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## CONVERSATION WITH SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK ABOUT SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Prof Ian Parker, Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom.

*This conversation between Ian Parker and Slavoj Žižek took place in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in September 2003. It is organised around questions raised by the manuscript of Ian Parker's book (published in English by Pluto Press in 2004, translated into Slovene and published by Ropot in 2008). Žižek comments on the claim, first, that there are deadlocks in his writing, and then we move on to discuss the role of specific theoretical elements articulated around these deadlocks – German idealism, Marxism, and then, from Lacan, the 'act', the objet petit a, Antigone and the real – before concluding with reflections on the place of religion and so why we come back to Hegel.*

*IAN PARKER: Let us focus on some charges from the book, and start with this. There is a temptation among many people who read you to put things together and try and make it into a system, maybe there is for you as well, but it seems to me that there is a deadlock of perspective between the different frameworks that are being used – Lacanian, Marxist ideas, Hegelian ideas – and one of the ways of making sense of how your writing shifts rapidly from one thing to the next is to say it is precisely because of those deadlocks of perspective. It seems that you get so far within a certain theoretical frame, maybe you're talking about Hegel and then it shifts rapidly to Marxism or then it shifts to Lacan.*

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Ok, I put it in these terms. The way I can only tell you, my god, now I will sound like a Californian, but I can only tell you how I experience it. I never ask these questions myself in general, I just pursue certain lines of thought and my motto is always 'better inconsistent than inconsequential' in the sense that you compromise for the sake of some superficial consistency. My idea is that if you are pursuing

potentially contradictory lines of thought it's better to go to the end on each of them. Ok, now what I try to do is nonetheless the following thing. It's that even if it may appear and probably, no it doesn't appear, it is that I jump, I don't know, from Marx to Hegel, Hegel to Kierkegaard and so on and so on, I nonetheless think that what I aim at is that there is some detail, some apparently particular feature which serves as a bridge, a link where you can make a passage. For example, already at the beginning of *My Sublime Object* it did strike me, and what struck me more than me becoming aware of it, is why nobody else noticed it.<sup>1</sup> How there is a precise parallel between Marx's commodity fetishism and the Freudian logic of dreams based on the famous notion of form, that the true mystery is the mystery of form. And if you read it in this way, Marx and Freud, there is a certain crucial parallel, which is I think not just a superficial parallel, which becomes transparent. For example if you read closely Marx the point of Marx's critique of political economy, it's not that there is a certain superficial aspect which is very strange, and let's penetrate to production. As Marx repeats again and again, this was already done by Ricardo, by the classical bourgeois economy. What Marx reproaches them for then is not that they are superficial but that they go too fast to the essence, and they miss the *commodity form*. And Freud does exactly the same thing, and it's very mysterious with Freud because you remember I quoted just one footnote, the very last one in the chapter in the *Traumarbeit*, about the dreamwork, where he notes that what matters, is the key to the dream is the *form of the dream*.<sup>2</sup> So this would be an example of how you have two fields which map, and what interests me are these particular links which are more precious than any general link. But even if you go even further, for example the notion of subjectivity, negativity and so on, again I think if you read the *Grundrisse* of Marx it is clear that for Marx in the antagonism between capitalist and proletarians it is that it is the proletarian who is subject in capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Marx is very precise; in the Hegelian way subject means being deprived of substance. The capitalist can be the master but the capitalist is not subject in a strict sense. So, any vulgar parallel which makes it seem as if in capitalism the capitalist is the subject who objectivises, exploits, instrumentalises workers misses the point. Which is why I reproach these Judith Butler feminists who play this game, the game of making it seem as if becoming subject means controlling the situation or becoming active.<sup>4</sup> No, for Marx becoming subject means being reduced to zero, to utter nothingness, this is the only way the subject operates. So again my point is how you have the Cartesian cogito, but then to ask where you find the cogito in Marx and the answer is that it's precisely in this pure subjectivity deprived of substance, a void which remains. What interests me much more are these particular links, and I don't like Wittgenstein, so the easy way to squeeze out of this would be to say yes, it's not a homogeneous structure it's just a set of family resemblances.

