

THE SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION: JULIA KRISTEVA AND SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK ON MARX, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RELIGION

Abstract: Slavoj Žižek and Julia Kristeva have followed strikingly similar paths in their intellectual and political development, moving from Marxism through psychoanalysis to Christianity. This article traces the way they have distanced themselves from Marxism and taken up psychoanalysis, of either the Freudian or Lacanian variety. For Kristeva, psychoanalysis provides the therapeutic solution to individual and at times social problems, whereas for Žižek it is the best description of those problems without necessarily providing answers. However, through psychoanalysis, they have gone a step further and become enamoured with Christianity, especially Paul's letters in the New Testament and the doctrine of love. Paul provides for Kristeva another and earlier version of psychoanalytic solutions, but he enables Žižek to find the social and political answers for which he seeks. By connecting these intellectual moves with their own departures from Eastern Europe, one from Yugoslavia (and then Slovenia) and the other from Bulgaria, I argue that their search for redemption, of both personal and social forms, betrays a residual socialism. In fact, their moves into psychoanalysis and Christianity may be read as compensations for a lost socialism, so much so that Žižek at least makes a belated recovery of Marx through Christianity and Kristeva can never quite excise Marx from her thought.

Key words: Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva, Marxism, psychoanalysis, Christianity.

For all their studied avoidance of one another, Slavoj Žižek and Julia Kristeva have followed strikingly similar paths. They have both moved out of Marxism to psychoanalysis and then to religion. Both find that Christianity, especially the idea of Christian love, provides the mechanism for social, political and, for Kristeva, personal transformation. And both have moved physically from Eastern Europe, one from Bulgaria and the other from Yugoslavia (and then Slovenia), to what may be called superstar status in the West. There are, of course differences as well – they interpret psychoanalysis in their own ways, Kristeva also sees psychoanalysis as salvific, Žižek

has rediscovered Marx through Christianity, and so on – and I will also explore these differences. However, the similarities are more than striking, so much so that such similarities are far more than merely analogous or accidental. What I propose to do in this essay, then, is explore their parallel paths – at intellectual, personal and political levels – and suggest some possible reasons for their paired moves.

Let me outline my argument before proceeding. I begin by tracing the way Žižek and Kristeva distance themselves from Marxism by means of psychoanalysis. Freud and Lacan, suitably reinterpreted, provide them with the means for trumping Marx. Psychoanalysis is, if you like, an alternative materialism for Marxism. Secondly, I am interested in the way they embrace religion through psychoanalysis. At this level, they come very close to one another, for they feel that Christianity, especially the texts of the New Testament by Paul, may bring about revolutionary and therapeutic change. In both cases such a move to Christianity functions as a substitute for a sidelined Marxism, which they cannot excise completely. For what they seek is not a spiritual Christianity that provides spiritual solutions, but a materialist Christianity that provides distinct social, political and psychological remedies. Thirdly, I compare their remarkably similar focus on ‘Christian love’, especially through Paul’s letters. For Kristeva Paul provides a mode of social transformation both through the doctrine of love and through the therapeutic institution of the *ekklesia* or church in which all the pathologies may be overcome. For Žižek the doctrine of love is the revolutionary core of Christianity, one that should never be forgotten. Finally, I suggest that their intellectual trajectories function at two levels. On the one hand, they are allegories for, or indeed are the ideological complements for their personal moves out of Eastern Europe. On the other hand, their intellectual paths may also be seen as nostalgia for the lost opportunities of socialism in Eastern Europe. With the redemptive possibilities of socialism exhausted, they seek an alternative political and social redemption that may overcome the rampages of capitalism.

What Marx Did, Psychoanalysis Can Do Better

On their first step of their search for alternative models of social redemption, both Žižek and Kristeva enthusiastically and com-

prehensively embrace psychoanalysis – the other great materialism of our age – in favour of Marx. However, in order to justify such a move, in their earlier work they seek to show how psychoanalysis provides the answers that Marx left hanging. Marx may have provided the initial insight, but Freud and Lacan are by far his superiors. Now, one might initially see such a move as one from a collective focus to an individual one, from social and political questions to ones of the individual psyche. In Kristeva's case this is far more obvious, but Žižek works very hard to ensure that his reading of psychoanalysis is as much social as it is individual.

Let me begin with Žižek. When Marx appears in Žižek's early work as the direct subject of discussion, he is a proto-Lacanian, one responsible for first formulating, however imperfectly, the crucial Lacanian category of the constitutive exception. In the first chapter of the first book in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek frames this in terms of how Marx 'invented the notion of the symptom' (1989: 11), particularly in the well-known discussion in the first part of *Capital* on the fetishism of commodities. Yet, although Žižek credits Marx for his original idea, for setting on its way a category that would bear untold fruit, in the end Marx is but a first step on the way to Lacan, via Freud.

Like Freud who followed him, Marx's insight was to seek the secret of the form, not the content hidden behind the form, let alone the content itself. For Marx the question was the commodity form: how does it function in providing the key to capitalism as a distinct mode of production? He was not interested in the hidden content of the commodity (human labour), since classical economists had already unearthed that content. Rather, he sought the reason for the form itself. What Marx did was take the anomalies of capitalism, the perceived blockages and distortions of the system as the secret of the system itself: in short, the constitutive exception. Thus, the cycles of boom and bust, economic crises and wars, are not deviations that stand in the way of the full realization of capitalism, but symptoms of the system, revealing the fundamentally antagonistic and unstable nature of capitalism. In other words, as Žižek will point out time and again, drawing from Marx's third volume of *Capital*, the limit of capitalism is Capital itself (see Žižek 1989: 51). Not only does the capitalist mode of production generate its own internal limit, but the limit

to the system is that which provides the very possibility of that system. Hence, in light of the constant tension between the forces and relations of production, the constant need to revolutionize itself to survive, the ‘normal’ state of instability and imbalance, ‘it is this very immanent limit, this “internal contradiction,” which drives capitalism into permanent development’ (Žižek 1989: 52). For instance, the dream of open competition sees the great hurdle not merely in terms of tariffs imposed by the governments of various nation-states, but in monopolies. Yet, the desire to outstrip one’s competitors has as its final goal precisely such a market monopoly, which then becomes the condition of possibility, the constitutive limit, of the ‘free market’.

