

ESSAY WRITTEN TO THE CORPOREAL TURN: CROSS-DISCIPLINARY REFLECTIONS ON
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Disability, Appearance, Politics

A comment from theology

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Abstract: Within western political culture an increasing emphasis has been placed on the anesthetization of life. One of the victims to this change is people with disability. People with disability now recognize a shift in political attitude. While change in “look” and “posture” earlier were tolerated as part of a human register of appearance, a shift of lifestyles and fashioned icons of beauty coupled with a logic of how citizens ought to be given status frame disability into a negative aesthetics of appearance. Since aesthetics and political discourse become more closely related and form presupposition for “aesthetic citizenship”, there is a need to think in new ways of how to contribute to a liberation from this kind of political suppression. From the perspective of the need for a social repair (Arendt), my contribution will first discuss how the politics of appearance frames disability negatively. Through considering the contributions of Rancière, Merléau-Ponty, Sartre, and Kearney I show how an understanding of disability reduced to a merely `negative ontology, can be contrasted with a philosophy of the negative that takes the negative as embodied possibility. In the last part of the essay I consider how the philosophy of negativity can change how we “judge” disability.

Keywords: disability –political discourse, embodiment, negative possibility, phenomenology, the sacred.

1.0 Introduction: The need for a religious critique of the politics of appearance.

Within western culture an increasing emphasis has been placed on the de-traditionalizing and aestheticisation of life.¹ Some of the victims of this change are people with disabilities. People with disabilities now recognize a shift in attitude. While deformity and change in “look” and “posture”, in western culture could be tolerated as part of a human register of appearance, a dramatic shift of lifestyles and fashioned icons of beauty, coupled with a logic of how citizens ought to be given full status as citizens now frame disability into a negative aesthetics of appearance.² People with disabilities often experience themselves taken as freaks, deviants, or even monstrous in appearance to the “normal” citizen.³ To avoid stigma and marginalization we need to develop a more critical reflection of how the politics of appearance functions. Curiously, we now have only small resources to help us consider what is genuinely harmful or positive in how political culture discerns between images of appearance. Since aesthetics and politics become closely related there is a need to think in new ways of how to contribute to a liberation of people with disabilities.

According to Rancière, known for his recent critique of the politics of aesthetics, politics will play itself out in the paradigm of relationship between stage and audience, a discourse of presence and a symbolic figuration of collective legends.⁴ The political myths will favor some forms of presence as more desirable, produce “canonical forms”, law on kinship, while others are considered as transgressive and monstrous forms.⁵ Rancière also mentions how a demonstration of consensus, presumes a connection between images of able-bodied citizenry, and meaning produced of agentive and attractive bodies. Having a particular occupation determines the ability to take charge of what is common to the community. Aristotle stated that a citizen is someone who has a part in the act of governing and being governed.⁶ Some bodily forms turn out to be prejudicially linked to a certain favor of how

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London, New York: Continuum, 2005). P.13, 18.

² See the critique of Hughes on visual culture and Tickosky and Michalko, on appearance in disability studies. Cf Bill Hughes, "The Constitution of Impairment: Modernity and the Aesthetics of Oppression," *Disability & Society* 14, no. 2 (1999). Rod Michalko, "The Excessive Appearance of Disability," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)* 22, no. 1 (2009). Tanya Titchkosky, *Disability Images and the Art of Theorizing Normality* (Toronto Routledge, 2009). Yet, there lacks a critical discussion of the politics of appearance.

³ Rosemary Garland Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).³ 7. Bill Hughes, "Wounded/Monstrous/Abject: A Critique of the Disabled Body in the Sociological Imaginary," *Disability & Society* 24, no. 4 (2009). "Appearance" P. 27

⁴ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. P. 17.

⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy* (London, New York: Verso, 2006). P.39

⁶ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. P.12

real citizens look and act by their capacities, while others are considered less representative. So, if we take secular politics to revolve around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, the government of the strongest.⁷ people with disabilities will mostly fall short of being included in such a description. If having a particular occupation determines the *possibility* to take charge of the common, people with disability will often be negatively charged, and fall below the level of ability required to be considered as normal citizens. Though people with disabilities are not one group they are often considered as not possessing the abilities to take part in governance. In history, in literature and drama, they are burdens, heterogenous organisms, freaks, that conform to the norms of monstrosity and defilement rather than being acknowledged as humans that contribute to citizenry.⁸ As the political also becomes mutual with the aesthetic mirrored by regard of fulfillment of desires, screened in media and information culture, citizenry becomes utterly charged with the morality of individual actualizations.⁹ When we take into consideration how actualization in aesthetic post-modernity is almost equal to *this* charge of the political possible, disability cannot be anything than the ontological negative possibility.

According to Hanna Arendt, one of the tools to achieve repair of the predicaments that frame marginalized people into a negative ontology is to do a conceptual work on 'wordliness' and 'facticity' and reframe. New narration can entail the character of a therapeutic setting that liberates. To Arendt this also puts appearance at the centre of interest. Aesthetic taste and political opinion are related because they are concerned with judging the particular according to its appearance rather than purpose.¹⁰ Political judgment involves representation through images and equally important, the use of phenomenology.¹¹

⁷ Ibid. p.13; ———, *Hatred of Democracy*.P.44

⁸ Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). C. Barnes, "Theories of Disability and the Origins of the Oppression of Disabled People in Western Society," in *Disability and Society: Emerging Issues and Insights*, ed. L. Barton (London: Longman, 1996). Cf. also the new literature on media framing of disability; Charles A. Riley II, *Disability & the Media Prescriptions for Change* (Lebanon, New England: University Press of New England, 2005).

⁹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*. P.1.

¹⁰ Confer Shaap Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, Routledge Innovations in Political Theory (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2005). P. 69 Ref. to Arendt Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).P.221, Ernst Volrath, "Hanna Arendt and the Method of Political Thinking," *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977). P. 182, Ronald Beiner, "Interpretive Essay:; Hannah Arendt on Judging," in *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Beiner (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).P.111

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, "Lecture's on Kant's Political Philosophy," in *Hanna Arendt, Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Beiner (Brighton: Harvester Press,, 1982). P.69

With the insight that a peculiar dualism of aesthetic citizenry and negativity ontology of possibility is a core phenomenon of the framing of disability this essay will try reframe disability by discussing 'possibility'. My aim is not to discuss the politics of appearance in a broad perspective, but to let the perspective of repair guide us. As it will be clear in section 3.0. , critical reflexivity will work best in a dialogue between a religious understanding and a secularist. Since theology has a tradition in handling 'appearance' and relate it to phenomenology, we will try to let a different perspective supplement the present dominant views (above). Theology has the capacity to move in-between the philosophy of religion, anthropology, ethics and phenomenology and supplement discourses.

2.0. Disability, secular appearance and the script of inability.

Linguistically an 'appearance' is the sensory or phenomenal aspect of the act, state, condition, manner or style, in which a person or object manifests itself before a public. More archaic, an appearance can mean an apparition, epiphany, or advent in time and space of any psychic or bodily character. Yet, we can also frame appearances into absences, privations and negations of what we take as a possible and pleasant appearance. Central in our discussion is how appearances are negotiated. As Arendt says, appearances are judged by politics.¹² Appearances can be what political culture conveys to discern between the worldly, the factual, fiction and the unreal by the use of imagination. For the reason that there exists reflexivity (Arendt), we have the possibility to disrupt the dominant discourses, and to invoke a reflexive discourse of appearances.

Hence, the politics of appearance is nothing but the realization of the construction of political judgment in the intermediary between the political discourses of the real, authenticity, fiction and critical reflexivity. If the politics of appearance exists in this intermediary, politics can achieve closures of phenomenology and it can open it. Hence, the distribution of political phenomenology of the visible and the invisible, that simultaneously determines the stage of politics as a form of experience, becomes one of its centers.¹³ There is now time to let phenomenology deliver the arguments.

If we take disability in post-modernity as variedly framed by a discourse of the living, experience and possibility, where "the political" regards not only participation, but the

¹² E.G. note 11 this essay.

