American foreign policy and film...track each other through time as compulsively as symmetrical sundials¹

As millions of people watched the horrific spectacle of the Twin Towers collapsing after the September 11 terrorist attacks, many eyewitnesses and survivors compared their dramatic experiences to a variety of Hollywood movies. In many ways Hollywood movies provided a language and imagery that commentators drew upon in making sense of the attacks and their geopolitical implications and many Hollywood producers, directors and writers later explained that they too believed many Hollywood films had seemed to ‘predict’ the atrocities of 9/11. The images of destruction in films like The Siege, Die Hard and The Peacemaker (amongst many others) became important reference points and ways of enframing popular understandings of the radically changing geopolitical world.

In October and November 2001 Pentagon officials began a series of meetings with Hollywood directors, screenwriters, scenarists and specialists in disaster movies to ‘solicit the help of Hollywood in the war against terrorism’ and imagine possible future scenarios and responses to them.² White House advisors also met with Hollywood executives to discuss the role of Hollywood in ‘getting the right ideological message across not only to Americans, but also to the Hollywood public around the globe’.³ The subsequent release of films like Black Hawk Down and Behind Enemy Lines arguably signalled a resurgent Hollywood interest in narrating US global military adventures. Moreover, their success at the box office suggests the contemporary popular appeal of a remilitarised US global role and, in the context of the new Coalition against Terrorism, also suggest a hunger for explanatory
narratives in this period of cultural and political anxiety, uneasiness and uncertainty. These and other films have attempted to (re)author a new post-9/11 geopolitical certainty and for some observers, these films have paved the way for further US/Coalition interventions, building support amongst the cinema-going public for a variety of global political campaigns.4

Of particular interest and importance in films like these are the ways in which they crystallise or firm up the uncertain role of America, American identities and US citizens in global political dramas – particularly during moments of crisis. Important questions can be raised about the ways in which geopolitical imaginations are expressed through film and about how different ‘threats’ and ‘dangers’ are constructed through various Hollywood narratives.

The articles in this special issue explore many of these themes in more depth and elaborate the complex connections between film and geopolitics. They reflect in various ways on common themes of national identity, gender and the construction of masculinity and ethnicity through film and seek to explore the importance of borders, boundaries and territories to cinematic narratives. The initial idea for a special issue emerged out of a piece of research we conducted on an earlier period of geopolitical change and uncertainty.5 The period from the end of the Second World War through to the early 1950s saw film in the United States become a central battleground for constructing and challenging Cold War geopolitical boundaries and imaginative geographies.

During the Second World War Hollywood was ‘sent to war’ and produced many films such as Days of Glory (1943), North Star (1943) and Mission to Moscow (1943) that articulated a kind of ‘Celluloid Russophobia’6 mythologizing Russian peasant life and showing the Soviet Union as a worthy ally that was not all that different from the United States. In the changing geopolitical context of the Cold War this was reversed into a ‘Russophobia’ with Hollywood, under pressure and fear from the House UnAmerican Activities Committee (HUAC), producing series of ‘Reds under the beds’ films depicting communist infiltration in the United States. Films like Behind the Iron Curtain (1948), I Married a Communist (1949), The Red Menace (1949), Big Jim McClain (1952) and My Son John (1953) constructed discourses of danger that ran alongside and extended other important and official geopolitical discourses. Films of this period were intimately connected to the formation of new geographical imaginations and in this sense their imagery formed a kind of geopolitical world:

the movies are a world, a country of familiar faces, a mythology made up a limited number of stories [possessing] a relation of wish, echo, transposition, displacement, inversion, compensation, reinforcement, example, warning … What remains constant is an oblique but unbroken connection to the historical world.
What also remains is a connection to the geopolitical world. The 1940s saw a series of geopolitical struggles and important ideological shifts and transitions as the United States reinvented itself as a benevolent defender of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’. Hollywood movies offered their audiences an understanding of international politics and the role of America in this arena and brought this home to America itself, stressing the threats and dangers within and posed locally. As a medium of mass communication cinema provided an important site of competition between Hollywood, film-makers and state institutions on a ‘battlefield of sounds and images’. During the Cold War the discursive figuration of the ‘Evil Empire’ in terms of absolute difference from the United States was important in rendering and securing American identity. HUAC’s concern with the filmic images of America and its ‘other’ demonstrate that films were an important part of the attempt to secure, during the Cold War, an ideological ‘fit’ with a wholesome sense of Ameri

