

The Freudo-Marxist Tradition and the Critique of Psychotherapeutic Ideology

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ABSTRACT *The ideology of psychotherapy is questioned through critical concepts taken from the Freudo-Marxist tradition. The paper first analyses in detail six determinant ideological processes detected in psychotherapy that three pioneers of Freudo-Marxism criticised in the 1920s: dualistic scission and metaphysical immobilisation (Luria); idealist generalisation and mechanistic determination (Bernfeld); and repressive adaptation and historical decontextualisation (Reich). Following this, it briefly reviews seven paired analogous processes that were denounced by continuators of the Freudo-Marxist tradition: valorative moralisation and the psychologisation of the social (Fenichel); instinctual-rational deprivation and the mechanisation of the subject (Adorno); alienating performance and surplus repression (Marcuse); manipulation and dehumanising alienation (Fromm); abstraction and mythologising (Bleger); authoritarianism and suggestion (Caruso); and depoliticisation and rationalisation (Langer). The argument will show how Freudo-Marxist questionings of these operations – many now forgotten – are still current and can be inspiring and enriching for a modern critique of psychotherapy. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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INTRODUCTION

The literal meaning of psychotherapy, the treatment [*therapeia*] of psychism [*psyche*], is so broad and so unrestrictive that it has been given the most diverse interpretations. Interpreted and reinterpreted time and again, the etymological nucleus of the term has constituted a juncture where multiple ideas obeying distinct theoretical–epistemological orientations, as well as determinations of a political, economic, social, cultural and historical nature, have come to meet and intertwine. It is this interweaving of such ideas that justifies our conception of psychotherapy as an ideological practice, as ideology in action, performed in relation to the other, the patient or client.

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The words and gestures of the psychotherapist not only represent and manifest psychotherapeutic ideology, but also present and effectuate it, realise it and dramatise it, often doing that which is neither thought nor expressed except while being done, through acts and their planning, by means of technique and the application of technique for the treatment of the psyche (Braunstein, 2006; Parker, 2007; Guilfoyle, 2009). Psychotherapy is thus ideology, and not just the expression or effect of ideology (Strunk, 1985). Hence, before seeking to infer the ideological content underlying the work of psychotherapists, we must first describe the ideological form that is immanent in their work, and so question psychotherapy as ideology, as ideological practice (House, 1999; Matot, 2000).

If psychotherapy is ideology, then those who criticise it can learn a great deal from the critique of ideology that has been cultivated, especially in the field of Marxism; and in this field perhaps nothing is better than Freudo-Marxism for dealing critically with psychotherapeutic ideology, which, in addition to being an ideological practice that is susceptible to a Marxist critique, involves a psychology that can be criticised from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychotherapy thus constitutes a perfect object for testing the edge and acuteness of a Freudo-Marxism, understood here in a broad sense – and without entering into the debates regarding the term – as the simple confluence and alliance of the critical perspectives bequeathed by Freud and Marx.

The Freudian critique of psychology and the Marxist critique of ideology can complement, enrich and strengthen each other through a Freudo-Marxist questioning of psychotherapeutic ideology. This questioning is outlined in this article, based on critical concepts proffered by Freudo-Marxism. We begin by analysing three pairs of fundamental ideological processes that we see operating in psychotherapy and that were criticised by Luria, Bernfeld and Reich in the 1920s. For each pair of processes, we examine how they are represented by the Freudo-Marxist author who noticed them, how they are integrated into their theory, why they are criticised, and how they can intervene in current psychotherapeutic ideological practice. We also discuss how the critique of these processes is inserted in their sociopolitical context and the history of the Freudo-Marxist tradition. Finally, we see how some followers of Freudo-Marxism have continued the critique of the ideological processes detectable in current psychotherapeutic practice.

