

# The Freudo-Marxist Mission

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The people of Madrid themselves, years after their revolt against Napoleon, shout “*long live the Chains*”. The very people of Paris follow the processions of the goddess of reason and are not satiated watching the action of the guillotine. The People themselves?

(Zambrano, 1958)

**Abstract.** *This essay presents a balance that hopes to show that despite the impasse between dissimilar discourses, the Freudo-Marxist mission does allow us to salvage its philosophical and practical program so as to continue rethinking the postures that led to the difficult encounter between two discourses: psychoanalysis and Marxism, their theoretical principles and their political consequences. This approach demands the discussion of four moments: 1) the Freudo-Marxist pronouncement; 2) Wilhelm Reich’s Sex-Pol mission; 3) Gérard Pommier’s Freudo-Marxism; and 4) its political legacy.*

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## Freudo-Marxism

The main features that Freudians and Marxists deem common are: 1) Their objectives: psychoanalysis and historical materialism are both demystifying critical theories of the subject of consciousness, of its futureless illusions (Freud) or inverted visions of reality (ideologies) and alienation in commodities (Marx); both propose emancipation: one of the repressed neurotic (psychoanalysis), the other of the exploited proletariat (Marxism). 2) Their means: gaining consciousness of contents repressed by consciousness that return in the form of symptoms (Freud), and of the oppressive relations of production that keep the working class subjected to exploitation, thus rescuing the subject of alienation (Marx). 3) Their materialist method: drives are the motor of history (Freud), the means of production and the satisfaction of human needs that of social history (Marx). 4) Their dialectics: the struggle of opposites, drive and defense (Freud), exploiters and exploited (Marx). 5) Their reading of history: the destinies of the drives determined by the vicissitudes of infant history that lead to the Oedipal drama (Freud), and the destinies of humanity: the modes of domination and exploitation (Marx). 6) Their models: topical (Unconscious-Preconscious-Conscious and Id, Ego and Superego)

(Freud), and the economic infrastructure, the base of the ideological superstructure (Marx). 7) Their dynamic model: the antagonistic Life Drive [*Lebenstrieb*] and Death Drive [*Todestrieb*] (Freud), and class struggle (Marx).

The dis-encounters that cause insufficiencies and require a profound theoretical revision are of two types: 1) Analytical practice: the etiology of neurosis uncovers the pathogenic action of the patriarchal family, authoritarian pedagogical methods and conditions of life, housing and unemployment, all of which demand a change; but while psychoanalysis frees the subject and allows him to work, society offers but a denigrating job or unemployment. To obtain prophylaxis and a cure, the social system must be transformed, which obliges psychoanalysis to integrate historical materialism. 2) Political practice: the emancipation of the working class lacks a theory of the mechanism through which the material conditions of existence are converted into ideology in the human consciousness, and an explanation of why the exploited majorities not only accept their conditions, but even “kiss their chains”. If Marx had developed this phrase, his opus would have followed the route of Etienne de La Boétie’s (1576) *voluntary servitude*; and he would have acknowledged that people “fall

into such complete forgetfulness of their freedom that they can hardly be roused to the point of regaining it, obeying so easily and so willingly that one is led to say, on beholding such a situation, that this people has not so much lost its liberty as won its enslavement” (p. 21). Or, as Lacan shows, the masses do not rebel against the master because they are promised enjoyment (*jouissance*). But the Marxist worker’s movement believed it needed psychoanalysis as a scientific, practical and technical auxiliary of consciousness.

As we will see later, the Freudo-Marxist project, judged unviable, was aborted. The genuine, though delirious, aspirations that sought to forge a single theory out of psychoanalysis and Marxism had the best of historical and political intentions, but they were unaware of the inalienable foundations of the two discourses. For this reason Armando Suárez (1995) was led to observe that:

The psychoanalytical movement, having just overcome its stage of ostracism and marginalization from the city of science, was beginning to consolidate positions in Europe and the United States [but] was still too fascinated by its discovery of itself and too jealous of its autonomy to allow confrontations with a theory of society and history that already occupied all the positions that applied psychoanalysis hoped to conquer. (p. 146).