For Žižek, it is Marx’s focus on the anomalies and disruptions, on the excesses that show how the system really works, that is the same as Freud’s method. For Freud the secret to the human psyche lies not in its normal operation, but in the slips, breaks and dreams that provide the glimpses of another, deeper logic. Put succinctly, the questions Marx and Freud sought to answer were: why does the result of human labour take the commodity form, and why have latent-dream thoughts assumed the form they have, appearing in dreams? In the specific form of the symptom, both Marx and Freud make the discovery that will become crucial for Žižek’s work, namely, the constitutive exception. It will turn out to be at the centre of his flood of Lacanian insights.

However, what we find in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* is that Marx quickly drops behind the scenes: when he does appear he is immediately subjected to re-readings in which Lacan provides the keys. In fact, most of Marx’s positions fall short before the feet of Lacan in what becomes a rather familiar pattern of discerning the function of the constitutive exception. Let me give a few examples. As far as ideology is concerned, for Marx ‘the ideological gaze is a *partial* gaze overlooking the *totality* of social relations’ (Žižek 1989: 49). Ideology is a false universalisation in which a contingent and historically particular position becomes dominant, such as human rights which are in fact the tool of capitalist exploitation, or the generic ‘man’ which is in fact the bourgeois individual. By contrast, for Lacan ‘ideology rather designates a *totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*’ (Žižek 1989: 49), examples of which I have already cited – Capital as the limit of capitalism, the extraneous item

or anomaly as the secret of the system itself, and so on. Or in regard to money, in order to answer the question Marx himself was unable to answer – to specify the sublime material character of money, the indestructible and non-corruptible material of money that endures beyond its immediate material nature – Žižek argues that only the ‘psychoanalytic notion of money as a “pre-phallic,” “anal” object is acceptable’ (Žižek 1989: 18), but only if we remember that such a notion of the sublime body depends on the Symbolic order. Finally, concerning surplus value, what Marx failed to see in his theory of surplus value, ‘the ‘cause which sets in motion the capitalist process of production’ (Žižek 1989: 53), is the function of surplus-enjoyment, the object-cause of desire, the excess that embodies the fundamental lack.

What I want to pick up, however, is the way Žižek turns Marx’s discovery of the symptom back upon him, via Lacan. Even with the few examples I have given, the characteristic Žižekian move becomes clear: the identification of that which is excluded or, even more profoundly, the methodological assumption that what cannot be identified – variously the Real, the surplus object, *objet petit a*, the fetish, woman and so on – provides us with the structural logic of the system, of thought, society, economics or whatever. As far as socialism itself is concerned, the fundamental problem is that socialism is not possible if we stick with Marx’s logic – or is that Lacan’s logic? Thus, in light of the argument that the very possibility of a particular system may be found in its limits, socialism must therefore operate with similar blockages, anomalies that both forestall the full realization of socialism and thereby enable its very existence. Or, in terms of the tension between the relations and forces of production, Marx was right when he saw this tension as the very logic of the capitalism itself, the instability and constant revolutionizing that are the result of this tension or limit. But Marx was wrong when he argued that a socialist revolution arises when the forces of production outstrip their relations, and that socialism would rearrange the relations of production in order to release the forces of production. In other words, socialism could not avoid replicating the logic of capitalism: ‘Is it not already a commonplace to assert that “real socialism” has rendered possible rapid industrialization, but that as soon as the productive forces have reached a certain

level of development (usually designated by the vague term “post-industrial society”), “real socialist” social relations began to constrict their further growth?’ (Žižek 1989: 53) The ingenuity of Žižek is that he locates the impossibility of socialism squarely with Marx and the contradictions of his various texts – in this case the third volume of *Capital* and the *Critique of Political Economy*. But it is a reading saturated with Lacan; hence Žižek’s preference for the first option, in which the limit of capitalism is Capital itself.

In sum, we find a situation where Marx provides the precursor to Lacan’s constitutive exception, which will then come to our aid by cleaning up Marx’s errors one after the other. As we move over to Kristeva, we might find that the subject matter is different, but the way Kristeva deals with Marx is remarkably similar to that of Žižek. Kristeva sidelines, conceals and bypasses Marx, but above all she trumps Marx through psychoanalysis.

In order to show how she does so, I focus on a key essay written in 1968, ‘Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science’ (Kristeva 1986: 74-88), an essay that is an extended engagement with Marx. Two parts of her argument interest me here. Firstly, Kristeva identifies what she sees as Marx’s great insight, namely the immanent method. Secondly, she argues that for all his insight, Marx falls short when he comes to discuss the key categories of production and work. At this point, according to Kristeva, Freud provides a far better analysis.

What is Marx’s insight? For Kristeva, he gave us a crucial ‘epistemological break’ (Kristeva 1986: 79) that is, quite simply, the immanent method, a method that emerges from the item or work in question rather than from outside. It also means that criticism must arise from the object under criticism. Thus, if we want to interpret the work of someone, say, like Kristeva, it means that we will use their own methods to interpret them. For Kristeva, Marx is ‘the first to practise’ this method (Kristeva 1986: 78).¹

Kristeva’s interest, at least at this moment, is on the implications of Marx’s insight for semiotics. Thus, ‘No form of semiotics, therefore, can exist other than as a critique of semiotics’ (Kristeva

¹ In her early *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she also gives Marx his due for pointing out that the signifying process lies outside the sphere of material production (1984: 105).

