

The duty to create *un beau vivant*

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Abstract

This chapter, in honour of Johan Cilliers, will not seek to engage his extensive oeuvre, but rather focus on a single text (2011), *Fides Quaerens pulchrum: Practical theological perspectives on the desire for beauty*, which I believe encapsulates something of Johan Cilliers' passion as well as fits into the theme of this volume. From his article certain key terms or even themes can be identified. I will engage these key themes by bringing them into conversation with the thoughts of Lacan and Hegel, and thereby enter into a conversation with his article and honour his thought. The key themes that I have identified from this article are the following: beauty, imagination, art, art theory, aesthetics, *Ästhetik des Hässlichen*, *Negativschönen*, desire, the good, and lastly the consequences of these various concepts for practical theology.

Keywords

Beauty; imagination; art; art theory; aesthetics; Ästhetik des Hässlichen; Negativschönen; desire; the good

Cilliers refers to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten who coined the term “aesthetics” in 1735 (Cilliers 2011:258). In this early use the concept aesthetics developed as a theory of art and in that sense can be understood as a philosophy of art. For many years and specifically till the romantic period, aesthetics was linked to beauty, truth and goodness. This direct connection it inherited from the classical period, specifically taking Augustine and Aquinas into consideration and their interpretation of beauty. With the beginning of modernity this direct link between beauty, truth and the good was severed (Cilliers 2011:260). In other words, there was a paradigm shift in the nineteenth century, specifically in Western thinking, where the other side of beauty became more important in aesthetic theory. The focus now shifted from what was classically seen as beautiful (good

and truth) to what Rosenkranz would refer to as *Ästhetik des Hässlichen* (aesthetics of ugliness) and Rosenkranz would specifically refer to ugliness as *Negativschönen* (negative beauty) (see Cilliers 2011:261). Rosenkranz explored this gradual abandonment of the unity between true, good and beautiful, where the ugly is not only something that can be transformed into something good and beautiful, but ugliness can be interpreted as an immanent aesthetic notion. “The pure image of the beautiful arises all the more shining against the dark background/foil of the ugly” (Rosenkranz 2007:36). This idea of the ugly being the background foil is expressed in Rainer Maria Rilke’s argument that ugliness is nothing more than a *terrible* beginning to unthought possibilities (see Cilliers 2011:261). One needs to interpret Rosenkranz’s thought in the context of Hegel’s thinking, as Rosenkranz was a reader of Hegel and certainly influenced by Hegel’s thought (see Krečič & Žižek 2016:60), although he never understood himself as a Hegelian. If beauty arises from the background foil of the ugly, then these two ideas, beauty and ugly, need to be thought together.

One possibility of thinking them together is to think the one as the origin of the other, for example, where beauty is interpreted as truth and goodness, yet the birth of this beauty is interpreted as a birth *from* chaos and disorder, which is interpreted as ugly. This idea of beauty or goodness being born of chaos and disorder is also found in the Jewish-Christian bible, where God is believed to have created the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) as the primal chaos. These two ideas of beauty and of aesthetics, namely beauty classically understood to be linked to goodness and on the other hand the *Negativschön*, should not necessarily be seen as opposites, but are in a sense both related to that which calls art (poetics, *tekhne*) forth, or the “power that inhabits the sensible”, as Jacques Rancière interprets the idea of aesthetics:

... does not refer to a discipline. It does not designate a branch of philosophy or a knowledge of works of art. Aesthetics is an idea of thought, a mode of thought that unfolds about works of art, taking them as witnesses to a question: a question that bears on the sensible and on the power that inhabits the sensible prior to thought, as the unthought in thought (Rancière 2004:1-2).

In other words, the shift has taken place from trying to interpret and understand beautiful artefacts to interpreting the unthought power that calls the creation of art (*tekhne*) forth.

This unthought power, which is interpreted as being beyond thought and reason, was often also interpreted as being traumatic and in that sense certainly ugly. This unthought (traumatic) is something to be avoided, or at least it is something that needs a certain distance, even a screen to protect one from it. The creation of such a screen of protection was the task given to art or religion. A screen that made, or transformed, or sublimated the traumatic into something palatable to reason.

Rosenkranz was the first to theoretically develop the notion of the ugly as an aesthetic category (Rosenkranz, 2007) where beauty no longer only focusses on the ideal or the perfect, but where beauty is rather interpreted as having an *ontological function*, according to Reschke (see Cilliers 2011:261) – aesthetics having an ontological function in the sense that it gives to the traumatic (the unthought or even impossible to think) a certain ontological place in a *reasonable* world of what is perceived as good and/or acceptable. This giving of ontological place happens via art or religion. Yet, the ugly (unthought) is not only what is prior to the world of reason but also that which can disturb and/or disrupt the current worlds of reason. In that sense it has the ontological function that opens the present reality to a radically different perspective. Aesthetics, according to Rancière, has this political (ontological) function – the function to create order or to *give* (create) a certain ontological/political order. Rancière distinguishes between *Politics of Aesthetics* and *Aesthetics of politics*. For him *Aesthetics of politics* “is a matter of configuring the sensible texture of the community for which those laws and constitutions make sense. What objects are common? What subjects are included in the community? Which subjects are able to see and voice what is common? What arguments and practices are considered political arguments and practices? And so on” (Rancière 2009:8–9).

