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THE AMERICANS AND REALIST SPY TELEVISION:
THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF AN
APPARENTLY OUTDATED GENRE.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation will analyze the use of a film genre which at first sight would seem to belong to the past. It will also relate it with our present time and cultural context in order to prove how this genre allows, because of its specific characteristics, the treatment of contemporary concerns and issues. This study will analyze the television drama series *The Americans* from a cultural perspective that tries to show the relevance of the series within the cultural context of the first decades of the 21st century. The focus will be placed on the portrayal of the main characters, their family and their personal relationships as both public and private human beings in a society which tends to be extremely demanding with its citizens.

Television series *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2015) follows the conventions of the realist trend in spy films such as *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965) or *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier and Spy* (Tomas Alfredson, 2011), both based on novels written by John le Carré, even though these conventions are changed, mixed and distorted. In Alan Booth's words, *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* "has become the classic Cold War allegory, as gothic in tone and message as the Bond films had been romantic" (151). Set in the Cold War period, westerners and easterners fight looking for the weaknesses in the other's system. Spy movies are heirs to the spy novels which according to Allan Hepburn are narratives that by means of the use of intrigue and violence "typically speculate on what constitutes an individual's belonging to a political order" (8).

These spy films from the late 60's and 70's are based on the paranoia, itself the consequence of a real risk, that the existent tensions would end up in a third World War. As Booth explains, the climate in which these spy films were released was the consequence of the paranoia created by some significant events:

The next major turn in the pattern of the spy film was prompted by American events which evoked dominant moods of suspicion and conspiracy-even paranoia:

The assassinations of the Kennedys and King; the Vietnam War; the squalidness of the Watergate affair; the revelation of intelligence agencies run rampant. As each affair was publicized, it was revealed so inadequately and suspiciously that the public mood of mistrust and fear for its democratic institutions became a national obsession. (152)

Espionage movies are made from the point of view of the West Block, as we usually only know by first hand names, faces and movements of westerners whereas those belonging to the Soviet Bloc remain in shadows, unidentified, not even individuals but a kind of mass. Spy movies are films noir, not in a generic sense but in that their mood is dark, with a certain sense of fatality, decadence, suspiciousness and loneliness. Spies have a risky way of life that frequently leads to death and even when they win their losses are enormous: espionage movies do not belong to the happy-ending type of films.

The traditional protagonist in a classical spy movie is a western man without family bonds. Romances are unusual and short term stories, because the woman eventually dies. Furthermore, as Hepburn states romance is not a usual ingredient in the “formula”, even though sometimes it is used as a way to test the typical male spy’s physical invulnerability to feelings such as love, sadness or happiness in a context where love is considered an intolerable weakness (14). All his life, time, and efforts are dedicated to his work as a spy. In Bratich’s words James Bond or John Le Carre’s characters are “isolated and abstracted heroes” (135). There is always some westerner who defects to the other bloc, a mole and someone from the other bloc who has some ‘treasure’ and the spy does his best to get to their secret. Treachery is intrinsically linked with the spy’s activities, as Hepburn signals “spies deal with betrayal and double-crosses the way detectives deal with motives and crimes” (25). Although there is sex in their stories, it is no as omnipresent as in the fantastic trend represented by *James Bond*.

The classical spy is mainly known for his actions, as his feelings are not evident at first sight and his most obvious affective bonds are created with his comrades. They are men without past or history, only that linked with their work as spies. The spy is as mysterious and secret as his own work, because he “by definition, eludes representation” (Hepburn, XV). In the case of the Smiley in *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier and Spy* the audience never sees his wife’s face because he sacrifices and loses his private life in favour of his work.

Moreover, the spies’ world exists in binary terms, they have to make a choice between being faithful to their mother countries and defecting to the other block. As Eco contends these oppositions are:

Very similar to Lévi Strauss’s binary oppositions [...] that involve the relation between characters, between ideologies, for example, between liberalism and totalitarianism, or the ‘free world’ and the ‘Soviet Union’ and a large number of relations between distinct types of values such as ‘cupidity-ideals’, love-death, chance-planning, perversion-innocence, loyalty-disloyalty. (quoted by Strinati,93-94)

It seems that this election, in the realistic trend, becomes a moral rather than a political issue, because there would only be one correct and right side and another that would always be evil and wrong.

