

CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSIONS

Politics of psychoanalysis in liberal and neoliberal capitalism

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Abstract

This article offers a discussion on the politics of psychoanalysis in liberal and neoliberal capitalism. After jointly reflecting on the persistence of neoliberalism in these times of Trump, the two authors separate and exchange various arguments, some more closely related to Marxism and others closer to Freudianism, in discussing the positions of psychoanalysis in regard to various aspects related to capitalism: its liberal modality and its patriarchal foundation, its scientific and university guises, money and the market, the socialist alternative and the revolutionary horizon.

KEYWORDS

capitalism, Marxism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, politics, psychoanalysis, revolution, socialism

1 | INTRODUCTION: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN FREUDIANISM AND MARXISM

The authors of this article are professors in the Faculty of Psychology at a Mexican public university known for its internal politicization, its student activism, its chronic strikes and its left orientation. One of the authors, David Pavón-Cuéllar (hereafter David), is a decidedly communist and Marxist critical psychologist, as well as a follower of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, but he is not a practicing psychoanalyst and does not belong to any association of psychoanalysis. The other author, Mario Orozco Guzmán (hereafter Mario), also has a Freudian and Lacanian background, but he does practice psychoanalysis, which does not prevent him from having clear left-wing convictions as well as respect for, and interest in, Marxist theory.

The dual attraction to Marxism and to Freudian–Lacanian psychoanalysis opens and keeps open the field of communication and understanding through which the discussion between Mario and David is established. However, as will be seen in the following pages, the fundamental coincidences of view between Mario and David have not prevented important discrepancies between their respective conceptions of the politics of psychoanalysis. These discrepancies can be partly explained by the dissimilarities in Mario's and David's profiles set out in the previous paragraph. Understandably, for example, a critical Marxist psychologist like David, however Freudian he may be, is wary of the complicity between capitalism and psychoanalysis. Likewise, it is no less understandable that a psychoanalyst like Mario, even if he is a leftist, does not believe in the capacity of socialism to free us from what psychoanalysis is concerned with.

The respective positions of David and Mario correspond, at least in general, to those of a rather Marxist standpoint and a rather Freudian perspective in the spectrum of options that can be adopted when discussing the politics

of psychoanalysis in the current historical context. It can be maintained, then, that the discussion between Mario and David is but one link in the long chain of encounters between Marxism and psychoanalysis, which has recently been explored by David and in which we find currents such as the Freudian revision of Marxism, Freudo-Marxism, Surrealism, the Frankfurt School, Althusserianism and the Lacanian Left (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017a). Some of the classic arguments found in these currents will reappear in the ideas espoused and defended by Mario and David, who, both being attracted by Marxism and psychoanalysis, will maintain very close positions that are sometimes only distinguished by a greater or lesser emphasis on certain factors.

The continuity and relative proximity between the positions of Mario and David, in addition to enabling communication and understanding, made the terms of their discussion particularly fine and precise. Only in this way have they been able to express and elucidate various discrepancies between the different ways in which we can now represent the politics of psychoanalysis: discrepancies that often go unnoticed, even when they are crucial in thinking about what the role of psychoanalytic practice can and should be in neoliberal advanced capitalism.

2 | NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM IN THE DAYS OF TRUMP

Perhaps there are those who think that it is too late to deal with an old neoliberalism that is already expiring and being displaced by the neo-fascist, nationalist, populist and protectionist despotism represented by Donald Trump and other leaders of the far right in the world (see, e.g., Jacques, 2016; West, 2016). We, on the contrary, are convinced that this recent phenomenon embodies an advanced, extreme and wild phase of neoliberal capitalism, as confirmed by, for example, Trump's plutocratic cabinet, his erosion of institutions, or his deregulatory and anti-welfare initiatives in the internal functioning of the US economy. We can say that this is what the leftist Lacanian psychoanalyst Jorge Alemán (2017, para. 5) calls the "neo-fascist version of neoliberalism". By the same token, we could also return to the terms used by Thomas Hobbes (1651/2010, 1681/1990) and in the classic debate of the Frankfurt School and say that we are before *Behemoth*, before an extreme lack of control, before social unruliness, the ferocious law of the jungle and a State disarticulated and swallowed by capital, as in the conception of fascism of Franz Neumann (1942/2009), and not, as in Friedrich Pollock's (1941/1982) view of state capitalism, before *Leviathan*, before a strong state that exercises absolute control over a capitalist economy and society (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017b).

If we are right, and we are faced with an unbridled neoliberalism that is showing its most brutal face through Trump and other such leaders, then our debate on the politics of psychoanalysis in liberal and neoliberal capitalism has not lost any validity, but, on the contrary, is more relevant than ever before. Perhaps it has never been so urgent to reflect on the relationship between psychoanalytic practice and a crazed system, crazier than any of its victims, that not only threatens the little equality, justice, freedom and democracy in the world today, but is endangering the human race in a great variety of ways, including those expressed in Trump's climate change denial, his nuclear program and the warmongering of his international policy.

