
CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOANALYSIS TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY

Pedro Sobrino Laureano
Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei, São João Del Rei-MG, Brazil

ABSTRACT. We seek herein to elaborate a comprehension of the current ideology with the aid of psychoanalysis and of some philosophers such as Benjamin, Zizek and Adorno. We analyze Sloterdijk's arguments, according to which cynicism constitutes the dominant form of consciousness in a post-ideological time, form which is characterized by what the author paradoxically calls "enlightened false consciousness". Then, we seek in Marx, in Freud and in the modernism of Duchamp and Malevich some elements for a renewal of the critique of ideology in an era of alleged disenchantment, drawing attention to the limits of the old form of critique and of some reductionist interpretations by Marx and Freud. We conclude this article with some critical reflections on the debate concerning the crisis of social authority and with some notes on ideology based on the Lacanian concept of *jouissance*. Our aim is to comprehend the transformations of power in contemporary capitalism through the psychoanalytical comprehension of the relationship between belief, truth and *jouissance*.

Keywords: Jouissance; ideology; psychoanalysis.

CONTRIBUIÇÕES DA PSICANÁLISE PARA A RECONSTRUÇÃO DA CRÍTICA À IDEOLOGIA

RESUMO. Buscamos elaborar uma compreensão da ideologia atual através da psicanálise e de alguns autores da filosofia, como Benjamin e Zizek. Neste sentido, investigamos os argumentos de Sloterdijk, para quem o cinismo constitui a forma dominante de consciência em uma era pós-ideológica, forma caracterizada por aquilo que o autor chama paradoxalmente de "falsa consciência esclarecida". Em seguida, buscamos em Marx, em Freud e no modernismo artístico de Malevich e de Duchamp elementos para uma renovação da crítica da ideologia em uma época pretensamente desencantada, apontando os limites da crítica anterior e de algumas interpretações reducionistas de Marx e de Freud. Concluímos com algumas reflexões críticas sobre o debate concernente à crise da autoridade social e com apontamentos sobre a ideologia a partir do conceito de gozo em Lacan. Nosso objetivo é compreender as transformações do poder no capitalismo contemporâneo a partir das ideias da psicanálise acerca das relações entre crença, verdade e gozo.

Palavras-chave: Gozo; ideologia; psicanálise

CONTRIBUCIONES DEL PSICOANÁLISIS PARA LA RECONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA CRÍTICA DE LA IDEOLOGÍA

RESUMEN. Se buscó desarrollar una comprensión de la ideología corriente a través del psicoanálisis y de algunos autores de la filosofía, como Benjamín y Žižek. Para tal, investigaremos los argumentos de Sloterdijk, para quien el cinismo es la forma dominante de la conciencia en una era post-ideológica, forma que se caracteriza por lo que el autor llama paradójicamente de "falsa conciencia ilustrada". Buscamos, entonces, en Marx, Freud y en el modernismo artístico de Malevich y Duchamp elementos a través de los cuales llevar a cabo una renovación de la crítica de la ideología en un tiempo supuestamente desencantado, señalando los límites de la crítica anterior y de algunas interpretaciones reduccionistas de Marx y Freud. Se concluye con algunas reflexiones críticas sobre el debate en torno a la autoridad de la crisis social y notas sobre la relación entre la ideología y el concepto de goce, en Lacan. Nuestro objetivo es entender la transformación del poder en el capitalismo contemporáneo, a través de las ideas psicoanalíticas acerca de la relación entre la creencia, la verdad y el goce.

Palabras-clave: Goce; ideología; psicoanálisis.

Some authors have been seeking to qualify the ideology proper of the current capitalism through the idea of cynical rationality (Sloterdijk, 1988; Žižek, 2011b; Safatle, 2012; Dunker, 2015). Cynicism corresponds to what Peter Sloterdijk calls "enlightened false consciousness" (1988, p.34), that is, a consciousness that, despite perfectly seeing the fetishistic character of its beliefs, continues, however, to enact them. In fact, the point of cynicism relates to the "even though" and to the "however": cynicism does not become ideology *despite* the consciousness that the subject has of the falsity of his/her beliefs, but precisely *because* of this very same consciousness. It is not the disillusioned realization that we no longer believe in social images, that we perceive them as mere semblances devoid of any legitimacy, but rather that we believe in them *precisely because they are mere semblances devoid of legitimacy*.

Sloterdijk argues that the social criticism grounded on Enlightenment, which sought to distance the subject from the ideological dream by waking him/her up to the material and historical reality, loses its effectiveness, in that it is reality itself that looks more and more like an ideological dream in relation to which there is no longer reality to which one could awaken. Cynicism would be this "*enlightened false consciousness... Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology*" (Sloterdijk, 1988, p. 34). The identification models of late capitalism are constituted as of the full recognition of social fetishism, of simulacra which do not ask to be taken seriously and which have in the reflective detachment their paradoxical effectiveness condition. In this way, the critical task of seeking for the detachment that allows the destitution of social imagination in the name of reality finds clear limits as, it is reality itself, for the cynical consciousness, which becomes more and more like a semblance.

