

Political Agreements and Disagreements between Psychoanalysis and Person- Centred Psychotherapy: A Lacanian Marxist Response to Schmid's Paper

DAVID PAVÓN-CUÉLLAR, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Michoacán, México

ABSTRACT *This paper draws on Marxist and Lacanian ideas to offer a response to Schmid's call for discussion concerning politics in psychotherapy and, more specifically, the political understanding inherent in the person-centred approach (PCA). After scrutinising Lacan's attitude towards politics, and discarding Lacanist politics, an alternative Lacanian Marxist political standpoint is proposed, in which seven points of political agreement between psychoanalysis and Schmid's conception of the PCA are discerned, namely: the rejection of a reductionist understanding of politics; the definition of the personal as something political; the conception of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as political activities; the assumption of a critical stance; the recognition of the necessity of dispute; opposition to scientific–empiricist fetishism; and the renunciation of control and indoctrination. Despite these agreements, however, the article also shows that the Lacanian Marxist political standpoint permits detection of fundamental political disagreements between its idea of psychoanalysis and the use in person-centred psychology of the ideological discourses of humanism, selfism, empathism and therapeutism. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: psychotherapy; psychoanalysis; Marxism; Lacan; person-centred approach; politics

In his article, the Austrian person-centred psychotherapist, Peter F. Schmid, makes “a plea for discourse and dispute among the different schools of therapy with respect to their political self-understanding and impact” (Schmid, 2014, p. 5). Even though I do not really belong to any *school of therapy* and thus am not directly concerned with this plea, I support it enthusiastically, and take up the challenge of responding to it here. My response is grounded on a particular theoretical–political articulation between Freudianism and Marxism and, more specifically, between the theoretical contribution of the Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) and a Marxist political stance predominantly influenced by Karl Marx

*Correspondence to: David Pavón Cuéllar, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo. Facultad de Psicología. Francisco Villa 450, Colonia Doctor Miguel Silva, C.P. 58110, Morelia, Michoacán, México.
E-mail: pavoncuellardavid@yahoo.fr

(1818–1883) himself and Louis Althusser (1918–1990). It is on the basis of this articulation that I identify a series of political agreements and disagreements with Schmid's ideas concerning person-centred psychotherapy with my own conception of psychoanalysis. However, it is necessary first to explain the political positioning of this Lacanian Marxist conception upon which I ground my response to Schmid. This requires examining Lacan's attitude towards politics, the idea of Lacanian politics itself, and my alternative of Lacanian Marxist politics

LACAN AGAINST POLITICS

Lacan is not really enthusiastic about politics. Indeed, he seems to condemn and reject the political sphere as a whole, while denouncing politics as “a matter of trading – wholesale, in lots, in this context – subjects themselves, who are now called citizens, by the hundreds of thousands.” (Lacan, 1990, p. 13) The uniqueness of each subject, so important for Lacanian psychoanalysis, would thus be disdained by politics, since political action would always, and necessarily, be directed to “groups” or “herds” (Lacan, 1986, p. 215), collective entities that leave no place for singular subjects, but only for thousands or millions of equal citizens, voters, atoms, constitutive elements of groups, who are organised, canalised, conducted and pushed by politicians who thus proceed like traffic policemen.

Lacan did not hesitate to say that “everything concerning politics is rooted in the police”; that “politics is pure and simple police”, “just a question of traffic”, of telling us to “move along” (Lacan, 1975a, p. 3). We are moved by politicians in different directions, towards all kind of precipices, or in circular revolutionary turns. We may be moved either to the right or the left, of course, but this held no significant difference for Lacan (1986). Both movements, to the left and to the right, lead to the same bad results, to the same “herd knavery” that amounts to a kind of “collective foolishness” (Lacan, 1986, p. 215). However, when comparing the politicians who are at the origin of this knavery and foolishness, Lacan did propose a certain differentiation among them, characterising Left-wing politicians as “fools” and Right-wing ones as “knaves” (pp. 215–216). Yet, in the end, both politicians produce the same crowds, the same foolish and knavish multitudes. These masses and their leaders were all scorned by Lacan, who reduced all politics to knavery and foolishness, and not just to policing and trading people wholesale.

