Based upon a short novel by Graham Greene, the 1949 British-U.S. co-production *The Third Man*, set in postwar four power-occupied Vienna, tells the story of the naive American writer, Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten), who discovers the corrupt activities of his allegedly murdered American friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles), and reluctantly helps the British police officers, Calloway and Paine (Trevor Howard, Bernard Lee), apprehend Lime. Long considered a classic of postwar British cinema, the energetic transnational cultural politics that shaped the film’s production and reception during the early years of the Cold War shed light on a heretofore underemphasized dimension of those politics: the struggle to define and control the role of American economic and entertainment culture in postwar Europe. While the British producers of the film, director Carol Reed and screenwriter Greene, countered accusations of anti-communism—presenting the Russian occupation of Vienna in a negative light, for example—with claims that entertaining audiences was their only goal (as Greene would write: “We had no desire to move people’s political emotions. We wanted to entertain them, to frighten them a little, to make them laugh” [Greene 11]), a closer look at the film’s production history reveals an important subtext that defines the influence of American economic and entertainment culture in terms of infection, corruption and disease rather than, as the U.S. co-producer of the film David O. Selznick would have preferred, as arbiter of democracy, health, economic opportunity and popular culture. Cold War politics were less interesting to the British filmmakers than the cultural politics of America’s influence on and in Europe. How was the metaphor of infection linked to the influence of U.S. culture on postwar Europe and what solutions does the film pose to this peculiar dilemma? How did aspects of the film’s publicity campaign wind up differing dramatically from the premises vis-a-vis the Cold War of the film itself? And how did German-speaking audiences respond to the conceptions of the U.S./Austrian relationship implied by the film and its publicity?
To conceptualize the influence of a particular culture on another in terms of disease and infection implies two things: completely asymmetrical power relationships on the one hand; on the other hand, an antidote, a way to limit the spread of the infection. In its plot, *The Third Man* works with this dynamic very effectively, positing a type of quarantining of Europe as a preliminary antidote to the new cultural influence of the United States. Space has to be placed between the disease and the subject. The influence of American culture is asymmetric and contagious in its nature. European culture must keep a distance, figure out its own role in the new power constellations of the Cold War world.

How is this link between contamination and American culture created in the film? The two U.S. leads play the major role here. Harry Lime, the quintessential American capitalist, comes to Vienna to enrich himself at the expense of the lives of vulnerable European children. He spreads disease and death rather than curing it by engaging in the sale of diluted penicillin, a lucrative business that frees him from the shackles of income tax and the IRS, that is, from responsibility for the well-being of the larger community. Yet his direct influence as a criminal is only a part of his function as ‘disease’ carrier. He also ‘infects’ his friends, Holly Martins and Anna Schmidt, whose search for the absent Harry reveals the extent to which they have been infected by his charm and amorality. Harry’s absence in the film only makes his influence the greater, like disease, he spreads his negative influence invisibly and irrevocably. Harry Lime himself is also ill with ulcers and is running out of medicine. He is himself infected, and his infectedness is reflected in his moral philosophy: that “bloodshed” and “terror” are sources of power, influence and culture.

You know what the fellow said—in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace—and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. (The Third Man)
Health and cleanliness are linked to boredom and the puritanical bourgeois stasis of the cuckoo clock and Swiss culture. (Later, Welles would report that he had been told in no uncertain terms that the cuckoo clock was a German not a Swiss invention).

Harry Lime’s hiding place in the film, the Vienna sewer system, suggests the subterranean and contaminating influence of his presence in the city. During the production of the film, Orson Welles, at heart a puritanical American, was afraid of being contaminated himself, and refused to enter the sewer system for any length of time. Director Carol Reed was forced to reconstruct the sewer in a London studio to accommodate Welles’ inclination toward hypochondria (Shadowing the Third Man). The British Major Calloway, who doggedly pursues Lime, is able to enlist the help of Lime’s friend Holly Martins only after showing him the diseased results of Lime’s business in the local military hospital: the dying children. Once Holly Martins is enlisted in the task of apprehending Lime, Lime’s damned presence in Vienna can be eliminated. Martins shoots his friend in the Vienna sewer.

