

Marx's Destruction of the Inner World: from the Colonial Internalisation of the Psyche to the Critique of the Psychological Roots of Political Economy

David Pavón-Cuéllar

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Abstract: Concentrating on the context of the colonisation, evangelisation and modernisation of Peru, this paper will show how pre-Hispanic monist, materialist, communist and collectivist conceptions of the subject, which excluded the existence of individual inner worlds, were violently replaced by subjective European Christian forms of dualism, idealism, classism and individualism. This replacement will be considered through the Indigenous sensibilities of both Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Guamán Poma de Ayala, but also through the modern Peruvian Marxist lenses of José Carlos Mariátegui and his contemporary César Vallejo. The critique of colonisation as a process of interiorising an inner world will help us revalorise the historical significance of the way in which the late Marx deepened the critique of ideology and psychology by destructing the inner world through his evaluation of political economy.

Keywords: Marx, Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Ideology, Peru, Colonialism

Introduction: the problem of the inner world

A well-known aspect of Marx's *Capital* is its reduction of people to the absolute exteriority and superficiality of their economic performance. What people do is not motivated by their most intimate roots—that is, by their personalities or their vices and virtues—but is instead determined by their specific positions and operations in the capitalist structure. It is as if this structure were the only psyche or soul of economic actors.

Unlike the political economy proposed by liberal thinkers, Marx's theory does not presuppose psychological dispositions, such as egoism, self-interest and ambition. Of course, Marx does not deny these dispositions completely; instead, he conceives of them as effects and expressions of economic requirements, forces and categories.

Capitalism, as conceived by Marx, does not respond to any internal constitution, but creates the kind of internal constitution necessary to reproduce and perform its essential operations. It can be said, therefore, that one's psyche is what it has to be as a part and function of the capitalist system. However, this does not mean, at least in Marx's theory, that modern capitalism creates one's individual inner world and everything in it. Instead, one's soul is older than its capitalist version. Marx and his followers traced the origins of the soul back to the times of primitive accumulation, the process of Christianisation and even the beginning of the class society. The following pages offer an exploration of

some of the historical features and turning points of these origins in the context of the colonisation, evangelisation and modernisation of Peru.

Inca perception and European imagination

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), the son of a Spanish conquistador and a Peruvian autochthonous princess, was familiar with his mother's culture and gave a clear account of what may be called *Inca materialism*. He noted how "these Indians did not pay attention to speculative things, but only to material things",¹ explaining that they "saw in a material way", as "they were astonished for the effects, but they did not seek the causes".²

Garcilaso illustrated how Incas described their world as if it could not be explained. This materialist consideration of a material effectivity devoid of any speculative causality, which reminds us of Epicurean *clinamen* and Althusserian *aleatory materialism*, sustained and framed a coherent system of ideas about the material evidences of persons, things and events. Human beings were defined as *allpacamasca*, or "animated earth", and their lives, both before and after death, were merely "corporeal" and not "spiritual".³ Gold and silver were "superfluous things as they could not be eaten", but were "valued for their beauty and brightness".⁴ Their materiality was their only social value, and this value was materially perceived and not ideally inferred or imagined. The Incas, in Garcilaso's terms, "did not allow imagination to go beyond what they materially see through their eyes".⁵

The Incas also, according to Garcilaso, renounced imagination and held to their vision, to *what they materially saw through their eyes*. Therefore, they prized gold and silver only for their beauty and brightness, and not for their economic value, which required imagination. The Spanish invaders, by contrast, made wide use of their imagination, particularly with respect to gold and silver. This was true even when it came to the family, as noted by a contemporary of Garcilaso, the Inca nobleman Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala (1535-1616). Guamán described how "the Christian Spaniards, when having children, imagine everything in silver, in gold, in fortune".⁶ This economic imagination underlay colonial perceptions of everything, even progeny. In the eyes of the newcomers from Europe, all things evoked images of pecuniary value.

1 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 64.

2 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 103.

3 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, pp. 74-75.

4 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 224

5 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 105.

6 Guamán Poma de Ayala 1615, p. 120.

Guamán witnessed, with astonishment, the processes of abstraction, commodification, de-realisation and symbolisation by which Spaniards turned all things, including their own children, into lucrative objects: profitable commodities whose symbolic values were imagined in the forms of gold and silver. This value, unsurprisingly, aroused an image of precious metals and corresponded to something that was generally measurable through the general equivalent underlying money. This equivalent was, then, translatable into a "price", in which Marx also discovered "imaginary quantities of gold".⁷

Imaginary gold

Children and other things can only fully realise their potential as commodities, in Marx's terms, by "transforming themselves from mere imaginary into real gold".⁸ Thus, one must begin with imaginary gold, which will be transmuted into real gold. This transmutation, for Marx, "may be more difficult than the transition of the Hegelian concept from necessity to freedom".⁹ Significantly, for the materialist Marx, the highest spiritual operation, which brings about the very emancipation of consciousness and the advent of spirit in history, cannot be as demanding as some of the meanest trickeries that materialise profit in earthly business. The selling of certain commodities and their conversion into money or gold as general equivalents may, indeed, be much harder than the most difficult logical-dialectical acrobatics. This can be clearly appreciated in some of the passages regarding the realisation of value and surplus value in the second volume of *Capital*.

It is not always easy to realise the value or surplus value of what has been produced, especially when the product is a child, as in the case mentioned by Guamán. Once a child has been engendered, he must still be sustained, well-educated and, finally, well married to a rich partner or well engaged with a rich Dominican or Jesuit congregation. Through these steps, the child will eventually become rich himself, allowing him to "enrich his parents".¹⁰ This final actual enrichment of the imaginative parents portrayed by Guamán, this realisation of the surplus value of the child functioning as a commodity, is precisely what Marx describes as the transmutation of imaginary gold into real gold.

