

8. JULIA KRISTEVA, MARX AND THE SINGULARITY OF PAUL

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We may need to be slightly Marxist...¹

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.²

This Marxist version of Julia Kristeva is not very well known. If her name means anything, it is Kristeva the theoretical and practical psychoanalyst, but hardly Marxist. Indeed, Kristeva may seem like a strange addition to a collection of essays on Marxist feminism, for Kristeva has both sought to efface Marx as far as possible and distance herself from certain forms of American liberal feminism. There is, however, a Marxist Kristeva, as well as a feminist Kristeva. If the feminist is a distinctly European one, then the Marxist is hidden deeply within her writings, peering occasionally from behind the page but much more present in her earlier texts. Needless to say I am interested in this hidden Marx within Kristeva's work.

I am also interested in the Kristeva who has written on the Bible. Of all the critical theorists who have done so, Kristeva would have to stand near the head of the list. So, instead of trying to locate what elements of her work are relevant for a Marxist feminist reading of the Bible, I focus on her own readings of the Bible, especially her interpretations of Paul in the New Testament. What follows, then, begins with Kristeva's readings of Paul, outlining her main arguments concerning love and the cures for the psychological pathologies in *Tales of Love*,³ and then Paul's invention of the collective in *Strangers to Ourselves*.⁴ From there I move on to recover the repressed Marx within Kristeva's work, and then finally I return to her readings of Paul to see what they look like with the help of Marx.

1. Julia Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews* (ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 70.

2. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 45.

3. Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 139-50.

4. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 76-83.

Succinctly put, my argument is that while her psychoanalytic readings of Paul fall short, a Marxist reading is able to offer a more comprehensive assessment of what is of value in her interpretation, especially on the questions of *agape* as something that comes from completely outside the human realm, the social and historical context of the pathologies cured by Paul, and the political implications of her focus on the collective.

Other-Than-Human Love

Kristeva's preferred method, one that she has been reworking consistently for more than three decades, is psychoanalysis. She practices it in her consulting rooms and in her writings, moving from individual to global society with ease, claiming that it offers, through a chance to restart psychical life, the only viable form of human freedom, indeed that it is the vivid, fleshly realization of Christianity.⁵ The problem with this work is that it is at best patchy. There is some very good and there is some absolutely dreadful Kristeva. As far as the Bible is concerned, her readings of Ruth,⁶ the Song of Songs,⁷ or Hebrew language⁸ are ordinary and superficial, if not simply bad. Kristeva trots out conventional, even conservative positions as though they are blindingly new discoveries. The reading of the Levitical taboos in *Powers of Horror*⁹ is much better and contains a distinct insight or two that have been noticed in biblical studies.¹⁰ If we thought that Kristeva's patchiness was restricted to her biblical interpretations — stretching herself a little too far perhaps — then we would be mistaken, for her theoretical work shows a similar oscillation between the good, the bad and the frightful. Given her tendency to offer sweeping analyses of a single theme, too often her work betrays a certain thinness. Thus, we find

5. Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, Volume 2* (trans. Jeanine Herman; New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 242. See also her translation of the biblical and theological elaborations on the death of Christ in psychoanalytic terms. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 130-35.

6. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, pp. 69-76.

7. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, pp. 83-100.

8. Julia Kristeva, *Language the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* (trans. Anne M. Menke; New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 98-103.

9. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 90-112.

10. Fiona Black (ed.), *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs* (London: Continuum, 2007).

a theme like melancholia¹¹ or the stranger¹² or love¹³ or the abject¹⁴ traced through signal points all the way from ancient Greece, via the Bible, and into the West. I find myself wanting the tangled materialist complexity of Marxist analysis, not least of which would be to trouble the assumed classicist narrative of such efforts. And like her biblical readings, some Kristeva is cringingly awful, such as 'Love will save us',¹⁵ as are her naïve political comments¹⁶ or sweeping social analyses based on anecdotes and personal encounters, whether they be of France or Europe or America or Bulgaria, efforts to pinpoint a global social malaise and offer a cure. When reading these analyses or those vast sweeping books, I find myself dubbing her 'The Analyst of the West', or indeed 'Earth's Analyst'.

Happily for this essay, the readings of Paul are among the better texts. Her two Paul texts need to be read with each other, one focusing on the formation of the individual subject via the theme of love from *Tales of Love*¹⁷ and the other concerning the question of the stranger via a much more collective agenda in *Strangers to Ourselves*.¹⁸ If the first moves from the individual to the collective, the second focuses solidly on the collective in terms of the *ekklesia*.

In the first of her two texts on Paul, 'God is Love',¹⁹ Kristeva argues that the 'true revolution' of Christianity was its focus on *agape* as the centre of its message. Elevated over against *eros*, *agape* becomes in Paul theocentric: rather than human love of God, the key becomes God's love for human beings (Kristeva forgets the crucial role of *philia* in all of this). In fact, 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'.²⁰ If Kristeva sounds more like a theologian than a biblical critic, then her reliance on the Swedish theologian Anders Nygren's *Eros og Agape*²¹ plays a large role. To be frank, I am less than impressed by Kristeva's 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.

11. Kristeva, *Black Sun*.

12. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.

13. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*.

14. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*.

15. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 121.

16. Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, pp. 255-68.

17. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, pp. 139-50.

18. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, pp. 76-83.

19. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, pp. 139-50.

20. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, p. 140.

21. A. Nygren, *Eros and Agape* (trans. P.S. Watson; London: 1953).

However, I am more interested in the slips of her argument. One of those slips comes at the point where she speaks of a 'gift-love', of love as a disinterested gift that breaks out of a reciprocal gift-economy. The problem here is that without naming it directly, she is actually talking about grace, not love. Indeed, we might expect Kristeva to favour texts such as 1 Corinthians 13, but it is nowhere in sight. Her preference lies with Romans and its heavy emphasis on grace. In fact, the majority of her references are to Romans – Rom. 4.6; 5.6-11, 15, 20; 6.3, 5, 14; 8.31-37. In this light, her efforts to rope the texts on grace in Romans under the banner of love are less than convincing. Is not the gift another term for grace, and is not Paul's great discovery in Romans that of grace? The key texts have been rehearsed often enough, with the canonical decision to place the epistle to the Romans first playing a significant role. Thus, Paul winds himself up in the first chapters of Romans until he gets to the final verses of chapter 3, where he distinguishes sharply between justification (*dikaioisune*) through works of the law and justification through 'grace as a gift' (Rom. 3.20-26). This distinction then becomes either the law over against grace (Rom. 6.14) or works versus grace (Rom. 11.6). It is no great surprise that Paul's key myth should resonate through the various dimensions of this position, for grace is inseparable from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was 'put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (Rom. 4.25; see further 5.15-17; 6.14).

Reading Kristeva on Paul, I can't help notice that she sits in an odd position in relation to Pauline scholarship. On the one hand she shares a deep assumption with much of that scholarship, if not biblical scholarship in general: the letters are either good for you, or they are not (or perhaps a rare mix of the two). On the other hand, she is about as far as one could get from the various 'new perspectives' on Paul. Now, pondering the New Testament for me is a little like peering over a low fence at the somewhat unruly yard of a neighbour. But it is striking how much of that scholarship tries to make the text good for you if you read it. And if it is not, you try to detoxify it. Feminist scholarship on Paul is a good example of this, as – to name but a few – the efforts towards a liberating potential of Romans 8.22-23,²² or the possibilities that emerge from Paul's use of birthing metaphors,²³ or the search for an anti-hierarchical strain

22. Luzia Sutter Rehmann, 'To Turn the Groaning into Labor: Romans 1.18-2.16', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff; London: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), pp. 74-84.

23. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Our Mother St Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Levine and Blickenstaff), pp. 95-97.

in Paul's thought,²⁴ show only too well. I might add the efforts to come up with an anti-colonial²⁵ or liberating Paul,²⁶ or the eradication of anti-Semitism and sexism through a recasting of Paul as one element in that 'Jewish book',²⁷ the New Testament. Kristeva falls into the same trap: Paul's comments on love can be good for you if you read him in the right way. The work of Økland²⁸ and Fatum,²⁹ who argue that the fundamental images and constructions of space in Paul's work are inescapably male, come as welcome corrections to this tendency to detoxify Paul. Indeed, the biblical left has been and continues to be wary of Paul. He is after all the one who is responsible for ensuring that a distinct structure of patriarchy was locked into the very ideology of Christianity, for the dangerously conservative text in Romans 13 about being obedient to one's rulers, and who denigrated and argued for the sublimation of the libidinal dimensions of human existence in his idealization of celibacy (1 Corinthians 7), to name but a few of his more stellar achievements.

However, Kristeva is a long way from another major element of Pauline criticism. Indeed, the odd Pauline scholar might be forgiven for thinking that she has a wholly unreconstructed Paul in her sights. Love? Grace? Justification? Works? Are these not the catchwords of Pauline scholarship before the old 'new perspective' in which Paul was no longer read as a singular, introspective and apolitical theologian, but in terms of his context, especially that of Judaism?³⁰ As for what we might call the new 'new perspective', in which Paul must now be understood in the context of the Roman Empire and its imperial cult, Kristeva's Paul

24. Faith Kirkham Hawkins, 'Does Paul Make a Difference?' in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Levine and Blickenstaff), pp. 169-82.

25. Sze-kar Wan, 'Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction', in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation. Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (ed. Richard A. Horsley; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), pp. 191-215.

26. Allen Dwight Callahan, 'Paul, Ekklesia, and Emancipation in Corinth: A Coda on Liberation Theology', in *Paul and Politics* (ed. Horsley), pp. 216-23.

27. Luise Schottroff, "'Law-Free Gentile Christianity' – What About the Women? Feminist Analyses and Alternatives', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* (ed. Levine and Blickenstaff), pp. 183-94.

28. Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

29. Fatum Lone, 'Image of God and Glory of Man: Women in the Pauline Congregations', in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaean-Christian Traditions* (ed. K.E. Børresen; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 50-133.

30. E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

seems very remote indeed.³¹ If one were to remain within the rarefied confines of Pauline scholarship, with its unquestioned assumption that the key to understanding Paul lies in some crucial element of his context, it would be all too easy to dismiss Kristeva. At their worst, such efforts are little more than hagiography, or 'rationalistic paraphrase' as Niels-Peter Lemche calls it in a different context.³² They simply rewrite the narrative of Paul in a slightly different way. At their best, they do indeed shed new light on Paul in terms of his context, although I can't help the thought that Paul must have been extraordinarily astute to be in touch with all these various currents of Hellenistic thought and culture.

