

david pavón-cuéllar

Marx in Lacan: Proletarian Truth in Opposition to Capitalist Psychology

By David Pavón-Cuéllar, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo in Morelia (Mexico)

Abstract *In Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, there is a precise place for Marx in relation to psychology. It is the place of truth in opposition to capitalism. It is also the place of subversion against adaptation. According to Lacan, psychology adapts people to the capitalist system, while Marx reveals the subversive truth that underlies the system. This truth emerges as the real symptom of a purely symbolic system. It is the symptom of a proletarianized subject reduced to the workforce that makes the work of the system. If this work can be psychoanalytically conceived as the work of the unconscious, its force can be Lacanianly conceived as the enunciating workforce that expresses the discourse articulated by the Other. This suffering workforce is a symptom that implies frustration and reasonably motivates workers' struggle against liberal capitalism.*

In Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, there is a precise place for Marx in relation to psychology. It is the place of truth in opposition to capitalism. It is also the place of subversion against adaptation.

According to Lacan, psychology adapts people to the symbolic system of capitalism, while Marx subverts this system by revealing the revolting truth that underlies it. This truth emerges as the symptom of an exploited, alienated and proletarianized subject reduced to labour, labour power, manpower, real workforce that makes the work of the symbolic system.

If the work of the symbolic system can be psychoanalytically defined as the work of the unconscious, its real workforce can be Lacanianly described as the enunciating workforce that expresses the discourse articulated by the Other. In the Lacanian reading of the Marxian analysis of capitalism, the subject reduced to this workforce appears as a symptom that implies frustration, brings about class consciousness and reasonably motivates worker's struggle against capitalism. However, in a Lacanian critique directed to both liberal and communist capitalisms, it is asserted that such a symptom can only be embodied by the proletarian condition in itself, as different from the proletarian condition for itself, whose class consciousness constituted a new capitalist psychology that concealed again the truth that had been revealed by Marx. Just as the old capitalist psychology, the new one would

have been aimed at adapting the subject to the symbolic system of capitalism. Actually, for Lacan, this adaptation is always the essential aim of psychology. This is why Lacan rejects psychology.

Reality of the Capitalist System and Possibility of the Human Subject

Lacan is not a psychologist, but a psychoanalyst. He is a radical psychoanalyst who drastically rejects psychology. This rejection of psychology is constitutive of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which has been aggressively constructed against psychology, especially Ego-psychology and other psychological deviations from psychoanalysis. For Lacan, psychoanalysis must resist psychology. Psychoanalysis must not let itself be absorbed, employed, or contaminated by psychology. In short, psychoanalysis must avoid psychology.

The term "psychology" usually has a negative connotation in Lacanian discourse. Here, as the case may be, psychology implies misinterpretation, misrepresentation, illusion, deception, manipulation, trivialization, and so on. These implications synthesize elaborate Lacanian denunciations of psychology. Among these denunciations, there is one that seems to be directly connected to the position of Marx in Lacan. It is the denunciation of the complicity between psychology and capitalism. This complicity is emphasized in 1965, in the twelfth seminary, when Lacan ex-

PLICITLY maintains that “all modern psychology is made to explain how a human being can behave in the capitalist structure” (Lacan, 1964-1965, 09.06.65). Lacan does not simply say that psychology explains how a human being *behaves* in the capitalist structure. What Lacan says, is that psychology explains how a human being *can behave*, or how it is possible for him to behave in the capitalist structure. At stake here is the *possibility of human behaviour* in the *reality of the capitalist structure*.

For Lacan, the capitalist structure is the reality assumed by psychology. When psychology approaches behaviour, capitalism is that which is given. It is taken for granted. It is presupposed as that which is what it is. It is just the way it is. It cannot be otherwise.

