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Troublantes Usurpations

Double and Duplicitous: Nazi Women in Postwar Hollywood Films, 1945-1961

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RÉSUMÉ. Cet article se concentre sur quelques exemples de Berlin-Filme (*A Foreign Affair* [*La Scandaleuse de Berlin*], *The Big Lift* [*La Ville écartelée*], *Night People* [*Les Gens de la nuit*] *et One, Two, Three* [*Un, deux, trois*]) : ces films ont été réalisés entre la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale (1945) et la construction du Mur de Berlin (1961). Pendant cette période, la capitale allemande a revêtu une symbolique particulière : Berlin était une ville bombardée, toujours hantée par les fantômes du Nazisme mais elle était également la vitrine de la Guerre Froide, le theatrum belli de la plupart des conflits périphériques (blocus de Berlin, création de la RDA et RFA). Le monde connaissait alors un changement de paradigme et les représentations fictionnelles de l'Allemagne ont été partie prenante de cette mutation. L'objectif de cet article est de montrer que dans ce tournant, c'est-à-dire de la rééducation des civils allemands à la définition d'un nouvel ennemi (le Communisme), le personnage de la femme nazie a un rôle à jouer pour le public américain. Grâce à sa dualité, sa fourberie, et ses impostures, cette figure permet, comme Rainer Rother l'indique, une réorientation de l'image de l'ennemi. Le dessein de cette réorientation est de préparer les Américains à une confrontation avec leur nouvel ennemi : le communisme.

ABSTRACT. *This article focuses on a few Berlin-Filme (A Foreign Affair, The Big Lift, Night People, and One, Two, Three) which were shot between the end of World War II (1945) and the building of the Berlin Wall (1961). At the time, the German capital was endowed with a definite symbolism. It was both a bombed-out city, haunted by the ghosts of Nazism and the Cold War's mirror, the theatrum belli of most of its indirect conflicts (e.g., the Berlin blockade, the creation of the GDR and FRG). The world was then facing a paradigm shift. This article argues that in this shift from the reeducation of German civilians to the definition of a new enemy (Communism), the character of the Nazi woman has a role to play for the American audience. Thanks to her duality, duplicity, and impostures, she becomes a means to, as Rainer Rother argues, "re-orientat[e] the enemy image." The purpose behind this reorientation is "to prepare Americans for a confrontation with a new enemy": Communism.*

MOTS CLÉS : cinéma, guerre froide, dualité, Berlin-Filme, nazisme

KEYWORDS: cinema, Cold War, duality, usurpation, *Berlin-Filme*, Nazism

Introduction

Drawing on film studies and gender studies, this paper examines the themes of duality, duplicity, and imposture through the exploration of the changing representations of nazi women in four Hollywood films shot and set in Berlin (i.e., *Berlin-Films*) c. 1945-1961, within the context of the developing Cold War. It proposes a diachronic study divided into four sections for clarity of presentation and argument, each corresponding to one *Berlin Film*. It argues that the figure of the nazi woman plays a preponderant role in the reorientation of the U.S. national narrative after World War II, from a World War narrative focused on nazism to a Cold War narrative focused on communism (Etheridge 57). Building on Ralph Stern's assumption that "Cold war politics require[d] the former enemy [to] be seen in a positive, if not […] unproblematic light" (Stern 71), I show that this reorientation was the result of a long ideological transformation, embodied by the double and duplicitous nazi woman in these films.

In a devastated post-war Berlin, where social control had loosened its grip, people suffered from what a character calls "moral malaria" (*A Foreign Affair*, Billy Wilder, 1948, 04:52") and usurpation—the act of unlawfully taking somebody's position—was in full bloom. This loss of (moral) stability led to an inherent ambivalence in characterization, that is to say, double and duplicitous characters, impostors. The gulf between appearances and reality, extending to the attendant Janus-faced personalities, is a constitutive element of *Berlin Films*. As the nerve center of the Cold War, Berlin was an agitated place of ideological inbetweeness because of its division into two city-states. The struggle in Berlin helped the Americans conceive of Germany as "a battleground between capitalism and communism" (Etheridge 11). The developing Cold War and its first crisis—the Berlin blockade—increasingly blurred boundaries between victims, perpetrators, enemies, and allies. In *Know Your Enemy*, Michaela Hoenicke Moore questions the idea of an American wartime consensus. She explains that, in the early Cold War, American public opinion was marked by an absence of consensus about the "German problem," complicating postwar plans: Were the Germans victims or culprits?

Berlin Films offered the American moviegoer a representation of these evolutions, using the figures of the usurper as one of its main protagonists. If, in the movies, the feminine protagonist appeared as a destitute *Fräulein*[1], she is rarely whom she seems to be. Usurpation appeared as a narrative strategy, enabling the narrative to move suspicion from one enemy to the next. Troubled coexistences were a feature of Berlin life, and usurpation helped the viewers capture the *zeitgeist* of postwar Germany. This breach between appearances and reality may have been seen as an illustration of the absence of a consensus, as evidenced above. It may also have been a way to reorientate the enemy image—from the nazi to the communist—for the

[1] *Fräulein* is the form of address for an unmarried German woman. However, the term underwent a semantic shift after the Second World War to describe German women who found providers and protectors in the GIs.

American public. This article, therefore, does not intend to arbitrate between radically divergent interpretations of Germany's commitment to nazism. It will instead determine to what extent Hoenicke Moore's thesis on the absence of consensus illuminates one of the primary vehicles of the cultural Cold War: cinema.

Cinema became an ideological weapon to demonstrate the superiority of the U.S. and its values over the Soviet Union. To represent this absence of consensus, cinema portrayed suspicious identities, preparing the Americans to confront the new enemy and reinforce national identity. If *Berlin Films* provide documentary evidence for the American moviegoer of what a devastated Berlin looks like, they also participate in America's post-World War II "victory culture" (Engelhardt).

