

# Introduction

Sensory Warfare in the Global Cold War

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The cases addressed in a recent research report are most unusual. One night in 2016, an individual assigned to the US Embassy in Havana, Cuba, was awakened by a “severe pain and a sensation of intense pressure in the face, a loud piercing sound in one ear with directional features, and acute disequilibrium and nausea. Symptoms of vestibular and cognitive dysfunction ensued.” As the report notes, the source of this intersensory confusion was “mysterious.” The individual was not the only embassy employee to display enigmatic symptoms. Other Havana staff suffered pain, and similar complaints were heard from diplomats attached to the embassies in Moscow and Guangzhou (and in 2021 in Hanoi).<sup>1</sup>

According to the report, which was published in 2020, several of the affected individuals developed long-term symptoms such as “tinnitus, visual problems, vertigo, and cognitive difficulties.” Although the report admits that the causes of the symptoms had not been determined, far-reaching theories were offered in the report’s aftermath. There was speculation that infrasound, ultrasound, or microwaves had been transmitted by an unknown device that could pierce walls, take out human targets without killing them, and leave not a single trace of its existence—in other words, a weapon that many Cold Warriors had

dreamed about throughout a conflict that had been fought partially through clandestine channels. Had this weapon become a reality in the early twenty-first century?

The Scottish sound studies scholar and DJ Steve Goodman (a.k.a. kode9), who coined the term “sonic warfare” in his study on sound conflicts,<sup>2</sup> devoted the audio paper “Dossier 37” to the report. In this paper he describes the document as “drenched in uncertainty and disinformation.”<sup>3</sup> For Goodman, the alleged sensory attacks were in fact rooted in the efforts of Donald J. Trump’s administration “to retreat from closer ties with Cuba.” They occurred in an environment of fake news and propaganda spread by Trump’s press team, an “unsound nexus” of “AI [artificial intelligence]-intensified deep audio-visual fakery . . . entangled in a meme complex which is still ongoing.” In April 2024, investigative journalists from three media outlets reopened the case, now linking it to activities of the notorious Russian GRU unit 29155, based on internal documents and GPS motion patterns.<sup>4</sup> In a first reaction, officials from US Intelligence Agencies did not confirm the results of this investigation. But even if the entire episode should remain in the shadow realm between covert actions and propaganda warfare, the broader political question remains: Is a new Cold War being fought with secret weapons, or did the old Cold War in fact never end?

With the Russian attacks on Ukraine in 2014 and 2018 and, most recently, the economic, political, and cultural bans against Russia as a result of its war of intensified aggression against Ukraine after February 24, 2022, there seems to be a return not only to a Cold War but also to a hot war on European soil. However, a series of events in the recent past indicates that secret warfare was never really abandoned. These include the radioactive contamination of former Russian agents in London, the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny (renewing a notorious KGB tradition from the 1950s to the 1970s, when “rare poison” was already the weapon of choice),<sup>5</sup> and numerous fake-news and hacking attacks on elections and government networks.

However, to answer this question in full, we must initially turn to the various forms of sensory warfare within the Cold War, which is the focus of the present book. *Sensory Warfare in the Global Cold War* is the first work to draw on a broad range of case studies to analyze how this conflict affected the senses and how sensory methods in turn shaped the conflict. Extending Steve Goodman’s concept of sonic warfare to include sensory warfare, the authors examine other sensoria beyond hearing.<sup>6</sup>

Their efforts tie in with current trends in cultural history and conflict studies. With scholars in both disciplines finally “coming to their senses,” sensory aspects of domestic and international conflicts have become a topic of interest, and the methods and questions addressed by both fields have intertwined in fruitful ways.<sup>7</sup> Scholars of sensory history have recently investigated individual aspects of conflicts, focusing not only on sight and sound but increasingly on other sensoria as well. Recent research has undertaken a broad analysis of nonmilitary forms of conflict such as slavery and racism, and historiographical approaches target a range of military campaigns, from the American Civil War and the Russian Revolution to the two world wars of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> These studies examine how war as the most extreme form of conflict has been perceived and how it in turn has changed contemporary perception.