Both in destroying humanity and in neutralizing the historical conquests of modernity, neoliberal capitalism could end up suppressing the very conditions of the possibility of psychoanalysis. Is it not permissible, then, for those who still believe in the Freudian discovery to have something to say to that which is threatening it? This is what we will do in the following pages in discussing how psychoanalysis relates to, and deals with, liberal society, patriarchy and capitalism, the scientific and university guises of the capitalist system, money and the market, socialism as an alternative and as a historical reality, and collective mobilization and the possibility of revolution.

3 | PSYCHOANALYSIS IN LIBERAL SOCIETY

David Let's talk a little about the circumstances in which psychoanalysis appears. As we well know, there is a historical coincidence between Freud's invention and a certain moment in the development of the capitalist system. I am convinced that such a coincidence is not fortuitous. I think that a particular victory for capital underlies in some way the success of the Freudian doctrine.

- Mario Something that accelerated the development of capitalism in Freud's Austria, as Decker (1999) explains, was that the liberal government advocated "a constitutional government, a centralized state, economic freedom, full religious tolerance and secular authority over education and marriage" (p. 61). There was much discourse of freedom, but there was, nevertheless, neurosis – that is to say, something derived from a lack of discursive freedom. Psychoanalysis arises under conditions of discourse inherent in liberalism, which, for Jews, meant competition and emancipation in conditions of progressive anti-Semitism.
- David If I am understanding you correctly, rather than emphasizing capitalist economy, you prefer to emphasize the determining role of liberal society in the emergence of psychoanalysis. I would definitely insist more on capitalism, but I must recognize, as Castel (1981/2014) has noted, that psychoanalytic practice has a distinctly liberal aspect which is already revealed in its methodological prescriptions of "free choice, free contract, free association, free listening, etc." (p. 53). On the other hand, as you have suggested, the patient, the analysand, would somehow suffer the discourse of liberalism and its intrinsically contradictory character. Perhaps the atmosphere of freedom, the lack of political repression, is precisely what reveals the psychic repression discovered by Freud and operative within the most liberal society.
- Mario That's right. The contradictions were reflected in a world of opportunities for profit and enrichment but with ideological mechanisms of containment and social restraint. Since that time, there has been simultaneously economic freedom and social, racial and neurotic repression. For instance, liberalism, a matter of the market, was not feasible for women who remained oppressed and obedient despite belonging to the high bourgeoisie.
- David Even for the bourgeois class, as the young Marx (1844/1997) observed, economic liberalism does not necessarily imply human emancipation. Producers do not gain their freedom through the free circulation of their products. On the contrary, trade becomes free at the cost of the freedom of people. Human beings end up reduced to the condition of slaves of liberated commodities and of the capitalist system that ironically regulates their liberty. In such circumstances, women can only recover a certain "freedom", which is obviously not freedom in the strict and classic sense of the term, through a hysteria that opens the way to what the system cannot regulate. This logically appears as a gesture of subversion and revolt.
- Mario However, for the first time, there seems to be nothing to subvert, nothing against which to rebel. The laws of the market impose the absence of law, uncontrollable economic liberalism, which frames human desires as the dimension of the uncontrollable unconscious. Of course, accelerated economic growth, as pointed out by Lacan (1970/1991), develops at a time of expansion of the master's discourse. But this apogee of the discourse of power is also its downfall, its overthrow in the haste to make profits, its collapse in the face of the impossibility of absolute repression. The symptoms that Freud observes are the downfall of the master's discourse. The hysteric reveals that downfall . . .
- David And, by so doing, she subverts the discourse of power . . .
- Mario She only exposes the existing subversion, which is the impossibility of the subject being lord and master in her own house.
- David I agree with you that the unconscious existence of the *id*, the circumstance that the *ego* cannot be lord and master in his or her own house, is what becomes clearly known through the revealing irruption of the hysterical symptom. But the hysterical symptom is the symptom of a hysteric, and what becomes known through this symptom, thanks to the person who suffers it, makes a mockery of the conscious individual promoted by liberal individualism. Is there not a political gesture of subversion and revolt? Moreover, in denouncing the constitutive castration of the subject, what is known in hysteria also prevents the subject from taking seriously masculinity and paternity, which Lacan (1970/1991) elicits significantly through the same master's discourse.

