

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Seven, Number Two

## Divine violence as auto-deconstruction: The Christ-event as an Act of transversing the Neo-Liberal fantasy

Johann Albrecht Meylahn, University of Pretoria

Walter Benjamin (1996) in his article *Critique of Violence*, unpacked three different forms of violence: state-founding (law-founding) mythic violence, state-maintaining (law-maintaining) violence and lastly divine (law/state destroying) violence. It seems obvious to link revolutionary violence to divine violence as it is a state destroying violence, yet in every revolution there is already the desire (revolution seen as a means to a particular envisaged end) to create a new state, and thus there is a very fine line between the divine violence of law/state destroying violence and the mythic state/law founding violence. The question that immediately comes to mind is: when does divine violence (state/law destroying violence) become mythic (state/law founding) violence? Is it perhaps possible that, in understanding this transition from divine to mythic violence, one can understand why so many revolutions fail to really create an alternative state? In an attempt to try and understand this fine line and to understand why so many revolutions fail, the difference between the two needs to be unpacked together with an understanding of what is a truly ethical Act – what is a just Act as an act of divine violence.

Why do so many revolutions fail? Why is it that so often the revolutionary victory brings about a worse or at least similar dictatorship than the one the revolution opposed in the first place<sup>1</sup>? I seek to understand this phenomenon, specifically writing from an African

---

<sup>1</sup> As Susan Buck-Morss argues: “any political movement that attempts to transform the death’s dead (the skeletal remains of the victims of history) into an angel’s face (history’s redeemer) is far more likely to unleash a human hell. Imagination, intending to set the world aright, makes a virtue out of violence against the violator. If enlightened critique stops here, it entrenches itself behind a self-imposed and self-defeating barrier, one that must be dismantled if humanity is to progress beyond the

context, a continent that in its recent history has seen numerous revolutions (or rather liberation struggles) "liberating" the people from colonial dictatorships or the dictatorships of the minority and yet it has been difficult to identify a revolution (liberation) that truly succeeded. In most of these liberation struggles those in power were replaced, but the living conditions of the majority remained the same. So what is it with revolutions/liberation struggles and their inability to truly change the living conditions of the polis? What prevents them from truly transforming the system, transforming the law that binds the *polis* to a particular system or hierarchy of power?

Revolutionary violence might begin as divine violence, as Žižek argues, but eventually this divine violence is transformed into mythic state-founding violence. Žižek uses examples that would shock most liberal hearts, for example Hugo Chávez who in 2008 subordinated the judicial sphere to his executive powers (Žižek 2008:469), or Jean-Bertrand Aristide's condoning of Pere Lebrun (necklacing) (Žižek 2008:478). What makes these acts of violence *perhaps* initially divine violence is that they are violent reactions or outbursts to the excessive structural violence of the current socio-economic-political system. In other words, these outbursts are expressions of the excess violence of the system. Yet these outbursts of excessive violence are transformed into mythic violence of state-founding violence as soon as they become a means to an end: the possibility of a new state. What is often not perceived in the typical liberal condemnation of these acts of violence is the excessive structural violence they are responding to, such as daily police brutality towards the poor and the structural economic violence that traps people in vicious cycles of poverty. Žižek argues that this is the parallax lesson of terror (2008:469), that there is no meta-language with which to discuss violence and or ethics because there is no bird's eye view. The moment you condemn the violence of the angry mob you are condoning the violence of the system. The problem is that in the history of revolutionary movements this angry violence of the mob against the excessive violence of the system turns into the mythic founding violence of a new system, but which ends up being similar to the one the violence first erupted against<sup>2</sup>. The term 'divine violence' conjures up the images of justified violence as in various theories of just war or even holy war – war/violence in the name of some or other noble cause. However, divine violence has nothing to do with the ideology of just war and with trying to find a form of violence that is more acceptable, more justifiable or more noble. Divine violence is not about finding some kind of balance between structural (law-maintaining status-quo maintaining) violence and revolutionary (new law/state founding)

---

recurring cycle of victim and avenger"(Buck-Morss 2009:144)

<sup>2</sup> Žižek unpacks this phenomenon by referring to the terror (violence of Lenin's revolution) which later developed into the mythic violence of Stalin's state-founding (2008:472).

violence and trying to propagate some or other just war theory, or necessary violence theory. Divine violence, as law/state-destroying violence, is exactly that: it seeks to destroy the state and the law that brings about the structural (law/state maintaining) violence and keeps people in vicious cycles of poverty and captivity, and it is violent as it destroys this law/state/system, but without this violence being a means to a particular end such as a new alternative law/state/system.

The problem with many of the violent revolutions mentioned above is not that they were unjust but that they were blocked, as they never really challenged the system but only replaced the actors in the system. Žižek therefore argues that Gandhi was more violent than Hitler (Žižek 2008:475) as Gandhi, with his passive resistance, truly undermined the British colonial system whilst Hitler and Stalin never actually changed anything but only replaced those in power. Gandhi's passive resistance undermined the functioning of the state apparatus and thus fundamentally threatened to destroy the system by undermining the power that the system had over its subjects by exposing its violent foundation. Benjamin (1996) describes the ultimate criminal as the one who does not only challenge the existing laws, as such a criminal can be judged and condemned by those very laws that s/he challenges, but the one who challenges the very foundations (mythic foundations – law/state-founding foundations), exposing the violence inherent in those very foundations, and thereby destroys the very authority and legitimization of the law. This kind of violence can be described as divine violence. It does not act in the name of a higher law, but it deconstructs the very foundations of the existing law/state, exposing the founding myth by revealing the inherent violence in the law/state.