### War on the Senses

In a groundbreaking book, Mark M. Smith investigates the American Civil War through the eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and stomachs of those who lived through it. According to him, war affects all senses not only in “hot” conflicts but also in their aftermaths: “War is hell on [the senses]; the violence of it engraves sensory memory in ways other experiences cannot approach, memory so powerful it can be relived, over and over again. Indeed, as far as the senses are concerned, all war is total war, pushing them to their limits and beyond, dulling and then overwhelming and then dulling them again. Distinctions become muddled, nerves fray, and the sense of self shatters.”<sup>9</sup>

Modern warfare, which was perhaps experienced for the first time in the Crimean War (1853–56) and the American Civil War (1861–65), can be seen as a decisive break in the history of warfare. Modern instruments such as binoculars, telescopes, and cameras (the last having been used for the first time in the Crimean War) “weaponized” the eye.<sup>10</sup> The sounds of shells from long-distance artillery brought war to civilian areas, shaping the auditory experience of soldiers and the civilian population. The ability to distinguish different projectiles by the vibrations of detonations or the sound of the trajectory proved a lifesaving skill. The death toll was unknown but ultimately so vast that it was often impossible to bury the bodies before decomposition set in. The resulting “stench of death” signaled the absence of civilization. Taste played a similar role. When hunger was used as a weapon

in drawn-out sieges, it dissolved the old social hierarchies of taste, with members of different social classes literally eating from the same pot—or in some cases even from the same garbage pile. At the front, the old form of battle in open fields came to an end. Now, warfare meant digging deep into the ground, diving under water, or flying up into the sky. In the mud and dust of position warfare, colors became murky and the old bright uniforms useless. The “observant men” of military staff were forced to abandon their “Enlightenment approach to warfare” in favor of a multisensory strategy.<sup>11</sup>

The world wars of the twentieth century intensified these trends. Camouflage, armor, motorization, *technicalization*, and, most significantly, trench fighting all changed warfare dramatically in terms of both its intensity and extension. In the First World War, new acoustics were developed not only to allow communication via audio (and visual) signals but also to disturb the enemy’s ears and eyes. These new forms of warfare directly assaulted the sensory organs. Gas attacks, which the German military staff used for the first time on the Western front, targeted the enemy’s respiratory organs and became known as the “invisible death,” heralding a new kind of horror.

Olfaction underwent additional significant changes in wartime. As Juliette Courmont concludes in her analysis of French and German nationals during the First World War, negative olfactory clichés about human beings emerged when former neighbors were “othered” by having unbearable stench attributed to them, thereby renewing stereotypes from the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71).<sup>12</sup> These clichés vanished soon after the war ended, yet the sheer number of negative olfactory stereotypes in the press, in scientific and medical research, and in private documents, letters, and diaries raises the question whether the propaganda efforts changed contemporary perceptions to the point at which the “other” was in fact sensed as different. In addition, behind the front lines, there was another war being fought against illness and epidemics, a war that was at times just as dangerous and deadly as the one waged against a heavily armed human enemy. The weapons in this war were hygienic and medical measures; the enemies were rats, bugs, fleas, lice, microbes, and viruses; and the effects were stench, itches, nausea, and numerous forms of pain—and death.<sup>13</sup>

The collective experience of modern warfare left not only the individual senses but also the entire human sensorium changed. As Michael Bull points out, “The sensory intensity of warfare led many combatants to feel a sense of alienation whilst on leave at home, for the war seemed more real than domestic peace.”<sup>14</sup> In his view, this led to “dislocation and transformation of

