



Bookshelf

2017

[Introduction to] Psychopathology of American Capitalism: Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice

Thomas Paul Bonfiglio
University of Richmond, tbonfigl@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/bookshelf>



Part of the [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bonfiglio, Thomas Paul. *The Psychopathology of American Capitalism: Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

NOTE: This PDF preview of [Introduction to] Psychopathology of American Capitalism: Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice includes only the preface and/or introduction. To purchase the full text, please click [here](#).

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bookshelf by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Thomas Paul Bonfiglio

The Psychopathology of American Capitalism

palgrave
macmillan

Introduction

*Tolling for the tongues
With no place to bring their thoughts
All down in taken-for-granted situations
Tolling for the deaf and blind
Tolling for the mute...
(Dylan 1964)*

These lyrics are from Bob Dylan's "Chimes of Freedom," a song that laments a litany of injustices, such as discrimination, incarceration, poverty, and war. Bells toll for the victims, but there is only regret, and no solution is offered. These lines indicate, however, problems in cognition, articulation, and perception not only among the victims, but also among the oppressors, as well. There is no available political vocabulary for organizing the disenfranchised classes. Moreover, the lines imply a general cultural blindness and deafness to the causes of social, political, and economic problems themselves. It is as if there were suffering and oppression in the system that neither the offenders nor the offended are fully conscious of. In short, these lines describe phenomena that fit well into a Marxist psychoanalysis of political economy. Marxism describes agents unaware of what motivates them *economically*; psychoanalysis describes agents unaware of what motivates them *psychologically*.

This study proposes a synthesis of psychoanalytic and Marxist techniques in order to illuminate the discursive gambits that suppress a socialization of the American political economy, maintain protectionist discourses of anomalous American capitalism, and suppress the discourses of the capitalist welfare state, which is currently the preferred model in the industrialized world. Marxist perspectives can be used to account for the construction and stratification of the political economy, but they are insufficient for illuminating its preservation. Psychoanalysis is necessary to analyze the dynamics that maintain and protect the system.

The structural similarities between the Marxist and Freudian models are well known and consist in transformations from infrastructure to superstructure. In Marxism, agents transform their infrastructural *economic* motivations into dissimilar observable behaviors; in psychoanalysis, agents transform their infrastructural *psychological* motivations into dissimilar observable behaviors. A productive metaphor for both would be the relationship between disease and symptom. Often, diseases generate symptoms that appear unconnected to the disease itself. The correspondences between the two are not at all evident and sometimes appear far-fetched to the untrained. The symptom can easily be misdiagnosed by non-professionals, who would not, for instance, be prepared to see leg cramps as a symptom of anemia. The professional, however, can trace the odd surface manifestation back to the underlying cause. So it is as well with the psychoanalytic and Marxist models.

It is important to emphasize that this concerns general cultural phenomena as symptoms of larger psychoeconomic processes. These processes can be described as collusions or conspiracies, but only in the context of performance and not conscious intent. Just as the physical cause generates the physical symptom without involving the conscious intent of the organism, so can the psychological cause generate the psychological symptom without conscious awareness on the part of the agent. Often, agents will engage in modes of behavior that suppress cognizance of their actions. Indeed, it is often the role of the analyst to help the agent recognize what she or he is doing. The same applies to the Marxist analysis of political economy. Agents act to avoid things that threaten their power, and the protective (re)actions are often performed in a manner that can cloak the true motivations, deny them, and justify them by diversions and displacements. Thus in describing these behaviors, one must exclude notions of conscious intent. The Latin *con-spirare*, “to breath together,” has given us the verb to conspire, and *con-ludere*, “to play together,” has

rendered “to collude.” It is within these literal resonances that the protectionist discourses analyzed here are to be understood. Agents will reflexively, and not always consciously, act in consort to protect their interests. And they will often deny the effects of their actions.

1.1 THE RELEVANCE OF MARXISM

In his study of ideology, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, Marx said:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class that is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class that has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production... The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships that make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (Marx 1969, p. 46)

Thus fundamental material possession creates defense mechanisms that guard and protect that material possession. Marx continues:

The production of ideas, of imaginations, of consciousness is immediately entwined in the material activity and the material intercourse of humans...as the direct outflow of their material behavior. The same is true of intellectual production, as it presents itself in the language of politics, law, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. Humans are the producers of their imaginations, ideas, etc.—real, active humans...consciousness is nothing but conscious existence, and human existence is the real conditions of life...Ideology makes humans and their relationships appear to stand on their heads, as in a *camera obscura*, but this phenomenon really arises from their historical conditions of life, just like the inversion of objects on the retina arises from immediate physical conditions. (26)

Inverted perception makes causes appear to be effects, true material forces to appear to be the effects of mental causes, of abstract notions of mind, spirit, and consciousness. It is important to emphasize that Marx was writing in reaction to the religious configuration of humans in the nineteenth century, one that saw them as in possession of a soul and of conscious responsibility for their actions. In Marx’s world, humans are the objects and subjects of concrete material forces, and not of “an abstract

action of self-cognizance (*des Selbstbewusstseins*), world spirit, or any other metaphysical ghost, but instead a completely material, empirically verifiable act" (46). These empirically verifiable forces, however, can affect agents in ways that they are unaware of. Marx adds:

While German philosophy descends from heaven to earth, we do it in the completely opposite manner; we climb from earth to heaven...Even the foggy illusions in the human brain are the necessary sublimates of material and empirically verifiable conditions of life, which are bound to material preconditions. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and other ideologies, along with their corresponding forms of consciousness, no longer possess the illusion of autonomy...It is not consciousness that determines life; it is life that determines consciousness. (26)

Sublimation, the chemical process of direct transition from solid to gas, is effectively used here as a metaphor for a transition from matter to spirit. Just as a gas exhibits no visible connection to its material base, so does ideology bear no visible connection to its own material base. Just as the chemist can trace the chemical effect back to the cause, so can the Marxist trace the ideological effect back to its cause. Marx uses the example of the Indian and Egyptian caste systems, which German philosophers invert the causality of. Instead of seeing that the division of labor creates the caste system and the religious illusions that help maintain it, German philosophers think that it was the religious ideas that created the caste system; thus, they back-read from spirit to matter and, in doing so, invoke a religious justification for inequality.

From a critical Marxist perspective, and a reductionist one at that, culture is generated by economy—all culture: "Morality, religion, metaphysics, and other ideologies, along with their corresponding forms of consciousness..." Ideology is the articulation and justification of inequality. An inequalitarian economy will generate ideologies and cultural products (sublimates) that reinforce that inequality.

It is here that one can also place the discourses of democracy propagated by the American upper bourgeoisie. Foggy illusions of radical individualism determine the ethics of the era of American free market hypercapitalism. This becomes essentialized: Americans become represented as ontological individualists; it is supposed to be in their spirit. What rules is an economy, in which the ruling class benefits from the individual actions of the

members of that class, i.e., there is little systemic social responsibility; much depends on individual volition.

1.2 MARXIST LIMITATIONS

Conventional Marxist analyses that oppose communism to capitalism are, however, insufficient for analyzing the American political economy for these reasons:

- in rejecting capitalism outright, they overlook the differences among types of capitalism, some of them highly socialized, others minimally so (US).
- the favored current world-scale economic model in the developed economies is the capitalist welfare state, which permits a liberal capitalist economy, but which also taxes high income and profit and redistributes wealth through social programs. These include a livable minimum wage, affordable health care, free or inexpensive education (including medical school) and job training, guaranteed vacations, paid parental leave, low-income housing, etc. The capitalist welfare state is maintained by a tension between strong conservative capitalist parties and strong socialist, communist, and labor parties.
- the true binary opposition in the USA is that between American hypercapitalism and a conservative, underfunded version of the capitalist welfare state. This binary suppresses the global dialectic that generates the capitalist welfare state and substitutes for it the proxybinary of Democrat/Republican. Thus it transforms the historical dialectic of proletariat vs. bourgeoisie into a hegemonic simulacrum of left vs. right.

There is a great danger in opposing capitalism wholesale in the United States. First of all, capitalism is not about to go away. The best that one could hope for is that the pernicious and anomalous form of *American capitalism* could change. Second, its outright rejection throws out the baby with the bath water and leaves no room for analyzing the form of liberal capitalism that characterizes the US economy. One will often hear a conservative say, "I am a capitalist." It is imperative to inquire what is meant here. What type of capitalist is the speaker? One who thinks that welfare programs should not exist? Or one who thinks there should be more short-term employment contracts? The former is an exceptional capitalist,

the kind found in the exceptional American system. The latter would be a conservative voice from a capitalist welfare state, such as France. The defensive utterance, “I’m a capitalist,” is a convenient vehicle for allowing hypercapitalism—the pernicious subset of capitalism—to slip by unnoticed, to persist as a dangerous stowaway.

Before engaging psychoanalysis in the study of the preservation of the exceptionalist American economy, it is first necessary to describe that economy in its damaging forms and indicate the culpable forces. There have only been Democratic and Republican administrations since WWII. Together, they have:

- all but annihilated the true left: the socialist and communist parties.
- reduced taxes on the highest incomes from 91% in 1963 to 39% in 2016.
- increased the poverty rate from 11% in 1973 to 13% in 2016.
- created an exceptional wealth discrepancy between the wealthiest and poorest sectors, a regression to levels not seen since the 1920s.

A good indicator of the distribution of wealth is the Gini coefficient, which measures the distribution of wealth within a given economy and operates on a scale of 0–1. A rating of 1 would be granted to an economy where one person has all the money, and a rating of 0 to an economy where everyone has the same financial resources. The wealth Gini coefficient of the USA is now among the lowest in the world. The CIA data from 2007 gave the USA a coefficient of 0.45, ranking it 142nd out of 176 countries studied (CIA 2007).

US maximum tax rates on the highest incomes have declined since WWII:

1945: 94%
 1962: 91.1%
 1965: 70%
 1982: 50%
 1990: 28%
 1993: 39%
 2003: 35%
 2016: 39%

The capitalist welfare states have low taxes on low incomes and high taxes on high incomes.