*But since it is a parallel between particular concepts, a parallel that is politically useful, it doesn't need to add up?*

I don't think that's a superficial parallel. If I were to give what in Hollywood – you know these stupid producers who are too stupid to read books and when you come to them with a script they say oh give me the punch line and then you are given twenty seconds – if I were to give the punch line on my work it would be to read Freud's death drive through negativity and German idealism. That would be, if I were put at gun point, given ten seconds, the fundamental insight would be this, that this is the only way to understand properly what Freud was saying about the death drive. I was never in this sense a dogmatic Lacanian, but I think that Jean Laplanche did

solve consistently the problem of Eros, Thanatos and all that stuff.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, that I agree with him that this dualism Eros-Thanatos is a regression by Freud. Of course he then tries to minimise, to abolish the very form of the death drive, so when I speak of death drive it's not simply the Freudian death drive, let's call it that what Freud was trying to capture with death drive. And my fundamental line would be that you then can approach through this lens in a backwards way to German idealism, you will find the thesis already, what Kant was aiming at in his radical evil and so on, and then you find this in Schelling, Hegel and so on and so on.

*So in a way Lacan is a way of getting back to Hegel?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, I admit this, yes. If you were to ask me at gunpoint to make this ultimate choice, if I were to I wouldn't say Hegel I would think a certain line of German idealism.

*And that includes Schelling.*

Kant, Schelling and Hegel it is these days. Fichte is a bit problematic although these days not only now getting a little bit rehabilitated but in a very interesting way I think because what you see these days is definitely not simply a kind of naïve subjective idealistic view. The general problem is *Anstoss*, at the same time an obstacle that you hit and what triggers it. The idea is that there is an irreducibly contingent *Anstoss*, an external point which triggers the entire activity of the ego, so again, yes if I were to be asked at gun point to choose between German idealism and Lacan it would be German idealism. It's the same as when Lacan says 'Kant avec Sade', people usually miss it; for him Sade is just a tool to get at Kant.<sup>6</sup> For Lacan it's basically Kant that matters to Lacan. But wait a minute, I mean here and there I do say something critical about Lacan, but we started, my god, with those inconsistencies.

*The question was about deadlocks, but I also wanted to ask about the relation between those different elements, whether for you Lacan is kind of machine for reading Hegel, but also a question about what is it applied to, and it seems that it's applied to cultural phenomena which are understood in a kind of Marxist or quasi-Marxist way. There's yet another question which is, to what extent would you call yourself a Marxist now?*

Why do you think, ok, now I am almost tempted to answer you the way Lacan answered the question 'is psychoanalysis is a science?'<sup>7</sup> I mean the problem is how you should define a science to include psychoanalysis, and so the problem for me would be, who is a Marxist today? I sincerely don't believe that you can simply isolate a certain type, for example, who is a Marxist today. Is Fred Jameson a Marxist? I doubt it, even the latest Fred Jameson position is that the notion of ideology is totally useless and everything is just a narrative and so on. The last time I was shocked, he sounded practically like a kind of a vulgar version of Lyotard so my answer would be here very simple; I don't know if I'm Marxist or not. What I try to do is to reinvent what would have mattered to be a Marxist today. If Marx is anything it's not so much historical materialism as a critique of political economy. What we should not forget is that today Marxism is referred to for a theory of fetishism, but for Marx this was a concrete economic tool of social political economic analysis. How can anyone claim to be a Marxist today without approaching fundamentally this question, where do we

stand with it? Do we have a Marxist theory of what is going on today, not just in general terms of imperialism, exploitation? Marx has a specific theory of value, proletariat, who is proletarian, what is going on today. Before anyone reproaches me, questions my Marxism I would like to see his credentials, sorry but I am desperately looking for it. Fred Jameson's trick is to rely totally on Ernest Mandel I think.<sup>8</sup> He knows nothing about the economy, Fred Jameson.

*Ok, what if we side-stepped Jameson for the moment and we go to Mandel and the groups that are around Mandel in the Fourth International. You know they would still be called Marxists and they would define themselves as Marxists.*

Ok, but where, what would we therefore expect of revolutionary potentials, where do they see it?

*In working class struggles, not only in the imperialist countries but also in the 'third world', in countries like Korea where much of production is located at the moment. There is a geographical split so that the mass working class is geographically located at the margins, outside the countries like the United States and Britain, not visible to many people who are working in that Western sector, and that poses a political problem, but it's a problem of political organisation, it's a problem of how to mobilise people in the imperialist countries in solidarity with the working class in the so-called third world isn't it?*

I think the problem is so, but we are again at this too naïve position, their idea is that it's all a question of proper political work of the progressive forces.

*Not only that but it's a consequence of the triumph of capitalism, the fall of the Berlin Wall had some big political effect.*

Ok but what I see more as a problem is that, even if you acknowledge the possibility and not only the possibility – I think it will happen – of some kind of more global political unrest what then, I mean like things that happened two years ago in Argentina can explode at a much stronger level and so on and so on.

