

1. Introduction

Yekaterina Orlova (Michelle Pfeifer) walks with determination. Behind her, the Kremlin complex occupies the entire landscape. The scene shoots only her in her tiny body and those ominous towers. As she moves toward the camera, the viewer starts hearing her steps, and she hastens her pace. In an interesting effect of sound juxtaposition, a conversation is taking place as she walks away from the Kremlin. Members of the British Intelligence and a CIA agent are interrogating Mr. Barley (Sean Connory), a British editor to whom Katia managed to send a manuscript to be published in the West. They do not appear in the scene. The viewer continues to see Katia walking while hearing the interrogation. Barley denies any knowledge of Katia, even when confronted with a letter addressed to him and signed by her in a very intimate fashion. The letter had been found with the manuscript.

This is the opening scene of *The Russia House*, a movie based on the homonymous novel written by John Le Carré, directed by Fred Schepisi, and released in 1990. The film is set during the time of Perestroika, and anxieties about the results of such an unexpected turn in the Cold War abound on both sides as Soviets and Westerners both manifest their inquietude about the events. As the interrogation proceeds, Barley recalls a meeting with Russian writers and wistfully reports the conversation he had with the group in a camp house on the outskirts of Moscow. In a flashback, he appears surrounded by the Russian intelligentsia as he explains his ideas about the historical moment they were passing through:

Barley: I "believe" in the new Russia. You may not, but I do. Years ago, it was just a pipe dream. Today, it's our only hope. We thought we could bankrupt you by raising the stakes in the arms race. Gambling with the fate of the human race.

Writer 1: Barley, you won your gamble. Nuclear peace for years.

Barley: Oh, rubbish. What peace? Ask the Czechs, the Vietnamese, the Koreans. Ask the Afghans. No. If there is to be hope, we must all betray our countries. We have to save each other, because all victims are equal. And none is more equal than others. It's everyone's duty to start the avalanche.

Writer 2: A heroic thought, Barley.

Barley: Listen, nowadays you have to think like a hero just to behave like a merely decent human being.

Immediately after this conversation, the camera comes back to the room where the intelligence officials are interrogating Barley. With an astonished expression on his face, one of them asks him whether he really believed that "nonsense." Barley answers as follows:

Barley: I don't know. I believe it when I say it. But you've got to be there. You're taking a leak in some filthy public urinal, and the man in the next stall leans across and asks you about God, or Kafka, or freedom versus responsibility. So you tell him. Because you know. Because you're from the West. And before you've finished shaking your dick, you think "What a great country." That's why I love them. And they're very fond of me.

Barley then remembers that one of the group's members, someone called Dante (Klaus Maria Brandauer), had approached him during a visit they paid to the graveyard, where many Russian poets and writers were buried. In another flashback, they appear inside the graveyard, and Dante walks toward him repeating some sentences from his previous speech, such as "If there is to be hope, we must all betray our countries" or "All victims are equal. None is more equal than others." In the middle of these quotations, Dante inserted one that was not Barley's: "How sweet it is to hate one's native land, to desire its ruin, and in its ruin to discern the dawn of universal rebirth." Intrigued with the quotation, Barley asks for the name of the author. And the conversation takes an unexpected path after the answer:

Barley: Pasternak?

Dante: No. Pecherin. An earlier poet. Pecherin understood that it's possible to love your country while hating its system.

Barley: If you say so.

Dante: I love my country.

Barley: I love it too - "your" country. And I'm reasonably fond of my own.

Dante: To save it, perhaps it's necessary to betray it. Yes? Because you and I, we love truth.

Barley: Who are you, Dante? What do you do for a living?

Dante: I am a moral outcast.

Barley: Oh, it's always nice to meet a writer. And what sort of rubbish are you turning out now?

Dante: Lies. I am the lie.

Barley: Really?

Dante: You spoke the truth. Promise me that you are not a spy, and then I will make you a promise in return.

Barley: I'm not a spy, actually. Not my line.

