

THE BAKHTIN READER

SHORT LOAN

Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov

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2 Critique of Freudianism

This extract is taken from the two final chapters of Vološinov, *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*, which was published in 1927, two years before *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Thus, it provides an earlier critique of 'subjective individualism' and shows the first movement towards a sociological account of consciousness.

Freudianism begins by identifying two opposing trends in the study of psychical life: objective and subjective psychology. In the latter, introspection is used as the fundamental means of gaining access to psychical life. It is argued that since any Marxist study must be founded upon an objective methodology, the inherent subjectivism of this introspective trend makes it totally unacceptable for dialectical materialism. However, objective psychology, as typified in American behaviourism and Russian reflexologists like Pavlov, has a tendency to rely upon over-simplistic mechanistic materialism – a crude biologism. This cannot account adequately for the complex interaction of the psychical and the social as evinced in the phenomenon of inner speech, for example. Although Freud's psychoanalytic theories depend equally and damagingly upon subjective introspection, they have the merit of highlighting this inadequacy in the objective trend. A Marxist understanding of psychical life must be both objective and sociological.

The abstract biological person ... does not exist at all... What is needed, as it were, is a second birth, a social birth. A human being is not born as an abstract biological organism but as a landowner or a peasant, as a bourgeois or a proletariat... Furthermore, he is born a Russian or a Frenchman, and he is born in 1800 or 1900, and so on. *Only this social and historical localization makes him a real human being and determines the content of his life and cultural creativity* (p. 15).

The passages given here provide a good sense of the direct and combative style, quite often humorously and ironically so, of the 'Vološinov' texts. They undoubtedly evoke a simplistic sense of central Freudian ideas, but the insistence upon the social construction of terms like 'sexuality' as opposed to the essentialist way it is often used in psychoanalytic writing is shrewd. The final discussion of bourgeois sexualization of family life makes interesting connections with Michel Foucault's ideas in *The History of Sexuality*.

From V. N. Vološinov, *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*, 1927.

Trans. I. R. Titunik and ed. in collab. with N. H. Bruss, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ill., 1987.

We have ... ascertained that Freudianism is merely one species of subjective psychology. We have also seen wherein consists the common ground

upon which Freudianism and all other subjectivist doctrines converge. But the issue is not exhausted thereby; we must also make a clear-cut delimitation and proper assessment of what it is precisely that *distinguishes Freudianism* from other subjectivist trends.

For, indeed, there is something paradoxically novel and original about Freudianism that strikes every newcomer to the doctrine. This impression of novelty most likely also formed in our reader's mind as he followed our exposition of psychoanalysis. This is something we must look into.

What immediately strikes one upon first acquaintance with Freud's doctrine and what remains the final and strongest impression of the entire construction is, of course, the *strife*, the *chaos*, the *adversity* of our psychical life running conspicuously throughout Freud's whole conception and which he himself referred to as the 'dynamics' of the psyche.

In this respect Freudianism is really quite different than all other psychological trends. Mental life for the old psychology was all 'peace and quiet': everything put right, everything in its place, no crises, no catastrophes; from birth to death a smooth, straight path of steady and purposive progress, of gradual mental growth, with the adult's consciousness of mind coming to replace the child's innocence. This naive *psychological optimism* is a characteristic feature of all pre-Freudian psychology....

To all appearances, Freudianism did produce a most radical change in these views on the psyche.

The human psyche belongs to the realm of nature, human psychical life is part of elemental life – that above all was the message the public at large seized upon out of the entire doctrine of Freud. Those people inclined toward Nietzscheanism (and there were quite a few of them among Freud's admirers) preferred to speak rather of the 'tragicness of psychical life'.

Apropos the last point, it should immediately be noted that while natural necessity is certainly a stranger to purposiveness and harmony, it is no less remote from tragedy. However, perhaps that expression ought not to be taken as characterizing Freudianism as a whole.

Now, did Freud really succeed in detecting Nature in our psyche? Are the conflicts of the 'ego', 'id', and 'superego', the 'death instinct' and 'Eros' really the conflicts of elemental forces? Or are they perhaps only conflicts of motives in the individual human consciousness? If that is the case, then we have something more like a 'storm in a teacup' than a conflict of elemental forces.

