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„Barbaric, Backward, and Belligerent:
Residual Eastern European Evil
in post-1989 U.S.-American and British Film“

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To those who make me read.

To those who make me write.

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1. Introduction

A Russian master-spy plots the assassination of the U.S. President...

A Slovak hostel exposes backpackers to torture and violent death...

A Serbian tracker executes a Navy pilot in an attempt to cover-up the genocide on Bosnian civilians...

What reads like the taglines of Hollywood propaganda exploits from the height of the Cold War, are actually plot excerpts of movies released in the 21st century. Significantly, Philip Noyce's *Salt* (2010), Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005), and John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) – an action thriller, a horror movie, and a war movie respectively – have in common a formulaic depiction of Eastern European evil as barbaric, backward, and belligerent.

This is not to suggest that filmmakers from the West impose the role of the villain exclusively on Eastern European characters. The aforementioned examples shall merely highlight that, despite the fact that almost two decades have passed since the decline of the Soviet Union, the Eastern European villain thrives and abounds in U.S.-American¹ and British cinema, evocating old rivalries from an outdated bipolar world order and reproducing equally old-fashioned conventions and stereotypes from the early days of cinema. Persistently portrayed as savage, demonic, and monstrous, the Eastern European villain exemplifies what Raymond Williams termed 'residual culture'².

This residual, pejorative depiction of Eastern Europeans in movies from the United States and Great Britain implies that the countries' respective film industries reproduce and naturalize a dichotomous order in which Eastern Europe is stigmatized as the evil Other. The West obtains a privileged position, constructing itself in binary opposition to a negative image of Eastern Europe. The latter serves as a projection of Western deficiencies and thus becomes irredeemably connoted with a plethora of negative characteristics. The formulas applied in the process actually predate the invention of cinema. They have been appropriated and installed by the U.S.-American film industry from 1917 onwards and encased in Western cinema tradition during the 1950s.

¹ The term 'American' is often used metonymously in relation to the United States. For the sake of clarification and political correctness, the term 'U.S.-American' will be used in this thesis.

² "The residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past as an effective element of the present. Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation" (Williams 122).

In the course of this thesis, I will analyze the roots and current reproduction of said formulas, focusing on the Hollywood horror genre of the 50s and U.S.-American as well as British backwoods horror of the 21st century. I will prove that the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, both of which are duly associated with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, did not redeem the Eastern Europeans of their traditional role as barbaric, backward, and belligerent villains. I will examine the ways in which their depiction was altered by 9/11 and the increasing globalization, and show that it has not changed substantially since the 50s. While the United States and Great Britain engage in a global war on terror, the countries' film industries continue to wage a cold war on screen.

2. Early Eastern European evil and the Cold War

2.1 Western cinema, Eastern European evil – the basics

2.1.1 Blending the concepts of Eastern Europe and evil

2.1.1.1 Russians, communists, Soviets

In 1950, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics stretched from the Black Sea to the Bering Sea, incorporating, among others, present-day Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The distance between Odessa and Vladivostok is approximately 75 000 kilometers. Vladivostok, which translates to ‘power in the East’, is closer to Tokyo than to any Western European city. (Freeze 465) It is this vast territory with which the term ‘Eastern Europe’ has been associated for more than half a century. A term that, mainly owing to this association, proves elusive in both its denotative and connotative dimensions.

To view Eastern Europe as the remains of the Soviet Bloc, as an imagined conglomerate of nation states formerly united under the red flag, may offer but an unsatisfactory approach to a tricky quest for clear definitions. However, it already hints at the conceptual nature of Eastern Europe by highlighting the difficulties in detaching it from its communist past. Besides, it also reveals the significance of Russia as a political, cultural, and geographical³ center. (In this regard, of course, the term ‘Eastern Europe’ is not only elusive but literally misleading, since the major part of Russia is located on the Asian continent.)

Despite the significance of the Soviet touch, Eastern Europe is more than the sum of nations which have emerged from the ruins of the U.S.S.R. Moreover, in consonance with a cultural studies point of view, the term ‘Eastern Europe’ does not merely refer to a particular geographical area, to a fixed space defined by a set of borders. It refers to a concept. It refers to a construction. Eastern Europe is, to borrow Edward Said’s famous words, a projection of the West. Thus, Eastern Europe is by definition everything the West is not, or, to put it more precisely, everything the West rejects as ‘un-Western’.

³ “The principal legal successor state to the Soviet Union was the Russian Federation. Thus it formally assumed the Soviet seat in the UN Security Council, took control of all the Soviet embassies and property around the world, and accepted responsibility for outstanding Soviet debts (approximately 60 billion dollars). Russia was [...] accounting for 60 per cent of the GDP and occupying 76 per cent of the territory of the former USSR.” (McCauley 412)

Eastern Europe provides an Other; it provides Us with Them, and only against Them We can materialize. This dichotomy is perpetuated and constantly re-constructed by the West via a plethora of cultural practices (among which film, not least because of its widespread appeal, plays a decisive role). In the course of these practices, features and characteristics are attributed to each side in binary pairs. For instance, 'Us versus Them' does not only equal 'West versus East' but also 'modern, progressive and civilized' versus 'old-fashioned, backward and uncivilized'. The smallest common denominators or, in other words, the most blatant generalizations of these attributes can be found in a simple yet notorious pair. It is the ultimate opposition: good versus evil. The West constructs itself as good and claims a privileged position over evil Eastern Europe.

This powerful dichotomous structure did not emerge over night. It has been built up slowly on the basis of a strong East-West-divide. The origins of the rivalries and resentments it incorporates (as well as their representation in popular culture) stem from neither the clash of capitalism and communism in general nor the Cold War in particular. They date back to political and economic conflicts preceding the foundation of the U.S.S.R. From a Western perspective, the October Revolution did not create a threat in the East, it just gave the old threat a new appearance. From a Western perspective, the U.S.S.R. was Russia in fresh disguise and communism yet another vehicle of its expansionist tendencies.

2.1.1.2 Russia: traditional enemy

Russia took a crucial step towards becoming a dominant global power in the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardji in 1774, gaining the upper hand over her old rival Turkey. Exhausted after six years of armed conflict, the Ottoman Empire granted Russia access to the Black Sea – a long-sought goal of the country's foreign policy (Marker 117). Moreover, "[t]he treaty forced Turkey ... to recognize the independence of the Crimean peninsula" (117). It was annexed by Russia in 1783 and would eventually turn into a decisive theater of war in the 1850s.

The treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardji also triggered British anxieties. The Russian Empire was expanding fast. It

experienced enormous growth not only in territory, but also in population during the eighteenth century. Natural growth alone accounted for much of this growth – from about ten or eleven million inhabitants in 1700 to about twenty-eight million by the end of the century. The annexation of new territories added greatly to this amount, increasing the total population to over forty million in the 1790s. (Marker 118)

With Kuchuk-Kainardji, the Turkish lock on Russia fell, not only opening the door to the Black Sea. The British mainly worried about their territories in Central Asia (Cain 4). Finally, however, the Balkans provided the battleground for Russian and British military forces to engage. In anticipation of the seemingly inevitable conflict, fear of the Eastern menace took hold of the British Empire. It manifested in literature and the press:

Russophobia elicited ... virulent expressions in print as well as in illustrations. Beginning in the 1820s, a number of pamphlets and books appeared sounding the alarm about the impending danger to England posed by imperial Russian expansion. (Cain 30)

Jimmie Cain Jr. claims that Russophobia is a major theme of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and British fiction in general. Hence, it is noticeable not only in the work of Rudyard Kipling (5, 97), for instance, but also in contemporary literature such as the *Harry Potter* series (173). According to Cain, Russophobia dates back to the prelude of the Crimean War and, importantly, does not only encompass Russia but also its "Eastern European colleague states" (20).

Furthermore, Cain draws parallels between the British Empire of the 19th and the United States of the 20th century, basically referring to the Crimean War as a sort of British Vietnam. In both cases, the (social) home front proved extremely significant. Domestic issues grappled with hegemonic war propaganda, while negative portrayals of the enemy circulated in the media. (Especially in regard to the latter, the Crimean War is obviously comparable to the Cold War as well.) Moreover, the media coverage of both conflicts was excessive and public opinion a weapon of its own, creating and solidifying the dichotomous gap between the nations at war. (13-14)

As mentioned above, negative depictions of Russians had been introduced as early as in the 1820s. Hence, "[w]hen the war actually came in 1854, the Russian army had acquired monstrous qualities in the public mind" (Cain 35).

PUNCH magazine proved particularly productive in constructing and perpetrating an unfavorable image of the Russian empire, its armed forces and foreign policy. Here, the term 'image' can be understood in its literal sense: PUNCH published cartoons – or illustrations – which depicted Russians in a derisive and racist manner. Most of the images examined by Cain are strikingly apposite in regard to my hypothesis. Owing to the limited extent of this paper, I merely picked two of them for a brief analysis:

Early on in the war, the illustration "THE RUSSIAN FRANKENSTEIN AND HIS MONSTER" appeared, reifying the popular notion of the Russian army. The czar, the creator, leads his creation, a hideous creature with an outsized, deformed human head and arms surmounting a torso and legs crafted from artillery pieces, in an assault against England and her allies. Brandishing a sword dripping with blood and a flaming torch, the monster leaves a path of broken bodies and destroyed buildings in its wake. Another illustration from later in the war, titled "RUSSIAN SAVAGES PREPARING TO RECEIVE A FLAG OF TRUCE," further reinforces the image of Russian bestiality. It depicts a group of Russian soldiers luring an English dingy flying a white flag of truce into an ambush. The faces of the Russian troops not only are drawn with malicious grins, denoting the treachery about to unfold, but they also verge on the subhuman in appearance, almost porcine in nature, perhaps a mockery of the Slavic and Asiatic features common in the Russian army. (Cain 35)

One may refer to "bestiality" as a particularly animalistic variation of monstrosity. Significantly, in the two illustrations presented, PUNCH did not depict Nicholas I or the Russian soldiers as completely detached from the human sphere. The czar (labeled the Russian Frankenstein) is not necessarily a monster, he has merely created one. The soldiers (referred to as Russian Savages), beasts they may be, are still "subhuman".

The illustration "RUSSIAN SAVAGES" insinuates a moral inferiority on part of the Russian troops, linking it to the allegedly brutish nature of Eastern Europeans. The fact that they engage in regular warfare and pretend to abide by its rules, makes them even more evil and hence also dangerous. In contrast, the evil presented in "THE RUSSIAN FRANKENSTEIN" revolves around the

blasphemous arrogance of a megalomaniac craving for power. Here, the monster is not the czar himself, but a hybrid of weaponry parts. War obtains human form and haunts its master. The czar (and thus the Russian Empire at large) is blamed for a war gotten out of control.

According to David Ransel, “the Crimean War at the end of his reign was not a conflict Nicholas consciously sought out for the aggrandizement of Russia or himself” (167). The war stemmed from a debate over the right to protect Christians in the Ottoman Empire, laid down in the treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardji. Austria and France would not support Nicholas I, who insisted on the protectorate. The Turks started the Crimean War; the British Empire eventually joined in (167). Armed conflict lasted from 1853 to 1856 (Freeze 472). The Crimean War may have been Britain’s Vietnam (Cain 13). It certainly was a trendsetting defeat for the Russians who would lose to Japan in “1904-5, Germany in 1914-18, and Poland in 1920” (Ransel 168). By then, the Bolsheviks were already in power, and the United States of America had replaced Great Britain as the major force in the West.

Communist Russia was a thorn in the flesh of the U.S. from the very beginning. Owing to the connections between government and film industry, disapproval of Bolshevism and fear of communist subversives manifested in Hollywood product long before the onset of the Cold War. As Tony Shaw puts it, “the American film industry had effectively been at war with communism for three decades prior to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s now notorious arrival on the political scene in the late 1940s” (2). It was a war for public opinion, against a distant, elusive enemy. The Red Scare materialized, however, in the labor movement and its related upheaval after World War I (13).

With the rise of the Hollywood studio system and the cartel of the major eight, U.S.-film productions became in sync and formed a broad front against communism. During the interwar period, Hollywood was conservative, profit-oriented and subject to censorship. Movie content had to follow the basic criteria dictated by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) – founded in 1922 and later renamed Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) – and the Production Code Administration (PCA) – installed in

1934 and “consistently opposed to treatments it deemed favourable to the USSR”. (Shaw 12-13)

In the aftermath of World War I, a large number of anti-communist movies was produced, many of them serving as models for the propaganda films which would sweep through U.S.-American cinemas from the late 1940s onwards (13). Although the popularity of the Communist Party (CPUSA) increased, “communists continued to be portrayed negatively on the silver screen” (15). While this was due to the leveling of Hollywood interests via the cartel and its censors, it was, crucially, also a result of substantial political support. In the 1920s, “[t]he interlock between the government and the film industry became almost seamless. At times it would be hard to tell where one stopped and the other started” (Segrave 23). Except for a brief disruption in the Vietnam era, the ties have remained strong ever since.

However, during the Cold War, Hollywood and the government did their best to construct a negative image of communism and its homeland, Soviet Russia. Henceforth, Eastern Europe was viewed not only as a bulk of anti-capitalist and anti-democratic nations united under the hammer and sickle, but also as the ultimate binary opponent of the West. Fittingly, it was Ronald Reagan, an actor turned president, who paid tribute to this persistent trend, figuratively adding the icing to its cake, by calling the Soviet Union the “Evil Empire” in 1983 (Austermühl 261).

2.1.1.3 The notion of ‘evil’

Ronald Reagan was neither the first nor the last president of the United States to label a foreign nation, people, or government evil. Frank Austermühl’s article “The Strategic Use of “Evil” in Political Discourse” gives a detailed account of this traditional U.S.-American phenomenon and the term’s shift of meaning over the last 150 years. Originally “a descriptive term [...] synonymous to “problem,” or “difficulty””, ‘evil’ developed into a rather abstract, politically charged rhetoric in the late nineteenth century. Theodore Roosevelt grew particularly fond of it, using ‘evil’ even more excessively than George W. Bush did during his presidency (266-267).

In Roosevelt’s discourse, “evil” becomes a powerful, politicized stigma used to mark and discredit the enemies of the American system, be they

anarchists, industrialists, or corrupt politicians. [...] Roosevelt discursively constructs an all-American in-group, with himself at the center, and an un-American, yet still domestic, out-group. Evil thus becomes the natural condition of the enemies of the American state. (Austermühl 267-268)

Accordingly, by the late 19th century, 'evil' constituted a staple of (U.S.-American) in-group- or identity-construction. This presupposes a strong link between the concept of 'evil' and the concept of the Other. As Michael Richardson puts it, "there can be no Self without an 'Other' against which to measure itself" (12). Correspondingly, there can be no in-group without an out-group. An in-group is defined by criteria which set apart individuals who belong from those who do not. Of course, the communal identity thereby created contradicts the unique Self of the individual, which renders the group an imagined community and the Other, against which it materializes, its construct. We can only grasp the Other from Our point of view, as a projection of Ourselves and Our imagined community (12).

The distinction between an in-group and an out-group is always evaluative and implies a hierarchy. A stable, exclusive in-group could not be established otherwise. Acknowledging a particular trait of a member of the community is tantamount to acknowledging that this trait is part of the criteria which define the community. Since a group of individuals – regardless of its size – cannot possibly feature the exact same set of traits, some of them have to be repressed in order to keep up the illusion of homogeneity. The repressed elements⁴ are deemed incompatible with the core criteria. The fact that they are present within the community nonetheless, creates both tension and confusion, threatening the community by revealing that it is indeed just imagined. Consequently, the repressed elements are projected onto the Other. To maintain the stability of the community and its propagated identity, the Other must not only be presented as incompatible with, but also as a binary opposition to the Self. The out-group is not merely portrayed as different, but, importantly, as worse (namely as evil). By defining itself, the in-group thus inevitably claims a privileged position over those who do not belong. Finally, this dichotomous structure is naturalized by a plethora of cultural practices

⁴ Concerning agency, it is the culture industry at large which represses.

which are constantly reproduced. As shown in chapter 2.1.1.2, Eastern Europe serves as an apposite example.

While Theodore Roosevelt used the term 'evil' to brand a domestic Other, 'evil' has been increasingly used to "refer to external threats to the American ways of life" ever since (269), becoming integral to the (discursive) reproduction of the Us versus Them dichotomy (267). Truman contrasted the allegedly violent, war-thirsty communist regime with freedom-loving, law-abiding democracy in his inauguration speech in 1949 (271). Reagan coined the term "Evil Empire" in 1983 (261). Bush (and Blair) located the despicable Other in the Middle East before and after 11 September 2001 (264-265). In each case, "the confrontation between America and its enemies boils down to the question of the humanity, or lack thereof, of its opponents, expressed through oppositional terms such as "good" vs. "evil," "humane vs. "inhumane," and above all, "civilized" vs. "savage" " (Austermühl 271).

Let us bear in mind "the question of ... humanity". From a dichotomous perspective, human equals good which, in turn, equals humane, civilized, etc, whereas inhuman equals evil – and thus also inhumane, savage, etc. If we translate this to the Us versus Them formula, we arrive at the basic set-up for the distinction between in-group and out-group. As discussed above, this renders 'evil' the sum of all attributes 'We' repress and project onto the Other. In order to examine 'evil', one has to remove it from its dichotomous structure. This removal provides the basis for Hans-Ulrich Mohr's eloquent definition of 'evil', with which I will work in my thesis:

"evil" is, in fact, an otherness which is still related to humanity. It appears in the shape of an aggressive, threatening, animalistic variation of human forms: In the ancient epic, as in the modern Science Fiction film, its special appeal of dangerousness derives from its closeness to the human sphere. The evil beings are monstrous in their outer appearance but they also show features that set them in comparison to our habitual notion of civilized humanity and security. This involves two aspects: First, the monster implicitly or explicitly threatens to invert the process of civilization, second, it is the opponent of a group, a society, established and defined by such a process. (225-226)

Mohr's definition applies perfectly, for instance, to the PUNCH illustration "RUSSIAN SAVAGES PREPARING TO RECEIVE A FLAG OF TRUCE" discussed in chapter 2.1.1.2. The Russian savages are depicted as beasts, their faces monstrously distorted into "aggressive, threatening, animalistic variation[s] of human forms". They are also "still related to humanity" via their garments, weaponry and apparent knowledge of the conduct of war and its "habitual notion[s] of civilized humanity and security." It is by breaking with and exploiting these "habitual notion[s]" that they "invert the process of civilization" and threaten a group "defined by such a process", namely the British soldiers waving the flag of truce.

The fact that the monster represents an "otherness which is still related to humanity" is its most important characteristic. Thus, the monster is not the embodiment of an evil which constitutes a binary opposition to humanity, but a blend of both human and evil components. We may draw two important conclusions from this. First, according to the ratio of components, some monsters are more evil than others. Second, we can only relate to the human components of the monster – the elements Our in-group, Our society represses. 'Evil', same as the Other, is 'Our' projection, but there also exists "an entity that corresponds to this projection, and it is one that has its own integral reality" which 'We' cannot possibly grasp (Richardson 12). Based on Homi Bhaba's famous notion of third spaces, one may conclude that the monster constitutes a third species, a mixture of Our projection and the 'real' thing or actual entity that is evil. The latter is inevitably unknown to Us, and only via the monster We can approach, examine, and cope with it.

2.1.1.4 Villains: cinematic evil

According to Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard, the concept of 'evil' (as a binary opposition to humanity) is a basic constituent of the U.S.-American film industry, since the latter is defined by "combat narratives" and their "Manichaeistic framework":

Warfare and its glorification in Hollywood cinema speaks to a recurrent common impulse, especially salient in U.S. history, to transcend the *ordinary*—those frustrating, boring, anxiety-ridden features of daily life that **violent struggles against threatening evil forces** might seem to

overcome. Thus, to legitimate war and its horrific consequences, powerful enemies are needed, and these of course have been furnished in great abundance by a long list of producers, writers, and directors in Hollywood: Indians, Mexicans, Asians, Arabs, Communists, Muslims, terrorists, drug traffickers, serial killers. Without such real or imagined enemies there can be no war mythologies, indeed no war *movies* as we have come to know them. **Enemies are by definition demons, forces of darkness and evil that inhabit a world of anarchy and savagery** – forces that appear all the more threatening because of their mysterious character. For combat narratives to work effectively, a Manichaeistic framework is required, pitting good against evil, light against dark, order against chaos, democracy against tyranny. In this scheme of things, **villains generally are cold, remote, ghostly, and elusive** while heroes are immediately *knowable*, concrete personae who embody the whole range of everyday feelings and emotions, who inhabit the real world of families, neighborhoods, and workplaces. **A villain who kills is filled with unmitigated evil, devoid of purpose and rationale, which fits the media stereotypes of Nazis, Communists, and terrorists**, whereas the hero is identified with fully intelligible and laudable goals or ideals [...] (54) [my emphasis]

Villains constitute the most prominent form of cinematic evil. One or many evil characters are almost always present and/or identifiable in a motion picture. This, in turn, puts a spotlight on the hero. No hero without an antagonist! (No Us without Them!) Especially in the days prior to Technicolor and sound, the necessity of recognizable villains constituted a certain dilemma for Hollywood. Stereotypical depictions of foreigners made for excellent bad guys, but put at risk the profits from the international market (Segrave 52-53). For instance, “[m]uch of Europe was reportedly angry due to the perception that their nationals were stereotyped and/or cast as villains” (53). Therefore, villains were preferably picked from a pool of nations which contributed least to Hollywood’s fortune. Eastern Europeans made great villains since Hollywood could afford to insult them without risking substantial losses at the box office (156-157). Adding the government-sponsored propaganda mission of Hollywood before and

during the Cold War, one may conclude that Eastern European participation in cinematic evil was indeed rich. However, it was rich in quantity, not quality.

In 2003, the American Film Institute listed Hannibal Lecter (*The Silence of the Lambs*) as the most impressive villain to have ever appeared in U.S. film. Darth Vader and Norman Bates took second and third place respectively.

[f]or voting purposes, a "villain" was defined as a character(s) whose wickedness of mind, selfishness of character and will to power are sometimes masked by beauty and nobility, while others may rage unmasked. They can be horribly evil or grandiosely funny, but are ultimately tragic. ("AFI's Villains")

The traits and qualities looked out for were roughly outlined by a set of selection criteria emphasizing the villain's cultural impact as well as their long-term significance and appeal ("AFI's Villains"). Hence, one might duly expect more than three decades of (cinematic) Cold War mirrored in AFI's evil top 50. A war-mongering communist dictator perhaps, a sneaky Soviet spy or a thief of nuclear warheads. But while the top 50 feature a wild variety of mobsters, murderous sociopaths, gruesome Disney characters, outlandish pests and even Nazis, the only villains linked to the so-called Evil Empire are the Martians of *War of the Worlds* and, arguably, brainwashing Mrs. John Iselin (*The Manchurian Candidate*). Besides, one might add Dracula – played by the Hungarian Bela Lugosi – as a remote connection; even more so in the light of Jimmy Cain Jr.'s work on Bram Stoker and Russophobia. From the list, Dracula seems to be the only villain clearly identified as Eastern European. There is, however, the curious case of one Hannibal Lecter, leader of the charts, which I will return to in section four. But for the moment, it suffices to say that *The Silence of the Lambs* was released in 1991, bearing no significant traces of the Cold War and its aftermath.

Does the most serious conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, a conflict stretching over almost half a century and allegedly pushing the world to the verge of extinction, lack cultural tenability on the silver screen? If so, the claim of a persistent trend towards Eastern European evil – in U.S.-American and, consequently, also British cinema – would certainly be invalid. But the villains were there, unpopular but in large numbers. They were

succeeded by entire generations of look- and act-alikes, transformed by modernization and globalization, but still crafted from Cold War patterns.

In general, Hollywood's crusade against the Red Threat did not produce memorable villains, but rather a broad front of evil, a faceless menace infesting Western cinema like a contagious disease. In most cases, it came in stereotypes too overtly propagandistic to make an impression, or remained vague, hidden in the shadows (quite literally in the horror genre). But it was always on the brink of surfacing in one form or another. And when it surfaced, the Red Threat, as staged by the film industry, promised nothing short of annihilation, whether by clandestine conversion or physical extinction.

2.1.2 The making of Soviet evil

2.1.2.1 New age, old enemy

During World War II, Hollywood had given Eastern Europe a brief break from being exploited as a rich source of cinematic evil. However, following the decline of Nazi Germany and the capitulation of the Japanese empire, the major studios quickly fell back into their old patterns. But Eastern European villains did not simply return to U.S.-American cinema screens; they reclaimed them with a vengeance. The fact that their ferocious comeback co-occurred with the beginning of the Cold War and the dawn of the atomic age should not be dismissed as mere coincidence.

In the words of Reynold Humphries, "[i]t is common practice when discussing the films of the 50s to evoke the Cold War, the Bomb and 'the Red Scare'" (56). Indisputably, the threats posed by nuclear weapons and Eastern European communists form a relevant political and cultural context to U.S.-American movies of the period. Combined, the Bomb and the Red Scare provided the film industry and its depictions of evil with an apocalyptic potency of biblical extents. Apparently, the wrong button pressed could turn the cold war thermal within the instant.

According to common knowledge, a war is cold if it is not declared by either of the parties involved. Therefore, dating the actual onset of the undeclared conflict between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. proves elusive. According to Tony

Shaw, “the clash between Washington and Moscow became direct and overt with the articulation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947” (44), but the length of its indirect, covert phase cannot be clearly determined. Arguably, one could speak of a seamless transition from World War II to the Cold War. In the words of Nicholas Christopher, *World War II*

ends but there is no closure. Another war – this one “cold” – begins immediately against a former ally that is suddenly an implacable foe, and dozens of potential Hiroshimas in the USSR and the U.S.A. are targeted for immediate and total annihilation at the commencement of “World War III.” (38)

Christopher certainly has a point, but his notion of the U.S.S.R. as “a former ally” which “suddenly” turned into “an implacable foe” does not seem entirely accurate. The fact that the latter half of World War II constitutes the only significant interruption of East-West-rivalries between 1917 and 1989 suggests that “ally” is too strong a term in regard to the wartime relationship between the U.S.-Americans and the Soviets. (In lack of an alternative, more accurate label, their so-called alliance could be called a partnership of convenience.) This becomes evident in post-war Hollywood’s enormous efforts at eradicating any trace of said collaboration (which will be dealt with below) and pre-war Hollywood’s negative portrayals of the Soviet Union. The “implacable foe” did not emerge all of a sudden; it had been there all along.