The Americans is an American television series produced by Joe Weisberg. The protagonists are a Russian couple, a man and a woman elected by the KGB to pretend to be husband and wife. The Jennings, Elizabeth (Kerri Russell) and Philip (Mathew Rhys) are Soviet agents and live as a married couple infiltrated as US citizens in order to create the perfect cover. They have lived for almost two decades in the United States and have perfectly adapted to the American way of life, they are indistinguishable from a real American family. During the day they work as travel agents and attend their duties as

parents and it is mostly during the night that they ‘escape’ from home and develop their activities as secret agents.

Stan Beeman (Noah Emerich) is a CIA agent and the Jennings’ neighbor. Both families, the real American one, the Beemans, and the fake one, live in front of one another. The Jennings share friendship and confidences with Stan and Sandra Beeman (Susan Misner) in their ‘visible’ life although they are enemies working for different countries and secret agencies in their hidden nocturnal life.

THE SPY GENRE AND THE ORIGINALITY OF *THE AMERICANS*

Initially the series is built on binary oppositions, following the typical structure used in realistic spy movies of personal, social, and political symmetry. Not only Russia and the US are confronted but also Elizabeth and Philip have their counterpart in Stan and Sandra Beeman. In the series universe one has to be faithful to the US or faithful to Russia, there are not middle terms. This is very contradictory because everyone has at least two sides in the series. In Mandel’s words:

Life is based on double standards [...] hence the individual drama, based on the contradiction between social norms and personal needs. Under normal conditions, this contradiction is restrained and repressed, especially when personal needs are frustrated. Crime and spy stories release these inhibitions, frustrations, and repressions, and allow the contradictions to flower (65).

Individuals are by far more complicated than the binary thinking that the politics of two blocks supposes.

Although traditionally the spy films have already focused on the difficulty to combine personal demands and the work of a spy, *The Americans*, because of its serial format, has the possibility of being narratively more complex than the usual spy movie. Both the duration of each chapter, one hour, and its serial condition give room for developing not only the characters but also diverse threads of plot. *The Americans* is in

its focus on the personal, not a parody of the classical spy movie but a rewriting, a tendency that Strinati defines as “reinventing and reviving genres and establishing their contemporary relevance [...] far from merely recycling the past (trying) to update cinematic images and themes” (233). The characters are rounded chapter by chapter, and change and evolve in a demonstration of the inadequacy of black and white thinking applied to human beings. The story is set in the US, during Reagan’s presidency a very conservative period in American political history, before Afghanistan, 9/11 or the economic crisis. But it has been produced in the second decade of the 21th century. The first season, the object of this analysis, consists of 13 chapters and was released in 2013.

We should ask why a TV series about the last moments of the Cold War has been made thirty years later. Why is this part of the past interesting for our contemporaries? The series mixes elements such as espionage, romance, and family life and the most evident intention in putting these elements together must be to attract as wide an audience as possible. Spy films are usually male intended, but with the addition of new ingredients, the series becomes apt for the whole family at the same time as a wider range of topics can be treated. Moreover, the uniqueness of the series can be found in the deep attention than personal, mainly romantic relationships, and family life receives, furthermore from the point of view of Easterners, spies working for the KGB. Mixing the extraordinary, uncommon, work of spies with the daily life of a middle class family creates a complex and interesting narrative connected with the worries of the contemporary audience in which the private sphere occupies a privileged place. The couple formed by Elizabeth and Philip Jennings struggle to combine their work as spies, their duties as parents educating teenagers and the difficulties of their relationship as a couple, at the same time as all these issues are treated with verisimilitude. This tension between personal and secret life has become a characteristic of contemporary spy movies, as Bratich explains: “the work of

separating mission from personal life is an ongoing dynamic whose negotiation creates narrative and character appeal” (135). It is a strategy already used in films such as *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Doug Liman, 2005) or in previous television series like *Alias* (ABC, 2001-2006) and *24* (Fox, 2001-2010).