McCarthyism, another illustration of this "age of suspicion," also characterized the early years of the Cold War. Hollywood started to be investigated by the Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of the Representatives (HUAC) in 1947. The industry blacklisted the "Hollywood Ten" and boycotted more than 300 artists, including screenwriters, directors, and actors. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court voted the United States V. Paramount Pictures, Inc., which enforced anti-trust laws and ended Hollywood's classic studio system and its near-monopoly on production and distribution. Hollywood studios were now under pressure from the federal government to divest themselves from real proprieties and their theaters, which until that point had been allowed to screen only the films of the studios that owned them. The break of vertical integration led to a drop in weekly audience numbers and a decline in box office returns. The fate of Hollywood was also jeopardized by the introduction of new forms of entertainment on a large scale: television (200,000 TV sets in the country in 1947 against more than 45 million in 1960) (Schatz 432) and drive-in theaters (300 in 1946 against 2202 in 1950) (Schatz 293), "siphoning off the traditional first-run audience" (Schatz 294).

After the war, even though spending limits on sets required by the government were eased, these critical disruptions within the industry encouraged the development of runaway productions (Steinhart 5)—Hollywood films shot outside the immediate Los Angeles area. As Daniel Steinhart explains:

> For many film companies, the authentic foreign locations of these productions became a way to differentiate their products and to entice US audiences who had been lured away by other leisure pastimes, especially television. Even though TV would eventually aim for realism through documentary techniques, with cinema […] producers could more fully represent foreign locations through color and wide-screen technologies and deliver to audiences a vividness that TV could not yet approximate. (Steinhart 7)

Authenticity, creativity, and finances have encouraged many Hollywood producers to make films overseas since the late 1940s. Authenticity is one of the

main reasons why critics praised *Berlin-Films*[2]. The studios had to get the permission of the four occupation zones to shoot in Berlin, and once there, they dealt with the OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States) for their material needs. In February 1949, the service's director of the U.S. Air Force Public Affairs Office (USAFPAO), Stephen Leo, wrote directly to the Commander-in-Chief of the European Command, General Lucius Clay, to ask him to meet *The Big Lift's* screenwriter and director, George Seaton, personally during his stay in Germany and to provide him with the assistance needed to shoot this semi-documentary on the Berlin blockade (Shaw 202).

As Robert Shandley explains, Hollywood never did run away from home entirely. It outsourced its productions to help weather the storms of the HUAC's accusations, the Paramount Decree, and the postwar industrial pressures at home (a drop in weekly audience numbers, the rise in television set ownership) (Shandley, *Postwar Romances*, 19). In moving productions abroad, filmmakers portended "some of the processes of contemporary global film production," such as, for example, "the use of cheaper foreign labor, the reliance on overseas production centers, and the steadfast pursuit of economic incentives" (Steinhart 14) and "essentially began developing the story of their own presence abroad" (Shandley 19). They used the theme of the Old World, especially Germany, as both a ruined, dangerous country whose inhabitants are usurpers, corrupting Americans' morality and the promise of a rehabilitated, democratic country as a platform to investigate the postwar relationships between Germany and the United States. The Berlin Blockade changed the dynamic nature of these relationships considerably.

If the Berlin blockade represents a historical turning point, the *Big Lift* is its cinematographic counterpart. Between the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War, the Allied powers' suspicion about the Germans shifted progressively toward a new enemy menacing peace: communism. The Berlin blockade led the U.S. government to change its mind about the Germans (Etheridge, Goedde) and called for a cinematographic shift as far as the U.S. enemy was concerned. As Geoffrey Cocks points out:

> Ever since 1948, America and Hollywood had been preoccupied with the Cold War. There was now a new and defensive emphasis on Communism as the brother of Nazi ideological "totalitarianism" that entailed a reevaluation of the German, if not the Nazi, in American cinema. In particular, the common German soldier was rehabilitated now that West Germany was an ally against Communism in Europe. (Cocks 45)

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[2] On *A Foreign Affair* see for instance: John McCarten, "The Current Cinema: Gamballing in the Rubble", *The New Yorker*, July 10, 1948, p.39. On *The Big Lift*: Bosley Crowther, "'The Big Lift', Fox Film Based on Air Operations over Berlin, Is New Feature at Rivoli," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1950. On *Night People*: Bosley Crowther, "Gregory Peck Stars in *Night People* at Roxy—Story was shot in Berlin," *The New York Times*, April 27, 1950.

The diachronic study of *A Foreign Affair*, *The Big Lift*, *Night People*, and *One, Two, Three* allows us to understand how, in a few years, the Americans went from the status of occupier in charge of denazifying and reeducating the Germans (*A Foreign Affair*) to a status of providers and protectors of a city which had to face the blockade for eleven months in a row (*The Big Lift*). As far as the Germans were concerned, they went from the status of perpetrator to that of an ally and client-state (*One, Two, Three*) of the United States in the fight against Communism (*Night People*).

Etymologically, usurpation refers to how someone takes somebody's position and/or power without having the right to do this. Nevertheless, usurpation has become a synonym for imposture—an act of willfully deceiving others—whether or not there is proof of such an act. Hence the recurrence of the theme in the films belonging to the genre of Hollywood noir thrillers. Since the Cold War has become the age of suspicion *par excellence*, the themes of imposture and usurpation reign supreme in Cold War films and, more significantly, in films noirs, whose production was influenced by McCarthyism and nuclear weapons.

Most of the *Berlin Films* are transnational works often shot on location by expatriate or refugee artists. They borrow from the visual aesthetics and share many of the themes of the Hollywood *films noirs*[3]. Hence the recurrence of the theme of usurpation in *Berlin Films* too. However, the complexity of the *Berlin Films*' tone, which stemmed partly from the influx of foreign directors, makes it difficult to establish and maintain them within the boundaries of a single category. *Berlin Films* blur the boundaries of the films' genres, often combining documentary features and feature forms, on-location and studio shooting, realism and fantasy, and even, in the case of the *Big Lift*, professional and non-professional actors.

A Foreign Affair is a comedy. It is also instilled by another significant influence: *film noir*. If it might seem a "contradiction" to nominate a comedy as a *film noir* (Sinyard and Turner 83), *A Foreign Affair* is undeniably a *noir* comedy, set in a devastated Berlin and culminating in the killing of Otto von Birgel, Erika's ex-lover. It shares many dramatic structures with *film noirs*: a double and duplicitous femme-fatale (Erika) seduces a morally flawed hero (Pringle), himself seducing a severe female moralist afraid of the behavior of the first one (Sinyard and Turner 83). The hybrid aesthetics of the *Berlin Films* (neo-realism, comedy, *film noir*) will lead us to question the links between usurpation and genre.