In France in 2013, a two-person household earning 12 000 € paid 0% in taxes; the equivalent household in the USA paid 10%. And in 2011, only 53.5 percent of French households—those in the more affluent categories—had to pay taxes. There is also no federal value-added tax (VAT) on purchases in the USA. A (re)distribution of wealth is only possible through a socialization of the economy, and it is this socialization that the American system rejects. The USA is one of the lowest taxed nations in the world. The OECD recently published statistics on tax revenues as a percentage of GDP among 34 advanced countries; the USA ranks number 31 (OECD 2014). Liberalism (free market economics and deregulation) will not bring about a more equitable redistribution of income. This is only possible through the system of the capitalist welfare state.

1.3 THE RELEVANCE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

While Marx's sublimates are extremely general: "politics, law, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc.," Freud's are very complex and are generated by defense mechanisms. This is not simply working off steam, but instead a working through, a processing. The diversions involved in these defense mechanisms are themselves sublimations. They express the desire or drive in altered form, and the sublimation effects a partial satisfaction. There has to be an element of satisfaction in defense mechanisms, or else they would not be deployed.

Psychoanalytic theory will be explained and applied in the course of this study as needed, but it is helpful to orient things up front with a summary of some vital concepts. The most important distinction in Freud's work is the distinction between consciousness and that which is unconscious. Conscious awareness comprises the tip of the iceberg; most of what goes on in the psyche is unconscious and consists in things that we really do not want to know or admit about ourselves. Unconscious processes are illogical, contradictory, and often absurd, but they nonetheless constitute the bulk of mental activity. And they are most readily observable in the analysis of dreams. Consequently, one of the most foundational aspects of psychoanalysis is dream theory, which informs Freud's first major book-length study. *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) appeared in 1900. Freud himself considered it to be his most important work. In dreams, one finds the narratives of our anxieties, which are repressed from conscious awareness, and which must undergo transformations in order to disguise themselves. The threatening narratives become differently

renarrated, a process called displacement (*Verschiebung*). Dreams will also find nodal points among these anxieties, least common denominators among a variety of them. Several anxieties become condensed into one common nodal point—a process called condensation (*Verdichtung*). Displacement and condensation correspond, in textual analysis, to metonymy and metaphor, respectively.

Consciousness and that which is unconscious are never distinctly separate; the border is quite porous. Freud introduced his study of dreams with an epigraph from book seven of the Aeneid: *flectere si nequeo superos, acheronta movebo* (“If I cannot bend the higher powers, I will move Acheron”). Acheron is the river in the underworld across which Charon ferried the dead. If Freud cannot bend the higher powers downward, he will move the lower ones upward. His project was to illuminate the continual intrusion of unconscious processes into conscious ones. This is visible in his second and third major works: *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens* (1901) (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*) and *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (1905a) (*Jokes (Wit) and Their Relation to the Unconscious*). The unconscious is a collection of things that are not part of consciousness. They are repressed, blotted out, and excluded by the defense mechanisms of denial, displacement, inversion, projection, transference, and so on. But the repressed eventually passes into wakefulness; this causes us to slip, to blunder, to misspeak, to misperceive: These are the famous “Freudian slips” discussed in *The Psychopathology*. They also appear in jokes, which often pretend to be innocent. The repressed is always present in varying degrees of partial, and often total eclipse, but there nonetheless. Thus Freud used the terms *latent* and *manifest* to distinguish the hidden and evident elements of the dream.

Freud used the terms primary process and secondary process (*Primärvorgang* and *Sekundärvorgang*) to describe the processes of unconscious association and conscious reasoning, respectively. Primary processes are characterized by displacement and condensation, an absence of logic, and a free association that does not recognize contradictions. Secondary processes restrict the primary ones—a sort of reality check—and impose logical analysis upon them. Both processes are continually active. A good example of their interplay is found below in the example of “kettle logic.”

The analytic techniques used in this study are largely from dreamwork and include displacement, condensation, doubling, redoubling, repetition,

inversion, projection, denial, fetishizing and repression (especially cognitive repression).

1.4 DISPLACEMENT AND CONDENSATION

One may diagram the dominant world economic model as such:

Left:		Right:
socialist	capitalist welfare state	capitalist
communist		liberal
labor		

and the American model as such:

capitalist2 capitalist1

And here, one arrives at the major structural displacement, a proxy battle of left versus right that is really a tension between two types of conservatism, and that suppresses the historical binary opposition. The opposition of Democrat vs. Republican neutralizes leftist alternatives. This major structural displacement is further articulated by several permutations:

- “Liberal” versus Tea Party and Libertarian: The infrastructural tension is displaced even further by a remapping of the left wing onto the Democrats and the right wing onto the ultraconservative Tea and Libertarian Parties; this results in a recentering of discourse between two conservative poles that shifts the center of gravity even farther to the right. The absurdity of the antitax and antigovernment arguments of the Tea and Libertarian Parties serves to make Republican platforms seem moderate in comparison. Indeed, the curious locution “moderate Republican” has become quite current.
- Affirmative action vs. non-interventionism: Equal opportunity employment practices designed to combat discrimination in hiring were first implemented in the 1930s and strengthened in the 1960s. The pendulum of the dynamic tends to swing toward the actual implementation of quotas, and then to lose momentum and swing back toward non-regulation. It stabilizes in the foggy area of a general declaration not to discriminate that is difficult to enforce. The only national quotas actually in place are limited to federal

contractors, and these are ambiguously articulated, leaving large spaces for exceptions. Federal statutes for employing a fixed percentage of minorities are adapted to the characteristics of the local workforce and the availability of minority workers. There are spotty laws in some states, such as Vermont. In the private sector, claims of discrimination are limited to civil courts. Thus the tension, the pendular swing, alternates between the mandated and the optional and centers in a very ambiguous space, where discrimination becomes actionable, but the processes of exacting penalties and legal settlements remain random, haphazard, and arbitrary.