Holly Martins, the American ‘anti-hero’ in the film, in his search for his American friend and lastly in his apprehension and killing of him, defines his search in terms of the black and white, villain and hero logic of the popular fiction westerns he writes. The moral absolutes this fictional world implies is the world of American popular culture. The film posits both the allure of this culture and its danger for postwar European society. As Holly Martins, the writer of U.S. westerns investigates his friend’s disappearance, he literally leaves pillage in his wake. His indiscrete investigations lead to, among other things, the senseless death of the Viennese porter who originally wished to help him with information. When he meets with the Czech actress Anna in the bar at the Casanova Club, he bellows loudly at a group of Russian soldiers as they enter the establishment. Anna, newly divested of her ‘western papers’ by Major Calloway and the Russian authorities in Vienna, urgently begs Martins to be quiet. Here Martins’ actions threaten Anna with exposure to the Russians. The influence of American popular culture as Martins represents it in his search for his friend has all the characteristics of spreading disease, all the more as Martins’ apparent cluelessness can almost be framed as a type of ‘natural’ or neutral force that infects and destroys the things it touches in the name of moral rectitude (Scholz, From Fidelity to History 28-53).
The character of Anna represents the European view of things in the film. She calls out Harry Lime's tendency to see the world through the black and white constructions of his own fiction rather than through the grey lens of postwar reality. The spread of such "fiction" is akin to the spread of disease, and, in the eyes of Anna Schmidt in particular, an illness she wishes not to contract. The two characters who claim to like Holly Martins' "wild west" stories, Calloway's assistant Sergeant Paine and Baron Kurtz, the co-organizer (with Lime) of the penicillin scheme, are fated to death or imprisonment at the end. Sergeant Paine, one of the most sympathetic European characters in the film, dies of a gunshot wound inflicted by Harry Lime in the chase through the Vienna sewers. The shootout that closes the film mirrors a central feature of western popular fiction and confirms its deadly nature for European audiences.

Holly Martins ultimately threatens to contaminate Europe irrevocably by falling in love with Anna. Anna Schmidt chooses to remain aloof of the moral absolutes that Holly's fictional world implies—her resistance to him reveals the film's consistent emphasis on "resistance to contamination" even to the point where it jeopardizes the implications of its own formula. While Holly Martins will continue to view himself in the role of her rescuer to the very end, the conclusion of the film unmistakably quarantines Holly into a separate world where he can no longer exercise influence over Anna. In the final scene in the Vienna Central Cemetery, the space and distance required to resist exposure to Martins are visually unambiguous. Holly remains at a distance, Anna walks past Holly without eye contact, without an exchange of words.

Anna's rejection of the American Holly Martins also very much reflected the stance of the British and European producers of the film: Carol Reed, author Graham Greene and producer Alexander Korda vis-à-vis the American producer David O. Selznick. Selznick's wish to control the plot development of the film to conform to the romantic melodrama mode, like Martins' pulp western fiction, jeopardized the creative goals of the film's production team: to entertain audiences by establishing a European view on the American influence in Europe. There was no real room for constructive compromise between equal parties, as the postwar parties were entirely unequal. Rather, distance and space needed to be established. Quarantining...
Europe from the influence of U.S. Cold War culture was a prerequisite for creative autonomy and national health.