In order to answer this question, it behooves us to restate in a somewhat different connection a set of ideas that we began to develop in the preceding chapter.

Freud's whole psychological construct is based fundamentally on human verbal utterances; it is nothing but a special kind of interpretation of utterances. All these utterances are, of course, constructed in the *conscious sphere of the psyche*. To be sure, Freud distrusts the surface motives of consciousness; he tries instead to penetrate the deeper levels of the psychical realm. Nevertheless, Freud does not take utterances in their objective aspect, does not seek out their physiological or social roots; instead he attempts to find the true motives of behavior in the utterances themselves – the patient is himself supposed to provide him information about the depths of the 'unconscious'.

Thus, Freud's construct remains within the confines of what a person himself can say about himself and his behavior on the basis of his own internal apprehension. Freud, to be sure, directs introspection along new pathways, makes it penetrate other levels of the psyche, but *he does not relinquish introspection as the sole method of authenticating the reality of psychical events*. The 'unconscious', too, can and should be included in the sphere of introspection. After all, the patient is himself supposed to recognize the content of the 'unconscious' (some repressed complex, for instance), to recall it, to attest to its existence with the aid of introspection. It is only in this way that a repressed 'unconscious' experience acquires the value of a psychological fact.

For introspection, all the products of the unconscious take the forms of desires or impulses, find *verbal* expression and in *that* shape, that is, in the shape of a *motive*, enter into a person's awareness.

It is completely understandable that, in Freud's doctrine, the interrelations prevailing between the conscious and the unconscious should be so thoroughly unlike the relations between two *material* forces that allow of a precise objective account. Indeed, Freud's 'conscious' and 'unconscious' are ever at odds; between them prevail mutual hostility and incomprehension and the endeavor to deceive one another. Surely interrelations of this sort are only possible between two ideas, two ideological trends, two antagonistic persons, and not between two natural, material forces! Is it conceivable, for instance, that two natural forces engage in mutual deception or mutual nonrecognition?

Of course, only after entering into consciousness and donning the forms of consciousness (the forms of desires, thoughts, etc. with specific content) can products of the unconscious engage in a conflict with ethical precepts or be perceived as deception of the 'censorship'.

Thus, *the whole of Freud's psychical 'dynamics' is given in the ideological illumination of consciousness*. Consequently, *it is not a dynamics of psychical forces but only a dynamics of various motives of consciousness*.

In the whole Freudian construct of a psychical conflict, together with all the mechanisms through which it operates, we hear only the biased voice of the subjective consciousness interpreting human behavior. The unconscious is nothing but one of the motives of that consciousness, one of its devices for interpreting behavior ideologically. . . .

That is not how Freud works. Freud lets himself be drawn into the conflict of subjective motivations of consciousness. The fact that he prefers a special set of motives – unconscious ones – and extracts such motives in a special way does not change matters in the least. A motive remains a motive – it does not acquire the weight of a material phenomenon. Freud's system provides us no access to the fertile grounds of objective apprehension.

But where do all those 'forces' with which Freud populates the psyche come from – the 'ego', 'the id', the 'superego' and so forth?

The conflict of motives supplies no evidential grounds for these forces. The conflict of motives is a real phenomenon accessible to objective apprehension – after all, it finds expression in verbal utterances. Psychical forces, on the contrary, are arbitrary constructs that Freud utilizes in the effort to explain that conflict. As is true of the majority of constructs in subjective psychology, Freud's theory is a 'projection' of certain objective relations of the external

world into the world of the psyche. What finds expression there is, in the very first instance, the extremely complex *social interrelationship between doctor and patient*.

In what does this interrelationship consist?

A patient wishes to hide from the doctor certain of his experiences and certain events of his life. He wants to foist on the doctor his own point of view on the reasons for his illness and the nature of his experiences. The doctor, for his part, aims at enforcing his authority as a doctor, endeavors to wrest confessions from the patient and to compel him to take the 'correct' point of view on his illness and its symptoms. Intertwining with all this are other factors: Between doctor and patient there may be differences in sex, in age, in social standing, and, moreover, there is the difference of their professions. All these factors complicate their relationship and the struggle between them.