Dante: You are nobody's spy? Not even ours?

Barley: Dante, I'm getting a bit jumpy, to be honest. I'm nobody's spy. Let's talk about something else. How about chess?

Dante: Oh, chess. In chess there are no lies. But in my game lies are everything.

Barley: What game is that?

Dante: The Soviet knight is dying inside his armor. You are in danger only from our lies. I commit the lie every day. I lie even to my masters. So, promise me that if I ever find the courage to think like a hero, then you will act like a merely decent human being. Right?

Barley: Dante, leave me out, will you?

Dante: Hey, you cannot reject me. Because I am strengthened by your rejection. So, promise me.

Barley: What the hell am I promising, for God's sake?

Dante: Promise.

Barley: All right. If you ever manage to be a hero, I'll be a ... decent human being. OK?

Dante: Promise?

Barley: I promise.

After Barley reveals this conversation, the officials realize that Dante may have been behind the manuscript. They discover that he is a respected scientist in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the manuscript contends that the USSR is bluffing about her strategic capacities. Consequently, the armaments race that has been going on since the beginning of the 1980's is based on a "lie," and the person who wrote the

manuscript wanted to alert the West. Nonetheless, psychologists, military officers, diplomats and western scientists couldn't discover if the author was telling the truth. Barley was the only one able to check its veracity. In the film, a dialogue takes place between Barley and the officials. Now in an amicable mood, they try to persuade a reluctant Barley to become a spy, travel back to the Soviet Union, and meet Katia and Dante to verify if the information is true:

Barley: Choose someone else.

Official A: We didn't choose you. Dante did.

Barley: Because I wasn't a spy.

Official A: We're not asking you to build the beastly rockets or push the button. Only to help improve our knowledge of the enemy. And if the enemy turns out to be a friend, where's the harm?

Barley: I thought we were all supposed to be chums together now.

Official A: Oh, my dear Lord...

Official B: Because this year it suits them to roll over and play nice doggie? Because this year they're on the floor anyway? You ninny. All the more reason to spy the daylights out of 'em. Kick 'em in the balls every time they get to their knees.

Barley: Well, that's where I disagree. I'll back my Russia against yours anytime.

These initial takes are sufficient to familiarize the reader with the broader perspective of this dissertation. Somewhat surprisingly, and irrespective of the affections the characters had for the USSR, they all participated in negative representations of the country. For instance, in the first conversation, "Writer 1" portrays the USSR as the loser of the arms race (Barley, you won your gamble. Nuclear peace for years); Barley describes the hygienic conditions of Soviet public restrooms (filthy public urinal) and the superiority of westerners who are always ready to answer questions that the Soviets don't know, or can't say, the answers to (God; Kafka, Freedom); Dante calls himself "the lie," in a reference to the USSR's bluff about its strategic capacities, and admits the Soviet Union's weakness (The Soviet knight is dying inside his armor. You are in danger only from our lies); "Official B" is more radical and uncompromising in his portrayal of how the USSR should be treated (Kick'em in the balls every

time they get to their knees); and even the unwillingness of intelligence officials to trust the information contained in the manuscript amounted to a negative representation.

But as Barley makes clear in the last sentence of his dialogue with Officials A and B, there is more than one USSR/Russia, and he will back “his Russia” against “theirs” anytime. In this context, one can trace a parallel between Barley and Dante’s love for his country and hate for its system. When asked if he really believed in the absurdities of his conception of the USSR, Barley answers that “he believes it, when he says it.” Barley’s formula is paradigmatic of the dilemmas that both characters experience: though they participate in the dominant negative representation of the USSR, they are reluctant to accept it, and oppose to it a positive conception. But the “believing when saying” formula is much richer, for it works for both representations of the USSR, the positive and the negative; one might just recall all the utterances that portray the USSR in negative terms. The difference between these two modes of representation is that the negative representation holds a status of being “already said,” of being something that everybody knows and share, even the Russians/Soviets, and, for this reason, being accepted without contestation. In contrast, the positive representation must be said to be believed, must manifest itself in the form of contestation to be accepted.