sensory experience.”<sup>15</sup> War was based on new technologies, and these technologies also shaped the postwar periods. Although new forms of industrial food preservation were originally invented to feed those at the front (canned food was in fact developed for Napoleon Bonaparte’s troops), they went on to industrialize civil nutrition in the decades to follow. According to media theorist Friedrich Kittler, stereophony was first invented for bomber pilots, whom it guided to targeted areas by transmitting separate audio signals to each ear through headphones.<sup>16</sup> Media technologies were increasingly used as propaganda tools. Speakers and sirens in militarized soundscapes became what R. Murray Schafer refers to as “signal sounds.”<sup>17</sup> In Nazi Germany, alarm systems and safety routines created shared listening routines that sonically shaped the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* and helped mobilize the population for war.<sup>18</sup> In the Second World War, the Stuka dive bombers of the German Luftwaffe were equipped with air-driven sirens to spread fear in enemy countries. The war fought with submarines, prototypes of which had been developed in the American Civil War, grew more intense and produced new sonification techniques, such as the audio signals of the fathometer. Such innovations were refined in the submarine arms race of the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> The new military technologies even left their mark on historiography—Marc Bloch, for example, the French *officier de renseignement* and later historian, systematically analyzed aerial photos in his studies of the agrarian history of the Middle Ages.<sup>20</sup> Numerous military inventions were optimized, and some went on to play a key role in the Cold War (e.g., secret reconnaissance flights and satellite photography). Such technological developments could have long-lasting effects. According to Paul Cornish, Nicholas J. Saunders, and Mark M. Smith, sensory signals “can evidently survive long after the end of the direct experience of conflict . . . even to the extent of forming an element of post-traumatic stress more than half a century later.”<sup>21</sup> As these authors conclude, this finding applies equally to the major global conflict of the second half of the twentieth century.

However, the Cold War is still uncharted terrain for sensory history. Although it was a conflict in which military strategies and weapons of mass destruction were always on the *horizon of expectation* (Karl Mannheim), it differed from preceding conflicts in terms of its duration and methods.<sup>22</sup> Simmering for decades, it was marked by alternating phases of intensified conflict and *détente*. Using mainly nonlethal methods, it was also a war of politics, culture, and propaganda that addressed different sensoria.<sup>23</sup> This propaganda was one of many expressions of conflict, but in fact it went

beyond this. As Nicholas J. Cull and B. Theo Mazumdar explain, propaganda “had a profound impact on the course of the Cold War: it surged in the early years; it flourished in the Third World during the middle years of the conflict; it reshaped during the period of détente and arguably played a key role in the ending of the Cold War.”<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the innovative and internationally emerging field of sensory history is especially well suited to studying the Cold War with an emphasis on its microstructures. The seminal work of historians in this field—among other scholars such as cultural anthropologists, cultural studies experts, and sociologists—has paved the way for a fundamentally different understanding of historical and contemporary problems.<sup>25</sup> Analyzing sensory warfare affords to go below the surface of reason and political thought and at the same time to focus on the historicity of the senses. Forming the core of the sensory history approach to the Cold War is the supposition that sensory warfare has deep, long-term effects that transcend politics, historical breaks, and turning points and underlie the mechanisms and cultural effects of bloc-building and the othering of people into distinguishable communities. What is often unconsciously perceived as micropolitics can lead to enduring differences that divide societies and move beyond the established concepts of traditional political history. Lasting for decades, the Cold War was a major event that “transformed the sensory world so dramatically that it seemed almost a brand-new creation,” as David Howes observes in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age*.<sup>26</sup> Understanding perception not primarily as a mechanistic interface between the human self and the outside world but also as a socially learned, culturally shaped, and historically specific mode of active *sensing*,<sup>27</sup> the authors of the present volume proceed on the assumption that human senses can be politically “governed” in a Foucauldian sense. Although they come from different academic fields and specializations such as Cold War studies, Eastern and Central European history, area studies, literature, film, and media history, they share an active and broad understanding of sensing.

### Politicizing the Sensorium: Cold Warfare

Before the Cold War unfolded as a military standoff with highly weaponized and deadly borders, with covert operations and even hot wars in countries such as Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, an underlying partitioning process took place. This was most obvious in Germany and especially in Berlin, where the front lines of the new military sectors cut through neighborhoods,

streets, houses, and even a cemetery. But the same applies to entire continents. Not only was the Cold War a standoff between the two superpowers and their allies, but it was also a conflict closely intertwined with the “political and social development in the Third World,” as Odd Arne Westad notes in a comment that emphasizes the global dimension of the conflict.<sup>28</sup> But even inside the political blocs that the superpowers formed with their closest allies, the conflict divided neighbors into distinct communities, split families, and turned friends into strangers, political opponents, and even enemies. Images became political icons that were used as weapons on the media front. Invisible and inaudible communication channels were developed, military methods were refined, and consumer goods were politicized.<sup>29</sup> Secret police developed overt and covert sensory practices, as did opposition groups and underground movements. And it was not only sensory but also sensual matters that became political in numerous espionage affairs.