For example, the present dominant political order can be idealized, aestheticized, captured literally in stone, as in various monuments and architecture. This political order can also be romanticized in novels and films, this would be the *politics of Aesthetics*, where aesthetics serves a particular political agenda. It can either serve the dominant agenda or it can

challenge that agenda by challenging the dominant order, in for example the works of Charles Dickens – in other words, to disrupt, question and thereby challenge the dominant political order, opening it for alternative politics and thereby alternative ontologies. Thus, beauty or aesthetics (which includes ugliness) has this political ontological function to carry out a world where everything has a specific place, or it can challenge the current politics with alternative possibilities granting new status and new places to different things and subjects.

Aesthetics, understood as creating possibilities of order out of disorder (ugliness) or imagining a more just society in times of injustice (ugliness of injustice), is as Rilke argues the terrible beginning of unthought possibilities (see Cilliers 2011:261). For Rosenkranz there was both a healthy and a pathological way to enjoy the ugly (Krečič & Žižek 2016:60). The healthy way was to see ugliness as a foil of the beautiful, but for him to enjoy ugliness for itself, he interpreted it as being pathological. Interesting choice of word, *pathological*, because pathological reason is what Kant wanted to avoid when it comes to his interpretations of truly ethical acts. To bring Kant's ethical interpretation into conversation with Kant's aesthetics, one could argue that to desire or find pleasure (*Lust*) in the ugly (traumatic) because it can be sublimated into a higher good (foil for the beautiful) would be *pathological*, where one abdicates one's reasons to act (desire or find pleasure) to something (super-ego) beyond oneself¹.

Cilliers' reflecting on Rosenkranz concludes that beauty (ugliness) exists in this paradoxical tension, a tension that is creative in its desire: "out of the experiences of suffering and threat, i.e. chaotic disproportionateness, emerges the quest for beauty as healing of proportions" (Cilliers 2011:262). To further unpack these ideas Cilliers turns to the film, *Life is Beautiful* by Roberto Benigni, to illustrate the power of imagination or re-imagination as the beauty of this paradoxical beauty (Cilliers 2011:257–258). The quest or the desire for beauty is to create order from disorder, proportionateness from disproportionateness, or in a disproportionate world to imagine an alternative world of meaningful proportions. In another sense, to

1 These ideas I have taken from Jacques Lacan's argument, specifically from his *Kant with Sade* (2006), as well as his *Ethics of psychoanalysis* (1992), and Žižek's (1998) interpretation of Lacan.

imagine in a world of injustice an alternative world of justice and/or in an unjust world to imagine a democracy to come, and thereby disturbing or disrupting the current disproportionateness or current states of injustice. This is the *politics of aesthetics*: to imagine a different order and place given to the various subjects and things of a specific world. This was a new (19th Century) view of aesthetics as the other side of beauty “... beauty should rather be understood as a space where all the disorders, imperfections, even the evils and the one-sidedness of our experiences of reality do not necessarily estrange us from the truth, where we rather have the possibility of stumbling upon ‘truth’” (Cilliers 2011:261).

Aesthetic can thus be interpreted as a response to a higher calling, or a response to a higher justice, a higher understanding of goodness (God), and therefore one could argue: a response to the super-ego, or a response to the other of the current dominant Other, and thereby challenge the current miserable state of the world in the name of this other of the current dominant Other.

The desire to create beauty can be seen as a need to create order from chaos, order from disorder and thereby create (*poiēsis*) in all its different forms *tekhne* or art. Whatever is created is then interpreted as a response to chaos and/or nothingness, in the name of something *erhaben* (higher), as the act of creation is inspired by this higher desire to create order: a political ontological desire, one could argue. Chaos and disorder are not just the negation of order and the disproportionate, but it is something in itself (Cilliers 2011:262). Cilliers argues that this very existence of this paradoxical tension is the quest for beauty. “The quest for beauty is sparked off by this paradoxical tension; it is perpetually energised by the movement from disproportion to proportion, i.e. from chaos to order. ... The very existence of such a paradoxical tension created by disproportion kindles a faith that is in search of beauty” (Cilliers 2011:262). The ontological function or the political function of beauty (ugly) is not to narrow the chasm between ideal and reality, “but to contrast this chasm by means of a paradox that opens up a radically different perspective on the same reality” (Cilliers 2011:261).

The desire for beauty in various forms of art or *tekhne*, is a *desire that needs* to transform disorder into order, chaos into order, meaninglessness into

sense and meaning, and this desire is part of what makes one human. It is, one could argue, what makes humanity being created in the image of God, who created the world from the nothing of primal chaos.