Usurpation is everywhere in Billy Wilder's comedy *One, Two, Three* and is portrayed to such extremes that it is no longer an offense but an end-justifies-the-means principle that guides the characters. Usurpation, which is usually harmful and illegal, becomes positive in *One, Two, Three*. *Berlin Films* deconstruct the generic conventions associated with the theme of usurpation in Cold War cinema, that is that a usurper is often a man, a spy, a private, or a petty criminal who is concerned either with resolving an enigma or a quest, establishing the Truth, or manipulating it. *Berlin Films* go further by manipulating and even transcending the conventions in

[3] See also *Berlin Express* by Jacques Tourneur.

the service of ideological reorientation. Gender becomes a resource for creating cinematic images of the enemy in *Berlin Films*. The narrative of the enemy image is itself usurped or subverted since one pattern that emerges is that the enemy is often male (Dudouyt and Maillet).

A Foreign Affair (Billy Wilder, 1948)

An American parliamentary commission is landing in Berlin to investigate the morale of the American occupation troops. There is only one woman among its members, a Congresswoman from Iowa, Phoebe Frost (Jean Arthur). As her name indicates, she is a young, austere, and even frigid woman. She is particularly shocked by the reality of Berlin's life: a flourishing black market, American G.I.s going around with German *Fräuleins* despite the ban on fraternization. Barely arrived, she discovers that one of the G.I.s has an affair and protects a German woman: Erika von Schlütow (Marlene Dietrich). She is also suspected of having a nefarious nazi past. However, it turns out that this G.I. is none other than Captain Pringle (John Lund), with whom Frost is falling in love too.

Phoebe Frost and Erika von Schlütow: Two allegories of their nation

Phoebe Frost and Erika von Schlütow appear as "direct opposites," each of them becoming "gendered allegories of a nation" (Gemünden 68). If the pristine Frost appears as an over-zealous technocrat, Erika is the sexy and seductive German cabaret performer at the Lorelei, the deadly seductress. She is reworking the archetypal *film noir* character of the *femme fatale*, who exploits men by using her sexual charms. She shares all the characteristics with the *noir femme fatale*: long blond hair, make-up, long, lovely legs, cigarettes, and access to her sexuality that "her innocent sister" (Place 49)—Phoebe—lacks. Like *film noir femmes fatales*, Erika is mainly cast in low-keys, or chiaroscuro, suggesting duplicity. If she also lures a good guy (Pringle) to his moral compromise, her duplicity is constrained by a dangerous and devastated Berlin.

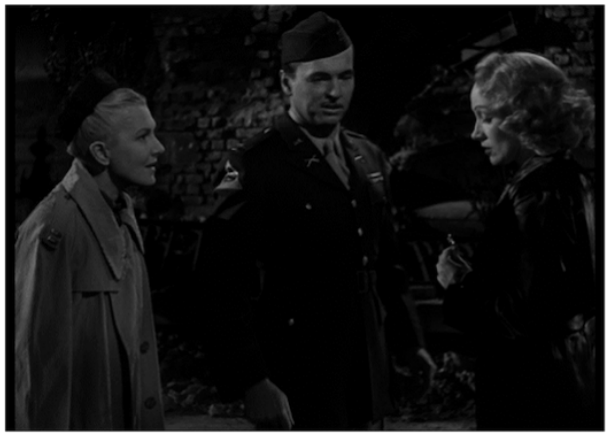

Figure 1: Erika and Phoebe: Two allegories of a nation (DVD Screenshot 50:45")

Frost passes for a German woman twice (Gemünden 70). Thus, although the two women appear as direct opposites, we agree with Gemünden that "the line that divides these two distinct representations of national identity is more blurred than the stereotypes suggest" (Gemünden 69). Her physical appearance is also an element that helps her confuse the issue. Frost is blond, stubborn, and straightforward in her dealings. Her hair—a blond braid encircling her head—is redolent of the style associated with Bavarian folkloric clothes, the Dirndls (Craig 199). It was also how *Mädchen* (girls), belonging to the girl's wings of the Hitler Youth, the *Bünd Deutscher Mädel* (BDM), did their hair (Craig 199).

Figure 2: Phoebe Frost: German or American? (DVD Screenshot 38:42")

Phoebe Frost will invent herself with a new identity to seduce Captain Pringle. She will drop her guard. She will be infected by the ambient "moral malaria," too. Thanks to Phoebe's "usurpation," Billy Wilder initiates a reorientation of the enemy image, suggesting that the antagonism perpetrator/victim is not as easy as it may seem. In Postwar Berlin, one molds its identity according to the circumstances; identities and ideologies are neither stable nor to be taken for granted.

The Contamination of Phoebe Frost

Because of war casualties, Germany suffered from a *Männermangel* (lack of men). In 1946, women between twenty and forty outnumbered men 160 to 100 (Goedde 2003, 44). This demographic shift "helped American soldiers reconceptualize Germany as a femini[ne] nation" (Goedde 2003, 44). However, in *A Foreign Affair*, German women seem to contaminate American G.I.s with what Phoebe Frost calls "moral malaria." The disease will not spare the Congresswoman.

Frost is the serious, bespectacled conservative Congresswoman of Iowa, wearing a hat veil and a woman's suit, whose shirt is buttoned up to the top. As time goes by, Berlin perverts her. The city transforms her both physically, morally, and

romantically. This "moral malaria" leads her to take off her glasses, make up, and slip out of her woman's suit into an evening gown that she has exchanged against her "typewriter" and "six-ribbons" at the black market.

Figure 3: The frigid Frost (DVD Screenshot 2:45")

Figure 4: The melting Frost (DVD Screenshot 16:02")

Figure 5: The melted Frost (DVD Screenshot 1:26:15")

If the ambient atmosphere undeniably contaminates Phoebe, Erika is the instructor of Frost's imposture. When the cabaret singer and the Congresswoman first meet officially at the doorstep of Erika's crumbled apartment, Erika, being surprised by Frost's austere look, says (50:54-51:42"):

> **ERIKA**: I see you do not believe in lipstick. And what a curious way to do your hair, or rather not to do it. […] Perhaps if you would change the line of your eyebrows a little.