ELIZABETH AND PHILIP.

I have chosen the first chapter as the center of this analysis because pilot chapter offer a very complete presentation and portrayal of all the characters and their motivations. The evolution of the Jennings, especially Elizabeth is observed and related to some subsequent chapters. The conventional model of the American family is followed to its last consequences; they even have kids, Paige (Holly Taylor) and Henry (Keidrich Sellati). Instead of the solitary spy we also have a woman. Moreover the main character seems to be Elizabeth because in the ‘spy rank’ she is better considered by her superiors and usually receives the orders first. Not only is the protagonist a non-western couple but it is mainly the woman that is responsible to her authorities. This renewal of the genre by means of using totally different protagonists can be seen in the line of adapting an ‘old’ genre to be more adequate to contemporary times rather than trying to do a postmodern parody of secret agents films. It is this intention of expanding the narrative possibilities of the genre to deal with complex personal subjects that makes *The Americans* a text engaged with the present times. This function of genre has been noted by Collins:

The recognition that the features of conventional genre films that are subjugated to such intensive rearticulation are not the mere detritus of exhausted cultures past: those icons, scenarios, visual conventions continue to carry with them some sort of cultural “charge” or resonance that must be reworked according to the exigencies of the present “ (25).

In this renewal appears the intention of treating personal life as a topic, something Collins calls the “desire to depict the previously undepicted” (257).

Elizabeth is a worried mother, murderer and femme fatale at the same time. She fulfills the prototypical femme fatale type in films noir when it is necessary for her job as a spy, sexualized and threatening to men. In the first chapters we know far more about Elizabeth than Philip, her husband. She is a human being with personal traumas such as the death of her father or the fact that she has been raped. The very first scene in the series introduces her. It relies on close-ups, that remark her beauty and details, how she moves her hands, controls and drives the situation to the point that she wants. She is in a hotel room with a man from whom she wants to get information. There is an explicitly erotic scene, with not very conventional sex, even more in the puritan US under Reagan. Elizabeth behaves as an experimented prostitute, her sexual practices and disinhibition are not, apparently among middle class housewives, not the most usual attitude for the 1980s or the 21th century. She is presented as very sexualized and ready to do whatever may be necessary for this man to talk his secrets. The fact that this sexual disinhibition belongs to a non-American agent is not casual, according to Brady. In previous TV series such as *Alias*, with a CIA female agent as protagonist, exotic and foreign women, among them Russian spies, are depicted as sexually deprived and morally corrupted the moment they use sex as a tool to get information. The US American protagonist in *Alias*, Jennifer Garner, would never cross the line that separates sex from her work (112). Sex for the correct model of American spy should be reserved to the private sphere. It could be said that the fact that Elizabeth does not obey this unwritten rule is caused by her foreignness and also as a first subtle indication of the superiority of American morality over the Soviet one. CIA agents in the series have no problem to kill, to consciously murder even innocent people but if they have sex, it is always for private reasons, never as a weapon at the orders of the state. But on the other hand, precisely the fact that the Jennings are not real Americans opens the possibility to create more ambivalent characters, outside the

binary model of goodies and baddies present in the traditional model in spy films. Moral ambiguity becomes clearly an option in a series where motives and ideologies are by far less important than individual motivations, which may be reflecting a contemporary view of the world.

She is very good at pretending, but when she is out from that hotel room she expresses disgust in the way she throws her wig away. But she is a professional, totally committed and loyal to the Soviet Union. In the family garage Elizabeth is about to open the boot of the car where Philip and she keep a defeated Soviet agent. She looks at herself on the windscreen as if it were a mirror and a flashback is introduced to narrate when Elizabeth was a young aspirant doing her training in Russia. She was raped by her superior with the excuse of “being trained”, defenseless because the only present witness turned the blind eye to what was happening. She was not strong enough to physically fight him and was not only raped but also humiliated. Elizabeth suffered the aggression, usually the worst trauma for a woman. Her dignity was taken away by this man and maybe never recuperated because of her duties as a spy. The KGB’s demands seem not to have a limit because Elizabeth is not the owner even of her body, life, desires and feelings.