The crucial point is that gold, in its Western sense of pecuniary value and as a general equivalent of wealth and profit, cannot become real in the end without being imaginary in the beginning. Its psychic formation is a necessary step in its economic materialisation. In the old colonial

7 Marx 1867, p. 59.

8 Marx 1867, p. 64.

9 Marx 1867, p. 64.

10 Guamán Poma de Ayala 1615, pp. 120-121.

family, as in other cultural spaces of Western modernity, gold cannot be obtained from the outside without being previously forged by imagination in the inner world. This is perhaps why both Marx and Guamán noted the importance of imaginary gold. Without being precisely idealists, they both understood that gold must be ideally projected by imagination into things and persons for these to become truly profitable commodities capable of yielding real gold.

Marx certainly recognised the decisive role of the precious metals coming from the New World in “the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production”,¹¹ but he also acknowledged how the “showers of gold” were preceded by “the Southern imagination of the Iberians”, which “was bewildered with visions of Eldorados”.¹² This imagination of gold mediated perceptions of everything in the colonisation of Latin America and motivated not only the education of children, but also the exploration and annexation of new lands, the annihilation of other cultures, the excavation of mines, the exploitation of the labour force and the extermination of millions of people. In all instances, these hellish realities coexisted with heavenly images of El Dorado.

Spaniards frequently saw other things when they were following their imaginations and looking for gold. In a Heideggerian sense, instead of letting these things reveal their own individual truths, the conquerors destroyed them to find and extract general equivalents of all commodities. They put an end to all sorts of material presences in order to materialise their mental representations. Their realisations of their inner worlds resulted in the devastation of the New World. Everything real was immolated for the image of gold.

Incan betrayal

Imaginary gold was inseparable from all things perceived by the Spaniards. On the contrary, if we believe Garcilaso, the Incas’ material perception of the outer world was completely purified from the metalanguage and imagination of the inner world. But, should we believe Garcilaso? His own writings refer to several evidences of the existence of imaginary spaces that would have distinguished Incan civilisation from pre-Incan and other South American autochthonous cultures. While other Indians “did not think of invisible things, and venerated everything they saw”, including all animals and even “plants, flowers, trees, rocks, stones, pebbles”,¹³ Incans were able to develop, for instance, the “mental” or “internal adoration” of Pachacamac, an imperceptible abstract god whose name meant “the one who does in the universe [*Pacha*] what the

11 Marx 1867, p. 638.

12 Marx 1854, p. 108.

13 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, pp. 26-27, 301.

soul does in the body [*Camac*]”.¹⁴ Garcilaso himself was aware that this ideal god was “alien” to “all the materiality” of the universe as conceived by Incan materialism.¹⁵

Garcilaso considered that “Pachacamac and the Christian God was only one and the same God”.¹⁶ According to him, the internal adoration of Pachacamac was a forerunner to Christianity, since it confirmed the existence among the Incans of an inner world or spiritual realm, an ideal metalanguage that differed from the unique language of the material world. Thus, the same adoration confirmed an incipient dualism dividing language/metalanguage, materiality/ideality, real/imaginary, universe/soul or *Pacha*/Pachacamac. It can also be inferred, from a Marxist reading of Garcilaso, that these dualist distinctions were based on the fundamental class division between the intellectual work of the Inca elite and the manual labour of the “common people”, who “were not allowed to learn science”¹⁷.

It seems, indeed, that the class division of Inca society, which was also, logically, a division of labour, allowed the development of an idealist dualism and its ideal correlate: the inner world of imagination. This inner world had its own speculative language of reason: a metalanguage that was not unrelated to the “particular language”, the “divine language” spoken by the elite and “not shared with common people”, who spoke only the “general language”.¹⁸ This betrayal of monism and materialism, which distinguished the Incas from other more determinedly materialist Indians, might have facilitated the Spanish evangelisation and colonisation of Peru, and, more precisely, the Western economic rationalisation of the world and the correlative projection of imaginary gold into all material things. Actually, according to Garcilaso, it was God himself who made the Incas “capable of reason” and “more docile to receive the Catholic faith”, as evidenced by “how much prompter and quicker to receive the Gospel were the Indians subdued, governed, and taught by the Inca kings than the other neighbouring peoples unreached by the Incas’ teachings”.¹⁹

There is, therefore, good reason to think that the Incas, by giving ground to dualism and idealism, prepared the ground for Western imagination and rationalisation, which were also imaginations of gold and economic rationalisations of all things translated into the general equivalent of gold. Capitalism and Christianity, which cannot exist

14 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, pp. 62-67

15 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 64.

16 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 63.

17 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 202

18 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 353

19 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 35.

without an inner world for the imaginary gold and the spiritual God, for the excavation of mines and the introspection of believers, found an open door in the Incas' inner adoration of Pachacamac and their dualist-idealist metalanguage. We should not underestimate the historical effects of these internal cultural conditions on the conquest of Peru. The Incas' existing imaginary metalanguage was easily translated into Western ideologies. Their interiority was ready to be colonised.