This can be read in the true Hegelian way, “the ugly is the subordinated moment in the game the beautiful is playing with itself, its immanent self-negation that lays the (back)ground for its full appearance; or it can be read in a much stronger literal sense, as the very (back)ground of the beautiful that precedes the beautiful and out of which the beautiful arises” (Krečič & Žižek 2016:61). The second reading is how Theodor Adorno in his aesthetic theory reads this relationship: as the ugly being the cause and the beautiful the effect (Krečič & Žižek 2016:62).

Taking the above into consideration, one can identify three different senses of relating the beautiful to the ugly.

In the *first sense*, the ugly is the chaotic, unformed, life-substance, which art elevates into an aesthetic form, but the price that is paid for this transformation (elevation-sublimation) is mortification. In this sense the ugly could be interpreted as the force of life (life-force) against the *death* imposed by the aesthetic form (see Krečič & Žižek 2016:62). The *second sense* is part and parcel of the modern era in which the ugly itself became an aesthetic category. The ugly was created by the dominant discourses of the world and thus the ugly denounces the very world that created it, opening the world to alternative possibilities. In this sense, art becomes a medium of truth – to reveal the truth of the world to itself. The ugly as sublime or comical that ridicules the world and thereby opens the world for other alternative truths. The *third sense* is if the ugly is not turned into the sublime or the comical to ridicule the world but remains the traumatic monstrous. The monstrous as that which is beyond a certain limit.

Cilliers’ interpretation of the ugly seems to tend towards the first and second interpretations – where the ugly is either transformed (sublimated) when seen from a higher perspective of justice or goodness, or it is transformed into an agent of truth, which reveals something of the ugly truth of the world, and thereby opens the world to alternative imagined possibilities. Beauty [ugly] is then simultaneously “the order of change and the change of order” (Cilliers 2011:261). If one reads the first and the second sense together one could conclude that chaos, injustice and disorder are seen as

the foil and as foil: the impossible possibility of order, justice and the good, which needs to be imagined. In this sense “beauty could be interpreted as the dialectic of paradox” (Cilliers 2011:262). It is in this context that Cilliers offers a description or interpretation of beauty: “Broadly speaking, one could say that the ‘meaning’ of beauty can only be understood in terms of the interaction (paradoxical tension) between the object itself (for instance in the proportion of the object); the perception of the one who views the object (beauty being “in the eye of the beholder”); and in the ‘alternative reality’ to which the object points and which it anticipates” (Cilliers 2011:262).

In other words, beauty can be described as the paradox between chaos and order (Cilliers 2011:262). It is the tension that is created by the paradox that kindles or inspires the desire or the faith in search of beauty (*fides quarens pulchrum*). Cilliers argues that this is specifically true in theological aesthetics, where the *beauty of God* is often revealed under “circumstances of chaotic disproportionateness, which could be viewed as disturbing ugliness” (Cilliers 2011:262). The Cross of Christ is paradigmatic of this disturbing ugliness, as the cross can certainly not be portrayed in perfect proportions. This brings Cilliers to the conclusion that “Only in a theological sense – or: through faith (*fides*) – can ‘ugly’ be observed as ‘beautiful’, or as chaos that is *en route* to be healed, i.e. radically different form of proportion” (Cilliers 2011:262). This then leads him to argue that beauty understood theologically resides in the desire for the non-desirable and he illustrates this with an example: the sculpture, *Kruzifixus* (1921), by the artists Ludwig Gies (Cilliers 2011:263).

Cilliers concludes the article by developing a practical theology with four movements based on this desire (search or longing) for beauty, where the sense of beauty differs fundamentally from what is typically desired. The four movements he develops are: observation, imagination, anticipation and celebration (Cilliers 2011:265–267).

The first movement of his practical theology is *observation*, but seeking not what is typically desirable, but seeking specifically the ugly. This “ugly” within society, that which is not desired but rather *out of place*, that which is marginal or ostracized needs not only to be observed, but also interpreted. The out-of-placeness or disproportion is interpreted within

the context of an *imagination of faith*. It is through this *imagination of faith* that the ugly (out-of-placeness) becomes beautiful in the sense of the coming of God's kingdom or the coming of divine justice, etcetera – where those who had no place will be given place, as in the various parables of the great banquet. In other words, the “ugly”, the disproportionate, the chaotic, the out-of-placeness is interpreted in the light of the *anticipation* of God's kingdom or God's justice to come or Christ's expected return: the *adventus* (see Cilliers 2011:268). These hope-filled (*anticipated*) alternatives need to be *celebrated* and enacted in and by faith communities, sometimes even against the ugliness of the dominant present reality.

These four movements of practical theology are driven by *fides quaerens pulchrum*, faith in search of beauty, which is a faith in search of hope, which is also a faith in search of reason and therefore a political search for a new, more just world order. The practical theologian thus becomes an *agent* of transformation thanks to her imaginative interpretation. Her imagination is inspired and determined by the Law/Love of the Other of the current dominant symbolic Other, namely: God's will, God's justice and/or God's kingdom to come, which is above (the other of the Other) the dominant ideology. One could argue that the imagination is inspired by the other of the Other, in this case the *Spirit of the* ultimate Father, *Name of the Father* (see Lacan 2013), which could be interpreted, as I will discuss later, as the super-Super-Ego. The practical theologian is thereby *justified* by her action: *justified* by her good works, her *good* hope-filled imagination. In this sense aesthetics is intertwined with ethics and by implication with the question of justice and therefore also *justification*. This connection between aesthetics and ethics and/or politics (justice and the justification in the *Name of a Father* that goes with it) I would like to explore a little further in the rest of this chapter.