1986: 78). Or, in the dense detail of her early writing, semiotics is the very act of producing models. Let me quote Kristeva again: it is ‘a formalization or production of models. Thus, when we say semiotics, we mean the (as yet unrealized) development of *models*, that is, of formal systems whose structure is isomorphic or analogous to the structure of another system (the system under study)’ (Kristeva 1986: 76).

Marx, it seems, couldn’t be more important, marking a fundamental break in the history of knowledge. In effect, Marx subverts ‘the terms of a preceding science’ (Kristeva 1986: 80) in the terms of that science itself. So he overturns economics by means of economics. For instance, he takes the term ‘surplus value’ from the mercantilists (Smith, Ricardo et. al.) and shows how the term means not the ‘addition to the value of a product’ but the extraction of profit in the relations of work. The key is that he does so *from within* the theories of the mercantilists. Like their own noses, they simply cannot see the proper origins of surplus value.

However, for Kristeva this is as far as Marx can go. In order to show how Marx falls short, Kristeva focuses on the question of production and work. By means of his immanent method, Marx may have revealed the dynamics of production, but his insight is only a half-truth. By contrast, Freud goes all the way, bringing forth the realm of *pre*-production, and that is located in nothing other than the unconscious. To bring home her point, Kristeva focuses on Freud’s category of the ‘dream-work’. Here Freud reveals a different type of work that precedes and pre-conditions Marx’s notion of work. In the dream-work, where the unconscious and scattered patterns of the dream take on a definite narrative sequence, where the unconscious and conscious intersect, semiotics takes root in the play of signs in the dream. And for Kristeva, at this point in her thought, a semiotics indebted to Freud is the way forward from Marx.

In this early essay, Kristeva trumps Marx by identifying a more original cause – the dream-work – that lies beneath Marx’s categories of work and production. Now, I must admit to having my misgivings concerning Kristeva’s argument: there are simply too many sleights of hand that make me suspicious. However, that is another argument, for my interest is in her move from Marx to psychoanalysis. On that matter, she is not content to unearth a more original cause, for in her later work she asserts time and again that psycho-

analysis outruns Marx in the final stages, providing a more comprehensive answer than he ever could. Thus, Freud achieves Marx's program of trying to unite the increasingly fragmented fields of human activity, or at least the separation of theory and action (Kristeva 1996: 151, 198). Further, Freudian social analyses and solutions outperform an exhausted socialism (Kristeva 1995: 209-10).

For Kristeva, then, psychoanalysis is not merely more comprehensive than Marxism, but it also provides the personal, social and political healing that socialism fails to provide (Kristeva 1996: 24-5). Over more than three decades, she has developed her own brand of psychoanalysis, practicing it in her consulting rooms and in her writings, moving from individual to global society with ease. Thus, in her written work she tackles major themes, such as melancholia (Kristeva 1989a) or the stranger (Kristeva 1991) or love (Kristeva 1987) or the abject (Kristeva 1982) and traces them through signal points all the way from ancient Greece, via the Bible, and into the West. Given the vast sweep of these works, her writing tends to be thin, if not banal at times, and her political comments naïve (see Kristeva 2002: 255-68). Her sweeping social analyses, based on anecdotes and personal encounters, whether they be of France or Europe or America or Bulgaria, are efforts to pinpoint a global social malaise and offer a cure. It will be a short step from here to Christianity, especially when she suggests that psychoanalysis is, by offering a chance to restart psychological life, the only viable form of human freedom, indeed that it is the vivid, fleshly realization of Christianity (Kristeva 2002: 242)².

Let me sum up my argument thus far. For Žižek, (Lacanian) psychoanalysis provides a more comprehensive articulation of key categories that Marx first elaborated, especially the constitutive exception. For Kristeva, Marx may be responsible for the profound insight of the immanent method, but (Freudian) psychoanalysis shows both a more fundamental cause of Marx's insights and it provides the personal, and occasionally social, solutions socialism was unable to find. There are, of course, differences between them. Žižek tries as hard as he can to render psychoanalysis an approach with social and political ramifications, while Kristeva focuses squarely on the indi-

² See also her translation of the biblical and theological elaborations on the death of Christ in psychoanalytic terms (Kristeva 1989a: 130-5).

vidual psyche, and from there she seeks to make social comments. Further, for Žižek psychoanalysis is the best *description* of our current psychic and social malaise, whereas for Kristeva, Marx does that job well enough. The task of psychoanalysis is to offer a cure.

From Psychoanalysis to Religion

This step, from Marxism to psychoanalysis, is but the first in the parallel paths of Žižek and Kristeva. It all becomes far more intriguing when they move from psychoanalysis to religion; or rather, to religion by means of psychoanalysis. Whereas their moves from Marxism to psychoanalysis are reasonably straightforward – Freud or Lacan simply overtake Marx – the shift to religion is more complex. In Kristeva's case, religion is a highly useful companion for psychoanalysis, for it offers a possible cure for all manner of pathologies. In the end, however, religion is useful insofar as its stories and institutions enhance the personal, and occasionally social, benefits of psychoanalysis. For Žižek, however, religion provides the solution to the problems that psychoanalysis identifies all too well. In order to overcome the social and psychic malaise of our contemporary life, which for him boils down to capitalism and its depredations, we need the revolutionary core of Christianity.