4 | PSYCHOANALYSIS, PATRIARCHY AND CAPITALISM

- David The master challenged by the hysteric is not indifferent, genderless or asexual. The master of the liberal society has a gender, a sex and a precise link with the subject that challenges him. The master is father and man. What I try to highlight is that hysteria, linked internally with femininity, not only mocks the ego and its imaginary ideal individuality but the symbolic figure of man and father who cannot be lord and master in his own house. Female emancipation begins with a hysterization treated and stimulated by psychoanalysis. Freud simply accompanies women in the conquest of a freedom that is characteristic of modernity.
- Mario That does not exclude the fact that modernity is also characterized by new specific conditions of gender oppression and by a certain bourgeois imperative of obedience for women.
- David Yes, of course. This is what tries to preserve itself desperately and brutally, with a brutality proportional to despair, through a primitive and conservative patriarchal figure that becomes reactive and reactionary in times of crisis as in the present or the 1930s. I am thinking of what is personified, for instance, by Putin or Stalin, as well as by the old mafia boss, the new hypermasculine drug lord, the tyrannical male of the monogamous bourgeois family and the decadent macho men responsible for the current wave of sexual violence in Mexico.
- Mario Figures of the master that must be refuted by the psychoanalyst and abolished in the analytic process.
- David That's right, questionable figures of the master in whom the ego is founded but, simultaneously, dubious masks of man and father that should also fall on the couch. The paternal and masculine seem to operate, in fact, as a sort of matrix and model of ego identity, which was explained by Freud himself (1921/1998a) by putting identification with the primordial father, the prototypical model of masculinity, at the very foundation of the individualization of the subject through his/her ego. Now, the crisis of this ideal ego, through which we are explaining the emergence of psychoanalysis, is inseparable from the cultural decline of masculinity and paternity that continued until the twenty-first century and had its most colourful manifestation in May 1968 in France and in the movements of sexual liberation, on which Federn (1919/2002) and Mendel (1968), among others, have reflected so much.
- Mario What you are suggesting, therefore, is that everything I have set out here has its origin in the current decline of masculinity and fatherhood.
- David Of course, this crisis of patriarchy is what would translate into the crisis of the ego, of its egocentric liberal and neoliberal individualism: a crisis that would, in turn, break out into fascism or neo-fascism, as well as into hysteria, and, through the hysterical demand, would call for the existence of psychoanalysis.
- Mario But are you aware of everything you are explaining by the father's disgrace? Doesn't an explanation like yours betray your Marxism and entail a psychologization of a historical and socio-economic phenomenon?
- David The crisis of patriarchy is not a psychological phenomenon!
- Mario If it is not that, what is it? If you see it as a socio-economic phenomenon, then perhaps we should remember capitalism, to which, strangely, you referred only at the beginning.
- David I have not forgotten capitalism! For me, in fact, it is not only liberal egocentric individualism but capitalism and classism itself that are undermined through the decline of the symbolic figure of the man and father. And, in thinking this, I am not betraying Marxism in any way. If we believe the old Marx (1882/1988) and Engels (1884/2011), male and patriarchal power are at the very origin of class society and of its private property regime, that is to say that they are the conditions of the existence of the capitalist system, which means, in turn, for Marxism, that they are the foundation of liberal society as well (Marx & Engels, 1846/1974). For those who judge all this from a Marxist point of view such as mine, it is not only the liberal and now neoliberal order that is brought into question by hysteria, but hysterical questioning also disillusion us about the patriarchal system, private property, class society and the capitalist system. I think that this disillusionment comes out of its traumatic background, that of castration, and can be taken seriously and elaborated theoretically and politically through a discourse like Freud's. It is here that, in my view, the greatest anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist revolutionary potential of the first Freudian discourse, that of the late nineteenth century, lies.

- Mario I agree with you that Freud's discourse could not have been articulated before the hysteric demanded that it make sense of what she had to say. Yet, it was not the hysterical but the modern discrediting of the Name-of-the-Father which spoke in the voice of hysteria and made psychoanalytic practice necessary to treat it in its hysterical spokespeople.
- David The desire of the hysterics in the subjective back of the world, was as decisive as the decline of the father in the objective world. In any case, psychoanalysis, for me, would be a way of responding to that desire and that decline that nowadays makes Trump so unsatisfying and ludicrous. This is an idea already found in the very young Lacan (1938/2001), who wonders if "the social decline of the paternal imago" constitutes a "psychological crisis" by which "the appearance of psychoanalysis" could be explained (pp. 60–61). To explain the discovery of the Oedipus complex historically, one would have to examine how Freud, "son of the Jewish patriarchy", was confronted with what was happening to families in Vienna, "the centre of a State that was the melting-pot of the most diverse family forms", whose common denominator was what Lacan describes as the "main determination" of "modern neurosis", namely, "the paternal personality always lacking, absent, humiliated, divided or false" (p. 61). Lacan's conception of this modern decadence of paternity, which – according to Zafiroopoulos (2003) – came to him from the sociologist Émile Durkheim, reappears several times in his teachings and writings, and sometimes in an axiomatic way, such as when he states that "in a social structure like ours, the father is always, in some way, a discordant father, a needy father, in relation to his function" (Lacan, 1953/1978, p. 305).
- Mario It remains true that this discordance and need have been accentuated in recent years.
- David This is what makes Hitler and Mussolini, who were already quite grotesque, now reappear as their own caricatures, as their own parodies, with the faces of Geert Wilders, Norbert Hofer or Gianluca Iannone. Likewise, in France, Napoleon returned in the form of Napoleon III and then in the form of Sarkozy. The "tragedy", as Marx (1852/2003, p. 10) would say, was repeated as a "farce" and then as a *farce of the farce*.