* * *

How does to publicize a film that sought to question Cold War absolutes within an increasingly hardening Cold War context? In Greene’s original story *The Third Man* and indeed, even in the revised story published after the film’s release, the characters of Holly Martins (Holly Martins in the book) and Harry Lime are first Canadian, then British nationals. The casting of two well-known and popular American actors in the roles of villain and anti-hero in the film created an implied link between the characters’ nationality and their functions in the plot, a link that was not lost on David Selznick. In a memo to his ‘foreign secretary’ Betty Goldsmith, dated October 10, 1948, he wrote:

I certainly am going to insist upon certain basic things on which I spent many, many long hours of wrangling in order to get Reed’s and Greene’s agreement; thus, for instance, the script is written as though England were the sole occupying power in Vienna, with some Russians vaguely in the distance; with an occasional Frenchman wandering around; and with, most important from the standpoint of this criticism, the only Americans being an occasional soldier who apparently is merely part of the British occupying forces, plus the heavy (Lime), plus the hero... and just to make matters worse, the American hero apparently is completely subject to the orders and instructions of the British authorities, and behaves as if there were no Americans whatsoever among the occupying powers, nor any American authority, and indeed as far as this picture is concerned, there is none. It would be little short of disgraceful on our part as Americans if we tolerated this nonsensical handling of the four power occupation of Vienna... I went through this at the greatest length... with Reed and Greene and came hell or high water, I simply will not stand for it in its present form. (Selznick 446)

From the United States Selznick generated such memos, insisting that the
negative implications of U.S. actors playing ambiguous characters in an occupied European city should be offset with an emphasis upon the positive role of the Americans in postwar Europe and their role as the new arbiters of freedom and democracy. Reed and Greene, as they claimed, ignored these memos and refused to allow any of Selznick’s advice to shape the end product. None of Selznick’s suggestions, to give the Americans a greater role in occupied Vienna, to glamorize the lead actress or to rename the film *Night in Vienna* instead of *The Third Man*, became a part of the final film.

* * *

In the following discussion I would like to present two little known on location publicity stills for *The Third Man* that conform to Selznick’s agenda to give Americans more visual presence in Vienna. These stills differed sharply from those that focused upon the (apolitical) entertainment aspects of the film emphasized by the British production team: suspense—for example, Harry Lime in sinister pose—or pathos—Holly Martins gazing longingly at the emotionally inaccessible Anna Schmidt.

In Figure I we see the conception of the American influence as the U.S. producer Selznick would have envisioned it. Joseph Cotten, one of the lead actors contributed to the production by Selznick Studios, passes out C.A.R.E. packages to a grateful and happy group of Viennese children and their parents. C.A.R.E., which originally stood for “Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe” was a consortium of private charity organizations in the United States. Its goal was to deliver food aid to victims of war in Europe (Morris 5-8). The original C.A.R.E. packages were army rations privately purchased and mailed to specific individuals; however, by 1948, the packages began to be generally and generally distributed, for example “to a hungry person in Europe”. Thus, the C.A.R.E. program expanded its mandate and became identified with broad relief efforts worldwide (C.A.R.E. relief agency).

The packages in the still contained an assortment of goods, basic nutritional infrastructure for the preparation of meals such as flour and rice (it's

1 To view Fig. I, see https://www.voogle.com/search?tbm=bks&g=From+Fidelitv+to+l-listory, 37.
Uncle Ben’s rice in the package Cotten is distributing) but also luxury items such as raisins and chocolate, which would certainly explain the smiling faces of the children. These goods are displayed in a row behind the figures on the still. The box contained thirty pounds in all, enough, according to the original function of the C.A.R.E. package as “U.S. army rations packs,” to provide one complete meal for ten soldiers (C.A.R.E. [relief agency]). In Vienna in 1948, the caption of the C.A.R.E. still states: the “food parcels” were distributed to “needy Austrian children” (Caption Text Figure 1).

To link the postwar C.A.R.E. campaign in Austria to The Third Man was clearly an attempt—more likely initiated by Selznick than by Carol Reed and Alexander Korda—the British producers—to associate the production with “the overwhelming achievements of the U.S. economic system” and thus to highlight the connection between “philanthropic relief and U.S. foreign policy goals” (Wagnerleitner 52). Ironically, this image contrasts starkly with the role the American characters in the film would actually play: Holly Martins, the writer, offers not economic aid to Viennese children but hack Western fiction and his ostensibly dead friend, Harry Lime, offers not food and medicine but poison, infection, disease and corruption as represented by the racket Harry Lime runs in the film: selling diluted penicillin to military hospitals on the black market.