ALEXANDER LURIA: DUALISTIC SCISSION AND METAPHYSICAL IMMOBILISATION (1925)

The origins of Freudo-Marxism are imbricated with the implantation of psychoanalysis in Russia. In 1906, barely a year after Sabina Spielrein discovered psychoanalytic treatment in Switzerland, another young Russian who was also in that country, Tatiana Rosenthal, became interested in combining Freud with Marx. In 1908, while the first translation of Freud's work into Russian was in progress, the Bolshevik revolutionary Adolf Iofe was undergoing analysis with Alfred Adler while studying psychoanalysis in Vienna. By that time, Iofe's friend Leon Trotsky was also interested in psychoanalysis and began to ponder it in light of Marxism. The following years would see not only the founding of the Moscow Psychoanalytic Society (1911) and Freud's treatment of the "Wolf Man" (1910–1914), but also the triumph of the October Revolution (1917) and the approach to psychoanalysis of the revolutionary leader Otto Schmidt and his wife Vera who, from 1921 to 1925, directed the Children's House

(*Detski Dom*), a public institution that mixed a school with a daycare centre and an orphanage, and whose functioning was inspired simultaneously by Marxism and psychoanalysis.

The apogee of Russian Freudo-Marxism coincided precisely with the onset of its dismantling by the Stalinist intelligentsia which, after the death of Lenin in 1924, rushed to combat psychoanalysis, not only because they deemed it bourgeois and idealist, but also because they associated it with Trotskyism. It was in this hostile context that the soon-to-be celebrated neuropsychologist Alexander Luria (1902–1977), after founding the Kazan Psychoanalytic Society and sustaining direct correspondence with Freud, prepared, with Vygotsky, an “Introduction” to Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and published the article that interests us here, “Psychoanalysis as a System of Monist Psychology” (Luria, 1977), the great founding text of Freudo-Marxism.

In this 1925 text, Luria located the coincidence between Marxism and psychoanalysis in the fact that they share two inseparable epistemological perspectives. The first is the *materialist–monist* perspective, which assimilates everything, including mental life, to a singular materiality that blurs the frontier between ideas and things, the psychic and the somatic, and other “aspects” of the “one world” conceived as a “single system of material processes” (Luria, 1977, p. 27). The other perspective shared by Marxism and Freudianism is the *dialectic–dynamic*, which holds that all things must be understood as being in continuous tension, scission, contradiction, evolution, oscillation, agitation and transformation, in a movement that does not exclude “leaps, breaks, discontinuities” (ibid, p. 28). Both perspectives can be appreciated in the Marxist conception of socioeconomic conflicts transmuted into ideological contradictions and psychological tearing, as well as in such Freudian ideas as the “drive”, the presence of the somatic in the psychic and the “conversion of energy from mental forms into purely somatic forms” (ibid, p. 36).

In the double perspective of Luria’s Freudo-Marxism, the dialectic–dynamic vision makes it possible to explain the constant change between psychic and somatic states, or economic and ideological aspects, of the only materiality recognized in a monist–materialist focus which strives “to integrate the organism into a system of social influences” (Luria, 1977, p. 47). This is what enabled Luria to overcome two ideological vices that never cease to operate in psychotherapy and that we can criticise from the perspective of Luria’s Freudo-Marxism. The first of these – the opposite of materialist monism – is *dualistic scission*, which leads us to believe in something that is psychic–immaterial, independent of the physical–material, and susceptible of receiving psychological treatment, a psychotherapy in the strict sense of the term, which is thus distinguished not only from a physiological intervention of a neurological or psychiatric nature that involves medication or surgery, but also from any concrete action in the socioeconomic material sphere. The second vice, contrary to the dialectic–dynamic, is *metaphysical immobilisation* that leads us to treat the psychic by artificially removing it from worldly agitation, by decontextualising it and fixing it in a static essence, extracting it from drives or conversive processes, abstracting it from the movement that leads us from the somatic to the psychic and from the psychic to the somatic, but also from the socioeconomic to the psychic–ideological and vice versa.