And it is in the midst of this complex and very special social atmosphere that the verbal utterances are made – the patient's narratives and his statements in conversation with the doctor – utterances that Freud places squarely at the basis of his theory. Can we acknowledge these utterances as the expression of the patient's individual psyche?

Not a single instance of verbal utterance can be reckoned exclusively to its utterer's account. Every utterance is *the product of the interaction between speakers and the product of the broader context of the whole complex social situation in which the utterance emerges*. Elsewhere¹ we have attempted to show that any product of the activity of human discourse – from the simplest utterance in everyday life to elaborate works of literary art – derives shape and meaning in all its most essential aspects not from the subjective experiences of the speaker but from the social situation in which the utterance appears. Language and its forms are the products of prolonged social intercourse among members of a given speech community. An utterance finds language basically already prepared for use. It is the material for the utterance and it sets constraints on the utterance's possibilities. What is characteristic for a given utterance specifically – its selection of particular words, its particular kind of sentence structure, its particular kind of intonation – all this is the expression of the interrelationship between the speakers and of the whole complex set of social circumstances under which the exchange of words takes place. Those 'psychical experiences' of the speaker, the expression of which we are inclined to see in his utterance, are, however, only in fact a one-sided, simplified, and scientifically unverifiable interpretation of a more complex social phenomenon. What we have here is a special kind of 'projection', a means whereby we project into the 'individual soul' a complex set of social interrelationships. Discourse is like a 'scenario' of the immediate act of communication in the process of which it is engendered, and this act of communication is, in turn, a factor of the wider field of communication of the community to which the speaker belongs. In order to understand this 'scenario', it is essential to reconstruct all those complex social interrelations of which the given utterance is the ideological refract-

¹ An authorial note here refers to 'our article, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art"':

Nothing changes at all if, instead of outward speech, we are dealing with inner speech. Inner speech, too, assumes a listener and is oriented in its construction toward that listener. Inner speech is the same kind of product and expression of social intercourse as is outward speech.

All those verbal utterances of the patient (his verbal reactions), on which Freud's psychological system depends, are also just such *scenarios*, scenarios, first and foremost of the immediate, small social event in which they were engendered – the *psychoanalytical session*. Therein that complex struggle between doctor and patient, of which we spoke above, finds expression. What is reflected in these utterances is not the dynamics of the individual psyche but the *social dynamics* of the interrelations between doctor and patient. Here is the source for the dramatism that marks the Freudian construct. It is also the source for that personification of psychical forces which we have already mentioned. Here, indeed, people, not natural forces, are in conflict.

The psychical 'mechanisms' readily disclose their social derivation to us. The 'unconscious' stands in opposition not to the individual conscious of the patient but, primarily, to the doctor, his requirements, and his views. 'Resistance' is likewise primarily resistance to the doctor, to the listener, to the other person generally.

Freud's system *projects* the entire dynamics of the interrelationship between two people into the individual psyche. This sort of projection comes as no surprise; it is, as we have already said, a common phenomenon in subjective psychology....

We must turn attention to still another aspect of the Freudian system. The content of the unconscious, that is, various repressed complexes (including above all the Oedipus complex), is relegated by Freud to a person's past, to his early years of childhood. But the entire doctrine on these early, preconscious stages of human development is built on the basis of evidence supplied by adults. Those few attempts the Freudians did make to analyze the behavior of children *directly* did not have, and could not have had, any substantive importance for the working out of the Freudian construct. That construct took shape independently of such attempts and even before they were made, and the analyses themselves already presupposed and entirely depended on it. Thus, the whole construct of infantile complexes was obtained by *retrospective means*; it is based on the interpretation of the remembrances of adults and of those compromise formations with the aid of which those remembrances could be reached....

Can such a retrospective method of reconstructing experiences from early childhood (a complex, after all, is a set of experiences) – can such a method be considered scientifically sound?