Before I return to Cilliers' four movements of practical theology inspired by faith in search of beauty, I need to turn to the third interpretation of the relationship between ugly and beauty, namely the *monstrous*, where the ugly, disorder, chaotic is not transformed, *sublimated*, into beauty or the sublime, but where it remains monstrous. To do this, I will return to Immanuel Kant and his interpretation of the sublime, as sublimation of the monstrous via the super-ego (Name-of-the-Father), one could say. This is what I believe inspires Cilliers' paradoxical dialectic: the paradox of the

Cross (injustice, suffering etc.) is sublimated, via God's justice, God's love, God's forgiveness, or the Kingdom to Come, Justice to come, Democracy to come, into a new imagined community carried out by this new sublime master signifier, in other words – a Divine (Kingdom) *politics of Aesthetics*. In a certain sense this is also Rebekka Klein's (2017) critique of Moltmann's and Jüngel's Theologies of the Cross: that the monstrous of the Cross is sublimated within a Trinitarian understanding of the Divine.

Kant tried to develop a theory to understand this difference between the ugly as sublime and the ugly as monstrous by differentiating between pleasure (*Lust*) and enjoyment (*Genuss* or *jouissance*).

The “disgust for the object” arises from a certain “enjoyment” [*Genuss*] in the “matter of sensation” which distances the subject from its purposiveness. Pleasure [*Lust*] is opposed to “enjoyment” insofar as “pleasure is culture” [*wo die Lust zugleich Kultur ist*] ... “Enjoyment” *in matter*, in contrast, provokes disgust. In addition, this enjoyment of losing oneself in the matter of “charms and emotions” has a direct impact on the health of our body: it generates disgust which manifests itself in corporeal reactions like nausea, vomiting and convulsions. Pleasure-unpleasure [*Lust/Unlust*] in the feeling of the sublime has nothing to do with that “enjoyment” [*Genuss*] destructive of culture and generative of disgust (Krečič & Žižek 2016:63).

If one takes this quote from Kant into consideration, where exactly to place *Genuss*, or what is its ontological status? It is not culture like *Lust*, but neither is it nature as it derails nature. There might be a link or even an identity (Krečič & Žižek 2016:63) between this *Genuss* and what Kant describes as “unnatural savagery” (*Wildheit*) (Krečič & Žižek 2016:63). A *Wildheit* which is a passion for freedom that is specific to humanity alone. I would like to remain for a moment with this idea of *Wildheit*, this unreason, non-culture, but which is *not* nature either. In other words, a *Wildheit* that is beyond the nature-culture divide. A *Wildheit* which is not the opposite of reason, culture, order, proportions, but neither is it nature or *the* “physical” reality, or the pre-cultural, pre-beauty foil that is filled with the terror of possibilities. That which is not the chaos out of which order is created, is not the ugly in the sense of the marginal, disproportionate,

out-of-placeness that can be re-imagined finding place in a more just, more democratic world order, but which is unreason, un-culture just as it is not-nature. This monstrous can provide a certain *Genuss*, or maybe even a *drive* as differentiated from *desire* and the hope that inspires *fides quaerens pulchrum*.

The desire, *fides Quaerens pulchrum*, and the practical theology it inspires is certainly a human rational and reasonable activity. Maybe even *the* human activity that transforms the human “animal” into a noetic soul? The desire to create order out of disorder, just like God created an orderly world out of the primal chaos. In that sense humans, as noetic souls, are indeed created in the image of God, just as the image of God is created and necessary for noetic souls to emerge. This is a strange mutual creation and a mutual necessity between God and humanity as noetic souls.

The need or desire to create the good, order, beauty from or out of chaos and disorder is a divine desire. The desire *of* the divine can be interpreted in two ways: a human desire *for* goodness and *for* beauty understood as divine attributes, and yet it seems to also be the desire *of* the divine who needs humans, who desires humans so as to be (if one takes Meister Eckhart into consideration). In other words, could this *faith in search of beauty* not also be that which creates God (see Žižek 2009:33)? Could this faith in search of beauty not be the desire that creates the Universal, a Master Signifier or Name of the Father, namely the Super-ego?

A faith of the noetic soul, that exists in the tension between the Godhead and the God of faith.

God has such a need to seek us out – exactly as if all his Godhead depended on it, as in fact it does. God can no more dispense with us than we can dispense with him. Even if it were possible that we might turn away from God, God could never turn away from us (Schürmann 2001:56).

Meister Eckhart continues:

In my [eternal] birth all things were born, and I was cause of myself as well as of all things. If I had willed it, neither I nor any things would be. And if I myself were not, God would not be either: that God is God, of this I am a cause. If I were not, God would not be

God. There is, however, no need to understand this (Schürmann 2001:215).

