



– Film Educational Handout –

## **A BOMB WAS STOLEN / S-A FURAT O BOMBA**

Romania 1961

Spy Comedy

**First showing in Germany:** 23rd November, 1962, in the GDR

**Director:** Ion Popescu-Gopo

**Screenplay:** Ion Popescu-Gopo

**Cameraman:** Stefan Horvath

**Musical Director:** Dumitru Capoianu

**Production:** Filmstudio Bucuresti

**Cast:** Iurie Darie, Emil Botta, Haralambie Boroş, Ovid Teodorescu, Geo Saizescu and others

**Running time:** 72 Min.

**Format:** 35 mm, b&w, without dialogue.

**Certificate:** none issued

**Recommended viewing:** 15+

**Educational Level:** Year 10 and above

**Themes:** the East-West conflict, the arms race

**Subject Areas:** History, Political / Social Studies, Art, Ethics / Religion, German

Rights/Permission for school screenings: PROGRESS Film-Verleih.

### **Content and Storyline**

The film opens in a deserted wasteland, which resembles a mysterious no-man's-land. This is where the main character appears for the first time. He picks a flower, but as he does this, a military aircraft catches him unawares and he's temporarily taken into custody by special forces in silver uniforms. An atom bomb is about to be tested. Back in the city, the young man goes looking for work, but by mistake – for this is a comedy, after all – he picks up a briefcase containing an atom bomb. Not realising what he's done, he carries it around the town, hotly pursued by a gang of criminals, who originally stole it and want it back, and uniformed guards from the XOX Company, from whom it was stolen and who also want to get it back. Whilst the two groups chase each other back and forth, each trying to stop the other getting hold of the bomb, ending with a final grand battle, the young man falls in love with a bus conductress. He wins her heart and at the end of the film, the power of their love turns the destructive bomb into small, energy-radiating pieces, which they distribute to the townspeople. In the final scene, they return to the place where it all began: the atom bomb test has turned the wasteland into a flower-strewn meadow.

### **Theme**

The theme of the film is an allegory of the arms race during the Cold War – the competitive pressure to 'get the bomb' and the fears about its destructive potential. Two opposing factions, symbolising wealth and power, battle for sole possession of the bomb. They race each other to get the bomb back from its unwitting owner, the young man. The members of the gangster mob are so afraid of what the bomb represents, that at the very moment they are about to seize it, their courage fails them and they fumble their chance. The nerdy lock-picker's lips tremble and twitch; the hard-bitten cowboy's forehead is bathed in sweat and the biggest, fattest man in the gang sneezes in terror at full volume. In spite of this high comedy, the film has a serious message: that the real danger of the bomb lies less in its explosive power but, on the contrary, in the mutual

rivalry of the rich and powerful to possess it. The solution to this problem is provided at the end of the film: neither the gangsters nor XOX, the company that owns it, will get it back for their warlike ends. Instead, the energy potential of the atom bomb is redirected for peaceful purposes to all men, whatever their origin or skin colour.

### Characters and Character Groups in the Film

#### The Man with the Flower

The anonymous hero of the film, who picks a flower in the opening scene, is the human on-screen *alter ego* of a cartoon character created by the film's director Ion Popescu-Gopo. This character had appeared before in his animated cartoons and almost always carried a flower. In *A Bomb Was Stolen*, the young man in the rumpled suit is at the same time the most unthreatening and the most dangerous character in the film. His peace-loving nature is underlined at the outset by his act of picking the flower. But although he harbours no evil intentions and is only looking for work, he very soon becomes a threat to the whole city: the slightest knock could set off the bomb in the briefcase...and so, quite unwittingly, he runs hither and thither through the town, literally a ticking time-bomb.

#### The Criminal Gang

The gang of criminals, who originally set out to steal and make off with the bomb, and who pursue the young man throughout the film, are deliberate allusions to aspects of American culture. The gang leader – portly, dressed in a smart suit, with a fedora on his head and a cigarette between his lips – reminds us of the gangster Al Capone, boss of the Chicago underworld in the 1920s and 1930s. Like Capone, who posed as a collector of antiques, the gang leader in this film is the owner of a bridal wear shop – where people smoke and gamble in a backroom, and where there's another secret room hidden behind a trapdoor.

