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## **Filmando la Historia: Billy Wilder y la Guerra Fría**

### *Filming History: Billy Wilder and the Cold War*

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**RESUMEN:** El artículo propone una reflexión sobre la visión de la Historia contenida en la obra del cineasta Billy Wilder. Desde esta óptica se repasa toda su filmografía abordando de una manera específica la interpretación de la Guerra Fría ofrecida en *Uno, dos, tres*, (1961). Utilizando Berlín como escenario, Wilder ridiculiza el enfrentamiento entre el Este y el Oeste, ofreciendo una inteligente y ácida perspectiva de las relaciones internacionales de la época. Mal acogida por el público en su momento –su estreno coincidió con el levantamiento del Muro– su demoledora visión del comunismo se reveló como profética tras los acontecimientos de 1989.

*ABSTRACT: This article reflects upon the vision of history contained in the work of cinematographer Billy Wilder. From this angle his entire filmography will be reviewed, focussing specifically on the interpretation of the Cold War in One, Two, Three, (1961). Using Berlin as a backdrop, Wilder ridicules the confrontation between East and West offering a sharp, intelligent perspective on the international relations of the era. Panned by audiences at the time –the premiere coinciding with the raising of the Berlin Wall– its devastating vision of communism proved prophetic in light of the events of 1989.*

**Palabras clave:** Guerra Fría, cine, Billy Wilder, Historia.

*Keywords:* Cold War, film, Billy Wilder, History.

## 1. Billy Wilder and the “witch-hunt”

Following the outbreak of the Cold War, many in the United States believed that the big screen could be used to disseminate ideas contrary to the American way of life<sup>1</sup>. In 1947 the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) put Hollywood in the spotlight. Some were even convinced of a preconceived Soviet conspiracy to take over the entertainment industry. While the most conservative media, such as that owned by Hearst, insisted on the real danger of Communist infiltration, the left began speaking of the “witch-hunt”<sup>2</sup>. In this context, certain *red hunters* such as Senator Joseph McCarthy reached considerable notoriety, though it is important to point out that, contrary to popular belief, the well-known Senator for Wisconsin, never belonged to HUAC<sup>3</sup>. His role as president of an investigative subcommittee of the Senate, began much later (February 1950) and focussed on denouncing Communist infiltration in the State Department and the Department of Defence. However, his name would end up defining the era<sup>4</sup>. The fact that many of those investigated or accused (such as Kazan, Rossen or Dmytrick) really were Communists should not disguise the fact that the HUAC seriously undermined the rights and liberties provided for in the United States Constitution. The blacklists and the production of a series of anticommunist films characterised the cinema of the Fifties, though the level of repression should not be exaggerated<sup>5</sup>.

The decade of the “witch-hunt” was the golden age of Billy Wilder (1906-2002)<sup>6</sup>. In the Forties he had made hits such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) or *The Lost Weekend* (1945), but it

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of this topic in PELAZ LÓPEZ, José-Vidal, “Cae el telón. El cine norteamericano en los inicios de la Guerra Fría (1945-1954)”, in *Historia Actual on line*, nº 15, Invierno, 2008, pp. 125-136.

<sup>2</sup> See: ROVERE, Richard H., *El senador Joe McCarthy*, FCE, México, 1987; GUBERN, Román, *La caza de brujas en Hollywood*, Anagrama, Barcelona, 1987; ALONSO BARAHONA, Fernando, *Macarthy o la historia ignorada del cine*, Criterio Libros, Madrid, 2001; COMA, Javier, *Diccionario de la caza de brujas. Las listas negras en Hollywood*, Inédita, Barcelona, 2005; COMA, Javier, *Las películas de la caza de brujas*, Notorius, Madrid, 2007; HUMPHRIES, Reynold, *Las listas negras de Hollywood. Una historia política y cultural*, Península, Barcelona, 2009 y CASTRO, Antonio (ed.), *Las listas negras en Hollywood. Radiografía de una persecución*, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> In Spanish, the confusion arises from the work of Román Gubern. In October 1970 and March 1974 Gubern published two editions in Anagrama under the title *McCarthy contra Hollywood: la caza de brujas*. Later, in 1987 and 1991, and with an additional afterward the same publishers edited the same text under the new title *La caza de brujas en Hollywood*. In one of his later contributions, the author notes: “History, ideology, politics, business and mythology are inextricably mixed in the tempestuous history of the *witch-hunt* in Hollywood, one of the episodes registered in the repressive tangle commonly, and somewhat inaccurately, known, as *McCarthyism*, as the purging of Hollywood professionals began before the eruption of the inquiries by Senator Joe McCarthy onto the public scene”, GUBERN, Román, “Balance de una villanía” en COMA, Javier: *Diccionario... op. cit.*, p. 7. Javier Coma justifies this undoubtable error by Gubern alluding to “a metaphorical usage of the surname of the Senator for Wisconsin” in *op. cit.*, p. 27. In the same work he states that: “It is important to clarify that the senator for Wisconsin had little influence over the investigations related to Hollywood and only directly accused the world of culture when he channelled efforts into suppressing subversive books in libraries in foreign countries sponsored by the State Department: this move affected writers such as Howard Fast, Dashiell Hammett, Lillian Hellman and Langston Hughes in June, 1953”, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> According to ALONSO BARAHONA, Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 55, the first to coin the term “McCarthyism” was graphic designer Herbert Block in the *Washington Post*.

<sup>5</sup> Even today it is possible to read surprising statements such as: “The cultural conformity which took hold during several years stank of political totalitarianism which, not in vain, was in some aspects reminiscent of what was going on, during those same years, behind the Iron Curtain (excepting the murderous nature of Stalin)”, SAND, Shlomo, *El siglo XX en pantalla*, Crítica, Barcelona, 2004, p. 366.

<sup>6</sup> There is a broad bibliography on Wilder in Spanish: WOOD, Tom, *¿Quién diantres eres, Billy Wilder?*, Alertes, Barcelona, 1990; RENTERO, Juan Carlos, *Billy Wilder. La romántica amargura de un cínico*, JC,

was in the following decade when he definitively became recognised as one of the great talents of the cinema. After this period, his career would go downhill, despite the odd, sporadic triumph in the Sixties and Seventies. His peculiar and caustic sense of humour and his undeniable gift for comedy, made him one of the great Hollywood masters.