Here, Suárez confirms that Freud is unfamiliar with Marxism, though not with its utopian proposals, which he denounces in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929): since human beings are exiled from nature by the law of culture, which prohibits incest, the project of happiness is unachievable. However, Freud (1929) opens a path towards wellbeing in culture: “The program that the pleasure principle imposes upon us, to be happy, is unachievable; but it is not licit – or, better, not possible – to abandon the effort to approach, in some way, its fulfillment” (p. 83).

Vladimir Lenin ignored psychoanalysis. Leon Trotsky tried to understand it, but only in order to combat Stalinism with a critique of the masses, the imaginaries that redress the leader, and the struggle between love and hate that is inevitable in culture, as evoked in Arthur Schopenhauer’s (1819) *The World as Will and Representation* with its porcupines that never cease to fling their quills in winter.

But the greatest impediments to the Freudo-Marxist movement were the sinister arrival of Nazism in Germany and the annexation of National Socialism in Austria. The rabid opposition that Wilhelm Reich

faced in the world of psychoanalysis was not so much due to his deformations of Freudianism, but because his political militancy led all psychoanalysts into the Nazis’ talons. The psychoanalyst Marie Langer expressed the panic that Freud himself felt, even recommending that his colleagues not receive militants in analysis, or that they prohibit them from practicing militancy. But not even Freud’s cautiousness could prevent the destruction of psychoanalytical publications, the dissolution of the Psychoanalytic Society of Vienna, or his death in exile.

After the Second World War, the empire of psychoanalysis was installed in North America, after vaccinating Freudianism through the introduction of the adaptation to reality and normalization focus, such as the psychoanalysis of Ego. Also, the International Psychoanalysis Association (IPA) extended its branches the world over. Psychoanalysis thus became institutionalized and conquered the psychiatric order; psychoanalysts became “mental health” workers. From the culturalist current to the adaptation approach, leaving aside the folds of subjectivity produced by the unconscious, the path to the supposed psychoanalysis of Ego and its reinforcement (Hartmann, Kris, Loewenstein and Rappaport) established the empire of the *reality principle* in the here, the now and the with me of the Kleinian school; the annexation of psychoanalysis to cultural anthropology (Margaret Mead); functionalist sociology (Parsons); dynamic psychiatry (Alexander), and semiological-juridical critique (Thomas Szasz) – until psychoanalysis was globalized and, in the words of Eugenio Trías (2001), transformed into a “Global Casino”, having interred the horror that fractured it in the period of German fascism, and having castrated the letter of Freud, the critique of culture, its rebellious and liberating nature, as well as the radical opposition of the desire for power.

In Argentina, under the leadership – both theoretical and practical – of Pichon-Rivière and José Bleger, psychoanalysis took hold as in no other Latin American country. They realized all the deformations and innovations imaginable: the psychoanalysis of groups, the family and couples, which are analyses of Ego and the imaginary group, and that only examine the dynamics of the group and not those of the subject of the unconscious, which is not collective but excluded from the discourse of the subject through repression in neuroses [*Verdrängung*], denial in perversion [*Verleugnung*], and expulsion and repression for psychosis [*Verwerfung*].

In France, despite resistance by psychoanalysis, Louis Althusser (1965) and Michel Tort (1970) introduced Marxist intellectuals to Freud and Lacan, thus conceding to psychoanalysis a theoretical place by affirming that it was “a new continent of knowledge”. In 1965, Althusser published his text *Freud and Lacan* in the *Nouvelle Critique*, wherein he argues for the scientificity of psychoanalysis, on the condition that it is read like Jacques Lacan (Althusser, 1965).

In the French May of 1968, the watchwords of Wilhelm Reich (1934) and Herbert Marcuse (1955) began to be heard once more, like banners of social liberation. But after the May 1968, the relation between psychoanalysis and Marxism was brought back to the discussion table by Lacanian leftists with their theorization of the improvisation of the masses and *schizoanalysis*, a proposal to blow up power with *the machines of war* that fracture the State (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, 1980).