This is not some kind of conspiracy theory arguing for the evil intent behind history and an evil power behind the birth of various states, but on the contrary these revolutions and the founding of states are driven by the noblest intentions, as the proverb says: the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Therefore Meylahn (2011a; 2011b) argued for the link between these two forms of violence (state/law founding and state/law maintaining) and the idea of seeking the good (peace) of the republic (state), thus linking violence to various interpretations of what is morally perceived as what is right on the basis of a particular interpretation of what is good, thereby linking this violence to the knowledge of good and evil. The moment one phrases it in these words one cannot help but link this knowledge to the narrative of the fall of humanity from Genesis 3 (obviously taking into account that one is from a tradition that has been influenced by the three religions of the Book). Both forms of violence (revolutionary and counter revolutionary) believe themselves to be justified by their various interpretations of the good and therefore they believe themselves to be warriors of justice, or warriors in the name of some or other higher good. It is exactly this legitimization, the idea that the violence

is morally justified, where the rotten apple is to be found. To truly challenge the system, the violence inherent in the idea of being able to establish what the good for the people or the good for the state is needs to be exposed, and that exposure of the founding violence in the knowledge of what is believed to be good would be divine violence. This is the founding myth: someone (normally the leaders of the state or the leaders of the revolution) have found the key (the apple) with which to return to the lost paradise. This apple (knowledge of good and evil) which the leaders are believed to have is the foundation upon which violence is legitimized – both law maintaining as well as law/state founding. It is the belief that the violent or non-violent actions are based on a higher good than the prevailing systemic (law-maintaining) violence of the status quo. Revolutions fail because they are legitimized by some or other concept of the good and thus they fight the good fight in the name of this good, but in the process they perpetuate the same violence they are confronting. They perpetuate the same violence because the founding myth (primal fantasy<sup>3</sup>) that the leaders have access to the key (lost signified) for the return to paradise, remains the same myth. The only way to move beyond this double-bind, Žižek argues, is divine violence. The problem is that divine violence cannot be a choice. You do not choose divine violence on the basis of some or other higher good, because the moment it would be such a choice it would again be state-founding mythic violence and regress into the same problem it is seeking to overcome. This choice would be founded on the same or similar primal fantasy as the state/law one is challenging and therefore nothing really changes. In other words divine violence is a form of violence that is not justified by some or other notion of the good, but where the knowledge of the good is suspended, where judgment is suspended and thus where one is confronted with a genuine choice (decision) without guarantees, clearly indicating which option is better because the moment one has guarantees it is no longer a choice but knowledge. A true *Ent-scheidung* is without any guarantees that the choice is good or right or just as it is a choice made without having any inclination of what is better as it is not supported by a primal fantasy. The judgment of good and evil is suspended for a moment and the choice is thus truly free.

It is these thoughts concerning divine violence and the primal fantasy that brings it into close proximity to the Lacanian ethical Act. In Lacanian terms a true ethical Act is an Act where the subject chooses him/herself as s/he becomes a subject and is no longer just the object of the big Other's desire. S/he chooses her/his own desire and not the desire of some big Other, in other words not some concept of the good as dictated by Society. An ethical Act is to unplug oneself from the symbolic system (laws) based on some founding myth of the Other and embrace one's "true" desire, and thereby to truly become subject and no longer to just be an object of the Other. Lacan linked revolutionary violence to the true

---

<sup>3</sup> See Sharp 2006 for further explorations of the primal fantasy and the loss of the signified.

ethical Act<sup>4</sup> (Hurst 2008:338) and in turn he linked this to the feminine libido but developing it further in the form of the feminine inventive sublimation (Hurst 2008:337).

The revolutionary who is prepared to die for his/her freedom Acts no longer in a lose lose situation of the double bind discussed above, but moves beyond this double bind. A truly ethical Act moves beyond this choice, but not in a Hegelian sublimation of the two opposites, but as Lacan argues in a feminine inventive sublimation of the universal particular dialectic. To choose freedom, even on the pain of physical death, is true life<sup>5</sup>. This choice of freedom is the choice of singularity, thus moving beyond Hegel's Antigone interpretation of universal versus particularity. But the choice is for the singular (not particular of the universal) where one is willing to die for the power to make that singular choice: the freedom of choice – a true decision that is not embedded in one or other myth of what is good and right. Lacan argues that ethics and thus the ethical Act belong neither to the masculine libido nor to the feminine hysterical libido, but in assuming **your** desire and not to cede your desire. Thus the ethical Act is to act upon your desire and not the desire of the big Other<sup>6</sup>. Freud once argued that "*Wo es war, Soll Ich werden*", which can be translated as "There where it (my desire) was, there I (not ego but *je* or subject) must (ethical must) become" (Hurst 2008:339).

Yet, choosing to acknowledge one's "true" desire and persevering in this choice opens one to the risk of once again falling into the trap of Imaginary fixation where one becomes fanatical about one's desire and makes it into an object of one's desire. Here again one has the fine line between true ethical Act (divine violence) and Imaginary fixation (state/law founding violence).