As interpreted here, the two vices detected by Luria lead psychotherapists to treat the psychic sphere in the abstract, as a static metaphysical essence suspended in a vacuum, artificially de-attached from all that upon which it is founded, that constitutes, transforms

and manifests it: the corporal or somatic, the nutritional and the sexual, but also the external physical, the socioeconomic, the material conditions of life, etc. The entire world and the body itself would thus be obviated in a totally idealist psychotherapeutic practice. The very spiritualist and contemplative idealism of this practice would make psychotherapists believe that it suffices to obviate worldly and corporal materiality in order to be liberated from it. They would not see that subjects are never so subjected to material reality as when they believe they can ignore it, and that the only means of freeing oneself from it is materialist and dialectic, monist and dynamic, and consists in struggling against, and in, material reality, without attempting to step aside, or extricate oneself from it. This is the first lesson that a psychotherapist can take from Freudo-Marxism.

SIEGFRIED BERNFELD: IDEALIST GENERALISATION AND MECHANISTIC DETERMINATION (1926)

The earliest Freudo-Marxism, which preceded the Second World War, did not achieve its full development in the Soviet Union, but in the German-speaking cultural world, where it emerged quite early on, almost at the same time as in Russia. It was precisely while analysing the Russian Bolshevik Adolf Iofe, in March 1909, that the Austrian psychoanalyst Alfred Adler gave the conference that can be considered the founding moment of Austro-German Freudo-Marxism. In that lecture, given at the Psychological Wednesday Society in the presence of Freud and some of his other early disciples, Adler (1909/1983) expressed the view that Marx had discovered the “primacy of drives” in the economic base of society, and concluded that “the theory of class struggle was in harmony with the results of our doctrine of drives” (p. 172). Freud himself was rather sceptical of this conclusion, but one of those present, Paul Federn, reaffirmed it by insisting that Freud and Marx sought to “suppress repression and lead things to consciousness” (p. 174). Ten years later, in 1919, Federn presented an interesting psychology of revolution, though his perspective was not truly Freudo-Marxist (Federn, 2000). That would have to wait until 1926, when the Freudian psychoanalyst and militant Marxist and Zionist, Siegfried Bernfeld (1892–1953), introduced the first sufficiently well-elaborated Freudo-Marxist proposal in his lecture entitled *Socialism and Psychoanalysis* (Bernfeld, 1926/1972).

Bernfeld’s lecture vindicated a Freudo-Marxism that adopted the materialist focus and the historical method attributed to both Marx and Freud. While the *historical method* demands rejecting “general concepts” and “setting out from a concrete case” to elucidate its history, the *materialist focus* entails distrusting conscious motives and seeing them as “pretexts, adduced motives that supplant unconscious ones” (ibid., p. 17). Thus it follows Marx’s examples that “explain belligerent patriotism as a superstructure that masks imperialistic class interests”, and those of Freud that “prove the participation of sadistic instinctive impulses in the patriotic fervour of a voluntary combatant” (ibid., pp. 17–19). Bernfeld’s historical materialism, in summary, propels us beyond false conscious ideological justifications that present themselves as general, to discover the true unconscious material causes, which are necessarily particular, in the singular history of each individual or collective subject.

As represented by Bernfeld, history constitutes a complex sequence of over-determined events that obeys no general laws, has no mechanical character, and does not describe a unilineal evolutionary trajectory, since it is not determined mechanically by either the

Marxian degree of development of the productive forces or the Freudian phases of psychosexual development. With this notion of a *particular and indeterminate history* and the correlated conception of *the materiality of unconscious causes* to which we have already referred, Bernfeld set himself in opposition to two fundamental ideological processes that we may discover in current psychotherapy. One is the *idealist generalisation* that leads us to reduce subjects to individual cases of ideal generalities and respond to their conscious intentions of curation through general recipes for “spiritual psychological phenomena” that are also general, are discovered deductively in all subjects, are “governed by their own laws” and appear as “psychic contents” that pretend to be “absolute, objective, undeducible” (*ibid.*, pp. 17–18). Another ideological process is the *mechanistic determination* that has us imagine that we can treat psychism through simple relations of cause–effect, means–goals, technique–result, remedy–cure, dexterity–success and treatment–relief, instead of recognising the complex over-determination of a historical sequence of “contradictions”, “conflicts” and “solutions” that interweave in a “dialectical progression” (*ibid.*, p. 21) that cannot be reduced to the simple mechanical succession of determinant steps and determined advances in treatment.