For psychology, capitalism is a closed reality. On the contrary, our behaviour is an open possibility. Our behaviour is still possible and not yet real. It is not yet what it is, but it is still what it can be thanks to psychology. However, for psychology, our behaviour can only be in the capitalist reality. So our behaviour *is only what it can be* in the capitalist reality, while this reality *can only be what it is*. The capitalist structure is the only conceivable context for our behaviour, which is only what it can be in order to be adapted to the capitalist structure. This adaptation of a flexible behaviour to a rigid capitalist structure is the central aim of psychological practice.

For psychology, paradoxically, the historical reality of capitalism is supposed to be something fixed and unchangeable, while the universal possibility of human behaviour is limited to the specific reality of capitalism. So, in fact, for psychology, human behaviour is only possible in capitalism. In other words, the capitalist society is the only place where it is possible for a human subject to be. Therefore the conditions of possibility of this subject are limited to the capitalist society.

The conditions of possibility of a human subject in the capitalist society are precisely what we get from psychology. Actually, as Lacan has remarked in 1965, “psychology is here to give us the conditions of possibility of a subject in a society dominated by the accumulation of capital” (Lacan, 1964-1965, 16.06.65). Once again, this capitalist society is a taken-for-granted reality whose conditions of possibility are not at issue. The only conditions of possibility at issue are those of the subject. For the subject, it is possible to be. So it is also possible for him to stop being, or to fade away. But capitalism has to subsist. It is not possible for capitalism to stop being or to stop being what it is.

For psychology, by definition, capitalism *is*, while a subject *can be*. The problem here is that a subject, for psychology, can only be in capitalism. And how can a subject be in capitalism? This is the question that psychology must answer. By answering this question, psychology does not only *state* the conditions of possibility of a subject in capitalism. As Lacan has remarked, psychology

gives these conditions. By giving these conditions of possibility of a subject in capitalism, psychology makes possible the existence of a subject in capitalism. Psychology helps capitalism to have a subject at its disposal. This disposable human subject is what the capitalist system receives from the psychological ideology.

Psychological Ideology and Adaptation of the Human Subject to the Capitalist System

In the Lacanian representation of an essentially religious psychology (Lacan, 1953-1954, 23.06.54, pp. 394-395; 1974-1975, 15.04.75), as in the Marxian representation of an essentially psychological religion (Marx, 1843, p. 202; Marx & Engels, 1844, VIII, II, p. 620), there is a sort of pious spiritualist ideology through which the materialist capitalist system equips itself with an appropriate subject (Marx & Engels, 1844, VI, II, pp. 546-547). What is at stake here is not a human being in general, but a subject for capitalism, suited for capitalism, adapted to capitalism. It is the subject “alone”, the “bourgeois”, the human being submitted to “inhuman elements”, the “religious” and “alienated man” who is “lost for himself”, the “private man” who “reduces the others to mediums, reduces also himself to a medium, and become the toy of unknown powers” (Marx, 1844b, pp. 356-363). This adapted being is the human being of psychology.

For psychology, as Lacan (1955-1956) has pointed out in his third seminary, “human beings are adapted beings, since they are alive, and therefore everything has to fit” (11.01.56, p. 95). Everything has to fit for human beings to be alive. Now, in view of the fact that human beings are alive in the capitalist system, everything has to fit in this system. So everything has to fit this system. Everything has to be adapted to the system. So human beings have also to be adapted to the system. Their adaptation to the reality of the system is their fundamental condition of possibility in the system.

To subsist in the capitalist system, subjects have to be adapted to it, suited for it, good for it, useful for it, usable or exploitable by it. This exploitability of the subjects is just the potentiality implied in the actuality of their adaptation. When psychology facilitates *adaptation to the system*, it also enables *exploitation by the system*. Economical exploitation is assisted by psychological adaptation. Adaptive psychology helps the exploiting system. Correlatively, the system uses psychology for the purpose of exploitation. We may say that *psychology is exploited to exploit*. We may also say that social exploitation is that for what psychology is used. With good reason, Lacan (1960) explicitly accuses “psychology” of this “vile use for social exploitation” (p. 278). This use is a “social mission of psychology” (Braunstein, 1975). Psychology fulfils this social mission when it correctly functions as an “ideological device” that maintains the “reproduction of relations between the exploiters and the exploited” (p. 342), not

only in the “economical domain”, but also in the “ideological and juridical-political domains” (pp. 357-358).