Our work on HUAC and the films of the 1940s and 1950s demonstrated to us that the connections between film, identity, geopolitics and foreign policy were complex and varied but also relatively unexamined and untheorised in geographical literature. Many of our sources came from film studies and historical literature – and the explicit geographical and geopolitical themes of this period’s films were pushed to the margins of this otherwise rich literature. Films, we would argue, exist in an intertextual relationship with other geopolitical knowledges. They reflect, reify, explain, author, support, undermine and challenge hegemonic geopolitical discourses. In putting together this special issue we wanted to explore further the filmic authorship of geopolitics or the production of geopolitical meaning in cinematic texts and their intertextuality with other geopolitical landscapes and discourses. Our purpose has been to show that film has for a long time held a unique position in projections of identity and that these projections can provide important examples of the ways in which geopolitics is made intelligible and meaningful in the popular realm and through the ‘everyday’.
A further motivation in bringing together such a volume was a concern to explore filmic narratives and cinematic traditions that existed ‘outside’ or beyond Hollywood and a desire to read more about the interconnections between cinema and geopolitics as they operated in other spaces and places. Previous work on colonial and post-colonial cinema in the Lusophone world\textsuperscript{12} had highlighted the paucity of sources concerning cinema and geopolitics in Africa, Asia and Latin America and demonstrated an overwhelming focus on Hollywood as the only ‘real’ cinema. In many ways this special issue does contain a large number of articles which are concerned with Hollywood or Hollywood film although there are contributions here which look a little further afield – to the Phillipines, Germany and Palestine.

We propose the title ‘Reel geo-politics’, then, as a way of exploring the construction of a particular kind of geopolitical reasoning, a unique reading of international affairs and political or ideological differences. This attempts to build on Christensen’s\textsuperscript{13} concern with ‘reel politics’ in his discussion of the anti-political Hollywood films of the 1950s. We use this title not to imply that this form of the geopolitical was any more real or actual than any other but rather to signify our intention to unreel and unravel the cinemato-graphing of political space at a variety of spatial scales.

CINEMA AND POPULAR GEOPOLITICS

As a technology of seeing and a form of projectionism film can be regarded as eminently geo-graph-ical and geo-political.\textsuperscript{14}

Alongside the emergence in the 1990s of a post-structuralist inspired ‘critical geopolitics’ has been an increasing critical focus on the ways in which geopolitical knowledges saturate ‘quotidian constructions of identity’.\textsuperscript{15} Ó Tuathail and Dalby\textsuperscript{16} usefully distinguish between ‘formal’, ‘practical’, and ‘popular’ geopolitics as different ‘types’ of geopolitical knowledges producing different but often complementary geopolitical imaginations and spatialisations of danger. The first two types refer, respectively, to the geopolitical writings of academics and the ‘common sense’ geopolitical statements of state leaders and bureaucrats. ‘Popular’ geopolitics, however, is a more expansive notion of where geopolitical knowledges are produced and refers to geopolitical representations found in a variety of cultural forms such as the popular media, novels, magazines and cartoons.\textsuperscript{17} What is interesting about much of this recent work on popular geopolitics is that whilst novels, magazines and cartoons have received increasing amounts of attention, the medium of cinema (and to a lesser extent radio) remain relatively neglected. Yet many geographers, either in their research or in their teaching, engage film directly.\textsuperscript{18} Cinema, as Cresswell and Dixon have recently argued, is not a traditional object of inquiry for geographers – as
opposed to landscape or region – and yet, in articles and books, in lecture theatres and seminar rooms, film has become one of the most popular sites for research and teaching:

Across the discipline, film has been used as example, as metaphor, as allegory, as a vehicle for querying the character of representation, and as a way of recording everyday perceptions of the world.19

Thus geographers have deployed and explored film as a ‘mimetic of the real world’, as a way of authenticating representations of distant peoples and places, as a way of exploring the construction of intersubjective meanings or the production of dominant ideologies and as a site of resistance. Additionally, geographers have increasingly sought to explore the complex of social processes that make up the film industry, ranging from financing to distribution and from production techniques to the construction of movie theatres and film technology. The issue of film’s relationship to some exterior and pre-existent reality is central to many geographers’ research agendas20 and remains an important question in any consideration of the relationship between cinema and geopolitics, between the reel world of cinema and the real world of global political space. This involves a recognition that cinema provides an important space of confrontation and encounter for viewers and the recognition that the reception of filmic meaning is far from passive. Instead it can be argued that films raise important questions about the ways in which spaces and identities are made up and dissolved within the structure of films themselves and in the relationships between the production and consumption of space in and around film. Thus film is important in the study of critical geopolitics because it represents a constitutive element in the production of political geographies and because political spaces, places and landscapes are implicit tools in the production of film.21 It is also necessary to recognise however that the theme of cinema and geopolitics is interdisciplinary in nature (and many of the contributions in this issue are written by non-geographers). According to Cresswell and Dixon the reality/representation divide has been gradually dissolved in recent years (particularly in the context of post-structuralist/antiessentialist interventions) leading to a reappraisal of geography’s engagement with film:

Films are no longer considered mere images or unmediated expressions of the mind, but rather the temporary embodiment of social processes that continually construct and deconstruct the world as we know it.