Despite living in an era which favoured submission, Wilder was anything but a docile conformist. As an exile in the States from Hitler's Germany, Billy Wilder had little regard for totalitarianism of any kind. His attitude towards communism was critical from the outset, even when it was fashionable among the more progressive members of the cinema community to sympathise with "Uncle Joe". In 1939 he had already written the script for *Ninotchka* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1939), one of the most successful parodies of the Soviet regime ever filmed<sup>7</sup>.

Wilder knew better than anyone the power of persuasion of the cinema. He often recalled the impression his first viewing of *Battleship Potemkin* made on him in Berlin between the wars: "Everyone who left the movie theatre, be they conservative or liberal, left convinced of the justice of communism". Therefore, he perfectly understood the significance of the investigations into the film industry: "It is precisely this danger that the witch hunters could sense. They had the incredible power, the violent attraction that can emanate from a film"<sup>8</sup>. However, at the same time, he was aware that the best way to defend democracy was not by restricting freedom of creative expression. When the HUAC hearings began, Wilder did not hesitate to show his opposition to the inquisitors. In September of that year he took part in the creation of the so-called "Committee for the First Amendment", a group whose members comprised 500 Hollywood personalities and stars whose objective was to "support those professionals called upon to testify before the HUAC who had classified themselves as *hostile* with regards to the interrogations and the interrogators"<sup>9</sup>. In the midst of an increasingly strange atmosphere, it was proposed that those in the cinema industry take oaths of allegiance. In a general meeting of the Screen Directors Guild, Leo McCarey suggested voting by a show of hands. Only John Huston and Wilder opposed. Years later the former recalled: "I am sure it was one of the bravest things that Billy, as a naturalized German, had ever done. There were 150 to 200 directors at this meeting, and here Billy and I sat alone with our hands raised in protest against the loyalty oath"<sup>10</sup>.

Hollywood's resistance soon declined, the Committee for the First Amendment "underwent a rapid process of disintegration"<sup>11</sup>. For someone with such a harsh vision of human nature as

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Madrid, 1999; KARASEK, Hellmuth, *Billy Wilder. Nadie es perfecto*, Grijalbo, Barcelona, 1992; CROWE, Cameron, *Conversaciones con Billy Wilder*, Alianza, Madrid, 2002; SEIDL, Claudius, *Billy Wilder*, Cátedra, Madrid, 1991; LALLY, Kevin, *Billy Wilder. Aquí un amigo*, Ediciones B, Barcelona, 1998; SIKOV, Ed, *Billy Wilder. Vida y época de un cineasta*, Tusquets, Barcelona, 2000 y CIMENT, Michael, *Billy & Joe. Conversaciones con Billy Wilder y Joseph L. Mankiewicz*, Plot, Madrid, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Brackett and Walter Reisch wrote the script along with Wilder. Garbo said at one time: "the mass trials have been a great success, comrades. In the future there will be less Russians, but they will be better", WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 46. The film would be shown once again in West Germany after the war before an enthusiastic audience and Hollywood would produce two remakes in the 1950s: *The Iron Petticoat*, (Ralph Thomas, 1956) and *Silk Stockings*, (Rouben Mamoulian, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 56,

<sup>9</sup> COMA, Javier, *Diccionario...*, p. 83. Among others this committee was formed by: Burt Lancaster, John Huston, Humphrey Bogart, Judy Garland, William Wyler, Edward G. Robinson and Gene Kelly. They would meet at Ira Gershwin's house (the brother of composer George).

<sup>10</sup> HUSTON, John, *Memorias*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1998, pp. 181-182. "Wilder himself never mentioned that story", KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>11</sup> COMA, Javier, *Diccionario...*, p. 86. John Huston was among the first to dissent.

Wilder, it probably came as no surprise<sup>12</sup>. His independent attitude was not deterred by this. He was against the persecution –he threw the form sent to him by HUAC in the bin– and never submitted to criticise those on the blacklist. Referring to the so-called “Hollywood Ten” (who refused to give testimony to the Committee) he would only say that two of the ten had talent, the rest were just unfriendly<sup>13</sup>.

On two occasions Wilder came close to the danger zone, both in 1951. The first arose over a film project with Maurice Chevalier –under the title *A New Kind of Love*– which was shelved when the State Department denied the French star entry to the United States on the grounds of his supposed connections to the European left<sup>14</sup>. The second came about over a possible collaboration on a script with Robert Rossen. A meeting took place between the two, but the relationship did not gel<sup>15</sup>.

It is certainly notable that during this convulsive period in the history of Hollywood, Billy Wilder was able to work with enviable independence and even allow himself more than one sharp criticism against various aspects of American society, including the cinema industry. The fact that his lack of sympathy for communism was made public after *Ninotchka*, will surely have borne an influence. His participation in the army's Denazification program in Germany after 1945 may also have helped him<sup>16</sup>. What he would always consider definitive, however, was his close professional relationship with Charles Brackett, a well-known conservative Republican, with whom he habitually wrote his scripts, though it is noteworthy that the partnership ended at exactly around this time<sup>17</sup>. Wilder declared his sympathy with the Democrats, although he did not spare the party his criticisms when he considered them to be pertinent<sup>18</sup>.

Despite his not being directly implicated, or perhaps because he wasn't, the “witch-hunt” certainly left its mark on Wilder's films. The films he made at the beginning of the Fifties are testament to this: three “uncomfortable” pictures with a considerable dose of censure. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) depicts the world of Hollywood, in its grandeur and its misery<sup>19</sup>, with incredible harshness. The drama about a screenwriter, played by William Holden, forced to be the scribe of a faded star in order to survive, and murdered trying to escape and break his ties with her, could be interpreted as a transparent metaphor for the predicament of the industry in the dark years of the blacklists. In *Ace in the Hole* (1951) the object of his implacable focus

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<sup>12</sup> During the Committee's first investigation in Hollywood, Wilder was walking through the rear courtyard at Paramount when he noticed a cloud of smoke and a nauseating smell from RKO's studios next door. His companion asked what they were burning. “Probably Eddie Dmytryk, Billy replied”, WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>14</sup> Chevalier was accused of signing the “Stockholm Appeal” which called for the prohibition of nuclear weapons and donated funds to the French (supposedly communist) resistance. SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

<sup>15</sup> As one of his biographers notes “Having distanced himself from communist inclinations before McCarthyism, Wilder had little reason to associate with anyone who had been called to testify before the HUAC, as was the case with Rossen in the same year”, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

<sup>16</sup> With the rank of Colonel he helped to edit a film (*Death Mills*) about the Nazi concentration camps which was shown in Germany. He also lent a hand to the cause in *A Foreign Affaire* (1948), although as always, the film went much further than the authorities of the American occupation would have liked.

