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## **Žižek, NSK, Marxism, Psychoanalysis and the State: Cynicism and Resistance to Capitalism and Bureaucracy in Europe**

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This paper explores cultural-political interventions in Slovenia by NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) and the role of different practical-theoretical perspectives on the state, on the nature of the state and on strategies to tackle it. Framing of the task in terms of dismantling, negotiating or subverting the state already, of course, highlights differences of analytic and political strategy. I am concerned here with the relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis and the ways that differences between the two traditions of work play out in actual political interventions. I will also address the question of the relationship between NSK and the work of Slavoj Žižek. The contradictory elements of Marxism and psychoanalysis can be conceptually organised through this mapping in which it will also be possible to determine their relationship with Western capitalism and forms of bureaucratic state management in Eastern Europe. I am implicated in this story, as you will see.

## Cynicism and Resistance

The philosophical foundations of NSK theory and practice go back well beyond the 1980s when it was founded to what is often taken to be the crucible of European civilization in ancient Greece. Slavoj Žižek has insisted that the idea of “Europe” and its legacy, what was later to become its Christian legacy, is important, so this is reason enough to turn to Greece as providing some compass points for making sense of the NSK political project. It is worth pointing out, for example, that in the recent referendum in Slovenia over whether the country should join NATO or not, Žižek publicly called for a “yes” vote to NATO, on the grounds that this would help shift the balance of power in NATO from the United States to Europe.

The relevant elements of the Greek tradition for this account are to be found in the activities of Diogenes the cynic. The Greek word “kynikos” or “dog-like” was claimed by followers of Diogenes, and Diogenes claim that to be an authentic follower of Socrates entailed a subversion of Socrates reverence for the State and an assertion, in its place of the “State of Being”. Diogenes was famous for his shameless repudiation of authority, with one example of this being his response to Alexander the Great who sought him out and asked him what he, Alexander, could do for him. Diogenes is reputed to have replied to Alexander that he could get out the way so that he could enjoy the sun. In fact, Diogenes was known for his shamelessness as such, and his followers, like Crates and Hipparchia had a “dog marriage” and fornicated in public, something Xenon responded to by attempting to cover their nakedness with a cloak.

All in all, the cynics were contemptuous of State forms, of marriage and religion used to hold the State in place, and their philosophy was a kind of “anti-philosophy”. They unmasked belief, and their strategies for doing that, as for example in the “dog marriage”, were to mimic dominant forms in order to ridicule and undermine them. Diogenes will be remembered, among other things, for walking the streets of Athens with a lamp in the daytime, looking, he said, for an honest man. Cynicism is associated with Diogenes and his gang, but the tradition was probably inaugurated by one of Socrates' students Antisthenes. His own emphasis on the intimate connection between wisdom and virtue actually owe more to the Socratic ethical tradition of the “good” as touchstone of good conduct and a good life than to the dirty disreputable antics of the cynics as we have come to know them. One might say that in retrospect, Antisthenes is more easily assimilated than Diogenes to the canon of Western philosophy, and so we are now left with, first, the lingering remains of a dispute as to who was responsible for “cynicism” and, second, the question of the political recuperation of it into tradition or its continuing role as a sarcastic subversion of what the authorities would like us to believe.

I don't want to labour this analogy much further, but I simply want to point out that in the case of the relations between NSK and Žižek, history repeats itself (this time more as farce), and that the question of recuperation or subversion is wide open, with the claims and counter-claims that could be made by either side risking simply being part of the spectacle. Marxism is the main reference point for organising this discussion, and psychoanalysis will be articulated as a practice in relation to it. Psychoanalysis is sometimes associated in academic debate with Marxist perspectives, but psychoanalytic practice does not have the same immediate relation to the state. Even though it has always had to operate within the constraints of specific state practices, psychoanalysts have often been able to pretend that they are merely concerned with personal change, and that this can proceed independently of political activity.

The cultural-political movement I will describe operates, for specific geographical and historical reasons, in a peculiar space between Marxism and psychoanalysis. This movement, NSK, developed in Slovenia in the 1980s as the Yugoslav state began to disintegrate, and it then developed distinctive strategies to question the role of the state as it operated until 1990 and the new independent state that was formed in 1991. Elements of this cultural practice, specifically "overidentification", have been described by Slavoj Žižek and this is a motif that runs from his early to recent political writings (e.g., Žižek, 1989, 2008).

Because the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia claimed allegiance to Marxism, even to a form of open socialist self-management, the particular psychoanalytic theoretical resources that were accumulated by the opposition in Slovenia were already positioned in relation to Marxism, and in practice in opposition to an actually-existing socialist state. But before we can explore that ambiguous position, and how NSK set about conceptualising and subverting it, it is necessary to clarify that which Marxism was formed to combat and replace; capitalism.

## Capitalism

Capitalism can be characterised, from the standpoint of Marxism, in the broadest, most open sense of the revolutionary Marxist tradition, in the following way (e.g., Bensaïd, 2002).

Capitalism, first, is a political economic system in which there is *exploitation* of the labouring classes. This exploitation requires control, if not now always immediate ownership, of the means of production that is organised around profit obtained from surplus value produced by workers. It requires, second, that the relationship between capitalist and worker be treated as something that is permanent and unchanging. The relationship is thus essentialised, though this

*essentialism* may be ideologically justified either as the kind of relationship necessary to civilised society or as expressing the natural tendencies of human beings to compete for resources and sell their labour to others. Third, capitalism rests on a particular conception of individual *rights*. The rights of those who own the means of production to employ others for profit, and of course the rights of workers to sell their labour power and to view that exchange as if it formed a contract that was consciously and freely that both parties engaged in.