It is also useful here to highlight a distinction between geo-politics and geopolitics,22 and foreign policy and Foreign Policy.23 The hyphenation of geo-politics draws attention to the ontological unthought that makes possible geopolitics in its conventional understanding. In this sense ‘official articulations
of geopolitics attempt to dissimulate the geo-politics that makes them possible, to repress their conditions of (im)possibility. In a related sense Campbell’s foreign policy/Foreign Policy distinction draws attention to the production of difference and otherness that takes place prior to Foreign Policy in its conventional sense. The former ‘foreign policy’ refers to the process of ‘making foreign’ and provides a discursive economy upon which conventional Foreign Policy operates – its actions reproducing and containing challenges to the identity scripted by foreign policy.

These distinctions are instructive for studies of formal, practical, and popular geopolitics but are particularly useful here because in both senses, the ‘moment of geopolitics’ is not fixed but diffused through society. A study of popular geopolitics recognises that ‘geopolitical knowledge does not simply ‘trickle down’ from elite texts to popular ones’ and points to the ‘intertextual nature of much geopolitics’ and the varied sources and analogies from which popular representations of the political are drawn and come to be blurred.

Geo-politics, according to Ó Tuathail, is partly about ‘address[ing] the big picture’ and examining the ways in which actors and dramas are arranged on a world stage or a kind of ‘global chessboard’ of political positions. Film represents a unique way of arranging these dramas and actors and of attempting a kind of spatialisation and visualisation of boundaries and dangers and American identity is connected to the geopolitical constructions and ideological codes of Hollywood films. They provide a way of solving (geo)political uncertainty, and the very uncertain nature of America itself, through building moral geographies and making clear the lines of division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is important to explore then, how in many ways cinema functions as an ideological state apparatus as the Manichean nature of geopolitical discourse was captured by the medium of cinema, and popular support for geopolitical strategies has been generated by the interpellation of movie going subjects.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The first essay, by Elena dell’Agnese, explores cinematic representations of the US–Mexico border region over a period of 65 years and focuses in particular upon westerns, horror films and the science fiction and film-noir categories. The essay examines the portrayal of history and racial stereotypes in around 30 films concerned with the US–Mexico border region and touches upon a range of themes from a discussion of colonial fantasies to an exploration of the representation of sexuality in border films. Conceptualising many of these movies as part of a broader ‘genre of imperialism’, dell’Agnese deals with the cinematic representation of Mexico and Mexicans as well as the multiple ways in which borders are seen to be constituted through film (for example as ‘magic curtains’, spaces of differentiation/otherization, as
something unsaid or unscreened or as a ‘contact zone’). Discerning a number of important imaginary (political) geographies of the border and fantasies about the white American man ‘going South’ this essay creatively examines the way in which ‘major shifts in the mood of American idealism’ can be traced through these films and discusses the ways in which they might be seen as products of a particular geopolitical moment.

The next essay, by Michael J Shapiro, explores a number of classic westerns, particularly those directed by John Ford, as a way of interrogating national mythologies of the American West. Additionally, Shapiro also raises questions about a number of contemporary films which return to the same western landscapes but offer more critical engagements with both the history of Euro-American imperial expansion and the cinematic narration of the nation that characterised the earlier classic westerns. Examining the cinematic construction of Indians and Indian territory in the classic western genre, Shapiro argues that the analysis of certain films can supply insights into the Euro-American geopolitical and biopolitical ‘ethnogenesis’ and provide new perspectives from which to view the ethnic and territorial privileging of certain presences on the North American continent. Viewing film as an increasingly critical medium with the potential ‘to challenge the hegemony of the modern state system’, Shapiro explores the ways in which films about the West construct particular geopolitical spaces, reconstruct a sense of ‘international relations’, represent certain landscapes or reflect upon the fixity or fluidity of borders and boundaries. In detecting multiple ambiguities and an ‘institutionalised silence’ in many films about the West, Shapiro notes the reassertion of alternative narratives (in music, cinema and writing) and the emergence of a more visible and voluble Native American geopolitical imagination of the American continent.