31. Context is the key, it seems. The new 'new perspective' has begun to overtake the old 'new perspective' in which Paul was to be understood in relation to Judaism, which was itself a response to the introspective, theological Paul. Despite the welcome correction of focusing on Paul's Hellenistic context, it is really a variation of the underlying focus on context itself. In other words, history remains the *sine qua non* of Pauline studies, and for Pauline scholarship that means going back and sorting out what Paul 'really' meant in his first century context. What one needs to do is locate an as yet neglected feature of this context, a feature that then becomes the secret passage to a new understanding of Paul. So we find one study after another immersing itself ever more deeply into, for instance, the ideological place of the androgyne as the answer to the tension between universalism and dualism in Paul's writings (Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994], Daniel Boyarin, 'Paul and Genealogy of Gender', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* [ed. Levine and Blickenstaff], pp. 1-12), or the Stoics who provide the inescapable philosophical and social background for Paul's thought (Diana Swancutt, 'Sexy Stoics and the Reading of Romans 1.18-2.16', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* [ed. Levine and Blickenstaff], pp. 95-97), so much so that he is a philosopher first (Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000]), or the various *encomia*, *progymnasmata*, *physiognomics* and other rhetorical treatises that provide us with a picture of collective 'Mediterranean' notions of personality that must not be confused with 'Western' individualist notions in our understanding of Paul (Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996]), or inheritance rights throughout the Ancient Near East, Greece and Rome which give some sense to Paul's theme of adoption (Kathleen E. Corley, 'Women's Inheritance Rights in Antiquity and Paul's Metaphor of Adoption', in *A Feminist Companion to Paul* [ed. Levine and Blickenstaff], pp. 98-121), or Hellenistic perceptions of sexuality and the body that become the necessary background for reading Paul (Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995]), or the *psychagogia*, the 'leading of souls' that runs through the moral philosophy of Greece and Rome which give us a sense of what Paul is on about in Philipppians (James A. Smith, *Marks of an Apostle: Deconstruction, Philipppians, and Problematizing Pauline Theology* [Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005]).

32. Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1998), p. 163.

Kristeva's reading of Paul on love unwittingly raises a deeper problem with this Pauline scholarship in its sustained flight from the older, theological readings of Paul: such scholarship kids itself if it thinks it is free from the long theological traditions that shape not merely biblical scholarship, but also societies and cultures. A scholar from Denmark will bear indelible traces of the Danish Lutheran Church, while one from Bulgaria would be hard put to deny the long Orthodox heritage of reading Paul, and so on. Such influence may operate at a personal level (how many biblical scholars are not also believers and members of Church or Synagogue?), an institutional one (the place of biblical studies within an educational establishment) or a cultural level (in the broad framework of the societies in which such scholars work).

At this point Kristeva falls short. Through her unfashionable emphasis on love, even grace in Paul, she may share the desire to make Paul good for you, or even unwittingly reveal the theological underpinnings of the current flurry of 'new perspectives' on Paul. But where she comes up short is in the inherently political nature of the old Pauline slogans such as justification, grace, sin, the law, works and (dare I say it?) love, slogans that have once again recovered their vital contemporary importance. At this point, however, we need Marx. But he will have to wait for a moment or two.

Crucifying the Pathologies

The catch with the focus on love, indeed on God's love, is that it neatly sidesteps another of Paul's recurring themes—the wrath of God with its own delicious kick. Paul is no hippy, and love is not all there is, but just when we think his diatribes against 'unnatural' passions really wind up to a hysterical crescendo, he gives it all a twist that puts everyone in the same boat (see Romans 1.18-32 and the twist in Romans 2.1-11). In short, no-one stands above anyone else and each person is subject to God's wrath. So how does Kristeva deal with this other theme of Paul's thought? She does so through Paul's narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For her the sacrifice of the body of the son is the distinctive and scandalous element of *agape*. But what intrigues me is her argument that Paul's standard narrative about 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—cuts through nearly all the psychological pathologies. As for Paul, he never fails to seize an opportunity to trot the narrative out (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 and so on). 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 and oral sadism.

I suspect there is something in this point, one that comes out of Kristeva's own interests. Let me take masochism as an example and examine it a little more closely. While *agape* goes beyond masochism, it must do so by traversing masochism. There are two steps in Kristeva's 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'.³³ 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 for the wellbeing of that 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 (*omoioima*) 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 [Paul's argument and other masochistic narratives] have in common'.³⁴ But Paul goes beyond it by making the masochism 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 leads to one pathology after another, but in each case he either 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 neutralized by making the passion of the cross a universal narrative. This short-circuits fantasy since we can no longer identify ourselves individually 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.³⁵ So also do we avoid the destructive

33. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, pp. 142-33.

34. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, p. 143.