If critique sought to denounce particular interests hidden behind universal statements, today it reveals the universality inherent to the actions of subjects who judge to be acting on their own account. Paradoxically, what the critique of cynicism should seek is the articulation of the *impossibility of disbelief*. That is, the impossibility inherent to the intentions of the subject who believes to be able to reduce fully his/her social position to the point of view of a particular group without, with this, effectively disputing the space of universal recognition.

Certainly, when a minority or a particular sector of society seeks the recognition of their rights, it argues on behalf of the particularity of its interests. Its claims, however, have consequences that concern the universal dimension of politics: the recognition of gay marriage changes the way that all subjects perceive the gender matter, just as the recognition that certain individuals should have access to quotas for a place in college or to a minimum income provided by the State changes the way that the *whole* society sees the issue of poor or black people. That is, *a purely particular action driven by the interests of a selfish rationality is impossible*.

And if critique sought to show the particularistic determinations inherent to universal statements as those of morals or religion, currently such a procedure tends to become innocuous. It would be worth going the opposite way, revealing the *ideological* moral constraint underlying the subject who cynically believes that his/her private interest is the only image of good. This is what we will seek to articulate in

this article through a reading of the articulated contemporary ideology of Marx and Freud and examples taken from modern art.

Freud, Marx and Modern Art

The importance of the analysis of commodity fetishism done by Marx (1867/2010) in the first chapter of *Capital* relates to the way that the philosopher subverts that which we understand as being the critique of ideology. Far from being belief systems that should be analyzed through its earthly and human roots, through the determinations of the production base, Marx advocates the idea that commodities present themselves in capitalism as trivial and mundane objects perfectly demystified. Commodities are perceived by subjects as objects determined by production relations and forces, *not* as fetishes. The role of theory is precisely to reveal the mystified aspect of that which, at first glance, appears as an absolutely banal object reduced to its material determinations. The theory does not disenchant the world but, strangely, “enchants” what is considered the objective stronghold of natural or social reality. Thus, it is not about unmasking the belief, but *unmasking reality itself*, showing the need for belief as constitutive of the sphere which the common perception judges as realistic.

Slavoj Žižek (2012/2013) argues that such Marxian reversal of the critique of ideology finds surprising affinities with the interpretation method created by Freud (1900/2006a). Normally, the discovery of the unconscious is understood as the revelation that phenomena belonging to universal spheres of valuation, such as morality, art, religion and science, should be understood through repressed sexual motivations. Freud would be a materialistic thinker for having seen in sexuality the natural reality suppressed by social ideological formations. However, when portraying the Freudian thought in this way, we lose, to Žižek, Freud’s central argument about sexuality. Far from having discovered the sexual natural base governing the high spheres of culture, Freud comes to a much more disturbing conclusion: that sexuality is crossed by the subjective ghost. To Freud, the belief organizes even that which the subject considers to be the immediate reality of his/her innermost sexual desires.

Now, the current cynicism paradox is that even the revelation of fetishism as a structural element in the constitution of what is understood as being the reality of material production, or of the fantasy that sustains sexual desire, is not sufficient to dissolve the permanence of the belief. There is a limit to the critique of ideology, just as in psychoanalysis there is a limit to the critique of the ghost through the resorting to interpretation. Because even the subject who is faced with the mystified character of his/her beliefs can continue to believe in them, and making him/her aware of his/her unconscious beliefs is not enough to dissolve them. The subject continues to believe in them, even if he/she is capable of rationally describing the material determinations that openly contradict the meaning of the belief. That is, it is the paradox of a subject who recognizes the fetish sphere as a key element of his/her actions and desires, but who, even so, continues to believe in the fetish.

Could we not highlight the similarity between Freud and Marx proposed by Žižek, by considering how such a critical program constituted a fundamental part of artistic movements of modernity as well? Let us take the examples of artists such as Duchamp and Malevich. In *The Black Square on the White Surface*, Malevich sought to represent the difference between picture and surface, the disparity between form and content that is responsible for the very existence of a frame, even before any object fills it. Duchamp, in turn, when exhibiting in museums trivial objects of mundane life such as a urinal, sought to highlight the role of the frame as being that which confers artistic status to any object.

One way to understand such works is through the idea that the artists would have desecrated objects subject to social fetishism, artistic fetishism, in the case of Malevich, or commodity fetishism, as in Duchamp. By showing the procedures necessary for the construction of artistic or industrial objects, they unmask the autonomy of the product as an appearance that ends up hiding social or material processes of value production. With social mediation being what contributes to the construction of the value of an object, or even the very production processes inherent to the work, the desecration procedure consists of inserting into the reified space of representation the productive dimension hidden behind the final product.