*What you are saying is precisely like the arguments that were going on between the Trotskyists and the Stalinists in the 1930s and 1940s around 'socialism in one country'; you've got a globalisation of capitalism and that's also a necessity for political organisation which are across national boundaries.*

Yeah, but ok, why does this organisation not happen?

*Strength of capitalism, strength of ideology, a lot of work to be done.*

And do you think that slowly this work will be done?

*I think the work will be done, but maybe it won't be slow, maybe it'll be fast, maybe it will even happen in unpredictable leaps, I've no idea.*

I put it in this way; generally I agree with this position of course, but nonetheless let's go a little bit more to the theoretical level. I'm not myself, I don't know enough, but can you still analyse it in the terms of Marxian labour theory of value and so on and

so on, who is exploited where and so on and so on? Because what would you say to this reactionary argument, that if you apply Marx's theory of value, then Arab countries are today exploiting the West? It's a clear cut case of Arab countries exploiting the West, so why should they be given their national resources? Countries like Iran, even Saudi Arabia, Iraq. If you follow Marx's theory of value, even at a very abstract level these countries are exploiting the West. What you presented me with as the Trotskyite position, I see this as, of course, this is evidently true; my god I wrote about this in I don't know which book. Even China itself for me is the ultimate capitalist country, a paradise for capitalism today because you have a state whose main function is to discipline the working class to do the work for the West. I mean, my god, I know from here, from these toys, made in Minsk today, almost always made in China, a little bit made in Korea, made in Indonesia or what not. I buy that at a general level. I know this is the big motto, a kind of solidarity between first world and third world ok, but what we get empirically is, on the contrary, that if there is a force that is reactionary against this solidarity it's the first world working class.

*That's always been a problem hasn't it, you know talked about by Lenin.*

Yeah, but ok, it's a problem, but where's the solution? You'd think that at some point they will see it or what?

*That's why political work is necessary, political work of building solidarity and supporting workers who are challenging wage cuts and privatisation in the western countries as well, anti-war movements and so on. What are first of all single issues then become generalised. If they are not they are recuperated by the capitalist state. It's difficult to know exactly how consciousness of that solidarity will emerge but it emerges surprisingly through different kinds of political organisation around different kinds of activity.*

I hope you are right, but you know what's my problem? I am tempted to answer in this way. I have no illusions about capitalism, I do fully agree that in the most orthodox old fashioned Marxist way that this cannot go on indefinitely, some kind of crisis will gradually have to explode either financially, some kind of Argentinean crisis at a triple level whatever, but somehow in my gut feeling is that what Marxists are lacking today is any kind of a minimal positive vision. In the long term I agree with you as to these short-term strategies, they are crucial. If you ask me where I stand, naively, it would be crucial to supplement the old welfare state with whatever standard struggle for any forums even if it's local, of alternative organisations. I was told, for example, that in South Africa or in favelas in Brazil you have these forums where they are forced to self-organise and then you try even illegally to connect to electricity. I think we should go one step further, it's not just within the system gradually, and I think that this is for me the limit of liberalism, that more and more without this it cannot survive. The progression is to still not only invent utopian models but practise them at least at a local level, some real alternative which means you really move out either, again, favelas or cultural forums so that you are outside, outside of the machinery. This is why again I will try to visit them if they invite me now to Brazil but, for example; I was told that favelas have a whole network and so on. They try but again you know at the same time, as you said, you do a tremendous service to the existing capitalist state because in this way you normalise.

*Everything can be recuperated. That's a fantastic thing that capitalism is able to do, capitalism is able to recuperate everything that is a challenge.*

I agree with you, but if you follow just this logic that you come to the conclusion that you should do absolutely nothing because everything can be recuperated.

*It depends what networks that you strike up as you are carrying out these local initiatives.*

Ok, then I would put it in this way. Then maybe where we maybe agree is just that maybe my interest is constrained, but from my experience more politically here and academic in the States is that I have maybe a deeper than average mistrust in these identity movements, feminism and so on. I think that they are, especially feminism and gay struggle and so on, I think that they are fully not only fully recuperable, but that already now they have been recuperated. Here I agree with Badiou, he is fanatical against it, that's his idea that American feminism is, ok we all know that there is a split in it between those, lets call them authentic grass root feminists who are involved with the problem of how should the Hispania or Puerto Rican women get organised, that's formidable, I die for that. But then you have, you know, these upper middle class, where you protest for things like why aren't women allowed to play golf or where is the ultimate artistic reading of old film noir to find the twist and all that, this kind of feminism especially the legalistic version. Here, I think I don't feel any solidarity.