<sup>17</sup> “Brackett, as a respectable Republican, notoriously conservative, was clear of any doubt or suspicion. Without knowing it at the time, he lived, to put it one way, protected under his shadow”, KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 306. Their last film together was *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

<sup>18</sup> “I was never a blind or stupid patriot. I came to America because I liked Roosevelt... but I also know how to be critical of him”, LALLY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

<sup>19</sup> STAGGS, Sam, *El Crepúsculo de los dioses. Billy Wilder, Norma Desmond y el sueño oscuro de Hollywood*, T&B, Madrid, 2003.

was the unscrupulous press, only concerned with making profit and which didn't hesitate to exploit the most base instincts of a society willing to be manipulated. Finally, in *Stalag 17* (1953), Wilder once again presents Holden, this time playing “a patriot who does not propagate his patriotism by sounding the trombone or walking around wrapped up in the flag”<sup>20</sup>.

The worst over, his subsequent three films bore a radical change in register, they would be romantic comedies: *Sabrina* (1954), *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) and *Love in the Afternoon* (1957), in which the lead characters were charming damsels in distress: Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe. Now established as one of the great directors of his time he would later film *Witness for the Prosecution* (1958), *Some Like it Hot* (1959) and *The Apartment* (1960), the picture which would raise him to the zenith of his fame winning five Oscars, including those of screenwriter, director and producer. With the confidence endowed by his unquestionable success, Billy Wilder decided that his next project would be a film about the Cold War<sup>21</sup>.

## 2. *Berlin 1961: Coming up against a wall*

At the beginning of the Sixties, Hollywood embarked upon a new phase in its relationship with the Cold War. The Committee had ceased its activities and the blacklist system had come to an end by 1960 when Dalton Trumbo appeared in the opening credits as the screenwriter for *Exodus*, (Otto Preminger) and *Spartacus*, (Stanley Kubrick). On the other hand, the competence of television, the aftermath of the sentence against *Paramount* in 1948 (which forced the major studios to completely relinquish their control over movie theatres), the increase in production costs, sociological changes among the public, the erosion of the so-called *star system*, or the crisis of the Hays Code, signalled a new era. Political cinema experienced a notable boom during the Kennedy years and small independent companies proliferated in Hollywood (such as Mirisch for whom Wilder worked, who at the same time carried out work for *United Artists*). All of this would call into question the suffocating ideological control that the major studios had yielded over the cinema industry for decades. At an international level, since the death of Stalin in 1953, talk of a “thaw” between the superpowers and Khrushchev had put into circulation a novel idea: “peaceful coexistence”. The cinema industry, sensitive to these new realities, began to offer a fresh perspective with respect to the East-West conflict<sup>22</sup>. Everything seemed to indicate that it was the ideal moment to “make fun of the Americans and the Soviets a little, and of the impressions they had of each other”<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> KARASECK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 306. According to the author: “It is Wilder's answer to the false, dishonest patriotism of the McCarthy era”, p. 307.

<sup>21</sup> As well as in the chapter corresponding to the biographies quoted on Wilder, On *One, Two, Three*, see AMADO CASTRO, Víctor Manuel, “*Uno, dos, tres. Una visión de la guerra fría demasiado irónica para su tiempo*” in DE PABLO, Santiago, *La historia a través del cine. La Unión Soviética*, Universidad de País Vasco, Diputación Foral by Álava, Zarauz, 2001, pp. 123-147; CAPARRÓS LERA, José María: *Cien películas sobre Historia Contemporánea*, Alianza, Madrid, 1997, pp. 547-549 y SAND, Shlomo, *op. cit.* pp. 377-378.

<sup>22</sup> Thus classic political films were made such as *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959), *Advise and Consent* (Otto Preminger, 1962), *Seven Days in May* (John Frankenheimer, 1963), *Fail Safe* (Sidney Lumet, 1964), or *The Best Man* (Franklin Shaffner, 1964) in which the vision of communism, of the Soviet Union and the danger of nuclear war moved away from Fifties orthodoxy.

<sup>23</sup> SAND, Shlomo, *op. cit.*, p. 377. In the same vein one could highlight *Red telephone... Are we flying to Moscow?* (*Dr. Strangelove*, Stanley Kubrick, 1963 or *The Russians are coming!*, Norman Jewison, 1966).

Wilder and his partner and co-writer I.A.L. Diamond soon had an initial idea for a script. It would be a film starring the Marx brothers –who hadn't worked since 1949– in which they would play a group of jewel thieves confused by the police for the ambassadors of a foreign power and taken to the UN where the usual chaos would ensue. The idea was to “create a satire of the current state of the world [...], a satire of the deterioration of diplomacy, the political tightrope, brutal jokes about the H bomb, that type of stuff. Everything is so dramatic these days that a few jokes told by the Marx brothers ought to relieve the tension”<sup>24</sup>. Groucho was interested but, at that time, Harpo suffered a heart attack and the insurance companies would not take the risk on three such senior actors<sup>25</sup>.

Their next step was to secure the rights to a theatre play from the Twenties, titled *One, Two, Three*, written by the Hungarian, who later settled in America, Ferenc Molnár. The work of only one act –a production of which Wilder had attended in Berlin in 1929– was about a French banker who was temporarily responsible for the daughter of a Scandinavian millionaire. The girl falls in love with a Communist taxi driver. Before her parents arrive in the city he must be urgently converted into a respectable capitalist. Wilder and Diamond soon understood the possibilities of setting the story in the present time. All that remained was to choose a backdrop for the action, and none could be better than the city of Berlin, since the end of the Second World War a living symbol of the division of the world<sup>26</sup>.