This desire, this quest for beauty, for God, is declarative, one declares God (Schürmann 2001:113). This declaration (creation of God) has to do with both ethics (the Kantian truly ethical act) and aesthetics, when the universal is not discovered, but declared. The universal, the absolute is declared, but declared from nothing: as a pure ethical-aesthetic act.

To understand this one needs to think the Kantian interpretation of the sublime together with his interpretation of the universal ethical command: Do your duty! (see Žižek 1998). Do your duty even without duty becoming a pathological excuse for one's actions, in other words where doing one's duty is a pure act, similar to Lacan's pure desire, where desire is not pathological (as it does not have an object-cause) but is the pure desire of the lack (see Žižek 1998) – the drive of one abyss calling to another abyss.

The experience of the sublime in Kant has two essential sentiments. "The first is the moment of anguish and of discomfiting fascination in face of something incomparably larger or more powerful – an anguish that the subject escapes from only by transforming it (in)to the other moment, into the sentiment of the sublime, i.e., of his 'supersensible' superiority" (Zupančič 1992:52). Transforming the anguish into something *Erhaben*, elevated, which is then linked with the subject's estimation of him or herself (*Selbstschätzung*) (see Kant 1987:121). This *Selbstschätzung* certainly is linked with the idea of justification: justified by works, justified by sublimation, justified by art or imagination. One can deal with the anguish of the ugly via this second movement, which could even entail sacrificing oneself, yet, this very sacrificial act also glorifies and justifies the self: lifts the self – sublimates the self into a higher category, for example a tragic hero. There is something very narcissistic in this sublimation. The subject is confronted with something traumatic, the traumatic proximity of the Thing, and needs to create distance. The distance that is created is an unconcernedness in the face of something that concerns him/or her dramatically. Kant refers to this as the pathos of apathy (Zupančič 1992:53). Freud helps with understanding this distance: it is a distance that rests on the super-ego (Freud 1988:430–431). Thus, in the field of aesthetics develops an ethical agency, namely the super-ego, so much so that one could argue

that the “super-ego is the birthplace of the sentiment of the sublime” (see Zupančič 1992:53). Yet, this ethical agency is both ethical and not ethical, at least in the Kantian sense, it is not ethical if the action (act) is motivated by pathological reasons (the super-ego) that justifies the act. It is ethical if it is purely out of duty without duty having any specific or particular content that can justify the act. In other words, the act is not a response to an injunction, but creates, declares the universal, the super-ego.

As Žižek argues, “The ultimate speculative identity is the identity of the act and the Other: an authentic act momentarily suspends the big Other, but it is simultaneously the ‘vanishing mediator’ which grounds, brings into existence, the big Other” (Žižek 1996:144).

The pure act is the act that declares the universal: creates the universal, which can retrospectively provide pathological reasons to justify the act.

The relationship between humanity, God and the world in which to be, is a relationship of desire: the search for beauty and order. There seems to be a coincidence between God’s desire and humanity’s desire, or God’s lack and humanities’ lack. It is important to note what Eckhart means by Godhead. Here Eckhart’s thought is very radical: The Godhead is the abyss of *Unding* (Žižek 2009:35). The nothing and humanity before humanity is born in the world. There is also this radical freedom of the nothing. In a sense there are two abysses that are confronting each other: the abyss of the Godhead and the abyss of humanity before desire or humanity before faith seeking beauty.

In the rest of this chapter, I would like to focus on the Kantian *Genuss* in the *Wildheit* without seeking to *tame* it in the theological *imagination* via sublimation of *anticipation* (Cilliers’ second and third movement of practical theology). Lacan argues that there is a life-and-death battle between religion and psychoanalysis, and he concedes “that religion plays a hegemonic role in this struggle, since a tendency to ‘domesticate’ the Real by providing a Sense of it is part of a quasi-transcendental human disposition” (Žižek 2009:241). Is it possible to return or to stay in the *Wildheit* – that radical freedom, which is not nature nor culture, but the birth of both? Or stated differently: that drive, or radical freedom, that is indeed monstrous and destructive, destructive even of God and thereby destructive of the good, the orderly, the sublime, the just, the righteous,

the new world order of the believed kingdom to come. This one cannot imagine, nor anticipate, but at best witness and give testimony to. A radical freedom as a pure ethical act or a pure drive, as Žižek (1998) interprets Lacan's pure drive.

As Kant argues, the monstrous is in the margin of the acceptable where the imagination is fully blocked to function. It does violence to subjectivity without being submitted to any law (see Krečič & Žižek 2016:62). This monstrous drive might be interpreted as the death drive. Freud, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, argues that it might be more important for the human organism to protect itself against stimuli from life (life-substance) than to the task of the reception of these stimuli (see Krečič & Žižek 2016:65). "Spirit is above life; it is death in life, an attempt to escape life while alive, like the Freudian death drive that is not life but pure repetitive movement" (Krečič & Žižek 2016:66). Julia Kristeva further explores this death drive when she argues, "Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be" (Kristeva 1982:2). The death drive, abjection, *Wildheit*, the monstrous should not be interpreted as the primordial matter, or mother nature, or physical reality, but it is what comes *before* these distinctions: nature vs culture, inside vs outside, conscious vs unconscious, repression vs repressed. Yet, this *before* is not to be understood chronologically, but it is a before in the form of these distinctions, as that which makes the distinctions possible, or the violent process of differentiation into these distinctions. For Žižek (2010:305), the death drive is the *transcendental form*. It is the violence of thought itself when it thinks these distinctions. It is the void in thought itself, it is what disturbs order, identity and worlds and thus reveals the fragility of laws (laws of physics and nature included).