The way the gang leader and his wife behave in the film is clearly meant as a parody of American consumerism: returning from a shopping trip, they show off, to each other (and to the film audience) the latest clothes they've bought, as they play modern jazz on the gramophone. In the wife's case, her clothes even match the décor of the flat. The behavioural quirks of the gang members are a catalogue of clichés straight out of American gangster films, westerns and slapstick comedies, effectively recreated here. But their outward coolness does not stand up under pressure: although they're armed with weapons and all manner of sophisticated burglary tools, and have every opportunity to achieve their ends, at the decisive moment, they lack the courage to make off with the bomb.

#### The Uniformed Guards

The uniformed guards, who, at the start of the film, are supposed to prevent the theft of the bomb from the XOX Company and then to recover it, are unbelievably clumsy and stupid. They obediently follow orders to pursue the gangsters, but then run straight past them. They move in close formation, under the command of an officer, who gives directions with a police whistle. They march through the XOX building as if they were a well rehearsed *corps de ballet*. The insignia on their uniforms – two crossed lightning flashes – looks rather like that of Hitler's SS: this could be to remind the audience of Romania's co-operation with the Nazis under its pre-war dictator Ion Antonescu, or may even be a direct reference to the Nazi régime itself and to its militaristic structures, which suppressed individual rights and activities. Their monochrome uniforms and their lack of any distinguishing personal features is in marked contrast to the striking and easily recognisable types in the criminal gang; so this may also possibly be intended as an allusion to the subordinate role of the individual in socialist society.

#### The Bus Conductress and the Townspeople

The young bus conductress with the blonde hair lives in modest circumstances in the suburbs. She returns there in the evening at the end of her shift; her neighbours are ordinary working people, who represent a cross-section of the citizens of 'fraternal socialist states' from all parts of the world.

The young man falls in love with her at first sight: her angelic qualities are underlined in the film by two surreal white wings, which every so often just appear on her back. She is a kind of Virgin Mary figure, who at the end of the film initiates the idea of the peaceful uses of atomic energy.

### Cinematic Resources and Materials

#### Genre

*A Bomb Was Stolen* is one of the few films which debates the theme of the arms race from both an artistic and comic point of view. The film is dialogue-free and is produced in the style of a silent film; it deploys slapstick, and parodies both the American cinema in general and the spy film genre in particular. The surreal storyline is evident from the opening sequence: an indeterminate landscape, the innocuous act of picking a flower, and the futuristic style of the uniforms worn by the military unit, all create an atmosphere of unreality, which pervades the film throughout. The humorous element stems from the ignorance of the leading character about what's in the briefcase he's picked up, as well as from the contradictions inherent in his role.

*A Bomb Was Stolen* stands out from the other spy films of its time, precisely because it manipulates the style and character devices of the conventional spy genre, breaks the rules, shifts meanings and uses this to create the comedy. But as in any spy film, the hero here is also on a perilous mission – only he doesn't know it. Another example: the most sophisticated tools deployed by the criminals to burgle the XOX site prove to be useless in the end. And the two rival groups do not symbolise good and evil – 'them and us' in the Cold War context – but are both equally reprehensible.

#### Communication of Thoughts and Feelings without Words

In exactly the same way as a true silent film, *A Bomb Was Stolen* employs visual language to express thoughts and emotions that would normally require dialogue. The conversation between the leaders of the rival groups, the gangsters and XOX, is carried out with the help of an electronic intermediary, a brain-operated typewriter. The audience understands the love affair between the hero and the bus conductress not just from his lingering, blissful gazes, but also from the angel's wings she grows in his daydreams.

#### Historical Influences from other Films

The production style of *A Bomb Was Stolen* is reminiscent of the slapstick used by the French actor / director Jacques Tati: situation comedy without words, backed by jazzy music, was the hallmark of *Monsieur Hulot's Holiday* (*Les vacances de M. Hulot*, France, 1953). There were close links from the earliest days of cinema between Romanian and French film-makers, partly based on the similarity of the two languages; there were French directors working in the Buftea Studios in the 1950s and 1960s, and it's quite possible some of Popescu-Gopo's comedy ideas came from his familiarity with Tati's film.