In the Lacanian perspective, the vices inherent in politics include exploitation, deception and manipulation, oppression and repression, despotism and tyranny. All these vices will be synthesised, explained and conceptualised through the Lacanian representation of the “Master's discourse”, which would be “directly experienced at the level of politics” (Lacan, 1991, p. 99). Indeed, for Lacan, “everything” in politics, “even revolution”, was comprised in the Master's discourse.

As a “Master's discourse”, politics is by definition, in Lacanian theory, the “opposite” of psychoanalysis, whose “analytical discourse” would be the only “counterpoint” against politics and its discourse (Lacan, 1991, pp. 99–100). We may also say that politics, with its Master's discourse, “is the reverse of psychoanalysis” (Miller, 2003, p. 112), an affirmation that is consistent with the fact that psychoanalytical discourse is about the unconscious, while political discourse, the Master's discourse, is “the discourse of the mastering consciousness” (Lacan, 1991, p. 79).

The problem arises when we come to see that Lacan (1975b) also described the Master's discourse as the "crystallisation of the structure of the unconscious" (p. 187), which supposes that this structure crystallises in the discourse of politics. He explicitly recognises, in fact, that "the unconscious is politics", understood as "that which relates and separates people" (Lacan, 1967, p. 10). The transindividual exteriority of the unconscious would then be a political exteriority. Therefore, though paradoxically, politics, which Lacan condemns and rejects, would be immanent in the unconscious – the very subject matter of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

LACANIAN POLITICS?

Lacan would never oppose the unconscious, of course, but he did oppose politics, which was, for him, the same as the unconscious. This explicit opposition between psychoanalysis and politics involves a deeper contradiction between the unconscious itself, as politics, and psychoanalysis, which deals with the unconscious. In a sense, psychoanalytical discourse essentially concerns its opposite, its inverse, what it condemns and rejects, that is, the political discourse of the unconscious, which resists Freud's purpose of *making conscious the unconscious*. Even if we discard this purpose, we may still consider that *psychoanalytical disalienating disidentification*, which subverts the symbolic system, opposes those alienating political identifications that are constitutive of an unconscious conceived by Lacan as the symbolic system itself, as language, as the discourse of the Other. From this point of view, psychoanalysis would be *the exact reverse of the unconscious* because "psychoanalysis is the exact reverse of politics", for "politics works through identification", through the manipulation of "key words and images" that "seek to capture the subject", while "psychoanalysis operates in the opposite way, by acting against the subject's identifications" (Miller, 2005).

By acting against identifications, psychoanalysis acts against the unconscious, and in so doing, also against politics. Therefore, psychoanalysis would be *counter-political*, not just *apolitical*. It would not just leave things as they are, but might depoliticise people. We have seen in different contexts how psychoanalysis might turn politically committed subjects – for instance, mobilised students or even members of guerrilla or Maoist radical groups – into innocuous psychoanalysts whose only guilt consists in reproducing the counter-political psychoanalytical mechanism.

We must stress the fact that *psychoanalysis may be counter-political and not just apolitical*. Now, if it is true that being apolitical is a political stance towards politics, this is even truer concerning the fact of being counter-political. Psychoanalysis can only act against politics by acting in a political way. Lacan (2001a) denounced the idea that psychoanalysts "make politics" even if they "do not want to know anything about politics" (p. 438). Thus, by rejecting and condemning politics, they make politics, *counter-political politics*.

We might object that Lacanian psychoanalysis does not reject politics as a whole, but only political identification, so that its political stance would be counter-identificatory and not counter-political (Klotz, 1999). The problem is that Lacan himself opposed psychoanalysis not only to identification, but also to politics, to the Master's political discourse, the identificatory discourse *par excellence*. Identification is inseparable from politics in Lacan, so that a counter-identificatory stance would be a counter-political stance – and this stance, as a political one, would automatically be an identificatory one, as can be seen in the identifications that define the identity of those psychoanalysts who oppose identification.