There are two traditional ways of traversing abjection or "dealing" with the death drive and that is art and religion (see Kristeva 1982:17). Rainer Maria Rilke (1995:331) therefore says that "beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror" yet beauty weaves a screen that renders the abject not only tolerable but even pleasurable. It is in the creation of this pleasurable screen, that the *terror of repetition* lies, and the death drive can be found. The repetition is in the symbolic according to Lacan (see Lacan 2006:34) and it is this symbolic that determines humanity rather than humanity determining

the symbolic. The symbolic is created only to determine and justify the actions. Thus, there is a gap in the symbolic that needs to be healed and it is the noetic souls that need to heal the gap in the Symbolic, which they in turn believe is the healing they require from the Symbolic. In a sense it is a mutual healing of mutual wounds, which reminds one of Wagner's *Parsifal*, where only the spear that smote the wound can also heal the wound: where wound and healing are difficult or even impossible to distinguish.

Where does this leave one with regards to aesthetics, beauty [ugly] and the doing of theology?

If there is no other of the Other, if there is no big Other and there is no super-ego that is not created out of necessity for an ethical subject to be, does this translate into a *radical* atheism? A *radical* atheism that is different from atheism, because atheism would in a sense still be a big Other, but radical atheism also challenges the big-otherness of atheism, where atheism is the super-ego. Where would radical atheism leave one? With the conclusion that all there is, is aesthetics: the mutual necessity of ethics and religion (sublimation), the mutual necessity of noetic souls and God? All there is, is textual act which is always both ethical and aesthetic and in which both the subject and the divine (extra-textual) are created. This creation is driven by the void in both and therefore the text is not all there is.

The text is not *all* there is, as there is the non-all², that which disturbs, disrupts the all. That which disturbs the text, haunts the text. The question is where to place this disturbance? From where does this disturbance come? Does it come from outside the all? The idea that it must be from outside or pre-, in the sense of before the text, is the traditional transcendental interpretation – as something is believed to be beyond the text, beyond reason. Yet, the problem with placing it outside or beyond the text, is that outside or beyond is always already *in* the text: in those very words, “outside” and “beyond” or “transcendent”. An alternative possibility would then be to interpret the non-all as the wound or void *in* the All. The

2 This does not mean that language is all there is, or that there is “nothing outside the text” (as vulgar readings of Derrida propose). On the contrary, language is *not-all* there is. There is nothing but language – except that language itself is internally riven: it is marked by an “other side” that can be accessed only through the practice of language itself (Comay & Ruda 2018:16).

wound in both the subject and the divine, the wound in ethics and in the super-ego, the wounds that mutually call to each other like the abyss calls to another abyss. The wounds that mutually *drives* the birth of both the various opposites, the wound that *drives the repetition*, the repetition of the creation of texts, of art, aesthetics, namely the *death drive*.

The non-All could then also be seen as the non-no-big-Other, or non-Nothing, but this does not translate into the various positive possibilities of there being X, whatever that X might mean as something mystical beyond names, as mother nature or as *the* actual physical reality, or various forms of mystical religions/theologies. Any positive identification, even if it is a non-nameable (negative theological) identification, would be a new master signifier. The non-all is *less than nothing*, as nothing would already be too much of a something, or even *the* Thing. In an attempt to come back to theology, I will read this idea of the non-all in the light of a possible reinterpretation of a *Kreuzestheologie*. If one reads the non-All in the light of the Christ event, then the incarnation “is” the death of God as God becomes fully incarnate in humanity: The Word becomes flesh (the universal becomes particular). It is not only a part of the Logos that becomes flesh, but the Word itself becomes completely flesh. Christ *is* the complete incarnation of God and therefore Christ *is* God. Christ is God becoming fully human, without a remainder or an excess of God staying behind somewhere. God himself becomes fully human and reveals Himself to humanity as human, as well as revealing Himself to Himself as a human. This is indeed a *monstrosity* and not just a paradox. It is a monstrosity as it is the death of God as I have argued elsewhere (Meylahn 2013). Yet, this incarnation of God, this incarnation of the Name-of-the-Father and thereby the death of the Father in the Son, is crucified. He is crucified in the Name-of-the-Father or stated differently: He is crucified by the Name (law) of the Father who accuses the Son (the incarnation of the Name-of-the-Father) of blasphemy. From the Gospel stories one reads about the legal reasons why Christ was crucified; he was found guilty by both the Jewish Name-of-the-Father (Law of the Father/Law of God) as well as the Law of the Roman Empire (*Pax Romana*).