### The Mission

Mission comes from the Latin *missio-onis*: dispatch, commission, charge; and from *mittere*: to send. Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century it has meant delegation, crossing. I shall take all these meanings in order to reflect upon the intellectual and practical movement of Freudo-Marxism as an ideological pronouncement, led by a group of psychoanalysts and second-generation thinkers who carry out a program of ideas and practices at the seat of Austro-German culture and politics (between 1926 and 1933), and whose project is to integrate the theory and practice of psychoanalysis into historical materialism and the workers’ movement that emerged from it.

Among its leading figures, Siegfried Bernfeld (1926), Erich Fromm (1932), Wilhelm Reich (1934) and Otto Fenichel (1934), as well as Paul Federn, Annie Reich (Reich’s partner), Richard Sterba and Georg Simmel, all stand out. A signifier generation that lives through the First World War, fight in it (except Fromm), and includes critical witnesses of the division of the workers’ movement between social democracy and the communist party. The Freudo-Marxists sympathized with the Bolshevik revolution, knew the violence of the Nazis’ anti-Semitic movement and the cruel irrationality of capitalism after the crash of the New York stock exchange in 1929.

In the wake of the defeat of the workers’ movement that brought the Nazis to power and the triumph of the Bolsheviks in Russia, it became historically necessary to discuss the importance of subjectivity in revolution. If, as according to Marxist thought, the

objective conditions were given for the socialist revolution, then there was no choice but to ponder, and debate, what it was that impeded historical subjects – leaders and masses – from achieving the expected results. And this begged the question: what is happening to class consciousness? To which the Freudo-Marxists responded. From psychoanalysis it was possible to elucidate the enigma of social repression and construct a program that took into account consciousness as commanded by unconscious life in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the dynamics of the masses hypnotized by the leader in the *Psychology of the Masses and Analysis of the Ego* (1921), and the second theme of *The Ego and the Id* (1923), where consciousness is the most superficial aspect of psychic life. Here, the Freudo-Marxist movement sets out from a Freudian theoretical base without, of course, forgetting psychoanalytic practice.

Wilhelm Reich opens his dispensary in Vienna in 1922, where he treats the sexual and psychic misery of the proletarian masses and impels a praxis through a passionate political militancy after the brutal repression of a workers’ demonstration in Vienna (July 15 1927) that left 83 workers dead. Erich Fromm, though resisting political militancy, is one of the key contacts with the Frankfurt School of critical philosophy, together with Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse.

The theoretical and practical wager of the Freudo-Marxists on psychoanalysis is produced without reserve. Perhaps its understanding of psychoanalysis is superficial, regarding subjectivity and sexual repression, but still it was able to extract political consequences and a liberating praxis. Likewise, the psychoanalysts’ knowledge of Marxism was but superficial, as they did not understand the posture of the *II Socialist International*, positivist, mechanistic, economicist and voluntarist. Thus, Freudo-Marxism as program and praxis unfolded amidst incomprehension by both psychoanalysts and Marxists, though most of them suffered exile for political reasons, not due to theoretical confusions.

The most committed of them is Reich, who is expelled from the German Communist Party in 1932 and from the International Psychoanalytic Association of Vienna in 1934. He settles in the United States, where he develops the *orgone* theory and the practice of *vegetotherapy*, which had lost their psychoanalytical and Marxist foundations. Bernfeld and Fenichel remain in the International Psychoanalytic Association of Vienna and renounce all political militancy. Fromm abandons the International Association of Vi-

enna and proposes a humanist psychoanalysis, without metapsychology, but with a humanist Marxism bereft of class struggle and economic determinisms, a religiosity without God, based on the concept of *social character* and committed to human values. Despite these variants, schools multiplied, at the cost of forgetting the letter of Marx and Freud (Suárez, 1995, pp. 142-166).

### Wilhelm Reich

Reich represents not only the possibility of a dialogue between psychoanalysis and Marxism, but also a program for a common praxis. Upon leaving the ranks of the socialists to join the Austrian Communist Party as a protest against the socialists' absence from the ruthlessly repressed 1927 march in Vienna, Reich organizes his psychoanalytic practice with a view towards the demands of the impoverished masses: abortion and contraception, though this leads to constant harassment. After his trip to the USSR, financed by the German Communist Party, he founds the Socialist Association for Sex Hygiene and Sexological Research. The fame of his Sex-Pol mission attracted 200,000 militants to his dispensaries. The theory and praxis most widely discussed was *The Sexual Struggle of Youth* (1932), though his key thoughts on the relations between psychoanalysis and Marxism are contained in his *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis* (1934), where he attempts to integrate a "total knowledge" of the human condition through Marxism (with its social perspective) and psychoanalysis (that attends individual phenomena).

