The Cultural Life of James Bond

Verheul, Jaap

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Verheul, Jaap.
The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007.
Amsterdam University Press, 2020.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/78229.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/78229

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2726980
2. A Socialist 007: East European Spy Dramas in the Early James Bond Era

Mikołaj Kunicki

Abstract
If the James Bond films were officially unavailable to East European audiences until 1989, the Eastern Bloc did not escape the global reach of the Bond phenomenon. East European spy dramas began to appear during the late 1960s, and they were mostly made for television and not all that distant in spirit from the Bond films. This chapter examines three television series: More Than Life at Stake (1967-1968) from Poland, The Invisible Gun Sight (1973-1979) from the German Democratic Republic, and Seventeen Moments of Spring (1972) from the Soviet Union. While these tales of espionage evince the projections of the west in the east during the Cold War, they reveal foremost the powerful appeal of consumerism behind the Iron Curtain.

Keywords: James Bond; East European spy series; Cold War; transnational film and television; Socialist consumerism

Until 1989, the Eon James Bond film series was officially unavailable to Eastern European cinema audiences. The only exception was former Yugoslavia, which saw the release of Diamonds Are Forever (UK: Guy Hamilton, 1973) in 1973. Yet, Central and Eastern Europe did not escape the global phenomenon of the Bond films. By the mid-1980s, Polish, Hungarian and Yugoslav VHS markets, both underground and legal, boasted bootlegged Bond videos in circulation. Some East German viewers could watch West German TV channels which occasionally broadcast the adventures of 007; others, particularly educated urbanites with exposure to Western popular culture, were no strangers to Bond, though not necessarily his fans. More importantly, East European filmmakers and policymakers were aware of

DOI 10.5117/9789462982185_CH02
the Bond phenomenon. Directors, script writers, film critics and cultural *apparatchiks* enjoyed access to the adaptations of Ian Fleming’s novels during their visits to the West and at closed screenings in film schools and studios. However, the absence of 007 on East European movie screens meant that national film industries were not under strong pressure to come up with direct cinematic responses. Competing with the world of luxury, excess, and explicit sexuality that the Bond films projected was, in any case, out of question. Considering censorship, and the shabby, everyday reality of the People’s Democracies, such rivalry was ideologically unacceptable and potentially laughable. Significantly, the first East European response to the Bond series was a spy thriller spoof, *Konec agenta W4C prostřednictvím psa pana Foustky* (*The End of Agent W4C*; Czechoslovakia: Václav Vorliček, 1967) by Václav Vorliček, shot in Czechoslovakia during the period of cultural liberalization prior to the Prague Spring of 1968.

During the late 1960s and early ’70s, new spy dramas, made mostly for television and not all that distant in spirit from Bond, appeared across the Soviet Bloc. This chapter examines three television series: *Stawka większa niż życie* (*More Than Life at Stake*; Poland: Janusz Morgenstern and Andrzej Konic, 1967-1968) from Poland, *Semnadsat’ mnogoveniy vesny* (*Seventeen Moments of Spring*; Soviet Union: Tatyana Lioznova, 1972) from the Soviet Union, and *Das unsichtbare Visier* (*The Invisible Gun Sight*; GDR: Peter Hagen, 1973-1979) from the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Since their release, all three series have acquired a cult status and remain, to this day, some of the most successful productions in their respective countries, while their protagonists—Captain Hans Kloss (Stanisław Mikulski), Werner Bredebusch (Armin Mueller-Stahl) and Max Otto von Stirlitz (Viacheslav Tikhonov), respectively—have frequently been referred to as the Polish, East German, and Soviet Bonds. Not only do such generalizations diminish the three series and preclude their significance, they also ignore their historical and political contexts and cultural impact as well as the convoluted relationship between East European Socialist spy dramas and Western popular culture.

*More Than Life at Stake* was truly pioneering, especially if we consider the fact that most of its characters were Germans and fully-fledged figures rather than cartoons; no small feat in Władysław Gomułka’s Poland (1956-1970), where Germanophobia constituted one of the ideological pillars of the regime and where party propaganda projected the Federal Republic of Germany as a revanchist and Nazi-influenced state. *Seventeen Moments of Spring* followed this trend, “humanizing” Nazi functionaries and historical figures that inhabited the Soviet drama. As Stephen Lovell (2013, 314) observes, “It is hard to picture a British film of the 1970s, or even of the 2000s, making [Heinrich]
Himmler, [Heinrich] Müller, and [Walter] Schellenberg so glamorous and sympathetic.” The laborious and ascetic Stirlitz was “anti-Bond,” whereas the Stasi agent Bredebusch was the East German response to the James Bond phenomenon. I argue that, while these tales evince the projections of the West in the East during the height of the Cold War, they reveal foremost the powerful appeal of consumerism behind the Iron Curtain. This is where I see the main link between these East European spy films and James Bond. With respect to differences, of crucial importance is the centrality of the experience of the Second World War in the founding myth of the People’s Democracies: the struggle against Fascism. More Than Life at Stake and Seventeen Moments of Spring are World War II tales whereas Das unsichtbare Visier takes off in 1950 with the return of German prisoners of war from the Soviet Union. While the Polish series is a spy fairy tale, the Soviet and East German productions have a decisively anti-Western, Cold War flavor. In this regard, they differ greatly from the Bond movies, which toned down the anti-Communism of Ian Fleming’s source novels.

Another difference concerns the double lives of the series’ protagonists. While James Bond does not hide his identity—in fact, he emanates a powerful air of self-importance—Kloss, Stirlitz and Bredebusch are impostors, moles planted in enemy forces. Not only does the risk of unmasking their identity add more tension, it also forces them to make compromises which are necessary to avoid suspicion about their Fascist and anti-Communist credentials. While 007 operates openly, the three eastern spies are employees of the regimes they try to topple or weaken.