As with the previous section, let me begin with Žižek. His decisive move to reclaim Christianity comes neither from some vague religious commitment, nor even as a central item in an ethnic or national identity; rather, it arises from his desire to become a political thinker and writer. The problem is that Žižek did in fact think that he was a political writer, claiming that *The Ticklish Subject* (1999) was his political manifesto. So Judith Butler's criticism that he was not in fact a political thinker stung. Published in the dialogues between Žižek, Butler and Ernesto Laclau, (2000), Butler points out that Žižek's fundamental category of the constitutive exception cuts away the ground beneath any political movement. Indeed, as far as Butler is concerned, Lacanian psychoanalysis forestalls any possibility of breaking out of the system, for Žižek's dialectic generates a blockage at the very point where such a break opens up. This works in two ways: firstly, the powers of domination rely on various oppositions to maintain and reinforce their power; secondly, any opposition move-

ment inevitably runs aground by betraying its ideals. It becomes merely another version of oppression. So Butler asks Žižek:

But what remains less clear to me is how one moves beyond such a dialectical reversal or impasse to something new. How would the new be produced from an analysis of the social field that remains restricted to inversions, aporias and reversals that work regardless of time and place? Do these reversals produce something other than their own structurally identical repetitions (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000: 29)?

We are trapped, it seems, ever to repeat ourselves in terms of the constitutive exception. At this point, Žižek's Eastern European roots show forth, for that is precisely where the socialist revolutions ran aground, and where the revolutions of the late 1980s and early 1990s also failed to live up to their promise of a path that was neither capitalist nor socialist. His theories cannot be divorced from his lived experience in Yugoslavia and then Slovenia – hence his touchiness about any new political movement.

What does Žižek do in response? He makes a most extraordinary turn to Christianity in three books that may be called his Christian trilogy: *The Fragile Absolute* (2000), *On Belief* (2001) and *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003). In contrast to his earlier dabbling in religion, these really are a full-scale engagement. Put simply, his position is that if Lacanian psychoanalysis provides the most comprehensive criticism of how life is under capitalism, then Christianity, especially the few letters of Paul in the New Testament, give us the means for overcoming it and moving past capitalism.

Now, Žižek is not known for his ability to develop a consistent and linear argument. It is one of the delights of his work, but it also leads him into some astounding blind alleys. Thus, in *The Fragile Absolute* he begins by outlining the rampages of global capitalism, the pseudo-fixes of New Age spirituality and postmodern politics, only to offer a solution that relies on 'Christian love' and ethics. 'Christian love' is none other *agape*, offering not the mix of lust and sappy feelings that attach to the current uses of the term 'love', but a tough political love that does not avoid difficult choices. However, once he has broached the topic of love, Žižek cannot avoid insisting on ethics as a crucial dimension of politics.

Žižek returns to this position every now and then, identifying love as the revolutionary core of Christianity (Žižek 2004a). However, in the second volume of his trilogy, *On Belief* (2001), he begins again and this time discovers Paul's doctrine of grace, which he argues is a much more powerful political category. This discovery – in effect, Žižek's own Protestant Reformation – is a belated recognition of the influence of Alain Badiou's study of the Apostle Paul (Badiou 2003). In *On Belief* Žižek recognises the materialist notion of grace that Badiou champions: grace signifies what comes from entirely outside the system; it is undeserved, unearned, unexpected and incalculable. Yet, even here Žižek only partially realizes Badiou's point, for Žižek still sees human agency at the centre of such a notion of grace. Unexpected and unearned it may be, but grace for Žižek is still brought about by human political agents.

Only in the final book, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), does Žižek stumble upon the possibility that such political and social change may happen outside human agency. He does not mean that God will bring about such change (that is Paul's reference point), but that human beings may find that a moment of profound change may in fact take place without their doing. Like Badiou, Žižek leaves open the question as to who or what that agent may be. However, for all his belated insight, it is a passing moment, for the book reiterates many of the positions from the previous books: we find love returning, often in a confused fashion as the equivalent of grace; the malaise of capitalism is still one to be overcome and New Age religion must be avoided at all costs.

Žižek now has the political and social solution to the problems that Lacanian psychoanalysis outlines so well. One question remains: where does it lead him? To begin with, it forces him to drop Lacan, even if momentarily, as he expounds what he feels is the core of Paul and Christianity. Yet he does not leave Lacan on the side of the road for too long, for we find him returning in later works. Secondly, it leads Žižek to Lenin. As Paul is to Christianity, so Lenin is to Marxism; indeed, Paul in the New Testament enables Žižek to become a Leninist, a 'fighting materialist' as he calls himself (Žižek 2000: 1). Lenin's idea of 'actual freedom' – stepping outside the context to produce a proper free choice – is nothing other than a version of Paul's grace. The later Žižek has become a Marxist in the West, especially of

the Leninist variety. It is precisely through his readings of the New Testament that Žižek has, perhaps for the first time, championed Marx, abandoning his earlier ambivalence over Marxism.

In sum, in response to Judith Butler's charge that psychoanalysis blocks any viable politics, Christianity provides Žižek with a political answer that Lacanian psychoanalysis was unable to provide. Although his position on the core of Christianity shifts ground – mingling love, ethics and grace – he does have a moment of insight when he identifies grace as a crucial political category, as an undeserved, unexpected possibility beyond human agency. The problem is that he does not hold to this insight into grace: he continues to mingle and confuse 'Christian love', grace, Christianity and psychoanalysis in curious ways.