The incarnation (the becoming human of the Name-of-the-Father) blasphemes the Name-of-the-Father in more than one sense. The becoming human of God is blasphemous, as it is monstrous, and to add to this,

Jesus' action and proclamation (ministry) literally blasphemes the Law of the Father, the Name-of-the-Father, both Jewish and Roman. Christ is crucified as a blasphemer who blasphemes the Name-of-the-Father, yet he *is* the flesh of that very Name-of-the-Father and therefore one could argue that the flesh (particular) Name-of-the-Father is crucified by the Name-of-the-Father (universal). The blasphemy can also be seen as the revelation of cracks in the Name-of-the-Father (cracks in the Law) into which Christ was incarnated, thus exposing the contradictions and the impossibility of the Name-of-the-Father, the Law of the Father. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ's preaching exposes the cracks in the Letter of the Law maybe thereby opening the Law for the Spirit of the Law. This is the classic interpretation of messianic deconstruction, where the dead letter is deconstructed by the haunting of the Spirit.

The Spirit of the Law which is repressed in the very formulation of the letter of the Law is that which blasphemes the letter of the Law and exposes the cracks and contradictions of the Law. That which the Name-of-the-Father, the letter of the Law, tries to suppress, namely the Spirit, will return to haunt and blaspheme the letter of the Law, as the Spirit will expose the cracks in the dead letter of the Law and thereby deconstruct the letter of the law. Such an interpretation would not be a unique interpretation of the message of Christ but *is* in a certain sense the message of the Old Testament prophets who argued that the Law should be written on the flesh of the hearts rather than carved in stone, thus also referring to the Spirit of the law rather than the dead letter of the law. What is unique or particular about the Christ-event, is firstly his being the incarnation of the Name-of-the-Father, thereby his incarnation already proclaims the death of the Father, as the Other of humanity, and secondly the death on the cross of the incarnation-of-the-Name-of-the-Father, which can be interpreted as a double negation. Yet, a double negation that does not translate into a positive, but into a non-nothing or non-All. The incarnation was the *not*-All (nothing – death of God), the crucifixion is the non-not-All, which if anything translates into radical freedom and an ethics beyond any good and evil, ethics beyond the imperative of some or other big Other, but likewise beyond the imperative of the not-Big Other. That which is incarnated in the margins blasphemes and thereby deconstructs the law of the Big Other, but the incarnation in the blaspheming margins is crucified. The law as well as that which is crucified

by the law is crucified. It is this second aspect (the double negation) that is often not thought or that is too monstrous and therefore sublimated. If it was only the crucifixion of the big Other, the Symbolic, then crucifixion could be interpreted as the law written on the flesh, or Henry's (2012; 2015) Life, or Caputo's (2013) Other that persistently insists and thereby continuously deconstructs the law in the name of justice and democracy to come. It is not the Other, the outside enemy that disrupts the Same, but it is the suppressed Other in the Same which is necessary for the creation of an identity (Same), that disrupts. That outside Other, excess or remainder, is what is created in the moment there is identity, differentiation, the moment there is thought (the dead letter of thought) as thought is only possible via this *différance*. It is a separation, a gap, a void in thought itself, and not that which is beyond thought or transcendent to thought. Therefore, one can say that the persistent Otherness, that persistent blaspheming is also crucified. All that remains is the Cross, as Paul claims that all he knows is Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). This Cross reveals the double crucifixion, double negation and thereby reveals the gap, the void in thinking, the wound from which all the opposites are born: Spirit-Law, Law-Sin, Body-Soul. The gap, *différance*, that is the transcendental form *in thinking* (in Spirit) that makes these differentiations possible, also the differentiation between righteous and non-righteous and justice and injustice. What is revealed in the Cross is the truth of truth, or the truth of thinking, one could argue.

This is the non-All. It is a *radical* atheism, it is the death of the Name-of-the-Father, but it is also the death of the death of the Name-of-the-Father. It is the non-All, radical freedom, pure duty and pure desire. A radical freedom where one acts out of this freedom, not because of any Name (law) of a Father. Paul Claudel's (1945:9–85) *Three Plays*, specifically the first play, *Hostage*, depicts something of this radical freedom that remains monstrous and is not sublimated by the saving grace of some or other super-ego. This monstrous radical freedom becomes clear in the conversation between Sygne and her priest, Badilon (Claudel 1945:61ff), where nothing can absolve her of her decision, neither God nor the Pope – she has to take this decision without any *pathological* help, that is without any Name-of-the-Father who can justify or give reasons for her decision. At the end of this first play, Sygne's death, the audience, the reader, and Badilon want/need/

desire a reason for her “heroic” act and all she gives is a deathly grimace and a clear No! (Claudel 1945:80). No reason to sublimate her act, in other words a pure act – the deathly grimace of the death drive.

What kind of community does such non-knowledge, non-reason, pure act create, call forth? What aesthetics is in this ethical-aesthetic act? It can only call a community forth that participates in the Crucifixion through baptism and communion. A community that witnesses the crucifixion, but it is not a community of ethical knowledge, but a community that acts out of duty alone, as one would act out of grace alone, without any pathological justification.