For Wilder, returning to Berlin meant returning to his past, to the city where he took his first steps in the world of the cinema and that which he had to leave in 1933, just after the Reichstag Fire. It was not Wilder's first film about Berlin. In 1930 he wrote *People on Sunday* (*Menschen am Sonntag*, Robert Siodmak), a passionate study of the city before Hitler. In 1948 he directed *A Foreign Affaire*, about the difficulties of Denazification. The German capital not only offered Wilder the perfect setting to illustrate the conflict between capitalism and communism, but also to develop some of his favourite obsessions.

One of these was the relationship between Europe and America, of which he himself was a curious product. In 1948 he had made *The Emperor Waltz*, a harsh satire of the old Europe through the story of an American who tries to sell a gramophone to the Emperor of Austria-Hungary. The contrast between both ways of looking at the world had already been explored in films such as *A Foreign Affaire* or *Witness for the Prosecution*, in which the North American occupiers were seduced by the charms of old Europe, but also in *Sabrina*, whose lead character undergoes a complete transformation on returning from Paris. It would come up again in *Avanti!* (1972), an example of how the sun in Mediterranean Europe can change even the most aggressive American executive. *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957) deserves a special mention as it told the story of Lindbergh, the first pilot to cross the Atlantic, symbolically uniting both continents. Other films took place entirely on this side of the ocean such as *Irma la Douce* (1963), a singular vision of upbeat Parisian life, or *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970), a personal investigation into the mythical British detective.

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<sup>24</sup> SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 547. “We could have the Marx brother confusing all the flags; for example, Nasser could enter under the Star of David. Outrageous jokes like that”.

<sup>25</sup> LALLY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-361. In *One, two Three* there is a reference to the Marx brothers, a play on words about Karl and Groucho.

<sup>26</sup> In the original script (later adapted after the construction of the Wall) a voice-over explains: “In February 1945, while Hitler's legions were being toppled by the relentless attack of the Allied Forces, the Three Superpowers, gathered in Yalta, agreed to the partition of Germany and the joint occupation of Berlin. The events that followed have shown that this decision was –to put it diplomatically– a clinker”, SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

The other major constant in his work which Wilder could give a fresh perspective to by returning to Berlin was the Germans. Since leaving the country for Hollywood in the Thirties, the inhabitants of Germany had become a frequent presence in his films: *Five Graves to Cairo* (1943), *A Foreign Affair*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Stalag 17* or *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Despite his personal and family tragedy as a Jew, Wilder never vilified his German characters, he simply ridiculed them, as he did with everybody. In *One, Two, Three* he explored how the Germans had adapted to the new situation arising after the war, from being the dominant European power, to being a divided, occupied country in the hands of the Americans and the Soviets.

After making the appropriate changes, in Wilder's *One, Two, Three*, Molnár's taxi driver would become a young Communist from East Berlin, the French banker would be C.R. MacNamara, manager of the Coca-Cola plant in Berlin, and the hot-blooded, amorous young lady the daughter of the director of the well-known brand of soft drinks. The ease of passage at the time between the two parts of the city provided the necessary justification for some of the film's most hilarious scenarios. Inspired by Molnár, the film's rhythm needed to be frenetic. As Wilder noted: "The general idea was to make the fastest film in the world and give the actors a few slow scenes so it would seem even faster still"<sup>27</sup>. In order to do this, the director thought it essential to cast James Cagney in the lead role, famous for the devilish speed with which he could fire his dialogue<sup>28</sup>.

<b>CREDITS</b>	
<b>Original title</b>	<i>One, Two, Three</i>
<b>Duration</b>	108 minutes
<b>Year</b>	1961
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Production</b>	Pyramid Productions, Mirisch Company for United Artists
<b>Director</b>	Billy Wilder
<b>Script</b>	Billy Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond (based on a work by Ferenc Molnár)
<b>Music</b>	André Previn
<b>Cinematography</b>	Daniel L. Fapp (black and white) Nominated for an Oscar
<b>Film Editing</b>	Daniel Mandell
<b>Art Direction</b>	Alexander Trauner
<b>Special Effects</b>	Milt Rice
<b>Cast</b>	James Cagney (C.R. MacNamara), Horst Buchholz (Otto Ludwig Piffel), Pamela Tiffin (Scarlett Hazeltine), Arlene Francis (Phyllis MacNamara), Howard St. John (Hazeltine), Hans Lothar (Schlemmer), Leon Askin (Peripetchikoff), Ralf Wolter (Borodenko), Karl Lieffen (Fritz), Hubert von Meyerinck (Count von Droste Schattenburg), Lois Bolton (Melanie)

<sup>27</sup> CROWE, Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 177. Wilder wrote in the preface to the script: "This piece should be acted *molto furioso*, with the rhythm of a fire alarm, giddy, at the suggested speed: one hundred and sixty kilometres on the curves, two hundred and thirty on the straightways", WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 55. The only line in the script preserved from the original theatre play is when Pamela Tiffin admonishes Cagney asking him "why didn't you look after me better?". When directing the scene Wilder insisted that the actress deliver the line clearly as acquiring the rights to the script had not been cheap. WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>28</sup> It would appear that the relationship between the two was not very affable during filming, although the film is full of tributes to the veteran actor: the grapefruit scene, the cuckoo clock music and even Red Buttons' imitation of him. Cagney would not return to the big screen until appearing in *Ragtime* by Milos Forman, 20 years later. Wilder considered him a very right-wing Republican, although he had a notable left-wing past. In 1940 he was interrogated by HUAC, in one of its first inquiries in Hollywood. According to Javier Coma, the FBI had a dossier on him over 200 pages long. The author insinuates the possibility of "a secret removal from the list" which allowed him to continue working without being bothered further by the inquisitors. COMA, Javier, *Diccionario...*, p. 68.