The following essay, by Andrew Crampton and Marcus Power, raises questions about the role of Hollywood as geopolitician and about the importance of film as a key geopolitical site, exploring the production of subject positions through cinema. In the staging of the Second Gulf War and its multiple plots and dramas this essay argues that there was an important intertext with the Second World War and its various associations with virtue. Focusing in particular upon the figure of the geopolitician coordinating the production of the stage of international politics for a viewing subject, this essay explores how Hollywood narrates contemporary geopolitical space. Allied to this is a concern to explore how audiences make sense and meaning of the films they watch and the conflicts represented therein. What are the implications of drawing on filmic interpretations of the Second World War in representations of contemporary conflict? In this essay the particular example of Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998) is discussed as a point of entry to a discussion of this intertext in an attempt to understand further how movies figure in the popular political imagination as ways of imagining and enframing global political change.
The next essay in the issue, by Klaus Dodds, focuses on the James Bond film series and sets out to explore the ways in which these films utilise particular geographical locations or seek to construct a very particular kind of geographical framing, narrating wider ideological conflicts in the process. Focusing in particular on the first five Bond films (made between 1962 and 1967) this essay examines the ways in which particular places are embedded within the filmic narratives of the Bond series in order to reflect upon the wider project of developing the conceptualisation of ‘popular geopolitics’. In particular the paper considers the ways in which certain films, such as From Russia with Love (1963) actively created a sense of an ideological and geographical boundary between different geopolitical spaces and argues that places such as Turkey, ‘were never simply passive backdrops and or “exotic locations”’. Dodds concludes that the literature on popular geopolitics could more fruitfully explore the detail of the filming process in order to understand more carefully the filmic construction of spaces of danger, threat, domesticity and exoticism.

The focus of the next essay, by Deborah Dixon and Leo Zonn is the ‘perilous place of Third cinema’ and the conceptual limitations within Frederic Jameson’s (1992) The Geopolitical Aesthetic. Exploring Jameson’s reading of filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik’s (1976) The Perfumed Nightmare Dixon and Zonn adopt an anti-essentialist perspective in order to offer an alternative reading of the film and to interrogate Jameson’s argument that Third Cinema is very much a redundant force within late capitalism. The reading of Tahimik’s film by Jameson had prioritised resistance against capitalism and framed particular spaces within the film as meaningful and significant in regard to this project but Dixon and Zonn set out to respond to this, noting how these spaces are ‘constituted from the temporary fixing of a series of people and place-based identities’. What is particularly interesting and important about this re-imagin ing and re-reading of the film is the exploration and recovery of geographies of gender and of how notions of masculinity and femininity are imbricated within political, economic and cultural spheres. Additionally, Dixon and Zonn also seek to focus in particular on Jameson’s notion of this film as a particular instance of ‘cognitive mapping’ whereby the individual subject is able to experience a sense of the social totality within which they are placed. This concept is reworked by Dixon and Zonn to focus attention on the ways in which objects are embedded within a web of significations, drawing out the ‘lines of fracture and contradiction that allow for such objects to become meaningful in a host of other contexts’.

In the essay by Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi, the main focal point is Palestinian cinema and its contribution (through the deployment of a variety of symbols) to consolidating the Palestinian nation and its historical narrative. Gertz and Khleifi explore the complex ways in which Palestinian cinema has attempted to create a homogenous historical narrative, to recover a lost unity and to reflect the struggle against the occupation. In particular the cinematic
Cinematography Construction of Political Space

construction of particular territories is teased out carefully here through a concern with how different Palestinian films depict the space of the home, village or town and seek to connect this to a national or ‘Palestinian space’. Tensions and contradictions between religious, familial, national and pan-Arabic identities are also explored here, particularly as they became more pronounced in films made since the end of the 1990s. Additionally, Gertz and Khleifi also concern themselves with why so many Palestinian films take place at borders and checkpoints such that they become ‘roadblock movies’ which struggle with the complicated project of mapping Palestinian territory. Through a focus on journeys and movements between spaces and identities these films construct an image of daily life as ‘stuck’ and ‘blocked’ leading to a sense of lost space and an image of immobility and stasis. The films discussed here and the outline of the changing dynamics and landscapes of Palestinian cinema provide an important and useful window onto the escalation of Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the strengthening of the Israeli occupation in recent years.