Despite their pretended opposition to identification, many psychoanalysts remain surreptitiously identified, like Millerian–Lacanian–Freudian psychoanalysts, with the psychoanalyst, with Freud, with Lacan, with Miller, but also with Allouch, Melman, Soler, etc. It is, ironically, in the name of these identifications that they adopt a counter-identificatory stance. This Lacanian stance thus becomes what we may call a *Lacanian stance*. It is *Lacanian*, and not just *Lacanian*, because it is a *political identificatory stance which is made in the name of Lacan and on the basis of a political identification with Lacan and what Lacan represents* – and hence the suffix “ist”. It is the same distinction as that between Marxian and Marxist. But what can be offered by this *Lacanianism*? Not much besides its counter-political stance, its internal struggles between identificatory factions and leaders, its sectarianism, and this “realism” that Miller (1999) described as a “healthy Machiavellianism” that “negotiates, manoeuvres, capitulates, but on the condition of not giving way to the horizon line of our desire” (pp. 14–15).

LACANIAN MARXIST POLITICS

Against Lacanism, I opt for Marxism. Such a stance should be diametrically opposed to a Lacanian stance whose *realism* implies what a consistent Marxist might pejoratively call *possibilism*, *opportunism*, *reformism* and *participationism*. In addition to all this, Lacanism has been proven to admit, and even possibly exacerbate, different kinds of dogmatism, as well as pessimism, defeatism, conservatism, adaptationism, scepticism, cynicism, solipsism, introspectionism and individualism. The end of analysis has often been misunderstood, not only as a kind of resignation, but also – what is worse – as an identification with the analyst, with Freud, with Lacan, with the Freudian–Lacanian “cause”, with “the School”, such that analyses can only serve to produce well-domesticated analysts, defenders of the cause, members of the School, of Lacan’s Church, of the Horde002C all politically identified with the Father, as Lacanists, not simply as Lacanians. Actually, in a certain sense, *a Lacanian cannot be a Lacanian*, since his Lacanism betrays the Lacanian radical, essential and fundamental theoretical and practical disagreement with political identificatory processes and with the conception of the end of analysis as identification with the analyst.

Lacan intrinsically excluded any kind of political identification with him. This is also why I opt instead for a political identification with Marx, with Marxism, and with everything that this means for a Marxist such as I, for instance, the anti-capitalist positioning, the idea of communism, the confidence in history conceived as the history of class struggle, the aim of transforming and not just describing the world, the rejection of any pretention of scientific neutrality, and an uncompromising commitment with the oppressed and exploited segments of society. By engaging with all this, I choose an open and frank Marxist political stance instead of a dissimulated and surreptitious Lacanian political stance. As for Lacan, I take his method, his practice and his theory, as well as many of his insights into the human psyche, but I subordinate all this to my Marxist political stance. Is this incongruous with a Lacanian perspective? Certainly it is, and I openly assume the incongruity, which may be salutary for both my Lacanian perspective and my Marxist stance.

Like others, I do not wish to have Marx without Lacan (Vinciguerra, 2003), but nor do I want Lacan without Marx (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2014). Probably my Lacanian Marxism, just like Freudian-Marxism, will lead to a “muddle with no way out” (Lacan, 2001b, p. 555), but I prefer this muddle to all the dangers I see in the separation between psychoanalysis and Marxism,

for I am convinced that we need to articulate them. It is on the basis of this articulation, and the resultant Marxist politicisation of Lacanian psychoanalysis, that I will now assess Schmid's paper on politics and psychotherapy.

SEVEN POLITICAL AGREEMENTS BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

My reading of Schmid's paper allowed me to discover more political agreements than I expected to find between psychoanalysis and the person-centred approach (PCA) in psychotherapy. My initial expectations were rather pessimistic, doubtful and unenthusiastic, mediated by a widespread negative psychoanalytical predisposition against PCA and the humanistic psychotherapeutic tradition as a whole. Such a predisposition, however, did not hold up against my reading of Schmid's persuasively written paper. But should this reading be considered more reliable than my prejudices?

Precisely because of my prejudices, I am not sure I always understand the PCA and its jargon adequately. My prejudices have impeded me from becoming more familiar with this approach and today they may still influence what I read and interfere with it. Therefore my interpretation of Schmid's paper might be affected by a deep misinterpretation. This possible misinterpretation might have played a leading role in my discovery of so many fundamental points of political agreements between psychoanalysis and PCA. Moreover such a "discovery" might also have been favoured by both my Marxist–Lacanian conception of psychoanalysis and Schmid's particular conception of PCA. Indeed, the political agreements between these conceptions might be more important than those between PCA and psychoanalysis as such!