Finally, the three series testify to the more nuanced status of Socialist television than the western stereotype of the medium as a tool of party propaganda. As Anikó Imre (2016, 8–9) argues, Communist regimes were initially mystified by the political, social, and cultural potential of the new medium and developed central programming through the adoption of models used by West European broadcasters. By the end of the first decade of its existence—that is, the late 1960s—Socialist TV had become a genuine mass medium, “a medium of leisure” which absorbed elements of “bourgeois,” light entertainment. The lower cultural status of television opened the small screen to alternative, novel forms. I argue that, on the one hand, spy television dramas, which East Europeans initially considered inferior to feature films, were an “adequate” response to the James Bond film series, which were deemed “unserious:” the opposite of artistic and socially and politically engaged cinema. On the other hand, both filmmakers and Communist politicians quickly grasped the opportunity of 007’s global appeal to reach mass audiences.
However, I do not endorse Imre’s (2016, 9) observation that television’s low prestige “kept away writers and actors” from associating with the new medium. In fact, the three dramas discussed in this chapter cast some of the most renowned actors of their respective countries. Furthermore, the three television series demonstrated the resourcefulness, innovation, and craft of Polish, Soviet and East German television productions during the allegedly dull and unimaginative years of the late Władysław Gomułka (Poland, 1956-1970), the mature Leonid Brezhnev (Soviet Union, 1964-1982) and the early Erich Honecker (German Democratic Republic, 1971-1989), respectively. In her seminal study on the history of Soviet television, Christine E. Evans (2016) successfully dispels the view that the Brezhnev era constituted a “zastoi” (“stagnation”) in Soviet popular culture. My chapter confirms this observation and provides further evidence on the availability of high-end film and television under deep state Socialism.

Captain Kloss: Empowerment, Impunity, and Indulgence in Nazi Germany and Gomułka’s Poland

Władysław Gomułka (1905-1982), the longest serving Communist leader in People’s Poland, came to power in October 1956, riding the wave of de-Stalinization. Gomułka promoted the Polish road to Socialism that, instead of fully copying the Soviet model, considered such national specificities as the country’s ethnic and religious homogeneity, the powerful position of the Catholic Church, and the predominantly private ownership of Polish agriculture. Gomułka’s National Communism projected People’s Poland as the apogee of nation-building and relied on ethnocentric, nationalist constructs of Germanophobia and, particularly in the late 1960s, anti-Semitism. The October reforms completed the abandonment of the doctrine of Socialist Realism, which greatly affected the arts. The late 1950s saw the rise of the Polish School, which established Poland on the world’s cinematic map.

The problem for the regime was that the Polish auteurs associated with this artistic formation—Andrzej Wajda and Andrzej Munk—were more interested in reflecting on the brutalized, politically confused, and demoralized war generation than in legitimizing the party state. Gomułka’s resentment of “elitist” cinema led to a crackdown on the Polish School, which was condemned as pessimistic and anti-heroic in the notorious 1960 resolution of the Central Committee Secretariat of the Party (Haltof 2008, 103). The push for popular cinema received the support of Gomułka, who appealed for “cultural entertainment serving relaxation [and] meeting the
cultural needs of millions of working people” (Gębicka 1994, 36, 38). The Polish leader lamented the overproduction of films made by, and addressed to, the intelligentsia as well as the absence of such pictures as *High Noon* (USA: Fred Zinnemann, 1952) (Kunicki 2017, 158).

This support for a politically acceptable popular culture also bolstered nascent Polish television, which began broadcasting Western TV series such as *Dr. Kildare* (USA: 1961-1966), *The Saint* (UK: 1963-1969), and *Bonanza* (USA: 1959-1973). As for domestic shows, one of the trademarks of Polish TV was *Teatr Sensacji “Kobra”* (*The Thriller Theatre “Cobra”*), which began broadcasting live performances of plays in 1956. Aired on Thursdays at 8:00 pm, after the main television news, *Kobra* was a smash hit that familiarized Polish audiences with Western and Polish authors of detective stories and thrillers. In 1965, Illa Genachow, who oversaw *Kobra*, connected the two script writers, Zbigniew Safjan and Andrzej Szypulski, who, teaming up under the pen name of Andrzej Zbych, wrote episodes for a new play, *More Than Life at Stake*, about Stanisław Kolicki, a Polish spy working in the *Abwehr* (the German military intelligence) during World War II (Giza 2005, 163).

The play was so popular that two years later, Janusz Morgenstern and Andrzej Konic began shooting the film adaptation under the same title. Both directors complemented each other: Morgenstern, one of the most recognizable faces of 1960s Polish cinema, easily moved between genre and art cinema, while Konic had worked as a full-time director on television shows since 1960. By 1968, they directed eighteen one-hour long episodes, which were broadcast from July 1967 until October 1969. *More Than Life at Stake* quickly gathered a mass audience, emptying the streets of Polish cities during its emission and transforming its lead actor, Stanisław Mikulski, into a national celebrity. Twelve episodes were also shown in cinemas in six two-episode segments. The series was immediately exported to the GDR, Hungary and Sweden, where it enjoyed critical acclaim and won numerous television awards. In Poland, it was followed by a comic book.