Moreover, there are a number of *hommages* to other famous directors: in the dream sequence, there's an obvious reference to the king of slapstick, Charlie Chaplin. The scene, where the young man dreams of living within his own four walls and eating a meal with his beloved, is almost identical to that in *Modern Times* (USA, 1935) – another sound film which was also produced like a silent film. In the same way, the opening scene, where the young man is caught unawares in the empty wasteland by a military helicopter, has strong overtones of the classic scene in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (USA, 1959), where Cary Grant is pursued by an aeroplane across bare, empty fields. The Hitchcock film was released just two years before *A Bomb Was Stolen*.

### Background and Secondary Themes

#### The Nuclear Arms Race between the USA and the USSR

*A Bomb Was Stolen* was made at the height of the Cold War, when the arms race between the USA and the USSR was in its most intense phase. Nuclear arsenals on both sides of the Iron Curtain were growing apace: their deployment was, at this stage, clearly intended for possible use

in war. In 1961, when *A Bomb Was Stolen* was made, it was just four years on from the declaration of NATO's deterrent policy of *massive retaliation*. A first strike by the USSR – nuclear or conventional – would produce a NATO response of total war, which would necessarily include nuclear weapons. This arms race began to intensify from the early 1960s onwards. On October 30<sup>th</sup> 1961, just days after Soviet and American tanks faced each other, guns at the ready, across Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin, the Russians exploded the most powerful hydrogen bomb ever at their test site in the Arctic Ocean. It was 3,500 times more powerful than the bomb at Hiroshima, which killed 45,000 people on the first day in 1945, rising to 136,000 over the next few months. The arms race had in fact begun immediately after the end of the 2nd World War: the USSR tested its first successful atom bomb in 1949, and thus the Americans lost their monopoly of nuclear arms. In the following years, both sides developed hydrogen bombs with ever more powerful radioactive destructive capability. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the two superpowers were locked in an arms race based on the use of strategic weapons with nuclear warheads. The Russians' success in launching the *Sputnik* satellite into space in 1957 suggested an intercontinental rocket strike on the USA was a real possibility, an event often described as 'sputnik shock' by historians. The arms race then broadened into a superpower 'race into space': the silver suits worn by the special units in *A Bomb Was Stolen* can be taken as alluding to this race to the moon.

1961 was also the year the USA began to deploy its B-52 bombers armed with nuclear missiles on 24 / 7 patrols across Europe, the Mediterranean and the Pacific Ocean: if war broke out, these could rapidly be launched at pre-arranged targets in the Soviet Union. A year after *A Bomb Was Stolen* was released, the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. The Americans regarded the stationing of Soviet mid-range nuclear missiles in Cuba as an extreme provocation and they blockaded the Soviet military transport vessels taking them there. Days of negotiations, threats and counter-threats finally ended with the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, backing down and withdrawing the rockets.

The rationale of the nuclear arms race was that as long as bigger and more dangerous weapons could be built, with ever more devastating and destructive explosive power, then neither side could contemplate attacking the other. The nuclear stalemate between the two superpowers guaranteed mutual total destruction in the event of a war, and ultimately had the effect of underpinning peace; at the very least, it ensured there was no open war between the Americans and the Russians.

#### Romania's role in the military alliance of the Warsaw Pact

Romania spent the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War supporting Nazi Germany and fighting against the USSR; then the victorious Red Army marched into Bucharest in August 1944. This paved the way for Romania's adoption of Communism and its alliance with the Soviet Union. The 'People's Republic of Romania' was declared in 1947, with the Communist Party as the only ruling party, under its Minister President, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. He brought about the Stalinisation of Romania, through forced collectivisation and the elimination of all political dissent.