5 | PSYCHOANALYSIS BEFORE CIVILIZATION, SCIENCE AND THE UNIVERSITY

- David It is as if paternity and masculinity were increasingly discordant and needy, inconsistent and penurious.
- Mario Even though they always had to suffer from a certain kind of penury and inconsistency.
- David What may be debatable is not the inconsistent and penurious character of the father but its confinement to the last two or three centuries, to so-called "modernity", to the stage of the greater development of capitalism and of the invention of psychoanalysis. There is good reason to suppose that the disgrace of fatherhood began long before. Perhaps we might even think that discredit is inseparable from paternity, at least in the Western tradition, as Lacan himself has suggested on more than one occasion, for example when referring to Hamlet and his "questioning of an overly ideal father" (Lacan, 1964/1973, p. 43). If this were the case, we could broaden our conjecture and affirm that the discrediting of paternity expressed by hysteria and elaborated by psychoanalysis is not a phenomenon typical of the modern capitalist era but is, so to speak, the weak point of the whole patriarchal civilization organized in social classes and based on private property. This would increase, far from undermining, the historical importance of psychoanalysis.
- Mario Psychoanalytic practice would be absolutely innovative as an elaboration and treatment of a castration constitutive of human civilization.
- David But here we might face another objection: were there, before Freud's invention, no other possible or already existing methods of elaboration and treatment of castration, of the hysteric's desire and the correlative paternal insufficiency? And is it not possible that these procedures were more effectively subversive than psychoanalysis? I'm thinking of certain forms of witchcraft, lesbianism, feminine infidelity or feminist activism and other subversive practices that have been justly valued by Shulamith Firestone (1970) and Silvia Federici (2004). If so, there would be no reason to think that psychoanalytic practice obeys a real, unsatisfied need to face the modern tarnishing of masculinity and parenthood.

- Mario This tarnish has always existed. Formerly his Majesty the King and the confessor were there to deal with it; nowadays we have Trump and the psychoanalyst.
- David But does this mean that we must return to the old and disappointing conception of psychoanalysis as simply secularized and rationalized confession, which is supposed to have arisen now to occupy the ground from which religious confession was dislodged under the effect of enlightenment, scientism and perhaps the same ruining of the father? What is your opinion on this? To begin with, do you think that psychoanalysis could have arisen earlier?
- Mario It is not possible to know if psychoanalysis might have existed earlier, but it is not comparable to the order of confession, which is a prescription of faith dictated by a system of ecclesiastical power. Perhaps psychoanalysis could have existed in the guise of auscultation of the mental mysteries. Its prehistory might reside in antique spiritual interventions like animal magnetism and hypnosis: practices that were presumed to be curative but were suspect as far as the supposed scientific knowledge of medicine was concerned.
- David It is interesting that you say that, because Freud was a doctor, he did not stop believing in science, and even at some point came to profess the narrowest empiricist and positivist conception of scientific knowledge. We can assume, following the first generation of the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer, 1946/2007; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1998), that this conception is internally tied to a capitalist modernity whose crisis must also be a crisis of modern science and of scientism as bourgeois ideology or a modern religion of capital (Lacan, 1936/1999a; Feyerabend, 1978). And it is no coincidence that this crisis of capitalist and scientific modernity is often associated with the contributions of Marx and Freud (e.g. Touraine, 1992). Both Marx and Freud bet on science, on scientific socialism and the science of the unconscious. Both believed in the scientific method and hoped to apply it. However, at the same time, they both represented the crisis of science. In fact, in both cases, what develops is not only related to the scientific tradition but also to the most radical exteriority of science – to the hypnosis and animal magnetism that you mentioned in the case of Freud, and, in the case of Marx, to German idealist philosophy, together with the revolutionary movements, and specifically to French utopian socialism (Lenin, 1913/1974). And it must be stressed that this nonscientific kinship of Marxism and psychoanalysis, as well as the crisis of scientificity that Marx and Freud represent, could also indicate the crisis of a capitalist system closely related to the scientific project of enlightenment, secularization, progress and technology, empiricism and positivism. This brings us back to our initial question: why the invention of psychoanalysis, representing a crisis of scientificity, coincided historically not only with the maturity of capitalism, with its crowning of science, with its external imperial expansion, its internal liberal consolidation and its democratic liberal institutionalization, but also with the higher phase of imperialism and the manifest explosion of several of the latent contradictions of capitalism?
- Mario I can admit that psychoanalysis is a product of capitalism. Like every product of capitalism, it seems that psychoanalytical practice is creating its own development and its own business. Psychoanalysis as an institutional business seeks to guarantee its scientific legitimacy, its continuity and existence, its distribution and growth. But what this insures is its perdition, especially if it is seen as a business of science, as a scientific-academic business, as a product of a university that is not really universal, since it is not always completely open to everyone. When psychoanalysis is turned into an academic commodity, it marks, again, the division of classes, of class prerogatives, as in Freud's times, when only a few could benefit from it. However, paradoxically, by gaining scientific legitimacy, by falling into the academic realm, by crossing the threshold of the university and becoming part of the university discourse, psychoanalysis became the business of all who were there to venerate knowledge but also to question it. Psychoanalysis arrived at this crossroads in its entrance into the university, provoking a knowledge that is as domesticable as it is critical and criticisable: knowledge that can be absorbed by the system but can also question the system and question itself as a system. Although this relationship with the university is decisive in the current history of psychoanalysis, it is not usually appreciated in its proper measure, and sometimes it is not even considered. For example, in his book about Freud in Mexico, Gallo (2010) does not take into account the university, which completely transformed psychoanalysis and immersed it in acceptable entities, such as the one called "psychodynamics of personality".

