

On the Possibility of Integrating Psychoanalytic Theory and Dialectical Materialism

—Taking Žižek’s “Parallax Views” as the Text

Kaidi Wu

College of History and Politics, Guizhou Normal University, Guiyang, China

Email: 1073150515@qq.com

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Abstract

If Marx’s dialectical materialism reveals people’s psychological activities or self-consciousness as a product of social life, its essence is a reflection of production relations. Then the advent of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory seems to have completed a certain “reversal” of the dialectical materialist interpretation reducing human social activities to the “magnification” of individual psychological activities, and treating the historical development of human beings as individual the counterpart of psychological development. In this regard, the opposition and contradiction between the two theories have become a foregone conclusion. But in Žižek’s “Parallax Views”, he took a different approach and provided a different route to realize the possibility of the fusion of dialectical materialism and psychoanalytic theory. If the nature of the opposition between psychoanalysis and dialectical materialism is the opposition between the internal psychological mechanism and the external reality, then when Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory stops the desire for emptiness and lack in the realm of human spirit, Žižek The desire for emptiness and lack is promoted to the ontological basis of actual existence. Thus, psychoanalysis and dialectical materialist philosophy will become one and the same science—as a science that pays attention to the emptiness, lack, and rupture of the constitutive subject or object. This is the real possibility of the fusion of psychoanalytic theory and dialectical materialism.

Keywords

Psychoanalysis, Dialectical Materialism, Žižek, “Parallax Views”

1. Introduction

If it is said that the advent of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and the process of

contact with Marxist theory, there has been a wave of academic research on the fusion of psychoanalysis and Marxist theory in the Western world. This wave is not only concentrated in Fromm, Marcuse, Reich and other “psychoanalytical Marxists” are also reflected in the publication of a large number of works on the comparison of psychoanalytic theory with Marxist theory, then in the post-Cold War era today, with the fading of the research boom. On the one hand, Marxism with class struggle as one of its cores gradually lost its hegemonic position in Western European intellectual circles, and the mainstream expression of social conditions increasingly emphasized “declassification”. As Ernest Laclau put it: “The term class, by becoming part of the chain of enumeration, has lost its articulating role without acquiring any new precise meaning. We are talking about the ability to resolve floating that which refers to the condition (Butler, 2004).” On the other hand, psychoanalysis is being replaced by psychiatry, clinical psychology, and positivist psychological theories, with analysts whose only weapon is discourse, unable to prescribe drugs to directly treat the mind symptoms, so it is difficult for psychoanalysts to retain visitors. In other words, is it still possible to revive the fusion of psychoanalysis and Marxist theory in contemporary times?

2. The Heterogeneity of Psychoanalytic Theory and Dialectical Materialism

In fact, another attempt to bring Marxism and psychoanalysis into contact with each other than the “psychoanalytic Marxists”. As early as 1963, Althusser wrote in a paper: “Marx based his theory on the denial of the ‘economic man’ myth, Freud based his theory on the ‘psychological man’, ‘on the negation of’ (Macy & Mai, 1998).” So far, we have actually obtained a quaternary matrix for dealing with the criticism of psychoanalysis by Marxist theory: 1) Adhering to the basic principles of Marxism and admitting the errors of psychoanalytic theory; 2) Revise the viewpoints of Marxism to rehabilitate psychoanalytic theory; 3) abandon both Marxism and psychoanalysis, and replace them with more scientific quantitative theories; 4) adhere to Marxism, and at the same time adhere to the meaning of psychoanalytic theory, clarify The former’s criticism of the latter is a misunderstanding. Under the common situation of being expelled in the contemporary era, the two should jointly open up a new way of integration, so as to abandon the external difference between Marxist theory and psychoanalysis. The last position may be quite tempting, but as Slavoj Žižek quotes Lenin, the army needs a thousand times more discipline in retreat than in attack. Re-clarification of the inner difference between psychoanalytic theory and dialectical materialism, which is a great achievement of Marxist theory, is now becoming an urgent task to resolve the contradiction and contradiction between the two theories. It is for this reason that a once neglected work such as “Marxist Criticism of Psychoanalytic Theory” deserves to be taken seriously again today. So the next question is: what exactly is the heterogeneity between dialectical materialism and