On May 14<sup>th</sup> 1955, the Soviets concluded what they termed 'a pact of friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance' between themselves and seven Central and Eastern European socialist states, including Romania. It was known as the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, or more familiarly, as the Warsaw Pact. This political and military alliance was designed to provide a counterweight to the western military alliance, **NATO**, and to lock the East European 'People's Republics' into the sphere of the Soviet Union. They submitted to the growing dominance of Moscow and ceded much national autonomy, but in exchange they could rely on the support of the Russian nuclear arsenal if it ever came to a war. With the establishment of the Warsaw Pact in the east and NATO in the west, two military alliances now faced each other across Europe, both armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. At this point, the USA, the USSR and the UK were the only nuclear powers.

Romania's relations with the USSR began harmoniously enough, but in the 1960s, the country began to distance itself from its northern neighbour in order to pursue more closely its own national interests. The breakaway was triggered on the one hand by the Soviets' inflexible attitude to the Hungarian uprising of 1956, and again during the second Berlin Crisis, which led to the building of the Wall in August 1961. Another factor was the Cuban Missile Crisis of just over a year later: Romania feared being dragged into a nuclear war that would have endangered its own security

interests. But there was another side to this split: Romania did not accept the power balance within the unified military command structure of the Warsaw Pact. The USSR insisted that it must have sole command of the unified armed forces in time of war and that it alone could decide on the use of nuclear weapons.

The first Warsaw Pact military exercises in fact took place on Romanian soil in 1955; they involved the first-use deployment of nuclear weapons. Soviet troops were at this stage still stationed in Romania and they were only withdrawn in 1958. Thereafter, the first differences of opinion between Bucharest and Moscow started to appear. In 1964, these became more acute, even while Gheorghiu-Dej was still in power, and continued when Nicolae Ceaușescu took over in 1965. Romania was one of the first Warsaw Pact countries to open itself to the west: it was the first member of the Soviet bloc to establish diplomatic relations with West Germany. Nonetheless, Romania remained a member of the Warsaw Pact until it was dissolved on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991.

Against this background, it's hardly surprising that a film which indirectly condemned Soviet nuclear policy was passed by the Romanian censors. If the film is taken as a parable of the situation at that time, with the uniformed XOX guards representing the Soviets and the gangsters the Americans, then *A Bomb Was Stolen* accurately reflects the Romanian view of both superpowers during the Cold War. And the fact that both the gangsters and their opponents are left empty-handed at the end of the film is yet another indirect condemnation of their belligerent objectives – and therefore those of both nuclear superpowers.

#### The Utopian Ideal of the peaceful use of Nuclear Energy

*A Bomb Was Stolen* concludes with the utopian vision of the peaceful use of nuclear energy, bringing with it prosperity and the a sharing of scientific progress. The Danish physicist Niels Bohr had already, in 1950, propounded such a vision of the domestic uses of nuclear energy, in an open letter to the United Nations. Bohr warned of the destructive potential of nuclear weapons and argued for scientific co-operation that would transcend the politics of east and west, in order to apply the benefits of nuclear energy worldwide for peaceful civilian use. He became a role model for the anti-nuclear movement of the 1950s.

#### Suggestion for further viewing

DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB (UK 1964, Director: Stanley Kubrick)

As with *A Bomb Was Stolen*, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* is a comedy about the arms race. But unlike the Romanian film, Kubrick's film ends not in a peaceful Utopia, but with the worst case scenario: an American atom bomb being dropped over Russia. The man responsible for this unauthorised warmongering is General Jack D. Ripper. Whilst the American President is out of the war room and personally trying to persuade the Soviet President that it's all a mistake that a US bomber is over Soviet territory, the B-52 has already broken off contact with its airbase and is on the way to its target.

Stanley Kubrick's film is full of references to other films and to real persons: as in Popescu-Gopo's comedy, there are in *Dr. Strangelove* clichéd western figures, like Major Kong, the officer in charge of the B-52 bomber. Dr Strangelove himself is a German scientist with a predisposition to giving the Nazi salute: he shows some of the character traits of the rocket engineer Wernher von Braun, who worked for the Nazis before becoming a leading light in the American space programme after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. The black glove he wears is also an allusion to Dr Rotwang, the mad scientist in Fritz Lang's 1926 film *Metropolis*.