- David I agree with you that insertion into the university has had very important effects on the functioning of psychoanalysis and on the role it plays in society. The first thing to be observed, as you point out, is the transmutation of the unacceptable into something acceptable. This seems to imply the assimilation of psychoanalysis into university knowledge, its epistemological regulation and its resulting reconciliation with some of the worst empiricist and positivist banalities, its confinement within the specialization of the human and social sciences, its readaptation to scientific discipline, its reabsorption by something that it ought to break up, its dissolution in a certain common sense and the psychologization of everything that ought to resist psychology.
- Mario Freud's discovery, in short, is domesticated in the academic context.
- David However, according to what you propose, the university that domesticates psychoanalysis is the same that opens it to society and, in a certain sense, democratizes it by making it a subject of concern for everybody and by exposing it to a questioning that is also a questioning of the system. In the university, psychoanalysis cannot remain self-contained but must be explained, defended and made accountable when subjected to constant scrutiny from teachers and students who question it at every moment and on widely differing levels, among them the political one. What is not clear to me is how this questioning can be concretely reflected in psychoanalytic practice. I do not have the impression that this practice has been markedly modified by the teaching of psychoanalysis in the university.

6 | THE MARKET, THE MONEY AND THE PAYMENT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

- David Perhaps psychoanalytic practice has become less elitist, but it still reproduces what it does not dare openly recognize, such as its characteristic connection of knowledge and power, its strategies of professional and institutional control through psychoanalytic associations, the competitive and monopolistic functioning of these associations and everything else that Robert Castel (1981/2014) has embraced under the concept of the "social unconscious of psychoanalysis", in which we find, for example, the "standing" and "prestige" of the analyst, his "social status of domination" by which he receives his patients instead of being received by them and especially his payment with its "disguised" economic purpose (pp. 53–70). Does not this payment turn psychoanalysis into a commodity like any other and thus incorporate it with its functional exchange value into the capitalist system? What are the implications of such commodification? Can it be avoided?
- Mario Payment in cash, in money, need not be a necessary condition of psychoanalytical treatment. This destroys psychoanalysis by transforming it into a lucrative medical business.
- David But is there any alternative? It is said that payment is indispensable for drawing strict lines between reality and the couch, for dissipating the fantasies of the subject, for avoiding an economic debt being added to the symbolic debt, for resolving the transfer and for many other purposes.
- Mario Yes, of course, but you don't just pay with money.
- David This is what I wanted you to say! But what would Freud say?
- Mario Freud discovered that money enters into a symbolic equation, into metonymic slips and metaphorical substitutions that allow us to pose the payment in the analysis in another way. Psychoanalysis cannot be reduced to the object of bourgeois consumption, even if that was its origin. The origin is not necessarily the destiny.
- David And what is the fate of psychoanalysis in a capitalist system that has become a globalized symbolic universe that seems to leave nothing outside of it? Capitalism tends to embrace everything. It is, in Lacan's (1960/1999b) terms, our language without "metalanguage", without "Other of the Other" (p. 293). That is why there could be no socialism in one country, as Stalin wanted. Likewise, psychoanalytical practice cannot be the Other of capitalism. Is not the inescapable fate of psychoanalysis to fulfil its function in the capitalist system and thus to enable the functioning of the system?