Nonetheless, the passage appositely highlights the immediate shift from global conflict to cold power play, while drawing attention to the significance of the Bomb in the process. The Cold War could always get thermal, bearing the threat of nuclear Armageddon. Acknowledging the connection between the atomic age and the Cold War, one might even conclude that the latter did not immediately follow after World War II, but that those conflicts overlapped. In fact, the nuclear arms race began as early as 1939, when research started to be conducted in secrecy, the results withheld (Rhodes 325). Hence, one could date the onset of the Cold War to 6 August 1945 – the day the early nuclear arms race culminated in the devastation of Hiroshima. Little Boy⁵ rang in the age of the atom, and thus, proving the apocalyptic potential of nuclear fission, also the age of anxiety.

⁵ The Hiroshima bomb was codenamed Little Boy (Rhodes 699-715). The Nagasaki bomb Fat Man (739-740).

An examination of Cold War evil, whether on or off screen, can hardly be detached from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Importantly, targeting civilians with such a powerful weapon raises questions concerning the increasing barbarism of modern warfare (Rhodes 698). It is often argued that the U.S.-military dropped Little Boy and Fat Man in order to prevent a tremendous loss of U.S.-American (as well as Japanese) lives, which an invasion of the Japanese home islands would have cost (685, 693, 698). On a scale of barbarism and evil – incongruous as that may sound – does the estimated loss of lives rank higher than the loss of lives it (allegedly) took to end the war immediately? Could it ever justify annihilating the populations of two cities? There are not any correct answers to those questions. Apparently, there are not any answers at all. Hollywood proved eager to give them nonetheless.

In this context, of course, the Cold War dimension of Little Boy and Fat Man plays a decisive role. Regardless of discussions on necessity and justifiability, the use of the Bomb has to be considered a demonstration of power. By flattening Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the ground, the United States displayed their scientific accomplishments and grim determination to put those accomplishments to use. This was strongly emphasized in U.S.-American cinema:

Ever since August 6, 1945, the atomic bomb had provided [...] protection, ensuring that the United States could destroy any nation that dared to launch an attack against its sovereignty. Hollywood helped create the perception that the nation had the ultimate weapon and the men to deliver it to the far corners of the earth. (Suid 210)

Conveniently, the far corners of the earth happened to be the doormat of the Soviet Union. Whether Little Boy and Fat Man were intended, at least at some level, as warning shots directed towards the East, is highly debatable. But if Hiroshima and Nagasaki were indeed attempts to fend off the Soviets, they proved nothing short of futile. Before the decade ended, the Evil Empire had struck back. They – the inhumane and savage communists – built a Bomb of their own. With the detonation of Joe I in September 1949, “The American nuclear monopoly ... ended. The fabulous monster had real claws” (Rhodes 767). Suddenly, this “monster” was more dangerous than ever before.

By then, the atomic bomb had long since made its way to the theaters (Christopher 52-53), had become a treasured film prop and renowned plot device. When made a major theme, in military films such as *Strategic Air Command* (1955), *Bombers B-52* (1957) (Suid 220) and *The Beginning of the End* (Boggs and Pollard 84), it was usually presented as a deterrent. Horror films of the period fantasized about the effects of radiation, but did not unveil the ugly truth. Unsurprisingly (at least in regard to the strong ties between Hollywood and the government), the U.S.-American public would not be bothered with haunting images of torched corpses and burnt children. Hollywood would not cast doubt on the outstanding endeavors that had brought the war to an end. The scientists who had built the bomb, the strategists who had ordered to use it, and the soldiers who had eventually dropped it – they were depicted as achievers, not barbarians and murderers. Hollywood has consistently conveyed this message, presenting World War II as a prime example of the good done by the U.S. military:

With few exceptions, the movie industry has presented an image of the U.S. armed forces as heroic, noble, all-conquering, and above all exciting, with World War II furnishing the ideal example of a “good war” fought by **good, civilized people** for exalted causes **against hated, barbaric enemies**. (Boggs and Pollard 53) [my emphasis]

Little Boy had killed 140,000 people by the end of 1945, Fat Man 70,000; the death toll rising with each radiation victim. By 1950, the two bombs combined had resulted in the death of 340,000 people (Rhodes 734, 740-42). As concerns Hollywood product, the threat posed by nuclear weapons was only addressed by a number of science fiction movies and Stanley Kramer’s *On the Beach* (1959) (Suid 228). Kramer presented a vision of nuclear Armageddon without omitting the role of the United States in creating it. In general, however, Others would take the part of the monster.

2.1.2.2 First steps – constructing the good war on screen

Only three days after Hiroshima, the day Fat Man hit Nagasaki, MGM initiated the production of a film on the Bomb (Suid 210). Contacts to Washington proved essential in the development of the project. Producer Sam Marx even had the opportunity to speak to President Truman, a remark of

whom inspired the title of the film: *The Beginning or the End* (Suid 210). The movie, released in 1947, appositely exemplifies Hollywood's tight collaboration with the U.S. government and military in the fifties. More importantly concerning this thesis, the movie also illustrates the significance of cinema during the Cold War. According to Lawrence Suid, *The Beginning or the End* "helped set the tone" for the impending conflict in regard to the Bomb and the Red Scare, as well as to the relation between the two:

[T]he film's title, which came from President Truman's comment to the producer, suggested that the filmmakers had a broader agenda than simply telling the story of the atomic bomb. Appearing when it did, *The Beginning or the End* contained the implicit warning that the bomb could end civilization. Thus, it helped set the tone for the developing Cold War. The United States had to remain ever vigilant against the danger that the Soviet Union posed, and the bomb would serve as our weapon of choice to thwart any attack on the country and the capitalist way of life. (214)

Hollywood got the range of a new (but well-known) target, although the war to end all wars was not officially over then. In fact, it would never be over for the U.S.-American film industry. Applying formulas established in the combat genre of the early 1940s – in films such as *Wake Island* (1942), *Air Force* (1943), *Marine Raiders* (1944) and *Story of G.I. Joe* (1945) (Boggs and Pollard 69) – it has propagated the so-called 'good war' ever since. As Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard put it,

"[g]ood wars" are U.S. military struggles for unquestionably noble causes, all-out wars pitting good against evil, democracy against tyranny, peace against barbarism. No military campaign fits this description more perfectly than World War II. (66-67)

By the latter half of the decade, basically just two things had changed in Hollywood's Manichaeistic crusade for the righteous cause: the opponent and the weapon of choice. Accordingly, *The Beginning or the End* praises, glorifies and lionizes the achievements of the U.S.-American military forces, their ability to protect the country and fend off any possible enemy. The plot focuses on the scientific brilliance needed to develop the Bomb and the military skills to transport it far behind enemy lines. As in many other U.S.-American movies to follow, the fate of Hiroshima and its population was barely touched upon (70).

Up to the present, Hollywood has stubbornly clung to the good-war-myth and frequently rekindled it in times of national identity crises (127-128). Ignorance, as tangible in *The Beginning or the End*, has remained a guiding principle. “Missing from the Hollywood good war, then and now was [...] any effort to depict events with some degree of accuracy or historical veracity.” (70) Jonathan Mostow’s *U-571*, released in 2000, demonstrates this in a drastic manner. Its plot revolves around the capture of the Enigma, the notorious Nazi decoding device, by the U.S. Navy and not – as historically correct – by the British. The film is “so fully absorbed in celebrating World War II as the ultimate good war – with American heroics at the center stage – that it rewrites history in a manner that seems preposterous, virtually Orwellian” (Boggs and Pollard 136).

Hollywood granted contribution to “the ultimate good war” only in small doses and almost exclusively to the British. The role of the Soviets was generally downplayed and denied. Evidence of a wartime alliance scarcely made it to the screen (Suid 227; Boggs and Pollard 129). After all, teaming up with villains to fight a mutual enemy does not send the right message.

Marginalizing and ultimately banning Eastern Europeans from the cinematic good war was a first decisive step in constructing them as evil. Now they could return as barbarians, demons and monsters. Hollywood, aided and abetted by the government, went from neglecting Eastern Europeans to showing them in the worst light possible. It did not take long until the propaganda machinery was in full swing.

2.1.2.3 Cinema Propaganda:

denigrating the Soviets as barbaric, backward, and belligerent

As soon as the United States had entered World War II, Germans and Japanese substituted the Soviets as the evil Other. All of a sudden, Hollywood ventured to portray the formerly stigmatized, new ally in a sympathetic manner. Among the pro-Soviet releases were *Miss V. from Moscow* (1942), *Mission to Moscow* (1943), *Tender Comrade* (1943), and *Song of Russia* (1944) (Shaw 23). But if the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) saw a chance of permanent rehabilitation in the public eye, they miscalculated bitterly. The anti-communist backlash that hit Hollywood immediately after World War II

turned into a full-blown crusade. The media, in the hands of the “US government’s propaganda apparatus” and the motion pictures industry proved valuable tools (44). In 1947, the year of the Truman Doctrine, the reign of the House-Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) over Hollywood began (44). It was not exactly a new management, but rather a fresh pair of ghastly hydra heads reinforcing the old one. A year later, the cartel of the major eight was declared illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court (Segrave 140). The dream factory writhed in the throes of a thorough makeover. The new Hollywood was dedicated to the fight against communism.

HUAC investigations focused, among others, on filmmakers who had participated in pro-Soviet productions during the war. Blacklists and bans became common practice. They were accompanied by a flood of anti-communist movies rendering the Soviet Union as the ultimate nemesis of the United States. The government’s propaganda apparatus mobilized against the new old binary opponent, and it was not the first time for Hollywood to chime in with current political tenors. Tight collaboration had begun approximately 30 years before.

“With the entry of America into World War I in April 1917, a partnership developed between government and the film industry” (Segrave 14-15). As the war progressed, film’s tremendous potential was acknowledged, and movies were recognized as commercials advertising the American way of life and the commodities it encompassed (58). Moreover, Hollywood product shaped an image of Americanism which did not only sell overseas but also in the homeland. “Even before the United States entered the war in 1917, motion pictures had become great recruiting vehicles for the armed forces”, write Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard (54). World War I, however, proved a first crucial landmark in “[t]he symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and the U.S. military” (54). In other words, the U.S.-American film industry has attracted audiences to join the nation’s missions against implacable enemies for almost a century.

Among the anti-communist movies of the early Cold War, the screen adaptation of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* proves particularly noteworthy. On the one hand, it sticks out as being both based on a literary classic and animated. On the other hand, it proves the collaboration between the major

powers of the West, namely the United States and Great Britain, against their mutual enemy in the East.

Interpretations of the novel (published in 1945) may vary, but the fact remains that at the top layer, Orwell's pigs stand for Bolshevik revolutionaries. To depict Russians as pigs corrupted by power apparently proved very tempting to the U.S.-American Cold Warriors in charge of cinematic propaganda. Although a British production, "[t]he origins of the animated, feature-length film of *Animal Farm* lie within the American secret services" (Shaw 75), and more precisely, the OPC, the Office of Policy Coordination. (75) The political climate (under President Truman) offered perfect conditions for the U.S.-propaganda apparatus to develop and expand since the Eastern menace was considered a major threat and movies were regarded proper vehicles for the propagation of the American way of life.

In 1951, the film rights for *Animal Farm* ended up in the hands of Louis de Rochement's production company. Officially not related to the U.S. government, it was actually run by the OPC (Shaw 76). De Rochement himself was not radical, but certainly fervent in his rejection of and opposition to communism (55-56). In November 1951, he hired renowned British animation artists John Halas and Joy Batchelor to produce *Animal Farm* as a feature-length animation film. Halas and Batchelor had experience with anti-Nazi propaganda cartoons (76). But although the two of them certainly acquiesced in the political implications of adapting Orwell's novel, they primarily worked on a movie, not a U.S.-American weapon against communism. They were guided by De Rochement who had a strong influence, even on the story level (78). Shaw lists various reasons for which de Rochement outsourced the production of *Animal Farm* to the British Isles, the most important one being that "the lighter the American hand in the film, the greater its propaganda potential became" (77). Released in 1954, the film received immense support from overseas. However, it did not become a commercial success (83-84).

Animal Farm, both the film and the novel it is based on, can be read in diverse ways. The depiction of Russian revolutionaries as pigs is astounding. Presenting Eastern Europeans as beasts certainly suits the hypothesis of this paper, but *Animal Farm* is, after all, an allegory and should not be over-interpreted. However, as illustrated in chapter 2.1.1.2, the portrayals of Eastern

Europeans as uncivilized and only remotely related to the human sphere had been introduced long before Orwell's novel.

The Hollywood studios produced propaganda films such as *The Iron Curtain* (1948) or *The Red Menace* (1949) in large numbers: 107 overtly anti-communist films were made between 1948 and 1962 (Shain qtd. in Shaw 48). The Eastern European villains had never been more prominent in Western theaters. While in real-life Hollywood suspected communist subversives resembled law-abiding citizens, the bad guys on the big screen could not be mistaken: "[C]ommunists were portrayed according to a set of conventions, making them easily identifiable for cinema-goers as 'baddies'. In essence, the celluloid communist stereotype of the McCarthy era was a more dangerous, extreme, 'Nazified' version of the pre-1945 model" (Shaw 51).

The conflation of Nazis and communists created a melting-pot of evil⁶, thus producing the ultimate villain. But it did not suffice to depict the Soviets as 'more dangerous' and 'extreme' than before – after all, these attributes are rather vague and in want of context – instead, the Soviets had to be turned into binary opponents of the West. The message was that these Nazi-communists existed for one purpose only: the downfall of democracy. Hence, as shown in propaganda movies of the 1950s,

[t]he Communist party did not stand *for* anything, only against sacred American principles such as God, motherhood and true love. Because members came across as stupid and backward, the films also implied that communism as a political system was much lower on the evolutionary scale than American democracy. (Shaw 51) [emphasis in the original]

The notion of communism holding a lower position on the "evolutionary scale" than capitalism suggests that Soviets were depicted as primitive variations of U.S.-Americans. Adding the "dangerous, extreme" component and substituting "primitive" for its synonym 'animalistic', we arrive at Hans-Ulrich Mohr's definition of evil. It is an evil which deviates from all common norms and

⁶ Conflations of Nazis and Communists are still common in modern Hollywood cinema. Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* series serves as an apposite example: the Nazis of the first and the third film respectively are virtually similar to and exchangeable with the Soviets of the fourth, except for uniforms and accents.

threatens to topple them, while it remains, at a basic level, related to them. It is an atavistic Other which operates in the margins of Our supposedly progressive, righteous consciousness. This atavistic Other came in various forms:

In short, 'they' were presented as a mixture of criminals, murderers, social misfits and sexual deviants, who were hypocritical, devious and emotionally detached, and engaged in illegal activities in order to weaken the USA and advance the Soviet cause of world domination. In contrast, 'we' ('ordinary' Americans) were presented as law-abiding, capable and self-sacrificing, as people who, though traditionally peace-loving, were at war with an implacable enemy. (Shaw 49)

U.S.-American propaganda films of the period were usually cheap productions, conveying a political message via stock characters and ridiculously simple plots. With the exception of a very limited number of films such as *My Son John* (1952) and *Walk East on Beacon* (1952), they failed at the box office. Whether those movies actually managed to frighten and mobilize the U.S.-American public remains unclear (Shaw 64). However, negative depictions of communists, Soviets and thus Eastern Europeans in general were not restricted to blunt propaganda. Even if presented in a more subtle and indirect manner, communists in Hollywood productions of the 1950s were universally marked by the negative attributes identified by Tony Shaw: dangerous, extreme, stupid, backward, hypocritical, devious and emotionally detached.

It was not until the end of the decade – and Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959) in particular – that filmmakers from the United States (and within the major studio system) openly questioned and deconstructed Hollywood's strong dichotomous traditions; Kramer paved the way for cinematic dissent, most notably the anti-Vietnam movies of the 70s (Shaw 225). Except for *On the Beach*, the U.S.-American film industry of the early Cold War commonly portrayed Eastern Europeans as the evil Other. Delving deeper into the subject, I will focus on a brand of motion pictures in which depictions of evil are virtually ubiquitous: the horror genre.

2.2 The Horrors of Cold War Hollywood in the 1950s

2.2.1 The roots of the monster: from vampires to aliens

The origins of Hollywood horror lie in the gothic literature of Victorian England. Imported to U.S.-American cinema screens, Mary Shelley, Robert Stevenson and Bram Stoker's infamous monsters proved essential in the development and hype of a new branch of the fantasy genre (Worland 30). "The first uses of the term "horror movie" by critics and industry commentators appeared in 1931-2 upon release of Universal's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*" writes Rick Worland (18-19). But not only the literary models came from the old world. Aesthetics and style of the classic horror movie were virtually washed ashore by waves of European filmmakers immigrating to the United States (54, 57). Whether lured by the prospect of money and fame in the interwar period or forced to leave home in the light of the Nazi rise (Richardson 3), their influence on the horror genre and Hollywood in general can be regarded as substantial.

In the wake of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, the horror movie thrived. Its classic period lasted until the mid-1930s. By 1936, producers had started reworking the material to revive the most renowned and profitable monsters on screen. The complete exploitation of former box office hits left its marks. Although the undead were, by definition, bound to come back time and again, their appeal diminished soon enough. Nevertheless, the horror genre had already gained a large fan-base. No need to lure fresh audiences with exotic sets and elaborate plots. Consequently, the horror movie got cheaper and more American. It was now based on more recent, local literature. (Davis 196)

With the classic monsters sucked dry, the industry moved on to new breeds of creatures. The quality of horror productions was plummeting fast, and the genre suffered a significant loss of reputation (Worland 76). By the late 1940s, horror was on the verge of extinction, or rather, as Worland puts it, entering a phase of "hibernation" (75). But while the horror movie receded, its elements transcended to other narrative forms of the U.S.-American film industry. This particularly concerned two genres, namely Film Noir and science fiction.

The Maltese Falcon (1941) is widely acknowledged as the first Film Noir (Davis 197); the beginning of a series of hard-boiled detective films which mirrored an increasingly popular trend towards elegiac, mostly fatalistic

narratives. In retrospect, they were ascribed to the unprecedented phenomenon of Film Noir, a term coined by the French critic Nino Frank (Christopher 13). Although Film Noir is considered an American original, its roots are clearly European. In regard to style, Film Noir derives from the French, German and Italian film schools of the 1920s and 30s (Christopher 13-15). Moreover, as Blair Davies argues, the Noir style was imported from the horror genre. The European filmmakers who had shaped the horror movie were now working on Noir productions (Davis 193). The shadows still hosted brute forces of evil, but they wreaked their havoc in the form of gangsters, mobsters, and femme fatales. In contrast to Blair Davis, Nicholas Christopher argues that the dark urban labyrinths inhabited by Noir characters received their main impetus from the “red menace” and the Bomb (49-51).

The 1950s witnessed the resurgence of prolific and memorable monsters. But this time, they did not emerge from horror literature, neither Victorian nor local. Instead, the previously condescended upon genre of science fiction which rose to immense popularity after the dawn of the atomic age, unleashed gruesome creatures onto the big screen: “Through most of the 1950s, science fiction [...] supplanted the horror film”. This does not mean that sci-fi eradicated the traces left by horror. Instead, in (temporarily) replacing it, sci-fi filled a gap, a niche for the threats haunting the U.S.-American public. Horror and sci-fi merged to adapt to the topical anxieties of the period. (Worland 77)

Topicality is of major importance here. According to Robin Wood, a basic formula can be identified in each and every film of the horror genre: “normality is threatened by the Monster” (70). I will come back to this formula in chapter 2.2.2 and elaborate on it in detail. For now it suffices to say that Wood considers normality a diachronic constant, whereas he regards the monster as a synchronic variable. For example, Hollywood monsters of the 30s serve as stand-ins for other cultures, while 50s monsters generally symbolize alternative ideologies (68). In the aftermath of World War II and its nuclear conclusion, the monsters have a very futuristic touch and usually appear in the form of mutants and alien invaders. Associations with the threats posed by nuclear war and communist subversion seem inevitable. Accordingly, Rick Worland links the cinematic advent of the new monster types to the Korean War (Worland 77) and hydrogen bomb testing (78) respectively. Outside of cinemas, however,

those creatures were not exactly novelties. As Mark Jancovich remarks, analyses of 50s sci-fi/horror usually neglect its literary co-texts and predecessors: “In science fiction literature, the alien invader (or Bug-Eyed Monster [...]) was not a product of the Cold War, but had been popular in the 1930s and 1940s” (30).

This leads us back to the paradigmatic shift from Victorian to U.S.-American horror models. Change manifested not only in the form of the monsters. The settings got bleaker, the characters lost depth and the scale of destruction was increased, from local to national and even global (Biskind 102-103). Worland calls the cinema of the period “terror-tinged” and relates it to the rise of the U.S.S.R. as “a nuclear-armed, international rival” of the United States (77). But dissimilar to the propaganda movies of the McCarthy era, “[s]ci-fi films that presented Communists directly, like *Invasion U.S.A.* and *Red Planet Mars*, were rare” (Biskind 132). Sci-fi/horror gave the Red Menace a multitude of faces, the least of them human, the most of them open for interpretation:

Science-fiction movies flourished throughout the Cold War and especially during the 1950s, when seemingly omnipresent images of aliens, giant insects and white-coated megalomaniacs projected the United States as a nation in the constant state of alert. While such images have been submitted to a multitude of interpretations over the years, there seems little doubt that the majority of them dramatized the need for Americans to pull together in the face of internal and external political and social threats. Some science-fiction movies had more obvious Cold War connotations than others. (Shaw 137)

The split between less obvious and “more obvious Cold War connotations” and thus between internal and external threats respectively is of major significance. The monster of 50s sci-fi/horror need not necessarily be a product of the increasing tensions between the nuclear super powers U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. in the wake of World War II. Accordingly, the evil represented by this kind of monster need not necessarily stem from Eastern Europe. Therefore, it is obligatory not only to examine each monstrous creature separately and in detail, but also to analyze in which ways alien invaders and mutations may connote threats originating in U.S.-American society.

2.2.2 Invaders, mutations, and Soviets

In spite of a plethora of strong traditions, ephemeral undercurrents, and recurring trends which have rendered the contributions of the horror genre to U.S.-American cinema diverse and captivating, basic horror patterns may be considered unchangeable and timeless. Robin Wood, approaching horror from a psychoanalytic angle, notes that at the core of each horror film lies “the actual dramatization of the dual concept of the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster. One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses” (68). As mentioned in the preceding mini-chapter, Wood identifies a “simple and obvious basic formula for the horror film: normality is threatened by the monster” (71). In his use of the term, being normal is tantamount to “conform[ing] to the dominant social norms” (71). Wood considers normality a constant, a fixed status quo, whereas the monster is “changing from period to period as society’s basic fears clothe themselves in fashionable and immediately accessible garments” (70). The monster, modeled after topical dreads and anxieties, is capable of subverting normality by uncovering the things repressed in a given society. Wood refers to this phenomenon as horror’s “progressive or radical” potential (170). It is opposed by a “powerful reactionary tradition” (170). The latter particularly manifests in the U.S.-American horror film of the 1950s and 1980s – in the heydays of the early Cold War and under the Reagan administration respectively (Jancovich 1). In films of those periods, specific, reactionary features of the monster can be identified. Significantly, “the dominant designation of the monster must necessarily be evil: what is repressed (in the individual, in the culture) must always return as a threat, perceived by the consciousness as ugly, terrible, obscene” (Wood 170).

Values and views which deviate from dominant social norms are presented as evil and projected onto the monster. Thus, they become or rather “return as” (Wood 170) an external threat, (re)producing a rigid distinction between good victims (Us) and evil creatures (Them). Conversely, progressive horror relates the repressed – what is perceived as evil – to Us. The threat is not merely presented as coming from outside, but also from within.

The progressiveness of the horror film depends partly on the monster’s capacity to arouse sympathy; one can feel little for a mass of viscous

black slime. The political (McCarthyite) level of 50s science fiction films – the myth of Communism as total dehumanization – accounts for the prevalence of this kind of monster in that period. (Wood 171)

To put it all in a nutshell, Wood states that 50s horror film yielded to the conservative (and strongly anti-communist) political climate of the time. Deviations from dominant social norms were depicted and perceived as external threats, which was mirrored in the form of the monster and the frequent (re)production of Us and Them as binary opposites. According to Wood, 50s monsters were preferably as far from the human sphere as possible in order to avoid identification. This dehumanization linked the monsters to the communists.

Taking into account the Hollywood witch-hunts and HUAC, as well as the nuclear arms race and increasing tensions between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A., (not to mention the tight collaboration between Washington and Hollywood), it seems natural that the allegedly evil Eastern Europeans served as models for Hollywood villains of the period. In terms of external threats, the communists certainly had a monopoly on cinematic antagonists in the 1950s. Especially sci-fi/horror proved an ample playground for imaginative reworkings of the Reds. As Tony Shaw points out, “[s]cience fiction was a popular vehicle for the covert language of the anti-Red crusade, with monsters from outer space or beneath the sea serving as the allegorical enemy intruder” (50). But Shaw also draws attention to the fact that nowadays 50s monsters are not read exclusively as stand-ins for the Soviets or external threats either, their prevalent forms as invaders and mutations notwithstanding (50). Crucially, significant factors in the shaping of the U.S.-American sci-fi/horror genre of the 50s encompass domestic sources of distress.

According to Mark Jancovich, for instance, “horror texts were at least as concerned with developments within American society as they were with threats from without” (2). He dismisses Robin Wood’s approach, claiming that Wood restricts his analyses to the invasion subgenre, while neglecting both its diversity and its parallels to contemporaneous horror literature (2). Jancovich remarks that “if there is a common feature to the majority of horror texts within the 1950s, it is not a conservative, Cold War politics, but rather a shift in

emphasis away from reliance upon gothic horror and towards a preoccupation with the modern world” (2).

Peter Biskind’s approach is more political. In *Seeing is Believing: or How Hollywood Taught us to Stop Worrying and Love the 50s*, he analyzes the U.S.-American cinema of the period in regard to domestic power struggles. The third chapter of the book is dedicated to the horror genre. Appositely entitled “Us and Them”, it refers to the well-known, eponymous dichotomy which is subsequently dismantled by the author. Biskind argues that in the allegedly reactionary U.S.-American horror genre of the 50s, Us and Them are not presented as fixed, clearly distinguishable concepts. They fluctuate according to the political orientation and the resulting perspective offered by each film. Biskind differs between three types of movies – centrist, left-wing and right-wing – and thus also between three different types of ‘Us versus Them’. (101-159)

Centrist movies favor culture over nature. Consequently, the evil Others are depicted as primitive life forms, while science and technology are assigned key roles in fighting them. The evil Others are equated with the left and the right. (Biskind 119) Right-wing movies favor nature over culture; the evil Others are associated with science and technology (119). The center, including the federal government and the military apparatus cannot be trusted (117). The evil Others are equated with the center and the left. Finally, left-wing movies are ambivalent towards nature and culture, but rather on the side of the latter (119). Here, the Others are usually not evil at all – as Biskind puts it, “[l]eft-wing sci-fi was afraid of the center and the right, but the alien was neutral and benevolent, which is to say, these films tried to defuse the paranoia towards the Other” (120-121).