However, it seems that such works do not perform a simple desecration of objects through the passing of the ball from the representation sphere to the production sphere. In a contrary movement, they show how even an object absolutely banal, which appears to be already indexed to their own material or social production processes, depends on the framing through which it becomes a “sacred”, artistic object, revealing what Walter Benjamin (1936/1994) calls “aura”. If the current ideological framework is that of cynicism, it is not surprising to know that a work of art depends on those who are in a social position to value it, or that commodities are produced by production relations founded on the exploitation of labor. What is surprising is that such objects do not cease to be “auratic”, in the Benjaminian sense, even though we consciously know their secrets.

Let us remember the words of Benjamin on aura, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence (Benjamin, 1936/1994, p. 176).

Benjamin’s intention is not to mourn the modern disenchantment, but to think about that, which, in these objects absolutely serialized, arranged as automata before passive crowds that are content to consume them, constitutes the very determination of what would be an auratic object and a disenchanted time. In fact, would it not be the role of modern art to reveal how the aura, traditionally associated with objects produced by the irreplaceable technique of the artist, can be found even in the reproducible objects of capitalism? This is about revealing how a spurious or banal everyday object already contains the ineffable quality able to make it desirable.

The value of an object can never be known through purely empirical determinations. There is an element of absolute contingency inherent to the determination of what will make it socially valued, and it is such element that makes the role of belief fundamental. Perhaps that is what Benjamin explains, through the transition from the religious regime of the art, in which the latter is inseparable from the social ritual based on tradition, to a political regime in which the loss of the ritual is capable of founding a new collective bond:

... for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual... But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics (Benjamin, 1936/1994, p. 181).

If we reduce modernism to the idea of desecration, we lose the subversive nature of works such as those by Malevich and Duchamp. They would be absolutely consonant with the modern disenchantment, with the lowering of sacred objects to their mundane, trivial attributes. Indeed, the exhibition of a urinal or a painting composed only of figure and background reveals how the universal dimension of art is inherently artificial, for being dependent on the recognition of groups that “frame” an object, turning it into art. But such works are not limited to stage, in a parodic way, social valuation strategies. They rather seek to show the artistic character of the frame itself, the sacredness inherent to the act of cutting a spurious object, as in the case of Duchamp, or the form itself, in Malevich, and raise them to the status of objects of art. The fact that the subject can reproduce them, that art becomes accessible to anyone, does not constitute an argument against its characterization as art, but the very modernist argument for the political autonomy of art in relation to social rituals of religious nature.

One consequence of cynicism as an ideology is not only the attempt to turn any object into appliance, commodity, but also the opposite movement, that which consists of recognizing the mystified character of a particular object without, with this, losing its status. If the general equivalent logic makes every object equal to the others, reducing it to its exchange value, the former can only be

achieved through the election of an object that still works exceptionally well and whose reproducibility does not imply the destitution of its fetish content. This, of course, has to do with money itself, which is not an ordinary object caught in the circle of social exchanges, but the one responsible for the constitution of the normal exchange circle itself. Money incorporates the social belief in the circulation of commodities for possessing relative autonomy in relation to any material ballast, relying ultimately in the collective trust.

But it is precisely the fetishistic character of money as commodity that is fully accepted, without the subject's consciousness contributing to the destitution of the effectiveness of the belief. Behind the circulation movement of the value, the subject recognizes the historical character of production relations and forces, but such recognition does not lead to any social transformation, but rather to the acceptance of the fetish. The more society becomes skeptical, seeming to waive, in regard to spheres such as sexuality, behavior, culture and religion, any element of belief, the more money itself is dematerialized, becoming a self-referential entity that does not seem to depend on any actual ballast.

Marx saw how money embodies the symbolic power that was given, in pre-capitalist societies, to political, magical or religious objects. But what he could not anticipate is that, unlike other social formations, *in capitalism, the critique of fetish does not contribute to its dissolution*. About statements like that we can recall Safatle,

Rather than the tragedy of an economic system that works at all times by concealing the fetishistic character of its value determination processes in all spheres of social life,... we would have the cynicism of practices capable of redoubling its own system of representations, taking at all times a Brechtian distance from that which they state, as in an eternal parody (Safatle, 2010, pp. 91-92).

It is not enough to say that capitalism shows what other societies attempted to hide. If value production is understood in its material character, as production of men who work, fetishism is also accepted fully, without the conjunction of the two statements, that of the recognition of the historical character of production and the *jouissance* of social semblances, contradicting each other or, at least, without this contradiction turning into a mainstay for the transformation of social agents. Paradoxically, the consequence of reducing value to its material characteristics is not the subject's immersion into a disenchanting reality, but the prevalence of the virtual sphere of social simulacra, the phantasmagoria of capital as a sublime object that seems to be beyond the natural and historical life. In this sense, cynicism is a strange mixture of realism and fetishism.

The subject accepts the fetish, which lives together with the recognition of the material reality of production. It is a split of consciousness, a double and contradictory recognition: the full acceptance of social fetishes, on the one hand, and the recognition of the historical character of production, on the other. Contradiction, however, does not arise as a possible place of transformation, does not set a tension toward its resolution, seeming to destitute, with this, the resorting to dialectics as a social transformation engine. While the subject recognizes production as the historical and material foundation of society, he/she is also capable of enjoying the fetish, the ideological character of the capital expansion movement. The capital is like a social automaton or, as Espinosa(2007) would say regarding substance, a *Causa sui* (cause of itself) whose expansion moves the entire historical universe.