These lines echo the whole reversal undertaken by Frost, who models herself upon the *femme-fatale*. Phoebe's dressing-up as a *Fräulein* is a (seduction) game beyond any idea of offense and illegality. She is made up to look like an *eindeutschen* (germanized) American who succumbs to Berlin's temptations from a time before putting on her uniform again and coming back to America as Pringle's future wife—suggesting a return to domesticity for her. Phoebe's contamination was also a way for Billy Wilder to express his skepticism about Allied policies. According to Tony Judt, opinion polls conducted in the direct aftermath of the war "confirm[ed] the limited impact of Allied efforts" (Judt 58). He reports that throughout 1945-1949, most Germans believed that "Nazism was a good idea, badly applied" (Judt 58). In *A Foreign Affair*, Nazism appears too ingrained in the Germans to promise betterment soon, as highlighted by a little boy, who compulsively draws swastikas, and the ambiguous character of Erika.

The Denazification of Erika explained by the Production Code

In the two years (1945-1947), which separate the very first steps of the plot and the shooting of the actual film, the director had become more doubtful about the success of the reeducation program (Gemünden 60), and it is reflected in his film. The allegory of Germany, personified by Erika von Schlütow, moves from a scandalous former Nazi who is compromised by her past, in the first drafts of the

scenario, into an attractive *femme fatale* who tries to cope and survive in the rubble of a starving city.

Wilder's freedom was limited and restricted by the (Motion Picture) Production Code or Code Hays, Hollywood's self-censorship code (Gemünden, Sollors). The script was submitted to Stephen B. Jackson[4] at the Production Code Administration (PCA) in November 1947. In a letter from Stephen B. Jackson to Luigi Lurashi, the interim chief censor warns the Paramount executive, head of the censorship department, that, according to the PCA: "the material presents a very serious problem of industry policy with regard to the characterization of the members of the Congressional Committee and the members of the American Army occupation" (Paramount files 2). He says that:

> the portrayal of the Congresswoman, Phoebe Frost, getting drunk in a public nightclub of poor reputation, hanging from the ceiling and being arrested and carted off to jail in the police van is in violation of that portion of the Production Code which states that, 'the history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly.' (Paramount files 2)

The Production Code Administration also points out the film's "over-emphasis on illicit-sex," which "seems to run through most of the script," especially in the relationship between Pringle and Erika (Paramount Files 2). This "general preoccupation with illicit sex" has to be "eliminated" (Paramount files 3) for the finished picture to receive the PCA's seal of approval. The same goes for the "portrayal of the wholesale and universal activities in the black market on the part of occupational personal" (Paramount Files 3). The letter ends as follows: "we will be happy to read the changes covering the above difficulties, and also the balance of the script when this is ready. You understand, of course, that our final judgment will be based on the finished picture" (Paramount Files 6). The denazification of the character of Erika von Schlütow is not only due to the Americans' and Wilder's change of attitude toward Germany's occupation and reeducation. It can also be explained by the fact that the film should conform to the requirements of the Production Code.

Erika, a resilient opportunist

Unlike Phoebe, Erika is a knowing, highly eroticized woman. In her first scene, she asks Pringle: "when you come back, bring me some sugar … And some soap … And hairpins … And a pillow" to go with the mattress he has exchanged against his birthday cake at the black market (21:23-21:38"). Pringle is both her protector—he hides an incriminating file to prevent her from being judged at Nuremberg—and provider. In postwar Berlin, where the barter economy and black market are part of everyday life, Erika's voice, body, and cunning have become her means to survive.

[4] Stephen B. Jackson was PCA's chief censor. He filled in for J. Breen in 1948.

Blurring the distinction between Erika and Phoebe, Wilder gives the spectator reason to sympathize with Erika despite her supposed Nazi past. If she may seem to make the most of her affair with Pringle, it is just because she has had to face privations and hardships for years: "We've all become animals with exactly one instinct left. Self-preservation" (1:33:45-1:33:50"). This quest for "self-preservation" is reinforced by Marlene Dietrich's triumphant return to the role of the sexy singer in a nightclub that made her famous eighteen years before *A Foreign Affair*, in Josef von Sternberg's *Der Blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*). In the musical comedy-drama, she is the heartless siren (Lola Lola), who lures Professor Rath to degradation but goes on singing, accompanied by Frederick Hollaender on the piano, as in *A Foreign Affair*. Erika is Lola Lola's older sister. She is a forced impostor. She has remained here for eighteen years, trying to make a living and relying on her resources to survive (Gemünden 66).

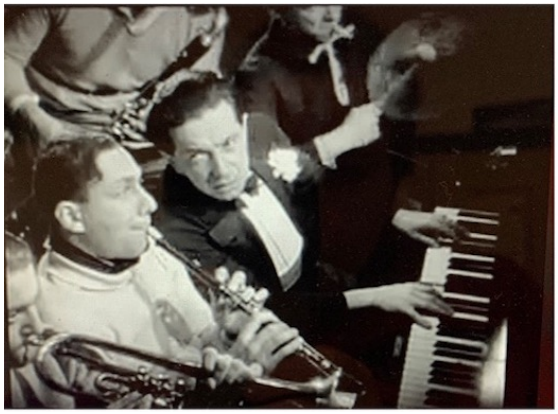

Figure 6: Frederick Hollaender in The Blue Angel (DVD Screenshot 21:32")

Figure 7: Marlene Dietrich as Erika with Frederick Hollaender (DVD Screenshot 33:11")

She is a usurper struggling for her life—a theme reminiscent of the *film noir* (e.g., *Pitfall*, *Night and the City*, *Out of the Past*, …). More than an impostor, Erika is an opportunist. Her opportunism and sleeping-for-food are intrinsic consequences of the postwar context. As Petra Goedde explains: "[l]eft without a male breadwinner after the war, and with scarce indigenous economic resources, [German women] looked toward American G.I.s to fill the vacuum, offering companionship and often sex in return for American army rations" (Goedde 1999, 9).