The debate over affirmative action is one of the most ingenious creations of the American political economy (see Chap. 11). It is a ferocious, heated, and desperate debate suspended, however, in an ineffective limbo, a Sisyphean endeavor climbing toward the implementation of quotas only to slide back into ineffectiveness, called back by voices claiming reverse discrimination and decrying the hiring of the less unqualified. The heated tension of this debate is exactly what the stratified American economy needs in order *not* to implement the necessary systemic social programs. The polarity of bureaucratized quotas versus liberal deregulation itself acts to maintain stratification.

- “The one percent” versus the middle class: This is another proxy struggle between two forms of prosperity within the same class. It fully occludes the discourse of labor and the subaltern. (See below under Cognitive Repression.)

There are many examples of collaborative displacement and condensation in the discourse of the American political economy. An especially powerful one acts to elevate the social subset of racism to the entire set; American discussions of racism often focus on the social aspect: a white family having a black or Hispanic neighbor, or having their child date a black or Hispanic—this displaces the discussion and condenses it to the social subset, thus suppressing awareness of economic imperatives; it detensifies the racial anxieties of, e.g., ghettoization, incarceration, infant mortality and diffuses these into metonymic and metaphoric images of lower psychic intensity.

1.5 THE RHETORIC OF REPETITION

This concerns the *fort/da* problem seen in Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Freud described the behavior of his grandson in discarding a toy on a string and then reeling it back in again and again. This was caused by the anxiety over the absence of the mother, who would leave the room and then return. The infant repeatedly performed a symbolic reenactment of absence and presence in an attempt to master the situation. This became a model for the repetition compulsion, where subjects were "obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of...*remembering* it as a part of the past" (Freud 1920, p. 16). Freud saw this as an expression of the death instinct, a desire to (re)turn to an inert state.

It seems plausible, however, that this could also be seen as a trauma of insecurity and a form of cognitive repression, an inability to become fully conscious of the behavior produced by the trauma, or, as one says in our current vernacular, an inability to *get past* something, to put it behind one. The insolubility of the problem is its continual presence, reenacted in symbolic form; it is the symbolic insistence that the mother not go away. The unresolved trauma causes entrapment in a tautological loop.

The American cultural narrative repeats *ad absurdum* the story of the individual who succeeds on *his* own will and strength. The nucleus seems to be the Horatio Alger myth of the "American dream" attainable to anyone with sufficient motivation. An excellent example can be found in the film *The Firm* (1993), whose hero (played by Tom Cruise), from a poor background, graduates first in his class from Harvard Law, outwits the government and the mafia, has an affair with a beautiful "model," and saves his marriage, all on his own means (Davis, Pollack, and Rudin 1993).

The structure of this narrative is most familiar and configures the hero in a dilemma *vis-à-vis* a helpless government. The government must be weak, and the individual must triumph, in order to justify his possession of his own means, a man of means. Now the displacement and repetition, a repetition with modification as in a musical refrain, reveals the infrastructural insecurity. The danger threatens to remove the system (*fort*), and the hero reinstates it (*da*).

This continual repetition is produced by a massive insecurity over losing autonomy. American economic success is perceived as generated by individual initiative and reward; thus, the system generates narratives of autonomous victory, symbolic masterings of any threat to that system.

The system supplies a continual recursion to individualist ideologies and virtually no narratives of ameliorative statist kindness, of people being rescued by government social programs. This master narrative suppresses other alternatives.

Another permutation of the repetition of the individualist model involves the reduction and remapping of political differences onto *ad hominem* arguments. Larger political debates of, for instance, deregulation, war, welfare, health care, etc., become occluded by a focus on the personal characteristics of the political candidates. Thus the frame of difference and debate is preserved, but it is displaced, and the content is filled by a sort of popularity contest. This is also a condensation, as the field of difference is reduced to the subset of the personalities of the political figures. The arena of the *ad hominem* can become, however, most violent, combative, and impassioned and give the impression of an imperative and desperate choice. This form of proxy struggle is a very effective defense mechanism for maintaining the status quo and suppressing awareness of larger injustices. The same minority population remains disenfranchised, the same resource wars are fought, and the same global regions get invaded.

1.6 COGNITIVE REPRESSION

Cognitive repression is one of the most potent psychological processes in the preservation of the exceptionalist American political economy. This involves a suppression of sources of information that could threaten the system, in order that these do not enter into awareness. The suppression is based upon a subliminal perception and subsequent bracketing from cognition. Some examples are:

- a media neglect of multiparty information from the USA and from the capitalist welfare states.
- a silencing of the American socialist parties; there is no media coverage of US socialist party conventions and only rare and marginal mentioning of the Green Party.
- a suppression of the discourses of the subaltern; a levelling of discourse to middle class; an *embourgeoisement/Verbürgerlichung* of the problematic. In 2011, 25% of black households earned less than \$15 k, and 40% less than \$25 k. Thus a large percentage of black households fall below the middle-class threshold.