And the Other is by no means, and despite sci-fi/horror’s preference for aliens and mutations, tantamount to communism:

[T]he Red Menace theory stands in the way of thinking through the idea of the Other. [...] Indeed the red nightmare was so handy that had it not existed, American politicians would have had to invent it. Movies did invent it, and it served somewhat the same purpose in Hollywood as it did in Washington. More often than not, the Communist connection was a red herring, allowing the center to attack extremists, extremists to attack the center, and both centrists and extremists to quarrel among

each themselves (corporate liberals against conservatives, right against left), all in the guise of anticommunism. But this was no more than a smokescreen for a domestic power struggle. Fifties sci-fi was more concerned with Main Street than monsters.’ (Biskind 111)

Not only does Biskind consider communism Hollywood’s “red herring”, he also suggests that it worked astoundingly well. In the 1950s, the communists served as the quintessence of the Other, hence pushing someone to the far side of the dichotomous divide was easily accomplished by equating that someone with the communists. Accordingly, if the evil presented in sci-fi/horror films of the period bears strong allusions to communism, it does not necessarily connote an external, Eastern European threat in the first place.

However, one has to bear in mind that, regardless of further subtexts and hidden agendas, the communists and thus the Eastern Europeans in general, were omnipresent on cinema screens. Whether aliens and mutants were intended to serve as stand-ins for the Soviets or not, they indisputably displayed a set of characteristics assigned to the communist Other. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) provides an accurate example (Boggs and Pollard 211) and elucidates the significance of 50s sci-fi/horror monsters as blueprints for generations of screenwriters, directors, and producers to come: “[f]uture Hollywood filmmakers learned to make their villains correspond to this menacing stereotype drawn from cold war hysteria” (211).

2.2.3 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*

From the 50s cycle of invasion movies, Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* sticks out as a particularly mesmerizing vision of the United States under attack. Rick Worland calls it “a seemingly unassuming programmer that has since achieved cult status [and] became one of the most famous movies of the sci-fi boom” (78). The self-explaining title leaves only one question open: will the invaders succeed in their evil endeavors? Interestingly, the answer would have been ‘yes indeed!’, had the studio not insisted on changing the film’s ending at last call. Instead of stumbling across a crowded highway announcing the alien threat like a manic street preacher, main protagonist Miles Bennell is permitted to warn the authorities, which suggests that the invaders

will ultimately fail in taking over the country (Worland 79; Jancovich 75). While the aliens (as illustrated below) can be read in various ways, the overall message is rather clear: the United States will not be overrun; We will resist Them, who- or whatever They may be.

The story of *Invasion* is set in Santa Mira, a sleepy town in rural California, to which Miles returns after a few years' absence. At first, nothing seems out of the ordinary, but when Miles resumes his work as a doctor, he is immediately approached by anxious locals reporting oddities in their relatives' behavior. Not that they act in a devious manner, they just seem emotionally detached. In other words, albeit perfectly normal, that is human, in appearance, they lack the human touch. This is the one thing the body snatching aliens cannot copy, the one thing distinguishing Them from Us. "It is this lack of emotion that renders the duplicates monstrous" (Cherry 171).

Even love interest Becky has noticed a subtle, almost undetectable change in her father. She is having dinner with Miles, when the latter receives a startling phone call and is summoned to the home of his friend Jack. Jack has found a duplicate, an unfinished, lifeless copy of his body. Soon, Miles also discovers a clone of Becky in the basement of her home. Of course, when he returns to show it to psychiatrist Dan Kaufman, a friend of his, the evidence has mysteriously disappeared. Kaufman and the police officer, who eventually arrives at the scene, do not believe the doctor. They have already been taken over.

The film's theme of brainwashing and subversion clearly resonates the Red Menace. It is almost impossible to tell the villains apart from the everyday Americans they have copied. On the one hand this relates to Hans-Ulrich Mohr's notion of the monster's "special appeal of dangerousness [which] derives from its closeness to the human sphere" (226). On the other hand, it corresponds neatly to the infiltration hysteria of the early Cold War:

The idea is that beings identical to ordinary Americans were in fact involved in a secret, nefarious plot to overthrow the government and bring to power a group of "pod people," automatons devoid of human emotion. Of course the aliens resemble the prevailing fifties view of Communists: godless, cold, ruthless, seemingly omnipotent, a dire threat to American society. (Boggs and Pollard 211)

Although the monster “explicitly threatens to invert the process of civilization [and] is the opponent of a group, a society, established and defined by such a process” (Mohr 226), the clones, however, lack the animalistic appearance constituting an essential part of Mohr’s definition of evil. This aspect of the invaders does not manifest until the source of the replicas is unveiled as alien seed pods. Resembling gigantic vegetables, those pods cannot move or communicate either. They just squirt out clones waiting to replace the people they were modeled after as soon as the latter fall asleep. Indisputably, the metaphor of sleep as the decisive act of subversion bears a strong Cold War connotation. If you lose your focus and drift away, you run the risk of being indoctrinated. If you do not pay attention, you might become one of Them. Importantly however, the alien Other need not exclusively be read as communist and thus Eastern European.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers has always been interpreted in two ways: as part of the anti-Communist thrust, where the aliens threaten freedom and the American way of life like the Soviets and their Hollywood ‘allies’; and as a humanist attempt to warn Americans of the way they have allowed themselves to be conditioned by an uncaring, emotionally arid society. The problem with this second interpretation is that it is ambiguous: do these threats to free thought come from outside or within? (Humphries 60)

Even in a reactionary reading of the film, one could argue it is both. A threat from outside combined with a weakness from within. After all, the individual is responsible for not letting their guard down and refusing to open up for an alternative ideology waiting to take hold. From a progressive perspective, one might argue that the film levels – to a certain degree – capitalism and communism in “their tendency toward blind social conformity”, as David J. Skal writes:

Mind-controlling monsters from space took the place of communists in numerous films. Of these, Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) is the best, possibly because the social metaphor is ambiguous. The story of an invasion by vegetable pods who create drained human doppelgangers in a California town has a clear Cold War resonance, but Siegel knowingly indicts the tendency toward blind social conformity –

what Erich Fromm called “the escape from freedom” that is a trait of industrialized societies generally. The enemy is them, *and* us. (250) [emphasis in the original]

For Peter Biskind, the invaders stand for corporate liberals from the center, who are equated with the communists in order to mark them as Them (141). Biskind assures that “[t]he pod society is the familiar mechanistic utopia usually (and rightly) taken as a metaphor for Communism” (141). I claim that this communist connotation proves dominant and, put rather simply, makes more sense than any other reading of the movie. I base this claim on three indicators. First, the significant metaphor of sleep, which has been discussed above.

Second, the extent of the invaders’ aspirations, which becomes clear in the scene in which Miles and his spouse seek shelter in the doctor’s office. From the office window, they witness duplicates loading huge piles of seed pods onto trucks. “It’s a malignant disease spreading through the whole country”, says Miles; the aliens intend to take over the United States. Before the doctor and Becky can make their way out of town, they are discovered by the clones of Kaufman and Jack. Kaufman’s replica elaborates on the body snatchers’ evil scheme: “Your new bodies are [...] taking you over, cell for cell, atom for atom. There’s no pain. Suddenly, while you’re asleep, they’ll absorb your minds, your memories, and you’re reborn into an untroubled world”.

It is not merely the United States anymore; the aliens want to take over the whole planet. Miles immediately questions the nature of this “untroubled world” – “Where everyone is the same?” he asks Kaufman, who nonchalantly replies: “Exactly”. Conformity can be considered a universal trademark of both capitalism and communism. In contrast, world domination, at least in the context of the early Cold War and the U.S.-American denigration of the Soviets as pure evil, suits communism better than capitalism.

Third, the vagueness of the alien invaders’ motives, which is in consonance with the attitudes towards and depictions of communists introduced in chapter 2.1.2.3. As Tony Shaw accurately puts it, “[t]he Communist party did not stand for anything, only against sacred American principles” (Shaw 51). Capitalist aliens would conquer the world in order to tap new markets, while communist aliens would conquer the world just to thwart the plans of their capitalist adversaries. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the aspirations of the seed pots

and the replicas remain incomprehensible. Sovereign rule over a planet drenched in conformity? Yes, but what for?! We do not know. And this does not only strongly connote the body snatching aliens to communism, but also renders them highly dangerous and horribly evil.

2.2.4 Them!

The New Mexican desert, notorious site of Trinity, is haunted by ghastly reverberations of its past. The A-bomb testing of World War II⁷ has produced a horde of mutated killer-ants: Them (!), gigantic in appearance, striving for food and expanding their territory. (Here, there is already a significant difference to the monsters of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. At least one motive of the ants is clearly comprehensible.) State trooper Ben Peterson and FBI agent Robert Graham, who both lost colleagues to the insect threat, join forces with Dr Medford and his daughter Pat. Led by the woman, the executives are able to destroy the ants' nest, only to find evidence that some of its inhabitants have escaped to build colonies throughout the United States. Says Graham: "And I thought today was the end of them", to which Dr Medford replies: "No, we haven't seen the end of them. We've only had a close view of the beginning of what may be the end of us". The trace leads to Los Angeles, where the ants have made themselves at home in the city's labyrinthine sewers. Martial Law is declared and the Army sent to deal with the problem. The public is not informed about the true nature of the threat. "Has the Cold War gotten hot?" asks a reporter at an official press conference, but he is not given an answer. In the meantime, two children disappear. Graham and Peterson lead an Army convoy into the sewers where Peterson dies saving the kids. Graham proceeds to the new nest and stumbles on three baby queens. After Dr Medford has confirmed that these are the last remaining specimens of the breed, the soldiers torch them to death. The federal government, guided by science, has finally succeeded. We beat Them!

Although Gordon Douglas' killer-ant-movie may not enjoy the cult status of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, it has been thoroughly examined by a great variety of critics. Its title alone, perfectly illustrating the (re)production of Us

⁷ Dr Medford explicitly mentions it in the film. See also Biskind 125-126.

versus *Them* in 50s sci-fi/horror, makes it an obvious choice. A more apposite allusion to the dichotomous portrayal of evil is literally impossible. Confronted by *Them!* in the opening credits, radiating brightly red against a black-and-white-background, one feels tempted to write *Them* off immediately as stand-ins for the Red Threat (Humphries 60). Apart from the hint at communism, the title of the film unmistakably relates its villains to the realm of the Other. 'Them' is a fourth case; the accusative indicates that They have already done a reprehensible deed (in fact accusing Them), which immediately marks Them as evil. The use of the accusative implies closure, a *fait accompli*, finished business. The effect is further reinforced by means of the exclamation mark. 'Them' becomes a fixed, unalterable, unredeemable unit. Conversely, 'They' could be interpreted as a subject in the making, waiting to be defined by its actions. The question would not be 'What have they done?' but rather 'What will They do?' – undoubtedly, *Them!* is much stronger a title than *They...* could ever be.

Overall, the film's title heralds the evil disposition of its eponymous creatures and their incompatibility with what Robin Wood terms "normality" (71). Wood identifies three different levels on which the ants pose a threat to the social status quo, or, in other words, the "bourgeois, patriarchal norms" (170). The mutated insects embody "the fear of nuclear energy and atomic experiment" (78) as well as the fear of the unconscious, the id (78). Besides, "[t]he fear of Communist infiltration also seems present, in the emphasis on the ants as a subversive subterranean army and on their elaborate communications system" (78).

This leads us straight back to the reactionary "myth of Communism as total dehumanization" (Wood 171) and the definition of evil given in chapter 2.1.1.3 of this thesis. The ants, which, on one level of meaning, clearly stand for the Soviets, are not entirely dehumanized. Regardless of their appearance, they indeed act like humans. Says Dr Medford:

Ants are the only creatures on earth other than man who make war. They campaign. They are chronic aggressors and they make slave laborers of the captives they don't kill. None of the ants previously seen by man were more than an inch in length, most considerably under that

size. But even the most minute of them have an instinct and talent for [...] savagery that makes man look feeble by comparison.

Thus, the ants are explicitly compared to mankind in the movie. Implicitly, however, they are strongly linked to a certain group of people only.

If the ants are like humans, which humans are they like? In 1954, when *Them!* was made, those humans that Americans regarded as antlike, which is to say, behaved like a mass, loved war, and made slaves, were, of course, Communists, both the Yellow Hordes that had just swamped GIs with their human waves in Korea, and the Soviets, with their notorious slave-labor camps. (Biskind 132)

Moreover, Biskind claims that the ants were deliberately modeled after the Soviets. "Presenting Reds as ants or aliens served to establish their Otherness" (Biskind 132), assigning them a place on the far side of the dichotomous divide. But again, the Cold War connotation only provides the top layer. "Russians in turn stood for the eruption of primitive aggressive behavior. Reds, in other words, were monsters from the id" (Biskind 132). This reading is in consonance with Wood's, who, for instance, interprets the underground from which the mutants emerge as the "unconscious" and their poisonous attacks on humans as "the release of repressed phallic energy" (78). Importantly, however, Wood does not read the monsters ("from the id") as particularly female. In contrast, Biskind states that the ants, among others, stand for the threat posed by emancipation: "*Them!* has as much to do with the Cold War as it does [with] the sex war" (133). As concerns the impact of the Cold War, Biskind equates *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* with *Them!*. He argues that in both movies communism is actually "somewhat of a diversion. It allow[s] those films to attack extremism in the guise of attacking the Red menace, to suggest that like Communism, extremism was subversive" (140). Extremism, according to Biskind, denotes left- and right-wing-politics (101-159). Hence, the term encompasses the entirety of values and practices opposed to the patriarchal ruling class. On cinema screens, the gap between centrism and (subversive) extremism expands from the political to the geographical. Out in the wilderness of the periphery lies the source of the menace which threatens to destroy the center (103). Like in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the menace is in part external (communist, Eastern European), in part domestic (extreme,

emancipatory). But in *Them!*, the external menace does not prove prevalent. One can therefore easily identify it as a projection.

This is evident, for instance, in the progress of the mutated insects to the center. Not the warrior drones, their interchangeability and conformity bearing strong connotations to communism, but the female ant elite moves on to the city and threatens to bring down civilization as We know it. And those creatures are not only subterranean but also airborne. The fact that the queens fly across the United States in order to engender new colonies, adds a sexual component to the menace (even if Erica Jong's famous metaphor of flying is not applied). The flying female ants are capable of driving a man crazy, at least in the eyes of his doctors: a pilot witnesses a flying queen ant on the move and is promptly written off as mentally ill.

While the ants are female, they are clearly not maternal. Yes, they seem to have a thing for children, but only, one might assume, to inject some of their extremist ideas into Our young; a poison that pollutes the mind rather than the body. Hence, the authorities have to see to it that the U.S.-American human resources are kept safe. Those attempts are not always successful. (For example, a little girl who survives an ant attack in the beginning of the film suffers a severe trauma.)

Apart from children, the matriarchic ants prefer attacking males (Biskind 133). They challenge the patriarchic norms and threaten to bring them down. It does not come as a surprise that, figuratively speaking, they end up at the stake. The last female ants are extinguished by a fire which, for the patriarchs on the safe side of the flamethrowers, certainly feels cathartic.

The motives of the killer ants are comprehensible. They fight Us because they want what We have. As I illustrated in chapter 2.2.3, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* comprises multiple layers of meaning, wrapped in a thick Cold War coating. *Them!* also allows for a variety of interpretations, but they are both more balanced and more easily accessible. Eastern European evil can certainly be identified in the villainous mutations, but not as a key characteristic and driving force. However, we have to bear in mind that there is a Cold War connotation and that the threat it constitutes, both nuclear and communist, is depicted as horribly serious.

2.2.5 The Day the Earth Stood Still

The alien protagonist of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, a humanoid who calls himself Klaatu, bears a variety of striking differences to the extraterrestrials to be encountered in most of the other sci-fi/horror films of the 50s. Not only does he look like one of Us – his exotic apparel notwithstanding, which he soon discards to walk amongst the citizens of Washington D.C. – he also seems to mean Us no harm. Nonetheless, Klaatu is met with suspicion and fear.

The film begins with an unidentified flying object appearing on the radar of the U.S. military. “Can’t be aircraft. Must be a buzz bomb!” exclaims one of the soldiers, thus evoking the Cold War and the Bomb only two minutes into the film. (Later on, Klaatu will be indirectly referred to as a Soviet invader: “If you want my opinion”, says Mrs. Barley whom Klaatu encounters in a boarding house, “he comes from right here on Earth. And you know where I mean”. Mr. Krull, a fellow patron replies: “They wouldn’t come in a spaceship. They’d come in airplanes”. But Mrs. Barley insists: “I wouldn’t be too sure about that”.) Correspondingly, having passed Washington D.C.’s historical sights and landed on a baseball pitch, of all places, the saucer is surrounded by a trigger-happy welcome committee of the U.S. army. Klaatu has hardly left his vehicle and pulled out a welcome present, when he is shot by an alarmed soldier. Enter Gort, Klaatu’s indestructible, taller-than-life robot. He emits a bright ray from his visor, evaporating guns and artillery alike. Only little piles of glimmering dust remain. The allusion to the Bomb is more than obvious. The technology yielded by Klaatu runs on nuclear energy, as the alien is not afraid to admit.⁸ Throughout the movie, Klaatu will demonstrate in which ways this tremendous power can be used to serve a good cause. First, however, he has to prevent Gort from killing the human aggressors. Unlike the robot, Klaatu forgives their insolence.

The movie’s death count hardly rises above zero⁹ and generally offers horror only in small doses. In other words, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is sci-fi tinged with occasional horror elements. The most prominent of the latter is certainly Gort. He is monstrous in appearance, and a fatal attack literally costs him but a

⁸ When asked what makes the ship go, he answers: “Well, a highly developed form of atomic power, I should imagine”.

⁹ Gort kills two soldiers after Klaatu has been murdered. Klaatu’s demise, however, does not count since it is eventually reversed.

blink of his mechanical eye. If Gort is the horror part of the movie, Klaatu is his sci-fi equivalent. He provides a model of what mankind could evolve into. He is envied for his incredibly long life span and even more for his flying saucer and supposed robot servant. Again, sci-fi seems to dominate horror: Klaatu appears to be in a position which allows him to give Gort orders. However, things are a bit more complicated than they seem at first. The relationship between Klaatu and Gort is not one between master and servant, as we come to realize in the course of the alien's undertakings on earth.

Klaatu is on a mission to warn mankind not to Bomb itself into oblivion. But the politicians, entangled in old rivalries and "petty squabbles", as Klaatu puts it, reject a peaceful gathering on neutral ground. Hence, Klaatu has to escape the grip of the authorities, in search of someone willing to listen. After politics have failed, science seems the logical choice. As Peter Biskind puts it, "[t]he intellectual elite are the only people smart enough to hear Klaatu's message" (154). The alien demonstrates his powers by letting earth stand still for a few minutes – but he does it the nice way: planes and hospitals are not affected and no lives are lost. Nonetheless, the authorities label Klaatu a threat, and the army hunts the alien down and kills him before he can host a conference of world's leading scientists. Fortunately, Klaatu has befriended a boy and his mother, the latter of which calls Gort for help. With the assistance of the robot, Klaatu is resurrected from the dead. Now, he can finally deliver his message to the scientists who congregated in front of the saucer:

The universe grows smaller every day, and the threat of aggression by any group anywhere can no longer be tolerated. There must be security for all, or no one is secure. But this does not mean giving up any freedom, except the freedom to act irresponsibly. Your ancestors knew this when they made laws to govern themselves and hired policemen to enforce them. We of the other planets have long accepted this principle. We have an organization for the mutual protection of all planets and for the complete elimination of aggression. The test of any such higher authority is, of course, the police force that supports it. For our policemen, we created a race of robots. Their function is to patrol the planets in spaceships like this one and preserve the peace. In matters of aggression, we have given them absolute power over us. This power

cannot be revoked. At the first sign of violence, they act automatically against the aggressor. The penalty for provoking their action is too terrible to risk. The result is: we live in peace without arms or armies, secure in the knowledge that we are free from aggression and war, free to pursue more profitable enterprises. We do not pretend to have achieved perfection, but we do have a system, and it works. I came here to give you these facts. It is no concern of ours how you run your own planet. But if you threaten to extend your violence, this Earth of yours will be reduced to a burned-out cinder. Your choice is simple. Join us and live in peace or pursue your present course and face obliteration. We shall be waiting for your answer. The decision rests with you.

Klaatu's concluding monologue aptly exemplifies the movie's ambivalence. While we have put our planet (and the whole galaxy) in danger by developing nuclear weapons, the decision between 'obliteration' and survival has been imposed on us. It is unclear whether Klaatu's warning is an advice or an order; whether he is the redeemer of internal maladies or the messenger of an external threat. Accordingly, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* has been subject to various interpretations. According to Tony Shaw, the film exemplifies a tradition of cinematic dissent within U.S.-American Cold War culture (Shaw 136). It "carried Hollywood's most powerful intergalactic message of the decade, as well as providing a counterpoint to the crude anti-communist nationalism of movies of the period" (140). Consonantly, Peter Biskind calls it a "critique of the witch-hunt and the Cold War [and thus] close to the edge of permissible dissent" (158). The Reds are not dismissed as subversive forces of evil keen on taking over the United States. Instead, the issue at stake – extinction via nuclear weapons, be they terrestrial or extra-terrestrial – exceeds trivial animosities between capitalists and communists: "The scientists have to learn that the life-and-death struggle between war-mongering Capitalism and Godless Communism is small potatoes compared with the global, even galactic question of nuclear conflict" (Biskind 155).

Similar to the movie on the whole, the galaxy from which Klaatu and Gort descend upon earth can be read in various ways. One could label it a vigilant protector, with Klaatu as its correspondent and Gort as its bodyguard. Conversely, however, one could also read the galaxy as a regime, the alien as

its propagandist and the robot as its executive. In contrast to Biskind and Shaw, Mark Jancovich interprets the installment of the robot police force as an indicator of consent: "Instead of respecting difference, the film demands rigid conformity to the universal order, an order from which there can be no valid dissent" (46). According to Reynold Humphries, Jancovich regards the message of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* as "fascistic" rather than "courageous and progressive" (57).

Of course, one does not necessarily have to equal Jancovich's notion of a "universal order" (46) with fascism. For instance, Biskind, Shaw, and Jancovich all stress the fact that Klaatu can be read as a Christ-figure (Biskind 152; Shaw 142; Jancovich 44). He walks among the common people under the name of Carpenter (referring to the profession of Joseph), is murdered but eventually resurrected and, last but not least, eventually takes off into unknown spheres. Moreover, the force backing up Klaatu seems divine. Importantly, it is not mercy or love. It is the wrath of God, convincingly impersonated by Gort. (The link between his nuclear powers and religion suits the early years of the atomic age very well. Off screen, this link manifested, for instance, in nuclear terminology: inspired by a poem by John Donne, Oppenheimer named the first Bomb test "Trinity" [Rhodes 571-72] and cited from the Bhagavad-Gita after it had been successful [676]. On screen, it manifested in a large variety of films, most explicitly in *Red Planet Mars* [Shaw 103-104].)

Gort threatens earth with extinction, which Klaatu sells Us as a blessing. But is it, really? Or does Gort stand for oppression and, ultimately, fascism? The robot can certainly be classified as evil according to Hans-Ulrich Mohr's definition of the term. Being a death-ray-emitting giant, the robot qualifies as a monstrous "otherness which is still related to humanity" (Mohr 225). Besides, despite representing a superior technology, he is also animalistic to a certain degree. Here, animalistic is synonymous to primitive, in the sense of a reduction to basics. Lacking facial features, Gort resembles the prototype of a human being, similar to the unfinished replicas in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Like the replicas, Gort is defined by the complete absence of emotion. Like them, he promises an untroubled world and the end of violence. If one deems the pod people evil, how can one regard Gort as good? Perhaps because Gort's behavior can be justified as reasonable; after all, mankind's

suicidal nuclear tendencies threaten his creators. Perhaps because the sympathetic alien Klaatu proves very persuasive in spreading faith in the universal order. However, even Peter Biskind who stresses the efforts of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* at deescalating Cold War paranoia insinuates that the movie's message and significance as an example of cinematic dissent remain subject to speculation. Towards the end of his analysis, he acknowledges that Klaatu could indeed be read as a "Soviet agent", his talk of the peaceful potential of nuclear energy as subversive (159). But whether he is interpreted as the brain to Gort's muscle in a communist plot for world domination or the prophet of a guiding moral system, the fact remains that punishment is impending. The threat is real and to be taken seriously.

3. Eastern European evil after 1989

3.1 Hollywood's villains in the 90s

3.1.1 1989: the end of Eastern European barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence?

The early Cold War and the doomsday anxieties it entailed reached a peak in the Cuba crisis of 1962. On and off cinema screens, direct confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union became rare. While Eastern Europe continued providing a constant source of cinematic evil, more topical conflicts often claimed the spotlight. The new villains were spin-offs of the original threat, related to the Soviet regime at least via their communist ideology. Vietnam proves the most infamous case in point. Being the first post-World-War-II conflict which grabbed the attention of the U.S.-American public and film industry alike, Vietnam offered yet another quest for the righteous cause, but proved an unforeseen disaster. Unlike World War II, it could not be marketed as a 'good war'¹⁰, what with the rumors of atrocities committed by U.S.-American troops, the drugs they abused and the traumata they suffered. Vietnam was more than a defeat. It blurred the boundaries between good and evil, casting doubt on the integrity of the armed forces and the government which had deployed them to South-East Asia. The States' traditional heroes faltered, their ambivalent martyrdom prolonged and frequently renegotiated by the country's filmmakers. On screen, the war marks a breach in Hollywood conventions concerning the depiction of villains. It is a breach bracketed by the early and late Cold War respectively.

During the Vietnam era, Hollywood was not at best terms with the U.S. government – a trend that had begun with Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959) (Shaw 225) and ended with Tony Scott's *Top Gun* (1986) (Shaw 225; Suid 669) and "a renewed cooperation on prestigious anti-communist movies like Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986)" (Shaw 225). In the reactionary 80s, Hollywood began to restore the U.S.-American soldiers (and the politicians behind them) as agents of the good cause and patrons of freedom. Aligning with the government's new old stance towards the U.S.S.R., the film industry

¹⁰ A term defined by Boggs and Pollard (66-67), see chapter 2.1.2.2.

was ready to bring Eastern European evil back to the cinema screens. But the remodeling of the Soviet Union thwarted Hollywood's return to the old schemata.

When the Cold War entered its fifth decade, a quick resolution seemed as unlikely as it had been in the 50s, the gap between East and West as impossible to bridge. Despite Vietnam, the Nixon legislature, and new crises in the Middle East, Eastern Europeans still provided the U.S. with the quintessential Other. Ronald Reagan bore testament to the unmitigated rivalries (and their dichotomous construction) by labeling the U.S.S.R. "the Evil Empire" in 1983 (Austermühl 261). Only two years later, however, the foundations were laid for both the end of the Cold War and the decline of the Soviet Union. In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (McCauley 383).