Lacan insists that this circularity represents the facticity of life, and we cannot pretend to dissolve such paradoxes without falling into the ideological trap of the Imaginary. All we can do is live through them: negotiating between committed perseverance and obsessive fixation, through persistent but careful reinvention of traumatic desires, taking into account the revisable contexts in which we find ourselves (Hurst 340-341). Žižek goes further than

---

<sup>4</sup> One can argue that for Lacan the revolutionary's choice is to assume your desire (See Lacan 1992:311)

<sup>5</sup> Žižek does not explain this ethical Act with the help of Antigone, but turns rather to the story of Medea as the counterpart to Antigone as retold in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In Morrison's *Beloved* Sethe sacrifices her children when she realizes that they will be returned to the oppressive system of slavery again. Thus death was a freedom greater than life in slavery (see Žižek 2000:152-153)

<sup>6</sup> "On the Lacanian account, then, the first step towards ethical action, having taken the feminine turn, which recognizes that all *moi* values are invented, is to "assume your desire". This implies, first, that the *je* must be capable of uncovering or recognizing something of the impossible desire of its Real being. The uncovering of singularizing desire in the register of the Real, however, must, necessarily occur as a traumatic invasion of the habitual fabric of the subject's *moi* identity. To assume a singularizing desire, then, is to allow its traumatizing effects. Or, put differently – for it is not often a matter of an explicit choice to open the *moi* to a desire – in the crisis of its invasion to assume your desire is first of all to recognize it and, second, to gather the courage to face it" (Hurst 2008: 339).

Lacan and argues that it is not just a matter of negotiating the best possible between perseverance in one's desire and obsessive fixation, but to move beyond these: to discover the desire as lack, exposing the mythological foundation of law (see Žižek 2000:92) and state and thus to Act not on the basis of this or that desire or Good, but to act in freedom and the suspension of the law. This is to Act in a moment of grace as the Act is not legitimized as being good or evil, but the Act itself is pure<sup>7</sup>, the Act itself is divine: a violence-justice beyond law (Žižek 2008:479). Divine violence does not serve any higher goal and that is why it is divine, why it is pure. Benjamin's divine violence is the "direct subjectivization of (or, rather, the direct subjective reaction to) this objective violence" (Žižek 2008:481).

The Act or divine violence is not in the name of the Father (it is not a masculine desire), that is to say it is not motivated by some or other ideological justification of what is good or right, nor is it the feminine hysterical desire of the lack and thus the breaking down of all laws with the aim of seeking to force the impossible Real to appear (Hurst 2008:336). It is thus not an active violence in the classical sense of these two desires, in the sense that it is motivated by either masculine or feminine desire, and for that reason it is often seen as being passive as it is not motivated, legitimized or authorized by anything outside itself. Therefore one cannot state whether an act is divine or not because to be able to do that one would need to place the act into a mythic system of good and evil or justice and injustice. It is for this reason also that there cannot be an ethical call or obligation for divine violence, which leaves one in a state of passivity, of not being called in the name of something to do anything.

To this passivity Critchley responds and argues that what Žižek is proposing leaves one in a "fearful and fateful deadlock, both a transcendental philosophical deadlock and a practical-political deadlock: the only thing to do is to do nothing. We should just sit and wait. Don't act, never commit, and continue to dream of an absolute, cataclysmic revolutionary act of violence" (Critchley 2008). Žižek (2008) responds to Critchley arguing that to do nothing is the most violent thing of all (Žižek 2008:474).

To understand this violence that subjectivises a subject, this violence that is about true choice without the ideological mythological backing or the knowledge of the lack and thus purely destructive violence in the *name of lack*, one has to link this violence to Žižek's understanding of minimal or pure difference or Derrida's *différance*. Žižek argues for a return to *différance* (2006a), but he interprets *différance* as a minimal difference. Žižek criticizes Derrida's apparent interpretation of Hegel and argues that Hegel's position is more intricate as Hegel is not arguing that through gradual dialectical progress the gap between ideal and actualization can be achieved, but rather, "to put it in speculative terms, his point is to assert

---

<sup>7</sup> "Divine violence is thus *not* dirtying our hands for the divine goal of non-violence; it is literally a *divine* violence, a violence which is *in itself* pure" (Žižek 2008:484).

a “pure” contradiction that is no longer the contradiction between the “undeconstructable” pure Otherness and its failed actualizations/determinations, but the thoroughly immanent “contradiction” that precedes any Otherness” (Žižek 2006a:232). Thus for Žižek pure *différance* is the gap that differs an entity from itself (Žižek 2006a:233). Therefore, if one would take the concept of justice, it is not the relationship between the ideal concept of justice and the various actualizations in the various laws/states that is at stake, but a difference (contradiction) in the concept of justice itself. The different or epochal legal systems are different failed attempts to actualize this ideal of justice, not because of the lack in the various actualizations, but because of the inherent pure difference within the concept of justice itself. This, Derrida would agree with (see Derrida 2002). Just wars and revolutions have often been fought in the name of the correct interpretation/actualization of justice, but such wars or revolutions only perpetuate the violence, but never get any closer to justice. Divine violence would not be on the “side” of a better interpretation or actualization of justice, but would be on the “side” of the immanent difference (excess<sup>8</sup>) within justice itself. It would be on the “side” of the autodeconstruction of justice itself (see Derrida 2002). If one identifies divine violence with autodeconstruction then one enters the idea of *Gelassenheit*, non-violence, or passivity. Žižek argues that “Divine violence is the very form in which non-violence appears” (Žižek 2008:485). How to understand this *Gelassenheit*? It is the non-active violence, as it is not violence in the name of something, but the violence (excess) immanent in the very concept of, for example, justice. It is the non-active violence of deconstruction<sup>9</sup>.

The difference is immanent to the concept of justice itself as an excess in the concept that is not actualized in the various epochal legal systems (law/state founding and maintaining systems), and therefore this excess can only but appear as violent. Because it cannot be contained in the various actualizations of justice in various legal systems, it cannot but be seen as evil<sup>10</sup>.

Derrida links divine violence to *différance* and deconstruction and the impossible possibility of justice (Derrida 2002). While Žižek would argue that the Act (divine violence) is justice, Derrida would rather keep open the judgment about something being justice, and rather argue for the impossible possibility of justice. Yet, how different are these two views from each other? The Act is not in the name of justice, it is not in the name of any higher

---

<sup>8</sup> Divine violence is to be located in the ethical overload itself, “it is the way this “overload” appears, makes itself palpable in the phenomenal domain” (Žižek 2008:486).