There is, fourth, an enclosure of natural resources so that these resources can then be bought and sold, and so that it is necessary for those who engaged in subsistence farming as part of a peasant economy to choose to instead become part of the industrial workforce. This commodification of natural resources has a logic in which there must be a governance of *territoriality* as the market economy expands, and then mutation of the management of territory as finance capital predominates and as various competing forms of imperialist control of foreign land, labour and markets. A fifth point, which runs alongside the essentialising of relationships, is that under capitalism economic relationships are ratified anew in the face of disparate ideological and moral challenges. This *ratification* elaborates the ideological horizon within which capitalism is questioned, this in such a way that there is sedimentation of taken-for-granted ground-rules for production and relationships, ground-rules that are not immediately open to question.

Sixth, development of production is viewed as a linear unfolding process, as a given law of economic progress. This apparent *linearity* of capitalist development, and of the natural development out of capitalism out of earlier modes of production, is replicated conceptually in causal descriptions of natural and social processes and in the temporal ordering of the working day and of an individual's life-span. There is a requirement, seventh, that there be a degree of *regulation* by the state of economic relationships, regulation that now operates in conditions of neoliberalism alongside deregulation and the privatisation of social welfare services. Capitalism constructs and warrants itself ideologically around the motif of the "free market", yet the state has always been a necessary regulatory apparatus to ensure that there is "competition" as well ensuring that resistance to capitalism is quashed.

Eighth, decisions taken by the exploited to sell their labour power, as well as decisions of the exploiters to invest, are treated as individual decisions, and this *individuality* is often invoked by supporters as a defining principle of capitalist society. There is a corresponding and necessary individualisation of the domain of subjective experience so that even attempts to make capitalism run smoothly are viewed as "state interference". Ninth, the *rationality* of the system is underpinned by a particular scientific view of social and personal enlightenment. This

ideological armature of science under capitalism is then set against alternative systems, which are derogated as pre-scientific, uncivilised and “irrational”, or may be romanticised as non-rational and intuitive, but usually in such a way as to prioritise the rationality assumed by each individual seeking further enlightenment from them. Finally, the tenth point, there is apparent transparency of social relationships, but this ideological trope of transparency itself functions to intensify the *alienation* suffered under capitalism. This alienation, and the individualising descriptions and explanations of it, serves to obscure the conditions of life which separates each individual from their creative work.

## Analysis

The characteristics of capitalism outlined so far raise a question about the governance of individuality, and the way each individual buys into this economic system or refuses this economic system in such a way as to remain trapped within it. Psychoanalysis is a practice which has often historically been assumed to be of the left, or is assumed even by many Marxists to provide an implicit if not explicit critique of bourgeois subjectivity (Parker, 2007a). However, it does seem as if, as a clinical practice, psychoanalysis is often actually complicit with capitalist production. The collusion of psychoanalysis with capitalism – even if ambivalently, reluctantly, unwillingly so – is apparent in the following respects. Here we can show how psychoanalysis is mapped into capitalism, which is the mode of production in which it emerged and flourished. I am concerned here with methodological principles of psychoanalysis as an actually-existing practice against which certain schools of psychoanalysis define themselves but which still governs the logic of their practice.

The key clinical device of *transference* in psychoanalytic work – the re-enactment of the past of the analysand in the present in relation to the figure of the analyst – requires a conceptual apparatus of ownership and self-management. It also, of course, operates within discrete privatised financial arrangements in which the analysand must pay the analyst, and transference therefore entails the reproduction of relations of power, relations in which the subject has been constituted. Even if there is also the claim that they thereby “work through” those relations, the analytic process as such is not usually put into question at the end of analysis; “transference” may then even be assumed by the analysand to operate outside the clinic, which itself is already a popular mistake made by those inducted into psychoanalytic culture. The analysand thus constructs a personal ideological device for experiencing and explaining what exploitation is. Most forms of psychoanalysis aim to reinforce some form of

*identity*, though there is some queasiness now about Freud's recommendation that the domain of the ego be enlarged. Some traditions are suspicious of the ego as the central organising instance, but then there is often a risk that the "subject" as such, even if conceptualised as a necessarily "divided subject", is treated as the unit of treatment, and some form of identity is thereby smuggled in the back door (or a kind of trapdoor leading to the unconscious).

If relationships and sedimented individual identities their component parts are not explicitly essentialised, acceptance of the law, which always also pertains to identity is effectively reinforced. The rights of each individual are limited conceptually and clinically by an elusive domain of the subject, the unconscious, and this domain remains forever out of reach. This all the more so in the ostensibly more radical forms of psychoanalysis which do not pretend to harmonise the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious. Psychic *structure* that governs the particular relationship between conscious complaint and the unconscious are divined by the analyst, who then determines the direction of the treatment and locks each category of subject in their rightful place. The rights of each individual to sell their labour power are questioned but then endorsed within the structure of the clinical treatment, which only begins when there has been a demand for analysis.

Psychoanalysis, in different ways in different theoretical traditions, revolves around the problematic of the *integrity* of the subject. This problematic is not neatly solved in any tradition of psychoanalysis, but reappears through discussions of the nature of the ego as a "bodily ego", of the nature of "skin" as a surface of demarcation, of the "I" who comes to be where "it" was, of the "subjectivising" of the subject, and of the value accorded to "responsibility" even if conceptualised as being capable of giving response to, accounting. The territory of the individual thus complements the territory of the state as a place from which commerce with others might take place.