In a mainly male world, the secret agents’ field, Elizabeth has to leave behind her personal suffering as woman to be competent enough to fulfill her duties towards her government. Even more when this is not a fair play between men and women since the demands are not the same. She was imposed and deprived of her sexual liberty by her own comrades, a privilege given to her superior and a right robbed to her. She follows orders without questioning them, being loyal to a cause that spectators know has been defeated in advance. It may be as meaningless as a woman from the 21st century trying to be the perfect mother, the best professional, sexually taboo-free, always fashionably dressed and never old, which is something doomed to failure. Sexual equality is neither

present in the series nor in contemporary times. Women from the series' fictional past and from the real present have to make more of an effort to acquire a position similar to men. The female spy that the series introduces to the audience is perfectly aware of it and is ready to pay the price: she has to be not just as good as a male spy but even better to be considered the same.

This model has been sold to women in contemporary times. Competitiveness is nowadays an essential part of most professional women's lives, who at the same time do not renounce to their natural role as mothers in charge of the reproduction of the species. These professional women share their lives with males who are, for instance and in general far from a similar level of commitment with their roles as fathers. Several sociological studies and evidence collected by Fagan in her study support this idea:

Women are significantly more likely to experience high levels of family interference with work when they have high family demands, while men's levels of family demands do not affect their family interference with work. Women may still feel that they are primarily responsible for their family, and thus experience increased family interference with their work (21).

In contrast with her husband, Elizabeth's point of departure as a KGB spy is absolutely faithful to the Soviet ideals and convinced about the righteousness of her mission, totally loyal to the Soviet Union. She is the flawless spy, she doesn't transmit the smallest of the doubt about her orders, even when several times Philip tries to convince her that defecting can be a solution, a path to find their personal happiness. Philip, at least in the first season, has no ghosts in his past. He enjoys his life as an American father and husband even though this is quite a contradictory image with the 1980s model of man. It could be said that Philip is closer to a contemporary man who equates the personal and family realm with the professional. A contemporary model of man who is more committed with things than in the past were only women's responsibility. A model that belongs to western society, quite new and may not be so

extended as one could believe because still nowadays it is the woman that takes care of the house:

Women say that they have to be 'on top of everything', which means that they have to control and supervise everything, at least in the area of home and child care activities. Many have domestic help, but the supervision function was nevertheless placed on the woman, never on her male partner. (Ekström, 44)

Although he flirts with the idea of defecting when he learns what amount of money he could be paid by the FBI, it is not money what tempts him, it is the possibility of becoming a real citizen, father and husband. Whereas Philip is from the very beginning presented as totally conscious of the desire to be a family man, Elizabeth in contrast has to evolve to show the shadow of a doubt regarding her work. As Smiley says in *Tinker, Tailor Soldier and Spy* "a fanatic always conceals a secret doubt".

It can also be said that the series, that is an American product, although critical with the American political system and politics, is not neutral in the sense that it presents the American model of life as a positive influence over Philip, which makes him less of a fanatic and more human in comparison with the first image of Elizabeth, who is presented as more radical, almost totally made in Soviet shape. The Soviet model is inflexible and tremendously cruel, capable of murdering the wife of a soviet agent who died in action and give her baby to the agent's parents in Russia, all of this after promising to relocate mother and baby in Cuba. In Lakoff's formulation of the nation as a family, he establishes a parallelism between the work of the nation and the family, where the nation is the father and the citizens are the children that need to be provided with laws, ruling of the economy, and education. (50) In this metaphor, the Soviet government does not fulfill his role as a father that should protect his children and provide security to them, whereas Brady signals that the US "is positioned in terms of paternalism and morality [...] nation and father alike protect their daughters' sexual innocence, while other

countries would require their sexual exploitation” (125). From the audience point of view the Soviet government will likely be understood as morally inferior to the US one. The head of the KGB is presented as capable of betrayal and murder without any bit of compassion and as a liar to the Jennings, whereas the American institutions are for the moment not so evil.