psychoanalysis? After the introductory content written by C. Clement and P. Bruno, the most tit-for-tat and fierce criticism in “Marxist Criticism of Psychoanalytic Theory” finally appeared in L. Seifer’s book entitled “Psychoanalysis” and “historical materialism” surfaced in the third chapter. In this chapter, Cypher points to Freud’s later texts such as “An Illusionary Future”, “Civilization and Its Discontents”, “Moses and Monotheism”, and points to Freud’s use as a clinical practice. The ambition of constructing a psychoanalytic theory that can provide explanations for all human activities after the gradual maturity of psychoanalytic techniques. However, in Cypher’s view, such ambitions are not only overstepping, but also expose Freud’s petty-bourgeois ignorance of human history and social activities, because Freud regards human collective social activities directly as individuals. The “amplification” of the psychological activities of human beings, and the historical development of human beings is regarded as the counterpart of the individual psychological development. These points of view in Freud’s theory are clearly incompatible with the dialectical materialist analysis of Marxism, according to which “the essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in a single individual, but in its reality it is the sum of relationships”. Human mental activity is not only the essence of human social relations, but on the contrary, it is the product of social relations and a reflection of social relations. The superstructure of social activities, such as religion, culture, political system, etc., is ultimately determined by the economic foundation of society and by production activities. Family life, the relationship between children and parents, marriage and sexual activity are certainly part of contemporary social life, but they cannot be the whole of social life, or even the axis or decisive factor of social life. Historical and anthropological research can easily point to how the “father-mother-me” Oedipal triangle family relationship became the dominant kinship in the context of the dominance of the capitalist mode of production, “a more recent study of gender Theory would also point to the Oedipus complex as a norm formed through the repression of reality’s diverse kinship (Butler, 2017).” The psychological mechanisms produced by family kinship and kinship are themselves historicized, determined as the superstructure, not decisive. It must be admitted that Seifer’s criticism is correct. When Freud tried to explain the human activities represented by religion with psychoanalytic theory, he made the mistake of projecting the collective with the individual and the reality with the psychology, which made him finally go on the path of idealism deviating from historical materialism.

3. Two Breaks Embedded in Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory

But is this an inevitable consequence of Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and separation from dialectical materialism? Is this the only way to explain Freud’s anthropological interest that baffles clinical practitioners, as Seifer critiques: “It is impossible to separate psychoanalysis from its utilization above eternity (Clement, 1985a)?” The answer to the question still has to go back to Freud’s theory.

In Freud, we can distinguish two kinds of ruptures. A rupture occurs in contemporary responses to Freud's legacy: contemporary psychoanalysts are wary of dealing with Freud's legacy, and Freud himself conceived of "applied psychoanalysis" as "going wider and wider". However, his contemporary disciples are more willing to disentangle the relationship with this part of the heritage, claiming that psychoanalysis comes from the clinic and should be limited to the clinic, all theories are temporary and serve only for analytical practice. Another rupture occurred simply within Freud's own theory: Seifer, while criticizing Freud's idealist errors, noted the Jungian tendencies hidden in *Totem and Taboo*, in this work, Freud had to turn to the very Jungian concept of "collective psychology" in order to explain how the social psychology transcended the limited individual life and acquired the same developmental capacity as the individual psychology. In connection with the fact that Freud and Jung parted ways around the time of *Totem and Taboo*, does this mean that we can distinguish two different tendencies in Freud's theory? One of them implicitly affirms Jung's obscurantist revision of psychoanalytic theory, and the other leads to Freud's eventual break with Jung? It is in the absence of an understanding of the possible ruptures in Freud's theory that Seifer, in a subsection entitled "Human Psychology and Socialization," argues: Social heritage, along with the ideas that interest us, is not something else. But the psyche objectified in a non-psychological form. At the same time, on the other hand, the neural basis of behavior—not only the brain as an organ, but also the stable structure of the various processes in the brain (in the process of individual learning) (Clement, 1985b). Later in this subsection, Seifer accused Freud of not only ignoring what was unique to humans relative to animals, but also to Liberation from natural instincts, on the contrary, restores human social activities to this instinct. The question is, does Freud's so-called "instinct" refer to just the kind of instinct that animals have? What Seifer ignores here is the "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" published in 1920, which represents a major theoretical turning point for Freud. Recall the main thesis of this work: the existence of a psychological mechanism, the pleasure principle, under the name of the principle of permanence, the subject always tries to maintain this state of equilibrium and independence, and even eventually attempts to cancel the life that accompanies the impulse and return to death. But in contrast, there are some forces that oppose the pleasure principle, including the reality principle, which requires the subject to delay the satisfaction of pleasure according to the requirements of the outside world. Surprisingly, Freud did not stop here, did not designate the pleasure principle and the reality principle as the whole mechanism of human mental activity, and even contrary to popular interpretation, he did not even designate the pleasure principle as the most important. Basic mechanism: "There is indeed a compulsive repetition in psychic life that goes beyond the pleasure principle...and this repetition seems to be more primitive, more fundamental, and more instinctive than the pleasure principle from which it deviates (Quinault, 2016)."