There is the assumption that the trajectory of each subject is the product of particular *determination*, and sometimes, it is said, overdetermination by familial relationships or chains of signifiers. These ground-rules are, of course, thrown into question in analysis, but there is very rarely the promise that the analysand will escape such determinations, merely the option of reducing them to nonsense in the analysis and forging a different relationship with them in waking life. Psychoanalysis thus insidiously ratifies the social forces it explores, and the analytic process can often end in a blend of stoicism and cynicism in the face of an outer world that must remain the same. There is often a causal developmental sequence identified, a *temporality* that has been buttressed by psychoanalytic appeals to evidence from developmental psychology. This temporal relationship is sometimes conceptually reworked in analyses of the production of

cause through deferred action by which certain events only become traumatic after the event. This merely serves to enclose the history of the individual subject within a narrative that is more efficiently stitched in place by threads that loop back and make the present into something that will always have been the case.

Even the most reflexive histories of capitalism use the same kind of device, to find in its origins what it will become so that economic history is caught in a closed circuit. Most versions of psychoanalysis enable the individual to function in particular societal conditions, even if the psychoanalyst does not actually to bring about such *adaptation*. Adaptation to life conditions sometimes proceeds through the path of subversion of identification and ideals, but this then leads to the giving up of political ideals, the idea that another world is possible, to living with and perhaps enjoying the symptom and an acceptance of “lack”. Like the economic system that houses it, psychoanalysis recognises that the most adaptable processes are those that are able work with rather than against innovation.

The particularity of each subject is often reduced to the function of individual characteristics. Above and beyond the claim that a “clinical case” cannot and should not be applied as a grid to other cases, the *individuality* of a path through analysis is also reproduced in the insistence that the treatment, and even political judgement internal to the school, takes place “one by one”. Collective processes are viewed as pathological, and ideological warnings about crowds are reproduced in the covertly individualised varieties of group analysis which are factored either as “ego training in action” or as the treatment of the group as a many-headed individual.

Psychoanalysis usually, despite Freud’s own warnings, adheres to a distinctive worldview which it assumes to be true, and which is sometimes buoyed up by appeals to science, to scientific method or in claims to be addressing the subject of science. These forms of *truth* are sometimes given a publicly-accountable frame, in which case there is an adherence to scientific standards and explicit rationalism, and sometimes given a hermetic cast in which case the internal logic is valued as specifically and even more rigorous than that of mainstream science. Finally, psychoanalysis aims to enable the subject to understand that there is no escape from alienation, and in some versions of psychoanalysis this alienation is viewed as a condition for being a subject, a subject of language. Claims to freedom have always been treated with suspicion in the psychoanalytic tradition, as forms of illusion or delusion. It is, instead, necessary that there be forms of *defence* against the temptation to abolish the social constraints that make us human, and psychoanalysis itself thus functions as a form of defence. It is one of the defence mechanisms capitalism utilises to warn those who rail against alienation that they will most likely

end up with something worse. There is thus a tense, sometimes uneasy, but mainly compliant relationship between psychoanalysis and capitalism (Parker, 2011).

## Marxism

So, what then, of Marxism, and how might Marxism be articulated in relation to capitalism? I have already said that my characterisation of capitalism is from the standpoint of Marxism, or rather as an articulation of the standpoint of the working class, which is what Marxism is. We are concerned with the actual material practice of Marxism (just as we have been concerned with the actual material practice of psychoanalysis) rather than with an idealised abstraction or academic social critique. So, we do need to articulate Marxism with how it has actually manifested itself historically under Stalinism, in the so-called “socialist states” and in the communist parties loyal to those states (Mandel, 1978). This material practice will, of course, be crucial when we come to look at NSK, and so I include here some attention to Stalinism as the political context against which NSK developed. There are also some homologies between the mutation of Marxism into Stalinism and the institutional history of psychoanalysis which are reactivated and subverted in some of the uses that NSK makes of psychoanalysis.

First, Marxism aims for the expansion of *democracy*, up against the limits of capitalist exploitation and then through a necessary break from those limits in a proletarian revolution. This democracy is defined by self-determination by associated producers of the organisation and distribution of natural resources and creative resources. This promise is betrayed by Stalinism; democratic centralism inside the worker’s movement is replaced by *centralisation* of decision-making and prohibition of opposition in the rest of society. Second, there is an ethos of *change*, in which understanding the world necessarily entails changing it. This refusal of any essentialism is underpinned by a dialectical mode of interrogation of reality which attends to and simultaneously facilitates transformations of social relations. This ontological commitment – to dialectical movement rather than to discrete essences – is replaced as the Stalinist *bureaucracy* crystallises. Relations become fixed in place, often with an appeal to identity categories such as “the proletariat” and its leadership.

In Marxism, third, self-determination of associated producers reworks notions of *autonomy* so that human rights becomes defined in relation to freedom understood relationally in an ethical relation to creative labour. This ethical self-transformative capacity is betrayed by pragmatic strategic defence of the bureaucracy in which even opposition to capitalism is



instrumentalised. Stalinist *instrumentality* turns political struggle into a tool of the pragmatic needs of the bureaucracy.