Billy Wilder blurs the frontier between "good" and "evil." Derdiger notes: "Erika is neither good or bad in any formulaic Hollywood sense, and she is just as likely to be a victim as a perpetrator, even if she is hardly a stereotypical victim" (Derdiger 34§). The silk dress embroidered with ivory-colored sequins that Erika wears during her cabaret performances is the same as Marlene Dietrich wore during her USO tour (United Service Organization), aiming to entertain American troops on the front. Wilder's reference to *The Blue Angel* and Marlene Dietrich's wartime activism against nazism turns "the figure of the Nazi sympathizer into a politically much more layered and ultimately sympathetic character" (Gemünden 71).

Figure 8: Erika wearing the silk dress designed by Irene Lentz (DVD Screenshot 30:16")

Figure 9: Marlene Dietrich performing on her USO tour in Italy in May, 1944.
Credits: Harry Kidd, Flickr. Source: Harry Kidd.

However, Pringle eventually returns to Iowa with his future wife, Phoebe Frost, while Erika is arrested and presumably sent to a labor camp. Erika's and Phoebe's usurpations serve an ideological purpose. If *A Foreign Affair* takes up the issue of fraternization, it does not seal a reconciliation between the U.S. States and Germany. The (ex)- Nazi woman, half-victim, half-perpetrator, is an example of convergence between the film's narrative and Hoenicke Moore's theses. The unstable universe depicted in *A Foreign Affair* reflects the tremendous cultural apprehension focused on the "German problem." The movie seems nevertheless to initiate a (long) transition from the shared status of "victim-perpetrator" to "ally" in the containment of communism. If there is no doubt about the fate of Erika, under the escort of five G.I.s, Hank (Paul Douglas) and Danny (Montgomery Clift), the two heroes of the *Big Lift*, remain divided on the "German problem."

The Big Lift (George Seaton, 1950)

In the spring of 1948, two American airmen, Hank Kowalski and Danny McCullough, are transferred to Germany to be part of a Squadron that will deliver supplies to blockaded Berlin. Soon, Danny will love a civilian—Frederica Burkhardt (Cornell Borchers). Nevertheless, the ghosts of nazism and the Soviet threat will taint his romance.

The courageous *Trümmerfrau* (rubble woman) does not arouse the suspicion of the spectators until a scene in the *Siegesallee* (Victory Avenue), which gathers the statues of all German military heroes (53:24-54:04").

Figure 10: Frederica, a courageous Trümmerfrau (DVD Screenshot 38:52")

Seeming and being: The Two-Faced Frederica

In this scene, the spectator (and the spectator only) understands that the husband of the "war widow" is probably not dead. Nor has he been enrolled against his will in the S.S. (*Schutzstaffel*), as she pretends. Frederica's husband now lives in the United States under a false identity. The nazi criminal, once no longer visible through his uniform, vanishes in the crowd and becomes a usurper. A close-up on an envelope and a letter addressed to Ernst Mirbach will later prove to the spectators that they are right (1:51:26"). It seems that Frederica is Mrs. Mirbach.

Frederica and Danny have what seems to be a romantic walk in the *Siegesallee*. The extradiegetic violin music conveys an atmosphere of apparent serenity. The two characters are then getting closer to the camera and the statue of Frederick the Great:

> **DANNY**: Who were these characters? Frederick the Great…
> **FREDERICA**: These are all the military heroes. It's called the *Siegesallee*. Victory Avenue.
> **DANNY**: They do not seek victory anymore, do they? (53:32-53:37")

Danny is filmed from above so that he looks tiny, almost insignificant compared to the statue of Frederick the Great. Asking what seems to be a mere rhetorical

question, Danny is accompanied by the extradiegetic sound of trumpets and drum rolls, turning the romantic atmosphere into a heavy one. Danny's question transforms Frederica, who looks somber and smiles when Danny's gaze meets hers.

Figure 11: Frederica's double face (DVD Screenshot: 53:53")

The *Trümmerfrau*, whom the spectator has won sympathy for, is, in reality, the wife of a Nazi. At least, it is what the spectator understands from the film's logic, which does not conclude about Frederica's true motivations. This ambiguity as to the interpretation of the scene and Frederica's identity and fate allows George Seaton to address the legacies of National Socialism. Frederica deliberately lies to McCullough. She invents for herself and her whole family a new identity. When Danny discovers the truth and decides to demand an explanation, she justifies her imposture by a struggle for self-preservation. Frederica pleads not guilty. She suggests that to cope with the situation, one must craft their identity. She, therefore, becomes an impostor under constraint, who schemes to marry Danny to gain U.S. citizenship and to divorce him once they have entered the country and then join her husband already living in the States as a true impostor.

Frederica's and her husband's impostures work as an implicit way for Seaton to say that the denazification of Germany was incomplete. As Ralph Stern postulates, "[F]rederica's character does little to reorient images of the enemy, even if Gerda's progressive enlightenment as to the virtues of American democracy serves as a foil to Frederica's failings" (Stern 72). Gerda (Bruni Löbel), Hank's (Paul Douglas) *Fräulein* is the perfect reeducated West German citizen. She can recite the Preamble of the American Constitution and the beginning of the Declaration of Independence by heart. The two feminine characters metaphorically symbolize that the airlift was at the cusp of two eras. Berlin was both the emblem of a totalitarian state whose

remnants were still visible in the city's urban and human fabric (Frederica), and a future re-educated, democratic city under American guidance (Gerda).

In many *Berlin Films*, Hollywood cinema portrays the relationship between the U.S. and Germany through a gendered prism and often reduces the political to a romantic conflict. Romances between a *Fräulein* and a G.I. help depict West Germany's development from an enemy to an ally of the U.S. If both German and American reviewers[5] criticize these romantic plots, George Seaton's semi-documentary offers a political response to the escalating Cold War, "stressing the high symbolic significance of a strong American resolve in West Berlin" (Horchscherf and Laucht 89). In the 1950s, the Cold War reached a new crisis—the Korean War—which led to a sharp increase in hostility between the Eastern and the Western bloc. Released in 1954, *Night People* (Nunnally Johnson) focuses on a different kind of imposture from the German woman.