How precisely did this “othering” function and how was it sensed? What were the sensory measures of the Cold War conflict—not only those incorporating vision and sound but also those that made use of the “close senses” of taste, smell, touch, and pain, whether in cultural policies, propaganda and counterpropaganda, or open warfare? How did the political partitioning of the world into (more or less) homogeneous blocs change contemporary sensescapes? How were *imagined communities* (Benedict Anderson) transformed into *sensed communities*?<sup>30</sup> And what were the long-term effects of this sensory alienation beyond political ruptures and historical turning points?

These are the key questions addressed by the chapters of this volume. In its examination of a wide range of sensoria, *Sensory Warfare in the Global Cold War* adopts the intersensory approach that sensory studies have lately emphasized, moving away from the older multisensorial concept.<sup>31</sup> Intersensory approaches focus on the interrelations between different sensoria rather than following one single sensorium. In fact, a comprehensive intersensory study of specific phenomena is probably unattainable, as neuroscientists believe there are eighteen or more human systems of perception, including the “new” senses such as equilibrium, thermos reception, and pain.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, some chapters are devoted to a single sensorium, but even in these chapters, the authors explore the interplay with other sensoria—colors and taste, haptics and smell, vision and sound.

Traditionally, Cold War studies often described the history of the conflict as being driven by anonymous superpowers. Monolithic blocs were compared and contrasted, geopolitical strategies were identified as agents, papers by



unnamed authors at think tanks and organizations were studied, weapons were counted, and territories were measured. When it comes to human agency, the focus was often placed on the (overwhelmingly male) players at the uppermost levels of government: heads of state, general secretaries, chancellors, commanders in chief, and secret police directors. In contrast, the present book centers on the human sensorium. Such an approach makes it possible to break down the macro perspective into micro processes that unfold on an everyday level. One consequence is that women emerge alongside men as central figures—e.g., as the target audience for mass propaganda campaigns involving food deliveries or household technologies or in the politicization of perfumes. And women were key actors on the front lines of the conflict as well, developing tactics for public diplomacy in important intelligence positions (e.g., Eleanor Lansing Dulles), carrying out propaganda strategies as announcers in the sonic warfare across the “Aquatic Frontier” between the two Chinese republics (e.g., Chen Xinmei and Chen Feifei), or working the switchboards of civil and military communication systems, like the mostly female telephone operators in East Berlin (e.g., “Erika”). Not only gender but also class and race are at the basis of this book: class is a key factor in the analysis of sensory warfare addressing especially workers’ needs and tastes or the bourgeois music tastes in the Romanian programming of Radio Free Europe; racism is at the ground of the olfactory detection techniques of the US Army during the Vietnam War.

### Covert Action: Sensory Warfare and Emotions

Shifting the focus to human agency in politics and everyday life does not mean ignoring the general objectives of Cold War strategies, including deterrence, containment, the “balance of power,” and *détente*.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it entails keeping in mind the general objectives of geopolitics, ideology, and military strategy while also examining in detail how these policies were executed in concrete tactics and how they actually affected contemporaries—or, more precisely, how they were sensed. This focus ties in with recent approaches that view public diplomacy as a crucial nonmilitary method of fighting conflicts. For example, research has examined how asymmetric conflict diplomacy employs different modes of listening, including “surreptitious listening” and “tactical listening,” both of which aim to build trust or “readjust public diplomacy messages and correct misconceptions.”<sup>34</sup> Public diplomacy often includes covert tactics such as “psychological operations” (PSYOPs), which are defined as “planned



operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals."<sup>35</sup>

The last decade has seen the publication of the first groundbreaking histories of emotions in the Cold War.<sup>36</sup> One important issue, as H el ene Miard-Delacroix and Andreas Wirsching argue, is the idea of "supra-individual emotional conventions that can be understood as normative sets."<sup>37</sup> However, as Mark M. Smith notes in his recently published *Sensory History Manifesto*, emotions are closely interrelated with sensory experience.<sup>38</sup> The history of this sensory experience is microhistory, often even nanohistory, and it takes a close look at phenomena such as light rays, sound waves, and scent molecules. It puts cognitive and processes and collective *emotives* (William M. Reddy) center stage,<sup>39</sup> studying taste buds, sensory receptors, and nerve channels in action. Several chapters in this volume address the emotions stimulated by sensory signals: the excitement caused by Spanish propaganda newsreels, the desire expressed in the male gaze of Europeans visiting China, and the production of fear in a wide variety of forms—the fear of being caught listening to Western radio stations in Cold War Romania, and the fear of losing loved ones in the Afghanistan war, triggered by photos of planes transporting the bodies of fallen Soviet "heroes."