By recognising the historical complexity and unconscious materiality of each unique existence, Bernfeld also comes to recognise the simplifications and idealisations that we perceive in the foundations of psychotherapy’s pretensions to efficacy. Of course, these pretensions can be justified and psychotherapists can achieve success in their treatments; however, if psychotherapy is efficacious and successful, it is only so with respect to a simplified and idealised psychism, one mechanised and generalised, in which we witness the degradation and dissolution of all that which is complex and irreducibly particular, that is, all that which distinguishes the material and historical existence of the person who seeks out the psychotherapist. All of this can be preserved only when treated through a historical materialist strategy that sets out, not from the good intentions of psychotherapists with their definitive universal remedies for supposedly objective and well-defined problems, but from the unconscious weavings of the existence of subjects themselves with their misguided interests and unconscious desires, and their individual and provisional conflicts and solutions. Here we have another lesson that psychotherapists can take from Freudo-Marxism.

WILHELM REICH: REPRESSIVE ADAPTATION AND HISTORICAL DECONTEXTUALISATION (1929)

A year after Bernfeld gave his lecture in Berlin, the then physician and psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) enlisted as a volunteer to help social-democratic workers victimised during the July Uprising in Vienna. That experience was a determining factor in Reich’s decision to join the Austrian Communist Party, to devote himself to reading Marx and Engels, and to begin cultivating Freudo-Marxism by undertaking an original reflection that would soon yield its first fruits. It was in 1929, during a stay in the Soviet Union, that Reich wrote the work that concerns us here – *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* (Reich, 1929/1989) – perhaps the most radical, thorough and ambitious of the early works in Freudo-Marxism.

Through its critical reflections on psychoanalysis, Reich’s work opens multiple fronts, including two that especially interest us here owing to their implications for the critique of

psychotherapy. The first defends the need for the *historical contextualisation* of psychoanalysis conceived at one and the same time as *bourgeois* and *anti-bourgeois*, as the “expression” and “subversion” of “bourgeois society”, and as a “social phenomenon” that is just as “closely linked to” as it is “incompatible with the bourgeois mode of existence” (ibid., pp. 69–78). Psychoanalytical practice would thus share this double character because it reflects an internal historical contradiction of bourgeois society, a dissonant form of self-awareness of this society, a consciousness in inconformity with itself. To be more precise, psychoanalysis would express the “awareness of sexual repression on the part of the society”, just as Marxism would represent “awareness” of “the exploitation of the masses by minorities” (ibid., p. 73).

Just as Marxism would be deprived of its revolutionary potential if it did not help workers become conscious of exploitation in society, so too psychoanalysis would lose its liberating capacity if it did not lead to awareness of the repression of sexuality. This brings us to the “second front” of Reich’s that interests us here, that of *liberating subversion*, in which the consciousness of sexual repression makes it possible to subvert this repression and so free oneself from a “class domination” founded upon the repressive device that, according to Reich, leads to the creation of docile and passive subjects who allow themselves be dominated more easily. The final proposal of Reichian psychoanalysis would be precisely that of liberating the dominated classes by helping their members to subvert their sexual repression by gaining consciousness of it.

The emancipatory proposal of psychoanalysis as conceived by Reich only makes sense in the context of capitalism and bourgeois society, for it is in this historical context, in which a certain form of sexual repression makes possible a certain form of social domination, that we can free ourselves from domination by subverting repression through the consciousness we acquire in the analytical process. Like subversion and liberation, conscientisation is inseparable from the historical context in which we find that which we subvert, and that from which we free ourselves and of which we acquire consciousness.