Retrospectively, we can argue that the conquest had long been foretold before it ever occurred. The Incas were waiting for their conquerors. They were, in a way, already vanquished before the arrival of the Spaniards. Garcilaso did not hesitate to affirm that the words of the penultimate king Huaina Capac, who predicted the Spanish conquest of Peru, "were more powerful to submit" the Incas "than the weapons of the Spaniards"²⁰

Cultural development as a vital weakening

Garcilaso showed how the civilised Incas were, paradoxically, much more vulnerable than less advanced tribes, whose radical materialist monism and pure exteriority without interiority seemed to be relatively immune to ideology, ideologisation and ideological manipulation, as will be discussed later. This was the case of the "stubborn" Araucos or Mapuches, who chose "to die for not being vassals of the Spaniards".²¹

Following a Marxist classical dialectical reasoning, it may be conjectured that the vulnerability of the Incas was precisely due to their high level of cultural development. Engels would have suggested that their "step forward was also relatively a step backward"²² and that their achievements were made "at the expense of their best capacities".²³ On the contrary, as was reluctantly recognised by Garcilaso, the more primitive communities of Peru preserved intact all those capacities that Engels attributed to the primitivism of the Iroquois and Aryan tribes: "dignity, righteousness, strength of character, and courage"²⁴ and "personal bravery, sense of freedom, democratic instinct".²⁵

How can one justify the idea that primitive populations were morally and politically superior to more developed ones? Engels insisted that the reason for their superiority was neither "some miraculous power innate" in their race, nor their "specific national qualities", but precisely their

20 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 509.

21 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 397.

22 Engels 1884, pp. 74-75.

23 Engels 1884, p. 205.

24 Engels 1884, p. 111.

25 Engels 1884, p. 181.

primitivism, with its "gentile constitution", absence of State, classless organisation, equality between men and women, collective subjectivation, communal property and communist economy.²⁶ Moreover, at least in the case of South American tribes, this primitive communism seemed to be inseparable from the above-mentioned materialist monism and its resulting immunity to ideology, thus confirming Plekhanov's and Lenin's theses on the intrinsic link between materialism and communism.²⁷

Materialist and communist subjectivation

A brilliant literary example of the materialist perception and the communist disposition of South-American tribes can be found in César Vallejo's proletarian novel *Tungsten*, specifically in his ideal representation of the Indian Soras, who are depicted as plain, candid, unpretentious and unselfish people devoid of the senses of individual property, profit, utility and exchange. The Soras wanted only what they needed to live, and "lived their life as a generous and expansive game".²⁸ They gave to other people what they needed, without demanding anything in return, and "were so confident in others that sometimes they inspired pity".²⁹ They "ignored the operation of trading", "calculated" nothing, overlooked the "economic result of their actions" and understood neither the concept of money nor "the language" of wages and commodities.³⁰ They understood only what was materially present and necessary for their communitarian existence and their spontaneous movement in the world.

The Soras were descendants of the Chankas, who were described by Garcilaso as "bellicose" people characterised by their "obstinacy and rebellion" against the Incas.³¹ In light of this, it might be tempting to take Vallejo's Soras as an illustration of the most primitive Peruvian groups, which, by contrast with the Incas, made no concessions to dualism or classism. If we take this line of reasoning, the contrast between the Incas and Soras is that—as considered by Morgan in his *Ancient Society* and by Marx in his *Ethnological Notebooks*—between the "middle Status of Barbarism" of Incas and the "Status of Savagery or the lower status of barbarism" of the Soras and other primitive tribes.³² It is also the contrast, sketched by Marx and well traced by Engels, between primitive

26 Engels 1884, pp. 110-111, 180-182.

27 Plekhanov 1907, pp. 42-46; Lenin 1908, pp. 36-38.

28 Vallejo 1931, p. 90.

29 Ibid.

30 Vallejo 1931, pp. 89-92.

31 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, pp. 195-196.

32 Morgan, 1877, p. 198; Marx 1882, p. 186.

communism and the origins of the State, the class society and the monogamous family.

Yet, we must not overemphasise the contrast between the Incas and the Soras. The ancestors of the Soras eventually allied with the Incas and were then conquered by them and assimilated into their civilisation. Vallejo's Soras, by comparison, were only fictitious literary personages, who seemed to personify the Peruvian Indians in their generality. They may be conceived, almost certainly, as heirs and representatives of all Peruvian Indians, including the Incas. After all, as we have seen in Garcilaso, the Incas' worldview may also be regarded as materialistic, at least in relation to the perspective of the Spaniards, and this materialism is inseparable from the kind of communism emphasised by one of the most important Marxists of Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui, a contemporary of César Vallejo.

From Inca agrarian communism to Spanish feudal colonialism

Mariátegui's account of the Incas stressed their collectivist, socialist and communist orientation. In Mariátegui's terms, Inca society had a "collectivist organization" in which "collective work and common effort were employed fruitfully for social purposes".³³ Collectivism certainly "weakened the Indians' individual initiative", but it also "instilled in them the habit of a humble and religious obedience to social duty, which benefitted the economic system".³⁴ Mariátegui described this system as a "socialist economy".³⁵ He also accepted the existence of an "Inca communism", an "agrarian communism" that should not be "negated or disparaged for having developed under the autocratic regime of the Incas".³⁶

Mariátegui's interpretation was based firmly on well-known historical evidences of Inca agrarian communism, including mutual help, cooperative labour and social exchanges based on reciprocity; the collective ownership of farmlands by the *ayllu*, extended family groups with common ancestors; the communitarian ownership of waters, pastures and woodlands by the *marca*, tribes comprising several ayllus; and the redistributive function of the State, which ensured that goods were distributed to the different regions according to need. Most of these evidences were enthusiastically expressed by Garcilaso, who gave details about the Incas' social equality, their communitarian possessions, their collective forms of distribution, their obligations to work and help each