<sup>9</sup> Derrida introduces the idea of the trace to get beyond the active passive dilemma of deconstruction because of *différance* (Derrida 1982:17). *Différance* is not the active cause of deconstruction as there is no intent behind *différance* to make it an active cause, but neither is it passive. In other words *différance* is neither active nor is it passive, but it is an active-passive effect of the trace.

<sup>10</sup> “Following an inner necessity, the “excess” of goodness (excess over equitable justice) has to appear as evil” (Žižek 2008:485).

good or goal, it just happens because of the excess in the concept itself: it is an event (autodeconstruction) motivated by nothing outside itself. This event itself *is* just<sup>11</sup>. It is not an expression of the imperfections of our actualizations of justice. Yet this event or Act is just beyond knowledge of good and evil and beyond various interpretations of justice and injustice and thus it is actually impossible to state that it is just and therefore it is not that different from what Derrida says about the impossible possibility of justice. To understand this one needs to unpack their respective interpretations of difference as either minimal difference or *différance*. In this article I will argue that Derrida's interpretation of *différance* is not that different from Žižek's interpretation of minimal difference although Žižek argues that there is an important difference (Žižek 2006a). Žižek's interpretation of Derrida, I would say, is a reaction against the messianism and the perceived role of the Other in Derrida's thought. Žižek argues that Derrida insists on the irreducible excess in the ideal concept "that cannot be reduced to the dialectic between ideal and its actualization: the messianic structure of "to come," the excess of an abyss that cannot ever be actualized in its determinate content" (Žižek 2006a:232). Žižek therefore accuses Derrida of holding onto a spectral Otherness<sup>12</sup> which is the basis for his messianism without messiah (Žižek 2006a:233).

Žižek offers an alternative interpretation to Derrida's messianism with his specifically Pauline Christological interpretation of the event of Christ as the arriving of the Messiah and the idea that all that is to happen has happened, but that the gap remains<sup>13</sup>. Žižek thus argues that there is nothing to wait for, "we do not have to wait for the Event, for the arrival of the Messiah; the Messiah has already arrived; the Event already took place; we live in its aftermath" (Žižek 2006a:233). He continues and argues that "what is difficult, but crucial to grasp is how this stance, far from condemning us to passive reflection, opens up the space for active intervention" (Žižek 2006a:234).

The question that Žižek pursues, is: What would Derrida's *différance* be without the abyss of Otherness? It is in this context that he develops the idea of pure difference, in other words difference without messianism or without the abyss of Otherness. Pure difference is: how the element is different from itself. He argues that the problem is not that we are doomed to the play of appearances and that one cannot pierce through the appearances to the underlying true reality. The problem is: How could – in the middle of flat, stupid reality,

---

<sup>11</sup> Divine violence is not as Critchley argues (Žižek 2008: 485) a sign of our imperfection, but it is a sign of our perfection, "of our participation in the "noumenal" divine dimension" (Žižek 2008:485).

<sup>12</sup> Derrida acts as if the choice is between the positive ontoethics, the gesture of transcending the existing order toward another higher positive Order, and the pure promise of spectral Otherness. However, what if we drop this reference of Otherness altogether?" (Žižek 2006a:233).

<sup>13</sup> "...while Christianity, far from claiming full realization of the promise, accomplishes something far more uncanny: the Messiah is here, he has arrived, the final Event already took place, and yet the gap (the gap that sustained the messianic promise remains" (Žižek 2006a:233).



which is *just there* – something like appearance emerge? (Žižek 2006a:234). Žižek responds to this question with the idea of frames and enframing and that there is no “neutral reality within which gaps occur, within which frames isolate domains of appearances” (Žižek 2006a:235). He continues and argues that every field of “reality” (every “world”) is always already enframed, that is to say seen through an invisible frame (Žižek 2006a:235). The parallax of the two frames is not symmetrical in the sense of two different visions of factor x, but an irreducible asymmetry between the two perspectives. Žižek, in seeking to understand pure difference, plays with the idea of two frames and how things appear in “reality”. Things appear in reality because they are placed within a frame, one could say that things appear (are unconcealed) within a specific horizon or worldview [frame]. For example, a dog appears as a canine creature within the biological worldview where creatures are classed and classified. In a different worldview [frame] the same creature appears not as canine creature, but as man’s best friend. Thus it is clear that appearance of reality is dependent on the frame in which it appears. What interests Žižek is not that there are different frames (canine creature and man’s best friend), but another invisible frame: one could say the frame of the frame. One is not aware of this frame that allows things to appear as they appear, but presumes this to be the way reality is. These two frames: worldviews and the frame that worldviews are necessary for things to appear, are not symmetrical but asymmetrical. What one has, is: “a perspective and what eludes it, and the other perspective fills in this void of what we could not see from the first perspective” (Žižek 2006a:235). These two frames never overlap (Žižek 2006a:235). Thus things do not merely appear; they appear to appear, thereby “concealing the fact that they *are* what they appear” (Žižek 2006a:235-236). This double framing conceals the fact that things *are* what they appear. The question is: how different is this interpretation from Derrida’s famous statement that all we have is the text as there is no outside text (Derrida 1997:158)? This “*are as they appear*” is to say that things are as they are enframed (textualised) and there is nothing beyond that: they *are* what they appear. Derrida’s *there is no outside text* could just as well be interpreted as there is no outside of framing, and the fact that there is no outside of framing is the frame in which framing happens, that is to say it is the frame in which things appear as they appear, thus concealing that things *are* what they appear. This logic of minimal difference, the constitutive noncoincidence of a thing with itself, provides the key for Žižek’s interpretation of the central Hegelian category of the concrete universality (Žižek 2006a:236). Universality is thus this battle *itself* between the frames – universality is minimal difference or *différance*. Thus Žižek can argue that the proper dialectical relationship between universal and particular is not that the differences are on the side of the particular, but that the universal is the site for unbearable antagonism, self-contradiction (Žižek 2006a:241). This means for him that

différance and the multitude of the particular species are ultimately nothing but many attempts to reconcile this antagonism.