	Hazeltine), Peter Capell (Mishkin), Til Kiwe (journalist), Henning Schlüter (Dr. Bauer), Karl Ludwig Lindt (Zeidlitz), Lilo Pulver (Ingeborg).
<b>Spanish premiere</b>	22-10-1962 (Madrid)
<b>Box office receipts Spain</b>	12.576.936 pesetas
<b>Viewers in Spain</b>	124.169

Source: <http://www.mcu.es>

Wilder's presence in communist Germany provoked a certain mistrust in the West<sup>29</sup>. Shortly after the arrival of the film crew in Berlin, a cinema club held a party in his honour in the Soviet sector. It was organised to celebrate the purchase of the rights to *The Apartment* in order that it be shown in East Germany. The Communists were delighted with the film as they considered it to be extremely critical of America<sup>30</sup>. In his thankyou speech Wilder provoked astonishment when he claimed his story could have taken place in any part of the world except Moscow, for the simple reason that “nobody in Moscow has their own apartment [...] the man would have first had to get rid of the seven families he lived with”. The East Berlin authorities soon began to suspect that Wilder was not going to depict them in a very flattering light in his new picture and demanded to see the script. His answer was a categorical “no”: “I wouldn't even allow President Kennedy to read my script”<sup>31</sup>.

However, the problems facing the film had only just begun. From its very birth, the GDR had seen itself destabilised by the continuous flow of human traffic passing to the FRG via Berlin. The situation started to become so unsustainable that on August 13, 1961, the East German authorities ordered the construction of the Wall to separate the two parts of the city. On the previous day alone, over 4,000 people had fled to the West. The raising of the Wall helped diffuse the tensions which for months had sparked fears of a fresh conflict, whilst at the same time it allowed the GDR to stop the outflow of people and establish the conditions for its economic stability. Berlin was, more than ever, a symbol of division, now even physically.

The construction of the Wall took place during the filming of the picture. “It was like shooting a film in Pompeii, with all the lava flowing out”, Wilder later remembered<sup>32</sup>. Scenes at the Brandenburg Gate had to be shot in the studio with a replica of the monument. In the final cut a preamble had to be added in which MacNamara's voice off-camera explained that the action took place before the Wall was raised by the Communists proving that they were “shifty”. The film, for the large part, was based on the ease of passage between one side of the divided city to the other. If viewers did not accept this convention, a large part of the film's humour would be lost. The film also gave the impression that Wilder wanted to mock that which to rest of humanity seemed a tragedy. When the film opened in Berlin, one newspaper published that “that which we find heartbreaking, Billy Wilder finds amusing”<sup>33</sup>. The critics were divided, although in general they were not favourable<sup>34</sup>. It didn't help much that

<sup>29</sup> His answer was: “I am a naturalised American, very loyal to my country, and I believe I can do more for it by provoking a few healthy laughs than by waving the flag”, WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> “I was praised as a social critic, as someone who had unmasked the capitalist world of markets and employees to which each one felt obligated to sell themselves”, KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, pp. 367-368.

<sup>31</sup> KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>32</sup> KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 140. “There were miles of west Berliners crowded together in silence at the border, which had remained closed throughout the previous night –remembered Diamond– and suddenly the scenes which we had shot there just days earlier took on a new historical significance, because it was possible they would never happen again”, LALLY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

<sup>33</sup> KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>34</sup> According to Pauline Kael “*One, Two, Three* is overwrought tasteless and offensive..., a comedy that pulls out laughs the way a catheter draws urine”, SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 566. *The New Yorker* wrote that Wilder “would



photographs of German civilians being shot down trying to jump the wire fencing by the *VoPo* had been published. The following year would see the Cuban Missile Crisis and the world would teeter on the brink of nuclear war. This combination of factors determined the commercial failure of the film<sup>35</sup>.

*One, Two, Three* cost almost three million dollars to make. Although not an excessive amount, the film did not recover the money. After advertising and distribution costs had been added Mirisch Company and United Artists had lost 1,568,000 dollars<sup>36</sup>. The best summary of what had happened was offered by none other than Wilder himself: “If there's anything I hate more than not being taken seriously, it's being taken too seriously”<sup>37</sup>.

### 3. *When two worlds collide*

Berlin is the microcosm which allows Wilder to analyse a confrontation between the capitalist and communist worlds, one which is not only geopolitical or ideological, but also about a way of life<sup>38</sup>. Together with the parody of the international relations of the era (summit meetings, the right to veto etc.), the film highlights the more risible aspects of the worlds situated on either side of the Iron Curtain. However, it also suggests the irrational drama of a divided world, set at odds in a never-ending conflict.

The **capitalist world** is embodied by the American characters and the Coca-Cola empire represents the American empire<sup>39</sup>. America is money, business, prosperity. It works because, as stated in the film, “everybody owes everybody”. It is not without criticism, above all from the mouth of the young Communist for whom capitalism is “like a dead herring in the moonlight. It shines, but it stinks”. The question of race also comes to the surface, with mentions of the segregation in schools (the Little Rock affair) and life in Atlanta (“Siberia with mint juleps”). For the Communist Otto, the United States are characterised by

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undoubtedly be capable of finding the funny side of the bubonic plague”, WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 211. During these years, American critics were fascinated by European arthouse cinema and tended to look down on artists such as Wilder.

<sup>35</sup> Years later Wilder explained: “A man running down the street who falls down and gets up again, is funny. A man who falls and doesn't get back up is not funny. His fall becomes a tragedy. The building of the wall was one of those tragic falls. Nobody wanted to laugh at the East-West comedy in Berlin, while there were people who, risking their lives, jumped out of windows to jump over the wall, who tried to swim through the sewers, got shot, and even died from a gunshot. But I couldn't explain to the audience that I made *One, Two, Three* in different circumstances to those when the film was released”, KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>36</sup> SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 565. Despite its commercial failure, Wilder (who co-produced the film at the expense his own company, Pyramid) received the salary agreed upon and maintained complete artistic control of the picture. *Op. cit.*, p 569.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 565. Wilder always considered that “It was a good film. Good. A high seven out of ten. Or a low eight”, CROWE, Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> A city which can “any day blow sky high”. There are several references to the difficult access to Berlin “unless those damn commies shoot it [the plane] down”. The famous cuckoo clock was given to MacNamara by his employees on the tenth anniversary of the “Berlin airlift”, that is, in 1958. We are also reminded that 1.500 crossed into West Berlin per day, fleeing from the East, which explains the eventual construction of the Wall.