We believe that nothing real, nothing objective can possibly be arrived at that way. What we are dealing with here is, in fact, a very widespread and typical phenomenon: *the interpretation of the past from the point of view of the present*. Anything like objective remembrance of our past inner experiences is, of course, entirely out of the question. We see in the past only what is important for the present, important for the instant in which we remember our past. We transfer from the present to the preconscious past of the child above all that ideological-evaluative complex which is characteristic of the present only. All those evaluations, points of view, associations that have

coalesced in the conscious period of our life with such concepts as 'love', 'sexual attraction', 'mother', endowing these concepts with their own complexion and making them meaningful for us, are what we then transfer to the interpretation of the facts of childhood and thereby create out of those facts of childhood coherent and meaningful events like those of adult life.

'Sexual attraction to the mother', 'the father rival', 'hostility toward the father', 'wish for the father's death' – if we subtract from all these 'events' that ideational significance, that evaluative tone, that full measure of ideological weight which accrue to them only in the context of our conscious 'adult' present, what would they have left?

They would, in any case, retain nothing that would give us the serious right to speak about an Oedipus complex, that is, about a repetition of the scheme of the Oedipus tragedy in a child's life. Precisely that aspect which gives the tragedy its profound and harrowing meaning, which horrifies and astounds the audience – that aspect would certainly be missing.

What would remain, then? A number of piecemeal objective observations that can be made about the behavior of a child: the early excitability of the sexual organs (e.g., infant erection) and of other erogenous zones, the difficulty of weaning a child away from his constant closeness to his mother's body (particularly, of course, the breast), and so on. There is obviously no need to contest a set of facts of this sort – they are commonly acceptable facts. But from a series of such facts to the grandiose and startling construct of the Oedipus complex there is a vast abyss. Once you give up projecting into the past the points of view, evaluations, and interpretations that belong to the present, then you have no cause to speak about any such thing as an Oedipus complex, no matter how great the quantity of objective facts cited in proof....

Exactly the same thing has to be said about the relation of the facts of infantile sexuality to the construct of the Oedipus complex. The facts cannot confirm the Oedipus complex because the facts belong to a different level, a different set of dimensions, than it does. The facts pertain to external, objective apprehension; the construct, to the sphere of inner experiences in a child's psyche. Moreover, in order to have any right at all to speak of infantile sexuality, the word 'sexuality' has to be understood to mean only a set of strictly defined physiological manifestations. If, on the contrary, we have in mind experiences pertaining to internal apprehension, experiences that are associated with those physiological manifestations but are permeated with value judgments and points of view, then we are making an arbitrary construct; instead of the physiological fact of sexuality, we take its ideological formulation. *The construct of the Oedipus complex is just such a purely ideological formulation projected into the psyche of a child.* The Oedipus complex is not at all the unadulterated expression of objective physiological facts.

The same must also be said about the other factors in the content of the unconscious. Everything involved here is a projection into the past of ideological interpretations of behavior that are characteristic for the present only. Freud nowhere steps beyond the confines of a subjective construct.

What, then, remains of the 'dynamics' of the psyche once we subtract the constructs that are untenable for us? – Conflicts within the verbalized behavior of human beings. A struggle of motives, but not a struggle of natural forces....

Wherever Freud criticizes the psychology of consciousness, we can join in full accord with him. A person's conscious motivation of his actions is certainly in no instance to be taken as a scientific explanation of his behavior. But we go further than that. Neither do the motives of the unconscious explain his behavior in the least, for, as we have seen, the Freudian unconscious does not fundamentally differ from consciousness; it is only another form of consciousness, only an ideologically different expression of it.