But Elizabeth is more than a spy: she is a human being, with all the facets and complications of a real woman. She suffers not only from professional but also personal anxiety. In common with many contemporary working mothers, she tries to reconcile her role as a mother with her work as a spy. Her kids and the beginning of a desire for a real romantic relationship with Philip are her weakness and the engine that slightly propels her evolution through the series. In contrast with previous Russian and other non-American female agents, Elizabeth has a genuine interest in and love for her kids. But it cannot be forgotten that her role as mother totally belongs to her ‘American side’, that she is an American mother because her maternity fully belongs to the model American family made up to provide the perfect cover. Although in the traditional spy film “foreign female spies are single-minded vixens who apparently place personal or national interests above family” (Brady, 113), Elizabeth’s maternity is genuine, may be a result of her ‘Americanization’ or a characteristic that makes her more believable and closer to the contemporary woman. This apparent mutation of the soulless Soviet agent into a caring mother is only another facet of the multiple sides that a real woman should have. Elizabeth cannot be read as only belonging to the ‘wrong side’, as the cold and amoral soviet spy that only follows orders portrayed in traditional spy movies. She is characterized as real, psychologically more complex than this type has previously been, according to Mandel, who asserts that “the psychology of the crime story is generally too one dimensioned to allow complex and contradictory human beings to emerge” (65).

When the series starts, Elizabeth and Phillip's private life is almost a complete fake. Only their parenthood is genuine, while everything else, including their relationship as a couple, is within the KGB orders, at least apparently. Moreover, they do not even know each other's real name, only their invented personal story, made up by the KGB. But there are some details that demonstrate that at that moment both desire to be a real couple. Philip is shown listening to a recording of Elizabeth's sex session with one of her targets and his expression shows a certain suffering. Another example is when they take prisoner the Russian defector that raped Elizabeth in the past. Their orders are to give him to KGB authorities, but Philip kills him when he learns that he had hurt Elizabeth. When Elizabeth understands that he has done it because he feels something for her, passion explodes and it is the first demonstration of private and personal feelings between them.

In contrast with Elizabeth's point of departure which is of total conviction, Philip has been somehow 'contaminated' by the American way of life and he enjoys it. He would be very willing to leave his life as a spy and remain only a father and husband. His professional ambitions as a spy are second best for him regarding his family. His strong vulnerability to western consumer culture contamination can be caused because he made less of an effort than Elizabeth to become a cover agent. Perhaps the path to the present has been less hard for him as a male spy than for Elizabeth as a female one. To be faithful to Russia can be understood not only as a question of political commitment but as a gender issue. Elizabeth's road as a female spy has been fraught with difficulties. The hard process that she has passed is shown in several flashbacks. Elizabeth had to overcome a long and hard work out to be what she is at the beginning of *The Americans*, but she is totally convinced, she shows a blind trust not only in the Communist political system but also in her superiors at KGB.

But, is there room in all of this for blind loyalty to the KGB? Although Elizabeth does not doubt, in the chapter entitled “Trust Me” it is perfectly demonstrated that her superiors may not deserve such loyalty. Claudia (Margo Martindale), her KGB supervisor orders some KGB agents to pass for FBI agents and to kidnap Elizabeth and Philip, torturing them to be certain of their faithfulness to the Soviet Intelligence because they suspect the existence of a mole. Elizabeth’s torture is mainly psychological. She is locked in a room with the walls plastered with her kids’ photos. Claudia is perfectly aware that this is, apparently, her only weakness, her preoccupation for Page and Henry’s welfare and this is why Elizabeth beats Claudia without mercy when she learns that her firm loyalty has been paid with the worst possible torture for her, the materialization of the nightmare of her kids in danger without any protection.