Kristeva too finds Christianity extraordinarily useful, although for slightly different reasons. For some years now Kristeva has been writing on the Bible, as well as crucial figures in the history of Christian thought and art such as Augustine, Aquinas and Holbein (Kristeva 1991: 83-93; 1989a: 105-38; 1987: 170-87). However, if we focus on her interpretations of the Bible, then we find that it is at best patchy: some of it is quite good and some rather terrible. For example, her readings of Ruth (Kristeva 1991: 69-76), the Song of Songs (Kristeva 1987: 83-100), or Hebrew language (Kristeva 1989b: 98-103) are ordinary and superficial. She argues for conventional, even conservative positions as though they are blindingly new discoveries. Thus, the Song of Songs is about heterosexual, even matrimonial, love, or Ruth is a model of tolerance and welcome. The reading of the Levitical food taboos in *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva 1982: 90-112) is much better and contains a distinct insight or two that have been noticed in biblical studies (Black 2006). The quality of her engagements with Paul in the New Testament is also somewhat better, so I focus on these works here since they show how closely she weaves Christian texts and psychoanalysis.

While for Žižek, the Bible provides the political and social remedies for our current problems, for Kristeva the Bible expresses in another, highly effective language the therapeutic possibilities of psychoanalysis. Paul is for her one of the best instances of this religio-psychoanalytical intersection. There are two texts on Paul, one focusing on the formation of the individual subject from *Tales of*

Love (1987: 139-50) and the other with a much more collective agenda from *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva 1991: 76-83). Not unexpectedly, she finds more in the individual implications of Paul's thought than the social.

Kristeva's argument in both is really quite simple: through his narrative of the life and death of Jesus Christ – the predictions in the Hebrew prophets, his death and resurrection, his designation as son of God, and the gifts of grace and faith – Paul provides answers and cures for nearly all the psychological pathologies. As for Paul, he never fails to seize an opportunity to retell the story (see, for instance, Romans 1:2-6; 3:21-6; 4:24-5; 5:6-11; 6:3-11; 8:11, 32; 10:9; 14:8-9). For Kristeva, Paul's genius is that this narrative of Christ's temporary death is able to deal with narcissism, masochism, fantasy, repression, death drive, oral sadism and psychosis.

Let me take masochism as an example and examine Kristeva's argument more closely. There are two steps in her argument. To begin with, she dives into Paul's convoluted arguments to come up with nothing other than a variation of the scapegoat. Here is Kristeva: 'Sacrifice is an offering that, out of a substance, creates Meaning for the Other and, consequently, for the social group that is dependent on it' (Kristeva 1987: 142-3). In other words, you obliterate something concrete – a red heifer, a goat, a human being – in order to produce the abstract sense of the group. The most common way in which that happens is to transfer the group's 'sins' symbolically onto the scapegoat and then cast all this evil out of the community – by banishing the scapegoat – for the wellbeing of the community. The catch here is that you create the symbolic notion of the group in the very process of identifying what is good and bad about it. The second step picks up Rom 6:5: 'If in union with Christ we have imitated (*omoiomati*) his death, we shall also imitate him in his resurrection'. From imitation we move via identification with the victim to the internalization of murder and thence to masochism. Kristeva does not shy away from stating that Paul's logic is masochistic – 'Jubilatory suffering inflicted on one's own body by a supreme and cherished authority probably is the trait they have in common' (Kristeva 1987: 143). But Paul goes beyond such masochism by making it analogous rather than real. Just as the initial sacrifice was symbolic rather than real, so the second, masochistic sacrifice is

analogous and not real. But note how Paul does it: Christ intervenes in order to overcome the pathology. Here he is the means by which masochism becomes analogous: believers die in a manner *analogous* to Christ, not *as* Christ.

What about the other pathologies? Paul's thought identifies and then negates or goes beyond the pathology in question, and, just as in the case of masochism, each time he does so by means of Christ. Thus *fantasy* is neutralised by making the passion of the cross a universal narrative. This short-circuits fantasy since we can no longer identify our individual selves as Christ. Further, *repression* is avoided by means of idealizing one's own death; that is, one's death is brought to the fore, rather than repressed, in the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection.³ So also do we avoid the destructive path of the *death drive* (unlike Sade or Artaud), since this narrative is a collective one that prevents us from identifying with the Father on our own, of writing ourselves into the story. If repression and the death drive are negated, *narcissism* is appropriated and then overcome. One appropriates narcissism by accepting that death (the limit of negative narcissism) is the way to achieve salvation. However, Paul overcomes narcissism by shifting the death onto Christ, and so it ceases to be narcissism, since it is focussed on another (Kristeva quotes Gal 2:20 at this point). We still have salvation, but not narcissism. Finally, *oral sadism* is conquered by the mediation of Christ: placed in between the self and its destructive hunger, Christ redirects oral sadism. Since oral sadism is primarily directed at the mother, the Son overcomes this by stepping in between and being eaten himself. Kristeva is of course referring to the Eucharist or the love-feast. There is no sadistic satisfaction in such an eating of the Son of the Father (not the mother), and so it becomes the means for identification with the Father.

The pattern is remarkably similar: fantasy, repression, the death drive, narcissism, oral sadism and even masochism are either negated or traversed by means of the narrative of Christ. These are

³ Or, as Kristeva puts it *New Maladies of the Soul*, the taboos of Leviticus offer a way to bypass the necessary repression of the desire for murder. Since such a desire is primarily a desire to murder the mother, by enabling a separation from the mother, specifically in terms of transforming sacrifice into a language and system of meaning, the Bible defuses such a desire (Kristeva 1995: 120). I must confess that this focus on the maternal function seems somewhat dated now.

all primarily individual pathologies, and Paul provides a means for overcoming them. Yet one pathology remains: psychosis, which is for Kristeva the sole collective pathology. In a passage from *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva 1991: 76-83), we find the idea that Paul's *ekklesia* speaks to psychic distress and soothes psychosis, which is usually divided into schizophrenia and paranoia. This *ekklesia* is a 'community of foreigners' (Kristeva 1991: 80). It is an 'ideal community', 'an original entity', a 'messianism that includes all of humankind' (Kristeva 1991: 80); in short, nothing less than a transformed society.