- Mario Psychoanalysis only favours capitalism when it perverts itself, when it becomes a business, the business of making money from the symptom, which implies suffering.
- David However, in the end, the symptom is always generating profit, and money is always being pocketed by the psychoanalyst. Perhaps we should think of this in a materialist way, as Ian Parker (2011) does, and recognize that payment in money is a “material condition of transfer”, a “material investment” that can be compared to the “tracks” on which the “transferential investments” will be made (p. 180).
- Mario It's not always like that.
- David Parker himself would say that “the very fact that there are exceptions serves to prove the rule” (2011, p. 180).
- Mario I would not speak of rules and exceptions but of contradictions imposed by capitalist society, contradictions that are reflected, that reveal their phantasmic grip in analytic experience but cannot be resolved there. To pretend that they are definitely solved there is ideological as well as pretending that work redeems all suffering subjectivity.
- David Of course, there is something ideological, idealistic and subjectivist, illusory and even superstitious, in the idea that psychoanalysis can solve the contradictions of capitalism, as if these contradictions were purely psychic, subjective or intersubjective, mental or relational, and as if they could find a solution within the capitalist system without radically changing it.
- Mario That's the point. If there is a solution, one should look for it in Marx's revolution and not in Freud's psychoanalysis.
- David The problem I see here is that psychoanalysis and its object, the psyche as represented by Freud and his followers, are conditioned and structured by these contradictions of the capitalist system. It is capitalism, with its class structure and its division of labour and everything else, that shapes the particular contradictions between the individual and the collective, between the private and the public, between the subject and the structure, between the bonds with the father and with the mother, between the principles of reality and pleasure, between the *ego* and the *id*, between the imaginary and the symbolic and even between the psychic and the physical. Let us say that everything that psychoanalytic practice works with is already preformed and pre-organized by the contradictions of capitalism.
- Mario But also by the unique, singular contradictions of the subject!
- David And also by the contradictions of capitalism that underlie those of the subject. This is something that Valentin Voloshinov (1927/1999) understood very well and that led him to insist on the “ideological” character, situated “beyond the individual” and not only “beyond consciousness”, of the “conflicts”, of the “struggles and antagonisms”, whose consideration put psychoanalysis far ahead of and above a conventional psychology clinging to a “peaceful and quiet mental life” (pp. 143–166). Now, although psychoanalysis cannot solve these ideological contradictions of capitalism, could it not be useful for people to think about them, to talk about them and to deal with them in their existence, to discover them through their own experience of discontent in culture, to become disillusioned with what conceals them and thus prepare to face them on the battlefield of history? Could we see here an alternative, still pending fate of psychoanalytic practice: a fate in which it might coincide with social movements and with the anti-capitalist orientation of Marxism?

7 | PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SOCIALISM

- Mario The destiny of psychoanalysis is to confront any form of government, any form of production that is based on the illusion of contentment in culture, of the end of cultural discontent, whether under capitalist or socialist production.

- David Does this mean that the relation of psychoanalysis to socialism would be comparable and equivalent to its relation to capitalism? This is disappointing. I would like to think that there is a particular dissonance between the capitalist system and psychoanalytic practice: a dissonance that might not exist outside capitalism but which is, at the same time, constitutive of psychoanalysis so that the end of this dissonance would involve the end of psychoanalysis. In other words, I am not sure that psychoanalysis, at least as we know it, can continue to exist in a truly socialist system. This system would dismantle the contradictions of capitalism that give shape, place and meaning to psychoanalytic practice. No doubt we would see other contradictions appear, new forms of cultural discontent, but I am not sure that they could be dealt with through a lucrative specialized job with a medical affiliation and with individualized attention, as is now the case with psychoanalysis.
- Mario Is it possible to consider a horizon where psychoanalysis will not be an independent professional job? Would it be feasible to put it outside the conditions of medical business and make it a way of meeting to face the difficulties of life?
- David It would no longer be psychoanalysis.
- Mario I think it would still be psychoanalysis, but there would be no reason to pay for it. However, it would be neither social assistance nor spiritual counselling.
- David And then what would it be? What would it serve and what would it do?
- Mario It would continue addressing the symptom.
- David How would it approach the symptom? And the symptom would be a symptom of what?
- Mario Freud thought that symptoms expressed modalities of social disengagement, that is, processes of escape from collective commitment. If the conditions of social relations changed, it would perhaps no longer be necessary to develop symptoms as a compensatory manoeuvre. In the symptom, the subject changes society into his or her inner group, his or her phantasy, at his or her pleasure. Socialism should help us to see other forms of the collectivization of the subjects, farther away than interests but closer than desires.
- David I wonder what is in that interstice between interests and desires. It might be the abyss that currently, in the capitalist system, opens up between the continent of psychology and that of psychoanalysis. On the one hand, psychological techniques, whether you like them or not, tend to satisfy the interests of the individual, which, in general, are only the interests of the system served by the individual. On the other hand, psychoanalysis, at least the one that resists psychologization and thus remains faithful to the Freudian project, seeks to recognize and give voice to those desires that insist on making their way out in any way that they can but which are fundamentally unacceptable, unusable, unexploitable and unassimilable to the interests of the system – which does not mean, of course, that they belong to the most intimate nature of the subject and that they are totally independent of the system itself. It would not occur to me to say that socialism would ensure the reconciliation of these desires with the interests of the system. Nor would I ever imagine, in the same sense, that socialism would make it possible to satisfy the desires that remain repressed in capitalism, as Wilhelm Reich seems to suppose when he states that “socialist economy constitutes the basis for the free development of intellect and sexuality” (1934/1989, p. 66), for the “definitive overcoming of the consequences of the millenarian sexual repression” and for “the establishment of a sexual life satisfactory to the masses” (1931/1971, p. 92). However, just like you, if I have interpreted your words correctly, I am confident that the interstice between desires and interests can cease to be an unfathomable abyss and can be probed in some way in a system, such as the socialist one, whose interests try to link themselves with the needs and also with the desires of the subject when aspiring to fulfil the yearnings of society and not only those of capital. But I do not think that this can be achieved through something that still deserves the name of “psychoanalysis”.