<sup>39</sup> Four years earlier Coca Cola had protested that Gary Cooper was a Pepsi Cola salesman in *Ariane*. Wilder had promised at the time that he would equal the balance in a future film. However, Pepsi, by means of Joan Crawford who was a member of the board, protested the use of the rival soft drink in *One, Two, Three*. This is why Wilder included the film's final scene, in which the lead is dispensed a bottle from a Coca Cola machine... which turns out to be Pepsi, WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 212. Interestingly, in 1929 Wilder as a journalist in Berlin had written that Coca Cola “tastes like burnt tyres”, SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 551.

delinquency, gangsterism, discrimination, corruption and the unemployed cotton pickers in Mississippi. It is he who provides the most critical perspective of America, which is why his conversion to capitalism at the end is all the more poignant.

The character who best embodies the capitalist world is C.R. MacNamara, the central focus of the film, played by James Cagney. MacNamara appears a self-confident man, always with a sing-song tone in his voice<sup>40</sup>. Or so it seems. In reality, throughout the entire film he is dragged along by events, trying to put right what others destroy. He is the typical American who wishes to mould the world according to his own interests, but is taken aback when others do not always yield to his wishes<sup>41</sup>. Paradoxically, his success in transforming Otto into a dignified capitalist son-in-law will prove to be his biggest failure, as he will snatch the promotion for which MacNamara had yearned for so long<sup>42</sup>.

His wife, Phyllis (“the accounting department”), constantly mocks MacNamara, ridicules his projects, and reproaches his authoritarianism, often calling him *Mein Führer*. Despite being aware of her husband's infidelity (he wears his elevator shoes every time he gets a new teacher), she does not recriminate him as she doesn't want to be a “nagging American wife”. This view of bourgeois social hypocrisy is typical of Wilder, it is a theme which is developed extensively in *Kiss Me Stupid* (1964). Nevertheless, she wants to return home, which could be interpreted as a nod to traditional American isolationism. The MacNamaras have been away from home for a long time (since 1945?) and their two children have a right to be educated in America, she reproaches: “Hopping all around the map from Baghdad to Caracas to Cape Town”. The happy ending in this sense is somewhat ill-intentioned, the family is saved and returns home but is that what they all wanted?<sup>43</sup>

In third place comes Scarlett, a spoiled, impulsive girl, typical of the post-war generation, who is wealthy and without worries of any kind, and who understands nothing of the world around her. In her ignorance and naivety she falls in love with a young Communist who embodies the complete opposite of that which she represents<sup>44</sup>. She considers that to declare oneself to be against the Yankees is not anti-American, given that everybody is against them in Atlanta. She thinks that Otto is a Republican because he is from the German Democratic Republic, and she seriously maintains that the USSR is an abbreviation of Russia. She doesn't hesitate to assert that her parents should be liquidated when the time comes.

Mr. and Mrs. Hazeltine, represent Middle America. He, absorbed in business, she wracked with ignorance. The husband is so full of prejudice that he won't even consider the possibility of doing business on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In their relationship with their

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<sup>40</sup> Inspired by Robert McNamara, Kennedy's Defence Secretary, also head of a large corporation, Ford, before entering into politics. Continuing the name play, Scarlett and her mother Melania, both from Atlanta, jokingly refer to *Gone With The Wind*.

<sup>41</sup> “With Cagney's presence he dominated the screen, the film could seem to back the values and beliefs of MacNamara, but the character is only meant to be a comic figure, an exaggeration of the persistent determination of Americans to reshape the world in their likeness”, LALLY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 370. Wilder explored for the first time the stereotypical American executive, wealthy and emotionally repressed in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, and again in *Sabrina* (Linus Larrabee), and in later versions of the same character in *Love in the Afternoon*, *Avanti* and to a lesser degree in *The Apartment*, *Ibid*, p. 270.

<sup>42</sup> Perhaps a subtle warning that the Germany of the economic miracle could soon become a serious rival to the United States, who had so generously helped in its reconstruction following the war.

<sup>43</sup> “On the rare occasions that children appear in Wilder's films (most notably in *The Seven Year Itch*, *One, Two, Three* and *The Fortune Cookie*,) they usually serve to highlight the drawbacks of bourgeois domestic life”, LALLY, Kevin, *op.cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>44</sup> Otto refers to her as a: “typical bourgeois parasite and the rotten fruit of a corrupt civilisation”.

daughter, the generational problems which were beginning to surface in America in the Sixties, can be detected.

The last American characters are the military police who arrive at the office looking for Schlemmer. They serve as a reminder that Berlin continues to be an occupied territory, under the protection of the United States. Their presence and attitude is a contrast to that of the harsh police in the communist zone.

The portrait of life in the **communist world** is devastating. If Berlin were the showcase of the East for the West, as its leaders desired, the image could not be more pitiful. A Berlin in ruins, fifteen years after the end of the war and with its inhabitants, above all, concerned with parading<sup>45</sup>. The references to life in the USSR are equally critical: trains which neither depart nor arrive on time (the train bound for Moscow at 7 o'clock leaves promptly at 8,15), minimal living quarters (the lovers will put a tablecloth and napkins on the bed as there is neither a table nor chairs), communal bathrooms, a dehumanised education system in which parents are not allowed contact with their children who are given over to the Party (The People's Maternity Ward, The People's Obstetrician, The People's Nursery School, "the state takes care of everything") and whom they can only see on parade, manipulation of information (in *Pravda* one can only read the funnies), a system in which freedom shines in its own absence (they are never mistaken because they don't vote) and, as if that wasn't enough, extreme cold (although according to Otto these are "fascist lies"). The party at the Hotel Potemkin shows the dull pursuits available to the proletariat. The Russian car in the chase scene is a living image of communism: it strives to imitate capitalism (it is a copy of an old Western model), but it falls to pieces while trying to catch up with it.