Yet, Žižek maintains that his master signifier for minimal difference is not différance, but parallax (Žižek 2006a:243). Parallax is a shift in view and one could summarize this shift in view as a shift from desire to drive, or shift in the *object a*. In desire the *object a* is the lost object (the belief that there is reality out there somewhere, but we have lost access to it). In drive the *object a* is the loss itself and the acknowledgement that it is not about a lost object (see Žižek 2006a:244-245), but it is about lack – all one has is the text, or all one has are two frames: things *are* what they appear.

What is the difference between parallax and différance? Parallax is the shift in view from desire to drive. Drive is fully conscious of the lack (where the *object a* is lack itself); is fully conscious that all there is is text (there is no outside text) and that one is always already part of the picture one seeks to interpret or understand<sup>14</sup>. This is not that different from Derrida's interpretation that all there is is text and context of which one is part (Derrida 1997:158ff). Thus the shift in view is an awareness of minimal or pure difference and that what appears is an appearing, and thus the fact that they are what they appear, BUT without this appearance being haunted by spectral Otherness, Žižek would argue. What Žižek is accusing Derrida of, is that with his idea of différance as both difference and deferment (Derrida 1982), together with the idea of trace, he brings in a spectral Otherness of a past that was never present and a future that will always still come (see Derrida 1982:12.21). Žižek is accusing Derrida of non-linking linking (relation – non-relation) the appearance of appearance (text/writing) to reality or the Other or actualization via the trace – a spectral Otherness.

But Derrida's idea of the trace is not a link as it is clearly a past that was *never* present and a future that is *a/ways* still to come, and thus there is not a direct link – only a haunting of a link, as Žižek rightly argues: a spectral Otherness. The question is, can one do without this haunting of the ghostly Otherness?

Does Žižek not have a similar spectral element in his materialist theology as he calls for a return to faith, but without reference to god? In other words, a return to an unbelief as a pure form of "belief deprived of its substantialization – the "unbelief" is still the form of belief, like the undead who, as the living dead, remain dead" (Žižek 2007:26). What is the difference between Derrida's spectral Otherness of the trace and Žižek's undead? The Other for Derrida remains dead/absent as he argues that the supplement always is the absence of

---

<sup>14</sup>See Žižek: "Materialism....resides in the reflexive twist by means of which I myself am included into the picture constituted by me" (Žižek 2006a:243).

presence (see article in *Of Grammatology*, 'That Dangerous Supplement...' Derrida 1997:141-164) and the *pharmakon*<sup>15</sup> is always the death or poison of presence.

Yet Derrida argues that faith is the only way to cross the desert, the desert of the infinite desertification of language, the name of God (Derrida 1995). His faith, or his trace of Otherness, is also without any substantialization just as Žižek's undead.

Žižek links his materialist theology directly with Christianity and specifically Paul's interpretation of the Christ event. What Žižek denies are that the specters that haunt his materialist theology are not that different to the specters of Otherness in Derrida and thus Derrida's direct acknowledgment of these specters in his concept of the trace are more helpful, specifically when taking his idea of deferment into consideration when interpreting the Christ event, as indeed Christ has come, but Christ is also still to come: the second coming. The kingdom has come, as the event has happened, but it always still remains to come as well in full completion. Thus in the Christ event there is both difference and deferment. Derrida's *différance* is thus more helpful in interpreting these Christian texts materialistically than Žižek's parallax.

The cross is indeed deconstruction, the death of God, and thus one could say that the cross of Christ is loss as *object a*, which drives the Christian church, but this drive is impassioned by the lack or the desertification of language (God) and this desert can only be crossed in faith and hope. How can lack impassion faith and hope if it is not haunted by the trace?

Prayer as an act of faith is not addressed to the Other, as Žižek suggests (2006a), but prayer as expression of faith (without substantialisation) has the ability to cross the infinite desertification of language. It is faith not in anything concrete, substantial or actual, but in what was, but never present and what is always still to come. Thus prayer, directed towards both the minimal difference as well as the deferment in the hope of what is *always* still to come, provides the impetus for the leap of faith – the true decision (*Entscheidung*): the ethical Act/divine violence.

The only way to truly unplug (Žižek 2000:123ff) from the system, that is to move beyond the aporetic circle where the option is to persevere with one's desire, but in persevering one falls victim to the Imaginary fixation (Hurst 2008:340-341), or stated differently: the only way to move beyond transforming the divine violence into a new state-founding violence, is via an active-passive or non-violent violence of divine violence. What this means is, not active (violent) in the name of some higher good or goal, but neither passive as in non-activity, but *Gelassenheit*. This is a *Gelassenheit* of the autodeconstruction of *différance*.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Derrida's discussion on the *pharmakon* which is Plato's interpretation of writing as both remedy (that which preserves presence), but also poison (that which destroys presence) (Derrida 1981:99f).