8 | PSYCHOANALYSIS AND REVOLUTION

- David I fear that psychoanalytic practice does not know how to deal with everything that is at stake in the social and communal sphere, whether in socialism and communism, or in traditional societies and primitive communities that have survived the onslaught of capitalism. All this, in my view, is inaccessible to a psychoanalysis that remains internally interwoven with modern individual subjectivity, with the patriarchal and monogamous nuclear family, with the dual and interindividual sexual relationship. By being a relationship between two individuals and by focusing on the individual and family experience of one of them, is there not a risk that psychoanalysis will fragment larger groups, communities or social classes and contribute to the propagation of bourgeois individualistic and familiaristic ideologies that favour capitalism?
- Mario The analytic experience seems to be an interindividual experience, a matter of two individuals. However, it is the history of culture and social struggles that is at stake in these individuals as links not only within the species and a generation but also within a productive chain. Capitalism has transformed the subject into an individual, a statistical sample, taking away his or her life and his or her word and also taking away the possibility of telling stories. In our capitalist society, these stories are usually discarded by unquestionable authorities, as in contemporary medical practice, where there is no time to narrate stories, as these portions of history are reduced to clinical data concerning individuals. Psychoanalysis, on the contrary, is a clinic of stories that are not just individual and that could make us reveal forgotten and repressed transindividual historical truths.
- David If psychoanalysis is a clinic of stories, how are these stories of a subject linked with the history of the people?
- Mario They are the same. As I said, the stories of subjects are portions of the history of the people.
- David Well, put another way, how is the experience of the patient or analysand, including his or her experience on the couch, related to the anti-capitalist collective mobilizations in the streets? Can it favour them, or does it, on the contrary, undermine or replace them? Can it generate distrust of ideals and collective projects? What happens to the collectivity, with that radically external otherness in the inner space of the psychoanalyst's office?
- Mario Psychoanalysis questions the narcissistic individualism of aberrant liberalism. It may propose practices beyond the couch and its possible individualistic confinement. Just as Freud (1912/1998b) questioned masturbation as an eroticism that turns the other into a phantasmal underpinning of one's enjoyment, so it is also time to think about the Eros of social commitment in group situations that reconcile the subjective transformation with the collective one.
- David This point is crucial, because collective and subjective transformation, contrary to what is usually believed, can be in contradiction, in conflict with one another, and even excluded from each other. We know that the dominant psychotherapy, according to Moreno's expression critically taken up by Deleuze (1969/1972), often makes "small-scale revolutions" to avoid "total subversions" (p. 113). As Deleuze himself explains, the psychotherapeutic logic "is not intended to change real social relations but to transform the interior of the individual to readapt it to these relations" (p. 125). This causes the dominant psychotherapy, the adaptive one, to be trapped in a reactionary and conservative logic, well described by Braunstein and his collaborators (1975/2006), in which it ensures "the necessary changes in man so that nothing changes, so that the essential, the structure does not change" (p. 412). The purpose, in other words, is to "change the mind" so that "everything remains the same" in the world (pp. 344–345). Here, in this psychotherapeutic device, changes in the subject serve to prevent changes in society. They serve, in other words, the reproduction of the capitalist system and the perpetuation of the establishment, of the bourgeois neoliberal State with its *pensée unique*, its single thought. Against the common notion that the subject must be transformed in order to transform society, very often the subject must be transformed in order to *not* transform society. The question that arises is how to make subjective transformation something that enables collective transformation instead of precluding it?