In order to exploit, the exploiting system uses its psychological device. Capitalism uses psychology. The fact remains that capitalism may be conceived as a kind of psychology, or as an *ideological-psychological system*, which would use the capital and other economic resources to dominate. But this conception of capitalism obviously overflows the limits of psychology. Beyond these limits of consciousness, internal mental processes, motivation, cognition and so on, the capitalist system rather corresponds to a *meta-psychological system*. And this system uses psychology. So we may say that psychology is subordinated to capitalism. This subordination of the psychological device to the capitalist meta-psychological system governs the complicity between psychology and capitalism. The complicity is between different levels or dimensions. In a sense, we might say that it is between a psychological content and a meta-psychological form. In traditional Marxist terms, we would say that it is between the superstructure and the base. The economic base of the capitalist system uses the ideological superstructure of psychology for the purpose of exploiting people. To be more specific, the economic infrastructural exploitation by the capitalist system is reached through the psychological superstructural adaptation to the same system. In Lacanian terms, we might say that the real exploitation by the symbolic system of capitalism is reached through the imaginary adaptation to the same symbolic system.

Psychological Adaptation and Marxian Subversion

For Lacan, the imaginary adaptation to the capitalist symbolic system is the dubious success of psychology. Also for Lacan, but in the opposite direction, there is the real subversion of the same symbolic system of knowledge, which is the patent achievement of Marx (Lacan, 1968-1969, 04.12.68, pp. 64-65; 1970-1971, 16.06.71, p. 164; 1972-1973, 09.01.73, p. 42). Therefore, in the Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, the relation between Marx and psychology amounts to an opposition between *Marxist subversion of the system* and *psychological adaptation to the system*. This is an opposition between confrontation and resignation, resistance and compliance, revolt and complicity.

From a Lacanian point of view, Marx is in revolt against the same system that is in complicity with psychology. Psychology looks after resignation to the system and compliance with it, while Marx promotes resistance to the system and confrontation with it. Finally Marx achieves the real subversion of the same symbolic system that uses psychology for the purpose of social exploitation.

Social exploitation is enabled by adaptive psychology and prevented by subversive Marxian theory. This theory prevents social

exploitation by achieving a real subversion of the exploiting symbolic system. The subversion is achieved through the subversive revelation of a truth that underlies the system. This truth of the system lies in the exploitation by the system. By revealing this exploitation, Marx has been able of preventing exploitation under certain circumstances. Under these circumstances, he has been able of subverting the exploiting system by revealing its exploiting nature. On the contrary, by concealing this exploiting nature, psychology enables the adaptation to the exploiting system and the resulting survival of the exploiting system. Therefore, psychology enables social exploitation by concealing it, while Marx prevents it by revealing it.

Marxian Revelation of the Truth

In Marxian theory as in psychoanalytical practice, the truth may be something deplorable and susceptible to be prevented by being revealed. The Marxian revelation of exploitation *will thus have entailed* a certain Marxist recovery from exploitation. We actually know that a symptomatic truth of exploitation has been practically cured by Marxists, in specific situations, thanks to its theoretical revelation by Marx.