In the process, *Sensory Warfare in the Global Cold War* highlights the sensed and emotional experiences of eyewitnesses to history (but also those of earwitnesses and nosewitnesses), analyzing both top-down and bottom-up processes: What policies of repression, partition, and propaganda had an impact on people? And, from the inverse perspective, what behaviors, consumer needs, and protests (often in the form of a refusal to participate) trickled up from below and finally had to be taken seriously by Cold Warriors at various levels of government? In doing so, sensory histories of the Cold War pursue what is in fact a contradictory goal: to rehumanize an inhumane conflict.

### Stages of Cold War Sensory Conflict

In contrast to world history, global history rarely addresses all continents at the same time. While the term *global history* may suggest worldwide coverage, as Sebastian Conrad explains, "this is not necessarily the case." To the contrary, "many topics are best displayed in smaller frames."<sup>40</sup> As a process, a subject matter, and a methodology, global history can result even in local histories, highlighting regional aspects of processes that are

broadly understood as dominated by North-West (or East-West) connections, structures, or conflicts while at the same time keeping those power structures in mind. The authors of the individual chapters of this book come from eight countries and examine a wide range of areas. Without claiming or even attempting to be comprehensive, this book delves into examples from Afghanistan, China, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United States, and Vietnam. Some of the chapters also touch on Albania, Austria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Korea, and Yugoslavia. The general temporal focus is on early postwar events and extends through four decades of conflict, looking at many aspects of what is only insufficiently covered by the generalizing term "Cold War." In fact, what underlies the local examples analyzed in this book is a much more complex global puzzle made up of overarching and undermining bilateral and multilateral conflicts (such as the East-West conflict, which is not identical with the Cold War, the Soviet-Afghan conflict, the Chinese partition, and numerous national schisms including the ones in fascist Spain and between pro-communist and anti-communist factions in "neutral" Switzerland).<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, this book is not organized by geography, chronology, or sensoria. Rather, the three parts reflect different stages of intensity in the Cold War sensory warfare. These stages did not unfold linearly and successively. They overlapped, sometimes following the cycles of heightened tension and *détente*, sometimes occurring erratically and locally.

The first part of the book, "Seduction, Manipulation, Othering," is devoted to the micropolitics of partition: the subtle, slow change that occurred below the surface of traditional policies and was often sensed unconsciously. Of interest here are the politically guided efforts to seduce the "other" into changing sides.

As Victoria Phillips demonstrates in her opening chapter on gastrodiplomacy,<sup>42</sup> directly after the Second World War, officials at the US Psychological Strategy Board launched their first operations to win not only the hearts and minds but also the stomachs, tastebuds, noses, and eyes of former enemies. Although the West's original goal in providing food to Soviet-occupied countries was to fight famine and feed former allies and enemies, the programs aimed at much more than just nutrition. American efforts to deliver certain tastes and colors through products that lacked any nutritional value (such as chewing gum and cigarettes) connected political messages to sensory experience.

Women also figure strongly in the chapter by Stephanie Weismann, who demonstrates how the “Sovietization” of the Polish perfume industry failed once women began demanding substitutes for unattainable French perfumes. Polish women’s long-established collective “Western” sensory taxonomies had significant consequences for the Polish economy. Weismann studies this process using the example of the Inter-Fragrances brand, whose founder became one of the first Polish millionaires and eventually played an important role in transforming the socialist republic into a market economy.

The sensory taxonomies covered not only smell but also taste and could be created through secret and public diplomacy tactics. As Cyril Cordoba demonstrates in his study, sight and hearing also changed during the Cold War. Analyzing tapes and films made by Swiss visitors to Communist China, he reconstructs the male gaze at the exoticized “other” and shows how the sound, color, and food of the Chinese Cultural Revolution were sensed by Western sympathizers, who brought back food and tea as well as documentation of their experiences on film and tape and used this documentation in public lectures.