This non-violent violence of divine violence or the Act can be explained by understanding the violent demand of Jesus to his disciples: “if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes even his own life – he cannot be my disciple” (Žižek 2008:487). This has to do with our being part of the structural violence of the big Other and the only way to move beyond or to unplug from this, is via hatred. Hatred is the first reaction to the violence of the state/system, the violence of the socio-symbolic network. This hatred that Christ demands is “not a kind of pseudo-dialectical opposite of love, but a direct expression of what St. Paul, with an unsurpassable power in 1 Corinthians 13, deployed as *agape*, the key intermediary term between faith and hope: it is love itself that enjoins us to “unplug” ourselves from the organic community into which we were born...” (Žižek 2008:487). This echoes Lacan’s argument that the only truly ethical Act is love<sup>16</sup>. “The domain of pure violence, the domain outside law or legal power, the domain of that violence which is neither law-founding nor law-sustaining, *is the domain of love*” (Žižek 2008:488).

This unplugging as an act of divine violence or an ethical Act as being in the domain of love will be further unpacked by bringing the above ideas into conversation with Lacan’s discourse theory (Lacan 1991). This unplugging begins with an awareness of the desire of the other, or in terms of the above discussion it begins with a shift in view from desire to drive. Thus beginning to hate one’s father and mother is a hatred of the symbolic order (the big Other). It is a reaction to the objectification of the self through the desire of the Other. This is the first reaction to the excessive violence of the state-founding, state-maintaining violence.

I will begin by exploring the Genesis (Genesis 3) story of fallen humanity. The story of the tree of knowledge can traditionally be interpreted as a primal fantasy<sup>17</sup> to explain the lost paradise. In the first section of this article it was argued that it is here where the rotten apple is to be found, because this is the traditional interpretation of the Genesis narrative as the story of paradise lost. The strange thing is that what is believed to be the way to regain entrance to paradise, in this traditional primal fantasy interpretation, is to repeat the original sin, which is to seek to have knowledge of the good and thus to be able to oppose evil, and once all evil is eradicated humanity could return to the lost paradise. In other words, the story was never actually read, but it was interpreted as this primal fantasy of lost paradise and that somewhere hidden is the key with which to regain access to paradise: the state of harmony. The key was believed to be knowledge of good and evil. One can read this story differently, namely as a creation story that seeks to explain why things are the way they are,

<sup>16</sup> For Lacan the true ethical Act is motivated by love and not law (Hurst 2008:329)

<sup>17</sup> “The primal fantasy represents what occurred at castration in the terms of a narrative of possession and loss. This fantasm thus consoles the subject by positing that s/he at one point did have the phallic Thing, but that then at castration, it was taken from the subject” (Sharp2006)

and part of this creation story is to explain why humans are the way they are: divided subjects in Lacanian terms. The Genesis story is thus not a primal fantasy story, or a master discourse of the loss of the signified, but a revelation of the 'real' – the decentered, 'naked self'" (see Meylahn 2010:7).

Placing this story into Lacan's discourse theory, one can argue that in the position of the agent you have the fruit of knowledge (Meylahn 2010:7) as the object of desire, namely that which will bring humanity into union with its Creator. The supposed gift of this fruit is knowledge of good and evil ( $S_2$ ) this will be in the position of knowledge which imparts the ability to classify things as either good or evil thus giving the subject mastery over the other ( $S_1$ ). This is the master signifier ( $S_1$ ) that will cover up the shortcoming or the absence between Creator and creation, namely mastery over others/creation<sup>18</sup>. Yet, after eating of the fruit Adam and Eve do not experience themselves united with the Creator, but on the contrary they experience themselves divided and separated: naked. The consequence of this eating (disobedience) is castration as they are expelled from paradise (Meylahn 2010:7-8). Genesis 3 can thus be read as a narrative that reveals to humanity its 'true' state where being banned from paradise is not because of some lost object, but because of a state of truth, namely the truth of the gap between Creator and creation, and that this separation is essential for the subject to exist. Thus if one would place this story into the Lacanian discourse formula, in the place of *truth* under the bar is the barred self seeking to be like God. Above the bar, in the position of *agent*, is the fruit in the place of *knowledge* ( $S_2$ ); is the knowledge which the fruit in truth offers – not the knowledge of good and evil, but the knowledge of pure difference/difference. Thus the *product* of this discourse is  $S_1$  – the master signifier as a naked barred I, which is linked to the truth of the discourse: a naked barred I, seeking eternally to bridge the gap, by seeking the lost object *a* as in the desire. This is why history repeats itself in an ever perpetuating cycle of violence. The question is, how can one unplug from this cycle of violence? The way to unplug is, as Žižek has argued, to shift the view (parallax) from desire for the lost object *a* to a drive where the object *a* is loss, that is to say the naked self is accepted and does not seek to overcome the symptom of being naked but embraces its symptom: nakedness. This unplugging would be an Act of divine violence.

Lacan's discourses also help one in interpreting both capitalism and the various fantasies that capitalism creates so as to continue as dominant discourse, and this is the background that needs to be interpreted to understand how the Christ discourse is an Act of unplugging from this fantasy and thereby transversing the neo-liberal perversion.

---

<sup>18</sup> See Verhaeghe 1999:89-98 interpretation of the master signifier.