Fourth, Marxism is a form of *internationalism*. It is a self-consciously internationalist movement which pits itself against the imperialist and global ambitions of capital to segregate the workforce. Against this, Stalinism revived *nationalism* through the motif of “socialism in one country” and an appeal to national sentiment in each country where a variety of home-grown bureaucracy ruled. Fifth, Marxism restores not only *meaning* to creative labour but also provides a meaning to the development of capitalism, and then to the forms by which it may be transcended. Stalinism responds with simple appeals to authority and the closing of debates around the interpretation of history around one correct account. This *totalisation* also serves, of course, to ratify the power of the bureaucracy as the interpretative tool through which historical determination can be judged and measured. The historical narrative Marxism provides is, sixth, one that learns from the past so as not to repeat it and provides a means by which past struggles against exploitation find redemption. Marxist *history* is therefore also historical intervention in which combined and uneven development is characterised by unexpected connections leaps which bring history alive again in the revolutionary process.

This conception of history is betrayed by Stalinism which must rewrite the past in order to favour the standpoint of the leadership. This *fixity* of sequence replicates the fixed position of the bureaucracy, and it serves to justify alliances with the “progressive bourgeoisie” of capitalist economies friendly to the leadership. It serves to fix the narrative into fixed sequences of stages of development so that they culminate in present-day arrangements. Seventh, Marxism enables, requires collective *resistance* to capitalism, and resistance to the strategies of divide and rule by which opposition to capitalism is rendered into individual, ethnic or nationalist complaint. Stalinism turns this resistance into obedience to a command-structure, a form of *authority* in which various forms of populism and State-sponsored rearticulation of power relations are seen as the most effective means of change.

Eighth, Marxism values *collectivity*, collective activity as the basis for participation which is not reduced to simple equality or equivalence of each individual’s voice but of subjects constituted in such a way as to be able to understand and change the world, through praxis. The bureaucracy replaces this with a cult of the personality in which great leadership individualises resistance and subordinates it to party and state *discipline*. Ninth, Marxism is an open self-transformative process of inquiry and change. The *reflexivity* necessary to Marxist analysis as a form of intervention is evident in its progressive recursive engagement with other social forces such as feminism and, more recently, ecological movements. Stalinism, in contrast, operates on

the assumption that some version of *science* will save the day, in its most grotesque forms as an identitarian “proletarian science”. Here, “scientific” dialectical materialism is the path to accumulating unquestioned truth about society and nature.

Finally, Marxism is a theoretical and practical articulation of the working class as it grasps the nature of alienation under capitalism and constructs its own zones of *freedom*. It aims to overcome alienated conditions of production through a revolutionary process in which there are qualitatively greater degrees of free association, in which the free association of each is dependent on the free association of all. Stalinism only offers the barest comfort in the humiliating *deference* to elders and betters; the mystifying non-dialectical opposition to capitalism as a competitor posed through the cynical and ironic complaint of those who must be positioned as victims of the bureaucracy. This is complaint sometimes expressed as the view that however bad the exploitation of man by man is under capitalism, under the domain of the bureaucracy it is at least the other way around.

## **NSK**

Now we turn to a cultural political movement that developed under Stalinism in its dying days, in Slovenia in the 1980s (Monroe, 2005; Parker, 2004a). This is a living laboratory, a case example through which it is possible to work through some of the contradictory and complicit relationships between Marxism and psychoanalysis.

NSK stands for “*Neue Slowenische Kunst*”, “New Slovenian Art” as a self-designation for a movement that is already marked in the German language, and so also deliberately and explicitly outside and against the domain of the bureaucracy which was founded on the resistance of the Slovene partisans against fascism. The component parts of NSK were heavily influenced by certain psychoanalytic ideas. Wilhelm Reich had already been popular as a counter-cultural force in Yugoslavia, with the film “*Mysteries of the Organism*” being one symptomatic connection between the East European and West European left. There had also been widespread academic debate drawing on the tradition of the Frankfurt School, and at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s the work of Althusser and then Lacan become popular as a theoretical resource to understand and challenge the hold of the bureaucracy.

NSK thus drew on elements of psychoanalytic theory to turn Stalinised Marxism against itself, and psychoanalysis – we could even say “Stalinised psychoanalysis” – against itself. These are the conditions of possibility for the work of Slavoj Žižek, and it is even possible to see Žižek’s political-psychoanalytic project already elaborated and played out in NSK, though it is not

the task of this paper to do that (see Parker, 2007b). This cultural-political practice utilises psychoanalysis in such a way as to disturb the relationship between psychoanalysis and the capitalist system that gave birth to it and to which it so faithfully corresponds. As we will, the key problematic around which NSK came to operate in and against versions of Marxism and psychoanalysis was the State. Here it is the State as crystallisation and sedimentation of Marxism betrayed and a micro-state in each individual citizen for whom the worst most reactionary aspects of psychoanalysis would imprison them in it.

The first thing to note about the conditions in which the NSK developed was that the opposition movement inside Slovenia in the late 1970s actually started with mass youth rebellion. This movement unleashed creative energies against the regime, but it was clear that the resistance needed to be organised, so the question is what forms of *organisation* would be necessary to combat a regime that was itself highly structured? The opposition movement started with punk, and while punk did open up possibilities for chaotic refusal of organisation and any kind of centralisation, the NSK project took a quite different path. The intervention of the NSK group began with the appearance of the band Laibach in the industrial town of Trbovlje in the 1980. The name was already a provocation, for “Laibach” is the German name for the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana. One can see a question here, but it is a question that is posed to the audience as to whether this means that Laibach are fascist.