33 Mariátegui 1928, p. 13.

34 Mariátegui 1928, p. 13.

35 Mariátegui 1928, p. 14.

36 Mariátegui 1928, p. 54.

other and the absence of both poverty and luxury. Garcilaso explained, for instance, how Incas "collected provisions into a common place, to be distributed according to the necessities and largeness of families".³⁷ He also observed how all necessities were supplied and all dissipations were excluded such that "none could properly be termed poor" and "none could be called rich".³⁸

In addition to replacing a monist-materialist culture for a rather dualist-idealist ideology, the conquest of Peru substituted equality and communism for different forms of inequality and classism. This economic-social substitution, which was inseparable, as we have seen, from the cultural-ideological replacement, was described by Mariátegui as a process of destruction-construction by which the Spaniards "established the bases of a feudal economy on the ruins and remnants of a socialist economy".³⁹ According to Mariátegui, the demolition of Inca socialism, its underground subsistence as "ruins and remnants" and the subsequent edification and perpetuation of Spanish colonial feudalism under the form of Gamonalism were the most decisive factors affecting the situation of the Peruvian Indians in the 20th century. This "Indian problem" was essentially a "socio-economic problem". It was rooted in "feudal Gamonalism" as a "land tenure system", so its causes were "in the country's economy and not in its administrative, legal, or ecclesiastic machinery, its racial dualism or pluralism, or its cultural or moral conditions".⁴⁰

A neo-colonial assimilationist

Mariátegui's explanation of the Indian question was recently questioned by his grandson, Aldo Mariátegui, a rather uncultured and unsophisticated journalist, a virulent enemy of communism, and an influent organic intellectual of the Peruvian Right. Aldo Mariátegui discarded the idea of Inca socialism, describing it as an "act of faith" that revealed the "idealism", "romanticism" and "ignorance of Marxism" of his grandfather.⁴¹ Disregarding the aforementioned socialist, collectivist and communist aspects of Inca society, Aldo projected an extremely naïve idea of the Asiatic mode of production onto ancient Peru. In so doing, he ignored the long history of discussions surrounding this kind of economic formation, completely dissociated it from communist-socialist formations, and overlooked its fundamentally collectivist nature, its

37 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 47

38 Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, p. 228.

39 Mariátegui 1928, p. 14.

40 Mariátegui 1928, p. 35.

41 Aldo Mariátegui 2015, pp. 34-35.

rooting in primitive communism and its hypothetical ramifications for modern socialism.⁴²

Aldo Mariátegui's approach is too simplistic to be discussed. He used the opaque label of the "Asiatic mode of production" to argue that his grandfather was wrong, but he did not give any explanation for his claim. It is as if *Mariátegui le Petit* were driven only his desire to escape his grandfather's shadow by simply disowning him.

The same conjectural impulse might be also what motivated Aldo to reject his grandfather's conviction that the Indian problem was essentially a socio-economic one, requiring a socio-economic solution. According to the grandson, the "Indian problem" should be solved by "universalizing education, improving communications and road connectivity, extending the right to vote, and integrating markets".⁴³ However, measures of this kind, which are commonplace in demagogic liberal-neoliberal speeches in Latin America, were already brilliantly and convincingly refuted as insufficient by Aldo's grandfather, who showed, on one hand, how improvements in laws and administration are "quite useless" and have even "favoured the absorption of Indian property by the latifundium system", and, on the other hand, how schools, teachers and educational initiatives are "denaturalized under the pressure" of the socio-economic structure and even cancelled by the "mechanics of the Indian's servitude".⁴⁴

The rightness of the grandfather's points, as well as the uselessness and even dangerousness of his grandson's arguments, can be well illustrated by two of César Vallejo's most celebrated stories. The education of Paco Yunque, the child of servants, implies his submissive acceptance of his exploitation by Humberto Grieve, the son of the servants' masters.⁴⁵ Similarly, in the already cited novel *Tungsten*, improving communications and integrating markets are only means of the primitive accumulation of capital through the theft of the Indians' lands and the creation of conditions for the exploitation of workers, resulting in the systematic pillage of natural resources, the control and corruption of society, the destruction of the natural environment and the violation and prostitution of women.⁴⁶

We must not disregard the real general direction of the typical modern, liberal-neoliberal and progressive-universalist declamatory measures in favour of Indians. For instance, which is the common

42 Wittfogel 1957.

43 Aldo Mariátegui 2015, pp. 34-35.

44 Mariátegui 1928, pp. 39-44.

45 Vallejo 1932.

46 Vallejo 1931.

denominator of Aldo's measures of universalising education, improving communications, extending the right to vote and integrating markets? What these measures most clearly have in common is the colonial and neo-colonial rationality of assimilating the Indian universe into our universe, as if the two universes—for the mere fact of being universes—were not mutually exclusive and as if the assimilation of the Indian universe into our universe did not imply the subordination, inferiorisation, expropriation, exploitation and even annihilation of the former by the later. This is why Vallejo's Soras "lived in a kind of permanent retreat in face of the advance of Western civilization".⁴⁷ This is also why, in the 17th century, Guamán Poma de Ayala insisted that "Indians should stay in their villages" and that "there should not be Indians in cities, next to Spaniards".⁴⁸

Marxism as a modern religion

Aldo Mariátegui clung to the administrative-educational appearances of things, neglecting their economic, social, historical and cultural implications. This logically led him to conclude that the Marxist method of analysing such implications has no purpose. According to Aldo, Marxism offers no method of analysis, research or study, since it is nothing more than a "religion as extremist as the Islam and the old inquisitorial Catholicism", a "religious dogma" that "disguises itself of science and philosophy".⁴⁹