#### The Director, Ion Popescu-Gopo

b. 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1923, Bucharest, d. 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1989, Bucharest

Popescu-Gopo was given art lessons by his father and went on to study at the Bucharest Academy of Fine Arts. From 1939, he worked as a cartoonist and book illustrator, then in

1950 he joined the Bucharest Cinematographic Studio, in their animation division. There, in collaboration with his father, he made his first animated films, such as *The Disobedient Duck* (1950), and *The Bee and the Dove* (1951). These animations reveal his admiration for the work of Walt Disney. In 1956 he made the first of several films featuring a character he invented, the 'little man': a 10-minute short called *A Brief History*, which won the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival in 1957. He made many more animated films as well as three full-length features, of which *A Bomb Was Stolen* was the first. He worked first as a director, later also as a teacher, in the "Anima" studios, which were founded in 1964.

### Recommended further reading

- Kalter Krieg. 60 Filme aus Ost und West. Katalog der Retrospektive der 41. Internationalen Filmfestspiele Berlin (*The Cold War: 60 films from East and West. Catalogue of the Retrospective of the 41<sup>st</sup> International Film Festival, Berlin*), German Cinematic Foundation (Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek). Berlin 1991.
- Diedrich, Torsten / Heinemann, Winfried / Ostermann, Christian F. (Eds): Der Warschauer Pakt. Von der Gründung bis zum Zusammenbruch 1955 bis 1991 (*The Warsaw Pact. From Founding to Collapse, 1955-1991*). Schriftenreihe der bpb (Band 782). (*Publications of the Federal Agency for Civic Education [vol. 782]*). Bonn 2009.
- Gerdes, Hilke: Rumänien. Mehr als Dracula und Walachei (*Romania. Beyond Dracula and Wallachia*). Schriftenreihe der bpb (Band 707) (*Publications of the Federal Centre for Political Education [vol. 707]*). Bonn 2007.
- Salewski, Michael (Ed.): Das Zeitalter der Bombe. Die Geschichte der atomaren Bedrohung von Hiroshima bis heute (*The Age of the Bomb. The History of the nuclear threat from Hiroshima to Today*). Verlag C. H. Beck, München 1995.
- Schumacher, Frank: Leben mit der Bombe. Kernwaffen und Kalter Krieg, 1945-1962. In: Der Kalte Krieg, hrsg. in Zusammenarbeit mit DAMALS – Das Magazin für Geschichte (*Living with the Bomb. Nuclear Weapons and the Cold War*, in collaboration with *Damals, the Magazine for History*). Konrad Theiss Verlag, Stuttgart 2010, pp. 25-32.
- Stöver, Bernd: Der Kalte Krieg 1947-1991. Geschichte eines radikalen Zeitalters (*The Cold War, 1947 – 1991: The History of a Radical Age*). Verlag C. H. Beck, München 2007. In particular chapter 5: „Eine Welt in Waffen“ (“A Weaponised World”).

### Further Links

- “The Celluloid Curtain – Europe's Cold War in Film” – website.  
<http://www.celluloid-curtain.eu>
- Website with information on the history of nuclear weapons, scientific data on atomic physics, a glossary of terms and an overview of the various initiatives to bring about a nuclear weapons-free world.  
<http://www.atomwaffena-z.info>
- bpb.de: Informationen zur politischen Bildung. Heft 245 (Information on Political Education. Pamphlet no. 245): *Internationale Beziehungen (International Relations)*. Articles and source material on the origins and development of the East-West conflict.  
[http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/90DR2J,0,0,Internationale\\_Beziehungen\\_I.html](http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/90DR2J,0,0,Internationale_Beziehungen_I.html)
- bpb.de: Essay by Annette Kilzer on *Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Learnt to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*.  
[http://www.bpb.de/themen/RGTCB5,0,Dr\\_Seltsam.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/RGTCB5,0,Dr_Seltsam.html)
- Progress-Film Agency website with Information on *Die Gestohlene Bombe*.  
<http://www.progress-film.de/de/filmarchiv/film.php?id=6621>
- Blog by a Romanian schoolboy AG with Information on Ion Popescu-Gopo and excerpts from his animated cartoons.  
<http://www.surprising-romania.blogspot.com/2009/07/ion-popescu-gopo.html>