But even under this strong psychological torture the spy prevails, she does not give any information to the alleged FBI agents, she remains loyal, like Philip. Even though at the end they are alone, no organization supports the spy that is caught. Both of them, Elizabeth and Philip, have been trained to endure torture, they are professionals. And it is the kind of torture chosen for each one that gives the audience clues about their inner side.

While Elizabeth is confronted with the image of her kids as unprotected, her Achilles heel, Philip is treated with callousness, beaten, almost drowned when finally the impostors threaten to beat Elizabeth in front of him. They take for granted that probably Philip could not endure the vision of Elizabeth mistreated, that this is his main weakness. And we shall never know what would have been his final reaction because Claudia orders to stop the performance before Elizabeth can suffer any harm.

Philip, after asking Elizabeth what type of treatment they have given her, concludes that Claudia has trusted Elizabeth more than him because as Elizabeth has said

to Claudia, Philip was very adapted to the American way of life. This revelation damages the fragile love relationship between them and later on they break their cohabitation because trust between them is broken. It is very interesting how in their relationship they distinguish the line that separates their work and their growing love relationship. Both of them endure that the other have sex with other partners, as one more part of their investigation duties, but neither of them understands the other having sex only for pleasure. This compartmented vision of the individual, divided into two, the public and private one, seems to connect with the contemporary man and woman. The Jennings understand lies, murder, promiscuous sex and lack of morality in general as an inseparable part of their work, their public/hidden self, as Soviet agents, but they preserve a very conventional ideal of marriage and family more in accordance with the American model. This is why Elizabeth decides to live in separated homes when she knows that Philip has had sex with Irina, his ex-girlfriend and a soviet agent as well. Elizabeth tolerates Philip having sex for spying purposes but not for pleasure, it can be said that they expect a private pact of faithfulness, in the only part of their lives that they can be what they decide, the private one.

Elizabeth and Philip recognize as sharply separated and recognizable what for them is their real life, in which they can take decisions with freedom, their private sphere and on the other hand their public one, ruled by orders and the interests of their government, which is totally fake, pretension. The difficulty to combine what they perceive as real and the fake one, built by obligations, is the same difficulty that the contemporary couples experience in the 21st century. One can wonder if we are always putting the public, professional career and economic success in the first place, to detriment of the private sphere that eventually is what can drive one to happiness. In that

sense the Jennings, Elizabeth and Philip function as a mirror in which contemporary audiences can see their own lives.

The Jennings are objects, pawns in a game only valuable while useful. Although the spirit of the series is not tragic because this is why romance, love and family are present, there is an underlying tragedy in the fact that there is no place to escape. But there is only a possibility if they are able to rely on one another. If they maintain their private sphere spotlessly clean, their bonds firmly tied with trust and truth, it will not matter what the events of their public life are. This is why in the last chapter of the first season when Elizabeth is nearly caught, shot and wounded, she asks Philip to go *home* with their kids. She figures out that they share a real home, with a real family and Philip's place is there, with their kids, taking care of them until the moment she can go back and take her role as a mother. They must combine the spy world with the family one, but what can make them feel, worry and be happy is the family one.

Although the kids, Paige and Henry, live unconscious of their parents' secret work, they are on the one hand part of the cover and on the other hand American citizens living with the enemy. Philip and Elizabeth must hide things and constantly lie to their own daughter and son, not only to protect them, but to be protected against them. As Brady points out: "as family is implicated in the deception, abuse and nationalism inherent in the spy genre, a very particular notion of familial relations and the ways in which they are linked up with nationhood is expressed" (113). The Jennings, working for a communist government and apparently with very solid communist principles, have to confront the fact that their kids are been educated within the capitalist system and are by definition their enemies. This would be another example of how the state, the public sphere intervenes and distorts private life, the almost impossible adjustment between the private and the public.