The motives of the unconscious that are disclosed at psychoanalytical sessions with the aid of 'free association' are just such *verbal reactions* on the patient's part as are all other, ordinary motives of consciousness. They differ from the latter not in kind of 'being', that is, not ontologically, but only in terms of content, that is, *ideologically*. In this sense Freud's unconscious can be called the 'unofficial conscious' in distinction from the ordinary 'official conscious'.²

From the objective point of view, both sets of motives, those of the unofficial as well as of the official conscious, are given completely alike in inner and in outward speech and both alike are not a cause of behavior but a component, an integral part of it. For objective psychology, every human motive belongs to human behavior as a part of it and not a cause of it. Human behavior may be said to break down into motor reactions ('acts' in the narrow sense of the word) and reactions of *inner and outward speech* (verbal reactions) that accompany motor reactions. Both these components of the whole of human behavior are objective and material in nature and require for their explanation factors that are likewise objective and material with respect both to the human organism itself and to the surrounding natural and social environment.

The verbal component of behavior is determined in all the fundamentals and essentials of its content by objective-social factors.

The social environment is what has given a person words and what has joined words with specific meanings and value judgments; the same environment continues ceaselessly to determine and control a person's verbal reactions throughout his entire life.

Therefore, nothing verbal in human behavior (inner and outward speech equally) can under any circumstances be reckoned to the account of the individual subject in isolation; the verbal is not his property but the property of his *social group* (his social milieu).

... We [have already] pointed out that every concrete utterance always reflects the *immediate* small social event – the event of communication, of exchange of words between persons – out of which it directly arose. We saw that Freud's 'dynamics' reflected the psychoanalytical session with its struggle and peripeteia – that social event out of which the patient's verbal utterances were engendered. ... What interests us [here] is not the immediate context of utterance but the broader, more enduring and steadfast social connections out of whose dynamics are generated all elements of the form and content of our inner and outward speech, the whole repertoire of value judgments, points of view, approaches, and so on with the help of which we illuminate

for ourselves and for others our actions, desires, feelings, and sensations.

This content of our consciousness and of our psyche in its entirety and, likewise, the separate and individual utterances with the help of which that content and that psyche manifest themselves outwardly are in every respect determined by socioeconomic factors.

We shall never reach the real, substantive roots of any given single utterance if we look for them within the confines of the single, individual organism, even when that utterance concerns what appears to be the most private and most intimate side of a person's life. Any motivation of one's behavior, any instance of self-awareness (for self-awareness is always verbal, always a matter of finding some specifically suitable verbal complex) is an act of gauging oneself against some social norm, social evaluation – is, so to speak, the socialization of oneself and one's behavior. In becoming aware of myself, I attempt to look at myself, as it were, through the eyes of another person, another representative of my social group, my class. Thus, *self-consciousness*, in the final analysis, always leads us to *class consciousness*, the reflection and specification of which it is in all its fundamental and essential respects. Here we have the *objective roots* of even the most personal and intimate reactions. How do we reach those roots?

With the help of those objective-sociological methods that Marxism has worked out for the analysis of various ideological systems – law, morality, science, world outlook, art, religion....

Any human verbal utterance is an ideological construct in the small. The motivation of one's behavior is juridical and moral creativity on a small scale; an exclamation of joy or grief is a primitive lyric composition; pragmatic considerations of the causes and consequences of happenings are germinal forms of scientific and philosophical cognition, and so on and so forth. The stable, formulated ideological systems of the sciences, the arts, jurisprudence, and the like have sprung and crystallized from that seething ideological element whose broad waves of inner and outward speech engulf our every act and our every perception. Of course, an ideology, once it has achieved formulation, exerts, in turn, a reverse on our verbal reactions.

Let us call that inner and outward speech that permeates our behavior in all its aspects 'behavioral ideology'. This behavioral ideology is in certain respects more sensitive, more responsive, more excitable and livelier than an ideology that has undergone formulation and become 'official'. In the depths of behavioral ideology accumulate those contradictions which, once having reached a certain threshold, ultimately burst asunder the system of the official ideology. But, on the whole, we may say that behavioral ideology relates just as much to the socioeconomic basis and is subject to the same laws of development as ideological superstructures in the proper sense of the term. Therefore, the methods for its study should be, as already stated, basically the same methods, only somewhat differentiated and modified in accordance with the special nature of the material.