- Radio documentary “*The Cold War in Spy Films*” on Deutschlandradio Kultur.  
[http://wissen.dradio.de/kino-der-kalte-krieg-im-spionagefilm.38.de.html?dram:article\\_id=10449&sid=](http://wissen.dradio.de/kino-der-kalte-krieg-im-spionagefilm.38.de.html?dram:article_id=10449&sid=)

### Supporting Educational Material on the Cinema

- VISION KINO: *School and Cinema: Practical Textbook for Teachers*.  
<http://www.visionkino.de/WebObjects/VisionKino.woa/1/wa/CMSshow/1109855?wosid=Kn90jwNCZMNhhnMifJHIQM>

### More on this topic on Kinofenster (*Window on the Cinema*)

- The Fog of War (Discussion on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2004).  
[http://www.kinofenster.de/filmeundthemen/neuimkino/archiv\\_neuimkino/the\\_fog\\_of\\_war\\_film/](http://www.kinofenster.de/filmeundthemen/neuimkino/archiv_neuimkino/the_fog_of_war_film/)
- Thirteen Days (Discussion on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2001).  
[http://www.kinofenster.de/filmeundthemen/neuimkino/archiv\\_neuimkino/thirteen\\_days\\_film/](http://www.kinofenster.de/filmeundthemen/neuimkino/archiv_neuimkino/thirteen_days_film/)
- Unter Kontrolle (*Under Control*) (Film of the month, Mai 2011).  
<http://www.kinofenster.de/download/monatsausgabe-unter-kontrolle.pdf>

### Glossary

**NATO** North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, founded in 1949. Military alliance between North American and West European states, with the original objective of deterrence and defence against the Soviet Union and its allies. After the end of the Cold War, its main focus shifted to the fostering of partnership dialogue, arms control and crisis intervention measures throughout the European and Atlantic areas.

## Suggestions for further classroom study

Study Area	Topic	Social Types and Classwork Exercises
German / Art	Character Outlines	<b>Group work (GW):</b> think up names or descriptions for the characters and groups of characters in the film. List them on a flipchart, add a drawing alongside to symbolise each one and a single sentence to sum up the main objective(s) of the character or character group.
	Film Genre	<b>(GW):</b> Define the characteristics of westerns, slapstick comedy and spy films. Next, compile a list of those characteristics which occur in <i>A Bomb Was Stolen</i> , and of when they appear in the film; then write them up on a wall-chart or panel.
	Film comparisons	<b>Class Work (CW):</b> Compare the dream sequence from <i>A Bomb Was Stolen</i> with the dream sequence in Charlie Chaplin's <i>Modern Times</i> (USA 1936); highlight the similarities and differences in terms of their content, humour and the artistic direction.
History / Political Science	Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear espionage	<b>Individual work (IW):</b> Write a short essay on the nuclear arms race.
	The NATO strategy of 'massive retaliation'	<b>IW:</b> Read document MC 14/2 in the NATO archive, and make notes on the military strategy the alliance adopted following the deployment of nuclear weapons. <b>CW:</b> Discuss the final sequence in the film against the background of the political situation of that time.
	Film comparisons	<b>CW:</b> Watch another film comedy on the theme of the nuclear arms race, for example Stanley Kubrick's <i>Dr Strangelove, or How I Learnt to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb</i> (GB 1964), and compare its style of humour with <i>A Bomb Was Stolen</i> .
Ethics / Social Studies	Civilian Uses of Nuclear Energy	<b>IW:</b> Read the appropriate section from Niels Bohr's open letter to the United Nations from June 9 <sup>th</sup> 1950, and, using keywords, define its demands. <b>CW:</b> Discuss the similarities between Bohr's demands and the final sequence of <i>A Bomb Was Stolen</i> . <b>Fishbowl discussion:</b> the advantages and disadvantages of peaceful and civilian uses of nuclear energy.
Art / Music	Cinematic Design and Production Techniques.	<b>CW:</b> Describe the role and use of music and sound effects (taking as an example the scene in front of the cinema); describe how, in individual scenes, thoughts and emotions are communicated without using dialogue.
	Setting stills to music	<b>GW:</b> Following the example of the scene in <i>A Bomb Was Stolen</i> outside the cinema, set stills from a variety of different genres of film to music and sound effects.