What marks this new community is that it offers answers to people's *psychic* distress.⁴ More specifically, the *ekklesia* soothes psychosis: it answers the schizophrenic split of the foreigner, for the *ekklesia* is by its very nature a foreign collective. But Kristeva goes further, for the *ekklesia* embodies within itself this psychosis. The way this works is that instead of trying to insert foreigners into an existing social body, Paul recognises the foreigner's split between two countries and transforms it into the passage between and negotiation of two psychic domains – between flesh and spirit, life and death, crucifixion and resurrection in a body that is simultaneously the group and Christ's body (see Rom 12: 4-5). Their external division becomes an internal one, internal to the collective's construction and the individual's psyche. The way Paul soothes such psychosis is that such a split is 'experienced as a transition toward a spiritual liberation starting from and within a concrete body' (Kristeva 1991: 82). In short, for Kristeva Paul's *ekklesia* becomes a therapeutic device, and Paul is nothing other than 'a psychologist, and if the institution he sets up is also political, its efficiency rests on the psychological intuition of its founder' (Kristeva 1991: 82).

It should by now be obvious that while their individual arguments may vary, the paths both Kristeva and Žižek follow are remarkably similar. And they end up at strikingly similar conclusions concerning Christianity, especially the New Testament texts of Paul: Christianity provides the social and personal answers that they both

⁴ For Kristeva, this is also a feature of sacred texts more generally: 'If it is true that all texts considered "sacred" refer to borderline states of subjectivity, we have reason to reflect upon these states, especially since the biblical narrator is familiar with them' (Kristeva 1995: 117).

seek in their different ways. Occasionally Žižek might hope that psychoanalysis does the job, but more often it undercuts any such effort. Kristeva, by contrast is much more optimistic about psychoanalysis, which carries out the same therapeutic tasks as Christianity, although in a different language.

All You Need is Love

There is, however, one point on which they agree: the idea and practice of Christian love is crucial for any redemptive social role for Christianity. Or, as Kristeva once put it: ‘Love will save us’ (Kristeva 1996: 121). For his part, Žižek makes the extraordinary claim that ‘love’ in Lacan’s Seminar XX is in fact Christian love (2000: 118; see 2003: 116). What he means here is that the fundamental unbalancing of Christian love, its threat to cosmic order is the point at which it starts to look the same as Lacan’s notion of love. Now, I have argued elsewhere that I am not at all persuaded by such arguments concerning love (Boer 2007), or indeed by the links made with ethics. However, my interest here is with the curiously similar tracks that Žižek and Kristeva follow.

Unfortunately, Žižek is far too enamoured with Christian love. Despite the fleeting insight into the nature of grace that I traced in my earlier discussion of Žižek’s Christian trilogy, in his later reflections (Žižek 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005) he returns to all the confusions of those earlier works – love is the same as grace, love is crucial for politics and thereby for ethics. His constantly reiterated point is that Christian love – he means *agape*, rather than the radical communal love of *philadelphia* that we also find in the New Testament – is the key to revolutionary politics.

Two biblical texts are crucial for Žižek, namely Luke 14:26 and 1 Corinthians 13. Both appear on a number of occasions in order to make related points. Luke 14:26 reads: ‘If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple’. On one occasion Žižek reads this call to discipleship in terms of the constitutive exception: one must renounce everything for the sake of Christ in order to get it back (Žižek 1999: 115). On another he sees this as a call to tough love, as a love ‘that enjoins us to “un-

plug” from the organic community into which we were born’ (Žižek 2000: 121). It is this type of love that he finds in 1 Corinthians 13, the famous text that states, ‘Love is patient and kind...’ (1 Corinthians 13:4). Or indeed Galatians 3:28: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ’.

Kristeva for her part is also deep in love. Indeed, one of her texts on Paul is called ‘God is Love’ (Kristeva 1987: 139-50). Here she argues that the ‘true revolution’ of Christianity was its focus on *agape* as the centre of its message. Elevated over against the sensual love of *eros*, *agape* (Christian love) becomes in Paul theocentric: rather than human love of God, the key becomes God’s love for human beings. If God is the locus of *agape* while human beings become the place of *pistis*: ‘God is the first to love; as center, source, and gift, his love comes to us without our having to deserve it – it falls, strictly speaking, from heaven and imposes itself with the requirement of faith’ (Kristeva 1987: 140). At this point it seems as though Kristeva and Žižek are reading the same script, even down to neglecting the crucial role of *philia* and *philadelphia* in the New Testament. To be frank, I am less than impressed by their concern with love. Indeed, given the steady stream of self-help and philosophical books on love, I propose at least half a century’s ban on any discussion of love.

Going West: The Search for Redemption

What are we to make of these strikingly similar paths from Marx, through psychoanalysis to Christianity, especially the New Testament theme of love, or *agape*? There are three points to be made in answering this question. The first is that for both Žižek and Kristeva it is part of a process of dealing with their departures from Eastern Europe. By ‘departure’ I mean not merely the physical taking leave, but also the intellectual and political departures they have made. Further, we cannot separate their individual moves from the political and social history of Eastern Europe. Let me say a little about each level.