Night People (Nunnally Johnson, 1954)

John Leatherby (Ted Avery) and his German girlfriend, Katie Gerhardt (Marianne Koch), are going to the cinema one night in West Berlin. While taking her back home, the 19-year-old corporal soldier is kidnapped, presumably by the Soviets, from East Berlin. In charge of the case, Colonel Van Dyke (Gregory Peck) will soon learn that the situation is not as easy as he thinks.

My enemy's friend is my enemy. My enemy's enemy is my friend

Van Dyke is assigned his best informer, *Frau* Hoffmeyer (Anita Björk), to dig up details. She warns Van Dyke that the Soviets wish to trade John for two German citizens—the Schindler couple - even though they have not specified why. Matters get tough when Van Dyke learns that the two Germans are not whom he thinks. Their will to save their skin has forced them to adopt a false identity. Frau Schindler reveals to him that her name is, in reality, Mrs. Cameron and that she is a British citizen. Realizing that he could be jailed for this arrest, Van Dyke questions the woman, who informs him that her husband, whose real name is Gerd von Kratzenow, participated in a plot to assassinate Hitler. She and her husband had been sent to jail but managed to escape during an American bombing raid, and she is sure that ex-Nazis, now working with the communists, want revenge. At the same time, Van Dyke prepares to exfiltrate his Russian counterpart, Col. Lodijensky, to the United States.

When Van Dyke is forced to return to the headquarters to meet his British counterpart, officer Stanways, he learns that Lodijensky has killed his whole family and committed suicide after someone informed the Russians of his exfiltration attempt. Stanways also gives him a photograph of a double agent—named

[5] See: Crowther, Bosley. "'The Big Lift', Fox Film Based on Air Operations Over Berlin, Is New Feature at Rivoli." *The New York Times*, April, 27th 1950, p. 47. "Eisgekühlte Berzirke". *Der Spiegel*, May 1950, p. 36-38.

Stramm—Lodijensky's denouncer. However, Frau Hoffmeyer and Mrs. Stramm are the same person. Van Dyke has been deceived by his feminine informer.

Troubling usurpation and gender trouble

One of the tendencies of the rubble-era filmmaking was to represent deceitful and "unscrupulous" women who were "dependent upon men" (Shandley 173). Such a tendency suggests that the subtlety of these *Berlin Films* compared to other anti-communist films may be explained by the presence of an "impostress" (a female impostor) among its main characters. If Hoffmeyer's imposture is troubling for the spectators, it may be because she blurs the stereotypes of gender. She possesses none of the "qualities" of the *femme fatale*: she has a pretty masculine silhouette and attitude. Physically speaking, she appears austere, poorly dressed, and very unfeminine. Her hair is short, and her lady's suit reveals her square shoulders. The double agent is an alcoholic addicted to absinthe. She is the perfect antithesis of the sexy secretary Ingeborg (Liselotte Pulver) in *One, Two, Three*, another comedy by Billy Wilder.

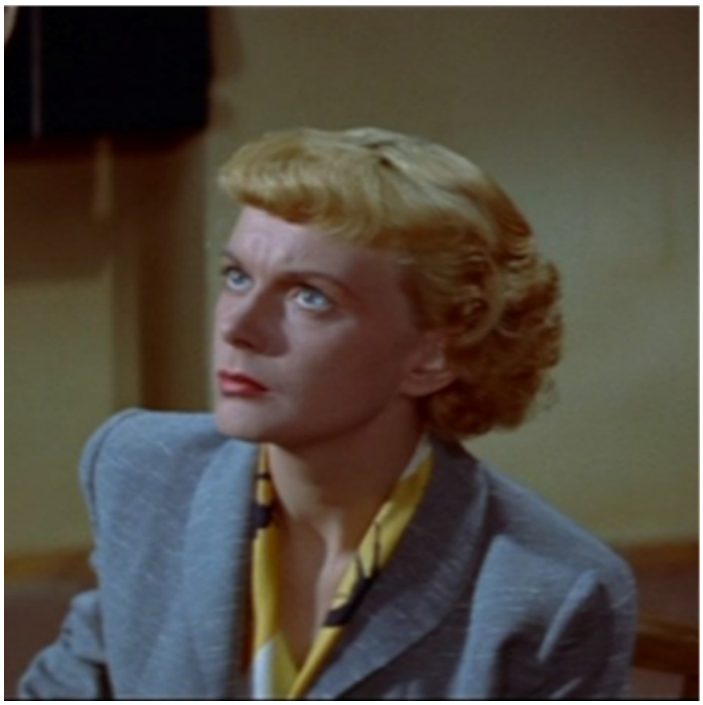

Figure 12: Hoffenmeyer, the manly double agent (DVD Screenshot: 56:13")

***One, Two, Three* (Billy Wilder, 1961)**

McNamara (James Cagney) is a high-ranking executive in the Coca-Cola Company in West Berlin. One day, he receives a call from his boss, W.B. Hazeltine (Howard St. John), working at Coca-Cola's headquarters in Atlanta, asking him to take care of his daughter, Scarlett (Pamela Tiffin) who has undertaken a Grand Tour. What was expected to be a two-week trip turns into a two-month stay during which the young woman becomes infatuated with, pregnant by, and married to, a young communist, Otto Piffl (Horst Buchholz). McNamara has to turn the East German communist into a perfect capitalist son-in-law before the Hazeltines travel to Berlin. To do so, he is helped by his venal secretary: Frau Ingeborg (Liselotte Pulver).

Figure 1: The sexy Ingeborg (DVD Screenshot: 07:42")

"Is everybody in this world corrupt"?

In *One, Two, Three*, the enemy image's reorientation appears outdated. The transition from nazism to communism is put aside, subverted by humor. Ideological divides are made entirely obsolete. Each character becomes a usurper. Despite his loathing for capitalism, Otto will be able to put himself willy-nilly (and literally) in the shoes of a capitalist executive in the twinkling of an eye.