Primarily concerned with boosting, or rather resuscitating the Soviet economy, Gorbachev soon realized that political reform was inevitable in the process (McCauley 389-90). He led the U.S.S.R. into the era of "*perestroika* ('reconstruction and reform'), *glasnost* ('publicity and openness') and *demokratizatsiia* ('democratization')" (384) [emphasis in the original]. The West should serve as a model of proliferation and stability. Gorbachev intended to redeem Eastern European socialism of its evil stigmata and pave the way for a modern, progressive, and economically sanitized Soviet Union. This included opening up to and breaking down tensions with the West by approaching the United States. On his own initiative, Gorbachev met President Reagan in Geneva, rekindling the relations between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. On that basis, Gorbachev eventually "managed to slow, then stop the arms race, and ultimately even initiate disarmament" (385). In December 1989, Gorbachev publicly declared the Cold War as de facto over (Shaw 294).

Like the beginning of the Cold War, the end of the conflict proves elusive and should be considered a steady process rather than a singular event. One could refer to the first "fireside chat" between Gorbachev and Reagan in 1985 (McCauley 404) as the onset of peace talks, but the war, which had never been officially declared, did not end officially either with a treaty or pact. However, both the decline of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War are

duly associated with the year 1989 and its seminal event: the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In the eyes of the public, this constituted the crucial rupture. The West did (and could) no longer regard the Soviets its archenemies and had to acknowledge Gorbachev as the godfather of the radical change.

While Gorbachev's new directives earned him high repute in the West, they weakened the Soviet Union from within. Popular fronts formed in many of its national republics, especially in the Baltics. Freed from the yoke of Stalinism once and for all, they could safely demand independence. Gorbachev envisioned a modern Eastern Europe, but none completely devoid of communist tutelage. The German Democratic Republic was the first nation to turn its back on the Soviets.

The Gorbachev government ... recommended perestroika to the East European regimes in the hope that more reform-minded leaderships would emerge. In a visit to east Berlin in October 1989, Gorbachev deliberately undermined the position of the GDR leader, Erich Honecker. As a result, his actions not only failed to strengthen socialism in Eastern Europe, but actually dealt the *coup de grâce*. The opening of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 signalled the end of the post-war order in Eastern Europe, a transformation that became possible when Gorbachev renounced the use of Soviet or local military force in the defence of communist regimes. The result was German unification, something that Gorbachev himself had originally opposed. (McCauley 405) [emphasis in the original]

The collapse of the Berlin Wall was a symptom of the Soviet decline. Accordingly, Gorbachev's politics met strong opposition within the Union, culminating in a military coup on 18 August 1991 (McCauley 411). The coup failed, tearing down the last pillars of political stability the current reform-oriented government had left standing. Gorbachev's subsequent attempts to save the U.S.S.R. proved equally futile (411). After Ukraine had split from the Union on 1 December 1991, the latter's demise became inevitable. Shortly after, the Minsk Declaration established the Commonwealth of Independent States, which the Baltic republics and Georgia did not join (412). The Soviet Bloc dissolved, diminished to less than the sum of its remaining parts. Gorbachev, "an inspirational leader abroad but a failure at home" (386),

resigned on 25 December 1991 (412). On 31 December 1991, the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist (412).

As discussed above, the Evil Empire had actually vanished two years prior to the Soviet Union's ultimate disintegration. By late 1989, Hollywood's major villains seemed to have left the stage for good. Also, they left shoes quite impossible to fill. While neither the U.S. government nor the country's film industry lacked new sources of enemies, the U.S.-American involvement in Kuwait¹¹ proved that "petty despots" such as Hussein (Suid 594) could not replace the U.S.S.R. as a binary opponent. On the one hand, the Iraqi troops did not provide much of a challenge (594). On the other, the whole campaign was controversial (Gombert 140-41). Like Vietnam, it could not be exploited as a good war, as a righteous crusade against implacable evil. This new conflict did not suit the big screen. The Iraqis – even if depicted as barbaric, backward, and belligerent – could not fill the gap left by the Soviets, whether in- or outside of cinemas. They merely added to a number of "low-level challenges" (Suid 594) which did not demand nationwide mobilization.

Hollywood and the Defense Department faced the same problem – finding credible enemies to confront. Deprived of the Soviet Union as a worthy enemy, the Pentagon sought new missions to justify its maintaining the world's largest and most powerful military establishment. Hollywood had returned to the armed services as worthy subjects, but filmmakers too needed meaningful enemies to challenge the United States in cinematic combat. (Suid 594)

While the classic military movie became rare after the decline of the U.S.S.R., the military itself remained present in U.S.-American cinema. However, Suid's notion of "worthy subjects" has to be put in context of both the 50s and 70s. In contrast to the majority of motion pictures in the early Cold War, the armed forces were now shown as hosting heroes and villains alike. In contrast to the majority of anti-Vietnam movies, the villains did not abound and clearly belonged more to Us than to Them. Moreover, while they may duly be labeled remnants of the Vietnam fiasco, they did not serve as synecdoches of the entire military apparatus – least of all those whose transgressions were not

¹¹ The Gulf War commenced in January 1991 (Suid 555).

necessarily rooted in the deplorable state of the armed service but rather imported from civilian life.

As Suid points out, Hollywood filmmakers sometimes “used the [Vietnam] war only as a springboard for the advancement of their stories” (556). Correspondingly, in many films of the 1990s, the military served as a setting for a variety of detective plots. Simon West’s *The General’s Daughter* (1999) provides an accurate example. West uses the Army as a “springboard” for criminal fiction, featuring a military investigator tantamount to a police officer or private eye as its main character. His antagonist is a sergeant who murders an ex-lover out of jealousy. One might term this kind of villain the ordinary criminal in a uniform. They were neither novel nor restricted to the 90s, as *The Presidio* (1988) and *Basic* (2003) illustrate. Generally, however, the military investigation genre revolved around felonies related to the military, for instance in *A Few Good Men* (1991), *Courage Under Fire* (1996), and *Rules of Engagement* (2000). Sometimes, the accused soldiers turned out as villains, sometimes as innocents. Crucially, however, in these films the armed forces were tested and trialed, and the grey zones between good and evil explored.

Villains from within the armed forces also appeared in a number of action movies in the 90s, including, for instance, a disillusioned Marine general in *The Rock* (1996) and a greedy stealth-bomber pilot in *Broken Arrow* (1999). The former takes hostages on Alcatraz and threatens to target the city of San Francisco with chemical weapons; the latter attempts stealing a nuclear warhead to sell it on the black market. But even those villains and their tremendous firepower “did not constitute high-level threats to the security of the nation” (Suid 604). After all, they were adversaries not stringed to an ideological, anti-democratic, and anti-capitalist background. Even the most impressive arsenal of doomsday devices poses but a minor threat if not in the hands of binary opponents from the far side of the dichotomous divide.

Crucially, the Hollywood evil of the 90s differed from its antecedents in regard to the balance of human and monstrous components mentioned in chapter 2.1.1.3. The human elements prevailed in case of most of the soldiers, thus rendering them less evil than the new villains from the Middle East for instance. While internal enemies in uniform could not possibly be considered good, they were far from being barbaric, backward, and belligerent. Killing an

ex-lover out of jealousy and contempt (as portrayed in *The General's Daughter*) may be a bad thing to do, but it seems comprehensible and almost rational to a certain degree. Conversely, detonating a belt of explosives on a bus does not; at least from a biased Western perspective. The evil deeds presented in the military investigation genre were minor misdemeanors compared to the Red Menace of the early Cold War. The soldiers of *The Rock* and *Broken Arrow* came closer, their terrorist actions binding them to the Other. Still, they were far from qualifying as binary opponents and clearly more human than the rest of the “low-level challenges” (Suid 594) that Hollywood could come up with. Productions of the period were

inspired by the well-known perpetual search for new enemies to replace the old Communists who [had] inhabited the erstwhile Evil Empire. (To be sure, Communists of one stripe or another [could] still be found but they no longer provoke[d] the same national fears and paranoia). The new enemy, not surprisingly, turn[ed] out to be an assortment of demonic Arabs and Muslims, fanatical, semicivilized, and violent, whose usual modus operandi [was] some form of irrational terrorism. (Boggs and Pollard 170)

Apart from “fanatical, semicivilized, and violent” – attributes which may be read as synonyms of barbaric, backward, and belligerent – “irrational” was the key characteristic of Hollywood’s new villains. In this context, “irrational” means incomprehensible from Our point of view. It means that, from Our perspective, the “demonic Arabs and Muslims” were evil for no apparent reason other than opposing what We deem good. They were thus based on exactly the same formula as the Soviets of the early Cold War¹². Back in the 90s, they were “[t]he new enemy”, the new extreme on the scale of evil, their monstrous components clearly outweighing the human ones. However, although Hollywood did its best to present the Middle East as evil¹³, it could not make up for the lack of an Evil Empire.

As terrorists (and criminals), the “demonic Arabs and Muslims” were on a par with the remaining “[c]ommunists of one stripe or another” – usually Red Army veterans or former Soviet politicians bent on reestablishing the old order. In *The*

¹² See Shaw 51; discussed in chapter 2.2.2.3.

¹³ For instance in Lewis Teague’s *Navy Seals* (1999), James Cameron’s *True Lies* (1994), and, to a lesser degree, Edward Zwick’s *The Siege* (1998) (Boggs and Pollard 192-93, 198-200).

Saint (1997), for instance, director Philip Noyce confronts his protagonist Simon Templar – an international thief of unconfirmed British origins – with Russian oligarch Ivan Tretiak. In the first act of the film, a news reporter refers to Tretiak as a “former communist boss ... now a billionaire oil magnate” who ventures into politics. In a public speech, Tretiak claims to be “haunted by the fantasy of an empire that reclaims a former might, a former size”. He also describes himself as “a poet spinning rhymes of a Russia ... armed to the teeth, not ridiculed but revered. No, more than revered: feared!” Noyce rather overtly links his villain to communism and even adds a nuclear touch: Tretiak considers cold fusion the key to gaining power over the country. He hires Simon Templar to steal the fusion formula from U.S.-American scientist Emma Russell. Predictably, in regard to Western cinema conventions, Russell is depicted as a philanthropic who wants to turn cold fusion into a gratuitous energy supply. In our hands, as the audience may once again conclude, nuclear power is a good thing. In contrast, Tretiak implicitly threatens to unleash its apocalyptic potential, for instance by promising Russian generals a huge nuclear arsenal. However, the film’s villain is portrayed as a criminal megalomaniac rather than a stand-in for an evil, Soviet-style Russia that could serve as a binary opponent to the West¹⁴. Needless to say that Templar eventually thwarts Tretiak’s plans.

In Wolfgang Peterson’s *Air Force One* (1997), to name another example, Russian nationalists hijack the film’s eponymous vehicle and demand the release of an imprisoned (supposedly Soviet) general. “When Mother Russia becomes one great nation again, when the Capitalists are dragged from the Kremlin and shot in the street ... you will know what I want”, explains the leader of the hijackers in the course of the negotiations over *Air Force One*. Unfortunately for him, the President happens to be an honorable Vietnam veteran who refuses to leave the plane when given the chance and stands up to the Russians instead. However, the President seems more worried about the well-being of his wife and daughter – held hostage by the nationalists – than the threat to the United States, created by the release of the general.

Terrorists, whether from the Middle East or Eastern Europe, and villainous G.I. Joes could not “provoke [...] the national fears and paranoia” of the Cold War. Besides, the interference of the U.S. military in Kuwait resembled a raid

¹⁴ This is emphasized by the fact that citizens of Saint Petersburg once help Templar escape Tretiak’s sidekicks.

rather than a crusade and hence evoked dubious Vietnam rather than 'good' World War II. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States had lost its Other and thus its main point of reference. The national identity was at threat, the country's political and economic orientation outdated. While the Pentagon needed a convincing Other to justify its involvement in the Middle East (Boggs and Pollard 181), Hollywood needed it to intensify the drama on screen. Both relied on an Other evil enough as to reflect the constructed good nature of the United States. They located it in Eastern Europe, in the ruins of the Soviet Union.

3.1.2 Balkan evil in Hollywood

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the disintegration of the Soviet Union became definite. Immediately, Eastern Europe went from stable to critical. Independent nation states were popping out from the ashes of the old order, paving the way for a number of territorial and ideological squabbles in a newly established East. While Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the United States' subsequent intervention caused a stir around the globe, Yugoslavia turned into a new European hotspot.

On June 25 1991, Slovenia and Croatia split from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, declaring their independence. Slovenian and Croatian armed forces engaged in combat with the (federal) Yugoslav People's Army separately. Both endeavors ultimately proved successful; Slovenia and Croatia became sovereign states. Two other conflicts in the area, which would be settled violently, revolved around Serb minorities in the former Yugoslav bloc and their ambitions to unite with the home nation. Apart from the Krajina, a Croatian district with a substantial Serbian overweight, there was the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which became tragically infamous owing to the ethnic cleansings by Serbian troops reminiscent of Nazi atrocities¹⁵ during World War II. (Ullman 1-2)

Prior to the war, the Bosnian Serbs constituted roughly a third of the country's population. They rejected belonging to an independent Bosnian state with a substantial, politically potent Muslim percentage. Conversely, the

¹⁵ See also Cain 171.

Muslims, facing an aggressive neighbor gaining in power, refused to give up the Serb-held districts. Tensions culminated in the spring of 1992, turning the dispute over Bosnia and Herzegovina into full-blown war and setting in motion events which soon shocked news audiences around the world. (2)

According to David Gombert, “a senior policymaker in the administration ... of President George Bush” (Ullman 4), the U.S. proved inconsistent in showing interest in the fate of the Balkans and the resolution of the crisis (Gombert 140). The U.S.-American stance towards the Balkan crises remained passive until February 1994, when Serbian troops bombed the Sarajevo market (138), following the mass murder of Muslims at Srebrenica. Subsequently, the first NATO bombs were dropped over Serbia (Ullman 4). The United States spent almost 50 years on the verge of a nuclear war, but did not bomb targets on Eastern European ground until the Cold War ended. What might seem ironical at first glance, turns out as a completely logical development.

While Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard read the U.S. involvement in the Balkans as evidence of the “resurgence of U.S. imperial ambitions” in the 1990s (181), David Gombert considers it a test of the nation’s new role as “guardian”, preserving a conflicting “Pax Americana” (141). In this regard, a comparison between Kuwait and Bosnia seems unavoidable. While Gombert deems the latter a flawed yet well-intended mission to restore peace, he labels the former a quest for oil (140). He emphasizes the clash between the nation’s vital interests and its world policing duties but, crucially, considers it a result of the Soviet decline, not a symptom of an age-old tradition (141). Gombert states that

the end of bipolarity and the collapse of communism unlocked instabilities globally. Old sores were reopened and old scores began to be settled, typically along tribal lines, making violence especially hard to prevent and harder still to stop once started. A dozen such disputes, mainly around the periphery of the former communist bloc, revealed a powerful source of insecurity and conflict in the post-Soviet world. (141)

It is of major significance that this “post-Soviet world” is a world haunted by the vestige of the U.S.S.R. Gombert speaks of a “world political revolution” strung to the decline of the Soviet Union. Beside the remodeling of Western Europe (with a unified Germany and a European Union in the making), he also links it

to “the volatile Middle East”, where Iraq, “a former Soviet client invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudi Arabia” (123).

As a network of business relations, the Cold War reboots the current system when it comes to an end, forcing the remaining global players to re-orientate. Gombert’s analysis of the Bosnian War suggests that the passive stance of the United States towards the Balkans, or, in other words, its neglect of Bosnia in favor of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was ultimately inevitable. It suggests that the Balkans were virtually useless to the U.S. and only tied to the Middle East via the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

Boggs and Pollard offer a contrasting perspective. They claim that,

[i]n the case of the Balkans, the U.S.-NATO campaign was actually motivated by long-standing economic and geopolitical interests in southern Europe and, by extension, central Asia and the Middle East. A fierce aerial bombing was intended to break the last holdout against full-scale corporate globalization in the region, epitomized by the Serb regime under Milosevic, which had been charged with genocide and other atrocities in the midst of a prolonged civil war. (182)

In the wake of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, the Balkans did not constitute an insignificant nuisance but one of the last European bastions against a new, Americanized world order. The crises in the Balkans can be read as proof that in the new order Eastern Europe lagged behind. Moreover, the Balkans offered the opportunity to fill the blank spots left by the Evil Empire with old stereotypes. The Serbian regime was perceived as “one of the few impediments remaining from Communist Eastern Europe” (182), as the heir to Soviet barbarism (as well as Nazi evil)¹⁶ of the past. To wipe it out meant to embed Eastern Europe in the global hegemony of the West and the U.S.A. in particular – a decisive step in renegotiating Eastern Europe as an economic hinterland. The turmoil created by the decline of the Soviet Union covered for the United States’ inadequate handling of the crises. Failures could be admitted, such as letting the Bosnian War escalate until the last possible moment. In retrospect, the former Yugoslavia could be termed too important

¹⁶ “The ethnic violence between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians that attended [the Soviet Union’s] demise shocked the world and drew comparisons to the mass killings perpetrated by the *Einsatzkommando* in the Baltic states and Russia during the early stages of the German invasion of Russia in 1941” (Cain 171) [emphasis in the original].

and instable to leave it to the Western European nations engulfed in their own agendas (of re-orientation) in the wake of the Cold War (Gombert 142). But in the end, the persistence of Eastern European evil would serve as the best excuse. In the words of David Gombert, with which he concludes his analysis of the Bosnian War: “Finally, shortsighted, wrong-minded, and even craven as Western policy has been, we should not forget that it was Yugoslavs who destroyed their multiethnic state and started the ensuing war, and who have fought it in a most heinous fashion” (143).

As peace talks were in progress in November 1995, new conflicts in the Balkans, this time between the Serbians and the Albanians, were already in sight (Ullman 2). It would take more than a decade until the former Yugoslavian bloc came to a rest, and even now, in early 2011, the maintenance of an independent Kosovo seems critical. The U.S.-American cinema has consequently portrayed the Balkans as a breeding place of uncivilized barbarians and shaped a devastating image of the Serbian people.

Among U.S.-American film productions of the 1990s, Mimi Leder’s *The Peacemaker* (1997) depicts Eastern European evil in a particularly noteworthy manner. On the one hand, it illustrates Hollywood’s reluctance to let go of the late U.S.S.R. as a source of serious antagonists. On the other, it perfectly exemplifies the dream factory’s essential approach to residual Eastern European evil in the wake of the Soviet Union.

The movie’s opening sequences do not leave any doubt about its overall tenor. (Following a brief overture depicting the murder on a Serbian politician in front of a church in Pale, Bosnia) a squad of well-trained hijackers takes control of a Russian army transport. Led by a rogue Russian officer, the hijackers steal ten nuclear warheads. The bombs are remains of the Cold War, as the remark of a Russian soldier suggests: “I did not join the army to have to see it dismantled to the Americans”. He is killed with the rest of the Russian troops on the train. The rogue officer then detonates one of the nukes to eradicate his traces.

So far, the film has already rendered the Russian-led hijackers murderous, scrupulous, and highly dangerous, the Russian army, to say the least, as hazardously incompetent. The strong Cold War resonance of the A-bombs

combines with the Russian incapability of securing them. The message seems to be that nuclear weapons are not a problem per se; the threat is posed by the Russians, who cannot handle them.¹⁷ To put it all in a nutshell, the beginning of the movie brands post-Soviet Russia as the root of a nuclear disaster waiting to unfold. In other words, Mimi Leder places the main threat, personified by a Serbian terrorist, into the bigger picture of Eastern European evil in the aftermath of the Soviet Union.

Dr. Julia Kelly, scientist and acting chair on the Nuclear Smuggling Group, and her Russian liaison, Colonel Thomas Devoe, are assigned the task of tracking down and retrieving the bombs. They succeed where the Russians have bitterly failed – as Colonel Devoe puts it: “The Russians could not find snow in the middle of fucking winter”. However, one of the nuclear warheads is missing. It “wind[s] up in Sarajevo where new villains (Serbs, of course) enter the picture, intent on bringing weapons of mass destruction to New York City” (Boggs and Pollard 198). Having accomplished their duties as guardians of world peace, the U.S.-Americans are now obliged to deal with a terrorist attack on their home nation. They locate the evil Serb and follow him through the streets of New York City. The sniper designated to take him out refuses to pull the trigger, afraid that the bullet could accidentally kill a little girl – this human reaction (good) to the barbaric endeavor of the Serb (evil) serves as an accurate example of the film’s constant reproduction of the Us versus Them dichotomy. Accordingly, “the hate-filled, cowardly, barbaric terrorist” (198) picks a church, an allegedly safe haven, as ground zero for the detonation. Furthermore, the church both mirrors the film’s overture and elucidates a further binary opposition. The Serb is not only an Eastern European terrorist, but also, as he announces on a video tape claiming responsibility, a Muslim. Blowing up a Catholic church certainly fits the image of an evil Muslim. Of course, the army officer and the analyst can prevent a nuclear catastrophe, but the explosives in the backpack detonate and the church collapses over the dead body of the Serb. It is indeed tempting to read this as divine punishment and the ultimate approval of the U.S.-Americans’ righteous cause.

¹⁷ The rogue Russian officer who steals the weapons also poses a threat because he constitutes a relentless capitalist from the former Soviet Bloc. I will deal with this particular kind of villain later on. However, Julia Kelly, main protagonist of the film does not refer to the hijacking as a theft, but as “a terrorist act”.

As mentioned above, *The Peacemaker* does not only serve as an apposite example of post-Cold-War Balkan evil in Hollywood but also depicts the Balkans as a manifestation of the greater evil still abundant in post-Soviet Eastern Europe. Let us go into detail and have a brief look at the Serbian terrorist. Interestingly, Mimi Leder equips her main villain with a background story which, despite being rather superficial, provides a clear motif for his actions. He blames the United States for the deaths of his wife and child during the siege of Sarajevo. In featuring the Serb's background story, the film's antagonist clearly differs from the majority of Cold-War communist villains of the 1950s. In line with Hans-Ulrich Mohr's definition of evil, they threatened to invert the process of civilization and thus annihilate a group, the United States, defined by this process (Mohr 226). But, importantly, they were usually portrayed as motivated exclusively by their (binary) opposition to freedom, democracy and capitalism (Shaw 51). Of course, the Serb's tragic motives do not mitigate the sheer despicability of his plot. However, his motives establish a link to the human sphere. They provide the only tangible components of an otherwise ultimately evil monster.

On the one hand, the Serbian terrorists of *The Peacemaker* compare to the Russian nationalists of *Air Force One* and *The Saint*. On the other hand, they are similar to cinematic fanatics from the Middle East. They all have in common a formulaic depiction based on exactly the same ancient Hollywood conventions. Furthermore, all of them constitute but "low-level challenges" (Suid 594) which are virtually interchangeable. (It should be borne in mind that We cannot grasp the actual "entity that corresponds to [Our] projection", to Our image of the Other [Richardson 12].) Here, Tony Shaw's notion of "commu-terrorists" (303) seems more than accurate. Instead of being forces in an epic fight between East and West, they represent a minor revolt against an East-West-alliance already accomplished. But villains such as Mimi Leder's evil Serb prove significant nonetheless, since they show resistance to the new (and implicitly better) world order. They are thus not only heirs of the Evil Empire but herald the return of Eastern European monstrosity on a large scale.

As pointed out in chapter 3.1.1, "Hollywood had returned to the armed services as worthy subjects", but lacked "meaningful enemies" (Suid 594). In many respects, Serbia could provide suitably antagonistic villains, but, mainly

owing to its small size and little political influence, lacked the potential for a significant binary opponent. Moreover, the Vietnam fiasco had rendered the United States very careful concerning the deployment of troops. Both the Bush senior and Clinton administrations “refused to contribute ground forces to U.N. peacekeeping activities for fear of potential casualties” (Ullman 5). A war that – from the perspective of the U.S.-American public – mainly comprised bombing campaigns could hardly be sold as a good war against a despicably evil enemy. Incredibly, however, Hollywood eventually managed to do it. Of course, this achievement would have been impossible without a little help from another All-American trauma: the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on September 11 2001.

Vietnam had been a confusing experience for the U.S.-American public, not least because the war had cast serious doubts on the dichotomous order of good and evil. But in regard to the terrorist attack on Manhattan, the assets were clear. The terrorists could be filed under evil aggressors, while the U.S.-American people were innocent victims. Accordingly, 9/11 has often been compared to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Both left the nation in the mood for war. Both caused a tight collaboration between the U.S. government and Hollywood.

Unlike the motion picture industry after Pearl Harbor, however, Hollywood seemed unable to come to terms with September 11. Although government officials came to Los Angeles seeking help in the war on terrorism, times had changed from the early days of World War II when studios could turn out war effort movies very quickly. Now, under the best of circumstances, filmmakers need close to two years to develop a project, put it before the camera, edit the footage, promote the movie, and put it into theatres. (Suid 669)

Hollywood was in shock, but as it turned out, it did have a ready-made answer to the attack. In order to profit from the hype of the nation’s newfound patriotism, Twentieth Century Fox released *Behind Enemy Lines* (directed by John Moore) two months early, on November 17, 2001 and launched a box office hit (Suid 670; Boggs and Pollard 182-83). Thus, Hollywood’s immediate reaction to 9/11 featured as its protagonist a Navy pilot serving in the Bosnian War. Moore virtually countered the terrorist ‘air-strike’ on the WTO center with

serial air-strikes on Serbia. From an objective (and marketing-oriented) point of view, one has to admire the brilliance of this move. The bombing campaigns of the U.S. forces during the Balkan crises were sold as acts of bravery; the oxymoronic message worked: it is okay to bomb Them, but it is a hideous crime to bomb Us.

Of course, Moore did not show the U.S. air-strikes. The main character of *Behind Enemy Lines*, Chris Burnett, sits in a fighter jet but does not drop any bombs. He is just on watch over Serbia, keeping the peace. Unfortunately, he happens to take pictures of mass graves proving the genocide committed by Serbian troops. Hence, the latter take down the F-18-fighter. While Burnett radios for help, his co-pilot is discovered by a unit of the Serbian army and executed by a “brutal Serb tracker” (Boggs and Pollard 183). This barbaric violation of international law, reminiscent of the PUNCH cartoon “RUSSIAN SAVAGES PREPARING TO RECEIVE A FLAG OF TRUCE” examined in chapter 2.1.1.2, sets the tone for the movie. The Serb tracker, apparently an unofficial adjutant to a Serbian commander, is introduced as Burnett’s unquestionably evil antagonist. He is unshaved and wears a track suit instead of a uniform. The cliché of the shabbily clad, ragged-looking Eastern European conveys the backwardness of the villain. This backwardness is not only a state of mind but also the physical lack of Western culture, its fashion and consumer goods. Besides, the tracker’s apparel marks him as a regular citizen, suggesting that each and every Serb could indeed be a relentless killer. Combined with the abominable war crimes of the army, this draws a devastating picture of the Serbian people. The Serbs are depicted as “demonized Others stereotyped as backward, fanatical, barbaric” (181). This portrayal is consonant with Cold War formulas of Eastern European deviousness. The Serbs’ plain, and indeed inexplicable, evil seems to be fuelled exclusively by a complete and unalterable (binary) opposition to Western values and ideals. But this is not the last cliché the film has to offer.