*When you talk about examples of an act, when you talk about examples of dramatic social change, changing the symbolic coordinates, why are your examples always individual examples?*

I do also refer to the October revolution, my god, if I may be a little bit.

*But you reduce that to Lenin, no?*

Oh, not quite. Ok, now I am trying to save myself desperately. Nonetheless remember when I have one passage in the introduction to Lenin.<sup>9</sup> I say that it wasn't just Lenin against the politburo but there was a tremendous pressure from below and so on and so on.

*But it's very easy to miss that isn't it.*

Yeah but ok you can go even further.

*Individuals, and mainly women.*

Ah, this is my feminist bad conscience in the sense of I want to be politically you know, because usually the success of the act in the usual approach is that all the great acts are always male, no?

*But in your writing all the great acts are always, pretty always, female. This is a deliberate motif to counter that idea that it would be macho etc.?*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but when you said about the individual, where I agree with you is,

and this is a little bit of anticlimax, I admit it, for example the big bombastic chapter political the last chapter of *The Ticklish Subject*.<sup>10</sup> What we get at the end is the act of that crazy Seattle teacher screwing with her pupil. You know that is what remains as an act, but my problem is simply that the terms where I'm at the time thinking in is that it doesn't matter at which level, the main point for me is to show how at different levels from personal to political that the place is still open, that you can do it.

*Well you could give examples of collective struggle, you could give examples of the movements in the favelas or the movements in South Africa, or attempts to set up communes, or Metelkova whatever but you know so that even.*<sup>11</sup>

Ok now you touched a traumatic point for me because you I too would like to do an act with full state support you know!

*Ok, let's leave aside Metelkova. Let's talk about other progressive collective activities. Would they be acts in a Lacanian sense?*

Ok I put it in this way, I accept this as a self-criticism in the sense that, that, of course, my examples are here determined by contingences of my condition, but I sincerely don't think that it ruins my theory. I think that today especially in the West it is important to give the message that it's possible at all levels.

*It's ideological that people assume that change is brought about by individuals rather than collectives, it reproduces that ideological assumption.*

Yeah, but again things are more complex for me. Isn't it a paradox nonetheless that the very movement which is supposed to be for self-collective action, Marxism, focussed more than all others even on, on the role of the individual. This is for me mysterious.

*Here is something I would like to specifically ask about now, which is the way in which psychoanalysis is taken from the clinical domain, which concerns a particular subject with particular relation to 'objet petit a', but this is taken by you, not only by you, but taken and used to talk about collective shared experience. For example, this is the problem, the problem of Cindy Crawford's 'objet petit a'. When you say that what makes her attractive is her 'objet petit a' near her lip, as opposed to Claudia Schiffer, how can it be possible that everyone in the United States has that mole as their objet a? This, of course, is part of a broader issue about how you can use psychoanalysis for cultural analysis.*

Ok, let me talk on the more general level. I know the usual way, and I agree with you it is not satisfactory. There are two usual ways to answer it. One way would have been to say; but psychoanalysis is already a social experience, through identification bla, bla, bla, how isn't it the point of psychoanalysis that you as subject are formed through interpersonal relations with your parents, your environment, and so on. That I think is not strong enough, I agree with you. Because, one thing is, it's still 'you' as a subject, as it were, in your immediate environment, family, even peers, and the other thing is collectivity proper. Then there is the second answer, which I also think is not satisfying, it would be the Adornian answer, which is, that although he is right in his essay on the structure of fascist propaganda, it's apparently a minor text, but one of the best of Adorno's.<sup>12</sup> The second would be the Adorno way, which is, to emphasize