- Mario This is only possible by giving symptoms their place.
- David I will go further and say that we must struggle on behalf of symptoms, in favour of their disrupting truth, and not against them, not in favour of the illusions of the establishment. Only in this way can we obtain the goal of insuring that this order is disordered, subverted and perhaps revolutionized by the subject who follows his or her desire: the desire expressed in his or her symptom. It is the surrealist ideal inspired by Marx and Freud and clearly expressed by Breton (1930/2008, 1932/1955) and Crevel (1932/1966). Change the subject to change the world to change the subject, and so on.
- Mario But there is another possibility you have not considered. Sometimes there is no change of the subject even if there is a revolution in the world. This is why Freud was sceptical of the hope that the communist revolution would end the discontent in culture.
- David Freud did not see much future for our illusion. Even the true communism we fought for could not cure us of the death drive and other causes of discontent. How can we then be Freudian and Marxist at the same time? I just think there are two extremes here that we must avoid. One extreme, the Marxist revolutionary one, is to sacrifice Freud and get rid of the death instinct in theory, as the Freudo-Marxists Wilhelm Reich (1933/2010) and Otto Fenichel (1935/1953) did, thus fixing in theory what they could not fix in practice, a common vice among us Marxists, which is quite ironic, considering that we are materialists. The other extreme that we must avoid, the opposite, the Freudian reactionary, is one that has been denounced by Ian Parker (2015): to sacrifice Marx and get rid of the revolutionary illusion under the pretext that "we cannot change society because we cannot change the underlying nature of human beings" (p. 27). In this case, we don't even want to change individuals so that it does not become necessary to change society, we renounce changing both society and individuals. It is a common attitude among psychoanalysts.
- Mario I'm not thinking about human nature! The problem is that even the historical and cultural are not altered in the least by most revolutionary processes. There have been social transformations that do not touch the subjective sphere. The revolutionary change is then reduced to a replacement of the one who occupies the place and status of the master. It should also be said, as Pierre Kaufmann (1979/1982) points out, that "it is the very bottom of individuals, of groups and of political power, from which arises the power antagonistic to love" (p. 55). Narcissistic enjoyment can be found in collective entities and not only in individuals. The work of Bejarano (1972/1978) on groups shows how leaderships anchor in the *ideal ego* and constitute resistance to change. It is this famous resistance to change that the Argentinean psychoanalyst Pichon-Rivière (1978) detected in psychotic fears of being attacked and of losing what has been achieved. Psychoanalysis must propose possibilities for dialectics of another scope in the subject-collective relation. It could only do so in the community and through a collective praxis.

9 | CONCLUSION: DIVERGENCES AND CONVERGENCES

Perhaps collective praxis, whether as group psychoanalysis or in some other way, could come to clarify much of what remains obscure in a discussion such as the one we have transcribed here, a discussion between two people, like the relationship between the psychoanalyst and his or her patient lying on the couch. Perhaps the obscurity inherent in this dual analytic relationship has been revealed through the shadowy areas in our dialogue. But, perhaps, not everything is shadow and darkness. We hope that our discussion has served to shed some light on some aspects of the politics of psychoanalysis in the capitalist system in general and specifically in its liberal/neoliberal mode.

The clearest points of the discussion have been those in which David and Mario have coincided: the contradictions inherent in liberal-neoliberal society and its internal historical connections with the emergence of

psychoanalysis, hysteria as the source of psychoanalytic practice and as a revelation of the insufficiency of an ego in which liberalism-neoliberalism is founded, the historical and sociopolitical incompatibilities between the two spheres of psychoanalytic practice and of the academic-scientific work exploited by capital, the beneficial aspect of the democratization and social scrutiny of psychoanalysis in the university, the danger of money as payment for an analysis that cannot survive its commodification, and the necessity and difficulty of using the couch to reconcile individual and collective transformations.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the aforementioned convergences have been overshadowed by the interesting divergences between the emphasis on liberal society (Mario) and the stress on the capitalist system (David) in explaining the emergence of psychoanalysis, the acceptance (David) or not (Mario) of patriarchy and its crisis as a decisive factor in the contradictions from which psychoanalytic practice arises, the convictions that there can be (Mario) or there cannot be (David) a separation between capitalism and psychoanalysis, the beliefs that the Freudian method as we know it would have to continue to exist (Mario) or should become something completely different (David) in a truly socialist context and the affirmation (David) or the negation (Mario) of an individualist and familialist orientation of psychoanalysis that would make it irremediably opposed to communist and socialist projects.

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