The images of the movie are another way of acceding this difference, and are worthwhile for understanding both the relation between Dante and the Soviet Union, and the relation between Barley and the West. The first scene of the movie shows a diminutive Katie (Dante’s accomplice) walking beneath the omnipresent gaze of the Kremlin. As it is known, and there is no need for it to be said — the Kremlin is a common metonym for the Soviet/Russian government. The scene shows her fragile body walking fast to escape from the huge architectonic complex that symbolizes Soviet power hulking over her back. In contrast, in many shots Barley’s acts of contestation are directed against the West, which is manifest through the presence in his interrogations of soldiers, intelligence officials, government representatives, diplomats, etc. The

images that are used to show these moments were very strong: an overwhelming number of officials representing the West, against a solitary Barley carrying mixed feelings about the Soviet Union.

This dissertation is concerned with the emergence of such negative representations of the USSR amongst scholars. In my view, seen through the Western perspective, the Soviet Union is described as inferior, contradictory, expansionist, and, due to her inherent difference with the West, endowed with an unchanging nature. Some of these features are explicitly portrayed in *The Russia House*; others I found during my research.

I believe that the emergence of such negative representations of the USSR can be understood by addressing the relation between the Cold War and sovietology. While the Cold War phenomenon was the broad context in which engagement between the West and the Soviet Union occurred, sovietology was a new subfield of the international relations discipline that congregated diplomats, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, economists, military officers, and others who were interested in studying the Soviet Union. Roughly, I argue that these two phenomena originated what I call sovietologism (or sovietologist discourse) and that it is in this “place” where one should look to find the origins of the above-mentioned description of the Soviet Union. While these descriptions axiomatically assumed the ontological incompatibility between the West and the Soviet Union, western discursive formations were the primary source of this differentiation. Hence, the title of this dissertation: *Sovietologism: the Soviet Union as a western representation*.

In this context, the relation between the production of knowledge about the USSR and the production of her subjectivity guided the analysis. In order to address this relationship, I focused on two different periods. The first ranges from the end of the nineteenth century to the immediate period before the World War II. This is the period when the humanities and the social sciences were passing through their processes of institutionalization. As it will become clear later, I believe that the new academic disciplines that appeared in these fields have paved the way for the emergence of *sovietologism*, especially through their treatments of the

concepts of Culture, the State and personality. The second is located in the 1950's, when sovietology became the discipline in charge of studying the Soviet Union. In fact, due to the interdisciplinary nature of sovietology, some level of conceptual borrowing from these areas was expected. However, as it will also become clear later, instead of devices deployed to help scholars to understand the Soviet Union, these concepts brought with them presuppositions so that the descriptions they enabled were not only descriptive, but also constitutive of Soviet's subjectivity.

To develop the argument, the dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter Two, *Subjectivity, power, discourse*, aims to explain how subjectivities emerge out of discourses and to suggest a way of understanding this process. After a brief illustration of how mainstream theories of international relations reify the State as the dominant form of subjectivity, I present a new ontology of power through a reading of Foucault's analytics of power. I then oppose the juridico-discursive representation of power, which I attribute to mainstream scholars, to the power-as-productive representation, which I believe critical theorists share. Afterwards, I attempt to show how the power-as-productive representation can be deployed to destabilize the juridico-discursive one. This can be achieved by exploring the relation between power and discourse. I then offer a spatial reading of discourse as one way of locating "the place" where subjectivity is produced. The relation among critical, genealogical, archaeological and hermeneutical methodologies in Foucault's discursive analysis is also discussed.