The plot follows the exciting and unbelievable war tales of Stanisław Kolicki, the Soviet and Polish superspy planted in the *Abwehr* following his escape from Germany to the Soviet Union shortly before the Nazi Invasion of June 1941. A patriotic Pole from north-western Poland and a student of the Danzig Politechnical University, Kolicki speaks perfect German and has Aryan looks (Mikulski, who was cast in the role, was tall, slim, and dark blond). Kolicki’s defection to the Soviet side coincides with the Soviet People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs’ (NKVD) arrest of the hard-boiled Nazi agent Hans Kloss. Due to a striking physical semblance, Kolicki impersonates
Kloss and is placed in the German military intelligence. The audience is witness to his adventures in occupied Europe and the Third Reich, from Poland to France, from Berlin to Istanbul. Kloss’s missions include blowing up a factory, obtaining information about Nazi fortifications in France, investigating betrayals in allied spy networks, liquidating double agents, and identifying Nazi war criminals. Kloss’ comrades include members of resistance movements, especially Communists, German anti-Fascists and, following an initial confrontation or competition, British intelligence agents.

Although Kloss’s bosses are in Moscow, he often refers to himself as an officer from the Polish intelligence, which strengthens his patriotic credentials but also puzzled some members of the Polish Commission of Film Approval (Komisje Kolaudacyjnej) that evaluated films and television series and mandated their distribution. During the assessment of Episode 4, “Café Rose” (1968), which takes place in Istanbul, Colonel Jerzy Gonczarski, editor in chief of the Polish Army’s daily Żołnierz Wolności, expressed doubts whether the Polish Communist underground could afford sending its agent to the shores of the Bosphorus. Other assessors quickly reminded Gonczarski that it was the Abwehr that dispatched Kloss and that he spied for the Soviets but collaborated with Western Allies (Filmoteka Narodowa, A-346 poz. 3).

It is surprising how quickly members of the Commission gave up on conducting a reality check and started to ignore the implausibility of some of the content of the series. Writer and film director Tadeusz Konwicki set the tone when he observed that More Than Life at Stake followed the conventions set up by western productions such as the James Bond franchise, and should therefore not be judged by the standards that applied to “realistic films.” In fact, Konwicki advocated for more boldness in showing Kloss’s incredible adventures because only then the series could rival the western spy thrillers broadcast by Polish TV and dominate the market for such productions in the Soviet Bloc. For the boss of Polish cinema, Tadeusz Zaorski, the story of Kloss delivered an optimistic message: Poles were not just victims but could successfully fight the Nazis as well (Filmoteka Narodowa, A-216 poz. 147).

In this respect, Captain Kloss is the opposite of the tragic or conflicted protagonist of the war films delivered by the auteurs of the Polish School. His world is populated by impeccably dressed men in Nazi uniforms who drink cognac, smoke Habana cigars, drive spacious cars, and spend their

---

1 The Commission was led by the chair of the Chief Board of Cinematography (Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii) and populated by representatives of the film industry, party officials in charge of culture and propaganda, censors, movie critics, and directors and script writers of assessed films.
evenings with beautiful women in restaurants, night clubs, and at parties. Thus, its setting in the Third Reich allows the series to mimic the glamour of the early James Bond films. While referring to Kloss’s milieu, film critic and script writer Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz (1970, 163) coined the term “elegant war zone” (“elegancka strefa wojny”), adding that “Europe conquered by Hitler reveals itself not as the world bound by barbed wire, but as a vast space available for comfortable travels of a (victorious) German officer, Hans Kloss.” What Toeplitz did not want to see or reveal was that the aesthetics of luxury and glamour which More Than Life at Stake projects were foremost relevant for contemporary Polish audiences that watched the series twenty years after the end of the Second World War. Most of the citizens of the People's Poland under Gomułka's stringent rule could only dream about international travel, elegant cars, and polite, clean shaven waiters serving French wine and cognac.

Like 007, Kloss encounters attractive women, including refined and mysterious female spies, femmes fatales, and naïve starlets, all played by popular Polish actresses. Yet, with two exceptions, Major Hanna Bösel in the episode “A Double Nelson” (1968) and Edyta Lausch in the episode “Edyta” (1967), Kloss does not let a flirtation turn into a sexual encounter. The fact that most of women he meets are either German—which precludes any romantic interest on behalf of a Polish patriot—or resistance activists—who have more pressing duties to perform—testifies to the rather puritanical spirit of Polish television under Gomułka. At the same time, the sexist spirit of the spy films of the 1960s mandated that Kloss should have a new female partner in crime in each episode. “I do not like when women play with guns”, Kloss tells Hanna Bösel. “German women look good with guns”, Hanna replies.

It is the portrayal of the Germans which constituted the ground-breaking novelty the series brought to Poland and the Soviet Bloc. Until that moment, Polish cinema, so fixated on the Second World War, portrayed Germans and Nazis as cruel killers, sadists, or automatons reminiscent of the Hollywood flicks of the 1940s. But in More Than Life at Stake, Kloss mingles with Germans and impersonates a German. It is significant that even his Polish collaborators refer to him as “Janek,” the exact translation of Hans. The Germans that surround Kloss are prone to intrigues and crimes but also capable of sentimentality and decency. Of particular importance is the distinction between the Wehrmacht and the SS. While army officers are opportunists or doomed followers of the Prussian military tradition, SS and Gestapo functionaries are fanatical National Socialists, war criminals, and social upstarts. In this respect, the series borrowed Nazi stereotypes
from West European and Hollywood movies that often juxtaposed noble Wehrmacht officers with sadistic SS officials. Stefan Olszowski, the propaganda chief of the Party in the late 1960s, was frankly alarmed by what he perceived as the division between the “good Germans” from the Abwehr and the despicable SS officers. He was immediately countered by Stanisław Stefański from the Committee of Radio and Television, who defended the need for differences in the portrayal of the two organizations; after all, it was unfathomable that Kloss would wear a Gestapo uniform (Filmoteka Narodowa, A-346 poz. 4).