- a suppression of the anxieties of, e.g., ghettoization, incarceration, infant mortality; a diffusion thereof into silence or proxy discourses of avoidance.
- a denial of the conservative nature of the Democratic Party.

1.7 KETTLE LOGIC

The suppression and denial of the information above necessitate an engagement of defense mechanisms in order to justify voting within the proxy binary, especially as concerns American academics and others who have access to the oppositional information. These mechanisms can be illuminated using Freud's example of the kettle joke (*der Kesselwitz*).

In his major work on dreams and the subsequent work on wit, Freud relates the story of a man who was sued by his neighbor for borrowing a kettle and returning it in damaged condition. The borrower's three defense arguments were:

- I never borrowed a kettle from him in the first place;
- It was already damaged when he lent it to me;
- I returned it intact. (Freud 1900, pp. 124–125)

We have Jacques Derrida to thank for our critical reception of the kettle joke. Derrida calls it *la logique du chaudron*. The knowledge of guilt causes dissimulation, a form of shell game, which accesses the primary processes of dreamwork into everyday life. As noted by Freud, dreamwork has no notion of contradiction.

I list here five common American defenses for not voting for an environmentalist or leftist (i.e., socialist/communist) party, and below each one, a very simple refutation that should have been obvious in the first place. Each is an example of faulty or "kettle" logic:

1. "You're throwing your vote away."

Has there always been a Democratic Party? Did the first guy (and it was a guy) who voted Democrat throw his vote away?

2. "But they don't have a chance."

This is clearly a flagrant circularity: of course not, if no one votes for them.

3. "Why vote for someone no one's ever heard of?"

Was Obama always known? Or the Tea Party, which came out of nowhere? And here it is important to emphasize that one knows about the Tea Party *because the media reported on it*. If the media reported on the Socialist Party or Green Party deliberations, which make infinitely more sense than the anomalous ideas of the Tea Party (such ideas can scarcely be found in the industrialized democracies), then the leftist parties would be visible.

4. "Socialism? Never work in the US."

Here, one only needs to point out the structure of the argument: The way things are is the way they will always be. This is especially surprising when it comes from American historians of Russia, who saw Russia turn into the Soviet Union and back into Russia again in little more than 70 years.

Moreover, such argumentation is most curious when coming from academics who teach their students not to essentialize, holding that attributions such as "American," "Italian," "feminine," "masculine," etc., are social constructs with no ontological validity. Yet, having preached thusly, they then contradict themselves and attribute an antisocialist essence to "the American," instead of seeing the antisocialism as a contingent temporal phenomenon clearly susceptible to change. This regression also involves a suppression of the awareness of material contingency.

5. "Nader cost Gore the election."

This reverts to the "great man" theory of history, long dismissed by historians, which holds that individuals are responsible for major sea changes. It also engages the habitual recourse to individualist causality, the current dominant American ideological construct. In a theatrical play, for instance, the behavior of actors is clearly scripted by a larger direction. The "great man" theory would rather see the play's protagonist as orchestrating the whole thing by himself.

These examples of kettle logic defenses are also based upon a suppression of knowledge of strategic voting in multiparty democracies. In the first round of executive elections, there were a dozen parties in France and over 30 in Germany and Italy. Voting in those countries is often strategic and involves leveraging, where one votes for a party that one is not fully

supportive of in order to block another party that one is very opposed to. A good example is the reelection of Jacques Chirac in 2002, in which socialists supported conservatives in consort against the xenophobic *Front national*.

1.8 NATIONAL DAYDREAMS

The anxieties caused by the perceived threats to the system produce oneiric responses, dreamwork narratives of resolution. The tales of heroic individual triumph are one example of such dreamwork solutions. Other examples are:

- the decoration of the college and university student population with images of color as a substitute for systemic economic solutions, a fairy tale solution without any class struggle. This is a dream image, in which the problem itself is suppressed. Freud’s analysis of the botanical monograph dream works well as an analogy here. All the anxieties (cocaine, sexual desires, the blooming looks of Gärtner’s wife, etc.) disappear into the pleasant image of a successful publication. (Freud 1900, pp. 175–180)
- the transformation of the racist infrastructural dynamic into the wish fulfillment fable of an accessible universal middle class via allusions to suburban whiteness. This concerns, for example, media images of fully assimilated black families in traditional suburban white settings. These offer wish-fulfillment images of progressiveness, while at the same time avoiding the realities of ghetto living conditions.