As it turned out, this C.A.R.E. still with Joseph Cotten would not circulate widely (if at all) in German-speaking countries. While it is possible that the stark contrast between the image of benevolence in the still and the agenda of black market corruption in the film might have led to preventing this still from entering circulation in Europe, a more likely reason for its absence might well be explained by Austrian and European ambivalence at being depicted as dependent on American economic aid. As American government officials were aware, Europeans could find “American economic aid psychologically galling” (Bischof 165). So it is not surprising that much of the publicity for The Third Man that actually did circulate in Austria and Germany preferred, for example, to focus on the centrality of German-speaking actors and actresses in the production (Schöfle, From Fidelity to History 31-33), or other aspects that highlighted the significance of the European and, in Austria, the Austrian aspects of the film: its setting, Vienna and the Austrian origins of its players.

Another intriguing U.S.-centered publicity still for The Third Man offers a more ambiguous reading of the relationship between the U.S. and Austria.
The still’s caption indicates that we are looking at “Orson Welles with a policeman in front of the Parliament building in Vienna” (Caption Text Figure 2). However, both are dressed very much like their characters in the film. Therefore, they are visually representing their characters as well as themselves. The two figures are standing in front of the Vienna Parliament by the Pallas-Athena fountain. The dramatic black and white contrast between the newly re-democratized Parliament building (it had been the seat of the Vienna Reichsgau during the Nazi occupation of Austria between 1938 and 1945) (Parliamentsgabe [Wien]) and the dark figures standing before it certainly invokes the visual aesthetics of *The Third Man*. Yet here it is not the ruins of Vienna, or its postwar economic desperation that are emphasized but rather its political institutions and its high cultural legacy. The statue of the Goddess of Wisdom that towers above the head of the arch criminal Harry Lime and the American superstar Orson Welles are facing in exactly opposing directions, yet visually they compose one figure. Thus, on one level, this image of the smiling cynical blending seamlessly into the ‘Goddess of Wisdom’ evokes the opposing philosophies of democracy and anti-democracy as Lime had articulated them in his cuckoo clock-speech.

If we are looking at the American actor Orson Welles here, as the caption suggests, then the still could imply a both/and solution to the problem of democracy and culture. American culture will now function to promote both democratic institutions and to protect the high cultural legacy of the city of Vienna. It contradicts Lime’s philosophical stance that war and terror beget high culture by visually situating the dramatic sculpture of the Goddess of Wisdom, an embodiment of high culture, as emerging from the figure of the American Welles. Now that the Nazis have been purged from the Parliament, the Austrian political system, with the help of America, can function to bring democracy and high culture together.

On the other hand, more ominously, if we are looking at the character of Harry Lime chatting with the Austrian policeman (he is very likely a film extra as well), the still would suggest collusion between the American criminal and the Austrian law in “reality.” In contrast, the film depicts the police pursuing the criminal Lime through the sewers of Vienna. Thus the still could be read as a type of pact with the devil—Athena’s facing away from these two suggests ambivalence and indeed, disapproval of their friendship.

Like the explicitly political C.A.R.E. package still that depicted the
average Viennese citizens (women and children) as economic beneficiaries of U.S. Cold War policy, this politically ambiguous depiction of Austrian high culture in the form of Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, in front of the Vienna Parliament emerging out of and towering above the American black market penicillin swindler and advocate of fascism, Harry Lime, on the one hand, or the American actor Orson Welles on the other, did not circulate widely, I would argue, because it did not contain the elements that would make the film The Third Man appealing to Austrian audiences.