In Lacan's capitalist discourse one discovers that capitalism, or rather the capitalist market, is the hidden dominant discourse. In the discourse of capitalism the subject becomes an agent of the market which is in the position of the truth of the capitalist discourse (Meylahn 2010:3). If the subject is the agent of the market then, as Lacan argued, every individual is really a proletarian in the global capitalist discourse (see Declercq 2006:75). Yet, the subject will not accept being an agent (slave) of the market and therefore a fantasy needs to be created to convince the subject that s/he is "actually" free and not a slave of the market, but that on the contrary the market serves the freedom of the self. Thus the truth of the capitalist discourse needs to be ideologically covered up and this is done by creating a fantasy that offers another truth, which the subject will accept and thereby unaware remain an obedient agent of the market. The fantasy that is created is that the truth is the object of desire, which are the objects of production. The subject believes s/he is free and is an individual subject in his/her own right if they are convinced that they are free to choose what they desire: the objects of desire. Thus this fantasy proclaims: you are what you desire/consume (see Declercq 2006:75). The subject is thus no longer enslaved to the market as its agent, but is enslaved to the objects of production (the objects of desire that are believed to be freely chosen) (Lacan 2001:415). The self (identity) is dependent on these objects, for example, the car I drive, the house I live in and the labels of my clothes say so much about me and tell the truth of who I am: I am a successful business man. But who defines or decides what objects are desirable? Who decides which Jeans are fashionable? The anonymous big Other decides what is desirable via fashion magazines, etcetera. The Other defines what is desirable, what car is essential for your unique identity, what clothes will truly make you into the man you want to be. The Other decides what is desirable, and therefore it is the Other who tells me who I am. This situation, where the Other tells me who I am, is the discourse of the hysteric, and as is typical of the hysteric it continues because the self is never satisfied with the answer the Other gives. S/he is never satisfied with the object of desire that has been identified as desirable by the Other (Fashion) and the moment s/he has this object it loses its desirability, because others also have it and therefore it can no longer be the one thing that makes me unique. Yet, this disappointment does not result in insight into the fantasy of the market, but rather the self believes s/he has made the wrong choice of object and thus frantically continues to ask the Other: what makes me desirable (who am I)? And the Other continues to answer, thus continuously producing new objects of desire/consumption, which is exactly what capitalism needs: continuous production. So this is a very effective fantasy that keeps capitalism going (see Meylahn 2010:4-5).

Žižek calls this "the explosion of the hysterical capitalist subjectivity that reproduces itself through permanent self-revolutionizing through the integration of the excess into the

“normal” functioning of the social link” (Žižek 2006b). Another fantasy, the discourse of the university, there is the continuous production of knowledge in never ending attempts to reduce the other to the same (Meylahn 2010:4-5), which is exactly what capitalism needs: continuous production of knowledge that can be sold. In the university discourse the position of truth is filled with a master signifier as a single fundamental truth to which everything can be reduced (Meylahn 2010:5). This truth ( $S_1$ ) addresses itself and communicates through its agent ( $S_2$ ) knowledge systems, theories, paradigms, etcetera. The position of the other is filled with the potential converttee or the unknown object which is addressed by the agent ( $S_2$ ) with the intent to reduce it to the same of the knowledge system based on the foundational truth. Thus the other is the object that needs to be *begriffen* (understood) or *ergriffen* (taken) by reducing it to an idea of the truth (*begriff*). The product is a subject (subject matter) that is definable, but the problem is that there always remains a *différance* and thus this process is also continuous with ever more production of knowledge, which in turn can be sold, and thus the capitalist discourse thrives on the university discourse as much as on the discourse of the hysteric. The rise in fundamentalism as well as the rise in strong theories from various self-help manuals to conspiracy theories all helps the market as these are highly popular.

How is it possible to unplug from this fantasy and thus truly challenge the capitalist discourse in an Act of divine violence?

Is there a way to break out, to truly Act with an Act of divine violence and return, not to the primal lost paradise, but accept the truth of Genesis: namely a barred naked self?

Lacan suggests the discourse of the analyst as a discourse to return to the naked barred self, and Žižek has argued for parallax – to turn from desire of the lost object *a* to a drive for loss as object *a*.

In these last paragraphs I will unpack the discourse of the analyst as a Christ-discourse in light of texts from the Gospel of John.

Christ is not the agent of this discourse just as the analyst is not the agent of the discourse of the analyst (Meylahn 2010:8). The agent of this discourse is the desire for pure difference as was explained above; it is to move from desire to drive where the *objet petit a* is not the lost object, but loss itself. The agent is a desire (drive) for pure difference without destroying difference. To unpack this in Lacanian terms, it is to preserve in the true self's desire without this desire becoming an Imaginary fixation; or in Žižekian terms, it is the drive of an Act of divine violence without this violence becoming mythic (state/law founding violence). As was discussed above, the only way to persevere in one's desire as drive or the only true Act as divine violence is love. Only true love as Christ revealed it: love of enemies; love of the other as other without reduction to the same. Only the unconditionality of grace

which demands nothing in return, can embrace difference without including it in the same of some totalization (Meylahn 2010:8).

Thus love and grace are the agents of this Christ-discourse that has the ability to take the truth of the Genesis discourse seriously, namely the naked self, without attempting to escape from the symptom or heal this symptom of nakedness, but truly embrace the symptom.

Love and grace are also the desires of Christ just as pure difference is the desire of the analyst. This desire is revealed in the new commandment (John 13:34). The agent or agency of this discourse (ethical Act), divine violence, is only possible in the suspension of laws of knowledge of good and evil as was discussed above. Thus one can say that the Act is only possible in a context of grace (*sola gratia*) and the agent (agency), Act or divine violence is love, love beyond knowledge (1 Corinthians 13) of good and evil. Yet love and grace are also the desires of the subject (the analysand) who desires what the analyst desires. The subject needs to be loved (accepted), and not just loved because s/he has the phallic thing, but loved unconditionally (out of grace alone).