35. 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,

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. First, the appropriation: the acceptance of death, as the limit of negative narcissism, becomes the way to achieve salvation. Then the overcoming: Paul simply shifts 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 the salvation, but no longer the narcissism. Since narcissism is so close to Paul's logic, Kristeva will later argue that the command to love your neighbour as yourself completes the overcoming of 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 Christ. To some extent, Kristeva has a point concerning these crucified pathologies in Paul. But I find myself longing for some good old history, some of the better versions of those intense concerns with Paul's context that I discussed in the previous section. However, all Kristeva can manage on the historical question is that the success of the new line of thought articulated by Paul answered problems that had arisen within Paul's Hellenistic context. Much more can be said, but before I can do that we will need to recover the hidden Marx in Kristeva's work.

Collectives

Among the list of the various pathologies, there is one that Kristeva does not mention – psychosis. Or rather, she doesn't mention it in *Tales of Love*. The section on Paul in *Strangers to Ourselves* is a different story, for there we find the idea that Paul's *ekklesia* speaks to psychic distress and soothes psychosis (which is usually divided into schizophrenia and

specifically in terms of transforming sacrifice into a language and system of meaning, the Bible defuses such a desire'. Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (trans. Ross Mitchell Guberman; New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 120. I must confess that this focus on the maternal function does not seem particularly radical.

paranoia). To my mind, Kristeva's enthusiasm for the *ekklesia* is where the collective dimension of her feminism comes into its own.³⁶

As before, I track Kristeva's argument in order to locate its shortcomings. Although she does not raise the question of psychosis in the section on Paul in *Tales of Love*, Kristeva does come around to the collective in that text, even if it is via the individual. Here she argues that the final step of Paul's reworking of *agape* is love of one's neighbour, or more specifically loving one's neighbour as oneself (Kristeva quotes Gal. 5.14,³⁷ but see also Rom. 13.8-10). And just in case narcissism should creep in the back door, Kristeva makes sure she points out that the self now includes neighbours, foreigners and sinners in the definition of 'Self'. The capital 'S' is important here, for it is a collective Self. This point comes out much more clearly in the passage from *Strangers to Ourselves*. The last thing we could say in this text is that Kristeva has an unreconstructed Paul in mind: over against the distinctly Protestant emphasis on an introspective and individualist Paul, or the great polemic of the Enlightenment in which the private individual is the point from which one must consider any group or society, or indeed Margaret Thatcher's chilling comment, 'there is no society', in *Strangers to Ourselves*³⁸ Kristeva sides firmly with the collective, specifically the *ekklesia*. This *ekklesia* is a 'community of foreigners'.³⁹ It is an 'ideal community', 'an original entity', a 'messianism that includes all of humankind'.⁴⁰ Note carefully Kristeva's language: although we might suspect she is getting carried away in all the eschatological excitement, what she sees here is the image of a transformed society. This sense of a new society is one of the most Marxist *and* feminist elements in Kristeva's work, as we will see in a few moments.

Indeed, Paul is not only a politician, for he is 'a psychologist, and if the institution he sets up is also political, its efficiency rests on the psychological intuition of its founder'.⁴¹ And what marks that new community is that it speaks to people's *psychic* distress, or rather spoke to the psychic distress of Hellenistic people and does so presumably today.⁴² More specifically,

36. In contrast to her reading in *New Maladies of the Soul* (pp. 122-23) where the focus on 'psychic conflicts that border on psychosis' is of a distinctly individualist focus.

37. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, p. 146.

38. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, pp. 77-83.

39. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 80.

40. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 80.

41. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 82.

42. 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, *New Maladies of the Soul*, p. 117.

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, assumes within itself this psychosis. The way this works is that instead of trying to insert foreigners into an existing social body, Paul recognizes 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 this split is 'experienced as a transition toward a spiritual liberation starting from and within a concrete body'.⁴³

I must admit that I find Kristeva's reading appealing, although not quite for the reasons she provides. I will come back to this question in the conclusion, for at this point I need to deal with a few problems. Firstly, as I pointed out earlier, Kristeva shares with some critics, feminists among them, the idea that reading Paul can be good for you; or rather, that if we search carefully we can redeem or liberate Paul. For instance, Hawkins argues that we can locate an anti-hierarchical strain in Paul's thought.⁴⁴ Horsley agrees, for in 1 Corinthians he finds an *ekklesia* that is an egalitarian alternative society to the Roman patronage system. Texts such as 1 Cor. 5.9-13; 6.1-11 and 10.14-22 reveal exclusive, eschatological communities that draw from but do not participate in wider imperial society.⁴⁵

The problem with such a reading lies in the language used: Paul uses exactly the same language in modelling an alternative social, political and religious *ekklesia* to those focused on the Imperial cult. Is it really an alternative, or another of the same? Kittredge, for one, is wary.⁴⁶ She argues that since political language shapes the internal organization of the *ekklesia*, it threatens to replicate the patriarchal structures of the other bodies on which it is modelled, particularly in terms of patriarchal marriage (her focus is 1 Cor. 14.34-35). Kittredge's hesitation echoes that of Økland,⁴⁷ who makes use of Marxist studies of space in conjunction

43. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 82.

44. Hawkins, 'Does Paul Make a Difference?'

45. Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), Richard A. Horsley, 'Rhetoric and Empire – and 1 Corinthians', in *Paul and Politics* (ed. Horsley), pp. 72-102.

46. Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, 'Corinthian Women Prophets and Paul's Argumentation in 1 Corinthians', in *Paul and Politics* (ed. Horsley), pp. 103-109.