The nuclear anxiety concerns the distribution of income (not the redistribution, because it was never distributed in the first place) and the perceived threat of the levelling of class boundaries. The reality of wealth vs. poverty, of affluence vs. destitution, creates guilt. This guilt must be avoided and expressed at the same time, apologized for, and symbolic solutions have to be invented. One can take an example from Freud’s *Maikäfertraum* (“May Beetle Dream”). Here is the content:

She recalled that she had two May beetles (*Maikäfer*) in a box that she had to free or they would otherwise suffocate. She opens the box, and the beetles are completely exhausted. One of them flies out the open window, but the other

one gets squashed by the window frame (“window wing”—*Fensterflügel*) while she closes it, as someone had asked her to do. (Freud 1900, pp. 295–296)

One can construct the dream thoughts/interpretation as follows: She was unhappy in her marriage. (She had been born in May and married in May, hence the displacement and condensation.) The desire for emancipation elicits guilt and gets thus remapped onto the narrative of two May beetles; one dies and one is freed. This is a typical redoubling, where several *Doppelgänger* are generated; the two May beetles symbolize two aspects of the dreamer; one expresses a wish, and the other a fear. There is a wish for freedom, to fly away freely, and there is a fear of death, of being crushed. The two May beetles also represent her and her husband; she escapes again into freedom, and now it is he who dies. Note that the dream does not recognize contradictions and antitheses, as Freud observed in his analysis of dreams.

One can see here that the nuclear struggle creates a symbolic and multivalent oppositionality. This is no solution, only a symbolic substitution and renarration. As Freud pointed out in *The Psychopathology*, waking parapraxes—the classic Freudian slips of the tongue, bungled actions, etc.—have the structure of dreamwork. One can use this small example from the May beetle dream to illustrate the apparent oppositional struggles in the American political economy, which renarrates the infrastructural tension into multivalent symbolic and contradictory images that serve as a symbolic (and an ineffectual) resolution.

A host of defense mechanisms is necessary to perpetuate the inegalitarian American political economy. These offer justifications that function largely as screen memories, distorting the infrastructural problem into simulacra of democracy. Some of these have already been mentioned here. Some other important psychopathologies include fetishizing and humor.

1.9 FETISHIZING

Fetishizing involves a problematic situation, in which psychic energy—often psychosexual—becomes diverted into a symbolic alternative that does not resolve the problem. The sexual fetish is perhaps the most common example. Libido becomes transferred to an accessory object, and the engagement with that object does not resolve the issue, but prolongs it. Fetishizing involves an avoidance of the central problematic. One seeks a simulacrum that gives the appearance of resolving the issue while not

resolving it at all, nor wanting to resolve it. This is particularly visible in the construction of American identity politics. It can also be seen in the fetishizing of the Democratic Party and especially in the election of Barack Obama.

Another important issue concerns the psychopathology of humor in the context of American politics, which, since the mid-twentieth century, has slowly and significantly moved into the theater of entertainment and amusement. Valuable perspectives can be taken from Freud's studies on wit and humor. One has recently witnessed the rise of cable TV satire as the dominant, if not the sole forum for oppositionality (e.g., Colbert, Maher, Maddow, Stewart). Freud's studies of wit can be applied here to illuminate the ideologies present in tendentious humor.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 2 reviews the major contributions to Marxist psychoanalysis beginning with Wilhelm Reich and views these as projects lacking a concrete political platform for change. It also outlines the basic workings of capitalism and the capitalist welfare state, as these relate to the exceptionalist hypercapitalism found in the USA.

Chapter 3 reviews the presence of Marxism and psychoanalysis in the discourses of race and gender. It addresses the scarcity of applications of psychoanalysis to issues of race and a corresponding disengagement from concrete political action in psychoanalytic feminism. It recovers perspectives from these discourses that apply to effective political organization.

Chapter 4 examines the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, who wrote a major work on psychoanalysis and Marxism. It focuses on their understanding of desire, the Oedipus complex and the role of the family, representation, and metaphor and metonymy. It argues against their notion that desire does not lie in the representational, but instead in "the order of production," as they put it. It argues that desire is incommensurable, that it lies in the symbolic and the representational, and that this configuration is basic to human nature. Desire constitutes the theater for the performance of bourgeois class interests and is essential to the discourse of Marxist psychoanalysis.

Chapter 5 examines some of the problems in Žižek's understanding of hysteria, commodity, fetish, and symptom, including his idea that Lacan said that Marx invented the symptom. It argues instead that Marx invented the notion of sublimation as a psychosocial phenomenon. It also examines

the ambiguities in Marx's understanding of commodity and fetish and separates the two into distinct phenomena.

Chapter 6 explores the nature of the fetish in depth and argues that fetishizing is part of human ontology. Separate from the economic, it is a product of the primary processes of dreamwork.

The sexual fetish is used as an operative model to illustrate how the commodity becomes a fetish when it enters into processes found in dreamwork and alludes to the fulfillment of desire. The chapter argues that commodity fetishism is a product of defense mechanisms arising from an anxiety of loss, and as a diversion of psychoeconomic energy.

Chapter 7 examines the language of politics in the USA and shows how the discourse of power has effected semantic shifts in the vocabulary used to discuss political and economic issues. It employs research on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to illustrate how the exceptionalist political economy has created a peculiar political vocabulary that restricts and channels thought and discourse into modes that reinforce the neoliberal economy itself. The resultant vocabulary terms make it very difficult to reason and discuss outside of the system. The operative model used is one of a matrix of language and culture where the two emerge in symbiosis. Traditional linguistic relativism relies on the power of language alone to determine thought. This study proposes that psychoanalytic phenomena can help account for the restriction of meanings to those that reinforce the interests of the class in power, as well as the refusal to yield semantic space to meanings that could jeopardize the hierarchical political structure.