The characters which stand out the most in the communist block (apart from Otto) are the three commissars. They are clearly inspired by three similar characters from *Ninotchka*, for which Wilder co-wrote the script. They are ambitious, cynical, lustful and traitorous. Moreover, they know perfectly well that the system for which they work is oppressive and remains afloat on lies and betrayals. Their points of reference are their own leaders: Malenkov was killed by Khrushchev and Trotsky by Stalin. Therefore, at the first opportunity, they desert. The Communists in the end want to be capitalists, which would explain the need to construct the Wall. There is a Russian proverb which one of the inspectors sarcastically pronounces: "Go west, young man". The system is sustained by a pack of lies which only dreamers like Otto believe, the youth of a generation who have not known the worst times in the history of communism. The fate of a dissident is manual labour in the salt mines, pulling heavy sacks with the feverish breath of the Cossacks on the back of your neck. There, says MacNamara, "they toss people in jail like we throw away used kleenex". All of this is peppered with the "Sabre Dance", by Soviet composer Aram Khachaturian, awarded the Order of Lenin.

In between the two aforementioned worlds are **the Germans**. Of course, they are of two kinds, as many capitalists as Communists. They are the most numerous characters and all appear to be cut from the same cloth. From the first scene they are depicted through the loyal chauffeur who open doors servilely. Later we see the disciplined office workers who get up and stand to attention at the boss's arrival as: "now it's a democracy they can do what they want. What they want is to stand". The Germans have become perfectly adapted to their new masters, who they serve as they did Hitler. In the East they have made the transition from Nazi totalitarianism to communism without difficulty. In the West the advantages of

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<sup>45</sup> Wilder insisted that the other side of the gate appear in ruins "however much the East Germans had done it up like a storefront", SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

American protection have become self-evident. The references to “the old days” are constant and it is surely here that Wilder is most in his element. He knows the country perfectly, its weaknesses and defects, and he exploits his knowledge to the limits. However, always from a humorous angle and without bitterness, which is praiseworthy considering that the majority of his family died in Nazi concentration camps<sup>46</sup>.

In the West there are several interesting characters. There is Schlemmer, obliging and Prussian, of course with a Nazi past which he is anxious to hide (“Adolf Who?”). His character would appear to be inspired by Schultz in *To Be or Not To Be* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1942). When MacNamara declares a “general alarm” and orders “complete mobilisation”, he enthusiastically adds: “like the good old days!”. Ingeborg, the secretary, is a kind of teutonic Marilyn. The chauffeur, Fritz, can remorselessly betray his employer for one good reason: money. The journalist who appears at the end, is ex SS, and also reflects Wilder's fixation with the press, present in several of his films (MacNamara doesn't know whether it's possible to buy a German journalist because he has never tried). The lawyer, competent and unscrupulous, authorises and dissolves weddings and adoptions at whim. The doctor, hums Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. Later the vendors of clothing, flowers, shoes, ties, jewellery, hats, manicures and pyjamas ask no questions, they are only concerned with doing business swiftly. The manager of the bottling plant accepts an inferior position in exchange for higher wages, in order to give his place to Otto. Count von Droste Schattenburg is of particular interest as he represents the old European aristocracy, that which Wilder sarcastically pokes fun at, reduced to working in a gentleman's washroom and who does not hesitate to sell his name and title for money.

For its part, in East Berlin, representatives of the communist system are depicted. These are embodied by the People's Police, whose brutal methods (although also treated comically in the film), are reminiscent of the Nazis. Even their attitudes and uniforms seem to underline the notion that totalitarianism has not disappeared in Germany. In the East they had gone back to their old ways. Not in the West, however, as they preferred to make money with their American friends.

The character of Otto Ludwig Piffl<sup>47</sup>, is perhaps that which Wilder depicts with the most sympathy, despite the problems he had with the actor cast in the role. His characterisation is impeccable: visor, motorcycle, jumper, no socks, nor underpants (MacNamara's wife is not surprised they are winning the Cold War), keen on reading (he was taking 200 books and a shirt to Moscow), chess (a common topic in Russia), in need of a haircut (MacNamara would do it with a hammer and sickle). He is a rocket engineer, but is ignorant of the basic rules of etiquette. He spits on Fort Knox and on Wall Street, and sends Frank Sinatra to hell. (“Unsanitary little jerk”). He is a young and naive idealist who believes the propaganda of the regime: “we will take over Western Europe, we will bury you” (almost literally a quote by Khrushchev). He believes that all the women in the world ought to have a mink which earns him the sympathy of MacNamara's wife and, above all, of her maid. He did not participate in the excesses of Nazi Germany, and is a victim of the new communist regime. His genuine love for Scarlett changes him and, when he finally opens his eyes, he ends up crossing over to the side of the capitalists without great difficulty. “Is everybody in the world corrupt?”, asks a surprised Otto before the deserter Commissar. “I don't know everybody”, replies the Commissar cynically.

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<sup>46</sup> “I really wanted to reflect the Germans as a bunch of lying, covetous, greedy ex-Nazis on one side of *Checkpoint Charlie* and as disused puppets, fascist and outdated, on the other. I thought that would be fun”, SIKOV, Ed, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

<sup>47</sup> A nod to his friend Otto Ludwig Preminger?

#### 4. Billy Wilder in view of History

*One, Two, Three* is not the only of Billy Wilder's works which is interesting from a historical point of view. As one of his biographers notes, Wilder "is an acute observer though cynical of the world around him, and his favourite topic is, perhaps, the inherent weakness of man"<sup>48</sup>. Indeed, is it not the human being who is the protagonist and driving force of history? The films of this exceptional portrayer of the soul have become, unintentionally, a first-hand source for reconstructing and interpreting the past<sup>49</sup>.

Wilder's films can be grouped into two categories according to their relation with history. In the first, those pictures set in earlier times to when they were filmed would be included, they are strictly *historical*. From a "chronological" point of view, the first would be *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, which has the world of espionage in the Victorian era as a backdrop and in which even the character of Queen Victoria appears. Following this would be *The Emperor Waltz*, set in the Austro-Hungarian court in 1906 (curiously the year in which Wilder was born). Next comes *The Spirit of St. Louis* about the epic first flight across the Atlantic in 1927. Also in the period between the two world wars are *The Front Page*, a stark tale of the world of sensationalist journalism in Chicago and *Some Like It Hot* set in 1929 around the notorious Valentine's Day Massacre. Later there would be *Stalag 17* about life inside a German prison camp during the Second World War and even *Witness For The Prosecution* which includes a flashback to post-war Berlin, that of desperation and the black market.