With the assistance of scholarship from Charles de Gaulle, Kristeva moved physically to Paris from Bulgaria when she was a young doctoral student in 1965. As she immersed himself in the intel-

lectual and social life of Paris, becoming part of the *Tel Quel* group, she neglected and distanced herself from her native Bulgaria, only to reassert that identity much later when she was a member of Mitterand's entourage that visited Bulgaria in 1989. Žižek, by comparison, has always maintained his connections with Slovenia, although much less so with the 'former' Yugoslavia. But Žižek moved much later, after 1989 and the changes that took place in Eastern Europe. He was soon to become what the French call a 'turbo-prof', taking up well-paid short teaching positions in the USA and Western Europe.

1989 is, of course, a crucial year. Žižek first made his mark after 1989 when he began publishing in English and travelling, while Kristeva only began to comment on Eastern Europe after this date. But it is also when the communist governments finally fell, one after the other, in a series of largely peaceful revolutions. It hardly needs to be said that the promise of a new way forward in those years has largely evaporated before the adoption of a rampant capitalism. Yet, in my visits to and discussions in Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary, I have found a real ambivalence to the socialist past. In the many discussions what came through time and again was the memory of the excitement of 1989, the profound sense – for a brief period – that anything was possible. Some felt 'good riddance' to communism, that communism was merely another means for the exercise of power by some human beings over others. Others felt that for all its flaws it was better than capitalism, and others saw the ambiguities, the gains and losses of the present. The question I kept asking – 'but when the changes took place in '89, did you imagine it would turn out like this?' – was answered in as many ways as the reader can imagine, although perhaps the sense was that the present didn't quite live up to the hopes of that time. I noticed the donkeys and carts in the country and was told that with the privatisation of land after the end of communism, many farmers could not afford machinery and had therefore gone back to hand harvesting and animal power. In the cities they were allowed again and the gypsies used them. One person excused the enthusiastic embracing the worst of US capitalism by saying that Eastern Europeans are not yet very good at being capitalist, but another pointed out that they are exceedingly good. Yet another suggested that Eastern Europe might still be able to forge a different type of capitalism. Often it seemed to me that there was a rapid

imposition of an ill-fitting capitalism over a much older layer that was in some way not comfortable with it. In fact, it struck me that many of those I spoke with are so deeply socialist in their assumptions and beliefs that they are not even aware of it. The assumptions of how a society should work with a widespread ‘safety network’ as it is called – medicine, adequate holidays, maternity leave, condition of employment, schools and universities without fees and so on – are anathema to the market economists having their way in the USA, Australia and other places.

This is the type of ambivalence I find in the work of Žižek and Kristeva. Let me give two examples, one from each. Žižek is a great lover of the joke, as was Freud. But Žižek’s jokes are mostly about the former communist bloc countries of Eastern Europe. For example, at the beginning of *For They Know Not What They Do* we find Rabinovitch, the Soviet Jew who seeks to emigrate. The emigration officer inquires concerning his reasons, to which Rabinovitch replies:

‘There are two reasons why. The first is that I’m afraid that the Communists will lose power in the Soviet Union, and the new forces will blame us Jews for the Communist crimes...’ ‘But’, interrupts the bureaucrat, ‘this is pure nonsense, the power of the Communists will last for ever!’ ‘Well’, responds Rabinovitch calmly, ‘that’s my second reason’ (Žižek 1991: 1).

However, Žižek’s interest in the joke is not in its original form, before the ‘collapse’ of communism in Eastern Europe, but in the turmoil of the false freedom of capitalism that ensued in the years whirling around 1989. Thus, with Jews steadily leaving the Soviet Union and the return of overt anti-Semitism, Žižek imagines a reversal of the joke:

‘There are two reasons why. The first is that I know that Communism in Russia will last for ever, nothing will really change here, and this prospect is unbearable for me...’ ‘But’, interrupts the bureaucrat, ‘this is pure nonsense, Communism is disintegrating all around! All those responsible for the Communist crimes will be severely punished!’ ‘That’s my second reason!’ responds Rabinovitch (Žižek 1991: 1)

What we find in this joke and many others like it is that Marx is conveniently sidelined, standing back in at least the second row:

not only does Žižek speak of the Soviet Union, the most powerful experiment in socialism except perhaps for China, but he rewrites the joke in terms of the end of communism itself. Elsewhere he writes of Yugoslavia and Slovenia, often by reciting experiences in the army or filthy jokes, or he will speak of communist Europe more generally. Jokes like these bring out most sharply Žižek's ambivalence about the socialism of Eastern Europe, let alone the role of Marx: one must of course refer to him, especially in the context of the massive changes that took place in the 80s and 90s, but he is in the past, the motivation for a failed economic and political system.

Kristeva too is ambivalent, although she has been much more negative about communism, and even claims to have all but lost her native Bulgarian tongue (Kristeva 2002: 242-3). Occasionally she brings forth the conventional argument that we need to avoid the two totalitarian extremes of Fascism and Stalinism – a refrain from her earliest texts (Kristeva 1980: 23) – by means of some mythical middle way. However, it is in her comments on feminism that a greater ambivalence about Marxism shows itself. Kristeva has, infamously, kept feminism at an arm's length, especially with an American audience in mind. For example, in her trilogy, *Female Genius*, she focuses on three women who were independent from and placed themselves, like Kristeva herself, above and beyond feminism as well as Marxism – Hannah Arendt (Kristeva 2001), Melanie Klein (Kristeva 2004b) and Colette (Kristeva 2004a). From this perspective, Kristeva can then view feminism in terms of three overlapping stages: the demand for political rights by the suffragettes; the assertion of ontological equality; and, since May '68, the search for sexual difference (Kristeva 2004a: 404). The problem, as far as Kristeva is concerned, is that feminism is trapped between two dogmatisms (Kristeva 1996: 7), either the dogmatism of 'leftism', as she tends to call it, or a conservative dogmatism of patriarchy and the right. Feminism tends either to mirror this second dogmatism, the one that it opposes, or take up communist dogmatism in its drive for liberation for all women. All too easily, feminism finds itself slipping into either form of totalitarianism.