how Freud is the opposite of Le Bon, even if Freud refers to him. For Le Bon we have this mystique of the crowd experience, but Freud's problem is precisely that the crowd is not the primordial given. Freud's problem is precisely to explain how, through what individual processes of identification and so on, the crowd emerges. So the idea would be that psychoanalysis does not simply apply individual notions to collective phenomena, but does at the same time, explain how a collective phenomena as such emerges through individual processes. Ok, now even if you turn this around once more and say that this is just a counterpart of the standard Marxist notion that individuality emerges only within certain states of society, even this is not enough, my ultimate answer would be the following one; that Lacan at his best, when he speaks about the 'big Other', his idea is the following one. It's not only this obvious fact that you can only be formed through social interaction, but it's that the difference between individual and society is not simply external, it runs within the individual. For you, in order for you to be individual, not only do you have to relate to society in an external way, but for you, the social has to exist in the form of rules and so on and so on. And that is for me, that is the crucial link, it's not just that there are other people, 'you and you', the anonymous social, you have to as an individual relate to it. And this social, of course, is in a certain way a fixed social, a presupposed social. And I think that, at that level I would then posit this kind of Cindy Crawford collective identifications. They are not for me collective in the sense that many people have them. This collectivity is reflected, it's not collective in the sense of 'we shall', and it's collective in the sense of 'you and I as individuals already refer to it as something shared even if we are wrong'. Even if you relate to something as 'one thinks that', you know when you say 'people think that', then you as an individual relate to it as collectively shared. I claim that – it is risky thesis maybe – but I claim that something can function as 'object small a' also at that level. That is to say, what you individually desire is in a way mediated through what people desire in this impersonal sense of what one desires. I am well aware that sometimes Lacan says the opposite thing, where he reads the 'object small a' as totally idiosyncratic. But here I would answer that, because, this may surprise you, the book of mine that is forthcoming is on Deleuze and I give a much more friendly reading of Deleuze, although it is friendly polemically, but there I go.<sup>13</sup> Here I intended to introduce the Deleuzian distinction between singularity and individuality, and I think that the 'object small a' is already singular, but singularity can be universal and so on. In this sense I would give you precisely this example of something homologous to it. Every collective identity in order to work has to have for people the feature at which identifies people, it cannot be only some universal feature, it has some totally contingent element, like the King according to Hegel. In order to function, collective identification should contain a kind of a totally contingent idiosyncratic, particular element.

*Idiosyncratic, for each one?*

No, idiosyncratic already in itself, in the sense that it's totally contingent, in the sense that you pick out something and say that's it but that's not necessary for it, idiosyncratic in the sense that it's not part of some universal structure in the simple sense of a universal notion. In the sense of, I don't know, for example, the example that I like is that given by Jean Claude Milner who has a wonderful idea when he says that the function of the political master is not only to pronounce general truth, but from time to time to pronounce, to make some totally crazy individual statement which becomes obligatory, and through that you are master. I found this wonderful

example in Soviet biology. You know, it wasn't just that there were these evolutionary platitudes; all of a sudden it was fashionable to claim that between early animal forms, there was a long period where there were algae. The idea was that algae are crucial, they play the key role, and it was a total madness. Nobody knew why it was the case, but you know this gave the identity to this collectivity. This is what I meant by idiosyncratic, and you had to identify with it, all Soviet biologists had to say, of course that first there were millions of years where the algae were the main life form.

*There is a collective process where algae become a kind of 'objet petit a' for all these scientists?*

The point is that the authority has to be reflective in the sense that it had to contain one element, which in the old Lacanian jargon, means just itself, it means, you know, like I tell you do this because it is good for you, but since I'm your master you have to accept it only because I say so. You know, in this sense, I think that idiosyncrasy is shared, it's already shared, part of collective identity. Now, on the other hand, I am not even – I am very self critical here – I am not fully satisfied myself with this. Ok, what would be your answer be, if we turn to that singular example, of Claudia Schiffer, Cindy Crawford, and so on? On the other hand, I know there is a certain theoretical naivety in claiming that. On the other hand, I know that there is, in a totally naive way, I am convinced that there is an element of truth in it.

*How do you arrive at that element of truth? Is it because that you look at Cindy Crawford with her 'objet petit a', and you feel fascinated by it, and then you generalize from that?*

No, no, no. Let me tell you in what sense that I arrive at it. In that stupid interview to which I refer, or, whatever, opinion poll, they did ask people. Let's suppose naively that it was not a total fabrication. They claimed that it is not positively so much this mole or whatever. They claim that most of the people when asked why said it's nice to see that she is not perfect.

*Oh, that's very close to Adorno then.*

It was a sign of imperfection, it was a relief, and you know that, this is the function this element had. It kind of made it easier for people you know, although she has style. Let me tell you a totally crazy story. A friend of mine, living in fashionable SoHo, not in London, the New York SoHo, once met her, and of course he tried to ignore her. In the evening he even walked alone in one street down in SoHo, he passed her, my friend. Very polite, didn't harass her, just passed her. But obviously he was fascinated by her, he tried to pretend not to look at her, but in the very way he had to focus not to look at her, he forgot and he hit a trash bin there. And she turned around and said thanks very much for this recognition. She saw through it and walked away.