In the last section of Chapter Two, I applied these findings to a preliminary analysis of sovietologism. Through the reading of some texts belonging to this discursive formation, I found an unexpected "discursive density" that I used as a point of departure. In a short time, scholars deployed many different discourses, from the most disparate fields of knowledge — anthropology, psychoanalysis, political science, social psychology, sociology, history, etc. — with the same objective of describing the Soviet Union's subjectivity. Additionally, they were all

united in their repetition of the same modes of description: tropes of inferiority, expansionism, and contradiction traversed the majority of renderings that insisted on the Soviet subject's ontological difference with the West, and imprisoned the Soviet Union in an unchanging otherness. The practical starting point for this discursive analysis of sovietologism is the insight that portrayals of the Soviet Union's subjectivity as inferior, expansionist, and contradictory found their conditions of emergence in complex interplay between: a) a specific notion of culture as a "pattern of culture"; b) a specific notion of the State as a "totalitarian State"; and c) a specific notion of personality as a kind of "collective personality" of the USSR; as well as by d) the effects of the "Cold War epistème" on the production of knowledge about the USSR and her unchanging nature in the 1950's. The rest of the dissertation is composed of a chapter on each of these points.

Chapter three, *The metamorphosis of culture*, explores the transformations of culture as an academic concept since scholarly journals started hosting discussions about it in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the beginning, the concept operated in a discursive formation whose boundaries were constituted through opposing extremes. Usually taking the form of dichotomies, these extremes framed debates, for instance, about the content of culture, the methodologies applied to understand it, and the disciplines that could appropriately claim it as its legitimate object of study. One could find a variety of suppositions about what culture was. However, by the middle of the twentieth century these extremes gave place to a relatively stable definition of culture as a pattern of behavior shared by a group of people in a specific geographical area delimited by State frontiers.

My aim in this chapter is to describe the process through which this homogeneity was achieved. I begin with a brief presentation of the different brands of evolutionist theories that marked the thinking of culture in its "scientific" inception. This evolutionist gaze is then related to the omnipresent dichotomies that constituted assertions about culture at the time: culture versus environment, culture versus race, culture versus

individual. I argue that these debates orbited around the gravitational center of evolutionist theory and created the conditions of possibility for later area-based renderings of cultural phenomena. In turn, these renderings institutionalized the notion of patterns as a conceptual innovation which was used to deal with culture as a scientific object. These novelties were essential to the appearance of the concept of configuration and the substitution of anachronous by synchronic approaches in the treatment of culture. Hence, the universal linear time that encapsulated earlier interpretations about culture gave place to the perception that different cultures belonged to particular spaces and should be studied according to the specific configurations that animated them. This figuration about culture was one of the elements that made the emergence of *sovietologism* possible.

Chapter four, *The metamorphosis of the State*, intends to show that the concept of the State is a discourse that exerts effects on reality instead of just representing it. As a discourse, its definition depends on the interplay of knowledge and power. This rendering is at odds with the reifying treatment dispensed to the State by mainstream scholars. In fact, when one digs deep into the texts about the concept of the State during the inception of the international relations discipline, one finds that it had no abstract definition, and was even applied interchangeably with the concepts of race and nation. Moreover, the concept of the State was associated/dissociated with/from the notions of federation, local government, territory, and sovereignty in such a way that, when practitioners explicitly advocated its use, the concept could be identified only in superficial, vacuous ways.

In this sense, the juristic and pluralistic conceptions of the State, which were treated by the specialized literature as the main dichotomy framing the theoretical debate of the period, were not, and could not be, the only meanings attributed to the concept of the State at the beginning of the twentieth century. Later, these two conceptions created the conditions for the individualization of the State and the emergence of other meanings that resulted in the concept of the Totalitarian State. The

implications of these findings open up the possibility of approaching the concept of the State from a discursive perspective and using this perspective to find out how the myriad statements about the State gave place to the relatively stable definition adopted in the 1950's. This stable figuration reinforced the idea of an ontological entity that could be easily identified as a unified subject in international politics, and was the second element that made the emergence of *sovietologism* possible.