Now, the truth revealed by Marx is not only the truth of exploitation, but also the truth of alienation and proletarianization. All things considered, Marx reveals the truth of exploitation, alienation and proletarianization of a subject completely reduced to the labour power of the system. In the Marxian perspective, this subject is the worker reduced to the workforce that makes the work of the capitalist system, of the “alienating language of material values”, of “objects in their mutual relations”, which has become the only “comprehensible language that we can speak between us” (Marx, 1844a, p. 32). In the Lacanian perspective, the same subject is every subject, as “each individual really is a proletarian”, a subject reduced to the enunciating workforce that makes the work of the unconscious, of the symbolic system, of language, which is always an alienating language of material values (Lacan, 1974, pp. 186-187; 1974-1975, 18.02.75; Pavón Cuéllar, 2009, pp. 58-61, 131-132; 2010, pp. 89-120). In both Lacanian and Marxian perspectives, “the work made by the subjects does not belong to the subjects”, but is “exterior in relation to the workers” (Marx, 1844a, pp. 60-61), who are just the “workforce” of the system, the “labour power” that is “bought” and “used” by the system (1867, I, II, VI-VII, pp. 130-153). The system owns and organizes the work executed by the subjects. The subjects are just the executors. They are “submitted” to the “means of production” of a system that is “personified”, appears as the Other of the subjects, and “employs” them as if they were “things” (1865, II, p. 384). The workers become “living extensions of the machine” (1858, II, p. 288). The “machine” becomes an “animated monster” that “unifies” the “individual works” (p. 287). The work made by each subject “belongs” to the system (1865, II, p. 383). It belongs to the capitalist system in Marx. It

belongs to the symbolic system in Lacan. It is the work of language and not the work of the enunciating workforce. It is not the work of the subject, but the work of the unconscious.

In the Lacanian perspective, the work of the unconscious is made when the enunciating subject expresses the discourse articulated by the Other. This discourse of the Other is nothing more than the historical existence of the symbolic system. So the system can be defined as a language that exists through each discourse expressed by the subjects, by their speech, but also by their attitude, their behaviour, their interactions, or their creations, including institutions, buildings, and all the other exteriorizations of the discourse of the Other. As for this discourse, it can be described as an enunciated knowledge (*savoir*) that conceals its truth (*vérité*), which is the truth of its enunciation. Now, for Lacan, this truth can only be revealed through a subversive revelation. This revelation has to be subversive because the revealed truth cannot be absorbed by a symbolic universe of knowledge that is supposed to absorb everything.

The enunciated knowledge is supposed to grasp everything, but it cannot grasp the truth of its real enunciation. It cannot enunciate its truth as cause. The truth of the stolen labour power that sustains the capitalist system, for instance, cannot be known by the system. It cannot be assimilated into idealist philosophy, utopian socialism, or classical political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nor can it be assimilated into hegemonic psychologies of the twentieth and twentieth first centuries. So this knowledge of the system cannot bring the truth under control. This uncontrollable truth revealed by Marx resists a knowledge that has to be disrupted by that which resists it.

The Lacanian opposition between Marx and psychology turns to be an opposition between the symptomatic *resisting truth* and the hegemonic *irresistible knowledge* of the system (Lacan, 1970-1971, 16.06.71, p. 164.). It corresponds to the Marxian opposition between the *revealed workforce* and the *disrupted working conditions* of the capitalist system: an opposition between the “living work” and the “objectified work”, the subversive “creation of values” and the adaptive created “values”, the “living labour power” and the “value’s autonomous being for itself”, the real “person of the worker and the capitalist” and the psychological “personification” of capital “with will and interests” (Marx, 1858, II, p. 282). It is the opposition between “the subjective” and “the objective condition of work”, the “work itself” and the “means of production” (1865, III, p. 412). In this perspective, psychology can be included among the other means of production, as *it produces something*. Psychology produces wellbeing, comfort, adaptation. It produces adapted workers, or happy workers, that is to say, *good workers*. But these good workers are also real subjects whose interest proves to be, thanks to Marx, opposed to that which produces them as good workers in order to enable their exploitation. Thus, in the Marxian pole, the workers are essentially “opposed” to the pole of psychology and other “means of

production” as “form of existence of capital” (*ibid*).