*It is the actual framing of it, it is actually not her objet a, but it is the 'objet petit a' for those who need it.*

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but again it's a problem in how this functions, because obviously, it would have been easy, for example, for her, to remove it through an operation. It's clear that through all the publicity, the machinery it's deliberately manipulated. As

often with all figures of authority, public popularity or authority, intelligent PR people are aware of it, no? They know that, in order for people to identify with you they have to offer you either some physical feature or some general, how I shall call it, sign of human weakness or whatever.

*Ok, I want move on and ask you about another case where there is a reduction to the individual, or it could be read so, in your work, the case of Antigone.*

But you know, to give you proof that I am aware of these other uses of Antigone, you know that in Slovenia, here Antigone was the main reference of the descendents of those ex-fascists here who were fighting on the side of the Nazis, because the communists killed them massively after the war and buried them anonymously. And then, of course, we did to them what Antigone was faced with, we need to rebury them and so on.

*So to go on about Antigone in Slovenia is to play with fire politically as well.*

Yeah, yeah which is why I didn't publish that part here, not because of any conformism but here Antigone means something almost naively in the political debate for many men, Antigone means solidarity with those who fought on the side of the Nazis against partisans in World War Two.

*But, connected with this again, is the question of ethics, is how, if Antigone is engaging in a kind of, and the way you present it is spontaneist, intuitivist. But in what way is her act informed by a judgement? Lacan says in the ethics seminar that ethics is always a question of judgement, essentially.*

But then he gives the example of Antigone.

*Yes, Yes, but how can ethics be a question of judgement if there is also an idealising of an act which leaps outside everything?*

Ok, why do you say 'idealising'? It's just a crazy gesture, it's a horrible gesture and Antigone is certainly not idealised. Lacan has, you must remember, a very nice point when he says that it's not idealising of act but it's that the act makes her appear beautiful.<sup>14</sup> Lacan makes this point in the first conversations with Ismene, you see Antigone the way she really was as a person and I mean Ismene is much more human, if you want, Antigone is a dirty arrogant bitch. After the act, when she is in that terrible space, she turns into something sublime, so it's not so much that her act is idealised as that acts, as it were, generate the idealisation. Alenka Zupančič convinced me on this.<sup>15</sup> Her idea is that the true act is where, and this other example is much more crucial I think for Lacan, is of Sygne de Coûfontaine, the Claudel example, and there you don't have any idealisation.<sup>16</sup> Antigone is sublime, beautiful, but there you have a totally desperate nervous woman, no sublimity there, and Alenka Zupančič looks in a nice way at what makes Antigone beautiful. You can locate it in the text precisely. It's that speech where she really, almost literally repeating the formal of the Kantian sublime, enumerates what she is missing; 'I am dying young', 'I could have had a husband', you know 'all that I will miss', and that gap, like 'all that I will miss', makes her sublime. She has to sacrifice everything but, as Lacan puts it in an ingenious way in the case of Sygne de Coûfontaine, there it's the opposite. Her horror is that she even is not allowed to sacrifice herself in the

noble way. The only way to do the favour to the Pope is to compromise herself, and that's the ultimate horror. I'm more and more convinced that Lacan's ethics seminar is a blind alley, a deadlock. You know what is the first symptom is that the big formula that everybody's quoting on giving way on your desire, it was just twice mentioned there, it never reappears.<sup>17</sup> So Lacan dropped it, it didn't survive as a big formula. All other statements – desire is desire of the Other bla bla bla – remained, and then Lacan returns to them again and again, and reinterprets them. This one was dropped immediately. The second thing is that, and here Miller convinced me, this mysterious statement on the very last page of seminar 11 that the desire of the analyst is not a pure desire, that this is against Antigone because her desire is defined as a pure desire.<sup>18</sup> In other words, there was a certain purity of desire which allows you to aestheticise Antigone which Lacan dropped immediately afterwards. I think it's already the next seminar, the transference seminar, but then you have an imminent critique, but it worries me again, and I oscillate because from Antigone I then pass to Medea, where was this, I think I am not sure, was it in the first Christianity book *Fragile Absolute*.<sup>19</sup> It's typical how my critics today remain mostly at least only with Antigone because, again, what fascinates me with Antigone even more, now I'm even more critical of Antigone, in Antigone Lacan comes at his closest to Georges Bataille, a heroic ethical act, you risk entering the terrible space bla bla bla, but I think that later Lacan absolutely renounces it, this idea that the authentic ethical act has to have something of this violent transgression. The first reason I oppose it is that it's politically dangerous, it comes close to this reactionary myth, that truth is accessible to us only in this kind of a momentary insight.