Mark Fenemore’s exploration of early telephony in Cold War Berlin offers an initial analysis of gendered listening, focusing on the most intimate form of conflict, played out through wires. At a time when connections were controlled by telephone operators, the human factor posed a risk in secret information technology. Combining both surveillance and gender studies, Fenemore analyzes a conflict in which not only sensory but also sensual encounters were politicized.

In the second part of the book, “Partition, Propaganda, Sensory Borders,” readers learn that these micropolitics were not fleeting but could have profound and long-lasting effects. Several chapters describe the drifting apart of sensory communities under the political divisions and the growing significance of media in the course of conflict.

Dayton Lekner’s chapter on listening at the “aquatic sound barrier” across the Taiwan Strait shifts the focus to a battleground in Asia. From 1953 to 1992, Xiamen (China) and Jinmen (Taiwan) were engaged in a sonic war, broadcasting propaganda messages and music from speaker towers to enemies across the sea. The psychological tactics involved recording and broadcasting the voices of relatives of the enemy soldiers on the other side of the strait and deliberately arousing emotions such as fear and sadness.

This type of targeting also took place in Cold War listening. In her contribution, Andreea Deciu Ritivoi examines efforts by US-financed radio stations to target audiences in Central Eastern Europe, especially Romania. Developing an “acousmatic voice,” the CIA-backed station Radio Free Europe, for example, sent messages and ideas not only through text but also through sound. As Ritivoi explains, this sound was “more cosmopolitan than local” and “eloquent in a classical, bourgeois sense.” Furthermore, such Cold War broadcasts created new methods of covert private hearing as a result of the danger they posed to audiences fearful of getting caught listening. The ether war eventually had bloody consequences when the Romanian secret service conspired in the bombing of a Munich radio station.

In fascist Spain, NO-DO cinema newsreels became the most important channel for spreading a propagandistic view of the world, since television was not widespread in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as José Manuel López Torán shows, the Spanish newsreel coverage of the Korean War and the Cuban Missile Crisis did more than just provide information on current conflicts around the globe. Through the associative visual strategies employed by the NO-DO newsreels, these short films sought in an unobtrusive way to create legitimacy for the Spanish Civil War, which was fought about two decades ago.

Finally, in my own chapter on the inner-German border, I set out to demonstrate how smells were one of the factors that could accelerate political conflict. Based on ideas from actor-network-theory and a reading of archived sensory protocols, I show how environmental pollution and weed killers along the so-called death strip, as well as an alleged “smell of death,” were discussed in conjunction with several political conflicts that ultimately involved the highest level of German-German diplomacy. And even the border itself smelled, odorized by “smell barriers” to prevent animals from illegally crossing the border and setting off alarms.

The third part of this book is devoted to the most extreme stage of the Cold War, marked by several hot conflicts. Titled “Mind Control, Covert Operations, Overt Warfare,” it focuses on borderland shootouts, military encounters, and hot wars within the broader ideological and economic framework of a bipolar (though in fact much more complex) world order. The chapters investigate sensory measures in what are often referred to as “proxy wars” in Central and East Asia. In fact, these wars had their own specific dynamics, features, and local consequences and were thus much more than just peripheral muscle-flexing by the superpowers. By addressing various

attempts to reprogram the human mind and body through the techniques of psychological warfare, psychoactive drugs, and secret experiments in the shadow realm of intelligence services, it also delves into the fringe sciences and covert operations in hot conflicts.

Examining a notorious chapter of Cold War intelligence, Walter E. Grunden tracks attempts to “brainwash” agents through sensory deprivation. In infamous experiments that failed quite dramatically, the CIA used sensory deprivation and psychoactive drugs, attempting to turn agents into willing killers, but ultimately produced brain-dead zombies, their senses dulled, some of whom never returned to a normal state.

At the same time, traditional media such as leaflets and newspapers continued to be an important means of propaganda, particularly when military personnel were the target audience. In his chapter on military propaganda in the two German states, Carsten Richter analyzes how the sensory monotony of barracks life made young East and West German draftees an easy target for (often sexualized) propagandistic visions of a better life “on the other side.” To protect the recipients of the messages, propaganda departments meticulously adapted and camouflaged the brochures, making them look and haptically feel as if they were domestic media when in fact they were fabricated by the enemy and sought to convince the recipients to desert or even to turn their weapons against their own country.