47. Økland, *Women in Their Place*.

with feminist and ritual studies to reconfigure the domestic politics of the Corinthian correspondence. Focusing on 1 Corinthians 11–14—the part that deals with ritual gatherings—Økland argues that Paul clearly demarcates the ‘sanctuary space’ of the *ekklesia* by means of a gender hierarchy of cosmic proportions, the model of the male body of Christ and women’s dress and speech. She makes use of ancient literary texts, ritual materials, archaeological evidence on gender roles, as well as some sophisticated theoretical work in Marxism and feminist studies, to argue that such a ‘sanctuary space’ is distinct from the Hellenistic context of public and private space, that it is inescapably gendered, and that the Corinthian correspondence begins to mark a shift from gender segregation into a hierarchical integration in which the male was closer to the godhead. Alternative this *ekklesia* may be, but that doesn’t make it any more egalitarian than the bodies it opposes.

The second problem follows from the first. For Kristeva, the *ekklesia* becomes something of a therapeutic device. Thus, if we look at Romans, we soon find Jews and Greeks, Greek and barbarian, wise and foolish, mortal and immortal, and on and on, along with a distinct narrative to account for the passage between for these splits. But what if we do a Foucauldian flip? What if, in the very act of providing therapy for psychosis, Paul’s theory and practice of *ekklesia* may in fact be responsible for psychosis and other pathologies in the first place? We need to keep this question constantly in mind, since Paul’s soothing *ekklesia* does not provide therapeutics for all—hierarchical and intolerant, it has a history of repressing sexual and gender difference, of denigrating the libidinal, of expelling or absorbing heretics, and of being intolerant to the foreigner.

Thirdly, Kristeva’s picture of a great universal collective of happy ex-psychotics is not quite the political collective that emerges from Paul’s texts. Here I would like to introduce an insight from Giorgio Agamben that has a direct bearing on the collective: he argues that Paul continually introduces oppositions that undermine his earlier ones. For example, if we assume that one of Paul’s great splits is between Jew and Greek (e.g. Rom. 1.16), then he has already unsettled this with the earlier one between Greeks and barbarians (Rom. 1.14). Are the Jews barbarians? Or are the Greeks split themselves? Agamben develops this much further to argue that Paul continually cuts across his binaries in new ways—flesh and spirit, grace and works, life and death, grace and law, sin and law, the law of God and the law of sin, and so on—so that we end up with a highly unstable collective. This instability intrigues me, for it provides a somewhat different image of the *ekklesia*. Not quite the same as the politico-religious gatherings on which it was modelled, different yet similar, egalitarian, segregated and hierarchical, providing an answer for and yet perpetuating pathologies, it is a curious body indeed. What is going

on here? Well, for the answer to that question we need a more Marxist Kristeva.

A Marxist Kristeva

On three occasions now I have reached a moment when my discussion of Kristeva has really required a Marxist angle, a Marxist Kristeva as I have dubbed her. There is no need, however, to add Marx to Kristeva's analysis, to bring him in as *deus ex machina* who can resolve all the difficulties of her interpretation. Rather, he lies hidden within her work, half-forgotten and buried in a dark corner of her mind. In this section I track the strategies by which Kristeva sidelines, conceals and bypasses Marx while never really being able to get rid of him.⁴⁸

We need to work backwards to find Marx in Kristeva, a little like her native Bulgarian tongue that she claims to have all but lost.⁴⁹ Here I would like to focus on a key essay written in 1968, 'Semiotics: A Critical Science and/or a Critique of Science',⁵⁰ an essay that is an extended engagement with Marx. At the end of the article we find a Marx who is trumped by Freud. Although Kristeva remains faithful to Marx's critical perspective, she needs to move past him, to show where he falls short.

As far as her 'Semiotics' essay is concerned, two parts of her argument interest me. 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.

I deal with these two points in reverse. Marx falls short, argues Kristeva, by focusing on the questions of production and work. This is fine as far it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. Freud's great insight was to draw attention to 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

48. Here she has much in common with Slavoj Žižek, for both of them reflect in their personal and intellectual trajectories the recent history of Eastern Europe. See Roland Boer, 'The Search for Redemption: Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Žižek on Marx, Psychoanalysis and Religion', *Filozofija i Društvo (Philosophy and Society)* 32.1 (2007), pp. 153-76.

49. Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, pp. 242-23.

50. Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader* (ed. Toril Moi; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 74-88.

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, while we might suspect that she has fallen into the trap of identifying original causes, at least with Marx she is not content to rest with such an argument. In her later work she asserts time and again that psychoanalysis 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 those separated fields of theory and action.⁵¹ Further, Freudian social analyses and solutions outperform an exhausted socialism.⁵² 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.⁵³

I am, however, reading Kristeva's 'Semiotics' essay backwards. Earlier in the essay she identifies Marx's great insight, what she calls his crucial 'epistemological break'.⁵⁴ And 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.⁵⁵

Kristeva's interest, at least at this moment in her thought, is on the implications of Marx's insight for semiotics.⁵⁶ Thus, 'No form of semiotics, therefore, can exist other than as a critique of semiotics'. 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)'.⁵⁷

51. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, pp. 151, 98.

52. Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, pp. 209-10.

53. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, pp. 24-25.

54. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 79.

55. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 78. 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. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. Margaret Waller; New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 105.

56. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 78.

57. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 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'⁵⁸ 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 wage-relation 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. Once this is done, we get the generation of a whole new set of terms that marks the rise of a new science.⁵⁹

Marx is even more important for Kristeva than might at first appear. This essay on semiotics is not the only place where Kristeva must rely on Marx. Let me give a few examples where Kristeva cannot dispense with Marx, especially at a sticky spot in her argument. The first is historical, the second political and the third deals with feminism. In an effort to deal with the rise of the avant-garde in literature – the moment of modernism from the end of the nineteenth century and embodied in the work of Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Bataille – Kristeva is able to mix good Marxist social theory with the best of them. At moments like these, her efforts to depict the big picture with a few firm, rapidly drawn lines, work extremely well. Thus the avant-garde is a signal and effort to deal with the massive changes that took place with the comprehensive onset and spread of capitalism: 'A new phenomenon has arisen since the rise to power of the bourgeoisie, the onset of the free market, the inflation of capital permeating relationships of production and reproduction and dominating them, and the crisis of the patriarchal family'.⁶⁰ At this moment of crisis in state, family and religion, capitalist excess and restructuring take precedence over restraint and structure. Everything must give way! Here of course, she is paraphrasing the famous statement concerning the constant revolutionizing of capitalism in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* – 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'.⁶¹ Psychoanalysis then becomes one of the

58. Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 80.

59. Kristeva herself is rather well-known for a series of new terms – *semanalyse*, *abjection*, *intertextuality* and so on – at the emergence, or even the hint or semblance of an emergence, of a new method or idea.

60. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 96.

61. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (trans. 1888 Samuel Moore in cooperation with Frederick Engels; Marx/Engels Internet Archive [marxists.org], 2004). The full paragraph reads: 'The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations

new modes of dealing with such profound social and economic changes, especially the relationship between the unconscious and the social restrictions Freud argued were crucial for any society to function.⁶²

Secondly, on a more political note, Kristeva's definition of the 'left' is a moment of sheer insight. Rather than seeing it as one side of the eternal shifting binary of left and right in our current political landscape, she sees the left as 'the locus where the question of politics, and above all of the limits of the political (from the viewpoint of symbolic formations, that is, the acquisition of culture and knowledge), can be formulated and dealt with'.⁶³ A psychoanalytic version, if you will, of the Marxist notion of the 'withering away of the state'. But it is also an extraordinary recognition of the Marxist point that politics is, after all, part of the domain of culture and religion and knowledge and ideology, *and* the point that this is what Lacan's notion of the Symbolic – of language and society and culture – is really on about. In the crossover, then, between Lacan's Symbolic and Marx's superstructure we find politics. But it is not only a point where political battles are fought, but where the left identifies itself by identifying the limits of politics and thinking beyond them.

Finally, and crucially for my engagement, when she faces difficulties in her dealings with feminism, Kristeva reverts occasionally to Marxism. She has, infamously, kept feminism at an arm's length, especially American liberal feminism. She teases such an audience with comments like the one concerning the phallus, which, as 'numerous scholars' have shown, is indeed the basis of signification and religion.⁶⁴ More substantially, in her trilogy, *Female Genius*, she focuses on three women who were independent from and placed themselves, like Kristeva herself, above and

of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his, real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind'.

62. For other examples, see Kristeva's argument for a different social context for gender relations in China (*Julia Kristeva Interviews*, pp. 100-101), or the analysis of the dilemmas faced by Mitterand's socialism in France (*Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 154).

63. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 174.

64. Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, Volume 1* (trans. Jeanine Herman; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 88.

beyond feminism as well as Marxism—Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ The problem, as far as Kristeva is concerned, is that feminism is trapped between two dogmatisms,⁶⁷ 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. Caught between a rock and a hard place, it will not be long before she trots out the conventional argument that we need to avoid the two totalitarian extremes of Fascism and Stalinism—a refrain from her earliest texts⁶⁸—by means of some mythical middle way. Otherwise, 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 modeled 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.*⁶⁹

Just when I began to suspect that Kristeva was yet another liberal in disguise, or perhaps even a conservative who bemoans a supposed religious crisis generated by the deterioration of belief⁷⁰ and thereby the

65. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (trans. Ross Guberman; New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); *Melanie Klein* (trans. Ross Guberman; New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); *Colette* (trans. Jane Marie Todd; New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

66. Kristeva, *Colette*, p. 404.

67. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 7.

68. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 23.

69. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 45, emphasis added.

70. Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, p. 221.

end of viable revolt,⁷¹ she produces an extraordinarily central Marxist point. Too often Kristeva invokes terms such as freedom and democracy (without any qualifiers), or 'plurality of consciences'⁷² or the importance of the individual, and dismisses communism as inherently totalizing. But here she produces a statement that would have been heresy in the countries of 'actually existing socialism' such as Bulgaria, but one that is deeply faithful to Marx. 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.⁷³ You cannot just take a Marxist ideology and graft it onto a capitalist one. Thirdly, the society desired by feminism *and* communism must come *after* bourgeois individualism – i.e. liberalism – and not before. This flies in the face of the argument that became increasingly common in former communist countries, namely that it was possible to bypass fully-fledged capitalism and move straight to communism.⁷⁴ 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. One might argue that with globalization, brought about by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, we are only beginning to glimpse what a full capitalism might be, what a fully commodified world might look like.

