

KEY TRENDS IN AMERICAN FILM

Session Three
New Cold War Cinema

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture
Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

14:20 – 15:50

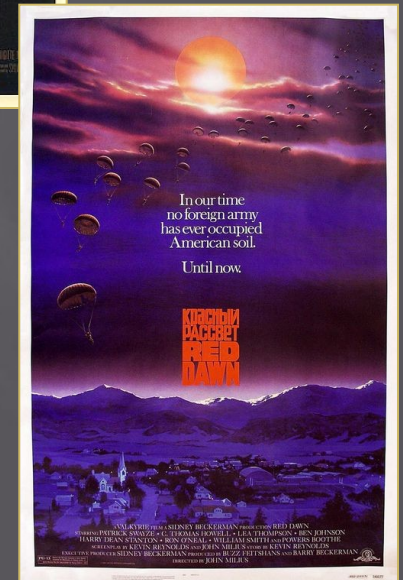
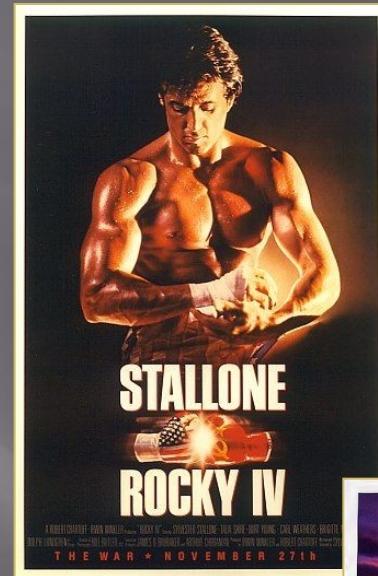
Screening: *Rocky IV* (1985)

15:50–16:05

Break

16:05–17:25

New Cold War Cinema

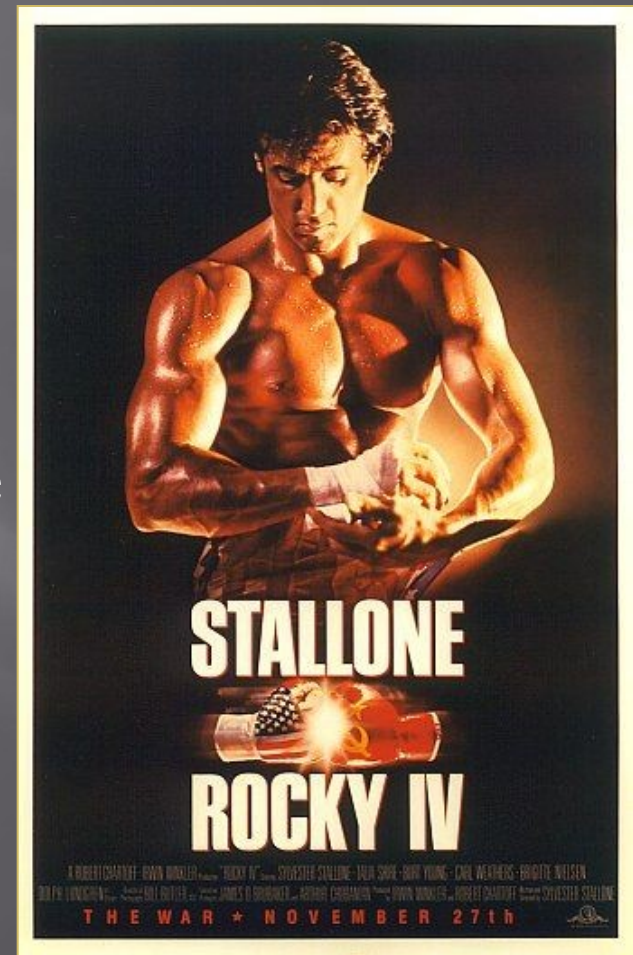


Agenda

New Cold War Cinema as Pro-Reagan Cinema

New Cold War Cinema as a cinema of (occasional) resistance

The case of *Red Dawn* (1985), and especially *Rocky IV* (1985)



What does Prince suggest were the main themes and positions of New Cold War Cinema?