Olfaction was also a factor in warfare, as Christy Spackman demonstrates. She focuses on the “people sniffer,” a device developed during the Vietnam War to detect the enemy by electronically measuring smell molecules in the air. Citing military documents, Spackman reports that the device’s effectiveness in the field remained uncertain. However, US Army strategists found a new use for the device in their propaganda war: they declassified the secret weapon and in presentations to the US media pretended they were in possession of superior military technology in an attempt to convince the increasingly war-weary American public to continue supporting the inglorious war.

In a final chapter on sensory warfare in a military conflict, Markus Mirschel views the 1980s Afghan War through the Soviet lens, emphasizing the changing role of military propaganda photography. While originally rooted in pictorial traditions of the Second World War, the Soviet-Afghan War produced new icons such as the “black tulip” (a metaphorical description of the Antonov planes that transported corpses back to the Soviet Union). These planes, originally idealized by military photographers as a symbol of the superior weapons of the Soviet Army, now came to represent

defeat and grief and thus demilitarized what Robert Jütte calls the “armed gaze.”<sup>43</sup>

### Cold Sensory Warfare: An Ongoing History?

Global approaches to the Cold War challenge common beliefs. In the West, the Cold War has often been regarded as a closed book, perhaps the last chapter of what Eric Hobsbawm calls the “age of extremes.”<sup>44</sup> However, it is a book that might now be reopened, after the return of hot warfare to the Middle East and even Europe.<sup>45</sup> In Asia, one of the “major battlefields for East–West conflict,”<sup>46</sup> the Cold War never ended. The military standoff between North and South Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel has continued to the present day along a border that calls to mind the iron curtains of the 1960s. Lately, the opponents returned to Cold War-style sonic and olfactory warfare when North Korea reacted on Southern activists’ border-crossing balloons loaded with Western media including K-Pop music by sending back their own balloons full of manure and human waste.<sup>47</sup> Tensions also intensified between China and Taiwan, where a covert war is still being waged, one that involves espionage and military strikes that at times ignite and keep alive fear of another hot war in the twenty-first century. In demonstrations against China in Hong Kong, protesters have recently used umbrellas to ward off tear gas attacks by the police, turning a defensive weapon against olfactory warfare into a political icon (and thus a visual weapon). These “weapons” were ultimately criminalized and banned by the authorities. Colors have also become political weapons in several “color revolutions” around the globe, including in Ukraine’s Orange Revolution of 2004.

Propaganda warfare in the form of “fake news” or manipulated photographs is more widespread today than in the twentieth century with its analog photography. Its target groups are larger, and it can be disseminated more quickly than the old Cold Warriors ever imagined. Fake news is being used in Russia’s war aggression against Ukraine, and radio stations are still an important tool for undermining censorship in totalitarian regimes. Independent radio stations currently face immense difficulties in Eastern European states such as Belarus, Hungary, Russia, and intermittently also Poland, where politicians had turned to authoritarian models. Radio Free Europe, founded during the Cold War, is still on air and online in the 2020s, now taking part in the information war between Russia and Ukraine. These are just a few of the many examples that show that sensory warfare is still a common method in current conflicts.

The Cold War did not invent sensory warfare, but as the longest global militarized conflict of the twentieth century, it brought some of its measures to cruel perfection. In order to determine whether today's covert conflicts should be regarded as ongoing history or as a new Cold War, we first need to study the sensory legacy of the Cold War. This book makes sense of a senseless global conflict that was fought not only *on* but also *through* the senses.