Despite the foregoing, I still hope there will be something crucial at stake in each one of the following seven political agreements I discovered between my Marxist–Lacanian conception of psychoanalysis and what I understand by PCA in Schmid's paper.

Rejection of a reductionist understanding of politics

Just like PCA, a consequent psychoanalysis should not reduce politics to merely "one of the possible dimensions of being a political person", particularly to what comes to mind when we think of counselling and psychotherapy; for instance, the struggle for a "security system that guarantees therapeutic supply for everyone", the opposition to "medico-centrism", and "the politics of the helping professions and their institutions in order to establish the professions and guarantee their influence" (Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 4). In my Marxist–Lacanian perspective, all these points are certainly important, though not as fundamental as the conception of psychoanalysis as a political practice (Lacan, 2001a; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2009, 2014), which is consonant with Schmid's "understanding of PCA as a politically-relevant approach in itself", as a "political enterprise" (pp. 4). There is a political enterprise in both psychotherapy and psychoanalysis because both deal with a psyche that is essentially political.

Definition of the personal as something political

By focusing on the subject of an unconscious that is the same thing as politics, Lacan approaches Rogers' understanding of "the human being itself" as "political", as "a politician"

(ibid., 2012/2014, pp. 5). Politics is inseparable, even indistinguishable, from subjectivity for both Lacanian psychoanalysis and the PCA. When Rogers said that “the most personal is the most universal” – and Schmid adds “the most political” (ibid., p. 14) – both authors coincide with our Lacanian idea of “extimacy” as the location of political “exteriority” in the deepest “intimacy” of the subject (Lacan, 1986, p. 167). The same idea is expressed by Marx’s definition of the subject as “the ensemble of social relations” (Marx, 2013d), as an Aristotelian “political animal” that “can be individualised only within society” (Marx, 2013a).

Conception of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as political activities

Lacan’s idea that psychoanalysts always “make politics” (Lacan, 2001a, p. 438) can be related to Schmid’s assertion that “psychotherapy must be understood as a political activity, or it fails as psychotherapy” (Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 9). In order to avoid failure, neither psychotherapists nor psychoanalysts should pretend to undertake apolitical activities. This pretention of being apolitical is just another political position, indeed the worst one, for it leads to a dead end, at least according to Lacan (2001a) and Schmid (ibid.). This is why both assume the impossibility of apolitical neutrality in their respective practices. As for me, as a Marxist, I assume not only the impossibility of being “impartial” in “a society based on class struggle”, but the necessarily acritical and even conservative and reactionary choice of any supposed apolitical practice, which inevitably “defends wage-slavery” (Lenin, 2013). Thus, I coincide with Schmid (2012/2014) when he writes that “to be apolitical means to stabilise, to fortify the status quo” (p. 14).

Assumption of a critical stance

Neither Lacanian psychoanalysts nor person-centred therapists would accept being conceived as acritical, for what we can call the *critical stance* is fundamental to both Lacan and Schmid. Schmid’s (2012/2014) statement that the PCA is “critical” by “its very nature” (pp. 6), recalls Lacan’s definition of analysis as a kind of “critique” (Lacan, 1999a, p. 83) that leads to “subversion” (Lacan, 2001c, p. 381), and his idea that the “critique” of the “relation to the real” is “absolutely consubstantial to Freudian thought” (Lacan, 1999b, p. 378), his choice of “criticizing” instead of “psychoanalyzing” written works (Lacan, 2007, p. 161), and his insistence on the proximity between Freud’s psychoanalysis and “Marxist critique” (Lacan, 2006, pp. 208–209). Lacan’s potentiality for critique may be further confirmed in the current centrality of Lacan among critical theorists, including critical psychologists (Parker, 2004; Owens, 2009).