Modern art appears as a possible ally in the critique of cynicism by reintroducing the dimension of the belief in that which in other social systems was excluded as a possible object of belief. Instead of desacralizing objects, reducing them to their material values, the intention is to raise them to the dimension of what must be recognized by culture. This is the framing of what is excluded by the norms ruling beauty. It is not about, however, a mere transgression, but the raising to the status of art of that which is outside the laws of Good and of Beauty. It is such a frame that makes any object a sublime object, as in the case of Duchamp and Malevich.

We should point out, in this sense, a clarification necessary to the concept of materialism, bearing in mind that the latter can be understood through either psychoanalysis or Marxism. In fact, in the context of a society in which, as we have sought to argue, the main ideological statement is the one according to which we live in a post-ideological era, the very opposition between materialism and

idealism should be problematized. If the current ideology is constituted mainly through the compulsory demand for adequacy of the subject to the material reality, we can say that, paradoxically, *reality is one of the current names of ideology*. This is what Jean Claude Milner expresses, arguing how the psychoanalytic concept of ghost can help us understand today the new authority figure that is precisely based on the 'reality' signifier:

It is true that we, modern Westerners, believe to be able to escape easily from the Master words... Besides, in a society intended to be lay and liberal, the critical spirit knows no limit and cannot retreat before any word. However, this very movement has its own Master word: even after everything ends, it still governs us; for this reason alone, we do not perceive it anymore as a simple name, but as what, by definition, has more power than any possible name. That which defined precisely as being more than a name must, however, be named: it is, of course, Reality... but reality, in its structure, is ghostly, since, as fantasy, is bond value (Milner, 2011, pp. 56-57).

Indeed, contrary to Marx's and Freud's vulgar interpretation, the materialistic perspective does not seek to reduce all fantasies and fictions to the mute reality of sex or of production, which, as Milner states, would go beyond names. In fact, today there are those who call for a return to the reality behind the ideologies, whether on the left or right. Those who criticize the general financialization of economy for having neglected the role of real people and of the productive economy, end up, in this way, redoubling the discourse of those who characterize any social regime that moves apart from the current pragmatic and liberal model as being ideological.

However, what such reductionist materialism does not see is precisely the key step of authors such as Freud and Marx regarding the critique of belief. Because to both Marx and Freud the true materialism *must include the subjective fictions*, the way that the subject necessarily distorts reality by seeking to grasp it as an immanent part of reality itself. Unlike the "materialistic" conception that seeks to normalize phenomena through a causal explanation capable of serializing them, the critical materialism of Marx and Freud attempts to show how even the smallest mundane object, such as sexuality or commodities, possesses an inevitable auratic dimension, being crossed by the double determination of the ghost and of desire (Freud, 1923/2006b; Lacan, 1992/1998).

The idea that the disenchantment of the world would be inherent to the modernization process can be read, therefore, as a description of the ideology that is proper of a post-ideological society. Unlike the old enchantment, this is a paradoxical *ideology of disenchantment*. If the religious discourse is constituted by the attempt to monopolize the sacred, identifying the transcendent with the particular dimension of a social group or community, the task of the current critique is not to deprive the world of the sacred, but rather to point the dimension of belief as already at work in that which we consider to be absolutely trivial. Similarly, therefore, the subversive character of Freud's and Marx's theses was to having seen even in the natural reality of sex or production the presence of the ghost, in Freud's case, or of ideology, in Marx's.

Such revelation of the sacred character of objects deemed trivial does not constitute the nostalgia for the old dimension of institutionalized belief. It is rather what we might point as being the belief in the construction of a universality able to distance itself from both the transcendent dimension of the old Good, supported by the exclusion of motivations or particular groups, and that of contemporary cynicism, which consists of denying universality and at the same staging it. Universality, therefore, is not constructed through a constitutive exception, an excluded term that allows the universalization of a certain group, but rather through that which resists to the inscription of the subject into an organic whole.

If today it is universality itself that is excluded (being, however, staged) by the cynical ideology, the idea supported is that universality does not oppose singularity but, on the contrary, is condition of the singular. Ernesto Laclau expressed such idea through the short circuit between the *small object a*, concept created by Lacan (1962-1963/2005) to consider the Freudian partial objects, and what he calls hegemony, the contingent movement in which a particular excluded group is raised to the position of

representative of totality¹. Before constituting the simple inscription of particularity under a universal concept, this is about raising a partiality that evokes the impossibility of the universal, the antagonism that prevents its constitution, as being already the name of universality itself: “the object *a* – the partial object – is not a part of a whole, but ‘a part which is the whole’... The partial object does not evoke a totality, but rather becomes the name of that totality” (Laclau, 2005/2013, pp. 175-176). If the *small object a* is not a *part* of a whole, but is already the name of the very whole, it is so precisely for constituting that which makes the construction of a saturated, organic totality impossible.