Chapter 8 studies the suppression of the left wing in American politics in the twentieth century, beginning with the anticommunist and antisocialist sentiments in the early part of the century and continuing with the oppression and persecution of leftism during the McCarthy era. It also illuminates the ethnocentric and anti-immigration elements involved in the efforts to purge the country of leftism. It shows that the real target of the purges was not Soviet communism, but instead the labor movements and the associated efforts (few as they were) to move toward the social democratic welfare state that existed in Western Europe. Psychoanalytic techniques are used to illuminate the representation of the welfare system as a "nanny state" and the emergence of a masculinist individualism that rejects images of maternal dependency. This leads into a discussion of oedipal factors in the ideology of Ronald Reagan, especially the cognitive dissonance involved in supporting the government because there is no government. Psychoanalysis is also used to study the fear of contamination

by association with images of communism. It is also argued in this chapter that anticommunism, with the Soviet Union employed as a straw man, succeeded in removing the politics of class and labor from the civil rights and women's movements.

Chapter 9 examines the lasting consequences of cold war ideology for American academia. The popular myth is that faculty were persecuted into silence by McCarthyism, and that everything returned to normal once the “commie-hunting” mania had ended. This chapter illuminates the systemic and viral effects of anticommunism on American scholarship and collects data showing that the ideologies of the period contributed to a general depoliticizing of research. Empiricism came to dominate in the social sciences, as did analytic philosophy and logical positivism in philosophy. Behaviorism excluded psychoanalysis from psychology. Literary studies came to view texts as context-free and autonomous. The role of philanthropic foundations, especially the Ford Foundation, is also examined for the privileging of empirical studies. A form of myopia has ensued, in which professors became viewed as “leftist liberals,” a depiction that masks the pervasiveness of neoliberal policies that, over the past decades, have reshaped higher education in the USA.

Chapter 10 studies the hegemony of English and the ideology of monolingualism in the USA as factors that codetermine American ethnopolitical myopia. At the end of the nineteenth century, Latin and Greek were required for college admission, and students went on to study French and German (Bonfiglio 2013). Currently, the USA is one of the very few countries whose college graduates remain, for the most part, functionally monolingual, despite the “language requirement.” The USA emerged from World Wars I and II as a dominant world power. At the same time, it developed a xenophobic resistance to immigration and foreign languages, especially as these conveyed information from foreign political economies. The USA exercised its power as a monolingual hegemon, and “English” came to be understood as the study of all world literature—period. It became the purveyor of meaning, and “the languages” came to be seen as skills in the service of English. The United States became the only country that does this with its principal language, a factor that helps to maintain American exceptionalism. This monolingual ideology is maintained by cognitive repression and strong defense mechanisms that deflect counterinformation.

Chapter 11 explores the discourses of identity politics, multiculturalism, and affirmative action in an effort to show how they act to divert attention

from issues of poverty and thus maintain class stratification. These discourses are illuminated using concepts of the narcissism of minor differences, the defense mechanism of projection, and doubling and repetition. It is argued that these discourses constitute an economy of symbolic commodity fetishism that conceals class inequalities and the connection between poverty and bourgeois prosperity. It argues that multiculturalism and affirmative action policies are necessary to compensate for the injustices that remain after social programs to ameliorate poverty have been implemented, but that they should not replace those social programs.

Chapters 12 and 13 summarize the arguments and offer a psychoanalytic Marxist account of the production of the current president.

American popular culture and American academia have performed some very curious operations on the understanding of psychoanalysis. One often hears that psychoanalysis has been disproven because it is “not scientific.” This needs to be discussed, briefly. One may begin with the understanding of science.

This term originally indicated knowledge in general. It originates in the Latin *scientia*, “knowledge.” The 1989 edition of the *OED* defines science as:

1. The state or fact of knowing; knowledge or cognizance of something specified or implied.
2. Knowledge acquired by study; acquaintance with or mastery of any department of learning.
3. A particular branch of knowledge or study; a recognized department of learning.
4. A branch of study which is concerned either with a connected body of demonstrated truths or with observed facts systematically classified and more or less colligated by being brought under general laws, and which included trustworthy methods for the discovery of new truth within its own domain.
5. The kind of knowledge or intellectual activity of which the various ‘sciences’ are examples. (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2017)

These are the main entries. The *OED* includes two more entries that concern attributive uses: “man of science” and “science park.” It is only in a subcategory of the fifth definition that one finds the specification: “In modern use, often treated as synonymous with ‘Natural and Physical Science.’”

It is important to emphasize that the current restriction of the semantic field of “science” to indicate only laboratory, experimental, or quantitative study is a recent development limited to North America that became popularized in the twentieth century. While a similar semantic reduction of the permutations of the Latin *scientia* is found in popular use in the major languages of Western Europe—except for German—the term still allows for usages beyond the scope of the natural sciences. French, for instance, distinguishes among *sciences naturelles*, *sciences sociales*, and *sciences humaines* (natural, social, and human sciences). In the USA, the term “human sciences” has been appropriated by the field of biology. Thus *sciences humaines* would have to be translated as “humanities,” which deprives it of scientific status, insofar as scientific status is understood in the USA. While French allows for the common ellipsis *les sciences* to refer to the natural sciences, it also allows *science* to be used by many fields. The term *science des arts*, if translated as “science of art,” would befuddle many a current American reader.