Our consciousness is the consciousness of a certain historical context. The conscientisation sought by Reichian psychoanalysis is, therefore, inseparable from its historical contextualisation. Hence we can position ourselves in Reich’s perspective by criticising the *historical decontextualisation* of a psychotherapy that tends not to create awareness of the historical context, and, therefore, cannot produce the conscientisation that makes subversion and liberation possible. How is one to contribute deliberately to any kind of liberation if one ignores that historical context from which one is seeking liberation? How can one subvert a repression that is set aside? How can one raise consciousness of something of which one is not conscious?

It is only by accident that a psychotherapy which is unaware of its historical context can lead us to consciousness, subvert that which is repressive in the context, and so liberate us. By ignoring or naturalising the context, by failing to perceive its historical character, psychotherapy leaves it just as it was found. Unable to question it, much less transform it, psychotherapy is obliged to accept the context, resign itself to it, and succumb before its fate. Therefore, when confronting problems in the psyche, a decontextualised psychotherapy will not be able to resolve them truly by resolving their causes in the historical context, but will only be able to relieve their psychic effects. This is all that psychotherapeutic practice could attain by treating the psyche and thus confirming itself as the psychotherapy that it is.

Why must psychotherapy treat the psyche instead of its context? Why must it adapt the psyche to the historical context instead of trying to adapt this context to the psyche? Why must the subject be repressed to adapt it to the context instead of subverting the context to liberate the subject? We can respond to these questions logically by referring to how difficult it is to subvert the context and how, instead, it is relatively easy to repress the subject. This response is convincing when we think of the repression of one single subject – but is repressing millions of subjects really easier than subverting a repressive historical context? Even if we were to accept this (which sounds so dubious), why should we repress subjects by treating their psyche? Would it not be better to use psychotherapy to strengthen the subject in order to transform the context? In this way we would achieve a Reichian psychoanalysis that breaks with the mutual exclusion between psychotherapeutic practice and revolutionary action.

Outside the Reichian Freudo-Marxist project, it is normal to see revolution and psychotherapy as mutually exclusive, since psychotherapeutic practice tends to repress in order to adapt, while revolutionary action seeks to subvert by transforming – and that which is subverted by revolution must be precisely the repressive adaptation that can be achieved through psychotherapy. This brings us to the second critique of psychotherapy inspired in Reich, namely that of *repressive adaptation*, understood as an ideological psychotherapeutic process that obtains our “complete subjection to social exigencies” instead of strengthening our “capacity to resist in the face of reality” (Reich, 1989, p. 79).

Once again, in order to become capable of resisting a given historical context, we must begin by becoming conscious of it, and this consciousness cannot be achieved through a decontextualised psychotherapy. If psychotherapeutic practice is to contribute to conscientisation, and thus strengthen subjects’ capacity for resistance and even subversion of that which is repressive in the context, for instance, the function of the authoritarian family in fascism (Reich, 1973), then such practice must be historically contextualised, situated and positioned with respect to the different vectors and conflicts of social reality. This will allow psychotherapy to achieve the liberation of the subject instead of repressing it by adapting it to an historical context that becomes more implacable the more it is unknown or naturalised. Here we have the third lesson of Freudo-Marxism for psychotherapists.

OTTO FENICHEL, THEODOR ADORNO, HERBERT MARCUSE AND ERICH FROMM (1934–1955)

Luria, Bernfeld and Reich, together with Rosenthal, Schmidt, Adler, and others not mentioned, were the pioneers of a Freudo-Marxist tradition that spread and developed in the ensuing decades, and soon, by the 1930s, had overrun the borders of Russia and central Europe. Here, in this part, we see how Freudo-Marxist authors multiplied and contributed valuable critical resources to the questioning of psychotherapy. While we do not pretend to offer an exhaustive analysis, perhaps not even a truly representative sample, we refer briefly to some of these authors, and in each case, as with those of the pioneers, strive to extract a pair of critical resources that each one has contributed.