While Burnett runs for his life (once hiding in a ditch, between the victims of a Serbian mass execution), his commander, Admiral Leslie Reigert, organizes a rescue team. However, he is stopped in his tracks by a superior NATO admiral who fears the political implications of a military operation on Serbian territory. *Behind Enemy Lines* “winds up questioning the very efficacy of NATO

peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, demonstrating that U.S. military authority is to be valorized above all else” (Boggs and Pollard 183). Ignoring direct orders, Reigert finally risks his career to get Burnett out of the enemy terrain. Prior to his ordeal, the pilot had planned to resign from the Navy, not being able to see any sense in the U.S. presence in the Balkans. Having been rescued and despite his friend and colleague’s death, he happily announces to stay on the force. After all, someone has to stand up against atrocious war crimes, and, apparently, the NATO is reluctant to do so. Even in the wake of the Soviet Union, there remains a terrifying Eastern European evil which has to be fought at all costs. “As might be predicted, recurrent images of the Serbs as horrible demons serve to justify, at least post hoc, the U.S. decision to militarily intervene in 1999” (183). Furthermore, *Behind Enemy Lines* managed to reignite the U.S.-American people’s lust for the Hollywood combat genre in the aftermath of 9/11. It paved the way for a new focus on the grandeur of the nation’s armed forces and the righteousness of their campaigns. (Suid 670, 673) The film thus proved the merits of Eastern European evil, even in the light of the looming threat by Arab terrorists and impending U.S. military campaigns in the Middle East.

Other films on the topic followed, some of them seemingly more critical than *Behind Enemy Lines*, at least in regard to the role of the U.S. military. Hollywood had never overtly questioned the necessity of U.S. involvement in the Balkans.¹⁸ But eventually, in the fashion of post-Vietnam movies, a film was produced which lamented the mental distress suffered by the troops sent to fight evil Serbia. William Friedkin’s *The Hunted* (2003) revolves around special ops instructor Colonel Belham and his trainee Sergeant Hallam. Taught the fine art of killing, Hallam is sent to the Kosovo on a mission to eliminate a cruel Serbian officer. Hallam sneaks through an apocalyptic setting, lit by the constant fire-bolts of incoming NATO missiles. He witnesses the mass executions of civilians and observes a little girl as she is looking for her parents in a pile of corpses. He passes by unnoticed, approaches his target and puts it out with great expertise and bloodshed. Back in the United States, Hallam is haunted by visions of the war. He writes letters to Belham, asking for help, but

¹⁸ However, the satire *Wag the Dog* (1997) came close, showing that Eastern Europe (in this case Albania) could easily be sold as hosting conflicts, if only the media reports were convincing.

Belham does not reply. The old instructor is eventually contacted by the FBI, after Hallam has gone on a killing spree. With Belham's help, they track down his old trainee. In the end, the two men face each other alone, and Belham, somewhat reluctantly, kills Hallam.

While the film's main critique rests on the conduct of the U.S. forces in dealing with its veterans and the harmful isolation of the individual soldier, it still presents Eastern European evil as the underlying source of the problem. The Serbs are almost voiceless, their articulations substituted by gun fire and stoic, if not proud, nonchalance in the committing of and commitment to their horrible crimes. Here, the Serbs are depicted as parts of a machinery; the link to the human sphere is basically indiscernible. Their evil has been established beforehand; apparently no further comment is needed. The terrorists of movies such as *The Peacemaker* and *Air Force One* could have been substituted by non-Eastern Europeans owing to the rather limited threats they posed. In *The Hunted* and *Behind Enemy Lines*, we find a broad front of Eastern European evil reminiscent of the early Cold War and its depictions of the Soviet Union.

3.1.3 The Jack Ryan franchise

Jack Ryan, a fictional character created by writer Tom Clancy, has appeared in four major Hollywood productions, all of which were released in the period between 1990 and 2002. In its entirety, the franchise mirrors the evolution of Eastern European evil between the first Gulf War and 9/11. Two of the Ryan films – *Patriot Games* (1992) and *Clear and Present Danger* (1994) – provide examples of Hollywood's temporary relocation of evil in the wake of the Cold War. The other two were released at significant junctions in history: Phil Alden Robinson's *The Sum of All Fears* (2002) shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; John McTiernan's *The Hunt for Red October* (1990) during the disintegration of the U.S.S.R.

Tony Shaw calls *The Hunt for Red October* "Hollywood's last major contribution to the Cold War" (293).¹⁹ The film's plot revolves around Marko

¹⁹ Two weeks after the release of *The Hunt for Red October*, John Frankenheimer's less renowned *The Fourth War* opened in U.S.-American theaters. The "Cold War parable" is set at the German-Czech border, where two colonels from the United States and Russia respectively engage in their "own personal war". (Suid 578)

Ramius, a Soviet submarine captain defecting to the United States with the prototype of a nuclear stealth sub under his command. Ramius wants to “avert a first strike on the United States and thereby hopefully establish the grounds for a post-Cold-War alliance between Russian and American peoples” (293). The CIA sends consultant Jack Ryan to contact Ramius, and both put their life at risk to guide the Red October to the United States. The events depicted, as the audience is informed by an insert at the beginning of the film, occur “[i]n November 1984, shortly before Gorbachev came to power”.

Five years passed between the publication of Tom Clancy’s novel and the release of its adaptation; five years in which the political climate between Soviets and U.S.-Americans had changed substantially. The U.S.S.R. was no longer “an implacable enemy of the United States” (Suid 572); East-West relations had ameliorated and were not on the verge of escalation any more:

Back in 1985, when the producers Mace Neufeld and Jerry Sherlock had acquired the rights to Clancy’s book, Russia’s underwater fleet posed one of the most critical threats to the United States. By the time *The Hunt for Red October* hit the screens in March 1990, however, Moscow’s hold over Eastern Europe had collapsed, and Mikhail Gorbachev had famously declared, in December 1989, that his country no longer considered the United States its enemy. (Shaw 294)

Presenting the film’s plot as topical rather than historical would at best have suggested that tensions had not ceased and that nuclear weapons remained an incalculable threat. At worst, it would have rendered the movie an outdated, if not ridiculous, Cold War relict.

The United States’ new stance towards communist Russia already shows in the film’s cast. At the side of the Australian Ed O’Neill, who makes for a dignified, good-natured Soviet officer, the Scottish Bond-actor Sean Connery turns Ramius into the noblest Russian to have ever appeared in U.S.-American film. The “comfortable majesty” which Lawrence Suid attests James Earl Jones in his role of Admiral Greer (577), certainly finds its equivalent in Ramius’ determined valiance. The submarine captain is depicted as “a plausible, selfless hero” (571) fighting an evil regime.

The movie’s Eastern European villains comprise a political officer of the communist party (whom Ramius kills before the sub puts to sea), a spy, and a

Soviet naval commander in pursuit of the Red October. The commander serves as a reversal of the good Russian; allegiant to the communists and inferior to Ramius in terms of tactical skills, leadership qualities, and looks, he does not only provide the former with a (binary) opponent, but also offers the Western audience a familiar image of the Other. Accordingly, the differences between the opposing submarine captains mirror Ramius' emancipation from his evil comrades. Their final confrontation elucidates that the good Russian has abandoned Them and become one of Us. Instead of sinking the Soviet sub that has tracked him²⁰, Ramius merely evades it. Another naval tactician claims the kill: the U.S.-American submarine captain who has boarded the Red October before the attack by the evil commander eventually tricks the latter into torpedoing his own ship. He trusts in the commander's bad judgment, furious temper, and most significantly, Soviet belligerence which Ramius has turned his back on.

Arguably, the evil captain may also be read as barbaric; nonetheless, the spy is the Eastern European villain presented as least human and most reminiscent of Cold War evil. In the disguise of a cook, he infiltrates the crew and wreaks havoc from within. His mission is to blow up the vessel before it can reach North-American shore²¹. Despite facing imminent death (the inevitable result of sabotaging the sub) the spy is bare of emotions. This lack suits the 50s stereotype of the quintessential Soviet (Shaw 49) and evokes the evil of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)²². It is what renders the spy barely human. He is portrayed as a basically face- and voiceless recipient of the Kremlin's orders, a mere marionette devoid of rationale and compassion, primitive in his want of basic social skills. Thus, the spy constitutes the typical Cold War villain.

While the defeat of the spy does not necessarily suggest the impending decline of Soviet barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence on U.S.-American cinema screens, the depiction of Ramius certainly does. However, putting Ramius in context of McTiernan's portrayal of the movie's U.S.-American characters reveals that at least some of the Cold War stereotypes are still in

²⁰ Which he does in the novel (Suid 572).

²¹ This may also be interpreted as an allusion to terrorism. One has to bear in mind, however, that if the villain were one of Our spies on a U.S.-American ship headed for Russia, his sacrifice would be heroic, not an abominable act of evil.

²² "It is [the] lack of emotion that renders the duplicates monstrous" (Cherry 171).

place. The best example is provided by the *Red October* itself. At first, the submarine seems to break with the Hollywood cliché of Eastern European backwardness. Apparently, the Russians have built a ship superior to and far more advanced than U.S. product. But the cliché is restored when the crew of the Navy submarine which dropped off Jack Ryan at the rendezvous point with Ramius, enter the Russian sub and maneuver it without major difficulties. Getting the ship out of harm's way, they contribute significantly not only to the film's happy ending, but also, as the audience may conclude, to the decline of the Soviet Union. The fact that Ryan is the one who stops the spy, further adds to the grandeur of the U.S.-American accomplishment. Unsurprisingly then, "[m]any Americans presumably watched the film with ... an element of pride that the United States had 'won' the Cold War" (Shaw 294).

Although *The Hunt for Red October* introduced to Hollywood the good Soviet and the noble Russian, it did not undo Hollywood's traditional depiction of Eastern Europeans. Thus, *The Hunt for Red October* did not initiate the dismantling of cinematic Cold War stereotypes. The character of Captain Ramius would remain an exception to the rule; he is unique in the history of the U.S.-American film industry. Ramius can only be interpreted as an ephemeral revolt against fundamental conventions of Western cinema. He should be read as an immediate response to glasnost and perestroika, not as a first step towards a relaxation of the cinematic East-West divide.

Two sequels of *Red October* were released within the next five years: *Patriot Games* in 1992 and *Clear and Present Danger* in 1994, both directed by Philip Noyce. Along with the lead act²³, Ryan had changed substantially. In *Patriot Games*, he is depicted as "a loving family man with strong feelings for his wife ... and daughter ... shown to be his greatest source of strength and motivation (as opposed to patriotism, anti-Communist ideology, or even loyalty to the CIA)" (Boggs and Pollard 216). In other words, Ryan's focus has shifted from the (inter)national to the personal. Thus, *Patriot Games* illustrates that the decline of the Soviet Union coerced Hollywood not only to come up with new villains, but also to remodel its heroes. The Cold War is over, and for the moment being, the country does not depend on Ryan's services. Accordingly, not the United States but the CIA analyst himself is attacked. Ryan's Soviet antagonists have

²³ The films feature Harrison Ford as Jack Ryan, whereas in *The Hunt for Red October*, the role was assumed by Alec Baldwin.

been replaced by an IRA squad. Its members “appear as brutal, unfeeling terrorists, who, in the real world pose absolutely no threat to the United States” (216). The film revolves around unlikely adversaries who, in Lawrence Suid’s words, pose but a “low-level challenge” (594).

Confronting Ryan with a Colombian drug cartel, *Clear and Present Danger* features another prominent source of alternative villains (Suid 604). Again, Ryan’s motivation is not grounded on ideological aspects; neither does he see his nation at threat. His focus has shifted once more, this time from the nuclear to the extended family of brothers-in-arms. First, Ryan has to cope with the cancer-induced death of his mentor and friend Admiral Greer. Second, Ryan has to avenge the death of a colleague and friend. Third, Ryan has to save an abandoned unit of U.S. forces operating in the South-American jungle. The film pits the men in the field against the authorities who treat them as figures rather than human beings. Accordingly, the main villain is not a gun-slinging drug trafficker (not until the end, at least, when it is man versus man), but a businessman consulting the boss of the drug cartel and aspiring to take his place. In his first scene, we learn that he was formerly employed by Fidel Castro. Communism has apparently expired.

Clear and Present Danger provides an apposite example of a new trend in the U.S.-American film industry’s depiction of evil. In the wake of the Cold War, villains do not necessarily long for the downfall of capitalism, but rather strive to find their place in the new, that is capitalist, world order. Of course, their means remain heinous and despicable; in the case of the cartel consultant, they include murder and drug dealing. He thus heralds a new type of evil, which will shape Western cinema in the subsequent decade.

Paradoxically, Robinson’s *The Sum of All Fears* (2002) resets the development of Ryan and his adversaries. The film features a young Ryan devoid of family and comrades, who has just started his career in the CIA. More significantly, Robinson also recreates the “outdated geo-political mindset” (Boggs and Pollard 201) which *The Hunt for Red October* so eagerly avoided: a continuant bipolar world order in which the United States are pitted against a gargantuan Eastern European power. This setting allows for a secret society of Austrian Nazis and their associates to plot the reestablishment of the Third Reich. The intend to trick Russia and the United States into annihilating each

other, in order to claim the ruins left standing. Russian generals in the service of the Nazis order a chemical attack on Chechnya's capital Grozny, which increases the tensions between the White House and the Kremlin. Grushkov, the consultant of Russian President Nemerov, refers to the generals who ordered the attack as "unhappy old communists". Nemerov takes responsibility for the bombing, remarking to Grushkov that it is better to "appear guilty than impotent"²⁴. In the meantime, Russian scientists prepare a nuclear warhead in an abandoned Soviet army base in the Ukraine. The Nazis subsequently detonate the warhead in Baltimore. The atrocity of the strike is reinforced by the fact that the city is hit while hosting the Superbowl²⁵. The attack leads the United States and Russia to the verge of mutual extinction. However, Jack Ryan is able to find evidence of the involvement of a third party and averts the nuclear holocaust. The villains are tracked down one by one and eliminated by the reconciled superpowers.

Carl Boggs and Tom Pollard call *The Sum of All Fears* "a cinematic throwback, the contemporary variant of tired cold war action-thrillers that were outlandish even in their own time" (202). However, the film does not only drag the Cold War into the 21st century – simply replacing the Soviet Union with present-day Russia – but also merges "World War II villains" with modern terrorists (202). Only in this constellation, "[t]he idea of stock Nazis conspiring to trigger nuclear Armageddon in a major U.S. city makes sense" (202). In fact, the film reproduces Hollywood formulas of the 1940s and 50s while addressing the topical War on Terror. This may be referred to as a sort of structural euphemism, or, put more eloquently, as the maintenance of a "safe emotional distance" (201): actually,

The Sum of all Fears "had been in production even before 9/11, but its release was delayed by several months because of initial misgivings after the events of that day. It was produced for an audience that could view terrorist attacks within U.S. borders from a safe emotional distance, but of course the post-9/11 atmosphere made this impossible. (Boggs and Pollard 201)

Beside the postponement of release dates, said distance can easily be accomplished by picking unlikely, outdated villains as cinematic threats. Nazis

²⁴ Grushkov and Nemerov converse in Russian. The citations are taken from the subtitles.

²⁵ The most prestigious sports event of the nation. It takes place annually.

and Soviets seem the obvious choice, not least because they also evoke good wars and epic victories. However, this basically readymade evil has to be treated with great care.

The Sum of All Fears is “a cinematic throwback” because it simply implements “outlandish” Cold War formulas” (Boggs and Pollard 202) in a modern plot instead of transposing them. The film thus suffers an overdose of clichés, best exemplified by its contradictory portrayal of Russia. For instance, while Robinson depicts the nation as a potent enemy of the United States, he also presents its politicians and scientists as drunkards and imbeciles. In the first act of the film, we hear Ryan remark upon the Russian President’s excessive drinking habits and subsequently see the President succumb to his addiction. Descending a staircase, he tells his secretary: “I cannot stand all these questions about my health ... I am to be described as robust and healthy”. On the clue of “healthy”, the President’s eyes bulge out in a mock expression of astonishment, and he literally drops dead. He does not sigh or moan either, just tilts backwards stiffly in a barely concealed slapstick act. As concerns the aforementioned scientists, Robinson has one of them (responsible for the decommissioning of Soviet nukes) wear a shirt reading “I am a bomb technician. If you see me running, try to catch up”. Of course, in consonance with motion pictures such as *The Peacemaker*, this may be read as an assignment of guilt. I claim that there is more to it. On the one hand, *Fears*’ depiction of Russians epitomizes Hollywood’s desperate urge for a known Other in the face of a threatening (dangerously close) new enemy. On the other, it exemplifies the impossibility of evaluating the disposition of the former Eastern Bloc and its further development at the onset of the 21st century. Consequently, Robinson fails in presenting the Russians as a plausible Other; the audience can easily recognize that this projection cannot possibly correspond to an actual entity²⁶.

The film’s ambivalence towards Eastern Europe shows best in the character of Anatoli Grushkov, consultant of the drunk president’s successor. Initially referred to as the man who does not only “kno[w] where the bodies are buried ... [but] probably buried them himself”, he appears aggressive, ruthless, cold-blooded, and anti-American. It is him, however, who supports Ryan significantly

²⁶ As discussed in chapter 2.1.1.3, Michael Richardson (12) states that the Other is a projection which corresponds to an actual entity.

in averting a nuclear war. In the movie's final scene, Grushkov approaches Ryan in Washington D.C. and reveals that he has been a double agent all along. The Russian bloodhound is thus replaced by a grandfatherly type who gifts Ryan with a figurative pat on the shoulder. They exchange sympathetic smiles, then Grushkov turns away, jacket draped leisurely over the shoulder, and leaves in an unknown direction.

3.2. Eastern European evil in the 21st century

3.2.1 New alien invasion narratives and the resurgence of the Soviet villain

The collapse of the Berlin Wall contributed to and represented the end of the Cold War. However, it could not end the presence of ultimate binary opponents on U.S.-American cinema screens. At least in Hollywood the Cold War was never over. It took but a brief break.

After 1989, Hollywood villains were mostly terrorists, criminals or a combination of those. As shown in chapter 3.1.1, criminals would often be located within the U.S. military's own ranks, even the ones with a terrorist tinge (for instance in *The Rock* and *Broken Arrow*). Genuine terrorists remained restricted to the realm of the Other; and regardless of their origins, they were virtually interchangeable. In presenting Them, the U.S.-American film industry relied on its well-established formulas. The new pool of villains was fed by the original source, resulting in what Tony Shaw calls "commu-terrorists" (303). Evidence can be found in the collective attributes of those new types of evil. They were not only depicted as barbaric, backward, and belligerent, but also denied an identity of their own, an identity beyond stock character traits and mere binary opposition to the West.

Eventually, Hollywood's reluctance to let go of the communists met with the opportunity, if not necessity, to resurrect them. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon announced a new era of global terror, which – and this might seem paradoxical at first – led to the renaissance of Soviet evil in Hollywood. But, actually, the term 'renaissance' does not cover the process in its full extent. More accurately, by reproducing outdated Eastern European evil,

the U.S.-American film industry tried to conceal that a viable evil Other, an ultimate binary opponent (lost in 1989), had ever been absent.

Importantly, 9/11 marked the onset of guerilla warfare on a global scale. It thus proved once and for all that, with the dawn of the 21st century, the battlefields had relocated from distant continents to U.S.-American cities. On the one hand, this meant that not only the soldier abroad had to take responsibility, but also the civilian at the home front. On the other hand, it meant that monsters could lure behind every corner, disguised as everyday U.S.-Americans. 9/11 rang in a second age of paranoia, the age of Homeland Security. Had the citizens watched out for communist infiltrators in the 50s, they were now looking for the terrorist next door (Broe xii). In this sense, the return of the Soviet villain may not seem paradoxical after all. It conveys the message that We once resisted infiltration and subversion by the Other and hence may as well do it again.

However, even the most striking similarities between Hollywood's post-9/11 releases and U.S.-American movies of the 50s have to be treated with care. Hollywood's recent wave of alien invasion movies illustrates this in an apposite manner. Of course, the fantasy film would have provided the appropriate genre to envision America's assimilation by diminutive terrorist forces, if only because such an attempt was less than likely outside the cinemas. However, the new trend towards alien invasion narratives has to be linked to other decisive factors such as the tremendous success of Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day*²⁷ (1996) and the appeal of the film industry's quickly evolving special effects branch. The aliens of the 21st century can hardly be read as stand-ins for Eastern European communists (or Middle Eastern terrorists either). This becomes obvious, ironically, in the Hollywood remakes of famous horror movies from the 50s. The best example is provided by Oliver Hirschbiegel's reworking of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, originally released in 1956. The storyline has slightly changed, the plot has been modernized, but the film has not lost its ambivalence:

In *The Invasion*, the 2007 version, it is worth noting that the pessimism of the ending of all three previous versions is invalidated in a post-9/11 sense of triumphalism as the US military save the world from the alien

²⁷ Which Lawrence Suid files under Hollywood's "search for new enemies" in the 90s (588).

menace (even though the pod people have brought peace to the Middle East, solved the crisis in Darfur, ended the Iraq war and brought in free healthcare for every American). This sends a message that wars, humanitarian disasters and social injustice only have a solution in a depersonalized world 'where human beings cease to be human' (as Yorish says in the film), and it certainly seems that this could be read as a particularly neo-conservative line which validates the war on terror. (Cherry 172)

As Brigid Cherry writes, the film "could be read" as an affirmative remark on U.S. military campaigns in the wake of 9/11; I claim that it should not. As in my analysis of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the act of conversion plays a significant role in examining the latest remake of the film. We will see that its connotations have changed substantially. In the production of 2007, the conversion of ordinary U.S.-Americans into emotionless drones occurs in the form of biological contagion. Regardless of this deviation from the original formula, sleep remains the ultimate rite de passage. However, a few people amongst the infected die of the alien DNA. Others cannot be turned due to their medical history. In the course of the film we encounter two of those: a psychiatrist's client and a little child. Significantly, the characters who seem most susceptible to assimilation and indoctrination are actually immune to the alien threat. In *The Invasion*, resistance is depicted as a bodily precondition rather than a state of mind. If sleep still connotes decreasing alert and the resulting loss of control in Hirschbiegel's film, it is a sort of control which cannot be maintained by pure determination. This indicates that the threat does not lie in Their attack from outside, but in the society that made Us vulnerable. The film seems to demand a learning process instead of military action. Accordingly, the conversion into the Other can be reversed in *The Invasion*. Of course, the fact that the aliens sort out the humans which cannot be turned, assumingly deporting and murdering them, adds a clearly fascistic note. But as Dr. Stephen Galeano – the character who develops an antidote to the alien endemic – hints at at the end of the movie, the real monsters could be Us. By thwarting the plans of the aliens, mankind may have defeated evil but it might as well have turned down its last chance for permanent peace.

Scott Derrickson's remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), released in 2008, also differs significantly from the original. For example, while protagonist Klaatu still bears Catholic connotations, he now resembles Noah rather than Jesus. Klaatu is not here to save Us. He descends upon earth only to save its fauna and initiate the extinction of mankind. Klaatu does not grant a last warning; there is no farewell-speech in which he merely threatens to unleash Gort instead of actually activating him. In the 2008 version, the robot, transforming into a ravaging armada of mechanical bugs (reminiscent of the biblical locust plague), devours half of the United States, before Klaatu can be convinced to save the nation's remainders. He sacrifices himself to stop the destruction: one of Them ends his life to save Ours. Noah is finally replaced with Jesus. Accordingly, the film can hardly rail against the new Other from the Middle East. In consonance with *The Invasion*, the aliens vanish and mankind is left to itself – for better or worse.

An exception to the rule can be found in the remake of *War of the Worlds*, originally released in 1953.

In Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), based on the 1898 H.G. Wells novel that envisions aliens from Mars invading planet Earth, a new wave of killers from outer space threatens innocent, peace-loving earthlings – the perfect tale for an updated cold-war-style paranoia in the post-9/11 era ... Like commies of an earlier time, these recycled demons symbolize an omnipresent threat that is supposed to bring to mind the grave menace of dispersed, elusive Al Qaeda operations. (Boggs and Pollard 222)

The invaders from the red planet correspond to the U.S.-American film industry's formulaic depiction of Soviets in the early Cold War. Belligerently, they attack earth without warning. Barbarically, they hunt down its human population. Those who are not killed – evaporated by alien laser guns, to be more precise (diminished to little piles of ashes which evoke the fear of nuclear annihilation) – are used as fertilizer for an alien weed. Their technological standards notwithstanding, the Martians are also portrayed as backward. For instance, we learn that the wheel is a device unknown to them.

In general, alien invasion narratives of the past decade did not establish a link between aliens, terrorists, and Soviets. There is, however, a strong Cold

War resonance in Hollywood's post-9/11 releases. It is best illustrated by the cinematic resurgence of a united Eastern Europe – united by an ill-fated economy on the one hand and (resurrected) Soviet evil on the other. Let us deal with the Soviets first. The latter's return to U.S.-American cinema was certainly favored by John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). The film demonstrated the tremendous durability of the Eastern European villain and its universal applicability (that is in times of crises not related to Eastern Europe). It also proved the merits of "a safe emotional distance" (Boggs and Pollard 201)²⁸ by rendering a controversial campaign in the Balkans a heroic mission.

The Soviets are known enemies and traditional binary opponents. Moreover, they represent a formerly serious threat successfully neutralized by the West (and the United States in particular). The successful neutralization is of major importance concerning the War on Terror. On the one hand, bringing Soviet evil back to the screen can be interpreted as a recall of past glories and, thus, a demonstration of strength. On the other hand, the co-occurrence of Eastern European communists and Middle Eastern terrorists in Western cinema results in an extended axis of evil. In other words, Soviets and Arab terrorists are leveled with each other. They are depicted as similar in their barbarism, belligerence, and backwardness. Consequently, if evil has not changed from the early Cold War to the 21st century, the good and righteous cause of the West cannot have changed either. Hence, considering that the film industry and the U.S. government had dropped their discrepancies after the Vietnam fiasco and revived their formerly strong bonds (Shaw 305-06), Hollywood's persistent depictions of Eastern Europeans as Soviets doubtlessly make sense.