Aldo seemed almost witty when he pretended to demonstrate the religious character of Marxism by tracing comic analogies with Christianity: "Marx = Moses or Jesus; *The Capital* = The Sacred Scripture; Paradise = society without classes; Moscow = Vatican; the hammer and sickle = the crucifix; Politburo = College of Cardinals; Communist Party = Church; East-West Schism = rupture between Moscow and Beijing; Popes = Stalin, Brezhnev and Khrushchev; Maoists and Trotskyists = heretics, sects, protestants; Lenin = Peter; Che = martyr, John the Baptist; Saints = Luxembourg, Allende, Lumumba, Mosaddegh, Javier Heraud, etc.; Inquisition = Russian KGB, Cuban G-2, German Stasi, etc."⁵⁰ Unfortunately for Aldo, these analogies, which are perhaps the only worthwhile contribution of his book, had been already traced, nearly a century prior, by the Belgian socialist—and future fascist—Henri De Man, who also added several other analogies, such as

47 Vallejo 1931, p. 92.

48 Guamán Poma de Ayala 1615, p. 151.

49 Aldo Mariátegui 2015, pp. 20-21.

50 Aldo Mariátegui 2015, p. 21.

“workers’ solidarity” = “Christian charity”,⁵¹ and “revolutionary myth” = “Final Judgment”.⁵²

The truly humorous thing is that Henri De Man was already thoroughly criticised by Aldo’s grandfather, meaning that the grandfather’s critique can be now be redirected towards the grandson. Like De Man, but in a different sense, Aldo could be justly accused of “decadentism”, “theological prejudices”, “otherworldly longings”,⁵³ “intellectual dilettantism” and “egocentrism”, as well as of “identifying the judgment of history to his own personal experience” and expressing his own “unconscious complexes” through his “contradictory, twisted, arbitrary thoughts”.⁵⁴ It might be conjectured, following José Carlos Mariátegui, that his grandson, like De Man, projected his own unconscious complexes, personal experiences and pious feelings into Marxism. In the works of both De Man and Aldo, the result has been a phantasmatic religious volatilisation of Marxist materialism and its material objects.

Of course, De Man’s and Aldo’s representations of Marxism as a modern religion might be insightful and profoundly true; however, this does not exclude either from the revelation of their truth through the subject’s phantasy or the dissolution of its object’s materiality. In Marx’s terms, the truth may require a “true fable” to reveal itself,⁵⁵ which is why Lacan may attribute it a “fiction structure”.⁵⁶ This is also why De Man’s misapprehensions of Marxism were taken so seriously by José Carlos Mariátegui.

Liberalism as psychology

Of the critiques that Mariátegui directed towards Henri De Man, the one that interests us most here deals with De Man’s psychologisation of Marxism and overemphasis on psychological interiority. De Man, according to Mariátegui, simply followed the “fashion” of psychology in modern times.⁵⁷ The important thing is that such fashion, as conceived by Mariátegui, seems to derive from the hegemony of the capitalist liberal ideologies of “individualism” and “free competition” that make us

51 De Man 1926, p. 125.

52 De Man 1926, p. 137.

53 Mariátegui 1930, pp. 101-109.

54 Mariátegui 1930, pp. 19-26.

55 Marx 1843a, pp. 312-313.

56 Lacan 1957, p. 448.

57 Mariátegui 1930, p. 25.

believe, for instance, in the power of our “ambitions” and “aptitudes”.⁵⁸ It would be, then, modern liberalism that imposed and promoted the idea, so visible in the work of De Man, of a decisive, psychic sphere of instincts, desires, feelings, interests, abilities and thoughts that is located in an interior, independent and isolated space.

By tracing the origin of the modern object of psychology, Mariátegui denounced the deep imbrication between the psychological supposition of the inner world and the capitalist ideological representations of individuals and their liberty. This denunciation can also be found two years later in the work of Horkheimer, who showed how the liberal doctrine is “essentially psychological”, since it explains everything in terms of “interests” and other individual interior “psychic forces”.⁵⁹ From this point of view, the psychological explanation reveals the explicative foundation of liberalism, which is also, accordingly, a kind of psychology.

Horkheimer, like Mariátegui, discovered the inner world of psychology in the very core of liberal political economy. If we believe in this discovery, then we accept that the ideological representation of society as a global free market, which is inseparable from capitalism and which was historically founded on the conquest and colonisation of Latin America, involves the opening of a psychological realm that seems coextensive to the aforementioned idealist–dualist individual interiority imposed on the populations of the New World through the long and complex practices of evangelisation and political indoctrination. Such practices later turned into processes of the neo-colonial psychologisation of a monist-materialist culture, which still resisted not only idealism, dualism, classism and private property, but also liberal–neoliberal psychology. The current outcomes of this psychologisation can be easily detected in the political discourses of a number of indigenous and indigenist organisations and movements, ranging from the populist-socialist *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) in Bolivia⁶⁰ to the overtly neoliberal evangelical *Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas del Cauca* (OPIC) in Colombia.⁶¹

The critique of liberal political economy as a critique of liberal political psychology

In a sense, for both Mariátegui and Horkheimer, *liberalism is a psychological system and not only an economic-political doctrine. Or, rather, liberal political economy is rooted in a liberal political psychology.* We may say, therefore, that a critique of the liberal political economy

58 Mariátegui 1930, p. 146.

59 Horkheimer 1932, pp. 27-30

60 Jahnsen Gutiérrez 2013.

61 Ramírez 2015.

can go only to the root of the matter—and, thus, be as radical as the one proposed by Marx in *Capital*—if it involves a critique of liberal political psychology.