In 1934 the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel (1897–1946) denounced those deviations from psychoanalysis that set out to judge behaviour on the basis of ideal moral values and sought to deal with “social facts inaccessible to psychology using psychological methods” (Fenichel, 1972, p. 172). This double denouncement signals two ideological vices that are frequent in

psychotherapy. First, *valorative moralisation* converts psychotherapy into an obscene form of ideologisation, indoctrination, manipulation, pastoral guide and social control; second, the *psychologisation of the social* leads psychotherapists to reduce society to the psyche, where they then strive to use treatment to resolve problems that are actually social in nature, as if all things social were psychic and, therefore, analysable through psychology and treatable by psychotherapy. This latter vice impedes social problems from being treated through such efficacious means as collective action.

Theodor Adorno (1903–1969), one of the principal philosophers of the Frankfurt School, also recognised the importance of collective action and the instincts that motivate it, and, by 1949, was concerned by the way in which psychoanalysis leads us to distrust, simultaneously, our instincts, seen as the traps or trickery of a species that assure its survival, and our reasons, conceived as superstructural rationalisations of the deceitful base of our instincts. The problem, in Adorno's words, is that "those who come to be indisposed against pleasure and Heaven", that is, against the instinctual and the rational,

are those who will best fulfil their roles as objects: those who are empty and mechanized [and] so often seen in those perfectly analyzed; this is not only an effect of their illness, but also of its curing, which destroys that which it liberates. (Adorno, 2003, pp. 58–59)

This destruction of that which is liberated is clearly not exclusive to the psychoanalytic cure, but can also be observed in the most diverse forms of psychotherapeutic practice in which therapists explain the instincts and reasons of the subject exteriorly from the perspective of their theory, thus excluding subjects from what they think and feel, from that which holds them back and that which pushes them forward, thus converting them into a simple mechanism deprived of their own movement. Here, psychotherapy incurs in the same ideological processes of *instinctual–rational deprivation* and the consequent *mechanisation of the subject*. What is obtained when all is said and done is a being that is insensible and unconscious, passive and manipulable, one that will have no valid reasons or effective drive to rise up when the time comes to act in an alienated way in the system, as would happen to the subject under the principle of actuation described by Marcuse.

In 1953, another member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), offered a profound critical reflection on two ideological–social processes that are often facilitated by psychotherapy. One is *alienating performance*, which expresses a "prevailing historical form of the reality principle" (Marcuse, 1983, p. 48) that is in "irreconcilable conflict" with the pleasure principle (*ibid.*, pp. 58–59) and "alienates" the subject in an "economic performance" determined by a certain classist "social stratification" (*ibid.*, p. 57). By promoting the alienation of the subject in this performance, psychotherapeutic practice will not be at the service of the reality principle, but will serve the performance principle which, in turn, will be subordinated to the interests and ideology of the dominant class. Thus psychotherapy will contribute to alienate the subject and to a second ideological–social process described by Marcuse, namely, the *surplus repression* of the subject, which consists in subjecting it to "restrictions provoked by social domination" that are not "necessary for perpetuating the human race in civilization" (*ibid.*, p. 48). While basic repression makes it possible to preserve civilised humanity, surplus repression presents the danger of "submerging it" in a "destructive dialectic" (*ibid.*, p. 55).

The destruction of humanity was a fear also expressed by Erich Fromm (1900–1980), the founder of humanist psychoanalysis and a dissident of the Frankfurt School, who, in 1955, openly denounced psychotherapy from the perspective of *normative humanism*, which, in attempting to go beyond sociological relativism, proposed absolute universal criteria to define the human being: individuality, fraternity, creativity, etc. These essential features of humanity would deteriorate under the effects of two ideological processes in which diverse psychotherapeutic practices often incur. The first one is *dehumanising alienation*, in which psychotherapists operate as “spokespersons of the alienated personality” (Fromm, 2011, p. 144) by promoting a form of mental health identified with the “alienated social character of our time”, and characterised by attitudes such as adaptability, aggressiveness, ambition and tolerance of all things (ibid., p. 163). These attitudes can only be developed by alienating a human being with whom they are incompatible. There is a clear incompatibility, for example, between the essential human trait of fraternity and the social attitude of ambition and aggressiveness promoted by psychotherapy under capitalism. If psychotherapeutic practice produces beings that are competitive, ambitious and aggressive, then it ends up producing alienated beings whose fraternity has been alienated. This alienation, which is so useful for the capitalist system, is achieved through the second ideological process in psychotherapy that Fromm denounced, i.e. personal manipulation, through which “psychologists lubricate individuals” just as “mechanics lubricate motors” (ibid., p. 143). Fromm went so far as to state that “the supreme achievement of manipulation is contemporary psychology”, which would do “for the entire personality” what Taylor “did for industrial work” (ibid., p. 144).