Indeed, SS membership was indicative of war crimes. For Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, it was clear that Kloss could never be an SS-officer because this would require some degree of complicity. Employment in the Abwehr, meanwhile, provides our hero with institutional protection and immunity. While Kloss’s collaborators or fellow spies are occasionally killed, wounded, or tortured, he acts with complete impunity. According to Toeplitz (1970, 162, 166-167), this solution removed any sense of tragedy from the adventures of Kloss and reduced the element of danger. Kloss’s chief antagonist is Hermann Brunner (Emil Karewicz), an SS officer. Not particularly bright or fanatical, Brunner often provides a comic relief and is a likable villain.

“I cannot look at a beaten man,” Brunner muses over Kloss knocking down a Gestapo agent, “If someone else is beating.”

Fifty years after its release, More Than Life at Stake may irritate by its predictability, theatrical acting, and technical shortages, but it continues to attract mass audiences, mostly due to the presence of some of the most popular Polish actors of their time. One disconcerting aspect concerns the period of the series’ production and initial release, the years 1967-1968, which saw the anti-Semitic campaign and the crackdown on students and the liberal intelligentsia. It is true that the tale of Kloss contains only one veiled reference to the Holocaust (the episode “Edyta”). However, the series lacked any martyrologic subplots and should not be treated as part of the xenophobic and anti-intellectual drive of Gomułka’s leadership.

For Mikulski, the role in More Than Life at Stake dominated the rest of his acting career—though he also enjoyed popularity in a string of popular Polish, Soviet, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak movies and television shows.² The series even survived de-Communization after it was briefly removed from television screens on charges of historical inaccuracies and Communist propaganda. Above all, More Than Life at Stake made a significant impact

² Popular in the Soviet Union, Mikulski held the position of director of the Polish Cultural and Information Centre in Moscow from 1988 to 1990.
on spy dramas across the Soviet Bloc by lifting pre-existing taboos on the portrayal of Germans under Hitler and by depicting a glamorous lifestyle, spirit of adventure, and escape from martyrdom.

**Thinking and Sharing with Stirlitz: The Multiple Lives of Seventeen Moments of Spring**

“Stirlitz had a thought,” a joke begins. “He liked it, so he had another one.” Based on the novels by Iulian Semenov, Tatyana Lioznova’s iconic spy series *Seventeen Moments of Spring* inspired numerous examples of deadpan humor that featured its protagonist, Soviet spy Colonel Maksim Isaev, better known as *Standartenführer* Otto von Stirlitz. The plot narrates Stirlitz’s efforts to obstruct and expose the secret peace negotiations between Heinrich Himmler’s emissaries and US representatives in February and March 1945. In her study on Soviet Central television during the Brezhnev years, Christine E. Evans (2016, 180) suggests that the creators of this multifaceted film aimed at engaging Soviet audiences in the active participation in Stirlitz’s tale. Viewers wrote letters to the Soviet Central Television in support of the series and Stirlitz, while others showed their involvement by crafting “Stirlitz” jokes, a major subgenre of late Soviet humor.

I suggest that the abovementioned joke accurately captures the essence of the Soviet spy drama, which opposes the James Bond films and their shootouts, fist fights, car chases, and sexual promiscuity. Throughout the twelve-episode and fourteen-hour long series, Stirlitz assassinates one agent-provocateur, smashes a bottle of cognac on the head of a *Gestapo* officer, refuses to flirt with a beautiful girl and instead chooses to play chess with a more senior female. Most of the time, he seats in the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) and contemplates. The message of the series is spelled out in the first episode by the character of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Chief of the RSHA. While scolding one of his officers who volunteers to be send to the front, Kaltenbrunner says, “It’s easy to die for the Fatherland and our Führer on the frontline. It is much more difficult to work here [...] wiping filth out. [...] It takes brains, Kruger, a lot of brains!” The series is not about dynamic action but about a slow-burning intrigue with a rational, laborious, and ascetic hero at its center. The intelligent Stirlitz must face equally clever opponents such as Kaltenbrunner and Heinrich Müller, Chief of the *Gestapo*, portrayed memorably by Leonid Bronevoy. Lovell (2013, 316) even goes as far as to suggest that “Stirlitz’s stream of thought is where the main action of *Seventeen Moments* takes place. There are two Stirlitzes: his face and body
are that of Viacheslav Tikhonov, his soul lies in the interior monologues of Efim Kopelian’s voice-over.” And yet, the “anti-action” series was a stunning commercial and critical success, which has endured the collapse of the Soviet Union and continues to attract a mass following in present-day Russia.

Both Lovell and Evans agree that the series benefited from the introduction of a new genre, the fictional TV miniseries, in the late 1960s and early ’70s. There were two reasons for this intervention. Like its western counterparts, Soviet Central Television used TV series to tackle “the problem of obtaining films for TV broadcast” (Evans 2016, 154-55). Second, following the end of the Thaw and, especially, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Brezhnev regime aimed to reestablish a rapport with society and instill a national culture which would reinvigorate Soviet patriotism and imperial identity. Given the status of television as a mass medium, this “culture” ought to be “largely televisual” (Lovell 2013, 317). New historical miniseries, which usually focused on the Russian Civil War or World War II (referred to as the Great Patriotic War in Russia), were often aired each evening, requiring viewers to fully commit themselves for significant periods of time in order to avoid missing out on a new episode (Evans 2016, 156).