New Cold War Cinema: The Party Line

Transpose Reagan-era Manichean rhetoric onto the comic book heroes/villains of action films

Ultra-conservative, hyper-patriotic

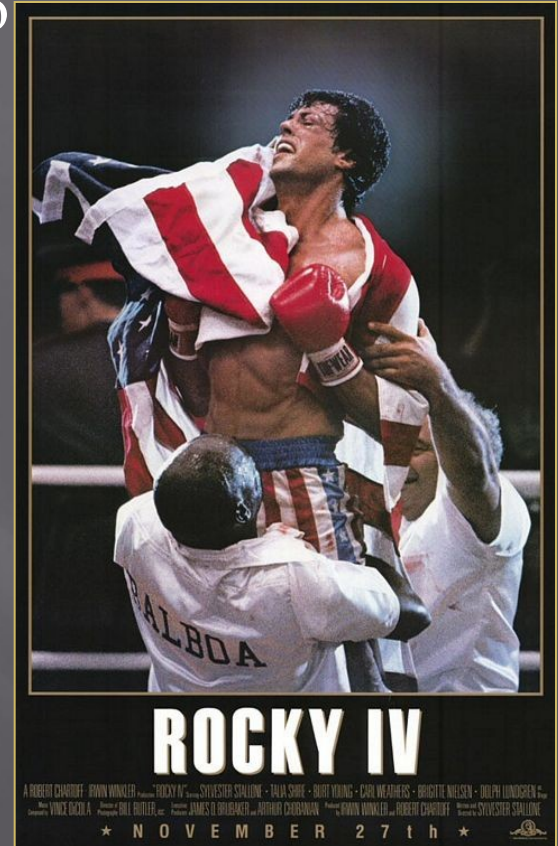
Hollywood acted almost propagandistically

American Superiority

“Reactive” militarism, capitalism, consumption, hyper-masculinity

Soviet Union (and others)

Monolithic, hostile, totalitarian, imperialistic



In what sense does Prince suggest *Red Dawn* is a prime example of this type of cinema?

Can we also see *Red Dawn* as less dogmatic than this?

The Case of *Red Dawn* (1984): Ideological Agglomeration or Cinema of Resistance?

Surface demonization/valorization is obvious

Self-critical

1. Reminds us of the prevalence of filmic propaganda; propaganda like itself
2. Posits that stories can be misunderstood by ideologues, due to inflexible viewing prisms
3. Promotes Marxian resistance of oppression

Milius seems to present this film as an act of resistance against Hollywood political dogma.



“Hollywood was always Left Wing, and I was a pariah. ... The codes of behavior that I live by, and the institutions that I admire, were probably dead before I was born. I feel I was more of a traditional American Conservative; that I was more in the line of traditional rugged individualism. I find resisting power, and revolution, very romantic.”

John Milius, writer-director of *Red Dawn*

Questions: *Rocky IV*

What characteristics/traits are demonized?

What characteristics/traits are valorized or celebrated?

What do you think are some of the political positions articulated by the film?

Is *Rocky IV* simply and solely right-wing, hyper-patriotic “Agit-prop”?

Rocky IV: Republican Victory Fantasy or Damning indictment of Reagan America

Consumer capitalism

Stupefying, soul-destroying

Political Institutions

Manipulative, exploitative, self-serving

Technology

De-humanizing

Free Press/Corporate Media

Provocative, misleading, dangerous

Self-Reflexivity

Implicates this film and Hollywood therein



Rocky IV as Agit-Prop

“Americans are being brought up with the idea that you can only deal with a Russian with a gun”. Georgi A. Ivanov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Culture.

“I call it war-nography” - Yevgeby Yevtushenko, Soviet Poet

“Even the biggest pacifist in the world is going to find himself shouting in the aisles”. Jack Curry, *USA Today*

“The anti-soviet, pro-American flavor of [*Rocky IV*] and other films like it cannot but damage U.S.-Soviet Relations [...] by warping the attitudes of the American people, particularly children and the uneducated,”. Carol Basset, *Chicago Tribune*

Rocky IV as Cultural Insensitivity

“There was not a word that was true in [*Rocky IV*] ... It hurt me that the Soviet Union and the Soviet people could be presented in that way [...] It frightened me and upset me. I have never seen so much violence”. Katerina Lycheva, Soviet child Actress and US cultural exchange Envoy

“What is objectionable about this film is not the conflict between the characters but the constant and unabashed pressure on the audience to scorn, pity, and demean the Russian people and their government”. Carol Basset, *Chicago Tribune*.

Rocky IV as Anodyne Fantasy

“We all know that [*Rocky IV*] is pure Hollywood, pure fantasy”. **Gene Siskel**, *Chicago Tribune*.