Fromm, Marcuse, Adorno and Fenichel warn psychotherapists of the risks of manipulating and moralising the individuals, depriving them of their own instincts and their own rationality, and thus contributing to their repression, mechanisation, alienation and dehumanisation. These dangers may only be prevented if we put strict limits to our psychotherapeutic interventions and renounce imposing our values or ideals on the individuals. This is a fourth lesson that we can take from Freudo-Marxism.

JOSÉ BLEGER, IGOR CARUSO AND MARIE LANGER (1958–1971)

If psychotherapeutic practice can contribute to alienating the subject, as we have just pointed out by situating ourselves in the critical perspectives of Adorno, Marcuse and Fromm, this is perhaps because it sets out from a psychological theory in which the concrete subject has already been abstracted and replaced by ideological myths, like those revealed in 1958 by the Argentine Marxist psychoanalyst José Bleger (1923–1972) in his evaluation of psychoanalysis through a critical reflection that is applicable to virtually any kind of psychotherapeutic practice. In reality, there is practically no psychotherapy that does not fall into the ideological processes of *abstractionism*, which situates an abstract theoretical “inference” in place of the “concrete subject” (Bleger, 1988, p. 78), and *mythologising*, which offers a false concretisation to abstract inferences like those of the psyche itself with its “interior life” and its “forces” or “drives”.

By treating the psyche and representing it abstractedly and mythologically, psychotherapy fails to occupy itself with both concrete subjects and the dramatic concretisation of their lives. Rather, it turns its attention to those mythologised abstractions that make up the theoretical reserve of psychology, that is, behaviour for behaviourists, cognition for cognitivists,

humanity for humanists, etc. What is important is that these abstractions constitute a knowledge over which the power of the psychotherapist can be exercised. As therapists know what is happening to the subject, they can substitute themselves for the subject and usurp her/his place, knowledge and power. The abstracted subject thus becomes an object that can be dominated by whoever holds the key to her/his abstraction – which brings us to the question of psychotherapeutic power, one that is well posed by Caruso.

In 1962 the Russian Count Igor Caruso (1914–1981) placed emphasis on the question of power by defining that which, in his Freudo-Marxist perspective, must distinguish psychoanalysis from psychotherapy. In his words, “the psychoanalytical posture, in contrast to certain authoritarian and suggestive psychotherapies, can only be founded upon a broad recognition of the sovereignty of the patient” (Caruso, 1980, p. 79). While psychoanalytic(al) practice must strive to abstain from exercising any power over subjects, the vast majority of psychotherapies constitute means of exercising power that become more successful as their power increases.

Therapeutic power takes on two forms which Caruso (1962/1980) criticised: *authoritarianism*, the power imposed directly from a position of knowledge; and *suggestion*, the power induced indirectly, through knowledge, from that same position. Clearly, psychoanalysis also often incurs in these forms of exercising psychotherapeutic power, for example, when it ultimately cedes to counter-transference and its “alienating projections and identifications”, which only serve an “alienation” that “resembles an assassination of man, for it dehumanizes him, [and] converts him into a thing” (ibid., pp. 79–81). Here, once again, we find ourselves before the dehumanising alienation described by Fromm which, in Caruso, seems to constitute the effect of any exercise of psychotherapeutic power.