Although some of these films proved successful, none of them achieved a success comparable to Seventeen Moments. Lioznova’s series blends several characteristics of multiple genres: a political thriller, which claims to be based on thorough historical research, psychological drama, and para-documentary. Historical and fictitious figures, including Stirlitz, are often introduced with a brief audio-visual file, which assesses their career in the NSDAP and SS and lists racial profiles and personal characteristics. Another way of articulating “real” history is the insertion of Soviet wartime newsreels documenting the progress of the Red Army in the liberation of Europe, exposing Nazi crimes and providing a reality check for the claims made by Nazi leaders on the screen. Evans (2016, 165) rightly claims that the series made viewers into investigators and spiritual co-authors of the series. The sense of engagement in Stirlitz’s actions must have been thrilling. But so was the look at the Nazi elite portrayed in the series. Germans were fully-fledged characters, resourceful, intelligent, and even sympathetic. But unlike Kloss in More Than Life at Stake, the main protagonist and nearly all characters around him wore SS uniforms. How could this humanization of the most demonic enemy occur? The documents from the meeting of the arts council of Maksim Gor’kii Film Studio, where Seventeen Moments of Spring was filmed, testify that at least one speaker objected to depicting the Nazis as idiots because this “undermined the achievements of Soviet counterintelligence” (Lovell 2013, 316).
This is a productive reading because it testifies to Stirlitz's mental powers. Yet, I posit that there is also another explanation for this phenomenon: Nazis kept fascinating Russians and East Europeans. Not only did the war bring incredible loss and destruction to the region on a much greater scale than in Western Europe, it also led to the establishment of the Soviet empire. During the first two post-war decades, Soviet propaganda kept the dangers of Nazism alive by emphasizing German revanchism as well as the continuities between the Third Reich and the German Federal Republic. Used as a tool for mass mobilization and legitimization, Germanophobia and anti-Fascism, too, made a significant cultural impact. Nazi leaders, including Adolf Hitler, Joseph Goebbels and Hermann Göring had already been portrayed in Mikhail Chiaureli’s *The Fall of Berlin* (Soviet Union: Mikhail Chiaureli, 1949), albeit as demonic and cartoonish figures. While the Polish producers of the Kloss series revealed a fascination with “Nazi glamour” (uniforms, weapons, and power), Lioznova and Semenov wanted to interrogate the “soul” and “mindset” of National Socialism.

Soviet television producers and directors knew that some viewers and actors objected to the humanization of Nazi characters. Stirlitz’s past in the SS and SD is not fully revealed in the series. Was he useful for the SS apparatus? Clearly, acquiring the rank of *Standartenführer* (the equivalent of army colonel) and free access to Walter Schellenberg and Martin Bormann required some merits in the service of the SS. We only learn of Stirlitz’s prior engagements off-camera, through the testimonies of other characters: Eismann, an ardent National Socialist, refers to Stirlitz’s exemplary service in Spain during the Civil War; Kruger mentions Stirlitz in the failed blowing up of the historical city of Krakow in Poland in 1945. Yet, these two examples only indicate two assignments our hero used to frustrate the rise of Fascism and its war atrocities. Again, viewers are asked to conduct their own investigation of Stirlitz by using the clues offered by his flashbacks to the 1930s. One thing we know for sure is that Stirlitz has been in Germany for so long that he refers to it as “home.” On the other hand, while reflecting on his acts and service, which will ultimately benefit the German people, he bitterly adds, “I am doing just their job for them.” It is “The Soviet Man’s Burden.” In this moment, reinforced by Soviet newsreels rejoicing the liberation of Hungary and other East European states, we can sense Soviet hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe.

The question is whether *Seventeen Moments* conveys any meaningful description of life in the Third Reich. When it comes to the Nazi security

---

3 This was a reference to another TV film based on Iulian Semenov’s prose, *Mayor Vikhr* (Soviet Union: *Major Whirlwind*, 1967), directed by Yevgeny Tashkov.
apparatus, it works well—in fact, too well for the “institutional anarchy” which characterized Hitler’s Germany. The picture of the disciplined and competent SD may have more in common with the Soviet KGB. Since the narrative takes place mostly in Berlin (where it was shot on location), we see some evidence of allied bombing, but the city is mostly quiet and orderly. The anti-Fascist resistance networks are limited to Communists who cooperate with Stirlitz, to religiously motivated dissidents like a Catholic pacifist priest named Schlag, who is rescued and recruited by our hero, and to lonely middle-class figures. There is no reference to the July 20, 1944 plot to kill Adolf Hitler and dispose of the Nazi government. As far as the everyday is concerned, we can see the pleasures of middle-class life in the west. Stirlitz’s occupies a spacious villa with a garden, owns a car, and enjoys his casual pint of beer or glass of cognac in The Elephant Inn, where he can also play chess with the elderly Frau Zaurich. Bits of glamour are particularly visible in Bern (filmed on location in Riga, Latvia): quiet and clean streets, charming hotels with well-stocked bars, and elegant guests dressed in the fashion of the 1960s. Swiss Alps (filmed on location in the Soviet Republic of Georgia) harmoniously coexist with good roads and trains that connect Switzerland and Germany. While driving with Schlag across the mountains, Stirlitz allows himself a moment of relaxation, listening on the radio to Edith Piaf’s “Non, je ne regrette rien.”