Recognition of the necessity of dispute

Critique may ultimately lead to dispute, the necessity of which should be recognised consistently by psychoanalysts and not only by person-centred psychotherapists. Schmid’s prescriptive definition of the psychotherapeutic encounter as “being together and being counter”, with the “obvious consequences” of the “clash of opinions”, and of “conflict and dispute” (Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 10), is consonant with Lacan’s prescription of a psychoanalytical process that should provoke differentiation between analyst and analysand, and avoid any kind of “identification”, empathy, and mutual comprehension between them

(Lacan, 1990). A consequent psychoanalysis should break this mirror of imaginary convergences and reveal divergences that always entail, in our Lacanian Marxist perspective, a basic political contradiction between those two poles, hegemonic and dominant, that Schmid (2012/2014) rightly describes as “the prevailing present-day understanding of everyday life on the one hand, the ruling doctrine, the doctrine of the ruling, of those in power, on the other” (ibid., p. 10). Now, beyond this political contradiction, a Lacanian Marxist would insist on the social, economic and cultural contradictions that oblige us “to raise our voice for all who, at best, speak in our practices, if they find their way to the therapy room at all: minorities, discriminated people, the ignored, the laughed at, the underprivileged” (ibid., p. 12).

Opposition to scientific–empiricist fetishism

Just like psychoanalysis, the PCA opposes “the fetishism of natural science and empiricism” (ibid., p. 11). We know that this fetishism has long been challenged by psychoanalysts. A Lacanian Marxist should also challenge it as a naturalist–scientific reification and empiricist legitimization of ideological entities.

Renunciation of control and indoctrination

Psychoanalysts, especially Lacanian psychoanalysts, would agree completely with Rogers’ political imperative of “a conscious renunciation and avoidance by the therapist of all control over, or decision-making for, the client” (Rogers, cited by Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 5). From our Lacanian Marxist point of view, this usurpation of the place of the subject would involve, just as for Schmid, a choice for “indoctrination” instead of “emancipation” (p. 104). Emancipation requires de-ideologisation and so excludes psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic ideological indoctrination.

FOUR POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND PERSON-CENTRED PSYCHOTHERAPY

While reading Schmid’s paper, I of course found not only the aforementioned agreements, but also important political disagreements between my Lacanian Marxist conception of psychoanalysis and Schmid’s idea of the PCA. These disagreements refer to non-problematised PCA ideas that would be absolutely unacceptable to Lacan and his followers in the psychoanalytical tradition.

From a Lacanian point of view, psychoanalysis would be incompatible with four of the basic PCA assumptions elucidated in Schmid’s paper, namely, *the human basis*, *self-centrality*, *the empathic aim*, and *the therapeutic practice itself*. These four assumptions would be assimilated in my Lacanian Marxist perspective, respectively, to the ideological-political discourses of *humanism*, *selfism*, *empathism* and *therapeutism*. The ideological-political character of such discourses implies that their “social-practical function” outweighs the “theoretical function” of “knowledge” (Althusser, 2005, p. 228). In other words, categories such as *the human being*, *the self*, *empathy* or *therapy* do not enable us to know anything beyond the social, political and economic relations that are established by them. These categories are “lived through”, experienced, and behaved (ibid., p. 240). They use us, but we cannot “instrumentally” use them to know something, as they can only make us know what we must know in order to relate to our

“existence conditions” and among ourselves in a certain way (ibid., pp. 241–242). This is why their discourses are ideological in nature. Each one of these discourses will be addressed separately below.

Psychoanalysis versus humanism

The word “human” is as self-evident as it is opaque and enigmatic. We do not know exactly what it means to be human, but we do know how the notion of the human being can be used to accomplish all kinds of purposes. It was often in its name that nature, non-human nature, was destroyed in the 19th century. Earlier, in the 16th century, the rational humanity of Europeans was a powerful justification for the conquest of the irrational, non-human Indians of Latin America. The so-called *human rights* have been the best mask for bourgeois individualist interests since the 17th century. And the humanist–humanitarian argument has been used for the last two centuries to condemn all manner of inhuman ideas and practices that challenge the human, Western–liberal–capitalist hegemonic ideology.

Rogers proceeds as an eloquent spokesman of the ideological humanist discourse in psychology when he accepts that “the concept of human nature with its actualising tendency, is, itself, a political basis” (Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 9). It is clear that this *human nature* conceived as an *actualising tendency* is based on an emancipatory political project instead of being a human nature that would be the *political basis* of the project. If the actualising tendency was naturally human, then why would this human nature be so different from previous human natures? Is it not evident that different cultures and different political ideologies are creating different human natures that do not seem, therefore, to be as natural as we are led to believe? If this auto-creation of human nature is itself evidence of the natural “constructive actualising tendency” of humans (ibid., p. 5), why should it be the evidence of different natural tendencies in other cultural contexts and political projects?