Figure 14: Otto, the communist (DVD Screenshot: 31:25")

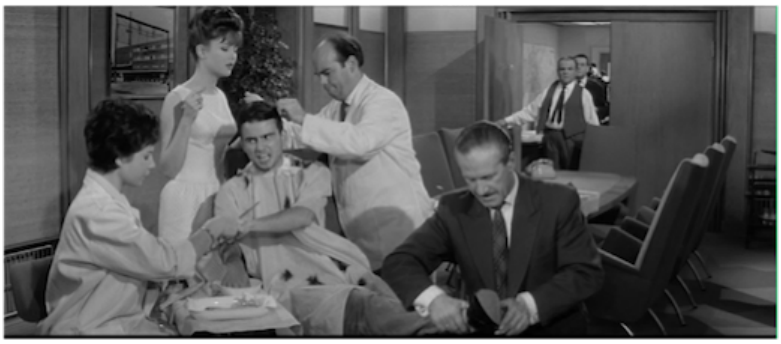

Figure 15: Otto's transformation (DVD Screenshot: 1:14:34")

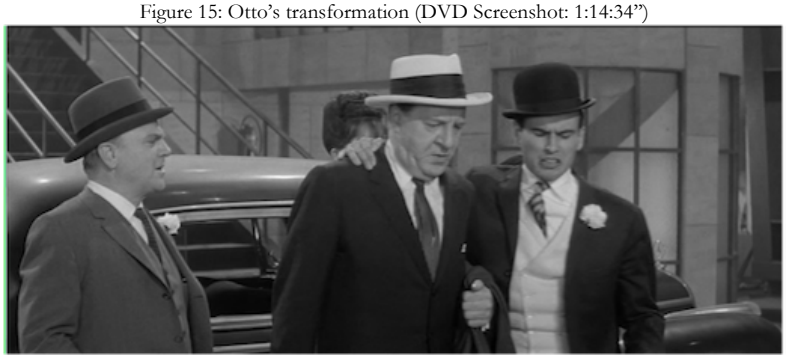

Figure 16: Otto, a perfect capitalist (DVD Screenshot: 1:41:27")

Like Erika in *A Foreign Affair*, the characters of *One, Two, Three* shelve their beliefs according to the benefits that can be reaped. The concepts of usurpation, imposture, and duality seem to be exploded or even transcended since every character makes their identity and opinions fit the situation they will benefit from. What if, after all, comedy was the genre of usurpation?

Reorientating the enemy image: from gender to genre

Focusing on nothing more than the marriage of a wealthy capitalist to a poor communist, the comedy shares many characteristics of the screwball comedies of the 1930s. Being characterized, like screwball comedies, by "super-chatting" and an accumulation of gags, *One, Two, Three* blows away everything in its path. Meanings, beliefs, convictions, certainty, and identity are shelved. Reality and appearances are confused.

Usurpation is strongly linked to suspicion. Hence the recurrence of the theme in anti-communist films in which suspicion is the ideological glue. In *Berlin Films*, usurpation and imposture are first subverted by gender. As far as anti-communist films are concerned, we are used to spy films in which the Communists are the bad guys. The character of the spy—belonging either to the good forces or the evil forces—is a man because, according to Michel Ciment, "men are at the center of criminal, detective, police or gangster narratives—women are only existing on the

story's fringes" (Ciment 89, my translation). It may sound no coincidence if in *Night People*, the noirest of these *Berlin Films*, Hoffmeyer is a manly woman.

Nonetheless, over the years, the agency of the feminine characters decreases paradoxically, leading them to be characterized by different forms of duplicity and imposture, being either conscious and intentional or resulting from their living circumstances. Berlin Films' reframing of imposture and suspicion into the feminine sphere offers a less Manichean portrait of the conflict than most Cold War films, whose ideological content was transparent. If the status of the divided city of Berlin and gender may explain the subtlety of these *Berlin Films* compared to other Cold War films, cinematographic genres should not be neglected. The explanation of imposture is not the same in comedies as in dramas or *films noirs*.

If the link between the theme of usurpation and *film* noir might seem more substantial than with other film genres, femininity as duplicity being one of its tropes, comedies aiming at correcting morals (*castigat ridendo mores*) may be a way to transcend usurpation as if the concept was no longer relevant. For instance, in *One, Two, Three*, the concepts of imposture, duality, and usurpation are deconstructed and made obsolete through a comedy of gestures and words. It is worth mentioning here that *One, Two, Three* is an adaptation of Ferenc Molnàr's play, *Egy, ketto, három* (*One, Two, Three*). First staged in 1929, *Egy, ketto, három* is a farce that follows the teenage daughter of a Scandinavian industrialist who, while the house guest of a Parisian banker, falls in love and marries a Socialist cab driver. The banker learns of this shortly before the arrival of the girl's father in Paris. Therefore, the bulk of the play deals with "the banker's devices to make the cab driver acceptable to the father-in-law."[6] Billy Wilder changed the scene and moved the plot to Cold War Berlin so that the former German capital became a background against which to satirize capitalist-communist relations. He attacks nazi Germany and the Soviet Union not as two totalitarian regimes but as aesthetics, first and foremost, political regimes in which spectacle has a preponderant place (Sinyard and Turner 106-108). As a result, the two ideologies are turned into a show in *A Foreign Affair* and *One, Two, Three*, a show in which Erika and McNamara are the stage directors.

Usurpation is no longer a transgression of the accepted norms but the norm itself. A review published in *The New York Times* on January 6th, 1962, explains: "The picture is a farce, and intentionally mocks and reverses every conventional attitude we have, or think we ought to have; virtue is punished, corruption and stupidity rewarded […]."[7] This difficulty of distinguishing between the norm (the good) and margins (evil) predominates in this treatment of usurpation and refutes any simplistic judgment. Impostors are powerful tools to reveal how a given period works (Gari). This elimination of the themes of usurpation and suspicion in *One, Two, Three* is linked to the Cold War climate of mistrust, oppression, paranoia, and fear that gripped Berlin throughout the period and led to the construction of the Berlin Wall.

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[6] Schumach, Murray. "Wilder to adapt Molnar Comedy." *New York Times*, January, 12th 1961, p.22.
[7] Gill, Brendan. "The Current Cinema: Faster, Faster." *The New Yorker*, January, 6th 1962.