This does not mean that the post-communist villains of the 90s (mere terrorists and criminals rather than old-fashioned Soviets) vanished entirely. In Rob Cohen's *xXx* (2002), for instance, a U.S.-American hero combining the virtues of athlete, stuntman, and playboy is hired by the NSA to destroy a Russian terrorist organization in Prague. The organization, called Anarchy 99, is made up of Red Army veterans who intend to attack major cities around the globe with a Soviet bio-weapon. In Clark Johnson's *The Sentinel* (2006), Russian terrorists plan the assassination of the U.S. President. They claim to act on an old KGB order; a meager motif which Johnson chooses not to

²⁸ A notion taken from their analysis of Phil Alden Robinson's *The Sum of All Fears* (2002).

elaborate on. Correspondingly, the attempted coup d'état Xavier Gens depicts in *Hitman* (2007) also lacks a comprehensible background story. We only get to know that a double of the Russian President is in charge of the conspiracy. With a little help from a high-ranking FSB-officer, he has the elected leader killed in order to take his place. The double addresses the aforementioned officer as "tovarishch" which translates to "comrade" and constitutes the film's only clear-cut allusion to the Soviet Union. We may assume that Gens' villains are nothing more than criminals with a slight communist touch. In contrast, Michel Gondry's *The Green Hornet* (2011) provides us with a Russian gangster completely detached from any socialist agenda. Chudnofsky does not seek to rule over a restrengthened Russia or annihilate the United States either. Instead, he is portrayed as a mobster running organized crime in a major U.S.-American city.

As the examples given in the preceding paragraph elucidate, Hollywood's post-9/11 Eastern Europeans vary in regard to their communist heritage. The Soviet components of those new villains range from non-existent to blatant. One of the most recent examples of the latter is provided by Phillip Noyce's espionage/action thriller *Salt* (2010). The film's eponymous protagonist, Evelyn Salt is a CIA-agent who turns out to be one among many "highly trained Russian sleeper agents ... inserted into American society to sabotage and assassinate". As a child she was indoctrinated by "a master-spy who had devised the greatest plan a Russian patriot could ever invent. A plan to destroy America". The master spy – an old Russian called Orlov – intends to pit the United States against Russia to reinstate the old Cold War order. Salt's mission is to kill the presidents of both nations. However, she saves the Russian leader by faking his assassination and takes out Orlov instead. She then proceeds to rescue the U.S. President from another sleeper agent.

Predictably, Salt's change of heart is in consonance with common Hollywood formulas: love makes her choose good over evil.²⁹ Unexpectedly, however, Salt's significant love interest is a German entomologist rather than a U.S.-American everyman. Love is universal and has even encapsulated the States' World War II enemies. Only the KGB sleepers are excluded, marking them as particularly despicable embodiments of evil. The peak of the movie's anti-Soviet

²⁹ A parallel, for instance, to the eponymous communist spy in Ernst Lubitsch's *Ninotchka* (1939) (Shaw 18-19).

tirades is reached when Orlov tells the CIA that Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who shot President Kennedy, was actually a Russian agent. It appositely mirrors Hollywood's renegotiation of Eastern Europe in the 21st century.

Another grotesque alternative account of historic events occurs in Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). In a parallel to 50s propaganda, the film conflates Nazis and communists: parts one and three of the franchise had confronted Indiana Jones with Nazi antagonists; the villains of the fourth episode differ from their predecessors only in their accents and uniforms. As regards the *Indiana Jones* movies, Nazis and Soviets could serve the same master, a standardized fascist regime. But while rumors of Nazi affiliations to occultism had rendered them relatively plausible adversaries in Indiana's quests for the Lost Ark and the Holy Grail, the Soviets of *Crystal Skull* are clearly misplaced. Moreover, Stalin's alleged interest in parapsychology, embodied by Irina Spalko, the film's main Eastern European villain, can be interpreted as a covert projection of controversial U.S. military endeavors. According to Cold War rumors the U.S.-Americans were interested in parapsychology³⁰, attempting to create the super-soldier. Hence, as both a conflation of evil and a projection of the West, the Eastern European villains of *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* serve as perfect examples of binary opponents.

While Indiana Jones took second place in the American Film Institute's hero ranking ("AFI's Villains"), none of his antagonists made it into the top 50 of villains. However, the list, compiled in 2003, includes the Martians from the original *War of the Worlds* movie (rank 27) ("AFI's Villains") – the only villains of the selection bearing indisputable connotations to the Red Threat. It should not be written off as a mere coincidence that they reappeared in U.S.-American theaters in the wake of 9/11. Also, as mentioned in chapter 1.1.4, there is the curious case of Hannibal Lecter, AFI's villain number one ("AFI's Villains"). Lecter gained a certain notoriety and an overwhelming aura of evil in Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The film revolves around a series of killings only marginally related to Lecter; in terms of screen presence, he is rather a side character. Accordingly, Demme gives only little insights in the top villain's story. *Hannibal* (2001) elaborates on Lecter's bestiality, *Red Dragon*

³⁰ Hollywood's latest comment on the subject was the satire *The Men who Stare at Goats* (2009).

(2002) on his capture and imprisonment.³¹ It is *Hannibal Rising*, released in 2007 and directed by Peter Webber, which reveals the origins of Lecter's terrifying psyche. Significantly, the first thing we learn about young Hannibal, is that he is actually Lithuanian, and thus Eastern European. During World War II, Lecter's family barely escapes the Nazis – who are headed East for Russia – and hides in the woods. After most of his relatives died in a firefight between a Soviet tank and a German Messerschmidt; Hannibal and his little sister Mischa fall in the hands of a rogue gang of Lithuanian war criminals. For want of food, they devour Mischa, which makes Hannibal suffer an irredeemable trauma.

After the war, the boy grows up in a Soviet orphanage; socialist lack of emotions adds to Lithuanian cruelties and Nazi atrocities. A monster is born. The trauma renders him mute, which Hannibal compensates by aggressive behavior – an animalistic feature reminiscent of Hans Ulrich Mohr's definition of evil³². Hannibal is barely human anymore but still related to the human sphere. As a teenager, Hannibal flees to Western Europe where most of his Lithuanian tormentors have settled. The latter engage in human trafficking, drug dealing, and murder. They are clearly depicted as Eastern European demons enjoying the merits of capitalism. Hannibal takes revenge (as well as the kidneys of his victims).

Hannibal Rising presents Eastern Europeans trying to come to terms with a new capitalist world order. Their cannibalism can be read as both a dog-eat-dog (or rather man-eat-man) mentality inherent in capitalism and a symbolic attack on the West. Significantly, the film portrays not only the evil (animalistic, all-consuming, uncivilized) nature of Eastern Europe but also its threat to Western economy. The villains of *Hannibal Rising* are not only binary opponents but also competitors in free market enterprise. The film thus combines the two prevalent roles of Eastern Europeans in the post-9/11 cinema of the West.

To put it all in a nutshell, Eastern Europeans remain being portrayed as the evil Other due to ancient Hollywood formulas of evil and the application of those

³¹ The Lecter films are based on novels by Thomas Harris. Chronologically speaking, the novel *Red Dragon* was the first in the series. It was turned into a motion picture in 1986, titled *Manhunter* (and without Anthony Hopkins as Lecter). In *Manhunter*, Lecter is indeed a side character. Due to the success of the follow-up movies, *Red Dragon* was again adapted, this time with focus on Lecter (played by Hopkins). However, the plot basically remained untouched. Lecter's childhood days would not be dealt with until *Hannibal Rising*: Harris' latest novel and the latest Lecter movie.

³² See chapter 2.1.1.3.

formulas to the West's new enemies. Hence, serious cinematic adversaries from Eastern Europe are usually related to the long gone U.S.S.R. In contrast, when Eastern Europeans are not depicted as representatives of the Soviet regime, they mostly come as struggling new players in the capitalist world order. The majority of characters belongs to the second category. Since the decline of the U.S.S.R., Eastern European villains have transformed from threatening communists to relentless capitalists.

3.2.2 Eastern European Evil in contemporary British cinema

Indisputably, the West as a political and cultural colossus is most widely associated with the United States of America. The runner-up is equally uncontested: Great Britain constitutes the second important global player of the occident. In the past, both the United States and Great Britain³³ stigmatized the dominant forces of Eastern Europe – the Soviet Union and Russia respectively – as the evil Other and defined themselves via the binary opposition thus created. Moreover, they bonded against mutual enemies in the two major conflicts of the 20th century and formed an alliance in the current War on Terror. Taking all of this into account, the fact that recent British and U.S.-American political discourse displays significant parallels concerning the use of the term 'evil' (Austermühl 263-64, 272) certainly make sense.

The construction of national identity (and in-groups or imagined communities in general) presupposes the naturalization of distinguishing criteria which are organized in dichotomous structures. Said naturalization is achieved by a constant reproduction of cultural practices of which cinema has been a crucial part since the early 20th century. Hence, the fact that the United States and Great Britain band together against an enemy they univocally designate the Other, suggests their respective film industries reproduce similar formulas of good and evil. This is also indicated by the fact that U.S.-American and British film have been closely related since the early days of cinema.

Even before 1914, when the U.S. film industry seized control of the international market (Segrave 12), formerly dominated by the French (1), U.S.-American presence had been strong in British cinemas. It "amounted to 50 to

³³ Section two of this thesis provides a detailed account.

60 percent of the British releases in the 1910 to 1914 period” (4). Besides, “[a]ll the major U.S. producers had representation in Britain by around 1911, some with branches but mostly through agents” (4). From the very beginning, the Isles proved a vein of gold and hence a major interest for the U.S.-American film industry. It used the opportunity provided by World War I to flood Great Britain with its product while keeping British film out of U.S.-American cinemas. (13-14)

In the 1920s, Hollywood entered an age of mercantilism, which has de facto remained until today. The eight major studios combined forces and formed a cartel (21) – a global regime, basically, built on block booking and theater ownership (28-29). Defense from Great Britain was scarce and usually fruitless. The British increased the import taxes on U.S. film (43) and introduced a quota system (laid down in the Cinematograph Act of 1928) (46) that would allow British movies a certain percentage of screen time in British cinemas. But that proved only a minor setback for the cartel. A few loopholes always remained, and the majors worked them with great expertise (111).

In the 1950s, when the U.S. propaganda machinery engulfed Hollywood, British filmmakers were approached to participate in the cinematic battle against the Red Threat. The screen adaptation of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1954) serves as an apposite example. Its depiction of the Soviets did not only align with U.S. cinema’s conventional and pejorative portrayal of Eastern Europeans, but was basically dictated by Hollywood propagandists.³⁴ The cinematic ostracizing of Eastern Europe during the Cold War was rooted in the United States, providing Western democracies the formulas to fight communism on the big screen.

After 1989, U.S.-American and British portrayals of the former Soviet Bloc and its inhabitants continued to correspond. The fact that the binary pair of capitalism versus communism no longer applies to the East-West-divide, does not necessarily rid Eastern Europe of its status as a binary opponent. Western cinema pushes Eastern Europeans to the margins of the capitalist world order and still depicts them as the Other. Unlike Hollywood, however, the British film has not resurrected the Soviets in the new millennium. Great Britain’s vicinity to Eastern Europe (at least to its densely populated parts) offers a plausible

³⁴ See chapter 2.2.2.3.

explanation. Emigrants leaving for the West after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as refugees from Bosnia and the Kosovo could reach the British Isles more easily than the United States. The Soviet heritage manifested immediately in an influx of immigrants. In British film, integration became a more important issue than annihilation by an undead regime. The new Eastern European villains may have a communist background but clearly prefer their new (criminal) existence in the West to the old days under the red flag.

The Eastern European character of Guy Ritchie's gangster thriller *Snatch* (2000) serves as a case in point. Boris "the Blade" Yurinov goes by the nickname of "Boris, the bullet-dodger" but is usually referred to simply as the "sneaky fucking Russian". Boris speaks with a thick, unmistakably Eastern European accent, drinks Vodka and owns an I-heart-Moscow-cup. According to Turkish, the main protagonist of the film, Boris is "as bent as the Soviet Sickle and as hard as the hammer that crosses it". We learn that the Russian is "ex-KGB cancer", a "highly trained undercover agent" who has settled down in London. In consonance with Cold War clichés, Boris is a criminal. Basically, however, all of the movie's characters are.

Boris deals with weapons and gets involved in the chase for a stolen diamond. He is certainly depicted as barbaric – shooting a man in the head, then chopping his arm off to steal the briefcase cuffed to it – but not as barbaric as his English equivalents. Correspondingly, the Russian is just a minor villain and not half as monstrous as the leaders of the pack. He is, by far, not the only stereotypical character of the movie either. However, Boris clearly provides its most potent image of the Other. Ritchie even equips him with an own theme tune, a balalaika melody audible whenever Boris appears on screen.

Snatch pictures the London underworld as a multi-cultural melting-pot in which the British mingle with "pikeys", U.S.-American Jews, the local black minority, and, of course, an ex-KGB arms-dealer. Clichés abound here and should not be read as racist undertones per se. Nonetheless, one has to note that the Russians are once described as "anti-Semite, slippery Cossack sluts", which crosses the line of appropriately inappropriate trash talk, even in the hippest gangster film. Furthermore, when business partners Avi (a New Yorker) and Doug (a London citizen) join forces to retrieve the diamond, Boris is the first one murdered. Most importantly, however, *Snatch*'s Russian character, albeit

being overtly linked to the Soviet Union, is bare of ideological resentments against the West. Boris is a criminal capitalist.

Conversely, Ritchie's latest London gangster saga *RocknRolla* (2008) features two types of Eastern Europeans. On the one hand there is Yuri, a Russian oligarch and building speculator adamant on obtaining "planning commissions where the law wouldn't allow them". Yuri is devoid of common Eastern European stereotypes. He is clad in country club outfits, always remains calm and considerate, and does not even drink. His British business partner, an uptown London gangster boss, once refers to him as a "dirty Cossack" whom "communism didn't slow down". On the other hand, there are the "comrades" of Yuri's assistant Victor. Victor assigns two ex-soldiers – "Chechnyans" as the end credits inform us – the task of protecting seven million euros. They are proudly comparing combat scars, when the transport is robbed. The accountant who ordered the robbery labels the Chechnyans "a couple of heavies"; One-Two, the main protagonist of the film, who participates in the robbery, calls them "war criminals".

While Yuri is a relentless capitalist of the highest order, who holds nothing sacred but profit, the Chechnyans do not seem interested in money at all. Here we have them again, the barbaric, backward, and belligerent monsters from the Cold War. Ritchie even implies that they are sexual deviants: when the Chechnyans manage to capture One-Two, they strap him to his bed, then dance around the room in their underwear. The scene is grotesque: two half-naked, heavily tattooed men, clutching machetes while moving to the rhythm of an Eastern European song booming from the stereo. One-two observes the strange ritual in terror. He is not only facing torture and painful death, but an animalistic evil he cannot make sense of. The Chechnyans' belligerence shows in their proud display of scars received in battle, their barbarism in their lust for torture, and their backwardness in their inability to speak English. They serve as prime examples of the Other; but it is an Other clearly bereft of ideology.

If we combine Yuri and the Chechnyans – serving as stand-ins for the capitalist drive and a basic evil drive (constructed as natural) respectively – we arrive at the most prominent depiction of Eastern Europeans in Western cinema of the 21st century. In general, the new formula only varies in regard to the ratio of the villains' human and monstrous components. In *RocknRolla* they are

balanced. However, when the human elements outweigh the monstrous elements, the resulting evil is still threatening, only in a less physical, more abstract fashion.

The two Eastern European protagonists of Suzie A. Halewood's *Bigga Than Ben* (2007) serve as accurate examples. *Bigga Than Ben* presents, in the words of narrator Cobakka, "the true story about two pieces of Moscow scum". Friends Cobakka and Spiker leave Russia to earn money in the West. Since they cannot afford the flight to Los Angeles, England's capital has to do. Cobakka's childhood friend Sergey picks them up at Heathrow. On the ride downtown, he tells the newcomers in a thick Eastern European accent: "You have to look and sound English, or you'll be shot for being a terrorist." *Bigga Than Ben* offers a constant play with the clichés inherent in the clash between East and West, while showing the incessant struggle for survival of impoverished immigrants. The latter include a vast array of Eastern European nationalities ranging from Albanian to Ukrainian.

Looking for cheap accommodation, Cobakka and Spiker are offered a place in a building filled with refugees from the Kosovo. They refuse, eager to set themselves apart from ordinary asylum-seekers. The two young Russians consider each other millionaires in the making. Legal ways to earn money are limited and neither inviting nor profitable. Shoplifting and fraud appear more promising. Cobakka even enrolls in university in order to get a student loan. When asked what he wants to study, he simply answers "capitalism".

Despite their numerous transgressions, London seems to change the Russians for the better. Spiker, labeled "a Moscow hooligan and Nazi" makes friends with a Jamaican. He admits that he used to be a racist in Moscow, but proves to have finally learned his lesson. In the end, however, Spiker exploits his interracial connections to score drugs. He turns into a heroin addict and splits with Cobakka who decides to become a law-abiding citizen.

Halewood's depiction of Eastern European stereotypes is getting increasingly taunting as the film progresses. For instance, *Bigga than Ben* includes a mini-episode entitled "Prosecution Moscow Style" in which three Russian loan sharks publicly beat up a debtor in the bright of day. Halewood portrays Eastern Europeans as uncivilized, dirty, and devious; as an assembly

of parasites infesting the West. Cobakka accurately sums up the film's overall message: "Wherever they go, Russians seem to crap all over the planet".

Last but not least, *Bigga than Ben* (featuring British actor Ben Barnes as Cobakka) indicates a noteworthy trend in post-Cold-War depictions of Eastern Europeans: while the characters illustrate the impact of globalization, the cast signifies an exclusion of the former Soviet Bloc. Examples of Hollywood movies discussed so far include *The Hunt for Red October*, *Airforce One*, *The Sum of All Fears*, *Salt*, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, and *Hannibal Rising*.

As concerns the British film *Birthday Girl* (2001), directed by Jez Butterworth, the Eastern European characters are played by Australian Nicole Kidman and French actors Vincent Cassel and Mathieu Kassovitz. In the case of Sophia³⁵, the female protagonist, the human elements seem to prevail. Sophia is a con artist who enters the life of John, a lonely English bank accountant who ordered a Russian spouse online. Sophia, who pretends not to speak a word of English, does not even remotely resemble the woman he picked from the catalogue. John wants to send her back to Eastern Europe immediately, but as soon as his initial disappointment has subsided, the odd relationship blossoms. Sex becomes a key factor; not least because Sophia indulges in John's bondage fantasies which, as the film implies, he could never have realized with an English woman.

The couple is doing fine until two Russians show up for Sophia's birthday. Yuri acts as Sophia's cousin; Sophia's actual lover Alexei as a friend who accompanies him. Alexei turns out a violent choleric – and that is not just part of the role he assumes but his actual nature. He kidnaps Sophia and blackmails John into stealing money from the bank he works at. It is a first step towards corrupting and subverting John, of making him one of Them. Since Alexei rightly suspects Sophia to have fallen in love with her victim, the Russian men take the money but leave their accomplice with John. She confesses to have already framed many naïve Englishmen, but instead of taking her to the police, John goes after Yuri and Alexei. In the end, he and Sophia take the money and escape to Russia. John's corruption is thus completed. He has become one of Them.

³⁵ At first, she uses the name Nadia as an alias.

Apparently, Sophia does not represent the cinematic conventions so far identified in Western cinema's formulaic depiction of Eastern Europeans; especially when compared to the Russians and Chechnyans of *RocknRolla* and *Snatch*. Correspondingly, even violent Alexei barely touches upon the barbaric and belligerent. In *Birthday Girl*, the Eastern European threat is neither physical nor ideological. Nevertheless, it is shown as inverting civilization. *Birthday Girl* gives proof of the fact that, in the wake of the Soviet Union, Eastern European agents of said inversion do not necessarily have to be portrayed as monsters to be labeled evil.

Arguably, Sophia could be termed a prostitute, but this aspect of sexual deviousness corresponds to John's bondage fetish. Thus, it does not mark difference. Sophia is not evil because she is sexually deviant, but because she makes John's fetish surface. In other words, she brings out the worst in John. The inversion of civilization is mirrored by John's conversion to the Other. It is a gradual process that culminates in John's decision to leave the country with the stolen money. One should not only read this as an accurate ending for a slightly unconventional love story, but as a predictable result of conventional Eastern European evil. It is of major significance that Sophia changes John and not vice versa. He does not make her revoke her criminal past. Conversely, she turns him into a criminal. In fact, John had it coming since that first fatal mouse-click. By ordering a Russian woman on the internet, he virtually made a contract, a pact with the Other.

3.3 Eastern Europe: cinema's global backwoods

3.3.1 The development of the monster: from aliens to hillbillies

In section 3.3, I focus on detailed analyses of Eastern European evil in Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) and Christopher Smith's *Severance* (2006). I argue these films signify the emergence of a global backwoods subgenre within horror film. Since *Hostel* and *Severance* are built up on an ample set of genre trends and conventions (either reversing or reproducing them), the respective analyses presuppose a brief examination of horror's development in the second half of the 20th century.

In the wake of alien invasion narratives and mutant chronicles fuelled by early Cold War anxieties, the 60s witnessed the rehabilitation of the horror genre as a profitable, popular, and critically acclaimed branch of the film industry. The reigniting spark came from Alfred Hitchcock's seminal *Psycho* (1960)³⁶ which rang in a paradigmatic shift within the horror film and redefined its stagnant conventions. As Reynold Humphries puts it, "[o]ne word can sum up the shift from classic horror to modern horror: *Psycho*" (85). Hitchcock created a new kind of monster, a "shy, boy-next-door type" (Worland 87) who differed strongly from the beasts from Victorian fiction and 50s sci-fi. Significantly, Hitchcock made the audience identify with the killer, mentally disturbed and sexually devious Norman Bates. Via the killer, he linked sex to violence (and thus, also exploitation to mainstream cinema). Most importantly, however, *Psycho* focused on the formerly sacrosanct institution of the family as a source of evil. (Worland 86-87; Humphries 85-86)

As illustrated in section two, early Cold War monsters usually came in the form of external threats, but could often be read as projections of domestic agendas. However, if the family was shown in a deteriorating state of disintegration, even if it crumbled from within, torn by its own members, the impetus always came from outside. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), alien seed pots have to replace (i.e. corrupt and convert) the citizens of Santa Mira with duplicates in order to infiltrate and infect their kin. This makes evident that the community – both at large and in its smallest constituents, namely the

³⁶ Hitchcock started working in Hollywood in the 1930s (Segrave 246); the most significant development within the horror genre (and cinematic evil in general) thus came from an originally British filmmaker.

families – is not evil per se. It just breeds an evil forced upon it, whether by a regime looming in the East or a source from within U.S.-American society. Hitchcock broke with this tradition and established a new trend.

Aligning with *Psycho*, filmmakers of the 60s and beyond tackled and dismantled the U.S.-American family. In 1968, another milestone of (horror) film history was released with Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. According to Rick Worland, the movie "culminated gothic horror's absorption into the family structure that ran through the decade" (93). While Norman Bates' somewhat secluded Motel had spread the atmosphere of a gothic mansion, Polanski's setting could not be more ordinary. In *Rosemary's Baby*, the devil is born to an everyday U.S.-American household. As in *Psycho*, evil does not merely befall the family, but originates from it.³⁷ "*Psycho* had announced that henceforth things would be different in the horror genre. *Rosemary's Baby* confirmed it." (94)

In the late 60s, the horror genre was shaped by "the real horrors of the Vietnam War and attendant domestic upheavals", which manifested strongly, if only indirectly, in George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (Worland 95). The murders committed by the so-called Manson-family in 1969 also proved influential. In Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972), a hippy band rapes, tortures and murders two teenage girls and subsequently receives a correspondingly cruel treatment at the hands of one of their victims' parents (99).

Although the content of exploitation productions such as *Night of the Living Dead* and *Last House on the Left* was still eyed with suspicion and disgust, horror had successfully evolved from an underground phenomenon to a well-established genre. *The Exorcist* (1973) finally "brought explicit horror firmly into the mainstream", not only winning an Academy Award, but also becoming "one of the most profitable movies of the decade" (Worland 100). However, the most excruciating and gory images of violence still came from the margins of the film industry. Apart from *Last House on the Left*, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) contributed most significantly and memorably to exploitation horror in the 70s

³⁷ Certainly, it could be argued that the family is threatened from an outside source since Rosemary's husband is supposedly possessed by an evil force while impregnating her. However, Rosemary gives birth to the child and "accept[s] Satan is its father" (Humphries 88).

(99). Adding, among others, an economic dimension to Hitchcock-based modern horror, these films established the subgenre of backwoods horror (Fuchs), which I will examine in more detail in the succeeding mini-chapter.

More suitable for a mainstream audience was John Carpenter's *Halloween*, released in 1978. The film marked the beginning of the genre's slasher cycle (Worland 101, 104) which became immensely popular in the 80s and featured "highly sexualized violence" as a distinguishing characteristic (105). Slashers generally revolve around a group of teenagers who mirror the target audience and are consecutively slain by a psychotic killer, quite overtly as a punishment for indulging in premarital sex (105). Other inappropriate and hence fatal behavior includes, for instance, the consumption of cannabis (Brigid 27).

Besides, within the slasher cycle of the 80s, the supernatural monster of gothic horror experienced a renaissance in U.S.-American cinemas. Jason, the villain of *Friday the 13th* and its ensuing episodes, turned out to be an undying nemesis, not just a mentally troubled boy from the neighborhood. Freddy Krueger, made popular by the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, was virtually a ghost and could only haunt teenagers in their sleep. Even Mike Myers displayed superhuman powers at the end of *Halloween*. Thus, the slasher film of the period was veiled by an "aesthetic and emotional distance between viewer and on-screen horrors that the most unnerving exploitation horror of the 1970s had stripped away". It was safe again to watch. (Worland 105-106)

At the same time, the ultra-violent and crude (and thus even less mainstream-compatible) splatter-genre developed. Originally a notorious cinematic undercurrent which developed in the shade of the slasher cycle in the late 70s and throughout the 80s, the splatter film's violent imagery always verged on the unacceptable, producing movies such as *Phantasm* (1977) and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) (Worland 107). "A splatter film's main interest laid in its construction of detailed, often breathtakingly gross effects of bodily destruction, decomposition, or mutation. Story and characterization became secondary" (107). Splatters clearly belonged to exploitation cinema and were not as popular as *Halloween* and its numerous follow-ups.