What truth drives this desire? What truth drives this discourse? It is the truth revealed in Genesis; the truth of pure, naked difference or *différance*. The truth that *drives* this discourse is not the lost object *a* (the fruit of knowledge of good and evil), but it is knowledge of difference: pure difference or *différance*. Thus in the position of truth of this Christ-discourse one can put the knowledge of *différance*. In the Gospel of John, Christ describes himself as the truth, the way and the life (John 14). This truth cannot be interpreted as a master signifier, but if anything it is the servant signifier that washes feet (John 13) that reveals a way to act, a way to live. What content does Christ give to this truth? He commands those who seek to follow him to love, as this will be the only criteria whereby they will be known as belonging to him (John 14:21). What kind of love is this? Christ responds and says: 'no greater love can anyone have than to lay down his life for another' (John 15:13). This laying down of one's life can be given a Derridian interpretation (see Meylahn 2010:8) as radical hospitality, which means to open yourself to the other to such an extent that the other becomes host and you hostage in your own home (Derrida 2000).

Žižek would probably not agree with this kind of emphasis on the other, as pure difference is not about the other, but about the contradiction within the concept itself. Thus it is not about opening the home to the other, but about becoming aware of the inner contradiction of the concept home which breaks the home open; that the home is contradicted in itself and that there is this unbridgeable gap, lack or pure difference. Thus the home is destroyed, not by the other, but by its own contradiction. The home (self) is broken open either by pure difference or *différance*. This is acknowledged and loved without the horror of either trying to reduce the other to the same or seeking to cover up the lack with



some object a. Žižek argues for parallax of the view that transforms desire for the lost object into the drive where the object a is loss itself. This knowledge of pure difference deconstructs the self, exposing it as naked and vulnerable, and this is the *truth* of the knowledge of pure difference or différance.

Love and grace as agents of the 'truth' are communicated to the 'other'. In the position of the 'other' is the debarred self, struggling to cope with its symptom. Yet in the light of the agent (love and grace) it realizes that it does not need the phallic thing of desire to be loved and accepted. "Love and grace thus deconstruct the demand of the (law) of all the phallic signifiers ( $S_1$ ) that have enslaved the 'self' in the master discourse; deconstruct the hysterical desire for ever more knowledge ( $S_2$ ) of 'self'; and deconstruct the discourse of the university's need to reduce the 'other' to the same (a)" (Meylahn 2010:8).

This deconstruction or transversing of the demands of the law, of the desires, of these fantasies created to protect the capitalist discourse, releases the self to recognize itself in the light of love and grace and the product of this is a new identity ( $S_1$ ). This new identity is not a master signifier, but a servant signifier, an "I" that embraces (loves) and becomes its symptom (naked) as it realizes that, in the eyes of the 'other', they are loved without any signifiers: as naked" (Meylahn 2010:8).

This Christ discourse offers a non-violent violent transversing of the capitalist fantasy as an ethical Act, as a divine violence beyond the violence of state-founding and state-maintaining, but as an Act of love.

## References

Benjamin, W., 1996, 'Critique of Violence, in P. Demetz (ed.), *Reflections; Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, trans. E. Jephcott, pp. 277-301, Schocken, New York.

Buck-Morss, S., 2009, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh

Critchley, S., 2008, 'Violent thoughts about Slavoj Žižek,' *Naked Punch* 11, Autumn free supplement.

Declercq, F., 2006, 'Lacan on the capitalist discourse: its consequences for libidinal enjoyment and social bonds, *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 11, 74-83

Derrida, J., 1981, *Dissemination*, transl. B. Johnson, Continuum, New York.

Derrida, J., 1982, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Harvester, Brighton.

Derrida, J., 1995, 'Sauf le nom' in J. Derrida & T. Duoit (ed), *On the name*, transl D. Wood, J.J. Leavey & I. McLeod, pp. 35-88, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

- Derrida, J., 1997, *Of Grammatology*, transl. G.C. Spivak, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore
- Derrida, J., 2000, *Of hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, trans. R Bowlby, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Derrida, J., 2002, Force of law: The “mystical foundation of authority”, *Acts of Religion*, trans. M Quaintance, Routledge, New York, pp. 228-298
- Hurst, A., 2008, *Derrida vis-à-vis Lacan: Interweaving deconstruction and psychoanalysis*, Fordham University Press, New York.
- Lacan, J., 1991, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII 1969-1970*, trans. R. Grigg, Unpublished manuscript.
- Lacan, J., 1992, The ethics of psychoanalysis: 1959-1960, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed J-A Miller, trans. D. Porter, W.W. Norton, New York.
- Lacan, J., 2001, ‘Radiophonie’, *Ecrits*, pp. 403-448, Seuil, Paris.
- Meylahn, J.A., 2010, ‘Holistic redemptive pastoral ministry in the fragmented transit hall of existence’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), Art.#426, 9 pages. DOI:10.4102/hts.v66i1.426
- Meylahn, J.A., 2011a, ‘Seeking the good (peace) of the republic: the violence against and of difference in defining the public space,’ *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32(2), Art. #505, 10 pages. Doi: 10.4102/ve.v32i2.505
- Meylahn, J.A., 2011b, ‘Religion and modernity in a secular city: A public theology of différance,’ *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(3), Art.#961, 8pages. Doi:10.4102/hts.v67i3.961
- Sharp, M., 2006, Jacques Lacan, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, viewed 30 may 2009, from: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/1/lacweb.htm>.
- Verhaeghe, P., 1999, *Love in a time of loneliness: Three essays on drive and desire*, Rebus Press, London.
- Žižek, S., 2000, *The Fragile absolute – or, why is the Christian legacy worth fighting for?*, Verso, London.
- Žižek, S., 2006a, A Plea for a return of différance (with a minor pro domo sua), *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Winter), 226-249.
- Žižek, S., 2006b, ‘Jacques Lacan’s four discourses’, *Lacan.com*, viewed 02 June 2009, from <http://www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm>.
- Žižek, S., 2007, Towards a materialist theology, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical humanities*, 21: 1, 19-26

Žižek, S., 2008, *In defense of lost causes*, Verso, London.