The “beyond the pleasure principle” is not a reality principle, but a compulsive repetition, a constant return of symptoms to the subject. Could there be anything more deviating from an animal’s “direct behavior” than this compulsive repetition? As Freud rightly discovered, what the pleasure principle upholds is precisely the dialectic of the life-death cycle of the natural alternation of the organism, and when the organism seeks a nourished and peaceful life, it is also seeking a peaceful death. The compulsive repetition that goes beyond the pleasure principle stands in opposition to such an organic cycle of life and death, and represents an obsessive immortality intended to break the natural cycle, elevating or degrading finite human life to the eternal realm of sacred or profane go in. Neither Freud nor Cypher could understand that, as a more basic psychological mechanism than the pleasure principle, forced repetition is by no means a natural human instinct, but an anti-instinctive tendency based on the most central mental activity. Unexpectedly, Žižek also found this mechanism of forced repetition in Hitchcock’s films. Hitchcock kept repeating the same motifs in different films: in “The Cape,” the Nazi saboteur grabs the protagonist’s hand from the torch of the Statue of Liberty; in “Rear Window,” James Stewart Trying to grab the pursuer’s hand, but the pursuer tried to break free to let Stewart fall; in “The Catch a Man”, American agents grabbed an innocent American tourist with their hands and took him to their side; in “Catch a Thief” At the beginning of Vertigo, Stewart tries to grab the policeman’s hand that stretches out to him; at the end of North by Northwest, Eva Marie Saint Grabbing Cary Grant’s hand from the edge of the cliff... This series of hand motifs even goes back to Wagner, in Ragnarok and Parsifal, the dying Siegfried Both Didurel and Didurel raised their hands. The motifs are not the proverbial MacGuffins, they don’t create suspense, they don’t encode meaning, they just appear in the movie, with a lot of libidinal betting. They are Hitchcock’s and Wagner’s obsessive-repetitive symptoms, or in Jacques Lacan’s terminology, they are all signs, symptoms that condense pleasure. As for Lacan under the banner of “returning to Freud”, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” is also one of his favorite Freudian texts to be used for surgery. Lacan, who is well versed in Hegel’s philosophy, is very clear that there is nothing unusual in the dialectical entanglement of life and death. Compared with Freud’s digging out the distinction between the pleasure principle and the nirvana principle, Lacan pays more attention to it. On top of the compulsive repetition that goes beyond the pleasure principle. If Freud’s surprise is that “all living things die due to internal causes” (Quinodo, 2016), what interests Lacan is that also due to some internal reasons, the subject in a sense transcends The cycle of life and death leaves immortal traces on the outside of itself. Another point that is different from Freud is that Lacan does not stick to the concept of “living body”. For him, the existence of compulsive repetition of symptoms has proved that the dimension of the subject has surpassed the animal body, freed from organic life, and the name Lacan assigns to that which draws the line between man and animal is pleasure.