Let us now return to those 'psychical' conflicts upon which psychoanalysis is based and which psychoanalysis attempts to explain in terms of a struggle between the conscious and the unconscious. From an objective point of view, all these conflicts are played out in the element of inner and outward speech (in addition, of course, to their purely physiological aspect), that is to say,

² For a much elaborated sense of unofficial consciousness as carnivalesque, see *Reader*, pp. 194–226.

they are played out in the element of behavioral ideology. They are not 'psychical' but ideological conflicts and, therefore, they cannot be understood within the narrow confines of the individual organism and the individual psyche. They not only go beyond the conscious, as Freud believes, they also go beyond the individual as a whole.

Dream, myth, joke, witticism, and all the verbal components of the pathological formations reflect the struggle of various ideological tendencies and trends that take shape within *behavioral ideology*.

Those areas of behavioral ideology that correspond to Freud's official, 'censored' conscious express the most steadfast and the governing factors of class consciousness. They lie close to the formulated, fully fledged ideology of the class in question, its law, its morality, its world outlook. On these levels of behavioral ideology, inner speech comes easily to order and freely turns into outward speech or, in any case, has no fear of becoming outward speech.

Other levels, corresponding to Freud's unconscious, lie at a great distance from the stable system of the ruling ideology. They bespeak the disintegration of the unity and integrity of the system, the vulnerability of the usual ideological motivations. Of course, instances of the accumulation of such inner motives — ones that erode the unity of behavioral ideology — can bear an incidental character and testify merely to the *assumption of a social déclassé status* on the part of separate individuals, but more often they testify to the emergent disintegration if not of the class as a whole then of certain of its groups. *In a healthy community and in a socially healthy personality, behavioral ideology, founded on the socioeconomic basis, is strong and sound* — here, there is no discrepancy between the official and the unofficial conscious.

The content and composition of the unofficial levels of behavioral ideology (in Freudian terms, the content and composition of the unconscious) are conditioned by historical time and class to the same degree as are its levels 'under censorship' and its systems of formulated ideology (morality, law, world outlook). For example, the homosexual inclinations of an ancient Hellene of the ruling class produced absolutely no conflicts in his behavioral ideology; they freely emerged into outward speech and even found formulated ideological expression (e.g., Plato's *Symposium*).

All those conflicts with which psychoanalysis deals are characteristic in the highest degree for the European petite bourgeoisie of modern times. Freud's 'censorship' very distinctly reflects the behavioral-ideological point of view of a petit bourgeois, and for that reason a somewhat comical effect is produced when Freudians transfer that point of view to the psyche of an ancient Greek or a medieval peasant. The monstrous overestimation of Freudianism's part of the sexual factor is also exceedingly revealing against the background of the present disintegration of the bourgeois family.

The wider and deeper the breach between the official and the unofficial conscious, the more difficult it becomes for motives of inner speech to turn into outward speech (oral or written or printed, in a circumscribed or broad social milieu) wherein they might acquire formulation, clarity, and rigor. Motives under these conditions begin to fail, to lose their verbal countenance, and little by little really do turn into a 'foreign body' in the psyche. Whole sets of organic manifestations come, in this way, to be excluded from

the zone of verbalized behavior and may become *asocial*. Thereby the sphere of the 'animalian' in man enlarges.

Of course, not every area of human behavior is subject to so complete a divorce from verbal ideological formulation. After all, neither is it true that every motive in contradiction with the official ideology must degenerate into indistinct inner speech and then die out — it might well engage in a struggle with that official ideology. If such a motive is *founded on the economic being of the whole group*, if it is not merely the motive of a *déclassé loner*, then it has a chance for a future and perhaps even a victorious future. There is no reason why such a motive should become *asocial* and lose contact with communication. Only, at first a motive of this sort will develop within a small social milieu and will depart into the underground — not the psychological underground of repressed complexes, but the salutary political underground. That is exactly how a *revolutionary ideology* in all spheres of culture comes about.

There is one other extremely important area of human behavior in which verbal connections are put in order with great difficulty and which, therefore is especially liable to fall out of social context, lose its ideological formulatedness, and degenerate into an aboriginal, animalian state. This is the area of *the sexual*. The disintegration of an official ideology is reflected first and foremost in this area of human behavior. It becomes the center for the accumulation of *asocial* and *antisocial* forces.