German is much more strict in this regard. The equivalent of the Latin *scientia* is *Wissenschaft*, which can refer to any field of study. One needs to specify what kind of *Wissenschaft*: *Naturwissenschaft*, *Sozialwissenschaft*, *Literaturwissenschaft*, *Kunstwissenschaft*, etc. German also allows *Geisteswissenschaften*, or “sciences of the mind,” equivalent to the American “humanities.”

The following controversial question seems self-evident in American English: “Is psychology a science?” To render the question in French as *La psychologie, est-elle une science?* or in German as *Ist die Psychologie wissenschaftlich?* would not correspond to any current discourse and most likely motivate the listener to ask why one is asking the question in the first place. Similarly, the question: “Is history a science?” would elicit a self-evident “no” in the USA and an equally self-evident *oui/ja/si*, etc., in Europe. Also, the English “scholar” would be translated as *Wissenschaftler* in German and *scientifique* in French. Of the three following sentences, (c) would be a semantic violation (in American English):

- a. *Dieser Professor der modernen Kunst ist ein wohlbekannter Wissenschaftler.*
- b. *Ce prof d'art moderne, c'est un scientifique bien reconnu.*
- c. *That professor of modern art is a well-recognized scientist.

Thus the question “Is psychology a science?” is a construct of American ideology and language, which, in turn, fabricate the image of a referent. During the cold war period, American scholarship reduced the meaning of “science” to empirical methodology alone. (How this came about in language and ideology is demonstrated in Chaps. 7 and 8.) American psychology became swamped by this methodology, which caused it to cast psychoanalysis overboard, as it was seen as more philosophical and speculative than “scientific.” Psychoanalysis found friendlier harbor in the humanities, especially in philosophy, history, and literary studies. This is, however, the case in the USA. In many other countries, psychoanalysis is alive and well, and Freud is read in psychology courses.

Consequently, one hears in popular discourse in the USA the statement, “but Freud has been disproven.” My response is usually, “Where has Freud been disproven?” Sometimes I resort to irony and say, “Yes, Freud was wrong. He just had a big ego. He was just projecting a lot. He had a lot of unconscious problems. He was, like, so totally in denial.”

This study does not share the perspective that empirical experimentation and statistical analysis are the only ways to study human behavior. It uses psychoanalysis as a human science the way it is used by reasonable scholars in the humanities in the USA and in the humanities and social sciences outside of the USA.

A final cautionary word also needs to be said about Marxism. This study does not equate Marx with Stalin. It also does not call for a communist revolution. It uses Marxist theory as an optical tool for studying political economy, not as a blueprint for how to run a country. And it enhances that optical tool with perspectives from psychoanalysis.

All quotations are taken from the original language of the document cited. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

REFERENCES

- Bonfiglio, T. P. (2013). *Why is English literature? Language and letters for the twenty-first century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- CIA. (2007). *The world factbook. Field listing: Distribution of family income—Gini index*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2172.html>. Accessed 10 March 2017.
- Davis, J., Pollack, S., & Rudin, S. (Producers) & Pollack, S. (Director). (1993). *The firm*. [Motion Picture]. United States: Paramount Pictures.

- Dylan, B. (1964). Chimes of freedom. On *Another side of Bob Dylan* [LP album]. New York: Columbia Records.
- Freud, S. (1900). *Die Traumdeutung*. In S. Freud (Ed.), *Gesammelte Werke: Vols. 2–3* (pp. 5–700). London: Hogarth. English edition: Freud, S. *The interpretation of dreams*. In S. Freud (1953–1974) (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vols. 4–5* (pp. 9–686). London: Hogarth.
- Freud, S. (1901). *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*. In S. Freud (Ed.), *Gesammelte Werke: Vol. 4* (pp. 5–310). London: Hogarth. English edition: Freud, S. *The Psychopathology of everyday life*. In S. Freud (1953–1974) (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 6* (pp. 1–279). London: Hogarth.
- Freud, S. (1905a). *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*. In S. Freud (Ed.), *Gesammelte Werke: Vol. 6*, (pp. 1–269). London: Hogarth. English edition: Freud, S. *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. In S. Freud (1953–1974) (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 8*, (pp. 1–236). London: Hogarth.
- Freud, S. (1920). *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*. In S. Freud (Ed.), *Gesammelte Werke: Vol. 13*, (pp. 1–69). London: Hogarth. English edition: Freud, S. *Beyond the pleasure principle*. In S. Freud (1953–1974) (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 18*, (pp. 1–64). London: Hogarth.
- Marx, K. (1969). *Die deutsche Ideologie*. In F. Engels, & K. Marx (Eds.), *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke: Bd. 3*, (pp. 5–530). Berlin/DDR: Dietz Verlag. http://www.mlwerke.de/me/me03/me03_009.htm. Accessed February 13, 2017. English edition: Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1976) (Eds.), *The German ideology* (3d rev. ed.). Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- OECD. (2014). *Education at a glance: Educational attainment of non-students, by age-group and parents' educational attainment (2012)*. <https://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>. Accessed February 13, 2017.
- The Oxford English dictionary*. <http://www.oed.com>. Accessed February 13, 2017.