Alongside these is the second group, those which were set in the times they were filmed but have come to bear documentary value for historians. These include titles such as *Five Graves to Cairo* about the war in North Africa, in which Rommel even appears, or *A Foreign Affaire*, in which he portrays the moral and material destruction of the old capital of the Reich. *The Apartment* could also be classified here which describes the drab existence of an American businessman, his joy, his pain and the loneliness of the big city, *The Lost Weekend*, which depicts the drama of alcoholism, and *Kiss Me Stupid*, a harsh portrait of the social hypocrisy in a typical village in the American West. Finally, of course, his series of films about the media: *Sunset Boulevard*, *Fedora* and *Ace in the Hole* (AKA *The Big Carnival*).

*One, Two, Three* falls into this second group. In 1961, Wilder chose the Cold War as the plot for a feature film because he wanted to paint a portrait of the world in which he lived. Certainly this era had risible or even ridiculous aspects within its drama: cities, countries and continents broken by ideology, nuclear bombs capable of destroying the planet several times over, irrational sectarianism. Over time, this portrait of his present has become a celluloid window through which to peer at the past. Through it one can observe the divided post-war Berlin with its characteristic human fauna. Also, however, owing to Wilder's lucid and ironic

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<sup>48</sup> WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 47. "Many critics believed that the cynicism in his work comes from his early life in Berlin after the First World War. Below the superficial cheer, Berlin was a city of disillusion and disenchantment at that time", *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> On the relationship between history and the cinema there is a summary in PELAZ LÓPEZ, José-Vidal, "El pasado como espectáculo: reflexiones sobre la relación entre la Historia y el cine", in *Légete. Estudios de Comunicación y sociedad*, Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción (Chile), nº 7, December 2006, pp. 5-31.

eye we may better understand the forced, arbitrary and artificial nature of the division of Berlin, of Germany, of Europe and of the world during those years.

*One, Two, Three* is arguably the film with the most historical puns per minute of footage. There are references to Algeria (“not with the Algerian situation the way it is”), to Cuba (rockets, cigars), Congo, Laos (“germ warfare”), decolonialisation (“Africa for the Africans”), the space race (Russian rockets reach Venus while American rockets end up on Miami Beach), racial segregation (in Georgia you never know when the schools will open), the situation in Eastern Europe (Albania and sheep), Willy Brandt (as a socialist rendered somewhat unreliable), to high-ranking members of the Kennedy administration (“Dean Rusk, Dean Acheson, Dean anybody”), to Khrushchev in the UN (the famous shoe scene during the secretary's dance), to Yugoslavia (“we will deal with Tito when the time comes”, and their ambassador in Berlin who wears striped trousers, an unmistakable symbol of bourgeois decadence), to Egypt (a reference to the deposed King Faruk) and even the cinema industry (*Spartacus*, *Gone With The Wind*, *La Dolce Vita* or *The Public Enemy*)<sup>50</sup>.

However, we should not stop short at the witty repartee or the frenetic pace of the film (reminiscent in some scenes of the screwball comedies of the Thirties and in others even *slapstick*). Wilder was not a “message” director but, undoubtedly, in all of his films he appeals to the audience in a more or less direct way<sup>51</sup>. *One, Two, Three*, proposes an in-depth reflection of the Cold War. Capitalists and Communists are alike, replete with faults, as is human nature. Nobody's perfect, as the famous closing phrase in another of his films sentences. However, if it is necessary to choose, which in life (and in history) it always is, the American way of life offers clear benefits. There is little to question for one who found in America a true promised land to where he fled the horrors of totalitarianism, German to be exact. The construction of the Wall during the shooting of the film, would come to clamorously confirm Wilder's choice.

The young Otto despairs when he realises that neither in the East nor the West are there idealism or values. “Maybe we should liquidate the human race and start all over again”, he exclaims in desperation. It is here that Wilder inserts his own moral: “Any world that can produce the Taj Mahal, William Shakespeare, and Stripe toothpaste can't be all bad”. At the end Piffel calls for equality, liberty and justice, without realising he is invoking Jefferson, Lincoln and the pledge of allegiance to the flag. The principles and values which make man worthy of such things may only be found in the refuge of American democracy. The film leaves the door open for hope for a better future, in that which mankind might, perhaps, regain its good sense... and follow in the footsteps of America. This dream is embodied by the young couple and, above all, in the child they are expecting. The good thing about the American way of life is that, as Scarlett points out, the child can choose whether to be “a capitalist or a rich communist”.

In 1986, in the midst of Perestroika, the film was re-released in Germany. Wilder and his wife travelled to Berlin for the event. The film which had been a flop in 1961 became an audience success, young students applauded enthusiastically<sup>52</sup>. In hindsight *One, Two, Three* was a

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly there are no humorous references to the witch-hunt in Hollywood.

<sup>51</sup> He only admitted that in *The Apartment* he wanted to “say a few things about our society”. “But we never intended to rub people's faces in our attempts at unveiling the truth. If we had done, people would have been horrified. In some films, I do hope that people leave the movie theatre more enriched. But I would never make people pay two or three dollars to shove lessons down their throats”, WOOD, Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> In 1986 the manager of one of the most prominent movie theatres in Berlin phoned Horst Buchholz (Otto in the film) and told him: You have to come and see this with your own eyes. We've had to put up the *Full House*

prophetic film. The story of Otto Ludwig Piffel, zealous bolshevik transformed into a capitalist (and a noble) in record time, (three hours and two minutes to be precise) would stand to represent the history of the GDR, absorbed by West Germany after the Wall came down in 1989. A perfect metaphor for the end of communism and the end of the Cold War<sup>53</sup>. Many at the time threw up their hands in horror on discovering the true face of the failed “real socialism”. Almost thirty years earlier, Billy Wilder had already shown it to be so.

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sign and everyone is getting up, clicking their heels and saying: *Sitzen Machen!*. They are brandishing American and Russian flags and joining in with the dialogue on the screen”, LALLY, Kevin, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

<sup>53</sup> “The film was prophetic: we know how whole countries can be transformed or reunified in this way (overnight)”, KARASEK, Hellmuth, *op. cit.*, p. 9. “Wilder broke several speed records with this movie: nobody could speak more quickly than James Cagney; nobody could change from being communist to capitalist so quickly; and no film has overtaken reality so fast”, SEIDEL, Claudius, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

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