The political–psychological front of Marx’s critique is the theatre of a thorough demolition of the liberal inner world of psychology.⁶² This world is completely emptied of itself by Marx. Instead of the liberal psychological interiority of selfish interests and strategic reasoning and calculation, what remains is the economic exteriority of the structure: money, commodities, values, exchanges, capital, accumulation, and so on. Marx summarises this substitution by saying that the capitalist’s “wallet” contains his “heart”.⁶³ So, we may say that the capitalist feels only through his wallet, that his states of mind are those of money and that economy is his psychology.

Actually, for Marx, the capitalist’s “soul” is nothing but “the soul of capital”.⁶⁴ Therefore, capitalism contains and explains the capitalist’s psychological processes and motivations. His psychology is the economy of the capital. For instance, the accruing intrinsic logic of capital, its “vital instinct to accrue”, underlies, for Marx, the psychic “hoarding instinct” of the capitalist.⁶⁵ In the same way, the capitalist’s insatiable thirst for wealth stems from “the contradiction between the quantitative limitation of money and its qualitatively unlimited nature”.⁶⁶ An objective economic contradiction, thus, comprises the truth of the subjective psychological attitude.

A person himself/herself, as well as his/her own personality, as conceived by Marx, corresponds to the “personification of an economic category”.⁶⁷ If “the capital is dead labour that feeds itself, like a vampire, by sucking up living labour”, its personification by capitalists is what makes them behave like vampires and sink their fangs into workers to “absorb their work”.⁶⁸ Likewise, the classic Weberian personality of Calvin’s ascetic old bourgeois, his idealistic orientation and capacity for abstraction–generalisation, obeys the logical–structural need for a “surplus in its general form”: that of pure and incorruptible money, which obliges the subject to “dismiss specific needs and worldly pleasures”.⁶⁹

62 Pavón-Cuéllar 2015.

63 Marx 1867, pp. 109, 188

64 Marx 1867, p. 179.

65 Marx 1867, pp. 178-180.

66 Marx 1867, p. 91.

67 Marx 1867, p. XV.

68 Marx 1867, pp. 179, 200.

69 Marx 1859, pp. 117-118.

Similarly, if the same traditional bourgeois must be hard-working to “sell more” and thrifty to “buy less”, it is because he can only “subtract from circulation, as money, that which he incorporates, as goods, into circulation”.⁷⁰ The exterior logic of the market, the true spirit of capitalism, clarifies the interior protestant ethics of the bourgeois.

Marx reduces psychology to economy, dismantles our inner world and replaces it with a capitalist exteriority, and so dispels our liberal illusion of being free individuals, autonomous economic actors, political citizens, self-governing voters and consumers, internally motivated by ourselves, thinking and calculating for ourselves, and able to sense our own needs, follow our own desires, obey our own interests and make our own decisions. By refuting this idealist illusion of the modern *pensée unique*, of supposedly free markets and bourgeois democracies, Marx offers a radical materialist critique of the political–psychological foundation of the liberal political economy and, in so doing, undermines one of the most significant ideological devices of capitalism.

The material economic structure as the psychic prison of the body

By doing away with the subjective interiority, Marx’s critique abolishes a place of power. He suppresses the very centre of the accomplishment of modern, insidious power, in which power accomplishes itself through the submission to it, which retroactively creates its place by opening the inner world of the free individual: the “soul” or the “interior psychic space”.⁷¹ This inner world, this place of power, is the arena of La Boétie’s “voluntary servitude”, in which the master has “power over you through you” and has “so many arms to beat you with” because he “borrows them from you”.⁷² It is the logical space of self-domination, of submission to oneself as a master, of the internal relationship of the subject with himself as his own slave, who must blindly obey his own interests and thoughts. Here, we have the “internally divided” sphere of Hegel’s *unhappy consciousness*, in which “the splitting of the roles of two singular beings, the master and the slave, is resituated in only one being”.⁷³

What Marx closes down is the central place of liberal–neoliberal power, Byung-Chul Han’s psychic space of “auto-exploitation”,⁷⁴ the disciplinary “soul” as understood by Foucault, as a “prison of the body”

70 Marx 1867, p. 91.

71 Butler 1997, pp. 66-85.

72 La Boétie 1576, p. 14.

73 Hegel 1807, p. 176.

74 Han 2014, pp. 16-18.

that is “produced” by power for the “exercise” of power.⁷⁵ Marx’s *Capital*, which is strangely more modern in this respect than the works of either Han or Foucault, reveals that this psyche, this psychic prison, exists outside the subject, in the material economic structure that creates the subject’s desires, interests, thoughts, motivations and calculations. It is, thus, Marx who establishes, long before Foucault and even more radically, that the inner world is a fold of the outer world. In other words, Marx demonstrates that psychological states are economic facts. It is precisely through this demonstration that his critique of political economy becomes a critique of political psychology.