If the human being is natural, why should it change so often? Schmid answers by carefully distinguishing between *the natural human being* and *images of the human being*, and actually defines politics “as the consequence of an image of the human being” (ibid., p. 5), such that political action inevitably follows from a certain image of the human being. From a Lacanian Marxist perspective, I would say rather that *a certain image of the human being follows inevitably from a certain political action*. This image is ideologically produced by the political action. Therefore, contrary to Schmid, I do not think that *politics is the consequence of an image of human nature*. Rather, I think that *an image of human nature is the consequence of politics*.

Both Marx and Lacan recognise that different political actions must create different images of human nature. Now, by creating a particular image of human nature, politics creates a particular human nature, as this human nature is nothing but a cultural image of human nature. So-called natural human beings are nothing but ideological–political beings. They are part of politics and not the basis of politics. It is rather politics that is the basis of the different models of human beings. This is why these anthropological models are just as plural and contradictory as different political stances.

Psychoanalysis versus selfism

As a Lacanian Marxist, I am convinced that a prototypical bourgeois political stance, that of liberal individualism, underlies the modern ideological discourse of selfism, with its

well-known psychological emphasis on *self-autonomy*, *self-ownership* and *self-empowerment*, *individualisation* and *individuality*, *individual personalisation* and *individualising personality*. The subject of this discourse is the subject of capitalism, the *bourgeois master*, that is to say, the *wealthy*, the *money-owner*, the *buyer*, the *consumer*, the *client* in the PCA. Now, by being “politically centered in the client” (Rogers, cited by Schmid, 2012/2014, p. 5), the PCA is politically centred in the subject of capitalism, which is also the subject of the discourse of selfism. It seems to me that this ideological discourse can be clearly detected in some of the political aims and tasks that Schmid assigns to the PCA, namely, the “facilitation of self-ownership” and “self-empowerment” (ibid., p. 4), “the facilitation of autonomy” (p. 10), the “therapeutic orientation” towards “freedom of choice”, the “self-directing disposition of the human being” (p. 9), and the “personality development of each individual” (p. 11).

When Schmid emphasises the *personality development of each individual*, he offers an individualist representation of the subject of PCA, which is neither a social class nor some other collective agent, but an *individual*, a *client*, the subject of capitalism, an *owner*. This owner is not only Marx’s money-owner, but the owner of all kinds of different things, including the self, which could be owned thanks to PCA and its *facilitation of self-ownership*. Nevertheless, this self-ownership would be a naïve illusion for Marx (2013c) and an imaginary aberration for Lacan (2001d). In a Lacanian perspective, the self is necessarily “alienated” and cannot be “owned” by the subject (Lacan, 1990). It is rather owned by the Other, that is, in a Marxist perspective, by the “economic system” (Marx, 2013b) and the “ideological apparatuses” (Althusser, 2013). After all, this system and these apparatuses *create the self*. It is just that they own their own creation. I must steal the system in order to own myself. And this is not only illegitimate, but simply impossible. This is why self-ownership, as the defining character of the self itself, can only be imaginary for Lacan.

Psychoanalysis versus empathism

In the Lacanian perspective, the imaginary character of self-ownership entails not only that the self is imaginary, but that everything that requires the intervention of the self will also be imaginary. This is the case of all those relationships that Schmid (2012/2014) considers most crucial for the PCA, i.e. relationships based on empathy between selves, the “understanding” of one self by another, “co-creation” between selves (p. 11), “Thou–I relationships” (pp. 11), and even “democracy”, understood as “participation and sharing” among selves (p. 12). From our Marxist point of view, this *democratic participation and sharing* cannot really exist in current bourgeois democracies where alienation, which is inherent in the capitalist system, excludes participation and sharing among selves and enables only exterior connections between things, not between persons (Marx, 2013b).

