

Preface to Russian edition of *Psychoanalysis and Revolution*

In her 2017 video essay *The Left*, Natalie Wynn (acting under the pseudonym 'ContraPoints') portrayed two cartoonish characters – a rightwing and a leftwing activist – to showcase current problems of the left. The rightwing one is depicted as an inspired, charismatic figure who appeals to the emotions of the crowd, skilfully playing on the feelings of the audience. The left activist is shown, on the contrary, as not at all arousing sympathy, mumbling and muttering something about Hegel. In the video the rightwing one smugly breaks out a standing ovation, while her rival is booed at the end, and responds to the audience with contempt, a spectacle that is familiar to many leftists today.

The loss of popularity that the left movement is experiencing today is due to what can be called 'high barriers to entry': if Marx is studied in high school or university, this study leaves much to be desired. When a young man or girl is confronted with leftist ideas today, it is often about representation in terms of what Galbraith called conventional wisdom: there is a short retelling of politics from the standpoint of dominant ideological common sense, usually then simply explaining why these ideas are wrong or out of date.

It seems that the same fate, but in a slightly different key, has befallen psychoanalysis today: the discourses prevailing in psychology and psychiatry define themselves through their opposition to the psychoanalytic method; psychoanalysis itself, meanwhile is passed through the ideological apparatus of the academy, and so appears as an anachronistic doctrine, interesting only to historians, like the theory of phlogiston.

One day a Marxist asked me why some leftists turn to Freud, because, they said, Freud's concepts 'have long ago been refuted by science.' For me, this is a great example of the role of very ideological conventional wisdom – and is it worth saying that the majority today also hold approximately the same opinion about Marx?

In the case of neither Marx or Freud should we fall into this trap of imaginary objectivism. Scientism, which seems to have become the dominant intellectual position, is an ideological reflection of the political concept of the 'end of history' of the 1990s, a concept which argued that there was now an end to ideological conflicts, an end to competition between alternatives, since there was only one political reality – liberal capitalism. Margaret Thatcher once expressed this idea more roughly and more succinctly as 'There Is No Alternative'.

Such is the scientific conventional wisdom, that there is no alternative to an objective scientific picture of the world that will ultimately allow us to build a convincing and accurate representation of reality. Not only does this point of view have nothing to do with real science, which is always full of uncertainty and chance; it still ignores the obvious fact of its own ideological predetermination. For a scientist, the possession of knowledge always precedes its formal investigation: let us take the example of a militant atheist – they know that there is no God (or ghosts or witchcraft, and so on) even before the demonstrate further evidence of his non-existence.

This position is absolutely Stalinist, it bears the clear imprint of what Slava Žižek in his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology* calls 'faith before faith': 'The subject believes, not knowing

what he believes, so that the final conversion to the new faith turns out to be a completely formal action, after which we will find out what we actually believed in’.

Dmitri Shepilov, a Soviet economist and politician who fell out of favour after Khrushchev’s victory in the internal political struggle, and who was the hero of the famous anecdotal formula of the ‘anti-party group, which included Molotov, Kaganovich, Malenkov ... and Shepilov, who joined them’, says in his autobiography is the following: ‘... Stalin understood: our economy is not doing well because there are no foundations of economic science. People don’t know how to properly run a household. We urgently need to write a textbook on political economy, not as agitation but as a real guide to action ... He immediately explained to me, and very competently, some questions that need to be explained in the textbook. At the same time, he quoted Lenin, went up to the cupboard, took out some books, did not look, but immediately opened the necessary pages ... We wrote the textbook in separate chapters. I managed to give four chapters to Stalin. He edited them himself and spoke to me about each in a very fundamental way’.

In this passage, Stalin appears as a kind of superman, in addition to unlimited power possessing absolute intellectual superiority. He is the Master who has objective knowledge of reality, holds representation of the dominant signifier, the ultimate and absolute point of reference. It is curious that after Stalin’s death Shepilov accused Khrushchev of lack of education combined with a pretence of omniscience, for which he paid the price, removal from power.

When Mark Fisher put forward the scandalous notion of calling the impersonal logic of modern neoliberal capitalism ‘market Stalinism,’ many smirked, suspecting a typically leftist tendency to exaggerate. Today, however, it is becoming more and more obvious that this concept well describes not only the economic conditions in which we find ourselves today (strict adherence to the ‘objective’ logic of economic market laws that dominate people), but also the intellectual environment that produces ideas, thereby legitimizing these very conditions in the eyes of the majority.

Capitalism does not have any ‘market Stalin’ (although such a figure could easily be imagined, for example, in the form of the dream of some ‘classical liberals’ about Pinochet or Lee Kuan Yew), but this figure is transformed, in the words of Jorge Aleman, into a headless force spreading ‘without limit to the last limit of life’. Nevertheless, capitalist conventional wisdom functions as if this figure was invisibly present in the economic system, as if this figure was distributed among all who participate in it. This fantasy figure accordingly possesses the same objective and final knowledge about the economic reality of late capitalism that Stalin allegedly possessed about the Soviet economy.

The neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek came up with the idea of distributed knowledge: unlike traditional academic knowledge which is concentrated among intellectuals, scientists and experts, this distributed knowledge is born from the daily activities of ordinary participants in economic activity. Hayek is here shifting from the figure of a single Master, who owns unconditional knowledge, to the idea of ‘objectivity’ (Marx would say ‘ghostly objectivity’) that dominates individual consciousness and actions.

This move is fully described by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in his Seventeenth Seminar in the form of a transition from the 'discourse of the Master' to the 'discourse of the University'. The semblance of objectivity created by the social form of the University (as an objective system of knowledge which is independent of the actions of an individual), in fact, implicitly hides the Master who has the power to give orders. This is the 'distributed impersonal market Stalin' which today operates as a neoliberal intellectual status quo, a position of 'no alternative'.

This is the status that formal academic social sciences have today: sociology, economics, psychology, and others. This has grown force in the last few decades through the colonization of the scientific field of social knowledge by neoliberal economics, which George Stigler called 'economics imperialism', the imperialism of economics. The method of neoclassical economics – the movement from the general to the particular (of assumptions and models built on their basis) – is becoming a comprehensive method in other areas of social knowledge. Psychologists are told that scientific work in which no quantitative comparison of any two theoretically determined variables is carried out does not meet the criteria of 'science'.

Psychological practice, formed under the influence of this Master, scientism, has the same gloomy features as Stalinism: absolute confidence in access to objective truth, arrogating to itself the right to speak on its behalf, a contemptuous or nihilistic attitude towards everything that cannot be formulated in the ideological language of neoliberal psychology.

Last but not least, this concerns psychoanalysis, which for mainstream psychology acts as an enfant terrible – just like Marxism in relation to dominant socio-economic doctrine. Gandhi is credited with saying that the liberation movement goes through four stages: 'At first they don't notice you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you. And then you win'.

Since both Marxism and psychoanalysis indicate a lack, a gap in the imaginary integrity of the subject field (of economics and psychology, respectively), they are simultaneously subjected to all three procedures: at the same time, they are not noticed, ridiculed and attacked. There is no talk of victory yet.

It seems that I quite specifically answered the question of why today *Psychoanalysis and Revolution* by Ian Parker and David Pavón-Cuéllar seems to be a text that is more than relevant. Today there are four generally accepted ways to look at the relationship between psychology and activism: complete ignorance of each other (during the day a political activist goes to a rally, and in the evening he comes to a cosy psychologist's office to talk about his childhood); hostility of activism to psychology ('it is not proper for conscious political activism to delve into personal problems when it is necessary to act ...'); the hostility of psychology to activism ('political activists play when they just need to start with themselves, their problems'); absorption of activism by psychology (psychological language begins to penetrate political activism, political problems are formulated in it: patriarchy is 'toxic', exploitation 'restricts self-development,' etc.).

None of these methods are satisfactory: in the first three cases, the principle of division in societies of control leaves the various areas of human life isolated, guaranteeing the

panoptic machine control of subjects within these areas; in the fourth case, although there is a certain positive result – progressive goals like the fight against patriarchy or exploitation are recognized as legitimate – the political struggle turns into a personal matter for everyone, into a struggle against personal discomfort. A psychological language adapted to political activism is an inconvenient, inappropriate, although sometimes a helpful tool for progressive action.

As Parker and Pavón-Cuéllar point out, psychoanalysis is not psychology. In the same sense, we can say that Marxism is not an economic theory. Both of these practices have their own unique ways of pointing out symptoms indicative of social scarcity in late capitalism. There are methods that neither mainstream psychology nor mainstream economics have mastered.

The timeliness of this book lies precisely in the fact that it proposes to stop and try to formulate the language that would allow us to build bridges between psychoanalysis and political activism, avoiding all the above-mentioned unsatisfactory modes of interaction. Today we can safely turn over the final formula of Marx from *Theses on Feuerbach*: 'Activists have only tried in various ways to change capitalism, but the point is to interpret it.' Žižek illustrates this formula differently with an indecent anecdote: 'Marx, Engels and Lenin were asked which they would prefer, a wife or a mistress? The conservative Marx replied 'Wife!' Bon-vivant Engels replied 'Mistress!'

And Lenin surprised everyone: 'I would like to have both.' Why? 'I would tell my wife that I am going to my mistress, and to my mistress, that I am going to my wife. And he himself to the library to study, study, study! *Psychoanalysis and Revolution* provides a good reason to tell your psychoanalyst that you are engaged in political struggle, and your fellow activists that you are engaged in psychoanalysis; ourselves - to take the time to carefully study this important book.

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