However, we should not wait until *Capital* for the conception of the external psychic prison. The still young Marx had already apprehended this conception by discovering “human *psychology*” in “*ordinary material industry*”.⁷⁶ Furthermore, this discovery of the material exteriority of the inner world also had many precedents before Marx. One of the first can be found as far back as the 17th century, in Pascal’s ideas about “external” faith and about “custom” as the “mystical foundation of authority” that “bends the automaton, which persuades the mind without its thinking about the matter”.⁷⁷

Spiritual faith as a reflection and internalisation of the existential ritual

Pascal is almost Marxist in his materialist notion of a material and external unconscious determination. Actually, Marx’s principle of the precedence of existence over consciousness was tacitly accepted by Pascal when he prescribed “kneeling, praying with the lips, etc., in order that a proud man, who would not submit himself to God, may be now subject to the creature”.⁷⁸ In this passage, external subjection through *kneeling* and *praying with the lips* precedes and conditions internal subjection. The spiritual faith, then, results from the existential ritual.

It is as if Pascal’s internal conscious faith was the reflection or internalisation of an external unconscious ritual. This idea is, indeed, very close to the Marxist psychological concepts of *internalisation* and *reflection*, which are, respectively, used by the Soviet psychologists Lev Vygotsky and Aleksei Leontiev. Just as Pascal’s internal faith seems to reflect and internalise the external ritual of kneeling and praying, so, too, is psychic life either an internalisation of language in Vygotsky or

75 Foucault 1975, p. 38.

76 Marx 1844: 151.

77 Pascal 1670, 250-252, 294, pp. 123, 136. See Žižek 1989, pp. 34-36, and Pavón-Cuellar 2014, pp. 215-218.

78 Pascal 1670, 250, p. 123.

an internal reflection of activity in Leontiev.⁷⁹ Is it not true that praying makes use of language and that kneeling constitutes an activity? This is why a conversion to Christianity presupposes the verbal-orthopaedic transmission of language, activity, material words and gestures, which ultimately become the most intimate devotion.

Let us take the case of the New World, where Garcilaso and the Jesuit Joseph de Acosta recognised that spiritual evangelisation was possible thanks to the previous material: the economical-political “domestication” and “subjection” of primitive populations by the Incas and Aztecs, as well as by the imposition of only one language over various tribes in Peru and Mexico.⁸⁰ Then, as we know, the sword opened the way to the cross, and Christianisation was materially based on the imposition of external discourses and practices. The Christian soul came into being as a fold of the Spanish Colonial Empire.

Material colonisation was inseparable from spiritual evangelisation. The preaching of the gospel required external obedience, attention, responsiveness, discipline and passivity, with bowed heads and docile bodies. The exterior subjection of Pascal’s unconscious automaton, thus, created the subjected interiority of pious and conscious individuals. Their Christian psychic life ensued from the internalisation of words and the reflection of gestures.

The internal psychic space as the folded external surface

The hypothesis of the reflected–internalised psyche is certainly convincing, but it poses two theoretical problems from the Marxist perspective. First, reflection and internalisation, at least as understood, respectively, by Leontiev and Vygotsky, may be mutually exclusive terms. If Leontiev’s concept is consonant with the Leninist materialist theory of imaginary or photographic reflection, Vygotsky’s notion, rather, reminds us of the hieroglyphic materialist assumption of a symbolic ciphering internalisation of the outer world, a fascinating hypothesis that was violently condemned by Lenin.⁸¹ This is only one of the reasons Vygotsky’s cultural psychology could not survive during the period of Stalinism, while Leontiev’s theory of activity was interpreted as a kind of concession and adaptation to the Soviet context.

Vygotsky and Leontiev allow completely different interpretations of the Marxist conception of the inner world as a predicate, deed or expression of the outer world—or, as is perhaps better put in Plekhanov’s terms, the conception of the subjective consciousness as “the object’s

79 Vygotsky 1934; Leontiev 1964.

80 Acosta 1589, pp. 417-421. Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, pp. 35, 353-354.

81 Lenin 1908.

consciousness of itself”.⁸² However, this conception, independently from its diverse interpretations by Vygotsky or Lenin and Leontiev, poses another problem: it may lead us to reconstruct the inner world ruined by Marx, and, in so doing, to reconstitute the psychology of dualism and idealism by assuming, in an anti-Marxist, anti-Spinozist way, that an object’s consciousness of itself is not part of the object, that the predicate is not the same thing as its subject and that the reflected outer world is distinct from its reflection in the inner world, as posed by Lenin and Leontiev. Such assumptions sufficiently justify Korsch’s critique of the Leninist theory of reflection, of its division of the material whole in order to form an ideal sphere, ignoring that the relation of the psyche to the world is not that of the internal reflection to the reflected exterior, but that of a part of the whole “with the other parts of that whole”.⁸³

The world, as conceived by Korsch and other Western Marxists in their strict monist perspective, is neither physic nor psychic, but physic and psychic, material and spiritual. From this, we can draw Pannekoek’s assertion that “ideas, the spirit and consciousness” do not belong to an inner world, but to the only world, the outer world of “objective reality”.⁸⁴ A version of this same argument can be found in the critique of Leontiev by another Soviet Marxist psychologist, Sergei Rubinstein. According to Rubinstein, psychic activity cannot be explained by a reflection of physic activity, since this “external material activity” already has a “psychological content”, or, in other words, since it already “contains psychic components in its interior, through which it is regulated”.⁸⁵

Rubinstein, Pannekoek and Korsch rightly situate the psyche outside. Thus, they share Marx’s notion of the external psychic prison of the body and conceive of reflection as a part of the reflected reality, of the inner world as a torsion of the outer world and of the spiritual life as residing in the cavity of, but being essentially immanent to the material surface. It is, again, as if internalisation were the fold of the external materiality and as if the internal psychic space were nothing but the folded external surface. Such a radical monist–materialist vision can be seen in the works of Pannekoek, Korsch, Lukács and others, but maybe not in Rubinstein. This is perhaps because radical materialist monism was simply incompatible with psychology and its dualist–idealist foundations. However, this does not mean, of course, that it was incompatible with psychoanalysis.⁸⁶ Actually, the idea of the *exterior*