The conceptual errors of Freudo-Marxism and Reich's psychosis revealed the deficiencies of the encounter between these two discourses with respect to its practice. With Reich's expulsion from both the Communist International and the International Association of Psychoanalysis, the bridge between Marxism and psychoanalysis suffers a mortal wound. But added to that were the fractures within Marxism and psychoanalysis themselves: "Marxist" currents that deformed Marx, and the many schools of "psychoanalysis" that forgot the letter of Freud. Thus, Freudo-Marxism is burdened with conflicts over interpretations and practices.

However, Eric Laurent (1986) does justice to Reich by updating his Sex-Pol mission in the French psychoanalytic journal *Ornicar?* The name Reich sounds like an empire and represents the technique of *bio-energy* that is adopted by the rebellious generation of the 1960s. The Sex-Pol mission is not born as a theoretical and conceptual development, but of the

coincidence between Reich's personal crisis and a social crisis. Sex-Pol is a signifier that brings together progressive pragmatic activities, adopted later by all democratic societies, which have striven to foster them from the 1960s to today. Progressive organizations succeeded in including Reich's program in European Constitutions and now in some Latin American ones. The Sex-Pol mission is more than a bundle of practical sexual measures; it is a signifier that provokes rebellion.

Reich's mission – according to Laurent – reminds the psychoanalytic community and the world of phallic enjoyment [*jouissance*], the subject's entry into the symbolic order, into the enjoyment of language and the phallic function: the phallus, signifier of enjoyment and the desire for the Other. Reich wishes to make the phallus exist as a signifier destined to designate all the effects of the signified as one whole. For this reason he is expelled from every psychoanalytic brotherhood in 1934. In response, one starry night in 1941, in the city of Main in the United States, Reich hallucinates a blue light, the energy of which extends over the entire world, and in which he perceives the *orgone*, not a concept, but a point of contact with reality, a possible relation with the scientists of his time, a signifier that forms a social bond to subject itself to culture and shirk psychosis. Because – and here I follow Freud – that which is expelled from discourse [*Verwerfung*] returns in the real, as in the case of Schreber, like a blue light hallucinated on the horizon.

### The Recognition of a Radical Absence of Man's Essence

Freudo-Marxism... an impossible project? I share with Gérard Pommier (1987) the lucid thoughts that he expresses in his book *Freud Apolitical?*, especially the thesis that Marx and Freud have only one point in common, one that refers to an anthropological aspect that underlies their discourse: the recognition of a radical absence in man's essence; being is absent, not only because the human cub becomes a being, but because its being is represented by a signifier that represents it before another signifier.

In this regard, it is worth recalling the pertinent clarification that Jacques Lacan presents to philosophy students at the Sorbonne in Paris, namely that the object of study of psychoanalysis is not man, for it is not an anthropology; but, rather, something that man lacks: the enjoyment lost upon being dragged out of nature by language through the fundamental law of culture: the prohibition of incest; a lack that cements

the division of the subject between its being and the signifier that represents it, such that he becomes subject to language and of language. For Marx, meanwhile, the essence of man is reduced to the set of his social relations. Suffice to recall that in Marx' 6<sup>th</sup> Thesis on Feuerbach the human essence is not an abstraction that is inseparable from singular individuals, for its reality is the set of social relations.

Unlike Marx, in the field of psychoanalysis, and especially since the teachings of Lacan, what we find is the absence of being, the absence *in* being of the subject [*manque à être*, says Lacan] as a result of the effects of language; of the symbolic structure that makes family history. Absence of Being not only because once we became beings of Being hardly anything remains of us as subjects, but because when someone asks, *who am I?*, there is no possible answer, given that language backs up against the limit of what is sayable: being. It is because of this that the end of an analysis has as its ethical imperative *to make this being that is lacking*.