PAST AND CONTEMPORARY BACKDROP

If the Cold war was a period of anxiety and paranoia for western countries, in the first decades of the 21st century we are living again a period of fear and paranoia. Today our main threat comes from Islamic fundamentalism. When citizens live scared and often traumatized after events such as 9/11 and the Afghanistan war, one may question whether the politics of their government has been adequate to protect citizens and to what extent western governments are or not guilty of the situation. As Lakoff articulates, people voted Reagan in the 1980s because they identified with him. Voters trusted him and found a connection between themselves and Reagan's world view, although sometimes these same voters did not agree with his policy (7). The series does not present exemplar CIA agents, and overtly it puts such words as 'crazy' on the lips of one character to qualify Reagan's exterior policy. *The Americans* seems to criticize American society, politics and hypocrisy in Reagan's time but this critique can be extrapolated to our times in which terrorism is the threat.

From under a conservative view terrorism is again a question of binary thinking, victims and perpetrators. Terrorists are evil people and we must pay them back with the same coin: force and violence. But the inefficacy of force to end with terrorism leads people to question and try to analyze the reasons for its existence from a more liberal perspective. As Lakoff explains:

Liberals tend to ask questions about the deeper, systemic causes of terrorism [...] what factors caused the hatred of the United States, the absence of schools other than religious madrassas in those countries, US support of authoritarian monarchies in many Arab nations and US active support of Israel (62).

People trying to understand why their families and lives are under threat and go beyond the conservative explanation can point an accusing finger at US government and its

political strategies. We no longer believe in the righteousness of our political system, corruption has been proved everywhere. *The Americans* would be a reminder of how things started and how they have become. Our own political system could be blamed for the situation of crisis.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Americans* would depart from the conventions of a genre that was created and developed in a historical period marked by fear and anxiety and which was useful in order to convey the pessimistic mood and the frame to develop today's general worries in western society. By means of presenting a new side of the coin of the Cold War, trying to be more realistic and less 'patriotic' than previous Spy movies and series, *The Americans* can be seen as part of what Collins calls "new sincerity" rather than a post-modernist recreation of a genre and the past.

The Americans expands the possibilities of spy films by giving more emphasis to private life adapting the model to a contemporary society in which individuals are as isolated as cover spies, each one pursuing his/her own self-interest. Although establishing a binary world made up of symmetrical oppositions, *The Americans* departs from the moral concepts of right and wrong to present characters with moral ambiguity and conflicts. Politics, economics and global issues are the backdrop for the most relevant part of the plot, how human beings struggle to live in happiness. American or Russian spies, it is in the private field, in the relationships of affection where humans look for fulfillment.

The Jennings are killers and concerned parents, moral ambiguity is present in each second of their lives. For the time being Elizabeth and Philip have surrendered their public life to the pressure exerted by their own society, the Soviet one, while their inner side

struggles to achieve happiness in the private field: love and family. This is what the Jennings have in common with spectators, the contradictions between our natural and more family side and what society expects us to be and act. They seem to have endorsed that statement that Margaret Thatcher made in 1987, when she affirmed that it was “no such thing as society, only men, women and families”. As a consequence of 9/11 and a generalized economic crisis, society today has lost confidence in the power of politics and politicians to rule our lives and still less to deserve our trust. Consequently, it is perfectly understandable to look for happiness in all spheres only depending on personal, individual rule, and leaving moral principles only for the private field whereas moral ambiguity becomes a rightful option for the public one.

However, in terms of politics and the vision of the American way of life the series does not send a monolithic message, it is rather ambivalent. On the one hand it seems to criticize the system, especially the most conservative views, and on the other it subtly praises US culture. It shows how Soviet spies become ‘humanized’ under the American cultural influence whereas their morally questionable behaviour is a consequence of their foreign origins. In that sense the series remains faithful to the American double morality in which violence is an essential part of their identity whereas sex and some non-traditional sexual practices are not tolerable for real American citizens, only for foreigners like the Jennings.

However, the audience takes Philip and Elizabeth’s side even though as models the Jennings are morally ambiguous. The model of US that is offered is not so exemplary and Elizabeth and Philip’s worries are familiar and known to us, from the problems with their children to their marital crisis. The Jennings are as American as they are Soviet, the result of cultural mingling and this is the trend nowadays: a global world produces the

mixture of people, assimilation and change. Of course, the Jennings should be assimilated by American culture and not the other way round.

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