As Žižek has pointed out in some of his writings defending Laibach and NSK, like a good psychoanalyst they do not answer this question of transference (Žižek, 1993). The organisational form thus serves to produce an enigma; it plays with existing relations of power while opening a space to question them. It renders relations of power explicit so that the audience must work through those transferential relations – the repetition of past relationships in relation to the band – themselves. For Laibach to tell the audience that this is simply a game, a ploy to expose the regime, would actually to have fallen into the trap of endorsing that power relationship rather than unravelling it. So, closed *organisation*, the closed organisational form produces a form of transference which turns the regime against itself. And so, it keeps open the question of transference, rather than stabilising it as a warrant for patterns of exploitation or centralisation or power.

Let us turn to one of the most powerful ideological resources the Stalinist regimes used to legitimate their existence, the safe-guarding of the nation and *nationality*. NSK tackles this in a number of ways. There is explicit participation in some of the most ridiculous romantic images of the nation. Alongside the band Laibach, a key component of NSK is the artistic group Irwin (originally known as “R Irwin S” in a found name object taken from a Cincinnati clockmaker).

Here, *nationality* as a form of identity is repeated to the point where it becomes ridiculous, and one might draw a parallel with the way the analysand speaks interminably of their “identity”, and in the process finds some distance from it. Irwin have recently initiated the NSK Garda project, and we see here a “transnational” dimension to this Slovene cultural-political intervention that now, as Yugoslavia has been fragmented into separate nation states, questions the identity of each nation. With respect to Croatia, where members of the Croatian armed forces pose dressed in NSK uniforms and saluting the NSK flag.

This unravelling of identity is undertaken also in Kosovo with the Serb forces based there. It is also extended to the armies of the “salarymen” in Japan, and serves to draw attention to the identity of the workforce under capitalism. Other elements of the NSK also draw on nationalist imagery, to question grandiose projects of state-building and the quest for territory, for example in celebration of the entirely fictional “Slovene Space Agency”. *Nationality* is therefore quite explicitly turned into something that needs to be constructed, and the elements from which it is constructed are quite deliberately chosen from outside the nation. The nation as a separate discrete essentialised identity is questioned in the very process of its production.

*Submission* to the nation is also disturbed even as at the moment it is performed. Posters were produced and circulated by the “Novi Kolektivizem” group of NSK in 1990 as Yugoslavia was disintegrating, and as Slovenia was being levered out from the “socialist federation” under pressure from Germany. This is a time when Slovenia shifted from the “east” of Europe into the “west”, from the “socialist stage managed” sector into the capitalist free market, so questions of freedom and the fight for freedom in Europe were on the agenda. The solution free market invited as it grabbed the spoils of war in Yugoslavia was, as the slogan on a Novi Kolektivizem poster put it, to “Buy victory”. Another poster proclaimed “I want to fight for a new Europe”, but this time the poster pasted up in the streets of Ljubljana was in Croatian. The meaning of national identification is thus reduced through repetition, to nonsense.

The posters were an intervention at a time of war that called for identification with the State and with capitalism, in such a way as to subvert both. *Submission* provides a way of embracing ideology, for it is only by offering oneself up to forms of interpellation – to the way in which one is hailed by ideology – that it is possible to take a distance from that interpellation. It is the fantasy that we have a place outside the ideology that is the most powerful lure of ideology itself, and NSK tackles this fantasy head on (Žižek, 1994).

Slovenia broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991 to become a separate *State*. This posed a question to the opposition. What forms of participation could there be in such a State that proclaimed itself to be “independent”. The response was “NSK State in Time” formed in 1991.

This “State in Time” has embassies around the world. It has set up consulates, in Florence in a hotel bedroom, for example. An NSK Embassy was established in Sarajevo in the mid-1990s. This embassy operated during the Laibach “NATO Occupied Europe” tour.

The NSK State in Time diplomatic passports issued in Sarajevo were realistic enough to enable people to escape Bosnia-Herzegovina during the civil war. Submission to symbolic forms that define identity is thus reworked. Here NSK mobilised elements of dominant symbolic structures that send a message to the individual subject “you are this”, but they turn this message back into a reply that “we are this”. And this message in reverse simultaneously twists the clinical structure of those addressed beyond contained guilty obsessional adherence to open hysterical defiance. In psychoanalytic terms, this is defiance that includes the subject within it, for now this is as deliberate participation rather than by adopting the position of victim (Žižek, 1993).

The NSK State in Time issues its own stamps. In addition to the [nskstate.com](http://nskstate.com) website, there are passport offices that issue passports. To obtain a passport in one of the passport offices is a long and laborious process. The process reproduces the apparatus of the State and submission to the state inside the art installation. NSK citizens, which number more than the Vatican City, are not members of NSK, and not all citizens have diplomatic passports. The “integrity” of the state is questioned from within, within the very procedures of enunciation which declare it to be a State. The first inside page of the passport has the phrase “art is fanaticism that demands diplomacy”. Here a psychoanalytic model of the subject, fanatically adhering to the identifications that comprise it, is turned against itself in the call for a “diplomatic relation” with others. This, remember, is against the context in which “diplomacy” between the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and friendly capitalist nations functioned to seal over the conflicts both sides of the border that divided them. Calls for unity inside the Soviet Union went hand in hand with alliances with the State apparatus on the part of communist parties working to support diplomatic deals between friendly nations and the Soviet Union. This alternative *State* is not democratic, and does not pretend to be so.