The cross confronts us with the void, the lack in the Other, the lack in the Name-of-the-Father, the lack in the symbolic with God’s abandonment of himself in the Cross, exemplified in Christ’s cry from the Cross in the Gospel of Matthew. This leaves us with a pure void, in a certain sense pure nihilism. We know nothing but Christ crucified as Paul says. The resurrection is then the creation *ex nihilo*. The creation of new possibilities out of nothing, a pure ethical act, without any pathological justification or condemnation. Without any pathos or logos or without any *Padre* (Name-of-the-Father) to justify us or declare one guilty or innocent, like Sygne, and in that sense truly beyond good and evil. New possibilities are born in such ethical acts, as these acts become political through aesthetics, at least in Rancière’s interpretation of the *aesthetics of politics*. The creation of a fiction out of nothing, out of pure duty or pure desire, and yet this fiction determines the place and the role of the things (including subjects) of a new world (a new ontology) – a radically new world as a resurrection world. Cilliers’ turn to the film, *Life is beautiful* would have been interesting if the son would have known all along that his dad is *playing* a game to protect him, and if he (the son) *played* along so as not to disappoint his father. Yet, even the attempt to please the father would be a pathological motivation and therefore a justification (sublimation of the traumatic) of his actions, a justification of the film, thus making the film beautiful (sublimated). Life as such, in its raw form, is not beautiful, or rather it is beyond the distinction ugly and beautiful. What could be beautiful is maybe the film, *Life is beautiful*, as aesthetics is beautiful, just like fiction can be beautiful. In a certain sense the film *is* beautiful, especially if one takes the imagined interpretation into consideration, where the son knows that his dad is

acting to protect him, and he *plays* along to not disappoint his father. It would be beautiful in the sense of it being a pure ethical act or pure desire, in the full knowledge that there is no superego, that there is nothing beyond his *game*, *this fiction*, to justify or condemn the various actions. There is no Other, there is no super-ego, there is no other of the Other to justify or condemn, there is only the free choice to play a game of imagination: *to create a fiction*. The duty to create beauty, the duty to be imaginative without any super-ego to judge the beauty or imagination created. In that sense the film, *Life is beautiful* is indeed beautiful, because it is a play, an imaginative play without any super-ego or superior concept of justice or goodness or beauty to justify it or to sublimate it. The sublimation is created afterwards, after the act of imagination. Just as Claudel's play, *The Hostage*, is beautiful although without reason – it is not heroic, nor tragic, nor comical, but it confronts the reader with a wound in reason; it confronts the reader with the lamb led to the slaughter; it confronts the reader with the Cross and the Cross alone, without sublimation: Solus Christus.

(Sygne suddenly sits straight up, stretches her arms out in the shape of the cross and then falling back upon the pillow gives up the ghost with a flood of blood. BADILON gently wipes her lips and her face, and then falls on his knees beside the bed sobbing) (Claudel 1945:81).

Cilliers' four movements of practical theology, specifically the second last movement, *anticipation*, reminds one of the deconstructive reading of justice and/or democracy to come. One can argue that prior to the various particular embodiments of justice in various laws or embodiments of democracy in various forms of democratic government there is a pure or true or universal essence of justice or democracy. Or one could say the God of justice or the God of democracy (universal concept) calls the various particular embodiments forth, which can never completely capture the God who called them forth. This universal Spirit of democracy or justice would then haunt the particular embodiments and thereby deconstruct the various particular embodiments thereof. The particular embodiment of justice or democracy would thus be deconstructed by the universal Spirit of justice or democracy haunting the particular embodiment. Or the Law, as interpreted by Christ in the Sermon on the mount, is deconstructed because of the prior universal Spirit of God's will haunting the particular

letters of the law. Or one can offer a Hegelian-Lacanian reading of the universal-particular dialectic: because the particular embodiment has cracks, it is not perfect as it is particular and not universal, it is divided, it is split, finite, imperfect, but the universal Spirit is also divided, split otherwise it would not need the particular. This double wound or void in both the particular and the universal, I argue is embodied in the Cross. In faithfulness to the cross (the double void) a duty is born, the pure duty, out of duty itself, without any kind of justification or truth or essence, out of pure duty to again and again (repeat) and construct democracies and enact justice – driven by this void, the split and not driven by anything prior or essential, but if anything by the radical future always still to come. Driven by the void, driven by the cross, one's duty is to *create* new life, new possibilities: resurrection. From Cilliers' four movements to three movements: observation, witness the cross and the duty to imagine a beautiful life.

The creation of art, the creation of beauty out of the Cross: *ex nihilo*. This creation of art is governed by a dual impulse, Rancière argues. First, the production of a resemblance on the basis of a mimetic principle and second, the work of art is itself a dynamic “resemblance in so far as it constitutes an organism, a logos, a ‘living beauty’ [“un beau vivant”]” (Rancière 2004:9). Art as an organism of living beauty, living reality: resurrection reality. The duty to create living beauty.

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