Although the lack of human essence in Marx's case is rather evident, in the sense that he only defines alienation in relation to the group, it would seem that the lack of being in Marx only concerns Ego, or the individual, conceived as product and effect of social life. It deals with the dispersion of human essence, though it is not abolished completely. There is a displacement of human essence in the set of social relations, but this does not impede the establishment of a kind of fixing of being. Human essence is not the final explanation of things; it is a historical product. For Marx, the being of man is relative, though it endures as economic activity. Marx sets aside the optical problem, leaving it at the mercy of relations with one's peers and the relations of production.

Something distinct occurs in the case of Freud, for whom the subject of the unconscious depends on the symbolic system. And this is because the order of language is incomplete, for no being can define itself on such an inconsistent basis. It is to this radical incompleteness of language that the historical future responds; the unyielding search for social identity and the class struggle itself; the reason why Gérard Pommier points out that Marxism explains effects, not causes. And this is why the encounter between the theses of Marx and Freud comes to be so extremely forced:

There exists no direct articulation between Freudianism and Marxism. What we are dealing with, between the individual and the social, [is] a relation of failure: since enjoyment has failed, a tentative recovery in the group is produced, class struggle. There is a fissure that

makes all union between the subject, as a being of desire, and any of its imaginary identifications, principally the social one, unrecoverable. (Pommier, 1987, pp. 182-183).

It is not possible to posit a direct articulation between Freud and Marx, for what exists is an abyss, an *impasse*, between the individual and the social. Given that the subject fails in its search for the plenitude of its being, it throws itself into recovering it in the group, in a search for relation and for belonging, where specular alienation becomes inevitable: Ego is similarity, made in the image and resemblance of the other. Thus it is inevitable, since in its multiple identifications Ego is asymptotic (as Michel Foucault points out), that what is produced is an insurmountable failure that impedes the subject from identifying itself fully with the image that Society offers it.

Both the class-free state of socialism and the free enterprise of capitalism subscribe to the assumption that, thanks to the virtues of these systems, men and women can put an end to servitude. This species of Utopia is sustained in a mode of production that, paradoxically, seems to accentuate and aggravate the interdependence of men and women.

Undoubtedly, the passionate struggle for freedom responds to the existence of previous oppression, whose existence in capitalism, feudalism, slavery and even socialism, it would be folly to deny. But it is also important to point out that oppression becomes less evident once direct, individual coercion ceases. However, it is equally undeniable that there exists a mode of industrial slavery that exerts a merciless oppression upon an entire social class.

Following Gérard Pommier, it is important to recall some of Marx' theses; such as the one that holds that social classes are defined as a function of the ownership of the means of production. Their formation responds to a certain mode of production in a given period of history. Social classes confront one another directly, transversally, or covertly at certain historical moments, to put an end to the exploitation of man by man and to free men and women from all oppression and servitude.

Psychoanalysis is also expected to provide liberation from the symptoms and suffering that are produced. To obtain this, analysis leads to the alleviation of repression. This is precisely where Freudianism and Marxism touch to constitute a grand *impasse*, *Freudo-Marxism*, one of the most ambitious attempts: the confluence of two dissimilar, even antagonistic, discourses. For the aim is to establish a parallel between social repression and sexual repression. Up to a short time ago, it was said that Marx and Freud

joined hands in defining history: *the history of class struggle* and *the history of sexual repression*. However, the prohibition of incest, the foundational law of culture, has no parallel in social repression, because the prohibition of incest is not enunciated. Sex-Pol is denouncement and a program of political militancy in the shadow of Reich and his theory of *orgone* to liberate sexual repression; however, it suffers limitations both theoretical and practical. The objective of social repression is to preserve, ruthlessly, the political power of the State. A repression achieved in many ways: *with bread and the circus*, soccer, spectacles, bribes, abandonment of symbolic obligations, or the cowardice of the masses...