This is the Marxist Kristeva who interests me. There are four points that may be drawn from the quotation above: no gender without political economics; no ideological change without social and economic change; no mismatches between bourgeois ideology and feminism; a communitarian rather than an individual feminism; in short, Marxist feminism rather than bourgeois feminism, but a Marxist feminism willing to bide its time and let capitalism run its course. Given the variety of feminisms that make up a multifaceted movement, Kristeva clearly sides with a communitarian and progressive feminism rather than an individualist and liberal feminism that focuses on rights. In other words, the individual has a place but only when one begins from the collective.

71. Kristeva, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, p. 24.

72. Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 51.

73. 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, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, p. 154.

74. In a further twist that echoes Chinese arguments, it is sometimes asserted in post-communist countries that there are many capitalisms and there a gentler form might grow. I am rather sceptical, especially after spending some time in a number of Eastern European countries.

Conclusion

Now that a more Marxist Kristeva has emerged, it is time to reiterate her main points on Paul. On love: although Kristeva argues that *agape* is a love that comes entirely from outside any human action or causation, and although she also evokes the traditional theological category of grace, yet she falls short on the political implications of her argument. On the pathologies: for all the insight that Paul provides a means for curing, or rather, crucifying the various pathologies, she is woefully thin on why this might have been the case for economic and historical reasons. On the collective: her welcome focus, via the *ekklesia* in Paul, on the collective as a new society comes to ground in the image of a universal collective of happy ex-psychotics who have all been able to negotiate the tension between two psychic domains, passing from a concrete body to a spiritual domain.

One might be forgiven for thinking that Kristeva is still searching for the redemption in Christianity and psychoanalysis that Marxism failed to deliver.⁷⁵ But what happens to these three points when we allow Kristeva's repressed Marxism a chance to speak? There are two answers, one relating to love and the other to the pathologies and the collective. Now, the point Kristeva almost reaches in her discussion of love is that Paul's few letters are the great site in which ecclesiastical, cultural and political battles have been and continue to be fought. I need only mention the long political struggles around the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, especially the infamous Thirty Years War (1618–48) between the various alliances of Roman Catholics and Protestants. That the Reformers stressed grace, justification and predestination, while in response the Roman Catholics took up Molinism, with its emphasis on giving human beings as much involvement as possible in ensuring their own salvation,⁷⁶ shows how deeply these theological slogans provided the language in which these cultural and political oppositions took shape.

75. See further Boer, 'The Search for Redemption', pp. 153-76.

76. Attributed to Luis de Molina (1535–1600), especially his *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis* of 1588. Over against the Reformers, Molina gave as much room as possible to human works and obedience to the divine commandments. Basically, Molina argued that freely chosen human cooperation with the gift of grace was the ultimate cause of the efficacy of grace. This effectiveness, which boils down to the ability of human beings genuinely to obey God, comes not from grace itself, but from the human decision to obey. Molinism just escapes espousing self-earned salvation by arguing that the free act of human beings to cooperate with God is itself foreknown by God. In short, we can get to the line, but we need a helping hand to get over it. I hardly need to point out its conscious opposition to the Reformers.

If we thought that these days are well and truly past, that the time when the Bible provided the language of politics belongs to a dim and distant memory, then we need to think again. While Kristeva gets to the edge of such analysis, hampered as she is by her devotion to psychoanalysis, other Marxist readers of Paul throw into relief the inescapably political nature of Paul's texts. I think here of Alain Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*.⁷⁷ For Badiou, Paul is the first militant who outlines the structure of the event via his doctrine of grace, and who thereby establishes a political group faithful to that event. Badiou is interested firstly in the way Paul deals with the resurrection, which is in terms of the notion of grace, and secondly in the way it can be turned into a materialist, political and militant doctrine. How does he do this? Grace emphasizes what is inexplicable, unexpected, what comes from outside human experience and causality. In Italy, Giorgio Agamben also responded to Badiou's interpretation with a very different take that focused on the messianic and remnant themes in Paul, themes that keep alive the possibility of political change.⁷⁸ Standing at a variance to all of these, there was the 'spiritual testament' of Jacob Taubes, his last lectures that were transcribed from an audio tape and translated as *The Political Theology of Paul*.⁷⁹ Now, none of these characters are biblical critics: they are in fact philosophers of different Marxist hues, and they show once again how Paul's tortured texts are as relevant as ever at a political level.

What, then, are we to make of Kristeva's concern with other-than-human love? Rather than her catholic-cum-hippy reading of Paul on *agape*, these themes of Paul are inescapably political. In that light her stress on the external and undeserved nature of *agape* (really a code for *charis*, grace) has some mileage. The great political insight here is that political, cultural and socio-economic change does not necessarily rely on human agency. Nearly all theories of substantial and qualitative political change rely in some form on human agency. The catch, of course, is that most such theories rely on models of past change, most notably the shift from feudalism to capitalism. What if, by contrast, the future agency for such change was to come from non-human sources? I think here of the ultimate contradiction between unlimited capitalism and a limited planet that I have argued for elsewhere.⁸⁰

77. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (trans. Ray Brassier; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

78. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (trans. Patricia Dailey; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005).

79. Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (trans. D Hollander; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

80. Roland Boer, *Political Myth* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, in press).

As far as the pathologies and the collective are concerned, I found myself wanting a decent dose of history to make a little more sense of her argument that Paul provides a collective means for dealing with these psychic problems. On that score, I am intrigued by the recent focus on the Roman Empire as the context for Paul's thought, and indeed the New Testament as such. Richard Horsley⁸¹ has been instrumental in this work, but he does not in the end go far enough. Horsley and those who follow him focus on the extraordinary transformations brought about in the Roman Empire by Augustus: the full-fledged development of the cult and gospel of the Emperor, the centralization of patron-client relations in the emperor, and the profound impacts of such changes in regional cities such as Ephesus and Corinth. Above all the infamous *pax Romana* turns out to be a system of violence, blood, systematic destruction and enslavement in order to expand and maintain the empire. Here is Horsley:

During the first century BCE Roman warlords took over the eastern Mediterranean, including Judea, where Pompey's troops defiled the Jerusalem Temple in retaliation for the resistance of the priests. The massive acts of periodic reconquest of the rebellious Judean and Galilean people included *thousands enslaved* at Magdala/Tarichaea in Galilee in 52-51 BCE, *mass enslavement* in and around Sepphoris (near Nazareth) and thousands crucified at Emmaus in Judea in 4 BCE, and the systematic devastation of villages and towns, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and *mass enslavement* in 67-70 CE. In the area of Paul's mission, the Romans ruthlessly sacked and torched Corinth, one of the most illustrious Greek cities, slaughtered its men, and *enslaved* its women and children in 146 BCE.⁸²

Was it merely the Emperor, warlords and the Romans themselves who are responsible for such acts? Such a concern with their agency loses sight of the political and economic issues at stake. One of the basic signs of change in social formations is a high level of violence, social unrest and conflict as a new system imposes itself on an older established one. Such troubled transitions produce displacement, tension and violence, in demographic, economic, social, political and *psychological* terms. I have highlighted the references to enslavement in my quotation from Horsley, for the Greeks and especially the Romans brought a new economic system to their Empire, a slave-based economic system in which the slaves did all the work and the relatively few 'citizens' did not.⁸³ In conventional

81. Richard A. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

82. Horsley (ed.), *Paul and Empire*, pp. 10-11, emphasis added.

83. See Sheila Briggs' useful study of Paul and slavery, although a more systematic treatment indebted to Marxist analysis would have strengthened her study. Sheila Briggs, 'Paul on Bondage and Freedom in Imperial Roman Society', in *Paul and Politics* (ed. Horsley), pp. 110-23.

Marxist terms, the extraction of surplus value – what the slaves produced above their needs for subsistence – was extracted from them by those who owned them, thereby generating and maintaining their positions of wealth and power.⁸⁴

What we have then at the most basic level is a transition from what I have elsewhere termed a Sacred Economy⁸⁵ to a slave system, a brutal shift in Marxist terms from one mode of production to another. This transition gradually transformed the Roman Empire. The imposition of a different economic and social system took place in a piecemeal fashion through systematic violence and disruption, especially in the three or four centuries at the turn of the era. So I would argue that the various pathologies that Kristeva sees answered in Paul's missives may be regarded as the manifestations at a psychic level of such a massive and brutal transition. The troubled genius of Paul, then, is that he may unwittingly have found a myth – the crucified and risen Jesus – that provided a means of dealing with these pathologies.

So also with the ambiguous and unstable *ekklesia*: it seems to me that Paul's collective is a political, religious and psychological answer to the brutal changes everywhere apparent in economic and political forms. His response, as the old socio-psychological point would have it, was to provide unwittingly the forms that would facilitate the shift into the different slave-based social formation. It is not for nothing that this answer would become the ideology and practice of the later Roman Empire.

These are the types of conclusions a more Marxist Kristeva might make. But we can see the various possibilities already within her own readings, for Kristeva does want to retrieve Paul, especially one who provides a transformative focus on *agape* and *ekklesia* and for whom the secret is the myth of the death and resurrection of Christ. Even more, she wants a Paul whose thought and collective is innovative, therapeutic and unique. Is this not what she wants when she lets her feminist and Marxist wishes come to the fore – collective, progressive and socially transformative? Yet, it seems to me that Paul is not quite up to the task. While Kristeva regards Paul's invention of the *ekklesia* as a new political and psychological body, it turns out that this body is only partially and ambiguously innovative, saturated as it is in the social, spatial, gendered and hierarchical space of the Roman Empire; or, as I would prefer, of the slave-based system violently enforced by the Romans.

84. See further Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: New Left Books, 1974), pp. 13-103.

85. Roland Boer, "The Sacred Economy of Ancient "Israel"", *The Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 21.1 (2007), pp. 29-48.

All the same Kristeva's collective agenda is something I would rather endorse than discard, but not in the form she presents it. Rather, given that such an *ekklesia* is gendered, hierarchical, slave-bound and politically conservative, it would be worthwhile to invoke Ernst Bloch's dialectic of utopia at this point: even the most degraded collective forms give voice to some utopian impulse.⁸⁶ The trick is to extract that impulse from its oppressive content.⁸⁷

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86. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

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