## Notes

1. Katie Bo Williams and Jeremy Herb, "US Investigating Possible Mysterious Directed Energy Attack near White House," CNN, April 29, 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/29/politics/us-investigating-mysterious-directed-energy-attack-white-house/index.html>; Graison Dangor, "'Havana Syndrome' Reportedly Held Up Kamala Harris' Vietnam Visit. What Is It?," Forbes, August 24, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/graisondangor/2021/08/24/kamala-harris-vietnam-visit-reportedly-held-up-by-havana-syndrome-scare/?sh=4cd1f68464ad>.
2. Goodman, *Sonic Warfare*.
3. Goodman, "Dossier 37."
4. Journalists of The Insider, 60 Minutes and Der Spiegel. See Roman Dobrokhoto, Christo Grozev, and Michael Weiss, "Unraveling Havana Syndrome: New evidence links the GRU's assassination Unit 29155 to mysterious attacks on U.S. officials and their families", in: The Insider, April 11, 2024, <https://theinsider.ru/en/politics/270425> (April 21, 2024).
5. Jong, "Intelligence and the Cold War," 313.
6. See Mrozek, "Bewaffnete Organe."
7. See Howes, "Foreword: The Engagement of the Senses"; Smith, *Sensory History*.
8. See Smith, *Smell of Battle*; Smith, *How Race Is Made*; Plamper, "Sounds of February, Smells of October"; Leonard, "Sensorial No Man's Land"; Kettler, *Smell of Slavery*.
9. Smith, *Smell of Battle*, 6.
10. See Jütte, *History of the Senses*, 325–26; Encke, *Augenblicke der Gefahr*, 18.
11. Smith, *Smell of Battle*, 42–43.
12. See Courmont, *Odeur de l'ennemi*.
13. See Bourke, *Story of Pain*, 222–30.
14. Bull, "Sensory Media," 224.
15. Bull, "Sensory Media," 224.
16. See Kittler, "Rock Music."
17. In his classical, widely debated soundscape concept. See Schafer, "Soundscape," 101.
18. See Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes*, 104.
19. See Cote, *Third Battle*, 69–78.
20. See Bloch, "Plans parcellaires," 557. On this topic, see Raulff, *Ein Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert*, 92–123.
21. Cornish, Saunders, and Smith, introduction to *Modern Conflict and the Senses*, 4.
22. The term *horizon of expectation* was popularized by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, who actually adapted it unmarked from the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim. See Mrozek, "Die sogenannte Sattelzeit," 137.
23. See Gienow-Hecht, "Culture and the Cold War"; Laugesen, *Taking Books to the World*; Crowley and Pavitt, *Cold War Modern*; Mrozek, "G.I. Blues and German Schlager."
24. Cull and Mazumdar, "Propaganda and the Cold War," 323.
25. See Smith, *Sensing the Past*; Le Breton, *Sensing the World*.
26. Howes, "Introduction: 'Make it New!,'" 1.
27. See Smith, *Sensing the Past*; Le Breton, *Sensing the World*.
28. Westad, *Cold War*, 396; Latham, "Cold War in the Third World."
29. See Rosenberg, "Consumer Capitalism"; Zhuk, "Soviet Studies and Cultural Consumption"; Priestland, "Neoliberalism, Consumerism."
30. Benedict Anderson coined the term *imagined communities* in 1983. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6, *passim*. On the adaption of his term for sensory history, see Mrozek, "Sensed Communities."
31. See Howes, *Empire of the Senses*, 9–12.



32. See Mrozek, "Achtzehn Sinne."  
 33. See Gaddis, "Grand Strategies."  
 34. Di Martino, "Spectrum of Listening"; Cull, "Reading, Viewing."  
 35. Kilbane, "Dutch Boy at the Dike?"  
 36. See Greiner, Müller, and Walter, *Angst im Kalten Krieg*; Starck, *Between Fear and Freedom*; Biess, *German Angst*, 95–129, 298–307.  
 37. Miard-Delacroix and Wirsching, "Emotionen und internationale Beziehungen," 22.  
 38. See Smith, *Sensory History Manifesto*.  
 39. See Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 105–109.  
 40. Conrad, *What Is Global History?*, 8, 12.  
 41. See Lüthi, "Sino-Soviet Split"; Irwin, "Decolonization and the Cold War."  
 42. See Rockower, "Guide to Gastrodiplomacy."  
 43. Jütte, *History of the Senses*, 114.  
 44. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 3, passim.  
 45. In respect to the Gulf War, see Brands, *From Berlin to Baghdad*, 302–34.  
 46. Bagnato and Guderzo, introduction to *Globalization and the Cold War*, 1.  
 47. Shaimaa Khalil and Thomas Mackintosh, "South Korea to resume loudspeaker broadcasts over border in balloon row", BBC, June 10, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1rr92dwqnyo>.
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