*Ok, so now my question is about the real. Is Lacan's account of the real a way of leading us to some other understanding of class struggle or is class struggle reducible to the real in a Lacanian sense, the real of sexual difference?*

With Lacan the notion of the real is not limited to sexual difference but first the real can be a trauma in general.

*Yes, yes but.*

Point two, whoa, whoa, whoa, point two, science is, for Lacan, discourse in the real. Lacan adamantly opposes the idea that science is sexualised. For Lacan sexualised science is precisely pre-modern, not science, which is not real, it's this, you know, light and dark, the universe is screwing itself, feminine and masculine principle. For Lacan, modern science has desexualised the real. He repeats it again and again. The second thing I don't get is, why is real for her, for Judith, a kind of a fixity; if anything, real means precisely that you have to change it all the time. Judith automatically reads then real as if there is a fixed patriarchal formula and then all of a sudden real becomes Lévi-Straussian, these eternal rules of exchange and so on and so on. Lacan explicitly says not only that the real can be changed but this is his idea of psychoanalysis. The wager of psychoanalysis is that through the symbolic you can intervene into the real. Otherwise, as Lacan puts it, psychoanalysis is meaningless. My point would have been that if you read sexual difference as 'there's no sexual rapport', this means precisely that it's not a binary opposition.<sup>20</sup> The binary opposition is a pre-modern sexual difference; the binary opposition means man/woman, two principals, masculine/feminine principal and so on. The Lacanian notion of antagonism, the real is impossible, is precisely not binary, in what sense? In that precisely, paradoxically, it's connected to the question of phallogocentrism,

because, as Lacan repeats, there is no binary. The primordial repression is the repression of the binary signifier. Lacan would have said that the problem is not that there is a Ying-Yang binary, the problem is the binary with one missing, with the feminine missing, which precisely makes a woman more, following my reading, more radically subjective and so on. The paradox is that people who reproach me with the possibility of my work being misread in a conservative way are the only people who read me in this way. It's a little bit like, for example, when feminists attack phallogocentrism and mock, you know, the phallic signifier, phallus, who apart from them thinks, I mean, where are any of these naïve phallogocentrists they criticise? You know, it's the same with what I call ironically my religious writings. Many of my friends are worried, 'but, you know, you could be exploited by, re-appropriated by them'. Maybe, but I certainly wasn't, they hate me like hell! A year ago there was here a West German wanted to do a big interview with me, a small interview as part of a bigger show on West German TV, a journalist, and they approached the church because they wanted me to appear in front of a church, and they already made a deal with the bishop's office here in Ljubljana, 'we have a Slovenian intellectual', and then at the end the church guy asked 'oh but who is that intellectual', and they said my name, they told me, and he slammed down the phone didn't want to know. I mean, who is reading me in this way, my god, nobody, nobody is. It is the same as with Laibach; let's return to Laibach, that would be my example. You know many liberals had this fear, but what if they are playing with fascist symbols, what if nonetheless some young, sorry, there were none. I know of no case, at least in Slovenia, I don't know how it was in Germany that Laibach were perceived as supporting neo-Nazis or whatever. On the contrary, here they are so hated. There was a rumour seven, eight years ago that they got for one of their concerts some state support, and there was an outcry among right-wing intellectuals. How could they get money, and a post-communist who was a minister of culture accepted the game and said no, no it is a misunderstanding, we did not finance them, but he reacted as if he were guilty, as if he had to justify his position. Later it got more blurred because now they are getting money. My problem is that I don't see why this worry, am I a Marxist or not, this is for me a worry which presupposes that the situation is fundamentally transparent, we know what a Marxist is and then you measure me. My problem is simply, no less than you I would love to be a Marxist, but how would it function today? You know, how? What, what kind of solidarity, I mean my big fear, as of everyone, I'm not even very original here, half-liberal, is that, you know, that if workers move in any way in the West today, all too often they do it precisely in nationalist or protective ways, precisely against solidarity. I agree with you, I'm far from judging the situation closed, my fear is exactly the same as yours, my fear is that it will explode, it will not go on, it will explode and the point is, will we be ready at that point.