The NSK state is a symbolic apparatus. It has been claimed by Žižek that as Yugoslavia disintegrated, the NSK state provided a symbolic state form which did not correspond to geographical territory. Some of the key symbolic resources are drawn from Russian *Suprematism* (Arns, 2003). Founded by Kazimir Malevich in 1915, Suprematism is useful for a number of reasons. First, there is a reduction to pure form, meaningless figures that are then injected with content, and so Suprematism provides visual correlates of a Saussurean approach to language in which the visual signifiers are reduced to nonsense, absolute difference that

analysts might aim for at the end of analysis. Second, Malevich was incorporated by the Bolsheviks into avant-garde art after the revolution, even though he was not revolutionary. There is therefore a political ambiguity built into Suprematism as an art movement. Third Malevich is a Russian artist, and so the symbolic material of a Slovenian art movement, NSK, is built out of external resources, and, a further twist, Malevich was not actually Russian but Ukrainian.

Suprematism produces its own meaningless representative symbols, such as the Black Square. Malevich's Black Cross also has a useful ambiguous connotative relation to anarchism and Christianity. These Suprematist elements are incorporated into NSK art, including in the Irwin installations. The Black Cross is then exported to different contexts, for example on the skyscrapers of New York. The NSK response to the 9/11 attacks was the US tour called "Divided States of America" with the slogan "United we fall". Suprematism revels in the way we are determined as subjects by material that we may understand to be "unconscious", material that we cannot escape but which we can forge a different relationship with. *Suprematism* thus provides a matrix within which other ideological elements can be articulated.

NSK State is a State in Time, not in geographical territory, and so *temporality* is one of the governing devices of NSK. The 2003 Laibach album was called WAT, which stands for "We Are Time". Symbolic resources for this State are taken from the past as well as from outside Slovenia. The Black Cross is resignified in the context of Kitsch images of Landseer deer, for example. There is also use of National Socialist art mixed together with Socialist Realist iconography. The Black Square is repeated in different contexts to disturb and create moments of ambiguity (Gržnic, 2004). The "time" element is worked in different ways in different elements of NSK, but always with an element of "retroactivity". Here there is reworking of psychoanalytic conceptions of time, of *temporality* as a cultural-political analytic form, against linear conceptions.

One of the key political strategies of NSK is a particular take on identification with power which is often termed "overidentification". This utilises and subverts *adaptation*. Overidentification is not simple parody, but brings the opposition much closer to the imagery that is being reproduced and reworked. Western cultural material, which seems innocent, is incorporated and reworked. This material is twisted, so for example, "Get back, get back to where you once belonged" sung in heavy metal tones on Laibach's cover of the Beatles "*Let it Be*" album draws out latently authoritarian and xenophobic significations, and the phrase "nothing's going to change my world" (from the track "Across the Universe") is resignified in line with fascist imagery of the nation.

The most recent Laibach album is “Volk” which evokes, of course, community and nationalist conceptions of the people. Volk in Slovene also means “wolf”. The album comprises twists on national anthems, some with changes of wording, some with very little changes but in a way that draw attention to latent imagery within the anthems. The English anthem, “Anglia”, for example, is a taunting “God save your gracious queen” which follows the description of imperialism and torture conducted by the British state. The most well known example of overidentification was through the Novi Kolektivizem contribution for 1987 National Youth day, which was praised by the panel of judges for evoking the spirit of Yugoslav socialist youth. The “poster scandal” erupted when it was revealed that the NK poster was based on a 1936 Nazi poster. The message about the regime was thus returned to it in reverse, “you say you are this, you are this”.

Overidentification thus reproduces, in a voluntary submission to ideology, what the regime requires. The regime requires that there is also some cynical distance. Ideology works not only by people adhering to it, but believing that they have some freedom to do so, and so the phenomenon of “dissidence” in Eastern Europe provided a buffer zone between citizens and the State. Overidentification dissolves this buffer zone and disturbs an attempt at *adaptation*. It could be said that it brings subjects closer to an “identification with the symptom” which, by virtue of that identification, embraces and dissolves its grip (Žižek, 2005). Voluntary submission to authority in the NSK state which is not a democratic state requires that bourgeois individuality is opposed. NSK projects are *group* projects. In the early years all statements were group statements, and members of the band Laibach had changing personnel. Laibach thus presented an enigma about identity. The “*group*” revealed the truth of the particular identifications that a subject adopts in order to produce themselves as if they were separate, distinct.

There is thus also an aspect of deliberate *mystification* in NSK activities, and certainly no claim to transparency or “understanding”. The NSK State in Time comprises “state artists” which is the Irwin group, “state politicians” which is the band Laibach, and a “state church” which is the theatre group Cosmokinetic Theatre Noordung. Theatre performances include confining the audience so their heads are between planks of the stage and sacramental wine and wafers are forced into their mouths by the performers. It should be remembered that, unlike most of Yugoslavia, Slovenia is a Catholic country, so religious imagery, and the Black Cross for example, are quite deliberate provocations. The *mystification* is the setting for more intense identification. The identification provoked by NSK State practices mobilises *enjoyment*. NSK uses its imagery in order to produce enjoyable identification, and overidentification with what is worst in ideology. This is what provokes accusations that Laibach is fascist, a fascism beautifully

enacted, for example” in “Tanz Mit Laibach” on the *WAT* album. NSK uses and plays with fascist imagery. Such *enjoyment* takes it to the limits of psychoanalysis, and beyond.