For psychoanalysis, sexual repression is not a direct, immediate effect, nor one that can be localized in social subjection, because for psychoanalysis repression is not produced by any injunction. When parents anticipate all their child's needs and desires, believing that they have satisfied all their demands, they deny him all that which is beyond the demands, because they cannot – and do not – want to recognize that the child's desire is sexual. This is why repression is imposed, though no prohibition exists. For psychoanalysis, repression is not the effect of the injunction. Thus, political power is not linked to psychoanalytic repression.

No revolution has succeeded in eliminating repression, and none ever will. Political liberation does not mean emancipating oneself from a mode of production or from the reigning tyrant but, rather, from the Master and the power structure. For this reason, political liberation is utopian, in that it seeks to achieve something beyond eliminating repression, for it demands the fall of the unifying symbol of the social group that makes the social bond, the chief (who can be deposed, even assassinated, but only to be replaced by another to preserve social cohesion). As Pommier (1987) affirms, "though economic liberation is historically viable, political liberation is, in contrast [and] in this sense, absolutely utopian" (p. 185). Perhaps this is why Trotsky proposed, in addition to the economic revolution, the political one, the permanent revolution to impede Stalin's dictatorship. A project that evokes a phrase from Milan Kundera's (1981) novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting".

The subject produces an *impasse* in Freud-Marxism, a stalemate, a difficulty apparently insurmountable; for the subject cannot be reduced to a theory, a social system, a political project, since it is for-

ever gestating something unexpected. A subject radically opposed to society and even to culture itself, for it is the irreducible, that which introduces discontinuity and difference in what is homogeneous, uniform, and stable in every society.

A subject that is not pure negativity, pure difference, but a *plus*, an excess that creates something new in the bosom of the society conceived as Unity, tearing it apart with its invention. Something that goes beyond the economy, the field of conservation and dominion, and that Freud calls the unconscious; the desire that goes beyond necessity, an anti-economic point of view, an excess of the *drives*; a beyond the homeostatic equilibrium, a *Beyond the pleasure principle*. A subject that surpasses life, through an excess of potency, that by limiting itself identifies itself with the Other. A subject that, in order to realize itself, must make a new being. A subject that does not rest, that does not subject itself to the being of any State, as Eugenio Trias points out, because it is restlessness until death, as Georges Bataille's philosophy of excess teaches.

## Conclusion

It is possible to recognize Freud-Marxism in the programs of the proletarian movement, for it promises economic, political and sexual equilibrium: *the full realization of the subject*, through which society as a whole must achieve the same objective. The Freud-Marxist mission reaches an *impasse* due to the fact that it demands the sacrifice of this subject (for the good of the community), conceived as alienated in bourgeois individualism, and the repression of its drives. This means sacrificing the luxury of living differently, for the good of a State that claims to be and not to exist, for a society where no subject has any reason to differ and oppose but only to renounce all difference. If what is demanded is the sacrifice of this singularity that is the subject, which is subject to language, it is because the great value of this subjectivity is recognized. If it is asked to sacrifice itself – as María Zambrano (1958) holds – it is because this subjectivity is capable of sacrifice. That which is unacceptable in political parties, psychoanalytic associations, universities, factories, schools, concentration camps, forced labor camps, and prisons is suppressed. Zambrano's radical position is shared by psychoanalysis, so that the subject may distance itself from the specular alienation that the enjoyment of group demands. The place of the subject is society, but with the freedom to enter its interior space, which allows it to dissent and risk changing that with which it does not agree.

The subject is unpredictable, it does not pertain to the future (which is predictable), but to the future that is insinuated with a new light. Its time is the future because it is the space of freedom. This subject distances itself from the group and retreats into its interior solitude, to the space that creates difference and the time of freedom, though it is impossible for it not to enter into conflict with society, which lives in the past. The subject goes beyond her, with her customs and traditions. The drama of the subject is that it must confront the past through a society that does not pass, but that sustains itself through its rites and fears, its way of being and enduring, of returning and embracing its ancient masters.

However, thanks to the thought and practice of Freudo-Marxism, there emerge social demands and struggles that gestate reforms that socially humanize capitalism. These changes make possible diverse inquiries into subjective life, that before this movement were excluded from social and political discourse. Freudo-Marxism, with its program of sexual and political liberation, is in the constitutions of all modern states and is gradually making inroads into those of Latin American countries as well.

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