## Worksheet

By accident a young man inadvertently comes into possession of an atom bomb. He innocently carries it across the town in a briefcase. But the gang of criminals, who stole the bomb and want it back, and the uniformed security guards of the XOX company, from whom the bomb has been stolen, are both hot on the young man's heels.

*A Bomb Was Stolen* is one of the few artistic and humorous treatments of the nuclear arms race. It's a 'sound film' without dialogue, produced in the style of a silent film, and recalls the slapstick comedies of the French actor / director Jacques Tati. It's possible to detect allusions to other films with regard to some of the characters and the dramatic construction. The final sequence reflects the demands of the growing anti-nuclear movement of the time.

The tasks here are designed for students from age 15 upwards and are intended to stimulate the analysis of the film's characterisation, production and political message. These tasks are suitable for the following subject areas: German, History, Politics and Social Studies, Ethics, Art and Music.

### Task 1: Preparatory work before viewing the film

Subject areas: German, Art, Music

- a) Find out in which year this 'sound film' was made.
- b) Consider for what reason(s) a director might have decided, in 1961, to make a sound film without dialogue in the style of a film from the silent era.
- c) Observational tasks whilst watching the film:
  - Which different characters and groups of characters appear in the film?
  - How do people communicate their thoughts and feelings without words?
  - What roles do music and sound effects play in the film?

Once you've seen the film, do you think your ideas in question b) above were right?

### Task 2: Analysis of Characters and Groups of Characters in the Film

Subject areas: German, Art

- a) Work in small groups and give names or descriptions to the various characters and groups of characters in the film. List these on a card or flipchart and alongside each one, sum up the objective(s) of the character or character group.
- b) Working on your own, design a 'wanted' poster showing the personal particulars (appearance, distinguishing features, mannerisms) of the members of the group who set out to steal the bomb.
- c) What are the differences between these people and the other groups in the film?
- d) Think yourself into the position of the film's director, and explain, as if to a journalist, how you created the leading role of the young man and why you gave him his particular characteristics. Deal with issues such as his age, appearance and mannerisms, and consider to what extent he's different from the other characters in the film.

### Task 3: Reflect on the Ending of the Film

Subject areas: German, History, Politics and Social Studies, Ethics

- a) As a class, talk through the final sequence of the film: what is its message?
- b) Working in small groups, develop an alternative ending to the film and write it up on a sheet of

A4. Consider the following point: what would have happened if the gang of criminals had succeeded in finally getting hold of the bomb?

c) Individually, read the NATO document numbered MC 14/2, from 1956, and note down the military strategy adopted by the Allies following the deployment of nuclear weapons. Afterwards, discuss in class how to interpret the ending of the film *A Bomb Was Stolen* in the light of the political situation at that time.

**Task 4: Cinematic Design and Production Techniques**

Subject areas: Art, Music

**Stills: © Progress Film-Verleih**



Look at these two stills from *A Bomb Was Stolen*. Describe how thoughts and feelings are communicated in the film without any dialogue. Develop alternative ways to the ones shown here for expressing such ideas.

**Stills: © Progress Film-Verleih (left) / © Warner Brothers (right)**



b) Look at the two stills from *A Bomb Was Stolen* and *North by Northwest* (USA 1959, Dir: Alfred Hitchcock). To what extent do you think Ion Popescu-Gopo was influenced by the Hitchcock film? Describe the atmosphere created by these images, taking into account the way they are designed and framed (detail, size of image, camera angle, positioning of people and objects and so forth).

c) Working individually, write a short critique of the music and sound effects in the film *A Bomb Was Stolen*. Describe the style of music and how music and sound effects are used: conclude with your own opinion and judgment on these topics.

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