These anachronisms reinforce the contemporary spirit and appeal of Seventeen Moments, moving it toward the conflict Soviet audiences knew: the Cold War. It is worth mentioning that Evans’ “spiritual co-authors” of the series include the KGB. Iurii Andropov, the KGB boss, had developed a close relationship with Iulian Semenov in the 1960s. He and his deputy Semen Tvisgun took a great interest in the series and provided KGB consultants (Lovell 2013, 309). Anti-Americanism is at the very center of the film because it is Stirlitz’s mission to block a separate peace agreement, which would allow the Germans to redirect their armies from the western front against the Red Army. Operation Sunrise, the secret talks between US diplomat Allen Dulles and SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Wolff to negotiate a surrender of Nazi forces in Italy, did take place in late winter and early spring of 1945, producing friction between Western Allies and the Soviets. The film magnifies its significance. The scene of the negotiations between Dulles and Wolff features a group of CIA operatives dressed in contemporary, 1960s fashion (white shirts and ties, the classic look of US officials). Soon thereafter, we see Soviet newsreels showing the victories of the Red Army. While the Soviets fight, Americans are negotiating with the enemy. It is all about the ensuing Cold War. “Nothing was over,” Kopelian’s voice-over ruminates in the epilogue. “Everything was just beginning.”
Spying on Fascists While Dancing in Buenos Aires: The Exotic Adventures of a Stasi Spy in Das unsichtbare Visier

Peter Hagen’s Das unsichtbare Visier begins where Seventeen Moments of Spring ends, with the outbreak of the Cold War. The year is 1950. Among the group of German prisoners of war returning from Russia to the Federal Republic of Germany, we find Lieutenant Achim Detjen (Armin Mueller-Stahl), a former Luftwaffe pilot. However, his real name is Werner Bredebusch. He is a veteran of the National Committee for a Free Germany, an anti-Fascist organization set up by the Soviets after the battle of Stalingrad (1942-1943), and a Stasi agent. His mission is to infiltrate a secret network of former Nazi officers and war criminals active in Western Europe and South America. He later joins the Bundeswehr and unmasks various West German and CIA plots to destabilize the German Democratic Republic, launch a new war, and introduce weapons of mass destruction. During his adventures, Bredebusch traverses West Germany, Italy, Portugal, Norway, Argentina, and Paraguay (shot on location in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany). He pilots planes, climbs the walls of castles, rides horses in the South American Pampas, and seduces attractive women.

The attributes of 007 that are missing are Bond’s high-tech gadgets and the criminal masterminds who are set on controlling the world. The latter are replaced by hardened Nazis-turned-capitalist warmongers and American CIA agents. As Thomas Rodgers (2015) correctly observes, “Das Unsichtbare Visier didn’t try very hard to hide its inspiration: like Bond, its opening credits showed a man walking down a rounded corridor, and today its theme song would be clear grounds for a copyright infringement lawsuit.” Bredebusch and his Stasi supervisors are not only the defenders of the GDR but also the guardians of the peace-loving part of the world, and sworn enemies of neo-Fascism, colonialism and US-sponsored authoritarianism. As one East German spectator commented, “James [Bond] fuels wars, Detjen is preventing them” (Haller 2014, 91).

This representation is consistent with GDR propaganda, which equaled Fascism with capitalism and projected the German Federal Republic as the descendent of the Third Reich. To this end, Das unsichtbare Visier emphasizes the claim made by the governing Socialist Unity Party that the East German state was the only legitimate heir and embodiment of German anti-Fascism. As Sebastian Haller (2014, 73) suggests, the series should “be examined as a cultural artefact, which oscillates between the narrative of antifascism and the state-led development of an entertainment and popular culture in the 1970s.” The series vilified the Konrad Adenauer
era (1949-1963), the alleged militarism of the Federal Republic, and the subjugation of West Germany to American imperialism. Bredebusch remained the protagonist of the series for the first nine 75-minute-long episodes shot between 1973 and 1976. Mueller-Stahl was dropped from the series in 1976 due to his protest against the forced expatriation of Wolf Biermann, an East German poet, singer, and dissident. Blacklisted in the GDR, the actor emigrated to West Germany in 1980 (Mueller-Stahl 2014). Ironically, Bredebusch makes his exit from the series while being flown to safety in the GDR at the time of the erection of the Berlin Wall. The remaining seven episodes saw two different main protagonists, stressed the collective effort of the Stasi espionage services, and covered the contemporary period as opposed to the 1950s and early '60s depicted in the first installment. My analysis focuses on the Bredebusch episodes, the series' political background, and the glamour of exoticism that tapped into the needs of the Wall-locked and travel-deprived East German people; a society that was, however, exposed to both the James Bond phenomenon and West German popular culture.

Like Seventeen Moments of Spring, Das unsichtbare vizier was very much the product of a modernized Socialist state television, the cultural policies of the Communist regime, and the cooperation between the security services and the filmmakers’ community. First, GDR television occupied a unique position on the map of the Soviet Bloc as it had to compete with West German TV stations, which could reach most East German viewers. Second, the new Erich Honecker leadership (1971-1989), which abandoned the principle of two German states and one German nation in favor of two separate nations, invested in the mutual reinforcement of ideology and mass entertainment. Shortly after coming to power, Honecker famously complained about the “boredom” evoked by East German television. The answer was the production of shows that would dissuade GDR viewers from watching West German programming but which were nonetheless informed by western standards. Third, the Department of Agitation of the Ministry of State Security was engaged in the production of Das unsichtbare Visier and other spy films and television series as it supplied the DEFA (the state-owned film studio of the GDR) with feedback and consultations. Colonel Günter Halle from the Stasi co-authored the script of seven episodes shot from 1977 to 1979 (Haller 2014, 85-90).