Slavoj Žižek (2014a) also sought to show how a renewed concept of universality finds an unexpected support in the Freudian idea of death drive, thought of as an “unbound energy” capable of disaggregating bonds constituted by the life drive. The death drive, as the abolition of identifying ties that allow bringing subjects together in communities, becomes, according to Žižek, the bond of subjects who have lost any relationship with their national, family, ethnic or labor territories; subjects reduced to the character of rest of the symbolic operation that Lacan thought of through the role of the *small object a* in the economy of desire (1962-1963/2005). What is at stake in this rehabilitation of universality, then, is the contemporary need for reconstructing the belief, not despite but from the impossibility of organic social relations at a time marked by the crisis of the universals of culture.

The usual way through which one interprets the Freudian idea of unconscious remains tied to the common notion of critique of ideology as the demystification of alienated consciousness. Freud would have revealed, behind the moral values of modernity, the “dirty secret” of sexuality and unacknowledged desires. What is lost in this interpretation therefore is the real subversive power of Freud’s theses. If the function of an analysis was (mistakenly) understood as being to lead the subject to recognize the repressed sexual determination that distorts the universals of morality, today it is to point out the normative and moral aspect contained in the very raising of individual *jouissance* to the hegemonic socialization model. That is, the subject under analysis should not learn to confront the sexual reality of his/her symptoms, the repressed material base on which his/her high moral ideals depend, but to find a space where he/she can recognize his/her inability to take sexuality as being merely the selfish determination of the will guided by the maximization of pleasure.

The novelty brought by the Freudian description of sexual logic and the Marxian description of commodity fetishism is not to having shown the naturalistic, or particularistic, nature of social aspirations characterized by the universality of their statements. In fact, their analyses would thus have broken into an open door. It is perhaps not by chance that the popular reception of psychoanalysis has been mostly based on the idea of Freud as being the one who was able to show the sexual motivations inherent to the ideals of civilization. But sexuality to Freud does not consist of the interaction of biological causes, but of the organization of a system of social beliefs that determine what the subject experiences as being the intimacy of his/her desire, just as to Marx commodities are not the product of the concrete social work but of the social belief that sustains the very value production.

In fact, Marx and Freud did not inaugurate here only a critical program able to think of ideology at a time that insists on being characterized as post-ideological, but subvert the very duality between knowledge and belief, problematizing any social transformation project that is legitimized by the

¹ We do not seek herein to develop in greater detail the concept of *small object a* in Lacan, but only to point the use that writers like Laclau and Žižek make of it, concerning the dialectics between universality and singularity with regard to political thinking. However, we must point out that there is an important distinction in Lacan’s work between the concept of *Das Ding* (the Thing), as it appears in *Seminar VII*, and that of *small object a*, as introduced in *Seminar X* (1962-1963/2005). Now, such a distinction relates to our theme: in *Seminar VII* (1997/1999) Lacan thinks of *Das Ding* as an object of transgression that is born of desire beyond the Symbolic Law, implying the deadly encounter of the subject with *jouissance*; in *Seminar X* the relationship between signifier and *jouissance* becomes closer. The *small object a* implies, in this sense, a fragmented *jouissance* split between excess and lack. The Law is no longer what limits *jouissance*, both considered now through a correlation that occurs precisely through their disjunction.

Lacan expresses this point as well in *Seminar XVII* when pointing out how *jouissance*, far from being transgressor, is ex-time – neologism that seeks to express the idea of something that is at the same time internal and external – relative to the symbolic chain. “Moreover, it is for this reason that I articulate as surplus enjoying what appears here, and not by force or by a transgression... What analysis shows if it shows anything – ... – is very precisely that nothing is transgressed. To make one way is not the same as transgressing” (Lacan 1992/1998, p.17). This refusal of the Law/transgression pair seems fundamental, then, to the contemporary critique of ideology, since, as we have argued, the latter is precisely based on transgression itself as being already being the statement of the law.

demystification of the alienated consciousness. We have seen how both end up discovering something which modern artistic vanguards had also encountered: far from insisting on a mere unmasking of objects subject to the religious or moral thinking, the critique seeks to reveal the ghostly or ideological character that conditions the very supposedly disenchanted reality of capitalism, the belief implicated in fields that are *ideologically* perceived as not being ideological, such as those of production and sexuality.

Ideology and Jouissance

Regarding the contemporary ideology, we can ask why capitalism manages to become credible, despite it being a system that is organized from disbelief. According to our previous argument, capitalism is not legitimated because it constructs totalizing ideological systems which, by heckling the subject at all levels of his/her experience (from private life to sexuality, spanning labor and consumption habits), leave no room for critical detachment. The mediation of belief in capitalism can be related, rather, to that which we can call *non-ideological nucleus of ideology*, that is, the *jouissance* that the subject derives by subverting his/her own ideological identifications (Zizek, 2012/2013, 2014b). Capitalism remains credible because it mobilizes the fantasies of fulfillment and restitution of the *jouissance*.