Ultimately, the Lacanian opposition between Marx and psychology expresses the Marxian fundamental conflict between Work and Capital, which can also be lacanianly understood as a conflict between the *truth of work* and the *capital of knowledge*. But this conflict is not reducible to an opposition. Capital is not only opposed to Work, but also generated by Work. The truth of work is the truth of capital. It is the truth of the capital of knowledge. Yet knowledge cannot know its truth. It cannot control or manage it, even if it is supposed to control and manage it. Even if the truth should theoretically not resist knowledge, it intrinsically resists knowledge. So the resisting truth appears as a symptom, a hysterical symptom of the irresistible knowledge. It emerges as a real symptom of a purely symbolic system. This symptomatic emergence is just another name for the subversive revelation. Actually, in a Lacanian perspective, we may say that the Marxian revelation of truth is subversive because the revealed truth is a hysterical symptom that has no place in the obsessive normality of Modern knowledge.

The revelation of truth is subversive because it is symptomatic. But there is another reason why the revelation is subversive. It is subversive because the revealed symptomatic truth of enunciation is also the unbearable truth of exploitation, alienation and proletarianization of a real subject completely reduced to the suffering workforce that generates the enunciated symbolic value. This truth is obviously frustrating. It is also comprehensibly revolting. This is also why its revelation may be subversive. The Marxian revelation of the truth is subversive, for example, because it cannot reveal the generation of capital without revealing the revolting situation of exploitation, alienation and proletarianization of those whose workforce generates capital.

As any other enunciation or generation of a symbolic value, the generation of capital involves a derealisation or degradation of the real subject who is exploited, alienated and proletarianized by a symbolic system. Thus, in the symbolic system of capitalism, the worker cannot generate capital without becoming capital, a “living capital”, a “working capital”, a “human commodity” (Marx, 1844a, p. 106). In general, the real human subjects cannot generate a symbolic value without becoming it, and therefore “losing” their real being, “devaluating” and “dehumanising” themselves (pp. 57-106). For Lacan, this frustrating and revolting truth was revealed by Marx. And its revelation was not without consequences. It reasonably motivated unions, strikes and many other forms of worker’s struggle against capitalism. It also led to denunciations without precedent, as well as economical, political and intellectual revolutions. In all these cases, the symbolic system of capitalism has been subverted by the Marxian emergence of its real symptom. Up to now, this symptomatic revelation of the truth of capitalism still subverts all normal and normalising capitalist knowledge, including *the psychological knowledge of the conditions of possibility of a subject in a society dominated by*

the accumulation of capital.

The Exploitable Human Beings and Their Adaptive Psychological Knowledge

The Marxian revelation of the truth shows how *conditions of possibility of subjective existence in capitalism* amount to *conditions of possibility of subjective degradation by capitalism*. Take for instance our adaptation to capitalism. Thanks to Marx, this fundamental condition of possibility of our existence in capitalism proves to be the fundamental condition of possibility of our degrading exploitation by capitalism.

To be exploited by the system, we have to be adapted to the system. The possibility of the exploitable subject has to be adapted to the reality of the exploiting system. This adaptation is ensured by psychology. Psychology helps us to be adapted subjects. Unfortunately, by helping us to be adapted to the system, psychology helps us to be exploited by the system. So it rather helps the system to exploit us.

To exploit human beings, the exploiting system just needs exploitable human beings. It just needs adapted human beings with an adaptive psychological knowledge. It just needs these human beings who know how they can behave in the exploiting system. So the system needs psychology, because psychology is here, as Lacan has remarked, to explain to human beings how they can behave in the exploiting system. By explaining that, psychology really explains to human beings how they can let themselves be exploited by the exploiting system. So, again, psychology helps the capitalist system to exploit, or, to be more precise, psychology helps the exploiting system to have exploitable subjects at its disposal. These subjects are not only found by psychology, but they may also be shaped by psychology. As we know, psychology shapes the exploitable subjects by adapting them to the exploiting system. Adapted to the exploiting system, the subjects are adapted for exploitation by the system.