4. The Possibility of Fusion of Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis

In contemporary times, as a member of the “Lacanian Marxists”, Žižek is the philosopher most keen to defend the materialistic nature of psychoanalysis. Žižek seems to reveal his intention to merge dialectical materialism with psychoanalytic theory in the preface to “Parallax Views”. Although there is a willingness to merge, the basis for fusion is still lacking. Of course, he is fully aware of the various criticisms of psychoanalysis made by dialectical materialism in the past, but he has chosen a different line to realize the possibility of the fusion of dialectical materialism and psychoanalytic theory: “Someone has applied psychoanalysis to the socio-ideological process, followed by a tedious standard critique of it, and a psychoanalytic response to this standard critique. There is a structural similarity between: one the second relationship between historical materialism and dialectical materialism is the above-mentioned true psychoanalytic response.” It is not easy to understand Žižek’s remarks, and the difficulty is not only in the need to clarify Žižek’s views on the interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis also lies in a more fundamental question: what does the word dialectical materialism refer to in the preface titled “Dialectical Materialism Is Coming to the City”? The best reference for answering this question is, of course, the official Soviet classic of Marxist philosophy, *On Dialectical and Historical Materialism*. According to this article, dialectical materialism is a world view that uses a dialectical method to understand natural phenomena, and uses materialistic theories to explain and understand natural phenomena. Dialectical materialism is material because it believes that “the world is material in its essence” and that “matter, nature, existence, is an objective reality that exists outside of consciousness and independent of consciousness; matter is the first Sexual because it is the source of sensation, representation, consciousness; while consciousness is secondary, derived because it is the reflection of matter, the reflection of being (Compilation Bureau of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1985).” This is basically one of the starting points of Seifer’s criticism of psychoanalytic theory. However, such a definition does not satisfy Žižek. From a philosophical point of view, Stalin’s version of dialectical materialism presupposes the actual existence of material entities as “things at hand” outside of consciousness. The philosophy of psychiatry is not without its counterparts in psychoanalysis. After Freud, a new school of psychoanalysis called ego psychology emerged in the English-speaking world. The ego psychology stream abandoned the important theoretical dimension of psychoanalysis opposing common sense, and regarded external reality as a given, requiring the subject to pass Psychoanalysis to adapt to something. Self-psychology advocates that the “normal” state of the subject’s psychological mechanism is the ability to open up to reality and adapt to reality, thus classifying the state of maintaining a critical distance from social reality as “pathological”. The weakness of the school of ego psychology, as well as Stalin’s ver-

sion of dialectical materialism, lies in the preservation of reality in external opposition to psychological mechanisms. But in Freud, especially in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, things are by no means that simple. First of all, the opposition between the reality principle and the pleasure principle is ambiguous. The reality principle does not cancel the pleasure principle, but delays the satisfaction of pleasure according to reality; in addition, the intervention of the reality principle on the pleasure principle is only the last step, and the background is already that the pleasure principle and the pleasure principle Force confrontation between repetitions. The revolutionary rewriting of Freud's theory by Žizek and Lacan is based on the mutual confrontation between the pleasure principle and forced repetition. According to Žizek and Lacan, the reason why the psychological mechanism can break through The closure opens up to the outside world, not at all because the external reality "is there", or because reality exerts an unavoidable pressure on the organism from the outside world, but because the antagonism between the pleasure principle and the symptoms of compulsive repetition has previously broken what the pleasure principle holds. The calm closure intended to maintain breaks the psychological mechanism's insistence on full satisfaction. That is to say, for the human psychological mechanism, whether it can adapt to the external reality is a pseudo-question. The real problem is that the unbalanced impulse within the psychological mechanism makes it have to give up the pursuit of inner closure and have to turn to External pursuit, pursuit of what?

Lacan's answer is an object that is not an object, an object-cause, an object which he calls object a. In the seminar on the interpretation of "The Symposium", Lacan rewrote the myth of Aristophanes about spherical human beings. In Lacan's view, what is missing in the incomplete and broken spherical human is not his other half, but a Organ, a "flake". "This slice, this organ, is characterized by the fact that it does not exist, but it is still an organ. I can give you more details about it, its zoological status, that is libidinal...Object a is only its representative, its sign (Miller & Sheridan, 1998)." Both the sheet and the object a are non-existent objects, and they are both metonyms for the internal rupture of the subject. When this original rupture is transformed from internal opposition to external opposition, the subject Just outside of itself, an object shining with sublime light is found, this object a "is not an affirmative entity existing in space, it is ultimately just a curvature of space itself, precisely when we want to get the object directly, It tempts us to make such a bend (Žižek, 2014a)." In short, object a is not the opposite of desire, it is the cause of desire, and the fact that the subject can only look for object a outside means that the subject must maintain himself in the other, in the social network The presence. Psychoanalysis is therefore not a doctrine that assigns a transcendental essence to human beings, but, as Žizek put it, a science that justifies and explains the social nature of human beings. For Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis, the analysis of the materialistic nature of psychoanalysis seems to be over. But Žižek is more ambitious than La-