Capitalism, in this sense, is the first social system to having recognized (at least partly) that which, through the reading of the surplus value discovered by Marx, Lacan calls the “surplus *jouissance*” (2006/2008). It is the coincidence between excess and lack that characterizes the human distortion of the instinctual, or even culturally determined, sexuality. Far from being forbidden, *jouissance* becomes a key piece in the legitimization of the system. If societies based on moral waiver ideals promise infinite *jouissance* for the future, by means of religious asceticism or hard work, capitalism does not work through the promise of future *jouissance*, but through the imposition of a *jouissance* that must be updated and fulfilled outside the symbolic mediation of desire (Dunker, 2015). *Jouissance* which, though entirely mediated by social institutions, is experienced by subjects as a particular choice.

The matter of the relationship between ideology and *jouissance* can also be related to the current debate about the crisis of authority. In fact, the debate about the end of ideologies can be retraced to modern statements such as those of the “Death of God” and of the “end of metaphysics” until what psychoanalysis calls today the “crisis of the law of the father”, the absence of a social representation of Law capable of stabilizing the *jouissance* of the drive. However, we can propose a Foucauldian question about the debates concerning the crisis inherent to a historical time supposedly characterized by the decline of social authority. Just as Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976/1999) wondered why we need to believe in the idea that sexuality would have been repressed by centuries of Christianity and capitalism to be released only in the twentieth century, the question now is *why do we live in a time that constantly needs to comprehend itself as being in a legitimation crisis?*

Debates on the crisis usually generate two opposing answers, not only in the field of psychoanalysis, but in the very field of human sciences, when sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, etc., seek to conceptualize the current power. We can divide such answers between nostalgic – those who, like Lasch (1983), criticize the prevalence of individualism in the contemporary world – and affirmative, in some advocates of postmodernism, as Lyotard (2011), who see in the current hybrid and decentered society the decline of the repressive power of modernity. In the field of psychoanalysis such opposition is translated into the oscillation between two perspectives: the nostalgia of the Law of the father and of the symbolic authority, on the one hand, and the postmodernist celebration of fluid, flexible identities, on the other (Dunker, 2011).

Now, it does not seem appropriate to associate each one of these positions with a certain psychoanalysis school, but rather to indicate that this conflict between two perspectives of power marks our society in a constitutive way. That is, it is a contradiction or, in Lacanian terms, something impossible to be symbolized, in the sense that this is a problem that splits society itself, not only the theorists who reflect on it. An analysis of the current ideology that manages to see beyond the opposition between these two fields, between these two answers, should not seek for an unambiguous

response capable of determining what power is, but rather seek to understand how the current power *is already structured around this contradiction*. That is, it is already articulated around the impossible unity between the two perspectives.

Power today consists precisely of this infinite hybridization of subjectivity, which is required to choose between identities *prêt-à-porter* [ready to wear] that could be continuously recycled, but excluding, in this way, any room for real transformation. That is, everything happens as if the new form of power operated precisely through social fragmentation and hybridization, not against the latter. In this sense, we think that the main point today is to rethink the role of radicalism at a time that is precisely characterized by a mixture of accelerated hyper-transformation and absence of real transformation.

What both the advocates of open society and the nostalgic defenders of the symbolic prohibition may not realize is that authority today, far from having fallen, *works precisely through the crisis*. A crisis which, far from marking the decline of authority – whether said decline is affirmed or repudiated – is the mark of its continuity, installing a perpetual state of exception through which the authority governs not in spite of, but precisely *because* of the fragmentation, of the social chaos and hybridization of subjectivities. That is, there is a complementarity between the “non-ideological” *jouissance* that subverts all and any authority and ideology itself. As if the current crisis of authority constituted its normal operation, and power, far from disciplining individuals in normative institutions, had as main task to organize the anomie through which it is legitimated. Power no longer seeks, therefore, to exclude the anomie and social fragmentation, but rather to manage it, using what would be feared by other historical formations as a continuous and paradoxical source of legitimation.

In this sense, we might no longer give the same answer that Foucault provided to the issue of sexuality. Everything happens as if such an answer had been fully absorbed by power today. To Foucault (1976/1999), the association between sexuality and truth is only a discursive construct intended to discipline the subject, to inscribe him/her into a non-historical truth norm. However, the current power does not seek to discipline sex through norms anymore, but to incite it; it does not produce subjectivities in line with rigid identities that normalize the social field, but individuals capable of parodying whatever belief systems; it no longer operates through the great universal or totalizing systems that suppress the difference, but by managing the difference in a anomie space where Law and transgression condense within the same statement. In short, the classic image of power as universal and totalitarian agent is no longer able to think of a power that is exercised precisely through the continuous exclusion of the universality of its statements.

