film was written by no less than Dmitrii Shostakovich, who had suffered under the Soviet state's cultural and educational policy in 1936, but who had remained loyal to the Soviet system and had since managed to re-establish himself in the official cultural scene.[11] The film achieved further prominence due to the fact that two female roles were awarded to stars of the Soviet cinema. Both Liubov' Orlova, who had played leading roles in numerous other films by Aleksandrov, and the great tragicomic actress, Faina Ranevskaia, played leading parts.[12] The lead male role was performed by Vladlen Davydov, who, because of the film, became one of the few new stars of cinema in the 1940s. With his impressive figure, he was particularly well-suited physically to represent the superiority of Soviet power.[13]

Aleksandrov's film is set at a fictional location, Altenstadt on the Elbe.[14] At the beginning, he shows how Nazi Germany sinks into chaos in the final stages of the war, and how many Germans try to flee the Red Army in the final days. Moments later, the Red Army triumphantly marches across the screen accompanied by its tanks, whereupon the Nazis go into hiding, or try to destroy all evidence of their Party membership. However, in the film the Red Army is received with huge jubilation by the majority of the population. The negative side effects of the occupation, such as the mass rape of German women, are not depicted.

As the film unfolds, the principles according to which the Soviet Union and the USA are ruling their respective occupation zones become obvious. In this context, *Meeting on the Elbe* shows the relationship between the Americans and Soviets gradually changing in the early years following the war, not least due to their different value systems.

In world politics, the film is set against the background of steadily deteriorating East–West relations. At the beginning of *Meeting on the Elbe* there is a highly emotional encounter between American and Soviet soldiers, who meet and hug each other on the banks of the Elbe. Already at this early point, a US General voices his displeasure at this affectionate, friendly contact of the allies, likewise at the popularity of the Red Army with his GIs. In his opinion, such fraternization is in general the worst