In our bourgeois democracy, instead of “inter-subjective” relations, we have predominantly what Lacan (2007) described as “inter-signifier” connections, connections between signifiers or symbolic values within a symbolic system of language (p. 10). This system will obviously exclude any possibility of *empathy*, *understanding*, *co-creation*, *Thou–I relationships*, *real democracy* and other illusions created by the ideological discourse of empathism. When psychotherapists offer all this in the context of the capitalist system, they are not only lying, but may ultimately prevent a transcendent social revolution of the system by leading people to

forget their alienation and limit themselves to accomplishing small, individual “revolutions” that release tensions and conflicts through limited empathic relationships (Deleuze, 1972).

Psychoanalysis versus therapeutism

I completely support Schmid (2012/2014) in his decision to oppose “any kind of therapy that repairs the individual and does not think of changing or destroying what destroys human beings” (p. 13), but it is not enough to *think of changing or destroying the system* while we are only *repairing the individual!* As for myself, since I oppose this reparation, I also oppose any kind of individual therapy (from the Greek *therapeia*, treatment, care, cure), as it always entails a repairing individual treatment, a care or cure, instead of a social revolution.

We must always remember what psychotherapy as such means when we insist on the fact, as does Schmidt, that “*psychotherapy* must be understood as a political activity” (ibid., p. 13). This psychotherapeutic political activity treats and cures the individual instead of radically transforming society. Instead of changing the system, it merely repairs one piece of it, and by repairing this piece, it protects and preserves the system. It is thus an essentially conservative political activity. Therefore, even though I agree with Schmid when he writes that each psychotherapist “faces the political challenge to take sides” (ibid., p. 13), I consider that every psychotherapist already politically took sides, from the beginning, through the simple act of becoming a psychotherapist. In so doing, the psychotherapist sided with the system and against the transformation of the system.

Unlike Schmidt, I see no difference between psychotherapy and “different forms of social engineering or social control” (ibid., pp. 10). It is not by chance that so many of these forms of social engineering or social control describe themselves as psychotherapies. I do not see why these psychotherapies should not “deserve” to be called “psychotherapies” and why this word should be essentially connected to “an emancipatory meaning” (p. 10). If the PCA wants to preserve this emancipatory meaning, it would be better to simply reject the word “psychotherapy” and the resultant ideological discourse of “therapeutism”, which offers reparation, care and cure, rehabilitation and relief, instead of radical change, transformation and revolution (Epstein, 1994).

CONCLUSION

By its very nature, psychotherapy entails a choice in favour of care, cure and reparation: a conservative choice that is intrinsically political. In acknowledging this, I recognise the correctness of Schmid’s main claim that *psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy*. By the same token, however, I must reject psychotherapy, for I reject its intrinsic political–therapeutic posture, which corresponds to a conservative choice diametrically opposed to my revolutionary Marxist political stance.

From the point of view of my political stance, I must recognise that *psychotherapy is political*, but must also insist on the fact that *psychotherapy is politically opposed to psychoanalysis*, as the psychoanalytical process, at least as I see it, entails a revolutionary movement like the one promoted by Marxism (Lacan, 2005, 2006; Parker, 2011). This movement does not necessarily oppose psychoanalysis to the PCA, as this approach also commits itself to “revolution” (Schmid, 2012/2014, pp. 5, 9, 12)–but is it possible to sustain this commitment without rejecting the psychotherapeutic choice?

I think that the PCA must go beyond therapeutism in order to become consistently revolutionary. At the same time, if PCA really wants to recognise the necessity of dispute, it should not seek an empathy that may ultimately avoid any kind of dispute. Similarly, if the PCA really opposes indoctrination, it must also abandon indoctrinating ideologies such as humanism, selfism, therapeutism and empathism.