“This cinematic combat between Rocky and the Ruskie was as offensively predictable and jingoistically implausible as the 32 blows Stallone took in the third round”. **Ellen Goodman**, *Washington Post*.

“[Stallone] is far too dense and self-involved to create propaganda of any artistic or political merit [...] When it comes to movie propaganda, we should learn a little from the masters of the form [the Soviets]”. **David Remnick**, *Washington Post*

Rocky IV as Leftist Tract

“*[Rocky IV]* has less to do with nationalism than populism ... That’s not American war-nography; that’s universal box office”. **Anon., *New York Times*.**

“In this day of rapprochement with the Russians, *Rocky IV*’s ultimate message can only be contributive ... it’s one more small step for mankind”, **Arthur Knight, Hollywood Reporter.**

“*Rocky IV* was pro-Russian”. **Sylvester Stallone.**

“I put American down at the end [of *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)]! I put my own country down.” **Sylvester Stallone.**

Prince: Historical Precedent and the fine line between themes and position-taking

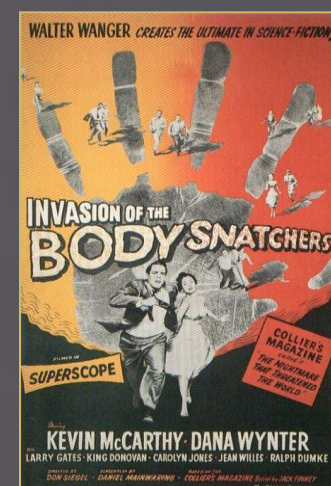
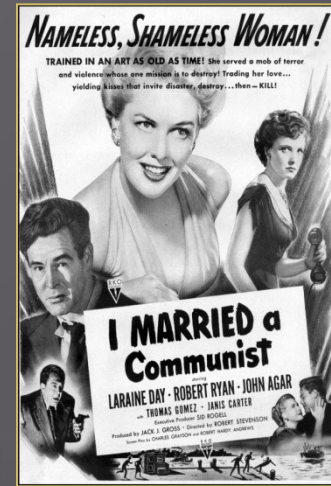
Understands NCWC as the successor to the Anti-Communist cycle of the 1940s/50s

This was anomalous: Hollywood prioritized politics (HUAC) over economics

Earlier films insulated Hollywood from accusations that it harbored communists

NCWC is better understood in relation to 1950s sci-fi: thematized cold war issues ...

But took a variety of positions thereon



Prince and Ignoring filmmakers' Politics

Films were both “Auteur” Pieces

Red Dawn: John Milius – Old Right; Paleoconservative, Anti-Federalist, traditional values, religion, family

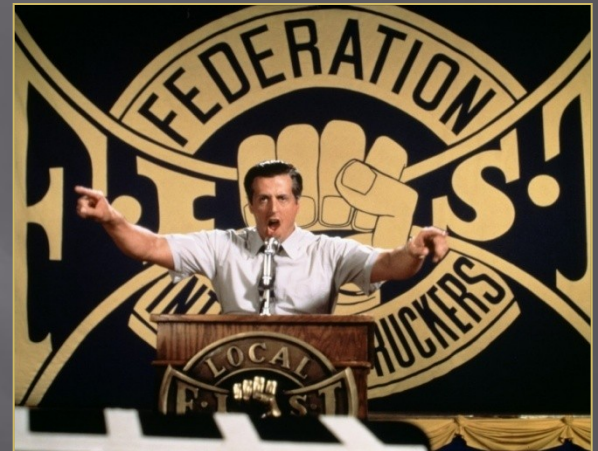
Rocky IV: Sylvester Stallone – Populist

By 1985, a very powerful filmmaker

History of populist filmmaking

History of anti-institution filmmaking

History of Leftist filmmaking



Plymouth Rock landed on us ...

F.I.S.T (1978) Trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAndBxYrTBE>

First Blood (1982) Trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAqLKlxY3Eo>

In Sum

Prince sees this New Cold War Cinema as pro-American and heavily Anti-Soviet (albeit with some reconciliation by late 80s)

On a basic narrative level, we can see these films as celebratory fantasies of American spirit overcoming the evil Soviet empire

However, what Prince casts as ideological agglomeration, can sometimes be seen as an attempt to offer a self-reflexive critique

After all, some of these films critiqued State power, the media, technology, consumerism, social inequality, and self-indulgence

Some also came from anti-Reagan filmmakers