**The critical response to The Third Man in Austria and Germany offers insights into why the politicized publicity stills did not enjoy a wide circulation, if any at all. In an article in the German newspaper Die Zeit entitled “Wien und der ‘Dritte Mann’” (“Vienna and The Third Man”) published in 1950 from Vienna, the question was raised why a film that depicted the city of Vienna and its many war ruins in such an “uncompassionate” (”mitleidslos”) way could be so popular with Austrians?

3 My evidence clearly suggests that The Third Man was as popular in Austria as it was in other European countries and the United States; see “Wien und der dritte Mann” as well as “Filme der Woche: Der Dritte Mann”. For a recently widely circulated discussion in the British newspaper The Guardian arguing the opposite, see Cook (2006). For a more detailed analysis of the critical response to the depiction of Vienna in the film see Scholz, From Fidelity to History 42-43.
memory was a part of the self, after all, and did not require the will
to call it forth ([H.M.W.] 3).

According to H.M.W., the author of “Vienna and the Third Man”, a particular
emotional dynamic shaped the film’s overall effect on Austrian audiences.
The film seemed to function as a kind of immediate ‘Vergangenheitsbewälti­
gung’ (coming to terms with the past), that is, a means of coping with the
harsh memories of the war years and indeed, immediate postwar years. In
this sense, it could be argued that the Third Man functioned in Austria much
as some of the more successful ‘Trümmerfilme’ (rubble films) functioned in
postwar Germany: as a way to give meaning to the experiences of war and
postwar trauma borne of hunger, deprivation, need, and military occupation
(Svetov 15-16). Significantly, the emphasis would be placed on the status of
personal victimhood and not on responsibility for aggressive national
politics, in the case of Germany (Shandley 20-76), or, in the case of Austria,
collaboration during the Nazi occupation (Löffler 75-93, 203-15).

Figure 3 shows a typical on-location still from the film that can
covably be read as the above review suggests.6 It depicts the American
Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten). He’s had a few drinks too many, and he’s
just seen his old friend Harry Lime—a friend he believed dead—disappear
somewhere on the square ‘Am Hof’ in post-WWII Vienna. He is torn be­
tween doubts over his own sanity, unrequited love for his friend’s Czech
girlfriend Anna, relief that his friend may still be alive, and near certainty
that Harry is mixed up in a vicious black market racket. The darkroom and
mysterious aura of the Vienna square reinforces the haunted expression on
Holly’s face. His predicament—that of an enterprising but unwelcome
American pulp fiction writer stumbling through the labyrinth of postwar Europe is inextricably linked with the city where he finds himself. As the Zel article suggested, an important aspect of this postwar ‘reality’ had to do with the marked ambivalence of Europeans toward the influence and presence of American military and popular culture. This quality is reflected, ironically, in the American Holly Martin’s expression as he ponders whether he should not catch the next plane out of Vienna before he finds out more than he wants to know. His face, framed by the dark Vienna square, mirrors his own disappointed expectations as well as those of European and Austrian audiences, who were both mesmerized by and deeply suspicious of America’s role in postwar Europe (Scholz, “Will the Real Vienna”).

If a large portion of Austrian and German audiences appreciated The Third Man’s attempt to visualize the scenario of suffering and victimization of the immediate postwar years, they were also more than happy with the unhappy end in The Third Man. No doubt the most famous on-location image of The Third Man is Anna Schmidt’s walk past Holly Martins after Lime’s burial in the Vienna Central Cemetery. This melancholy scene was discussed with great enthusiasm by Alex Natan in a review of The Third Man, also from Die Zeit. He writes:

The “third man” has been buried. His lover walks along a long, tree-lined avenue of the Cremin’s Vienna memorial park, below the sound of church bells and church choirs. She doesn’t see the American, she walks past him, a European woman, like millions of other continental women, who still have their pride, their feminine dignity—that is not a “happy end”, it isn’t an end at all. It’s life (reality). The greatness of “The Third Man” is based on the fact that it has become a mirror of continental life. Unforgettable 7 (Natan)

6 This provocative comment suggests that the C.A.R.E. package publicity still may have been known to the reviewer; unfortunately, I have no direct evidence for this yet.