REFERENCES

- Althusser, L. (2005). *Pour Marx [For Marx]*. Paris, France: La Découverte. (Original work published 1965).
- Althusser, L. (2013). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm> (Original work published 1970).
- Deleuze, D. (1972). *La psicología, mito científico [Psychology, scientific myth]*. Barcelona, Spain: Anagrama.
- Epstein, L. (1994). The therapeutic idea in contemporary society. In A. S. Chambon & A. Irving (Eds). *Essays on postmodernism and social work* (pp. 3–18). Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholar's Press.
- Klotz, J.-P. (1999). Politique versus identification [Politics versus identification]. *La Cause Freudienne*, 42, 21–25.
- Lacan, J. (1967). *Le séminaire. Livre XIV. La logique du fantasme*. Séance du 10 Mai 1967. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/stenos/seminaireXIV/1967.05.10.pdf>
- Lacan, J. (1975a). *Le séminaire. Livre XXII. R.S.I.* Séance du 13 Mai 1975. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.ecole-lacanienne.net/stenos/seminaireXXII/1975.05.13.pdf>
- Lacan, J. (1975b). Intervention dans la séance de travail « Sur la passe » du samedi 3 novembre 1973 [Intervention in the work session “About passe”, November 3 1973]. *Lettres de l'École Freudienne*, 15, 185–193.
- Lacan, J. (1986). *Le séminaire. Livre VII. L'éthique de la psychanalyse [The ethic of psychoanalysis]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (1990). *Le séminaire. Livre XI. Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse [The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (1991). *Le séminaire. Livre XVII. L'envers de la psychanalyse [The Reverse of Psychoanalysis]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (1999a). Au-delà du principe de réalité [Beyond the Reality Principle]. In *Écrits I* (pp. 72–91). Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (1999b). Introduction au commentaire de Jean Hyppolite [Introduction to the commentary of Jean Hyppolite]. In *Écrits I* (pp. 367–378). Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2001a). Radiophonie. In *Autres écrits* (pp. 403–447). Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2001b). Introduction à l'édition allemande des écrits [Introduction to the German edition of the writings]. In *Autres écrits* (pp. 553–559). Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2001c). L'acte psychanalytique [The Psychoanalytical Act]. In *Autres écrits* (pp. 375–383). Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2001d). *Le séminaire. Livre II. Le moi [The self]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2005). *Des noms du père [The names of the father]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Le séminaire. Livre XVI. D'un Autre à l'autre [From one Other to the other]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lacan, J. (2007). *Le séminaire, Livre XVIII, D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant [On a discourse that might not be a semblance]*. Paris, France: Seuil.
- Lenin, V. I. (2013). The three sources and three component parts of Marxism. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/mar/x01.htm> (Original work published 1913).
- Marx, K. (2013a). Theses on Feuerbach. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm> (Original work published 1845).
- Marx, K. (2013b). A contribution to the critique of political economy. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/appx1.htm> (Original work published 1859).
- Marx, K. (2013c). The German ideology. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/> (Original work published 1846).

- Marx, K. (2013d). The economic and philosophical manuscripts. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/eppm/> (Original work published 1844).
- Miller, J. A. (1999). L'acte entre intention et conséquence [The act between intention and consequence]. *La Cause Freudienne*, 42, 7–16.
- Miller, J. A. (2003). Lacan et la politique [Lacan and politics]. *Cités*, 16, 105–123.
- Miller, J.-A. (2005). Anguila. Retrieved 20 April 2014 from <http://www.lacan.com/newsletter2a.htm>
- Owens, C. (Ed.) (2009). Lacan and critical psychology [Special issues]. *Annual Review of Critical Psychology*, 7.
- Parker, I. (2004). Psychoanalysis and critical psychology. In D. Hook (Ed.), *Critical psychology* (pp. 138–161). Cape Town, South Africa: UCT Press.
- Parker, I. (2011). *Lacanian psychoanalysis: Revolutions in subjectivity*. Hove, UK: Routledge.
- Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2009). *Marxisme lacanien [Lacanian Marxism]*. Paris, France: Psychophores.
- Pavón-Cuéllar, D. (2014). *Elementos políticos de marxismo lacaniano [Political elements of Lacanian Marxism]*. Mexico City: Paradiso.
- Schmid, P. F. (2014). Psychotherapy is political or it is not psychotherapy: The person-centred approach as an essentially political venture. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 12(1), 4–17. (Original work published 2012).
- Vinciguerra, R.-P. (2003). Marx pas sans Lacan [Marx not without Lacan]. *Letterina*, 34, 57–65.



David Pavón-Cuéllar is a Communist, Marxist, Lacanian and critical psychologist. He holds PhDs in Psychology (University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain) and Philosophy (University of Rouen, France). He is Professor of Psychology and Philosophy at the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo (Morelia, Mexico).