There is something suspicious in a society that needs all the time to think of itself as being in a crisis of identities, bonds or leadership. It would be the case, then, to say that the contemporary authority is no longer constituted through the disciplinary space described by Foucault (1975/2001), in which the subject is identified before a norm, but through the *organization of the identity crisis*, including and first of all concerning itself, as a social power. Unlike the classic images of power, the current authority does not need discipline, Law and Order, but the perpetual management of its own crisis.

This is about understanding the new way through which the relationship between power and *jouissance* is managed. If the traditional conception of authority consists of forcing the subject to renounce, today it seeks to organize the post-ideological space of *jouissance*. The statement of power is that we should not take our social roles seriously, as they are only means in relation to the particular purpose of *jouissance*. The main task of ideology, then, is to organize the space of this non-ideological or post-ideological *jouissance*. This is how capitalism settles in, therefore: not through renunciation, the identification with the Cause or through the demand manifested by the belief in its effectiveness as a social system, but through the non-ideological *jouissance* of subjects who *do not need to believe in the system so that it works*.

In this sense, just as Marx said that “The man anatomy is the key to the monkey anatomy” (Marx 1941/2011, p. 120), capitalism allows illuminating the “dark secret” of other ideological systems. He shows how even ideologies based on universal ideals that imply the subject’s renunciation are also based on the mediation of *jouissance*. However, the opposite is also true: if it is only with capitalism that we can understand the transgressive nucleus of social systems centered on universal value

systems, it is only through the analysis of past systems and of the role that social belief plays in them that we can understand how the “autistic” dimension of the current *jouissance* is entirely immanent to the ideological space of social belief.

Even in social systems constructed from universal ideals, the subject only converts when he/she exchanges sacrificed earthly pleasures for a promised *jouissance*, or even for the latent *jouissance* that is authorized by submission to ideals. The common idea that the old power was based on the sacrifice of *jouissance*, while the current one would have released it, should be, therefore, problematized. Not only no ideology could be legitimated if it did not recognize the need to mobilize the desire of subjects, promising a useful return to the sacrificed pleasure, but also the current release easily becomes a compulsive duty capable of generating displeasure and guilt.

If ideology was only based on renunciation, on sacrifice or on moral discipline, it would become unsustainable. In some versions of Christianity, for instance, the moral sacrifice is exchanged for the infinite *jouissance* of paradise, the return of innocence after the Fall; in some interpretations of Islam, in turn, by obeying the commands, the believer is rewarded with *houris*, virgins intended to meet the sexual desire of men in paradise. In the same way, Fascism and Nazism consisted not only of the ideal of sacrifice and renunciation for the cause, but mainly of the organization of the non-ideological space through which the subject is authorized to enjoy. The totalitarian message of renunciation and identification with the cause must be complemented by its obscene opposite (Žižek, 2010/2011a): renounce, identify, and then you can steal, kill, rape, etc.

This non-ideological or, we could say, clinical element of ideology is fundamental. No ideology is pure, consisting only of the statement of renunciation and submission. The subject becomes fully identified with an ideological statement not when he/she identifies with his/her manifest text, but with the transgression inherent to the “non-ideological” subtext of ideology. Transgression which, today, is fully assumed by power itself, finding the light of day through the crisis of societies based on interdiction. It is a power that is no longer ashamed of its exercise, a power that not only is not afraid to update itself, but that *should* be constantly updated. Thus, this is what constitutes the singularity of the capitalist ideology. The latter reveals that which in other social systems could only be articulated implicitly: *jouissance* and transgression. Hence the emptiness in insisting on *jouissance* and transgression as subversion instruments of the current power.

Final considerations

“The normal man is not only far more immoral than he believes but also far more moral than he knows” (Freud, 1923/2006b, p. 65). This phrase from *The Ego and the Id*, in which Freud seeks to summarize the psychoanalytic program, contains two ideals we believe are essential for us to understand ideology. For psychoanalysis not only discovers the immorality inherent to morality, but also the morality that is proper of immorality. Thus, the critique of ideology does not consist merely of denouncing selfish motives as the ultimate foundation of moral ideals, but refers to the contrary movement as well, the articulation of the *idealistic* character underlying immorality itself. Freud does not place the ideals of culture within the naturalistic dimension of sexuality, but shows how sexuality is ideologically mediated. The primary task of ideology is to organize the non-ideological space in which, instead of thinking, the subject enjoys.

The Freudian thesis about the morality of immorality seems crucial at a time constituted by the crisis of the ideals of renunciation, sacrifice and submission to the cause. A time which has as one of its main marks the transcription of any universalistic aspirations in terms of private *jouissance*. Thus, if we characterize the task of analysis as being that of leading the subject to assume the selfish motives of his/her conduct, keeping a critical and reflective distance from the ideological dimension, we end up reinforcing the cynical rationality. We sought to argue how the task of critique, as well as that of the psychoanalyst, seems to be exactly the opposite. Just as Freud and Marx showed how even ordinary objects such as sexuality and commodities are crossed by belief, the intention now is to show how the

demotion of any universalistic aspirations to the particularity and selfishness of individuals is fundamentally ideological.