*Your religious writings point to a resource, but there's kind of like enthusiastic almost evangelical kind of advertisement for what Christianity is.*

For the potential that was in it, and which has now passed elsewhere of course. The point, but I think that this might be another primordial fear, but I think that the ruling ideology today is spontaneously pagan, and I think that a certain impetus from Christianity is crucial as a form of precisely a new beginning, which is why I go systematically here into it into this kind of a why I radically distrust all this.<sup>21</sup>

*But why not just say revolution is possible, why index it to Christ?*

Because I like to snatch territory from the enemy. Isn't it a nice gesture to take? Isn't it the idea is to do what almost Freud did to Judaism, to take you know, it's not you are Christians we are we, it's, no, we take from you even Christ. I mean I simply like that gesture. On the other hand there is a certain messianic aspect. I don't like the term because 'messianic' was re-appropriated later by the Levinasians, Derrideans and so on, because the way I understand the messianic is that you know the Messiah has arrived. I love this attitude of, you know, no waiting for the big event, everything already happened. I go into this at the end of this book, but on the other hand my counterpoint would be to you, but isn't it that everyone is making fun of this kind of Christianity already today? Listen; who takes it seriously in America and in England, even in the United States, yes I know there is the Bible belt. I remember when I was young I found Dostoyevsky always boring but I heard about and basically went to the Grand Inquisitor in Karamazov Brothers. Even now I'm on the site of the Grand Inquisitor you know, which is why my hero is St Paul. He is totally disinterested in Christ as a person. You find almost none of this, Christ did that miracle, he did this, and this doesn't bother St Paul. It's only, Christ died, he arrives, and ok that was the event, now lets build the party and so on. Point two; he is external to the event. With the other apostles meeting, lets say in, 43, ten years after crucifixion, you can imagine then this nostalgic moment of having dinner, 'do you remember how Christ asked me to pass him the salt' ten years ago. None of that with St Paul, he is external, external, and this is why I'm with St Paul. My second point is that, do you really think that there are any fundamentalists who, I mean don't I write in a crazy enough style, that I cannot imagine any, any true fundamentalist reading me. But the second point is that, for example, it's a different field but similar, I spoke with some anti-Zionist Jewish friends, and they told me that for a long time that they played the liberal game of good Tel Aviv versus bad Jerusalem as if you know the bad guy is sat there in Jerusalem, and it took them long to say that the true dangers amongst Jews are the Tel Aviv liberals. They pretend to be more enlightened but, for example, even at the superficial political level you know that under Rabin and Barak more new settlements were built than under Sharon or earlier under Netanyahu and so on. Sharon is an atheist proclaimed. You know that a good friend of mine, a Jewish lady told me that she had an religious crisis when she was 18 and went to a Rabbi and asked him publicly in class not privately, 'I love Judaism, but ethically we have a heck of a problem I don't believe there is God' and so on, and the Rabbi told her 'What's the problem, neither do I'. It is nothing to do with the religion, my point being that I don't buy this focusing the fear on fundamentalists.

*Yes, but there could be a reading of Judaism or Islam, or some gestures towards Buddhism that would do the same kind of work. Why is it that Christianity is privileged?*

Oh, oh my God, because it is the absolute religion, here again, sorry, it's the best.

*This is Hegel again then? This is why; why he's put it there right at the bottom of everything isn't it.*

Yeah.

*Why Lacan is used to read Hegel and.*

Christianity the only religion where God becomes an atheist, you know that has 'father why has thou forsaken me' and so on. You know if you read Christian classics closely, for them the highest sin is not so much sin as killing, fornicating bla, bla bla, but doubting in God and God commits that sin in that moment. And, you know, this idea, it's a totally different logic than other religions, it's basically the logic of 'I speak from God' but so is God speaking from himself so we are all in the same sheet. It is totally, and here I claim Christianity is Hegelian and so on and so on, because in Christianity afterwards you don't get a return to God you get the Holy Spirit. I claim that some radically new logic emerges here. It means God was there, how shall I put it?

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- 3 Marx, K. (1973) *Grundrisse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
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- 6 Lacan, J. (1989) 'Kant with Sade', *October*, 51, pp. 55-104.
- 7 Lacan, J. (1989) 'Science and truth', *Newsletter of the Freudian Field*, 3, pp. 4-29.
- 8 See Achcar, G. (ed.) (1999) *The Legacy of Ernest Mandel*. London: Verso. For a theoretical restatement of Marxist analysis from within this tradition see, for example, Bensaïd, D. (2002) *Marx for our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*. London: Verso.
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- 16 Lacan, J. (1960-1961). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VIII, Transference*, translated by Cormac Gallagher from unedited French manuscripts.
- 17 'the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire' (Lacan, 1992, p. 319, p. 321).
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