Chapter Five, *The metamorphosis of personality*, applies the same procedure from the previous two chapters to the concept of personality. The research presented in this chapter clearly shows that when scholarly journals started hosting discussions about the concept of personality at the end of the nineteenth century, those that participated in the debate were more concerned with its sources than with its meaning. In this context, two main explanations of the causes of personality emerged. In the beginning, they were located at the individual level, and personality traits were attributed either to differences in the intensity of natural instincts shared by all individuals or to some inherent ability or skill individuals developed vis-à-vis others. Conversely, in a second moment, the origin of personality was located at the group level, and social determinist theories of personality became dominant. A clear definition of personality was never sought during this passage from the individual to the group pole of determinism, although behaviorist methodologies forced the treatment of personality to become more abstract and more “scientific.”

Scientism was characterized by the emphasis given to the use of statistics and laboratory experiments. But the main goal of the scientific enterprise was predictability and control: the causes of personality were supposed to be discovered so that scientists could predict its appearances — and correct deviancies, which is why the sources of personality traits were believed to be more important than the proper definition of personality. Moreover, the detection of deviations was possible only insofar as there was some norm from which to deviate; but as discussions about the definition of personality were almost inexistent, there was no

deliberate effort to define the social norm. These two absences — absent definitions of personality and social norm — coupled with statistics' need to apply collective categories, created the conditions of possibility for the identification of the concept of personality with the concept of a social group, and thereby spawned the idea of a social personality after World War II. The idea of social personality is the third element that made sovietologism possible.

The interplay among the notions of patterns of culture, the Totalitarian state, and social personality did not produce a monolithic idea of the Soviet Union. Rather, they operated as the markers delimiting the frontiers of sovietologism. Sometimes, they were applied within a coherent thread connecting each other, at other times, they were applied in a contradictory fashion. Such fluidity in treatments of the Soviet Union's subjectivity supports the impression that there was no agreement among sovietologists about the contours of the object they were dealing with. In fact, some scholars found the sources of Soviet behavior in the psychological aspects of its leadership, others in the nature of the Soviet regime, in the structure of Soviet society, in the Communist party, and so on. However, because these different approaches were operating inside the same discursive formation, there were certain themes that conspicuously pervaded their descriptions of the Soviet Union. In chapter six, *The Soviet Union in the Sovietologist Discourse*, I focus on three of them: its expansionist drive, its inferiority to the West, and its contradictory nature.

In chapter seven, *The Soviet Union as a western representation*, I try to explicitly show how the discursive formations of culture, the State, and personality performed an essential role as markers for the emergence of the Soviet Union as a subject of sovietologist discourse. I offer a transversal reading of these discursive formations in an attempt to retrace their similarities as discourses affected by the same *epistèmes* in different periods. Through this movement, I revisit how the configurational notion of culture, the totalitarian nature of the State, and the appearance of social personality all exerted a dominant function in these discursive formations

immediately before the World War II and were afterwards reinforced by the Cold War *epistème*. Consequently, sovietologists sought stability in the USSR's subjectivity, not because these were inherent features of the Soviet Union, but because these features were required by the power-knowledge relations that traversed the production of knowledge during that period. To demonstrate this, I offer examples illustrating the mechanisms that seemed to immunize the USSR to transformations, and emphasize the preponderance of collective categories over the individual: the role of the party, the educational system, Soviet science, and representations of some aspects of Russian history that confirm the impossibility of changing the Soviet Union's subjectivity. The "throwing away of individuals" symbolized by the mechanisms that kept the Soviet Union's subjectivity immune from changes, also reinscribed its collective quality according to the Cold War *epistème* of predictability and control. Hence, sovietologists' production of knowledge about the Soviet Union also produced the Soviet Union's subjectivity.

A brief *Conclusion* restates the dissertation's argument, presents some observations about post-Cold War engagements between Russia and the West, and suggests further explorations of the relation between sovietologism's representation of the Soviet Union and the how Russia is portrayed today.

PART I – Subjectivity, Power, Discourse