The slasher cycle paved the way for postmodern horror. The term refers to a recent tradition vaguely defined by a set of elements and characteristics, which include self-reflection, "pastiche" (Worland 109), "open-endedness" (109), and

“parody” (110). Beside Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead II* (1987) which Rick Worland refers to as a “swiftly paced, absurdist comedy” (110), Wes Craven’s *Scream* (1996) provides an accurate example of postmodern horror. As “a postmodernist revival of the slasher film” (113), the movie mocks and explicitly references slasher formulas and general horror conventions. Speaking of formulas and conventions, the low-budget production *Blair Witch Project* (1999) made a final contribution to 20th century horror, which eluded a clear categorization within the genre. “[D]evoid of violence, gore, or even a monster” (114) it certainly was as groundbreaking as *Psycho* had been 40 years earlier. However, unlike *Psycho*, it did not serve as a stylistic and aesthetic model for a whole generation of filmmakers³⁸.

Finally, from 2001 to 2010, the horror film was subject to a variety of differing, if not contradictory, trends. We may identify three main currents. First, a tendency towards an approved-for-all-audiences horror, exemplified by the *Harry Potter* series and recent teenage vampire dramas. Second, a wave of remakes, including films originally released in the classic 30s, the sci-fi-dominated 50s, and the gory 70s. The list consists of motion pictures such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Wolfman*, *The Omen*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Dawn of the Dead*, etc. Third, and most important in regard to the topic of this section, the past ten years witnessed the emergence of a new horror subgenre merging slashers, splatters, backwoods horror, and even postmodern horror. This new subgenre which has not been confined to a label so far, not only proves a formidable success in mainstream cinema, as the *Saw*-franchise³⁹ and *Hostel*⁴⁰ make evident, but also produced a number of films which, comparable to the majority of Hollywood’s early Cold War horror films, bear the unmistakable touch of Eastern European evil.

³⁸ *Blair Witch Project*’s own (inevitable) sequel (*Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2*, released in 2000) was a rather conventional horror film. However, the *Blair Witch* formula reappeared in *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *The Fourth Kind* (2009), and *Paranormal Activity II* (2010). The full impact of *Blair Witch Project* cannot be assessed yet.

³⁹ So far, seven *Saw* movies have been released.

⁴⁰ *Hostel* “spent a week as America’s top moneymaker” (Edelstein).

3.3.2 Backwoods horror

The name of horror's backwoods niche derives from the formulaic setting of the films it encompasses. Backwoods plots unfold in the rural hinterland beyond suburbia, in remote places of the (originally U.S.-American) periphery. The latter can be understood as a binary opposition to the center and is thus defined by a stark contrast with civilization, progress, and modernity. Accordingly, the concept of the periphery and its various negative connotations – including barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence – may provide a key to backwoods horror. First of all, they unmistakably distinguish it from gothic horror traditions; no spooky castles and superstitious villagers here, just a vast industrial wasteland. Second, they emphasize the subgenre's political and social dimension by locating the backwoods in said dichotomous structure. Third, they evoke Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone. This suggests that the backwoods may be read as a site on which subalterns encounter, confront, and negotiate with their colonial oppressors. Hence, if Eli Roth's *Hostel* and Christopher Smith's *Severance* are to be regarded as backwoods horror on a global scale, Eastern Europeans are, in this context, rendered the subaltern peoples colonized by the capitalist West. Global backwoods horror does not depict Eastern Europeans as evenly matched enemies but as uncivilized barbarians inhabiting the outskirts of the free world (market).

However, although the backwoods genre offers a fertile theoretical basis for an analysis of Eastern European evil in Western horror cinema of the 21st century, it is not entirely unproblematic. Apparently, the actual categorization of motion pictures as backwoods horror does not enjoy widespread critical acclaim. For instance, Rick Worland, Brigid Cherry, and Reynold Humphries do not explicitly mention the term in their respective reflections on U.S.-American horror in general and supposed backwoods classics in particular. Moreover, divergent filing systems and terminologies left aside, said writers do not note a link between films such as Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) – not only a classic but indeed the promethean backwoods movie (Fuchs) – and recent productions of similar composition, such as *Hostel*. Apart from critical denial of backwoods horror, this is mainly owing to the fact that boundaries between related (sub)genres tend to blur, making clear-cut categorizations virtually impossible.

Fuchs states that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* established a backwoods trend within the splatter film, itself an often condescended subgenre of horror. In contrast, Brigid Cherry does not even regard the splatter-film as a horror tradition in its own right⁴¹. Her “Body Horror, splatter and gore films (including postmodern zombies)”-section, which consists of “[f]ilms that explore abjection and disgust of the human body, often involving mutation, disease, or aberrant and fetishistic behaviour (for example cannibalism or sado-masochism)”, does not contain *Chainsaw* or *Hostel* either (6). *Hostel* is listed under “Exploitation cinema, video nasties or other forms of explicitly violent films” – that is “[f]ilms focused on extreme or taboo subjects, including violence and torture, other controversial subject matter such as Nazi death camps, rape and other sexual assaults upon women” (6). *Chainsaw* is ascribed to the slasher-cycle (6). However, while Cherry’s definition of the subgenre is similar to Worland’s, the latter states that *Chainsaw* should not be regarded a slasher (221-222). Interestingly, he does not suggest an alternative category. Neither does Reynold Humphries. Both merely praise the film as a masterpiece of innovative, trendsetting exploitation horror, only equaled (in terms of long-lasting impact) by Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. Nonetheless, as I will demonstrate shortly, Worland and Humphries’ respective examinations of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* do not only implicitly reveal it as a backwoods horror movie but also underline structural similarities to *Hostel* and *Severance*.

The backwoods genre may alternatively be referred to as hillbilly horror⁴², emphasizing the danger exerted by the monsters inhabiting the backwoods, rather than the setting itself. These monsters are represented by “primitive, incestuous ... [and] bloodthirsty rednecks” [my translation] who indulge in cannibalism and violent killing sprees. As Fuchs explicitly states, the rednecks or hillbillies are depicted as “animalistic creatures” [my translation], which perfectly exemplifies Hans-Ulrich Mohr’s definition of evil. Productions which adhered to the *Chainsaw* formula include *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), *Tourist Trap* (1979), *Mother’s Day* (1980), *Motel Hell* (1980), and, more recently,

⁴¹ In Cherry’s account, horror comprises six categories: “The Gothic”, “Supernatural, occult and ghost films”, “Psychological horror”, “Monster movies”, “Slashers”, “Body Horror, splatter and gore films (including postmodern zombies)”, and “Exploitation cinema, video nasties or other forms of explicitly violent films” (5-6).

⁴² Correspondingly, Humphries refers to the villains of Wes Craven’s *The Hills Have Eyes* as “hillbillies” and compares them to the Leatherface-clan of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (119-121).

producer Michael Bay's remake of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2003)⁴³ – marking the revival of hillbilly horror – and Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003). (Fuchs)

An examination of the genre has to start at the original *Chainsaw* movie and its depiction of evil. Crucially, Hooper's villains combine traditional horror elements (made traditional by *Psycho*, that is) with an innovative turn. Hitchcock had turned the nuclear family into a source of evil and related the resulting violence to sexuality. Hooper aligns with those premises but adds an additional layer by invoking a politically and socially significant divide between the center and the periphery. The multiple facets of the film are heralded by its title. Worland dismantles it word by word (210-211): the definite article 'the' marks the massacre as a recognizable, virtually idiomatic event and underlines the movie's fake claim to be based on fact; Texas functions as a symbol of both the rural South and the West in general; the chainsaw "connotes the [nation's] urban/agrarian conflict"; and, at the time the film was released, the term 'massacre' was commonly associated with the Vietnam War. The latter provides yet another undertone in the film's elaborate composition. Accordingly, Fuchs states that *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has to be considered a product of the Vietnam era and, more precisely, as a reaction to the Nixon government and the failure of hippy culture. It is not a coincidence that one of Hooper's villains – the one, in fact, who is introduced first – "resembles deranged cult leader Charles Manson" (Worland 214). The Hitchhiker⁴⁴ offers a first glimpse at the impending evil ultimately embodied by notorious, chainsaw-wielding Leatherface.

"Like the watershed *Psycho* before it, *Chain Saw Massacre* depicted the monsters as recognizably human, though its backwoods cannibal family was visibly more bizarre than the handsome Norman Bates" (208). The clan displays a "degenerate madness" (212), its members posing a "primitive threat to a group of modern, urban characters" (215). Moreover, Hooper depicts the

⁴³ As Rick Worland puts it, "[b]loody carnage aside, the remake is finally much more similar structurally to classical horror films than the original". Moreover, alluding to films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, the movie's pretense to picture actual events is easily discarded as such. The effect is further reinforced by the casting of renowned TV star Jessica Biel as the female protagonist and sole survivor. Taking all of this into account, Bay provides a mainstream version of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which might also explain the remake's box office success. (225-226)

⁴⁴ *Chainsaw's* villains do not have proper names.

Texan hinterland as “a region simultaneously empty, dead, and highly dangerous” (218), a veritable backwoods setting for the plot to unfold. Leatherface and his relatives lost their jobs in the local slaughterhouse to superior technology (217, 224); having “literally substituted people for cattle” (217), they prey on city folk who stop at the family-owned gas station. Worland reads the monster den’s vicinity to a “busy highway” as a “partial return to normalcy” (224). The gas station serves as a contact zone, where the marginalized rednecks virtually trade with representatives of the center. Moreover, it evokes the notion of a family business⁴⁵, and, importantly, relates Leatherface’s atrocities to the latter.

The unholy power of the film derives from Leatherface as the literal embodiment of drives, whose aim is immediate satisfaction in the most direct fashion. One is both impressed and horrified by the character’s eruption from nowhere and his implacable pursuit of victims as he lets nothing stand in his way. As such he is not just the drive become flesh, but the drive as the basis of economics. To succeed you must eliminate your rivals, cut down on costs and make workers increasingly ‘flexible’. Leatherface also shows just how the victims of this ‘get rich quick’ ideology accept its implicit values: he has interiorised them, made them his own, then projected them onto the outside world so as to transform any and every person he encounters into a rival to eliminate. And more: just as *Dawn of the Dead* makes the zombie the privileged signifier of capitalist consumerism, so *Texas* transforms the victims of Leatherface and his family into so much meat to be recycled and sold for profit. (Humphries 123)

In other words, Hooper’s monsters “behave in a way that imitates predatory capitalism” (Humphries 121). They are not barbaric, backward, and belligerent in their refusal of an allegedly progressive system which the center has imposed on them. Instead, they are barbaric, backward, and belligerent in their ways of adapting to the system. The threat emanating from Leatherface and his relatives stems from a social and political, but also from an “economic rivalry” (175). Significantly, the formulaic backwoods threat is not an external, but an

⁴⁵ Humphries writes that in the work of Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, and George Romero, “family values ... are inextricably linked to economic ones” (119).

internal one. This leads me back to the cinematic shift in the portrayal of Eastern European evil.

I argue that within the horror genre of the 21st century there exists a global backwoods tradition in which Eastern Europeans are depicted as rednecks⁴⁶ from the margins of the capitalist world order. According to this tradition, the West incorporated the evil formerly associated with the Eastern Bloc and is now threatened by the Soviets' alleged heirs from within. Accordingly, I claim that the basic formula of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was recently reproduced by filmmakers from the United States and Great Britain, resulting in global backwoods movies such as *Hostel* and *Severance*.

3.3.3 *Hostel*

Simon Crook calls Eli Roth's *Hostel* a "squirmmer" exemplifying a recent trend towards "sado-horrors à la Saw". David Edelstein labels the film and the subgenre it stems from "torture porn". Crucially, both draw attention to the fact that the film does not indulge in drastic depictions of violence and death for merely voyeuristic reasons; instead, Crook and Edelstein read *Hostel* as a reaction to the atrocities of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo respectively. Returning to Robin Wood's definition of horror as a synchronic mirror of society's greatest fears (70), we may conclude that filmmakers are inevitably influenced by the major military campaigns of their time. The Vietnam War inspired Tobe Hooper, the War on Terror Eli Roth. This is one of numerous parallels between *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Hostel*, which elucidate the latter's belonging to the backwoods genre. However, the differences between the movies reveal Roth's squirmmer as a global variant of the *Chainsaw* formula.

Hostel opens with the slightly deranged tunes of a whistled melody reverberating through the chambers of a derelict basement. Decay clings to the objects caught by the camera lens. The place is empty, waiting to meet its purpose. A trickle of blood on the floor thickens to a steady stream, washing a couple of teeth down the drain. Cut to the city of Amsterdam. The intriguing whistling is replaced by upbeat rock music, as a group of backpackers

⁴⁶ In regard to their communist past, the term 'redneck' is fittingly ambiguous.

comprising Icelfander Oli and U.S.-Americans Josh and Paxton pay a visit to a hash bar. Having indulged in a weed binge, the friends proceed to a Dutch discothèque. Oli has sex in the restroom, and Josh picks a fight on the dancefloor. Kicked out of the venue, the three companions sojourn to a brothel where only shy Josh refuses to have sex with a prostitute. Except for this brief instance of moral integrity (making believe that Josh might be spared the cruel fate likely to befall the others), Josh, Paxton, and Oli prove noisy, ignorant, rude, and intoxicated.

Arriving at their hostel after curfew, the backpackers find its doors closed. In a joined effort of screaming and cussing, they demand to be admitted, which provokes an attack by an angry mob of unnerved neighbors. Dodging beer bottles, Josh, Paxton, and Oli seek shelter in a nearby apartment. The owner introduces himself as Alexei. “Not everyone want to kill Americans” [sic.] he remarks with a sympathetic smile and an Eastern European accent. Hearing that his guests plan to leave Amsterdam for Barcelona (looking forward to getting “hooked up” by a friend of Oli’s), he advises them against it. “You have to go east, my friend”, Alexei announces, “this is where the best girls are. The best”. Underlining his words with pictures of nude model-type females on his digital camera, Alexei sends Josh, Paxton, and Oli to a Slovak hostel in a small town near Bratislava. Alexei is depicted as a salesman propagating the (sexual) merits of Eastern Europe; the backpackers buy the picture without realizing that their lives are part of the bargain.

The train station where the friends arrive is virtually in the middle of nowhere, a place reminiscent of *Chainsaw*’s rural Texas: “empty, dead, and highly dangerous” (Worland 218). However, disappointment makes way for enthusiastic high-fives, as Josh, Paxton, and Oli discover that the bleak landscape hides a beautiful ancient town. In the end, of course, when the latter has been revealed as a mere façade, the vast emptiness surrounding it can be recognized as the true Eastern Europe. But for the time being, the backpackers are not suspicious. The television in the hostel lobby shows a dubbed version of *Pulp Fiction*, the receptionist is not only pretty but also fluent in English, and when the friends enter their room, two half-naked women are already awaiting them. Natalya has Russian parents, Svetlana is from Prague – it seems that not

just Slovakia, but Eastern Europe in its entirety has conspired against the backpackers.

The women take Josh, Paxton, and Oli to the local disco. Josh has to step outside for a minute since he cannot stand cigarette smoke (again, he is depicted as the nice guy who might survive). A dark passageway emits a crowd of Slovak kids, a juvenile gang, none of them older than ten. The leader asks Josh for a cigarette, then orders him to hand over chewing gum and a dollar. When Josh does not comply, the kids draw clubs and knives from their pockets. Facing assault, the backpacker is saved by a Dutchman he had met on the train to Slovakia. The Dutchman flicks a few coins onto the ground which the kids pick up before they scramble, having received their payment. "Here children commit the most crime", says the Dutchman who will eventually become Josh's nemesis. However, the remark must not only be read as an ironical hint at the impending atrocities. It also reflects on the film's central issue of guilt and its focus on the East-West divide. The Dutchman assumes the role of a colonial master who blames the subaltern people for the evil he has brought upon them himself. On the one hand, we may infer that the subaltern evil is irredeemable since the youngest pose its worst manifestations. On the other hand, we may read the comment on the children as a comment on the subalterns in general. This would suggest that *Hostel's* evil Eastern Europeans are all children, at least in comparison to the conquistadores. Demonstratively, the Dutchman soothes the alleged aggressors by distributing gifts of the lowest value.

Like the gas station in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the hostel provides a suitable contact zone between center and periphery. Here, however, the economic dimension is even more overt. The whole town seems built around the hostel, its entire economy based on it. From toothless taxi drivers who pick up the backpackers at the train station to the corrupt police who block the only road out of town in case one of the victims attempts escape. In the hostel, the Western tourists basically trade their lives in for sex. The girls promised to the backpackers in Amsterdam turn out to be prostitutes paid to seduce and drug visitors. Josh and Paxton had jokingly called Alexei a pimp; now we learn he actually is one. In spite of *Hostel's* blatant depiction of topless women, the film's link between sex and violence is to be taken seriously, at least in regard to its undeniable economic undertone.

Oli is the first one to vanish. The morning after the Iclander's disappearance, Josh and Paxton run into a local who wears Oli's jacket, leaving no doubt about the town folk's complicity in the crimes. All of a sudden, the place has lost its amiability. The narrow streets form a labyrinth and are roamed by the juvenile gang from the disco passageway. Natalya and Svetlana start conversing in a language unknown to Josh and Paxton. Even the films on the lobby TV seem strangely distorted; Paxton laments the lack of subtitles. Nothing makes sense anymore. Additionally, the dubbed Hollywood movies also symbolize Eastern Europe's reaction to globalization and capitalization in the wake of the Cold War. Eastern European culture does not just incorporate Western product but assimilates it. The periphery adapts, subverts, and exploits the system of the center. The Leatherface clan of the *Chainsaw Massacre* butchered urban dwellers to feed on them. The Eastern Europeans of *Hostel* let urban dwellers butcher themselves, not only turning them into dead meat, but, explicitly, money. Unlike Hooper's hillbillies, Roth's traffickers do not humiliate their victims. They simply deliver them. No pleasure, just business.

The basement of the opening sequence belongs to a deserted factory at the margins of town. Where the old industry had been (probably come to a halt, whether immediately or in the long run, with the decline of the Soviet Union), a new one settled. Expensive-looking limousines are lined up in front of the building, the rich men owning them are busy in the torture chambers beneath. Josh dies down there, his throat slit by the Dutchman. (We realize now that he has only saved him from the marauding kids in order to enjoy killing Josh himself.) Paxton loses two fingers to a chainsaw but – in a fortunate turn of events – is able to kill his tormentor and one of the guards. After hiding under a pile of severed body parts and a brief encounter with the film's "very own Igor" (Crook), Paxton manages to reach an elevator. In a locker room upstairs, he disguises as a customer on his way out. In said locker room, appositely, the audience learns more about the motives for the "sado-horrors" (Crook) witnessed so far.

First, Paxton discovers a business card which reads "Elite Hunting" and even provides a mail address: "blatanikov@gang.rus". On the back of the card, a few handwritten figures inform us that U.S. citizens are most expensive on the torture market. In contrast to what Alexei said in the beginning of the film,

indeed everybody seems keen on killing Americans these days. The barbaric, backward, and belligerent subalterns from the margins of civilization just realized how to make money out of it. The business card eradicates any doubt possibly left that *Hostel* depicts capitalism at work, only in an Eastern European style.

Second, one of the customers, preparing to descend to the basement, approaches Paxton. Fooled by the latter's stolen apparel and realizing they are both from the United States, he asks Paxton what it felt like to kill somebody. The customer also explains why he paid a large amount of money to be there, stating that sex has lost its kick and that murder seems the next logical step. This may be read as final comment on the film's link between sex and violence. Sex has become boring and meaningless because it is not only easily available, but, in fact, also a customer service. And if sex can be bought, why should not violence be either?

Hostel's Eastern Europeans are evil because they provide the Western elite with an atavistic ritual, with a retreat to the primitive at the margins of civilization. The periphery corrupts the center. Those who participate, who strike a bargain with the barbarians from the global backwoods, are marked by a tattoo on the forearm.⁴⁷ The primitive, or animalistic, which they have indulged in and which, according to Hans-Ulrich Mohr is a distinguishing characteristic of evil, also shows in the Eastern Europeans themselves. They fall in either of two categories: "supermodelish babes" (Edelstein) and aberrant freaks. The freaks include Alexei the pimp⁴⁸, the taxi driver with the missing teeth, a cross-eyed member of the juvenile gang, the guards of the so-called art exhibit who may be aptly described as skinhead bodybuilders, and, last but not least, the Igor-character.

Hostel's Igor belongs to the basement staff; he is a massive hunchback, wearing a blood-splattered apron. He never utters a word, executes his duties mutely. These duties mainly comprise collecting discarded bodies and chopping them up for the meat grinder. Never flinching in the slightest, his every move apparently automated, he calls to mind the quintessential assembly line worker.

⁴⁷ The tattoo shows the head of a bloodhound, which is also the emblem of the Blatanikov elite hunting agency.

⁴⁸ He is once referred to as "our friend with this thing on his lip" owing to a conspicuous mole on his upper lip.

Besides, Igor fits in with the rest of Roth's Eastern European villains both in terms of deranged appearance and emotionless commitment. Moreover, as a reference to Frankenstein's assistant, he does not only serve as a sort of comic relief and reminder that *Hostel* is, after all, just a movie. He also provides another link to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. According to Rick Worland, "[i]ronic references to classic horror appear[ed] often in the revisionist horror of the Vietnam era" (214). *Chainsaw's* Hitchhiker is once referred to as Dracula by one of Hooper's protagonists; "*Hostel*, bizarrely, has its very own Igor" (Crook).

Having escaped the industrial area by car and being chased through the town's labyrinthine streets, Paxton faces a roadblock consisting of the well-known crowd of criminal children. Paxton hands over a bag full of chewing gum, which buys him more than just free passage. When his pursuers – two armed Slovak thugs – appear at the scene, the kids obstruct their way, then attack and kill them. The act itself – caving the thugs' skulls in with stones, basically the most primitive of weapons – is yet another example of Eastern European barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence; but the kids stand for capitalism in its purest and most relentless form. Like Leatherface, they are "not just the drive become flesh, but the drive as the basis of economics" (Humphries 123). The kids epitomize the threat emanating from the global backwoods. They convey *Hostel's* strongest image of Eastern European evil: a bagful of chewing gum in exchange for murder.

Contrary to *Chainsaw's* ending, Roth allows Paxton (and thus also us, the audience) to avenge departed friends and lost body parts. Paxton runs over Svetlana, Natalya, and Alexei with the getaway car. Later on, he murders the Dutchman in a public restroom, cutting off two of his fingers before slitting his throat. We acquiesce in both killings, concluding with relief that the atrocities committed in the Slovak factory basement do not go unpunished. *Hostel's* ending diverts from the *Chainsaw* formula, highlighting a crucial difference between the original backwoods genre and its modern variant. This difference mainly revolves around the question of responsibility: who made the backwoods a living hell? Hooper implies that the center is to blame; one could even read the cruelties by the Leatherface-clan as the inevitable reaction of a desperate, infuriated rural population to centrist politics and economics. The revenge is Theirs, not Ours.

In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, we never see the rednecks turn against each other, indicating an alliance against the urban dwellers which stands above the internalization of the capitalist drive (for survival). The monsters feature the virtue of social bonding. Conversely, the fact that the juvenile gang of *Hostel* attacks and kills the thugs who chase Paxton through the Slovak village, demonstrates the inherent evil of the backwoods. It is Their fault that capitalism has gone evil, not Ours. In other words, they bring out the worst in capitalism (like *Birthday Girl*'s Sophia brought out the worst in John). Roth leaves little doubt about which villains to label more monstrous: the Western torture-tourists from the center, or the Eastern European torture-promoters from the periphery. In *Hostel*, the periphery corrupts the center and not vice versa. In the end, even Paxton is corrupted by and converted to the Other side. He tortures and kills the Dutchman. He is marked by two missing fingers instead of a tattoo.

The *Hostel* formula was at least copied twice: by Eli Roth himself in the film's sequel – *Hostel II* (2007) – and Gideon Raff in *Train* (2008). *Hostel II* is set in the very Slovak village that turned out a death trap for backpackers Oli and Josh. The film revolves around a group of female travelers from the United States: promiscuous Whitney, artsy Lorna, and filthy-rich Beth. Before they end up in the torture chambers, however, Roth elaborates on the background of the elite hunting agency's proprietor. The man on top is a middle-aged Eastern European, a veritable CEO who lives in a mansion off the village limits and keeps a collection of severed human heads. He embodies the ultimate evil, best illustrated in a scene, in which he executes a little boy – a member of *Hostel*'s juvenile gang. The kids engage in their own business of tourist-hunting, and the CEO rightly deems them competitors. Killing the boy shall serve as a demonstration of strength and keep the gang in place. The Eastern European business man cannot afford mercy.

Roth also provides a background story on two of the tormentors, men from the United States who pay to kill Whitney and Beth. We learn that the bloodhound tattoo is not optional for customers of the agency and that the killing itself is not either. When one of the men fatally wounds Whitney but refuses to deal the coup de grâce, he is immediately disposed of by a couple of Eastern European thugs. Whitney becomes a special offer, her life is sold to a

customer willing to spend money on a damaged article. In contrast, Beth manages to knock out her tormentor, but does not make it out of the chamber. While the basement has retained the dreadful look of part one, it now also features a surveillance system and a number of other gimmicks which render escape virtually impossible. But, as Whitney told Lorna earlier in the movie, Beth “could pretty much buy Slovakia if she wanted” – she strikes a bargain with the CEO. Beth makes the obligatory killing by ripping her tormentor’s genitals out with a pair of pliers. The barbaric castration apparently earns her the respect of the thugs. She receives the bloodhound tattoo and is free to leave.

Hostel II implies that the global backwoods transform urban dwellers from the center into either victims or collaborators. The only sacred thing left is a contract; it stipulates not only a financial agreement but a lasting commitment. Beth survives, but she is converted into a killer. Assisted by the juvenile gang, she finally beheads the girl who lured her to the hostel. The kids are thereby confirmed as a rival company to the hunting agency, which is also indicated by the fact that the beheaded girl happens to be the mistress of the CEO. Roth depicts Eastern Europe as a breeding-ground of evil. It has to be mentioned, however, that he presents at least one half-decent Slovak who tries warning Beth. For this reason, his fellow villagers feel obliged to beat some sense into him, and when Beth encounters him for the second time, he has apparently learned his lesson.

In *Train*, a College wrestling team from the United States travels through Eastern Europe. The group splits up, as four of the students and the coach’s assistant attend a party and subsequently miss their train to Odessa. When a communications problem ensues at the ticket counter, they accept the help of a friendly Eastern European woman fluent in English. She suggests the U.S.-Americans should get on the train she is about to board herself, a train which, as she announces, will go to Odessa. The wrestlers do not know that most of their co-passengers crave the U.S.-Americans’ healthy bodies in one way or another.

Indeed, the friendly woman and the train conductor run a business on harvesting organs from involuntary donators. They have specialized on tourists

and abduct them from all over Eastern Europe. *Train's* backwoods thus encompass the former Soviet Bloc in its entirety. The locals who are not accomplices prove sinister at least. Wrestler Vlad provides the best example. To begin with, Vlad does not play fair in the wrestling competition. Moreover, he lures the U.S.-Americans to the aforementioned party by promising easy sexual encounters and even dares hitting on one of the girls from abroad. One of her male colleagues reacts by picking a fight with Vlad.