A subject is adapted to the system when he “obeys” this “system of relations of society” (Cf. Leontyev, 1977). This adaptive obedience already involves the determination, motivation and execution of an activity, and the exploitation of it, and not only the adaptation of an already existing activity to the system. As Leontyev observes, “in society man finds not only his external conditions to which he must adapt his activity, but also these very social conditions carry in themselves the motives and aims of his activity” (ibid). The motives and aims of the activity have to be already adapted to *the system of relations of society*. The subjects have to be deeply and sincerely adapted, *psychologically adapted* at the level of their feelings and wishes, to the exploiting symbolic system. This is the only way for the subjects to be adapted for exploitation by the system.

To be adapted for exploitation by the system, the subjects have to be frankly resigned, from the bottom of their heart, to the reality of the system. They have to sentimentally comply with the system. They have to be in profound complicity with the system. This is why the system needs psychology. It needs psychology because psychology puts the subjects in this psychologically adapted position of frank resignation to the reality of the system and sentimental compliance and complicity with the system that bases its power on its reality. On the contrary, by revealing the frustrating and revolting truth of the system, Marx puts the reality of the human subjects against the possibility of the inhuman system, in a subversive position of confrontation instead of resignation, resistance instead of compliance, and revolt instead of complicity. In so doing, Marx endangers the system. He jeopardizes the possibility of the inhuman system precisely by demonstrating that it is nothing more than a possibility, the possibility of “dehumanisation” of “the moral existence, the social existence, and even the intimacy of the human hearth” (Marx, 1844a, p. 20). This possibility of the system is the possibility that governs psychological practice in its complicity with the system. It is the historical possibility of “separating from the human being its substantial being, and turning it into a material, exterior thing”, without admitting “the fundamental human being as its true reality” (Marx, 1843, p. 962). Now, by admitting this fundamental human being as the true reality that underlies the possibility of the inhuman system, Marx logically weakens this possibility of the inhuman system, strengthens the reality of the human being, and refutes the necessity of adaptation of the human being to the inhuman system, which is a basic premise of psychology.

The Proletarian in Itself and the Proletarian for Itself

If the misleading psychological knowledge belongs to the system and adapts people to the system, the Marxian revelation of the truth impedes this adaptation by subverting both the system and its misleading psychological knowledge. The Marxian revelation of the truth amounts to the emergence of a symptom that disrupts psychological normality. This symptom is embodied by the proletarian condition, which proves to be shared by all human beings, as all of them are reduced to a pure enunciating workforce that makes the work of the unconscious by enunciating the discourse of the Other (Pavón Cuéllar, 2010, pp. 89-120). By expressing this discourse articulated by the symbolic system of language, all subjects are exploited, alienated and proletarianized in the system (pp. 189-193). Here is the frustrating and revolting truth of the system, a truth that reveals itself as the real symptom of the symbolic system, a symptom that is embodied by the proletarian condition in itself. This proletarian condition is the universal condition of the subject of the unconscious. As pure workforce of the unconscious, every subject of the unconscious is a proletarian in itself.

Now, according to Lacan (1968-1969), the *proletarian in itself*, as a subject of the unconscious, has nothing to do with the *proletarian for itself*, as a subject of consciousness (12.02.69, pp. 172-173). This subject of consciousness is deceived by the class consciousness of a Communist Party (*ibid*). For Lacan, the appearance of this class consciousness, in different communist environments, was the occasion for the development of a Marxist psychology that concealed again the truth revealed by Marx. This truth, which concerns “existence and not consciousness” (Marx, 1846, p. 1209), would have disappeared behind the Marxist psychology of a “consciousness” that was still conditioned by the “material conditions” of the system (p. 1056).