can. Lacanians only position the theory of emptiness and lack in the realm of the human spirit, while Žižek has to go a step further and position emptiness in the real world. Ontological level, and redefine the controversial concept of “dialectical materialism” to achieve some fusion of dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis. To this end, he did not hesitate to leave the field of German idealism at his fingertips, and dived into the debate about materialism and idealism in the history of philosophy: “The ultimate disagreement between idealism and materialism does not involve the materiality of existence (only material things really exist), but refers to the existence of nothing or nothingness: the basic axiom of materialism is that nothingness or nothingness is the (one and only ultimate) truth, that is, the line between being and nothingness is blurred (Žižek, 2012).” The status of this less-than-nothing, contracting pre-noumenal entity ultimately determines the ultimate boundary between materialism and idealism. Contrary to our general understanding of the history of philosophy, Zizek does not attribute the title of materialist in the history of modern philosophy to Hobbes, but to Hegel, who is said to have reached the peak of German idealism. Correspondingly, Žižek does not adopt the common Marxist perspective to criticize Kant’s transcendental idealism, nor does he accuse Kant of ignoring how transcendental subjects are historically formed in practice. On the contrary, Žižek’s criticism of Kant starts entirely from the position of Hegelianism. He first appreciates Kant’s recognition of the fundamental and irreducible limitations of human existence in the name of “transcendental turn”—There is an antinomy that can never be mediated between rationality and sensibility, active and passive, and what transcendence points to is not the “synthesis” of the antinomy, but an absolute rupture. As for Hegel, Hegel’s revision of Kant is not precisely to reconcile the division set up by Kant. His real criticism is that Kant did not insist on attacking metaphysics. Kant still sees the thing-in-itself as an external, unreachable existence (isn’t this criticism similar to his criticism of the school of ego psychology?), on the contrary Hegel shifts the focus to the separation of the transcendental from the thing The fissure in the self. “Hegel moved from an epistemological obstacle to a positive ontological condition, transforming our knowledge of the incompleteness of the primordial substance into the positive character of the primal substance that is itself incomplete and inconsistent (Žižek, 2014b).” Hegel Ernest transferred the limitations recognized by Kant from human beings to ontology: the reason for the existence of antinomy is not that human beings fundamentally lack the ability to directly penetrate the ontological world, but the ontological world itself is incomplete and fractured. The pre-noumenal entity that provides the basis for reality is therefore not an affirmative entity, but merely a less-than-nothing entity “thing”, the affirmation of the negative, the rupture itself inscribed in the ontology. It might even be said here that Zizek’s ultimate ontological reference point is not even Hegel, but the infamous Schelling. More precisely, it was Schelling who wrote the manuscript of the Age of the World, because “the construction of history before the subject,

that is, that which must take place before the subject can establish a relation to ‘external reality’...in Schelling, then appears as a prehistoric confrontation with God, and that confrontation is resolved at the moment God speaks.”

Now we can stop going around in circles in the history of philosophy and define exactly what Žižek’s version of “dialectical materialism” is, and in order to accomplish this we must once again return to Lacanian-style oxymoron: “‘Everything is Is matter’ and ‘there is no immaterial’ are two fundamentally different assertions. This means that, rather than claiming that ‘everything is matter’, truly radical materialism should be defined as a non-reductionism that the immaterial phenomenon was established as a positive non-existence (Žižek, 2011).” The red line that distinguishes idealism from materialism is this “positive non-existence”, that is, the rupture inscribed in the total existence. While idealists try to prove that there is something “more real” beyond this rupture, materialists bravely acknowledge the rupture as the ultimate truth of all existence. In Lacan’s words, it is to admit that “the Big Other does not exist”. At this point, we also understand why Žižek has been tirelessly connecting the lines between psychoanalytic theory and philosophical theory. Because psychoanalysis, especially Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a science concerned with the emptiness, lack, and rupture of the constitutive subjectivity, fits exactly with Žižek’s definition of dialectical materialism. Psychoanalysis and dialectical materialist philosophy would then become one and the same science—a science concerned with the emptiness, lack, and fracture of the constitutive subject or object. The opposing and contradictory explanations that have remained outside the theories of the two sides so far will be replaced by the essential connection between the two. This essential connection manifests itself as a parallax relationship, the real point of which is not that we find the shadow of the other in the one, but that it is only by understanding the one that we can truly understand the other. This is the real possibility of the fusion of psychoanalytic theory and dialectical materialism.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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