The next essay in the issue, by Simon Philpott and David Muttimer, focuses on two ‘crucial moments in the American imperium’ by exploring the Americas depicted by actor Martin Sheen in his two most significant roles as the assassin Captain Benjamin Willard in Apocalypse Now Redux (ANR) and as President Josiah Bartlett in The West Wing. As Philpott and Muttimer suggest, cinema and popular culture more generally are crucially important in the active production and the active forgetting of history and here the United States is seen to be repeatedly capable of ‘remarkable acts of forgetting’ and to have regularly avoided the kind of ‘reflexive examination necessary for transformation in the face of an innocence lost’. The analysis of the The West Wing offered here explores the vision of America that is offered and the way in which it continues the self-delusion of American innocence that began with movies like ANR which focus on the loss of American innocence in the jungles of Vietnam. Interestingly, Philpott and Muttimer incorporate an analysis of the two ‘crews’ that surround Martin Sheen in ANR and The West Wing in order to reflect more widely on issues of race, gender and class in American politics. The loss in Vietnam and the subsequent questioning of the capacity for sacrifice raises some interesting and important issues about American masculinity. In particular the authors engage directly with Hollywood’s struggle to reconstitute masculinity with cinematic representations of white, muscular ‘hard bodies’ and to depict particular ethnicities and class structures.

The next essay, by Gearóid Ó Tuathail, also raises some important questions about gender, national identity and patriotism through an exploration of John Davis’s patriotic action adventure Behind Enemy Lines, loosely based on the story of Scott Ó Grady, a US fighter pilot shot down over Bosnia in 1995. The release of the movie in late 2001 was sped up in order to take advantage of a surge of American nationalism following the attacks of 11 September and the subsequent retaliations in Afghanistan whilst the
marketing of the film relied upon 9/11 imagery. Targeted at an adolescent male audience and constructed with the PlayStation age in mind, the film stars Gene Hackman, a veteran of the US marines and several ‘patriotic’ Vietnam movies. In his analysis of the film, Ó Tuathail is concerned with the films invention of a heroic moral engagement and with the post-Vietnam recovery of the heroic in the context of messy historical engagements and the frustrations and confusions of the post-Cold War era. The film is explored here in order to open a window onto the contemporary culture of US militarism, to interrogate its gender politics and the historical resonance of its storyline as well as to reflect on its ‘pornographic gaze on weaponry’. Additionally, Ó Tuathail is interested in the film’s articulation and reproduction of the ‘Jacksonian’ geopolitical tradition in American geopolitical culture and also in the way the film visualises and articulates the structure of feeling of US militarism. Usefully, Ó Tuathail reminds us that movies are ultimately commercial products designed to appeal to large audiences and to make money for their producers and that as a result the complexities of geopolitics are often effaced in the name of promoting and pandering to a chauvinistic brand of militaristic nationalism.

The final essay, by Inga Scharf, explores the emergence of New German Cinema and examines the impact of post-Second World War geopolitics on constructions of West German national identity. In particular Scharf is interested in the ways in which films have represented homelessness, borders and questions of belonging and draws upon a range of recent writing about ‘critical geopolitics’ in order to understand these constructions and how they have been popularised and portrayed in particular movies. Raising questions about the ways in which New German Cinema seeks to articulate counter-narratives of national identity in post-war West German society and about the depiction of gender identities, Scharf argues that the analysis of New German cinema can shed light on the construction of borders and boundaries enabling us to understand more carefully the impacts of divisions and separations in particular places and within particular communities, again by bringing out the importance of journeys, exiles, crossings and exotic adventures. As in the paper by Gertz and Khleifi, Scharf is concerned with the ways in which films render these divisions, borders, boundaries and separations as something which has wide-ranging consequences for the everyday lives of citizens and communities.

NOTES

3. Zizeck (note 2) p.16.
4. This is hardly the first time that the United States, in response to international developments, has attempted to revitalize its propaganda activities in the Middle East. An earlier episode occurred early in the Cold War, during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, when the United States was expanding efforts to incorporate the region into a global anti-Soviet alliance. It was concerned about the implications for US interests of the diminished post-Second World War abilities of Britain and France to project Western power and influence in the area, and by the enormous increase in anti-Western feeling that had been generated by the establishment of Israel. In Iraq, the American embassy in Baghdad in 1952 used a mailing list, mobile film units and ‘certain prominent anti-Communist religious leaders’ to distribute propaganda brochures. Fore more on this see Joyce Battle (ed.), *U.S. Propaganda in the Middle East – The Early Cold War Version*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No.78 (Washington DC, 2002). This article can be found at its original location, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/essay.htm/>.


6. Strada and Torper (note 1) p.43.


16. Ibid.


20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.


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