This area of human private life is preeminently the one most easily made the base for social deviations. The sexual 'pair', as a sort of *social minimum*, is most easily isolated and transformed into a microcosm without the need for anything or anybody else.

All periods of social decline and disintegration are characterized by *overestimation of the sexual* in life and in ideology, and what is more, of the sexual in an extreme unidimensional conception; its *asocial* aspect, taken in isolation, is advanced to the forefront. The sexual aims at becoming a surrogate for the social. All human beings are divided above all into males and females. All the remaining subdivisions are held to be inessential. Only those social relations that can be sexualized are meaningful and valuable. Everything else becomes null and void.

The present day success of Freudianism throughout Europe bespeaks the complete disintegration of the *official ideological system*. A 'behavioral ideology' has supervened that is turned in upon itself, disjointed, unformulated. Each aspect of life, each happening and object, goes out of kilter with a smoothly operating and universally respected context of *class and social values*. Each thing, as it were, turns its sexual, not its social, side to the human gaze. Behind every word in a poetic or philosophical text glares some stark sexual symbol. All other aspects of words, and especially the social-historical values inherent in them, cease to be heard by a modern European bourgeois — they have become merely overtones to the basic note of sexuality.

An extremely indicative and immensely interesting feature of Freudianism is its *wholesale sexualization of the family* and all family relationships in toto (the Oedipus complex). The family, that castle and keep of capitalism, evidently has become a thing economically and socially little understood and little taken to heart; and that is what has brought on its wholesale sexualization,

as if thereby it were made newly meaningful or 'made strange' as our formalists would say.³ The Oedipus complex is indeed a magnificent way of making the family unit 'strange'. The father is not the entrepreneur, and the son is not his heir – the father is only the mother's lover, and his son is his rival!

Precisely this novel and piquant 'meaningfulness', imparted to all those aspects of life that have lost their meaning, is what has attracted so broad a public to Freudianism. The obviousness and certitude of sexual drives contrast here with the ambiguity and uncertainty of all other social ideological values. Sexuality is declared the supreme criterion of *reality*, of essentiality. And the more déclassé a person is, the more keenly he senses his 'naked naturalness', his 'elementalness'.

Freudianism – 'the psychology of the déclassés' – is becoming the acknowledged ideological persuasion of the widest strata of the European bourgeoisie. Here is a fact profoundly symptomatic and indicative for anybody who wishes to grasp the spirit of Europe today.

The basic aspiration of the philosophy of our time is to *create a world beyond the social and the historical*. The 'cosmism' of Steiner's anthropology, the 'biologism' of Bergson, and, finally, the 'psychobiologism' and 'sexualism' of Freud that we have examined here – all these three trends, sharing the entire bourgeois world among them, have, each in its own way, served the aspiration of the latest philosophy. They have endowed with their own features the physiognomy of the modern *Kulturmenschen* – the Steinerian, the Bergsonian, the Freudian – and they have raised the *three altars* of his belief and veneration – *Magic, Instinct and Sex*.⁴ Where the creative paths of history are closed, there remain only the blind alleys of the individual 'livings out' of a life bereft of meaning.

3 Language as Dialogic Interaction

In this extract from *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* the positive agenda for a Marxist account of language is set out. It would, Voloshinov/Bakhtin claims, inevitably provide concomitant enlightenment for the Marxist study of ideology since both centre upon the production of meaning. A properly Marxist understanding needs to account, at the micro level, for individual consciousness and, at the macro level, with the whole social arena of meaning production in the various ideological fields of politics, religion, literature, daily life and so on, and with the process of their historical change. Rejecting subjective psychology's false division between the individual and the social, Voloshinov/Bakhtin brings these two levels

³ 'Making it strange' is a central idea of the Russian formalist critics; art attempts to make what has become familiar and ordinary appear strange and defamiliar. For Medvedev/Bakhtin's discussion and critique of formalism, see *Reader*, pp. 135–160.

⁴ Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925) inaugurated a movement to develop the cognition and realization of spiritual reality; Henri Bergson (1859–1941), French philosopher.