If comedy might finally be the genre allowing the film to transcend the themes of usurpation, imposture seems to be characterized by a particular aesthetics that mainly draws its influence from *films noirs*. This poetics of usurpation implies a consistent cultural attitude, a form of fracture. After World War II, Berlin was a traumatized city with a troubled identity. As Robert Shandley points out: "The end of World War II not only brought with the destruction of a genocidal German nation state, it also signified the end of an entire people's understanding of itself" (Shandley 1). *Berlin Films* were products of American cinema stemming from the postwar period, aiming at showing the American audience what a devastated Germany looked like. Given the moral, physical, and political chaos in which Germany lay, damaged, unstable, and false identities embodied by feminine characters would become fodder for many *Berlin Films*. Like German *Trümmerfilme* (rubble films), American *Berlin Films* use the "*mise en scene* of destroyed Germany as a background and metaphor [for] the destruction of German's own sense of themselves" (Shandley 1). However, if German *Trümmerfilme* became a way to exorcize National Socialism and transform "Berlin and Berliners from perpetrators to victims of international disputes" (Shandley 179), American *Berlin Films* used Berlin ruins to raise the question of the future of Germany.

All world's a stage

Reality is cracking in Hollywood's postwar Berlin, resulting in many close-ups on photographs. They are recurrent motifs of the style of usurpation, no matter the genre of the film. They indicate women's duplicitous nature. Danny and Frederica first meet at a celebration accompanying the landing of the 100,000th supply planes, during which Frederica is in charge of offering a present to Danny to thank Americans for the airlift (27:00"). Their story begins with a photograph intended for mass circulation. An American journalist-photographer asks Frederica to kiss Danny to capture the moment for his newspaper.

The staged photographs serve as a counterpoint to the two newsreels that open the film (Stern 77). Berlin is a world of appearances, simulacra, and usurpations. As Stern points out: "In Berlin the locations may be real, but the events depicted, at least those for popular consumption, are very much constructed, placing into question the documentary authority of the film itself" (Stern 77). A possible meaning of the many photographs is to indicate Berlin's duplicitous or constructed character and that of its inhabitants in a broad sense. The portraiture of the double and duplicitous woman is also a common motif in *Berlin Films*. In *A Foreign Affair*, a torn photograph of Erika on Plummer's desk leads Phoebe to think that he is the one who protects the cabaret's singer. In the noir thriller *Night People*, a photograph also brings Hoffmeyer's usurpation to the fore. Put on a green[8] desk blotter, the photograph Van Dyke has been given by Stanways is compositionally dominating, giving visual proof of Hoffmeyer's duplicity. As Janey Place notes: "The lesson is

[8] Green is considered as the color of treachery and betrayal in Western cultures.

obvious: only in a controlled, impotent, powerless form, powerless to move or to act, is the sexual woman no threat to the film noir man" (Place 60). If Janey Place's commentary focuses on films noirs, it could be applied to *Berlin Films*, whatever their genre.

Figure 17: Hoffmeyer becomes one with Stramm (DVD Screenshot: 53:57")

This visual style of usurpation conveys this climate of suspicion (usurpation's corollary) through photographs and extensive use of center-framed close-ups or profiles of suspicious characters, as proven by Hoffmeyer's, Frederica's, and Erika's portraits. Split-lighting, which lights-up half of the face while keeping the other half shadowed, becomes a way to portray usurpers. If Frost is mainly shown from the front and in full light at the beginning of the film, as she undergoes her transformation and becomes Erika's double, she, like her "mentor," becomes cast in a chiaroscuro, underlying their ambiguous character (Gemünden 60).

Whatever their genre, these films responded to this climate of hyper-surveillant paranoia, which characterized the early years of the Cold War, with a potent visual style of usurpation that reflected the public mood and mainly drew its influence from *films noirs*. If comedy may be the genre that allows usurpation to be transcended, this effulgence of the theme of usurpation through *Berlin Films* seems, nevertheless, to derive from the general influence of noir cinema in which "the civilian world seems pervasively threatened by a vague, looming force, an 'enemy' that somehow cannot be named or identified easily and that threatens to devour masculinity, security, and loyalty" (Williams 184).

Conclusion

Usurpation and suspicion structured post-war society. In *Berlin Films*, feminine usurpation reorientates the enemy image from the Nazi to the Communist. The theme seems to play an active role in preparing Americans to confront their new enemy: Communism. If the American is first portrayed as the victor/occupier and the German as the perpetrator/victim in the immediate postwar period, the Blockade of Berlin acts as a turning point. It entailed a reevaluation of the German, if not the Nazi, in Hollywood cinema (Cocks 45). After the airlift, the GIs were seen as liberators-saviors and the Germans as allies. The representation of the figure

of the feminine impostor was central to the context of the developing Cold War. In the direct aftermath of the war, Erika and Frederica were forced impostors and liars. Erika was an opportunist who took advantage of Pringle to escape punishment at Nuremberg and better her daily life in the harsh environment of postwar Berlin. Frederica was a liar who pretended to be in love with Danny to marry him and gain U.S citizenship. Their imposture was a performance shaped by the postwar context. In the mid-1950, Hoffmeyer was a double agent for the Soviets. When the Cold War got warmer (Korean War, McCarthyism), usurpation became more severe, and women blurred the stereotypes of gender, reinforcing the pattern according to which the enemy is often male.

Berlin Films belong to a cinema of transition - from a World War narrative, which "stressed tales of the enduring power of Nazism and fascism in postwar Germany," to a Cold War narrative, which tries to "rehabilitate Germany and anchor it firmly in the Western World" (Etheridge 57). In the reorientation process, nazi feminine impostors disappear to make way for masculine communist impostors. After the construction of the Berlin Wall (1961)– the most tangible symbol of the Cold War, screens would be flooded with male spies. A year later (1962), the most famous spy—James Bond (*Dr. No* by Terence Young)—would hit the screens, grossing more than $840,000 in just two weeks, illustrating the fact that the protagonists of spy stories and *films noirs* in the late 1950s, early 1960s and beyond are predominantly male, women existing only on the "story's fringes" (Ciment 89, Krutnik XIII) as foils of these ordinary heroes. Nevertheless, the paradigm seems to be changing, as proven by *No Time to Die* (Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2021), which introduces a female character—Noami (played by Lashana Lynch)—as MI6's first female 007.

Filmography

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