Her answer to this problem is as important as it is intriguing. In response to feminist agendas for social change based on gender, she states:

... what is happening now, in Eastern countries, is that the collapse of the Marxist and socialist idea is showing something else. It shows that we can arrive at a better society not before bourgeois individualism but after. I think they ought to revise their ideas, seeing what is happening in the East now. Because many feminist ideas were unconsciously calculated and modelled on the image of communist and Marxist countries, as if a progressive and communitarian ideology could produce the economy of bourgeois society. Now one realizes that one cannot just make the system of a society from the model of ideology. It is necessary to transform it. But not on this side of it, but by passing to the other side (Kristeva 1996: 45).

Such a statement throws Kristeva's ambivalence over Eastern Europe into sharp relief. On the one hand, she often invokes terms such as freedom and democracy (without any qualifiers), or 'plurality of consciences' (Kristeva 1996: 51), or the importance of the individual, and dismisses communism as inherently totalizing. But here she produces a statement that runs against those comments. Firstly, against any notion of idealism, she states bluntly that an ideology – here feminism – cannot a society make. Secondly, feminism, understood as a progressive and communitarian ideology, is incompatible with bourgeois society.⁵ Thirdly, the society desired by feminism *and* communism must come *after* bourgeois individualism – i.e. liberalism – and not before. Here Kristeva calls on the Marx who argues that the full run of capitalism must be experienced first before anything different may come into being.

As for the second point, the moves from Marxism through psychoanalysis and to Pauline Christianity also signal another path, namely from a collective to an individual focus, and then to a collective one again. As both Žižek and Kristeva move to psychoanalysis, they move from what is primarily a collective programme – for all its abuses – to an individual one. By now my observation will be obvious: such a shift reflects their own intellectual and personal moves from a crumbling socialism in Eastern Europe to a capitalist West. Žižek works overtime to ensure that his type of psychoanalysis is as

⁵ She makes a very similar point concerning the incompatibility between Mitterand's socialist agenda and France's capitalist economy in the context of the European common market (Kristeva 1996: 154).

social and political as it can be, and yet he comes face to face with the challenge by Judith Butler that it is in the end not political, or rather, that it undercuts any programme for political change; hence the move to Christianity, which provides him with another language for collective redemption. Kristeva, on the other hand, is much more enamoured with the focus of psychoanalysis on the individual psyche, even to the point of seeing most of Paul's contributions in this vein. Only in the last instance, with psychosis, does she see a distinctly collective solution from Paul.

Finally, there is a residual socialism deep in their work, which is a legacy of their backgrounds in a socialist Eastern Europe. Both Žižek and Kristeva are still faithful to the agenda they feel they have left behind: they still seek a way to salve the ravages of capitalism; they still seek a solution, a revolutionary way out of the current situation. If Marx won't do it, then psychoanalysis might. And if psychoanalysis can't do it, then Christianity, especially Christian love, provides a possible answer.

It is this part of their background that shows up so sharply in their work – the desire for a means of redemption. At that level, they are still faithful to Marx's impulse. Kristeva may feel that we 'may need to be slightly Marxist...' (Kristeva 1996: 70), while Žižek has, as I pointed out earlier, recovered a militant Leninist Marxism through Pauline Christianity. The underlying drive, however, has not changed. In both cases, their moves to Christianity function as substitutes for a sidelined Marxism (in Kristeva's case) or as a complement to a recovered Marxism (in Žižek's case). And for both it is a redemptive programme: Christianity enables Žižek to develop a politically redemptive agenda, while for Kristeva Christianity enables her to produce a therapeutic psychology of religion.

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POTRAGA ZA ISKUPLJENJEM: JULIA KRISTEVA I SLAVOJ
ŽIŽEK O MARXU, PSIHOANALIZI I RELIGIJI

Sažetak

Slavoj Žižek i Julia Kristeva su sledili neobično slične puteve u svom intelektualnom i političkom razvoju od marksizma, preko psihoanalize, do hrišćanstva. Ovaj članak prati način na koji su se oni distancirali od marksizma i preuzeli psihoanalizu u freudovskoj ili lakanovskoj verziji. Za Kristevu psihoanaliza pruža terapeutsko rešenje za individualne i, povremeno, društvene probleme, dok za Žižeka ona predstavlja najbolji opis tih problema, ali ne nužno i odgovor na njih. Pa ipak, posredstvom psihoanalize, oni su otišli korak dalje, postavši zaukupljeni hrišćanstvom, osobito Pavlovim pismima u Novom zavetu i učenjem o ljubavi. Za Kristevu Pavle pruža drukčiju i raniju verziju psihoanalitičkih rešenja, a Žižeku on pomaže da nađe socijalne i političke odgovore koje traži. Dovodeći u vezu ove intelektualne pomake s njihovim vlastitim napuštanjem Istočne Evrope, Jugoslavije (a potom i Slovenije) u jednom slučaju, i Bugarske u drugom, zastupam stanovište da njihova potraga za iskupljenjem, u ličnom i socijalnom smislu, odaje recidive socijalizma. U stvari, njihovo kretanje ka psihoanalizi i hrišćanstvu moglo bi se tumačiti kao kompenzacija za izgubljeni socijalizam, utoliko što Žižek pomalo zadocnelo obnavlja Marksa posredstvom hrišćanstva, a Kristeva nikad ne može da izbaci Marksa iz svog mišljenja.

Cljučne reči: Slavoj Žižek, Julia Kristeva, marksizam, psihoanaliza, hrišćanstvo.