In fact, if power had as its primary task to organize the space of Law and Order and to promise absolute satisfaction for “Another scene”, be the latter represented by religious transcendence or the fantasies of the neurotic unconscious analyzed by Freud, today such images of power are insufficient. For the role of power is rather to incite the subject not only to the perpetual relativization of his/her social ties and ideals, but also to transgression. Power which does not want, therefore, to discipline the subject and suppress his/her mundane *jouissance*, but to organize the space through which *jouissance*, being consented, ends up becoming demanded.

Instead of the images of a strong totalitarian power that castrates individual freedoms, power today is characterized much more by the widespread inflation of this very same individual dimension, by the organization of the space of a freedom reduced to that of private *jouissance*. In this sense, it would be worth considering the role of critique as being the reverse of demystification. If the religious monopoly of the sacred had as task to erect an exception transcending the dimension of human impulses, the true critique of religion and mystification, in this sense, should show how the “mundane” reality is subject to the logic of belief.

This is what seems to constitute the modernity inherent to Marx’s and Freud’s thoughts, to show how banal phenomena such as slips, jokes, sexuality, production and commodities are mediated by the social ghost, and that the absence of ideology does not imply, therefore, the recognition of the positive reality behind social appearances, but the recognition of the conflictive nature of reality, of what distorts our grasp of reality and which does not constitute, however, the consequence of ignorance or subjective illusion, but rather a structuring element of experience itself.

References

- Benjamin, W. (1994). A obra de arte na era de sua reprodutibilidade técnica. In *Magia e Técnica: ensaios sobre literatura e história da cultura*. São Paulo: Brasiliense. (Original publicado em 1936).
- Dunker, C. I. L. (2011). *Estrutura e constituição da clínica psicanalítica: uma arqueologia das práticas de cura, psicoterapia e tratamento*. São Paulo: Annablume.
- Dunker, C.I.L. (2015). *Mal estar, sofrimento e sintoma. Uma psicopatologia do Brasil entre muros*. São Paulo: Boitempo editorial.
- Espinosa, B. (2007). *Ética*. Belo Horizonte: Editora Autêntica.
- Foucault, M. (1999). *História da sexualidade I - A vontade de saber*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal. (Original publicado em 1976).
- Foucault, M. (2001). *Vigiar e Punir*. Petrópolis: Ed. Vozes. (Original publicado em 1975).
- Freud, S. (2006a). A interpretação dos sonhos. *Edição Standard Brasileira das Obras Psicológicas Completas de Sigmund Freud. v. III*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago. (Original publicado em 1900).
- Freud, S. (2006b). O eu e o isso. *Edição Standard Brasileira das Obras Psicológicas Completas de Sigmund Freud. v. XX*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago. (Original publicado em 1923).
- Lacan, J. (1998). *Seminário 17, O avesso da psicanálise*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar. (Original publicado em 1992)
- Lacan, J. (1999). *O seminário, livro 7. A ética da psicanálise*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar. (Original publicado em 1997).
- Lacan, J. (2005). *O Seminário livro 10. A angústia*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor. (Original publicado em 1962-1963).
- Lacan, J. (2008). *O seminário, livro 16. De um Outro ao Outro*. Rio de Janeiro. Jorge Zahar.(Original publicado em 2006).
- Laclau, E. (2013) *A razão populista. Três estrelas*. São Paulo. (Original publicado em 2005).
- Lasch, C. (1983). *A cultura do narcisismo*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago.
- Lyotard, J. F. (2011). *A Condição pós-Moderna*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio.
- Marx, K. (2010). *O capital. Crítica da economia política: livro I*. Rio de Janeiro: civilização brasileira. (Original publicado em 1867).
- Marx, K. (2011). *Grundrisse*. São Paulo: Boitempo editorial. (Original publicado em 1941).
- Milner, J. C. (2011). *Os nomes indistintos*. Rio de Janeiro: Cia de Freud, 2011.
- Safatle, V. (2010). *Cinismo e falência da crítica*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Safatle, V. (2012). *Grande hotel abismo: por uma reconstrução da teoria do reconhecimento*. São Paulo: Editora Martins Fontes.
- Sloterdijk, P. (1988). *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Zizek, S. (2011a). *Living in the end times*. London: Verso. (Original publicado em 2010)

Zizek, S. (2011b). *Em defesa das causas perdidas*. São Paulo: Boitempo editorial.

Zizek, S. (2013) *Menos que nada—Hegel e a sombra do materialismo dialético*. São Paulo: Boitempo editorial. (Original publicado em 2012).

Zizek, S. (2014a). *Absolute Recoil: towards a new foundation of dialectical materialism*. London: Verso.

Zizek, S. (2014b). *Event: A Philosophical Journey Through a Concept*. London: Melville House.

Received: Jun. 16, 2015

Approved: Nov. 04, 2015

Pedro Sobrino Laureano: Professor at the Psychology Department of the Federal University of São João Del Rei [Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei] and member of the Center for psychoanalysis research and extension [Núcleo de pesquisa e extensão em psicanálise] – Nupep