One of the first results of the “television dialogue” between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany was the launching of the police series Polizeiruf 110 (Police Dial 110, 1971—present) in 1971 as the East German response to the West German Tatort (1970—present),
which had premiered in 1970. While answering to the Bond phenomenon, the East Germans had to go beyond the 1960s *Kundschafterfilme* or “reconnaissance” espionage films such as János Veiczi’s *For Eyes Only* (GDR: János Veiczi, 1963), which told the story of an East German spy, Hansen, infiltrating US intelligence and aborting the invasion of the GDR. Hansen was presented as a family man, abstaining from alcohol and other temptations from the western world (Rogers 2015). *Das unsichtbare Visier*, shot by the DEFA film studio—which testified to the prestigious status of the drama—for East German television, would provide an appropriate response to Bond and his world of excess, decadence, and sexual promiscuity. It did so by adding to the sexist aesthetics and colonial nostalgia of the Bond films a familiar, homegrown subculture of pop music hits—*schlager musik*—known for their romantic themes and holiday pleasures, and a taste of exoticism.

The first episode, “*Der Römische Weg*” (“The Roman Path,” 1973), already contains numerous examples of this approach. Bredebusch finds his way to the ODESSA organization, which smuggles Nazi war criminals to South America via a Catholic monastery in Rome. Before this happens, he spends a night in a luxurious house where his caretakers conduct the last verifying test on him. Bredebusch is left with a beautiful former Nazi spy (Annekathrin Bürger) and a bottle of cognac in a bugged bedroom. He dispels any suspicion by drinking heavily and having intercourse with his companion. “There is nothing wrong with this man,” declares the house owner who listens to the couple’s encounter. Landing in Argentina, Bredebusch reunites with a group of former *Luftwaffe* pilots who, under the command of Colonel Krösing (Wilfried Ortmann), Detjen’s former commanding officer, train the Argentinian air force of Juan Perón. The German officers are partying in a posh club, drinking champagne, and recalling anecdotes from the war service. The scene opens with a long tango piece performed by professional dancers. Suddenly, Bredebusch runs from the table and starts dancing with Carmela Morela (Czech actress and singer Milena Zahrynowská), who appears in blackface. Zahrynowská performs a typical *schlager*, “*Sei ein Mann*” (“Be a Man!”).\(^4\)

In the second episode, “*Das Nest im Urwald*” (“The Nest in the Jungle,” 1973), Bredebusch traverses between Argentina and Paraguay, where he visits a colony of Nazi war criminals who seek to take control of the future.

---

4 Zahrynowská’s makeup is often interpreted as evidence of the amateurism of the East German crew. I see it differently: blackface was commonly used by white performers in British and American dance and music clubs until the 1950s.
Bundeswehr. While the German residents project the image of brutal colonial masters, the Argentinian and Paraguayan gauchos and peasants who Bredebusch encounters are the salt of their land, friendly, hardworking, and frequently engaging in melodic folk dances and songs. The depiction of indigenous people evokes the sentimental portrayals of the natives of the West Indies and other non-Europeans who cohabited the movie screen with 007 and other white protagonists of action films set in “the tropics.” It was also compatible with the image of the “noble savages” that populated Karl May’s westerns and the East German “Indianerfilme,” anti-colonial and ideologically correct American frontier films set in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and produced by the DEFA throughout the 1970s and ’80s. Above all, Bredebusch’s South American friends confirm the popular imagination of the merry, simple, and honest inhabitants of exotic locales promoted by popular literature and travel books; spatially distant peoples that average citizen of the GDR would never encounter. Still, East German viewers could find some consolation in the fact that these inhabitants of the Global South were befriended by a Stasi superspy.

Although laden with propaganda and factual inaccuracies, Das unsichtbare Visier does contain historical subplots that are plausible. Former Luftwaffe pilots and Nazi officers did train Juan Perón’s aviators and acted as military advisors to South American governments. Members of the Roman Catholic Church did offer a haven to Nazi collaborators and war criminals. Some characters depicted in the series have much in common with former Nazis who occupied prominent positions in the Federal Republic and participated in the “alte kameraden” (“old comrades”) networks of the SS and the Wehrmacht. Consider Colonel Krösing, Detjen’s superior, whose story resembles the biography of Colonel Hans-Ulrich Rudel, a Nazi “war hero” and ace pilot who rendered his services to such Latin American dictators as Juan Perón, Augusto Pinochet, and Alfredo Stroessner. But what about the non-Germans? While CIA agent Wilson (Walter Niklaus) dons a thuggish leather jacket and displays the utter cynicism of American imperialists, the French characters in the series are quite sympathetic. The main reason for Bredebusch going underground after his return to West Germany is that the French military investigators genuinely seek to arrest Detjen for war crimes committed in France. French Nazi-hunting journalist Charles André collaborates with Bredenbusch, though this does not prevent Nazi thugs from murdering him. The warm portrayal of the French should not come as a surprise, as General Charles de Gaulle had removed the French army from the NATO-integrated command in 1966, and had expelled US troops from France in 1967.
Subject to constant propaganda and political education, East German audiences were aware of these facts. Yet this does not explain the success of the series, which secured an audience rating of 50 to 60 percent in the GDR (Rogers 2015). I would like to propose several explanations for its widespread appeal. First, the series entered into a dialogue with both the Bond movies and West German productions, enriching them with familiar East German components and conventions. Second, the quality of the production surpassed all previous GDR spy and action television dramas and movies. Third, *Das unsichtbare Visier* was too prestigious to fail as it was the flagship of the revolution in mass entertainment that had been launched by the Honecker regime. Heinz Adamek, the chairman of the East German TV, acknowledged this shift: “A larger variety and a better balance of stories and genres, especially the increase of humorous, adventurous and exciting themes, is an essential task for our authors” (Haller 2014, 87).