As conceived by Caruso and other Freudo-Marxist authors, psychotherapeutic power is clearly political, despite the best rational ruses to which so many psychoanalysts and psychotherapists turn in order to bolster an apolitical image of their power. Here we encounter the two ideological processes that the Austrian–Argentine Marxist psychoanalyst Marie Langer (1910–1987) denounced in 1971 in psychoanalysis, but that we can also and still notice in the vast majority of modern psychotherapies. One is *depolitisation*, the “omission” of “the political”, of “the social act”, through “resistances and counter-resistances on the part of the patient and the analyst” (Langer, 1971/1989, p. 73); the other is *rationalisation*, which allows “the analyst to conceal her/his anchoring in the past and attachment to the established order” (ibid., p. 72). This conservative and reactionary position is ideologically dissimulated through a process of theoretical rationalisation that constitutes the foundation of depolitisation, which, in turn, is nothing more than the concealment of the political posture of psychotherapists and of the political character of the functions they perform in society, and which were denounced by other Freudo-Marxist authors, including Caruso’s suggestion, Fromm’s manipulation, Fenichel’s moralisation and Reich’s adaptation. As a counterpoint to these surreptitious forms of political functioning, Langer supported an openly revolutionary action in which it is no longer necessary to “renounce either Freudianism or Marxism” (ibid., p. 76).

Langer, Caruso and Bleger show different ways in which seemingly neutral psychotherapeutic knowledge may exert its power on the individuals, either directly through authoritarianism or indirectly through suggestion, either negatively through abstraction or positively through mythologisation, and always furtively by depolitisation and rationalisation. This exercise of power can only be stopped by giving up our position of supposed neutral psychotherapeutic knowledge. Here we have the fifth lesson of the Freudo-Marxist tradition for psychotherapists.

ARTICULATION OF IDEOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

This article is founded upon the firm conviction that Freudo-Marxism offers argumentative resources that are unique and insuperable, still current and effective, and, critically examining psychotherapeutic practice in modern times, can still be used successfully. Psychotherapy has been conceived as a complex ideology that articulates certain operations which clearly correspond to ideological processes that are denounced in Freudo-Marxism. By examining ten pairs of these processes, and their respective denunciations by ten Freudo-Marxist authors, we have been able to catch a glimpse of some of the possible articulations of these processes in psychotherapeutic practice.

To conclude: on the basis of our analysis, we can sketch out a possible successive order in the intervention of the ideological processes articulated in psychotherapeutic practice. The starting point can be no other than *metaphysical immobilisation* and the *dualist scission* (Luria) through which the very notion of the psyche that needs to be treated emerges. Once at least a minimal notion of the psyche has been achieved, it can be completed, and the possibility of treating it can be justified, through *abstraction* and *mythologising* (Bleger), as well as through *idealist generalisation* and the belief in its *mechanistic determination* (Bernfeld). Much that is not truly psychic will also appear as such by virtue of a *psychologisation of the social* (Fenichel). It is in this way, by mixing certain psychologised materials with other abstracted, mythologised, generalised and mechanised psychological materials, that one obtains a psyche that is treatable by psychotherapy.

With respect to treatment, this is conceived from the very beginning in an ideologically distorted way through its *historical decontextualisation* (Reich), *depoliticisation* and the *rationalisation* of its depoliticisation (Langer). This initial distortion is determinant, for it is necessary if the psychotherapist is to be able to put into practice, first, *valorative moralisation* (Fenichel), and then *authoritarianism* and *suggestion* (Caruso), *manipulation* and *dehumanising alienation* (Fromm). In this way, some of the immediate proposals that seem to govern psychotherapy are fulfilled, such as *instinctual-rational deprivation* and the *mechanisation of the subject* (Adorno), which, in turn, successively enable the *surplus repression* of the subject (Marcuse), its *repressive adaptation* to capitalism (Reich) and, finally, its *alienating performance* as a piece of the capitalist system (Marcuse).

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