Just as non-Marxist psychology, the Marxist psychology would have been aimed at adapting people to the symbolic system, in this case the symbolic system of a communist environment. At least Marxist psychology, as we know, did not confuse this cultural environment with a natural environment, and understood that people should actively adapt *to and through* a symbolic system, and not passively adapt *to* a real environment. For Marxist psychology, active adaptation passed through consciousness, and consciousness was inseparable from technical activity, language and other forms of cultural mediation by the symbolic system. In any case, from a Lacanian point of view, consciousness implied deception, and deception enabled adaptation, and adaptation was considered necessary for the satisfaction of people. Even a theoretician as Vygotsky (1934, 2, §3), who goes far beyond simple adaptive psychology, assumes that “a need can be truly satisfied only through a certain adaptation to reality”, and this adaptation “is always directed by needs”.

It is certainly true, as Vygotsky (1934, 2, §3) points out, that “the drive for the satisfaction of needs and the drive for adaptation to reality cannot be considered separate from and opposed to each other”. There is not an opposition and a separation, but a dialectical relation between the two drives. But this does not imply, as Vygotsky thought it did, that there is a similar dialectical relation between “the pleasure principle and the reality principle” (*ibid*). If the reality principle can be conceived as a drive for adaptation, the pleasure principle cannot be reduced to a drive for the satisfaction of needs. Besides these needs, which can be satisfied through adaptation, there is desire, which is that which seeks satisfaction through the pleasure principle. Now, from a Lacanian viewpoint, desire “has no adequate object”, and so it causes a “fundamental ‘inadaptation’ of the subject”, an “essential inability of the subject to adapt” (Van Haute, 2002, p. 294). Subject cannot adapt because his desire cannot be satisfied. More precisely, desire cannot be satisfied through adaptation, but only through transgression, contravention, subversion. So there really is an opposition, and not a dialectical relation, between the transgressive pleasure principle and the adaptive reality principle. As for the Vygotskian dialectical relation, it is not between these two opposed principles, but it is between two correlative components of the adaptive reality principle.

The adaptive reality principle is the only principle that is taken into account by conventional Marxist psychology. This psychology aims at adapting people to the reality of the symbolic system that governs the communist environment. Actually, for Lacan, this symbolic system still was a capitalist system. Therefore, in a Lacanian perspective, we may say that capitalism still exploited psychology to adapt and exploit people in communist countries. So, in these countries, the Marxist revolution revoked the Marxian subversion of both the capitalist system and its misleading psychological knowledge. A new Marxist psychological knowledge covered again the subversive truth uncovered by Marx (Lacan, 1965, pp. 349-350).

Conclusion

The subversive truth uncovered by Marx has no place in psychological knowledge. This knowledge is impervious to the truth. The truth cannot pierce psychology without subverting psychology. Psychology is intrinsically allergic to the truth, and so it is also intrinsically allergic to Marx, since Marx is inseparable from his truth.

If being Marxist means to be faithful to the truth discovered by Marx, then there cannot be, strictly speaking, a *Marxist psychology*. The only valid Marxist psychology, as it were, would be a psychology that would constantly subvert itself through the truth discovered by Marx. This truth would prevent psychology from consolidating itself as an accomplished knowledge. The accomplishment of a spiritual knowledge would be disturbed and thwarted by its own corporeal truth. The practical truth embodied by the *proletarian in itself* would burst into the theoretical knowledge acquired by the proletariat for itself. But this ideal knowledge of consciousness would also arise again and again from the material truth of the unconscious. Then we would carry out the “repetition of the process”, well described by Mao Zedong (1963), that “consists in passing from matter to spirit, and from spirit to matter, that is to say, from practice to knowledge, and from knowledge to practice” (pp. 260-261). Thanks to this process, the truth would be always there to question any general representation of the psyche. Psychology itself, as a discourse (*logos*) of the psyche, would constantly be criticized by itself. This seems to be the only way to develop a psychology of Marxist inspiration, which implies “to brandish the weapons of critique and auto-critique” (Mao Zedong, 1957, p. 154).