## NSK and Žižek

Let us turn to the question of the relationship between NSK and Slavoj Žižek. Žižek was very supportive of NSK, they were part of a common struggle against the Yugoslav regime through the 1980s, and the NSK State in Time initiative was, for Žižek, one way of breaking the deadlock of nationalist rivalries that flared into civil war in the 1990s. By the end of the 1990s, however, some tensions were evident, and there were rival claims about where the notion of “overidentification” originated. Some supporters of Žižek claimed that members of NSK who attended his lectures then put his ideas into practice, while some supporters of NSK claim that Žižek’s writing is simply a theoretical elaboration of their own cultural-political practice (Richardson, 2000). Actually, it would be possible to read Žižek’s own provocations of the left as well as the liberals and the right in the West as a form of overidentification which has a similar effect to that produced by NSK. It produces a “hystericisation” of the audience and provokes the question as to what he really believes, and what he wants. Žižek is, in some respects, NSK acted out on the academic stage.

Here the parallels with the fate of the cynics become evident. On the one hand, NSK have become part of the establishment. The IRWIN group has received a number of art awards, Novi Kolektivizem has been doing graphic design for children’s television in Slovenia, and when I visited Ljubljana in 2003 to talk to Žižek about the manuscript of my book *Slavoj Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (Parker, 2004a), Laibach featured on the back page of the airline brochure, now effectively recuperated by the tourist industry. Xeno’s cloak has been flung over their cultural-political fornication, and they have been tamed by a State apparatus that includes many old fellow-travellers of NSK. So, for example, NSK was invited by the Slovene Ambassador to Ireland Helena Drnovsek-Zorko to be part of the celebrations when Slovenia assumed presidency of the European Union in 2004. This apparent collusion with the establishment was uppermost in Žižek’s reaction when I mentioned NSK to him in 2003. I had spent an evening in the anarchist-occupied space “Metelkova” in the city centre the night before, engaged in fierce argument with Alexei Monroe who was trying to persuade me that I was wrong, that Laibach was not, as I thought, fascist (Monroe, 2005). Žižek complained that the anarchists in Metelkova were spoilt children of the old state apparatus, that they were unfairly using local authority land, and told me that NSK also got money from the state (Parker, 2005).



On the other hand, it would be possible to make this charge against Žižek himself, and activists in Metelkova were quick to condemn him for supporting the authorities, looking down on them from his expensive apartment building which is actually right next to the Metelkova site. They pointed out that when Žižek stood as a candidate for the Liberal Democrats for the presidency of Slovenia in 1990, this was on a programme which was explicitly in favour of capitalist shock therapy which became so important during the 1990s, and that the party programme was in favour of the death penalty. Žižek himself has made a reputation as a philosopher and theorist, and spends his time travelling academic circuits around the world making huge amounts of money, and, according to this argument, Žižek is a cynic who has been rehabilitated, a dog who is mainly obedient and whose attempts to bite the hand of his owners is tolerated because he is amusing.

In my opinion, Žižek is contradictory (as is NSK), necessarily so, and there has actually been an evolution of his work and political activity towards the left over the years. In the Preface for the Slovene translation of my book about him, for example, I engaged in a little self-criticism and pointed out that he had risked his reputation at key points to side with the left (Parker, 2009). I sent him the Preface, and he responded by emailing (on 26 March 2008) “please, forget about self-criticism - let’s reserve that for our enemies when we will win!!!”. One of the big problems is that there is a difference between his radical persona outside Slovenia and the political positions that he takes inside Slovenia, and this disparity is one of the things that lay behind the public row between Žižek and me in 2009, just as my book about him was being published in Slovenia. The pretext for the row was that someone had drawn Žižek’s attention to an article by me that was actually published in 2004 (to coincide with the launch of the English version of my book). The article began with a joke, as follows:

Let us start with a true story. In the middle of a crisis and crackdown in Slovenia toward the end of the 1980s Slavoj Žižek telephones an academic colleague in Britain late at night. This is before Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia and when the League of Slovene Communists was making some last desperate attempts to maintain power. The crackdown was directed at the opposition movement, in which Žižek and the artistic political grouping *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, were active. So, Žižek is on the phone during this political crisis in an agitated state. He tells his colleague how bad things are, that there is a total clampdown on the opposition. His colleague is sympathetic. Žižek goes on to tell him that things are even worse than that, for in every workplace a “commissar” has been appointed to monitor and control dissident activity. His colleague is very sympathetic, even slightly alarmed by the picture Žižek is painting. And it is even worse than that, Žižek says, for even in the universities, in every department a commissar has been appointed to keep order. His colleague in Britain exclaims that this is indeed dreadful. And, Žižek then informs him that there is only one good thing in the midst of all this. What is that, his colleague asks. In my department, Žižek says, “I am the commissar”. (Parker, 2004b: 23)

In 2009, my article had been translated into Slovene and circulated there by Igor Vidmar, an old anti-regime activist, ex-comrade of Žižek in the struggle, and associate of NSK, responsible at different points for promoting punk bands, including Laibach, in Slovenia. Žižek objected to my article in a public statement that was also published on the [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com) site which also publishes the journal *Lacanian Ink*. *Lacanian Ink* and [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com) are avid followers of Jacques-Alain Miller, son-in-law of Lacan and Žižek as a sometimes but not always, it should be pointed out, follower of Miller (and ex-analysand for a few months of Miller). Žižek objected that my joke was actually a claim that he had once been part of the old apparatus, which misreads my article, but it is nevertheless understandable that he would be worried about this claim. There has been a wave of persecution recently in East Europe against people who had been associated with the old Stalinist regimes. I responded by email and in a public statement, pointing out that it was a joke, and he Žižek responded on the [www.lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com) ([http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page\\_id=513](http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page_id=513)) site to that admittedly weak attempt at an account on 8 June 2009 with this:

Unfortunately, the only way I can understand Parker's reply is to read it as an exemplary case of postmodern cynicism: he tries to sell as a harmless joke what the large majority of readers take as a serious insinuation. And why shouldn't they? We are talking about the first paragraph of a long "serious" analysis of my alleged "ambiguities": the story about my acting as a Communist party "commissar" denouncing colleagues is quoted as a starting point (or a "hook into") the analysis of how my work relates to the NSK project. In short, Parker acts as a moral coward who wants to have a cake and eat it: to spread malicious lies about me while claiming they are innocent jokes exchanged among comrades. The least he should have learned from his visits to Slovenia is that here, stories about denouncing colleagues to the Communist authorities are NOT a joke!