**Conclusion**

The three television series discussed in this chapter demonstrate the osmotic relationship between the west and the Soviet Bloc; a relationship that confirmed that the Eastern European Socialist regimes were part of a global network of popular cultural circulation. In his influential article from 2004, György Péteri (2004, 114) proposed that, “Nylon rather than ‘Iron Curtain’ would be the appropriate metaphor to describe what was actually separating the worlds on the two sides of the Cold War front line.” Transparent and technically more advanced than iron and coal (the primary resources for Soviet-style industrial production), nylon captured the nature of the transfer of knowledge, culture, and economy from the west to the east. It also referred to the package of consumer goods sought by populations from the Soviet sphere of influence. It is noteworthy that Péteri borrowed his metaphor from the American sociologist David Riesman’s 1951 study on the “nylon war,” which saw the US literally bombing the Soviet Union with consumer goods so that “the Russian people would not long tolerate masters who gave them tanks and spies instead of vacuum cleaners and beauty parlors” (Péteri 2004, 114-16).

Riesman’s juxtaposition of spies and beauty parlors is highly symbolic and ironic in light of this chapter. I argue that the Polish, Russian, and East German creators and patrons of *More Than Life at Stake*, *Seventeen Moments of Spring*, and *Das unsichtbare Visier* crossed the “Nylon Curtain” in order to
deliver spy stories that took the spectator on a cinematic journey of beauty parlors for political-cosmetic treatment. Milestones in the production of Socialist television, the three series had a limited impact on the “cinematic Cold War”—to use the title of Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood’s (2010) survey of film’s role in the dissemination of American and Soviet ideologies. In Poland, the production of war films dramatically decreased after, firstly, the signing of the Treaty of Warsaw in December 1970, which normalized relations between People’s Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany and recognized the Polish western borders, and, secondly, after the fall of Gomułka in the same month, following the massacre of striking workers on the Baltic Sea coast by the Polish army and security forces. Most of the films and television series produced in the 1970s, during the reign of the less nationalistic and more consumer-oriented Edward Gierek regime (1970-1980), tackled contemporary issues. This was the time of the birth of the “Cinema of Moral Angst,” which engaged in a biting critique of corruption and of a society in crisis. Simultaneously, many TV series focused on Socialist technocrats and the everyday life of young professionals. In 1980, Poland plunged into the socio-political upheaval of the Solidarity Revolution.

While GDR television continued to produce ideologically correct, anti-Fascist action flicks, none of them matched the quality and success of Das unsichtbare Visier. It was West German broadcasters and the less flamboyant Polizeiruf 110 that continued to entertain East German audiences until the Fall of the Wall in 1989. The Soviet television screen, which had the capacity to provide Socialist blockbusters, continued to produce popular espionage series, among them the critically acclaimed Cold War thriller TASS upolnomochen zayavit (Tass is Authorized to Declare; Soviet Union: Vladimir Fokin, 1984), which was based on another Iulian Semenov spy novel and starred Tikhonov, the lead actor of Seventeen Moments. Yet the miniseries was released shortly before the ascent of Perestroika, which saw the elimination of anti-American movies. Furthermore, the aggressive anti-Communism and militarism of the Reagan-era produced anti-Soviet films which had little in common with the relatively subtle Socialist espionage flicks—Hollywood vehicles such as Red Dawn (USA: John Milius, 1984) and the Rambo film series (USA: Ted Kotcheff et al., 1982-1988) were truly loathed in the Soviet Union. “It’s hard to imagine,” the Soviet critic Nikolai Savitsky wrote, “that a viewer with aesthetic tastes could like Rambo II” (Shaw and Youngblood 2010, 57). Soon thereafter, the “Nylon Curtain” ceased to exist.
Works Cited

Unpublished documents

Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Kolaudacyjna, A-346 poz. 3 (April 12, 1968), *Stawka większa niż życie*—“Hotel Excelsior” and “Café Rose”.

Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Kolaudacyjna, A-216 poz. 147 (October 17, 1967), “Wiem kim jesteś” and “Wielka wsypa”.

Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Kolaudacyjna, A-346 poz. 4 (November 18, 1968), “Bez instrukcji” and “Zdrada”.

Primary and secondary sources


Selected Filmography

*Das unsichtbare Visier* (The Invisible Gun Sight, 1973-79, GDR, Dir. Peter Hagen)
*Konec agenta W4C prostřednictvím psa pana Foustky* (The End of Agent W4C, 1967, Czechoslovakia, Dir. Václav Vorlíček)
*Mayor Vikhr* (Major Whirlwind, 1967, USSR, Dir. Yevgeny Tashkov)
*Padenie Berlina* (The Fall of Berlin, 1949, USSR, Dir. Mikhail Chiaureli)
*Semnadsat’ mgnoveniy vesny* (Seventeen Moments of Spring, 1972, USSR, Dir. Tatjana Lioznova)
*Stawka większa niż życie* (More Than Life at Stake, 1967-68, Poland, Dir. Janusz Morgenstern and Andrzej Konic)
*TASS upolnomochen zayavit* (Tass is Authorized to Declare, 1984, USSR, Dir. Vladimir Fokin)

About the Author

Mikołaj Kunicki has been member of the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford since 2013. From 2013 to 2016, he was the director of Programme on Modern Poland and Senior Research Fellow at St Antony’s College. Before coming to Oxford, he taught history at the University of Notre Dame and the University of California, Berkeley. Kunicki received his Ph.D. in History from Stanford University in 2004. He also holds MA degrees from the University of Warsaw, Central European University in Budapest, and School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London. He is the author of *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism and Communism in Twentieth Century Poland* (Ohio University Press, 2012) as well as articles and book chapters on twentieth-century Polish history, cinema, nationalism and contemporary politics.