A psychology of Marxist inspiration has to be a critical and auto-critical psychology. To be really auto-critical, this psychology must refuse to become a psychology in all the sense of the word. Instead of being a Marxist psychology, it would be the “Marxist practice” of those “Marxists in psychology” who “work in and against the discipline” (Parker, 1999). *In the discipline*, because they will not resist to ascend “from being to thought, or from

practice to theory”, but also *against the discipline*, because they will not resist to descend “from thought to being, or from theory to practice”, a practice of the truth that will “test the truth” of psychological knowledge, a Marxist practice that will only be consistent if it is critical in relation to psychology (Cf. Mao Zedong, 1963, p. 260).

The “social practice”, which is our only “criterion of truth”, is not only fulfilled in “material production” and in “class struggle”, but also in “scientific experience” (Mao Zedong, 1937a, p. 27). In psychology, this scientific experience can only be fulfilled in the experience of concreteness and particularity, materiality and individuality, which challenges the theoretical abstract generalities of psychological knowledge. These generalities always arise from a particularity to which they have to return. Here, in this particularity, generalities are enunciated and subverted, demonstrated and refuted, founded and suffered. Here lies the symptomatic truth of every psychological normality. But this truth of psychology is in contradiction with psychology. So psychology is challenged by its own truth. This is why the truth of psychology can only be recovered by a critique of psychology, which constitutes the essence of critical psychology. Then critical psychology functions simultaneously as a kind of anti-psychology that fulfills what Mao Zedong (1937b) expects from science, that is to say, to “reflect” the “contradiction” inherent in its object in order to “stimulate the development of ideas” and “solve the problems of human thought” (p. 59). Otherwise, when psychology is not critical, it is “dogmatic”, and its dogmatism would show the “laziness” of psychologists who do not see the contradiction inherent in their object and their discipline because they “refuse any kind of effort in the study of concrete things” and “they conceive general truths as things that fall from heaven” (p. 65).

It is clear that no truth falls from heaven. Actually, for us, there is no heaven other than the one of the symbolic universe. And the only thing that falls from this heaven is knowledge. But dogmatic psychology takes this knowledge as a general truth, and tries to adapt the social and individual subjects, with their own particular truth, to this supposed general truth. And, as we already know, this adaptation enables exploitation. This is why we need a critical psychology of Marxist inspiration in order to hinder exploitation by showing to the exploitable subjects that their particular truth should not necessarily be adapted to the general knowledge, but that it is this knowledge that should be adapted to the particular truth of each subject.

Subjects must have the fundamental human right to adapt knowledge to their truth. Now, to adapt knowledge to their truth, subjects must adapt the environment to themselves, since they are their truth and the environment is that which deploys knowledge for them. So knowledge can only be adapted to a subject through the material adaptation of the environment to this subject. Through this adaptation of the environment to themselves, subjects create their cultural surrounding and in this way they

distinguish themselves from animals. As Vygotsky (1925, §2) categorically asserted, “Whereas animals passively adapt to the environment, man actively adapts the environment to himself”. To this we may add that, whereas animals have to be exploited by the environment, man is able to exploit the environment. He is able to exploit it by adapting it to himself. But this adaptation of the environment involves, not only a risk of destruction of the environment, but also the necessity of transformation of the environment. Here, instead of developing some knowledge of the environment and adapting to this knowledge, it is a question of adapting this knowledge to myself through a transformation of the environment that deploys knowledge for me. It is a question of “transforming the world” instead of “interpreting it” (Marx, 1845, p. 1033). Instead of enabling the knowledge of the system to interpret itself again and again in order to justify itself and so justify the adaptation to it and the exploitation by it, it is a question of revealing a truth that may burst into this knowledge and so subvert it and start a revolutionary transformation that needs to be permanent in order to be effective. This “permanent revolution” has to be relentlessly achieved by a critical psychology that must uncompromisingly refuse any kind of “reconciliation” with the system that governs dogmatic psychology (Cf. Marx, 1850). Instead of a reconciliation with the system, there must be a “transformation” of the system, a transformation that has to be “permanent”, or “uninterrupted”, because it could never be limited to a “jump”, but it has to consist in a concatenation of “increasing conflicts” (Trotsky, 1928).

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