Žižek did not reply to my email, and the break between us is, unfortunately, not likely to heal soon. The press conference for my book, *Slavoj Žižek: Kritični uvod*, was held in the Ministry of the Interior in Ljubljana, on 19 June 2009. The Ministry of the Interior, in a grim old socialist building which it was only possible to enter with passes and official escorts, was chosen by Igor Vidmar, the publisher, partly because he was imprisoned twice under the old regime. Another reason is the story Žižek often tells, that after the election in which he just failed to win a place in the collective presidency of Slovenia he refused the offer of a ministerial post in arts and culture and declared that he wanted nothing less than the ministry of the interior and to be in charge of the police. It was as I sat in the opening of the press conference that it really hit me that in the publication of this book I was but a pawn in a bigger game, just as a comrade from Ljubljana

warned me some time back. Among other things, Vidmar wanted to publish my book on Žižek because there had been a rift between the two of them after Žižek refused to participate in an earlier book Vidmar was putting together on punk in Slovenia, on the grounds that the book also included some contributors Žižek accused of being “nationalist”. Some comments were then circulated in Slovenia in which Žižek claimed that Laibach and NSK were “nationalist”, which goes back on his earlier defences of them, of course.

Meanwhile, in the middle of all of this, I was waiting to hear from *Lacanian Ink* who had agreed to publish an article by me on NSK. They had published my paper on Lacanian psychoanalysis and revolutionary Marxism (Parker, 2007b), and my article on NSK was exactly at this moment, in press, due to appear in issue 33 or 34. My paper was not in issue 33. I emailed them. No response. And then, in issue 34, an article by Slavoj Žižek appeared, which is really quite significant (Žižek, 2009). Here, in this article, Žižek describes how the German band Rammstein addresses totalitarian ideology: “Rammstein undermines totalitarian ideology not by ironic distance towards the rituals it imitates, but by directly confronting us with its obscene materiality and thereby suspending its efficiency. So don’t be afraid, enjoy Rammstein.” (Žižek, 2009, p. 141).

Now, despite some similarities between Rammstein and Laibach – both play with reactionary imagery and have some fascist fans – a big difference is that Rammstein do not, at any point, embed their totalitarian appeal in a broader network of practices that then question totalitarianism. They do not, as Laibach do, play with nationalism and then embed that nationalist appeal in a call for identification with a “global state” apparatus in which anyone, anywhere in the world can join. I hear that Žižek was writing after seeing a Rammstein concert with his son, who likes the music. Žižek has never claimed to actually enjoy listening to Laibach. But the issue here is Žižek’s replacement of Laibach with Rammstein in the journal that replaced this article with my article on NSK. It does seem that Žižek explicit identification with NSK is now over, though we can still find traces of that cultural-political project in the way he writes as well as what he writes about.

## Conclusions

The precise interrelationship between psychoanalysis and NSK strategy is ambiguous, so that not even psychoanalysis operates as a worldview that can pretend to escape from ideology. NSK state provokes uncertainty and refuses the coordinates of capitalism and classical Marxism, and, of course, Stalinism, even though it must necessarily repeat some of those

motifs. The characterisation I have given of capitalism can be contested of course, and the way we define the enemy also serves to define how we will seek to overcome it. The shape of the grid, and the way capitalism is given shape from the standpoint of Marxism, means that the cultural-political project of NSK is also given a certain definition, a shape that will also constrain it. Just as it questions the state from within its own given parameters, however, NSK was formed to contest hegemonic conceptualisations of the state in relation to capitalism – the formation of the Yugoslav state out of victorious partisan struggle that also overthrew capitalism – and then in relation to psychoanalysis, formed under capitalism as both an interrogation of and confirmation of bourgeois subjectivity and then imported into the cultural matrix of Stalinism.

NSK operates as a form of mediation between psychoanalysis and Marxism that treats the relationship between the two traditions of practical critique as a dialectical relationship. A dialectical relationship needs to be handled conceptually and politically in dialectical terms, and as part of a historical-materialist analysis of and intervention into capitalism and the bureaucratic pretenders to an alternative to capitalism. That is, the relationship cannot be mediated in such a way as to merely plug the gaps between two different views of the world, to seal over the divisions between the two or to enable each practice to complement each other. NSK mediates, instead, by functioning as an *obstacle* to any harmonious relationship between Marxists and psychoanalysts. In this way, in these particular conditions, it re-energises aspects of psychoanalysis and even of Marxism, and it does this by reorganising cultural-political action in relation to the State. It is not Marxist, and my argument in my book about Žižek was that neither is he, but NSK and Žižek open a space once again for Marxism in conditions scarred by Stalinism. It is not psychoanalytic, but it opens a space for forms of psychoanalytic practice that do not invite a return to capitalism as a way out from Stalinism.

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