82 Plekhanov 1907, p. 74.

83 Korsch 1923, p. 65.

84 Pannekoek 1938, pp. 112-113.

85 Rubinstein 1945, p. 169; 1959, p. 340

86 Pavón-Cuéllar 2017, forthcoming.

psyche underlies the Freudo–Marxist Reichian conception, first found in Voloshinov, of the inner world as the outer world “rooted” through ideology in the subject.⁸⁷

Interiorisation of interiority

To avoid psychologism, as well as dualism and idealism, it should be recognised that the ideological roots of the structure not only penetrate into the inner world, but also literally create this world. The internal sphere is opened and filled—as in Vygotsky—through internalisation. The psychic sphere is a reflection on the mirror and its illusion of interiority, and not the mirror or its internal container of reflections. The process of reflection, instead of being—as in Lenin and Leontiev—the functioning of the psyche, actually generates the psyche.

Psychologisation constantly produces and reproduces the psyche, the object of psychology, which is later found everywhere inside us, as if it had always been there. Actually, as we have seen, what we call the psyche has always been everywhere around us. It is not, strictly speaking, our soul, but our world, our prison, the external structure in which each individual has his or her place. This is what is projected into the subject, in Althusser’s terms, as a “mirroring foundation”.⁸⁸ The imaginary inner world misleadingly justifies, as an inexistent ideological foundation, the existent outer world.

As has been pointed out by Mariátegui and Horkheimer, liberal capitalism is validated by the internal psychic sphere that psychology projects into the subject. Yet, Lacan has shown us how this internal appearance is nothing but the image, the imaginary location, of the mirror’s illusion of depth.⁸⁹ Its function, according to Lacan, is to adapt the subject, not to the natural environment, but to the capitalist structure.⁹⁰ After all, the process that projects the psyche into the subject is the same aforementioned process that projects the exchange value—the imaginary gold as a general equivalent—into everything, subjects and objects, mountains full of gold and people full of life exploitable as a labour force. Mountains become mines, and people become slaves and virtuous or sinful believers. The pure exteriority of nature is, thus, denatured by the economic–psychological projection of something imaginary beyond the surface of the real.

The existence of the psyche is, indeed, not natural, but cultural and historical. It is inseparable from capitalism, but also from Christianity and the Western European civilisation in general. This is why, according to

87 Voloshinov 1927 pp. 73, 160-162; Reich, 1933, pp. 29; 1935: 100

88 Althusser 1964, pp. 108-115.

89 Lacan 1955, 1976.

90 Lacan 1965.

Lacan, “there is no Oriental Psychology”.⁹¹ This is also why there was no psychology among the Araucos, Mapuches and Soras in South America; among the Chichimecas or Guachichiles in Mexico; or even among the Incas or Aztecs, even if, in this case, as we have seen, culture has established the conditions of possibility for the existence of psychology. However, psychology, strictly speaking did not exist among the American autochthonous populations before the arrival of the Europeans. How could psychology exist among these people if they “have not been Christianised”?⁹²

Christianisation was indispensable for psychologisation. The psyche, the soul, was forged by the work of the evangelisers. Evangelisation allowed, first of all, the interiorisation of interiority. This interiorisation was a loss of the self in each individual, or, rather, *a loss of ourselves in each one of us*. It was an emptying, reabsorption and neutralisation of our exterior, material, relational and communal being. It was one of the worst defeats of communism and one of the necessary preconditions of capitalism. After Christianity emptied us of the material community, created our inner ideal world of piety and conscience and, thus, “made all national, natural, moral and intellectual relationships external to man”, capitalist society may easily “put egoism, self-interested wants, in place of social bonds and break up the human world into a world of atomistic, mutually hostile individuals”.⁹³

Conclusion: from the Critique of Ideology to the Critique of Political Economy

If it were true that Christianity created an inner world for the individual subject of capitalism, then it would also be true that Marx demolished this world through his critique of the psychological roots of the liberal political economy. This critique is radical because it goes to the roots. That is, first, it considers the ideological–psychological roots of capitalism, but also, in a deeper sense, pulls out these roots by returning to the world that the subject has internalised. This radicalism of the late Marx explains why he offers a critique of political economy instead of a critique of either ideology or psychology.

It can be said that Marx’s critique is so radical, so violent and so dangerous that it destroys its object, and, thus, at the end, “has no object”.⁹⁴ Its object is destroyed by Marx’s destructive critical analysis. His critique is radical, in this sense, because it proceeds as a “weapon of war” and not as a “surgeon’s scalpel”, and seeks to “strike” rather than

91 Lacan 1963, p. 256.

92 Lacan 1963, pp. 256-257.

93 Marx 1843b, p. 484.

94 Cf. Močnik, 1991, p. 118.

“clarify”; in sum, its “interest is not to refute, but destroy”.⁹⁵

Thus, Marx’s destructive critique is, essentially, materialist. Its material destruction of the object has nothing to do with any idealist refutation of ideas regarding the object. This refutation rests on a dualist division between the critique and its object, between the critical metalanguage and the objective language. On the contrary, Marx’s critique presupposes that there is no metalanguage. This is also why it is a critique without an object, a critique without a different dimension than its own, an authentic, immanent critique that rests on the immanence of history, the battlefield of the political struggle and the earthly scene of the active enunciation, and not on the contemplative sphere of the enunciated ideas.

95 Marx 1843c, pp. 493-494.

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