Only loosely connected at first, sex and violence are blending as the movie progresses. Accordingly, the evil doctor seduces the team's Head Coach but, instead of initiating intercourse, sedates and eventually kills him. The other victims are collected by the doctor's evil sidekicks one of whom rapes the girl Vlad had approached. When the train reaches the Moldovan border, a group of soldiers enter the vehicle. The conductor bribes the soldiers. When the money does not suffice, he offers the rape victim in exchange for free passage. The soldiers drag her away cheerfully, signaling each other (and the audience) by exaggerated hip thrusts that they intend to prolong the girl's martyrdom. As in *Hostel*, help cannot be expected from any inhabitant of the backwoods.

However, the Eastern European evil shows best in the sidekicks. There are three of them: a pair of twins – bald, heavily tattooed rapists featuring bad teeth and only rudimentary knowledge of the English language – and a massive old man of superhuman strength, who is covered in scars and apparently mute. The old man is the film's ultimate freak, a typical backwoods character reminiscent of the Leatherface clan and the incestuous family members of *The Hills Have Eyes*. He combines the whole range of characteristics included in Hans-Ulrich Mohr's definition of evil.

Gideon Raff clearly stigmatizes *Train's* villains as monsters. He even makes sure that the audience does not accidentally get the impression that the doctor might be a modern-day Robin Hood of Eastern Europe: on the one hand, her clientele is multinational; on the other, the treatment is expensive, as one of the patients relates. Like *Hostel*, *Train* clearly revolves around the evil nature of Eastern European capitalism. In both cases, a possible Soviet heritage on part of the villains is only vaguely implied: in *Hostel* via the deserted factory, in *Train* via the conductor, who greets the U.S.-American passengers with a salute when they board his vehicle.

3.3.4 Severance

Christopher Smith's *Severance* opens with a few chords of leisurely music the audience may duly associate with the idyllic bits of a wildlife documentary. We see a white, forty-plus male and two conceivably younger peroxide blondes run through the woods. We see the panic on their faces; in stark contrast to the score, they are running away from something or somebody. All of a sudden, the forest floor opens up beneath the women; trapped in a hole, one of them screams "Mr. George, help us please" in an Eastern European accent. But Mr. George just says "Sorry" (his accent is English) and proceeds along the path. He does not make it much further though; while the women undress to make a rope out of their clothes, Mr. George gets caught in a sling-trap. It is not yet revealed whether the women can free themselves. However, we witness Mr. George being stabbed to death by a killer in camouflage clothes. We can only see the blade, a boot, and parts of the killer's trousers. As the blood starts flowing, "Itchycoo Park", a feel-good song by The Small Faces commences. One line appears particularly misplaced (considering the events on screen): "It's all so beautiful".

Peter Bradshaw calls *Severance* "a British horror film ... lubricated with comedy" and laments that it merely revolves around characters "just getting picked off by brutal killers who are without identity or motive". What Bradshaw alludes to is the fact that the killers do not have names⁴⁹ or explanations for their atrocious behavior either. What he does not point out is that those lacks correspond to the killers' virtual loss of voice. Not that they could not speak per se, but they speak in an apparently Eastern European language rendered incomprehensible by the complete absence of subtitles. This does not only concern the killers, but also the women from the opening sequence (who at least know a few scraps of English) and the bus driver of the subsequent scene.

Cut from Mr. George to a bus headed for the Hungarian woods. Aboard we find (apart from the driver) "a squabbling bunch of white-collar workers from the home counties (and one blond American)" (Bradshaw). They are "the UK division of an American arms company" (Bradshaw) called Palisade Defence. Its current commercial plays on the television set installed in the front section of

⁴⁹ In the end credits they are referred to as "Flamethrower killer", "Headbutt Killer", etc.

the bus. It informs us that Mr. George is, in fact, George Cinders, president of the company. From the television screen, he announces that “right now ... our team of dedicated individuals are touring Eastern Europe, bringing the Palisade message to you”. The message can be summed up by one of George’s catchy phrases: “a home-run for freedom, a time-out for terror”. The team consists of Richard, head of the division, Harris, the cynic, Jill, the company’s conscience, Gordon, the eager boy scout, Billy, the coordinating talent, Maggie, the “blond American” (Bradshaw), and Steve, the *laissez-faire* protagonist. The commercial implies that Palisade Defence is as a ruthless and possibly racist company. Jill calls the clip “a recruitment video of the Hitler Youth”. Being similar to the character of Josh in *Hostel*, common horror conventions would render her the one most likely to survive. Jill appears like a lamb among the lions. Apart from condemning the commercial, she works on the development of alternative, non-lethal weaponry and does not indulge in any reprehensible activities whatsoever. Steve is quite the opposite. We see him smoke marihuana, pop magic mushrooms, and order escort ladies on the internet. To the horror veteran, he constitutes the quintessential victim. But as the film’s beginning has heralded, *Severance* reverses audience expectations.

Forced to get off the bus due to a fallen tree blocking the road, the group enters the woods. Richard is not sure in which Eastern European state they are exactly – Hungary, Romania, or Serbia – which suggests that to him they are all alike anyway. The supposed headquarters of the planned teambuilding exercise, which lies in the middle of the forest, turns out to be “a dump” rather than a “luxury lodge”. There is no trace of George who should have arrived earlier with food supply. Searching the decrepit lodge, Gordon discovers a pie in the fridge and Harris finds Palisade documents, mostly profiles of Soviet soldiers. The documents spawn discussions of Palisade’s involvement in Eastern Europe and the lodge’s part in said involvement.

Harris claims that the lodge used to be a mental asylum. He tells about a revolt shattered with the help of Palisade arms, and an inmate swearing to exact revenge on the company. Not only is Harris’ story reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe, but also features a Nosferatu-figure even listed as “Nose-feratu”⁵⁰ in

⁵⁰ Apart from the trademark elongated fingers, the character also has an incredibly big nose.

the end credits. The story thus constitutes an allusion to gothic horror, which parallels *Chainsaw's* Dracula reference and *Hostel's* Igor.

Jill tells a different story altogether:

Believe it or not, there is a tiny bit of truth in this story. A tiny bit. It actually occurred in the early 90s, when the Soviet Union broke up. Places like this were detention centers for war criminals, soldiers who liked the killing a little bit too much. They were lunatics. They wiped out whole villages. Burned people alive, put heads on spikes. They were savages, well-trained savages. The government locked them away. Tried to cure them. But it was no good. Some escaped, hid in some empty buildings nearby, but not for long. Obviously it wasn't Palisade who killed them, it was their government. But it was us who supplied the weapons.

Unlike *Hostel*, *Severance* is rather explicit about the Soviet origins of its monsters. Both films imply that the War on Terror has corrupted the West, but both locate the main source of evil in Eastern Europe nonetheless (*Severance*, however, a little less than *Hostel*, as we will see). Palisade may have provided the weapons, but, as Jill say, "[t]hese guys were war criminals, remember?!" Of course, when Steve bites on a human tooth lodged in the pie, it becomes obvious that the villains of *Severance* are more than just war criminals. They are cannibals like the Leatherface-clan; they are barbaric, backward, and belligerent hillbillies from the backwoods.

When Jill catches one of them observing her through a window, she wants to leave the lodge and head back to the city. She does not change her mind, although Richard tries convincing her that "it's probably just some locals messing around". Richard refuses to call off the teambuilding exercises, but allows Jill and Harris to go find a spot in the forest where their mobile phones work. Unsurprisingly, however, such a spot does not exist. The (literal) Eastern European backwoods are completely cut off civilization. What Jill and Harris find instead, are the deserted Palisade Defence bus and the mutilated corpse of the driver beside it. In the meanwhile, the others have participated in a paintballing-competition. Obviously, to the employees of Palisade Defence war is but a game. It is not before Gordon has stepped into a bear-trap and lost his lower leg in the process of breaking free, that they realize the game is dead

serious. Harris and Jill pick up the paintballers by bus, but another trap thwarts the team's attempt to escape from the woods. The hillbilly war criminals decapitate Harris and torch Jill to death. Although she is the most reasonable, sensitive, and innocent among the Palisade employees, her demise is not as shocking and confusing as Josh's in *Hostel*. We have long since identified Steve and Maggie as *Severance*'s main characters. Together with Billy and Richard, they carry Gordon back to the lodge.

A discussion ensues among the survivors as to which enemy they are facing and the latter's possible motives. When Maggie suggests that a mentally instable war criminal could be after them for Palisade's dubious activities in Eastern Europe, Richard replies: "We're a public company. Members of both our governments are on the board. They are not going to do anything immoral". Like the paintball shootout, this remark implies more than mere naivety. It is even more than a striking comment on the War on Terror and the ways in which both the British and U.S.-Americans deal with it. By clinging to the moral infallibility of the company, he rejects the idea of capitalism gone awry. Capitalism equals democracy, it is a good thing. If the system is exploited, if it becomes ruthless and "immoral", then only by the Other, only in the hands of the uncivilized, preferably the Eastern Europeans. In *Hostel*, Their atrocities were purely economic; in *Train*, they also provided a welcome opportunity for vengeance; in *Severance*, vengeance is all that is left.

When one of the hillbilly war criminals enters the lodge and drags Gordon down to the basement, we are allowed a first glance at the face of evil: black hair, square jaw, beard stubble, and, significantly, a grin from ear to ear. The killer apparently enjoys what he is doing – which in the case of Gordon means carving the Palisade logo into a human chest. His incapability of communicating and his affiliation to the infliction of pain seem related. The killer communicates by inflicting pain, evocating an animalistic, barely human evil. Moreover, the bloody mark on Gordon's body confirms the rumors of Palisade's involvement in the creation of this monster. Richard cannot bear the look of either. He flees the lodge, while the killer guns down Billy. Richard, however, is not spared an overdue revelation. A landmine forces him to open his eyes to the truth. Scrambling through the woods, he steps on a "CRM platoon-blasters, one of ours" as he laconically remarks. Meanwhile in the lodge, Steve and Maggie

manage to capture their adversary. Maggie grabs the hillbilly's gun and does not hesitate to put a bullet in his head. "I'd hate to be accused of not killing him when I had the chance", she says, having broken with yet another horror convention.

Holding on to each other, Steve and Maggie step out of the "dump", reassured they may safely leave the backwoods now. We are as surprised as they are, when confronted with a whole gang of Eastern European war criminals in the front yard. So far, we have only seen one of the killers at a time, their masks and camouflage apparel making them all look the same. In their interchangeability, they mirror the blond, Arian-style actresses from the Palisade commercial. We may read this as a caricature of the binary dichotomy between East and West. The fact that the villains do not understand a bit of English – rendering Maggie free to tell Steve that she is out of ammo – once more confirms their backwardness.

On their flight through the woods, Maggie and Steve stumble across the "luxury lodge" they had originally been headed to. Mr. George and Steve's escort ladies are dancing in the lobby, when the survivors arrive (*Severance* has fooled us again). "There are about five seriously sick fuckers coming our way to kill us, so you either help us or fuck off", Maggie says to George. "When you say sick fuckers, what do you mean here? Terrorists?" he asks. "Call them what you want", Maggie replies. But her boss insists: "Hold it. No one's going anywhere." Unpacking a rocket launcher he happened to have brought with him, he says: "Stamp terrorist on it, and I'll kill it". Together with Richard's prior remark on immorality, this is Christopher Smith's most striking comment on the War on Terror and the ignorance of their perpetrators. Moreover, the rocket misses the "little bastards" – as George refers to the hillbillies – and zooming straight up, destroys a passenger aircraft instead.

The flight through the woods continues. Steve disposes of two pursuers. He is wounded badly in the process, but manages to save the escorts ladies from the hole we saw them fall into in the film's opening sequence. Maggie gets caught by a hillbilly war criminal. He puts down his balaclava (as if to show his true face) and attempts raping Maggie. She knocks him out with a stone – a primitive reprisal for an animalistic atrocity – then searches for a bigger stone to

finish the job, as the idyllic wildlife documentary tunes from the beginning resume.

The attempted rape is not the only instance of sex-related violence in the film. *Severance* links sex to violence on various occasions and in different constellations. The first link occurs in a dream sequence in the first act of the film. Richard dreams of Maggie lying on her bed, only wearing her panties. She is facing the opposite wall, her face thus remaining hidden, while her back is turned towards Richard. "Fuck me now and fuck me hard!" she commands, urging Richard to approach her bare back. But when he touches Maggie's shoulder, she has suddenly been replaced by Harris, who wears a blond wig. Outraged, Richard starts stabbing Harris' private parts, then wakes up. When being asked if he had "sweet dreams", Richard's affirmative reply is accompanied by a satisfied smile. Maggie is involved in both the dream and the rape scene. In the concluding fight of the movie, Smith pits her against the last remaining war criminal (the "Flamethrower Killer"). However, it is one of the escort ladies, her breasts barely concealed by a jacket, who kills him. The Eastern European prostitutes side with the urban dwellers from the civilized center, not with the uncivilized barbarians from the periphery. After all, they are paid by Steve. Accordingly, when he delivers the last line of the movie, asking Maggie if she would like to engage in a "foursome", it is rather nonchalantly than jokingly.

Hostel and *Train* depict Eastern European economy as the dark side of capitalism. This dark side poses a serious threat to the West since it corrupts and subverts its economy. Conversely, in *Severance*, Western capitalism is not without guilt, as the Palisade staff and the company's "immoral" past exemplify. Nonetheless, the fact remains that, on a symbolic level, by attacking Palisade the Eastern Europeans attack Western economy. If We are villains, They are monsters. In the end, the plethora of ironic comments and reversals of horror conventions just highlight the uncontested stability of Eastern European evil – a reproduced classic and the film's only constant.

Finally, the U.S. girl, the British lad, and their Hungarian escort ladies row off into the sunset, the escort ladies naturally handling the oars. The song that plays over these last images is well chosen: "We'll meet again", written and composed by Hugh Charles and Ross Parker. During World War II, the song

was frequently played in U.S. harbors, when the troops left home for the battlefields abroad. Apparently, the war against the monsters from the global backwoods has just begun.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of Eastern European evil in a specific context presupposes an examination of the concepts of 'Eastern Europe' and 'evil' on a general level. Most importantly, Eastern Europe has to be considered a projection of the West. Hollywood has contributed tremendously to reproducing a dichotomous structure in which the 'good' West is privileged over 'evil' Eastern Europe.

For centuries, Russia has been the quintessence of Eastern Europe; between the October Revolution and the decline of the U.S.S.R., it also served as the quintessence of the Soviet Union. During that period, the terms 'Soviets', 'communists', and 'Russians' referred to a common entity: the Eastern European Other. The latter has been constructed by the West and, particularly, its dominant forces, namely the United States and Great Britain, as the ultimate binary opposition to the West – especially and with unsurpassed fervor at the height of the Soviet Union. Eastern Europeans were labeled barbaric, backward, and belligerent. In consonance with Hans-Ulrich Mohr's definition of the term, the concept of 'evil' on which this thesis is based revolves around said attributes.

As World War II merged into the Cold War, the Bomb and the Red Scare shaped a new concept of cinematic evil. The burden of Hiroshima and Nagasaki weighed heavily on the U.S.-American conscience, since it had resulted in the death of more than 300,000 civilians and provided the world with a doomsday device. In cinemas, however, the atomic bomb was presented as an incredible scientific achievement and a necessary deterrent against a new old enemy: the Soviet Union. While World War II was depicted as an unquestionably noble quest for the good cause, the role of the U.S.S.R. in defeating Nazi Germany was downplayed and denied. Hollywood, guided by the House Un-American Activities Committee, constructed the Soviets as the ultimate Other, opposed to freedom and democracy as epitomized by the United States. The epic fight between Us and Them did not only produce a large number of overt propaganda movies, but infested the entire range of film genres. I focused on the U.S.-American horror film of the period.

In the 1950s, horror blended with science fiction, producing new forms of evil. Most prominently, it came in the shapes of alien invaders and mutations.

While these types of monsters indisputably relate to the Red Scare and the Bomb respectively, their emergence is not rooted in the Cold War alone. Importantly, they are also manifestations of a paradigmatic shift within the horror genre from Victorian to homegrown U.S.-American monsters in the late 1930s. Accordingly, in the 50s, Hollywood's Cold War horrors stood for both external and internal threats.

I examined three relevant horror movies of the period and their depictions of evil. In *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), extraterrestrial seed pods craft duplicates of human beings to take over the world. Although the film can be read as a critique and warning of both capitalist and communist societies, the Soviet connotations prevail. In *Them!* (1954), an atomic bomb test has transformed a colony of red ants into giant monsters. Spreading from the New Mexican desert, they nest in the sewers of Los Angeles and prove a threat to the entire nation. Although the monsters clearly allude to the communist menace, their connotations to emancipatory revolt prove stronger. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), the alien Klaatu and the robot police man Gort visit Earth to warn mankind of its impending destruction. Nuclear warfare among the humans would pose a threat to the galaxy, hence Klaatu announces that the planet will be destroyed if peace does not ensue immediately. Klaatu can be read as both a fascist and a prophet. The message of the movie is truly ambivalent.

Eastern European evil is clearly identifiable in each of the three films discussed. Degree and concentration of the Red Menace vary. Significantly, however, the fact remains that the evil presented is always related to Eastern Europe and always poses a serious threat. Hollywood's sci-fi/horror of the 50s constructed Eastern Europeans as the horribly evil Other, inspiring generations of future U.S.-American filmmakers.

In the two subsequent decades, cinematic evil was defined by a growing unease with long-standing formulas and a split between the U.S. government and the country's film industry. Tensions peaked in the Vietnam era and would not recede until the mid-80s. By then, the U.S.S.R. had adopted a pro-Western course, owing to the reformatory politics of Mikhail Gorbachev. The bipolar world order of the Cold War disintegrated fast. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in

1989 sealed the decline of the U.S.S.R., and seemed to rid Hollywood of its traditional evil Other.

In the 1990s, the U.S.-American film industry entered a period of reorientation, defined by the search for alternative villains in the wake of the Soviet Union. Middle Eastern despots, international terrorists, drug dealers and other criminals, to name but the most prominent, took the place of the late Eastern European communists. Some of these threats were domestic – sometimes even from within the U.S. armed forces – resulting from the breach of Hollywood conventions in the Vietnam era and their complete rupture in 1989. The United States had constructed the Soviet Union as the ultimate evil; in the absence of the latter, new crises seemed but harmless skirmishes compared to fifty years on the verge of nuclear Armageddon. The decline of communist Eastern Europe made it impossible to label current involvements abroad necessary crusades to protect Western democracy.

However, the tragic development of the wars in former Yugoslavia provided both the U.S. government and film industry with a new source of Eastern European enemy. But while Serbian war criminals proved adequate replacements of Cold War evil, they clearly lacked in size. Besides, the aerial bombings by the U.S. troops could not be sold as a heroic, unquestionably 'good' engagement with the enemy. At least not until the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon shocked the nation on 11 September 2001. In its wake, *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) exemplified that U.S.-American audiences still approved of distorted historical accounts and formulaic Eastern European evil. *The Sum of All Fears* (2002) even presented a Soviet-style present-day Russia. Films like those heralded the cinematic return of Eastern Europe as a major binary opponent.

Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, both the U.S.-American and British cinema renegotiated the concept of Eastern Europe. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the resulting end of the bipolar world order, rendered the binary opposition of capitalism versus communism redundant. However, in contrast to the British film industry, Hollywood still frequently resurrects the Soviets as topical enemies. Phillip Noyce's *Salt* (2010) provides an apposite example from the recent past. Hollywood blends old and new antagonists (and

its formulas of depicting them), thus virtually confining current threats to known terrain and suggesting that they can be defeated.

However, the majority of U.S.-American and British motion pictures presenting Eastern Europe as the Other do no longer establish a link between 'evil' and 'communist'. The new breed of Eastern European villain is bereft of an ideological opposition to the West. Eastern European villains of the early 21st century are portrayed as making their way in the capitalist world order. Nonetheless, in most cases, their traditional, negative attributes (naturalized in the constant reproduction of Cold War formulas) still serve as their distinguishing characteristics – first and foremost barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, U.S.-American and British filmmakers have stigmatized Eastern Europe as the dark side of capitalism. Regardless of the ratio of human and monstrous characteristics, Eastern Europeans are generally depicted as feeding on and thus weakening the system from within. As Jez Butterworth's *Birthday Girl* (2001) exemplifies, they also corrupt and subvert Western citizens, thus recruiting accomplices in the cinematic tradition of Soviet evil.

Finally, I examined the modes of corruption and subversion by Eastern European villains in contemporary U.S.-American and British backwoods horror. Said villains do not only draw from rich Cold War traditions but also from genre conventions established during the past fifty years. Alfred Hitchcock's groundbreaking *Psycho* paved the way for the splatter- and slasher-era of the 70s and 80s which, in turn, shaped the backwoods sub-genre.

The backwoods formula is best exemplified by the genre's promethean movie, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974): cut off the country's profitable economy, monstrous hillbillies inhabiting the rural South of the United States slaughter and devour urban dwellers. The backwoods genre revolves around the clash between center and periphery. In recent horror movies from the United States and Great Britain, such as Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) and Christopher Smith's *Severance* (2006), Eastern Europe serves as a global backwoods, a periphery opposed to the Western center. Accordingly,

Eastern Europeans are depicted as slaughtering and – both figuratively and literally – devouring inhabitants of the Western center.

Hooper's *Chainsaw Massacre* has to be read as a critical comment on U.S. politics of the 70s and the shattered state of the nation. It draws attention to the fact that there is no homogenous Us. The national community does not exist, but is divided into binary pairs via a process originating from the center. In contrast, the global backwoods movies of the 21st century mainly depict the periphery as the source of the divide between East and West. We did not let Them down; They just did not adapt to Us. Significantly, in this difference lie the residues of ancient formulas of Eastern European evil.

When the U.S.-American film industry took control of the international film market during World War I, it almost immediately conventionalized the depiction of Eastern Europeans as villains. The formulas applied date back at least to the 19th century. During the early Cold War in the 1950s, Hollywood – protected, supported, and directed by the U.S. government – turned these formulas into a strong cinematic tradition. The resulting movies constructed the United States as a stronghold of good, binary opposed to evil Eastern Europe. When the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Cold War ended in 1989, the nation was suddenly lacking its quintessential Other. However, Hollywood continued to denigrate Eastern Europeans on screen and once again (re)produced them as binary opponents after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Allied in the War on Terror, the United States and Great Britain depend on a known image of the Other. The countries' respective film industries have provided this image since the onset of the new millennium. Hence, Eastern Europeans are still depicted as barbaric, backward, and belligerent.

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Abstract

The constantly pejorative depiction of Eastern Europeans in contemporary U.S.-American and British cinema suggests that the respective film industries reproduce and naturalize a dichotomous order in which Eastern Europe is stigmatized as the evil Other. In the process, the West obtains a privileged position. The United States and Great Britain construct themselves in binary opposition to a negative image of Eastern Europe. They project their own flaws onto the Other which thus becomes irredeemably connoted with a plethora of negative characteristics. The latter include, to name but a few, barbarism, backwardness, and belligerence.

More than 20 years have passed since the end of the Cold War – commonly associated with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – but the major Western film industries still depict Eastern Europe as a binary opponent. The persistence of said dichotomy results from strong cinematic formulas and recent geopolitical developments. On the one hand, Hollywood's notorious wave of anti-Soviet propaganda movies in the 50s deeply implanted the Eastern European villain in U.S.-American and British cinema tradition. On the other hand, the United States and Great Britain currently wage a global war on terror. Their adversaries operate internationally, are basically indeterminable from common citizens, and – ambiguously – prove hard to grasp. It is a guerilla conflict, and its outcome cannot be predicted. In this context, Eastern European villains provide a known Other which, as history has shown, can be defeated. Eastern European villains remind Us of the virtues of Western democracies and the need to protect them.

In my diploma thesis, I analyzed the roots of the formulaic Eastern European villain in Western cinema and its manifestation in the Hollywood sci-fi/horror genre of the 50s. Moreover, I showed that the depiction of Eastern European villains in contemporary U.S.-American and British cinema only slightly diverts from the original formulas. Finally, I revealed Western cinema's trend towards a global backwoods genre which constructs Eastern Europe as an uncivilized, parasitic hinterland within the capitalist world order.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Das U.S.-amerikanische und britische Kino der Gegenwart besticht durch die starke Präsenz osteuropäischer Bösewichte und die stetig negative Darstellung von Osteuropäern im Allgemeinen. Dies deutet darauf hin, dass die Filmindustrien der betreffenden Nationen Osteuropa bewusst als binären Gegensatz zur propagierten freien, westlichen Welt konstruieren. Dadurch nehmen die U.S.A. und Großbritannien eine privilegierte Position ein; sie definieren sich über gewisse Makeln, die, als unzivilisiert, undemokratisch, und archaisch zurückgewiesen, auf Osteuropa projiziert werden. Osteuropa steht in Folge für Barbarei, Rückständigkeit, und Kriegstreiberei.

Dass die beiden größten Vertreter des westlichen Kinos selbst mehr als 20 Jahre nach dem Berliner Mauerfall und dem damit assoziierten Ende des Kalten Krieges Osteuropa immer noch als binären Widersacher darstellen, liegt zum einen in starren Kinotraditionen, zum anderen in jüngsten geopolitischen Entwicklungen begründet. Im Hollywood der 50er verankerte die berüchtigte Welle an anti-sowjetischen Propagandafilmen den osteuropäischen Bösewicht dauerhaft im Fundament des westlichen Kinos. Letzteres wurde und wird im 21. Jahrhundert vom globalen Krieg gegen den Terror geprägt, in dem die Vereinigten Staaten und Großbritannien einem international agierenden, praktisch profillosen, und – im doppelten Wortsinn – schwer fassbaren Gegner gegenüber stehen. In einem Guerillakrieg von ungewissem Ausgang, der an der Heimatfront entschieden wird, fungieren die osteuropäischen Kino-Bösewichte als bekannte und bezwingbar geltende Gegner, als greifbares Fremdes, das die Tugenden der westlichen Demokratien und die Notwendigkeit ihrer Verteidigung klar und deutlich hervor streicht.

In meiner Diplomarbeit habe ich die Ursprünge der Formeln zur cineastischen Darstellung des osteuropäischen Bösen aufgezeigt und diese anhand von Beispielen aus dem Hollywood Sci-fi/Horror-Genre der 50er eingehend analysiert. Des weiteren habe ich erwiesen, dass die Darstellung osteuropäischer Bösewichte im U.S.-amerikanischen und britischen Kino des 21. Jahrhunderts nur minimal von diesen Formeln abweicht. Abschließend habe ich gezeigt, dass in besagtem Kino auch der Trend zu einem globalen Backwoods-Genre erkennbar ist, in dem Osteuropa als unzivilisiertes, parasitäres Hinterland der kapitalistischen Weltordnung konstruiert wird.

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