7 Orig. German: “Der Dritte Mann’ ist beerdigt worden. Seine Geliebte geht eine lange Friedhofsallee auf die Kamera [ ... ] Leaning on the side is the American, who has fallen in love with the woman and who believes he can buy her with C.A.R.E. packages [ ... ] She doesn’t see the American, she walks past him, a European woman, like millions of other continental women, who still have their pride, their feminine dignity—that is not a “happy end”, it isn’t an end at all. It’s life (reality). The greatness of “The Third Man” is based on the fact that it has become a mirror of continental life. Unforgettable.”
This evaluation suggests that audiences from the early fifties preferred seeing Europe associated with a woman who rejects an American than women who accept his proffered C.A.R.E. packages.

The notion that *The Third Man* "mirrored" life in Vienna in the immediate postwar period is reinforced by the critic D.G., writing in the left-leaning social-democratic (SPÖ) Austrian newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in 1950, and this despite its lack of "factual accuracy":

The film's plotting is [...] not without its flaws, especially for the Viennese viewer who is familiar [with the four power occupation]. But is this so important? *The Third Man* isn't supposed to be a documentary film in the sense of an historically accurate chronicle. The film wants to capture a moment of a time gone by, in a city that mirrored the entire insanity of this time—the peculiar, depressing atmosphere of occupation and insecurity, of poverty and postwar immorality. All this is captured masterfully.¹

Those dimensions of the film defined as real are all tied to the conception of the occupation as essentially negative and oppressive in character. By implication, the U.S. dimension of that same occupation, rather than being distinguished as positive, as in the C.A.R.E. still, is instead a part of the nightmare of the film's "reality": "of occupation and insecurity, of poverty and postwar immorality" (D.G. 7).

What do we make of the contemporary reception of the film in Austria and Germany? If we return to the image of Joseph Cotten distributing C.A.R.E. packages and compare it to the final shot of *The Third Man* we can see that the implications of these very different images of the U.S./Austrian relation-

ship have both a negative and a positive function. Negatively, British (and by extension, European) culture seeking to separate or quarantine itself from U.S. culture implies a form of anti-Americanism, a traditional perspective on the U.S. seen through the lens of postwar Europe: the elitist opposition between high culture (represented by Europe) and popular or low culture, represented by the U.S. Yet the film’s stance on the question of seeing the U.S. and Europe (and by extension, Austria) as different cultures with different agendas is not a rejection of the influence of American culture as such. Rather, it is a rejection of the Cold War logic that stipulated that the influence of American culture in Europe represented an unambiguous moral good, a disinterested humanitarianism with no pretensions to power and influence.

The Third Man as postwar thriller sought to question this inflated conception of postwar America by cordoning off an alternative European realm as an antidote to the Cold War’s opposition between East and West. This agenda, however, conflicted with the U.S. producer David Selznick’s goals for the film. In the film publicity stills discussed in this essay, the overall Cold War framework situated the United States as the rescuer (from war, hunger, fascism, communism) of Europe rather than as a victorious occupying force. This was not a message Austrian or German viewers were interested in. For them, the appeal of the film lay in a creative use of Austrian urban space, theatrical talent and music that spoke to a collective sense of victimization borne of war and its aftermath. And because this was done without pontificating about the Cold War or in any way raising questions of war responsibility or complicity with criminal actions during the war—it was celebrated as an aesthetically brilliant ‘mirror’ of postwar ‘reality’—and is to this day.

WORKS CITED


Figure 1: Publicity Still [RF2/Pub/63A]: "Joseph Cotten handing out food parcels to needy Austrian children." David O. Selznick Collection. Harry Ransom Center, U of Texas at Austin.

Figure 2: Publicity Still [RF2/Pub/65]: "Orson Welles mil einem Polizisten vor dem Parlamentsgebäude in Wien." Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.