¹³ Cf. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.p.13,18

fulfillment of actualizations, we must ask more to the point of what this does to the interpretation of disability. In recent philosophy 'possibility' is not necessary equal to the actual. There is a possibility to think absences and negativities within 'possibility'. Only when possibility is regarded as equal to its actualization and realization, will negative possibility retains a negative social ontology. By terming people with disabilities as tragedy of actualizations, they retain the dualistic framework of possibility. This is the path I challenge.

As known to many, Husserl was the one that provided phenomenology to disrupt the modernist metaphysics of actualizations and to introduce a new reflexivity of lived life. In his authorship a phenomenon is equal to an "appearance".¹⁴ This is also so in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Richard Kearney. The stance that Arendt took was partly provided by Husserlian phenomenology. These authors show a genealogy of reframing of appearances aimed to heal modernity from its dysfunctional oppressive ontology.

In my opinion, a decisive achievement is how Merleau-Ponty applied the term 'lived body' to offer an alternative mode of describing human possibility, draw worldliness and facticity nearer and strike a death-blow to a dualism of possibility.¹⁵ While the body in western tradition is usually taken as "tomb, temple or machine"¹⁶, or, more modern are considered as corpses, to be rewarded, used, punished, or controlled¹⁷, there is also embodiment. For Merleau-Ponty, embodiment retains the full structure of the world that I live through the body. The retrieval of this dimension, made it possible to formulate a critical theory of society, and reframe our modernist ontology.¹⁸

Being a contemporary friend of Jean-Paul Sartre, that started the battle of appearances, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre shared some vocabulary and would refer to "mere appearances" (Merleau-Ponty) or "flat appearances" (Sartre)¹⁹, as terms for the way we abstract the lived body into a lesser body. Yet, while Sartre discusses appearance by how we negates the

¹⁴ Toru Tani, "Appearance," in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics* (London New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2010).

¹⁵ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1995), Richard Kearney, *The God Who May Be a Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), — — —, *The Wake of Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

¹⁶ Anthony Synnott, "Soul, Temple, Machine and Self: The Social Construction of the Body," *British Journal of Sociology* 43 (1992).P , 80, 84.

¹⁷ David M. Levin, "The Body Politic," *Praxis International* 9 (1989).P.239

¹⁸ Ibid.P.240

¹⁹ J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Methuen & Co., 1958).P.

world to achieve a subjectivated world, seeing the world as a necessary produced “nothingness”, Merleau-Ponty saw the field of the negated not as “nothing”, or “empty”, but entailing a bodily primordially that structures the world with us in it.²⁰ In opposition to an abstract discourse that takes error, sickness, madness as naked appearances that separate us *from culture*, embodiment makes the world structure come to the core of consciousness such that human culture originates in it.²¹ To describe the political in full and our relations in public, we need the phenomenology of the lived body. We can understand the political as the free assembly of yet, unfulfilled bodies.²² Hence, he could achieve a different notion of that which we usually negate. His distinction is of great relevance. For Merleau-Ponty that which is negated, taken as a negative possibility, is not a strict gap or hole in being, but a “void”, a negativity that paradoxically is a ‘*texture*’.²³

In my opinion, his criticism touches hard on the problem we address. If one omits embodiments for ‘corpse’, abilities become easily related to a fictional discourse of the real that sets loose from the facticity of how the world is structured. With the structure of negative structure (above) forgotten and left behind, discourse can abstract abilities from corporeal frailty being and construct subjects ideally as the sole and able containers of their own acts. Rather than being a void where sickness, impairment and madness is part of facticity’s structure, corpses, can be seen as supply of abilities to be authenticated in introspection, or rituals of inclusion. However, if we proceed from ‘embodiment’ and not from ‘corpse’, the world can be seen as to impose its structures and rhythms on us in a far more complicated and sophisticated manner.

To explain this, we should note how there are aspect of negativity we entrust not to be below the level of ability. The phenomena of birth, pregnancy, infancy, even disease, madness, retardation, can be implemented into ‘negative possibility’, but they are not to equate with negative *ontology*. A person who cannot see or walk is not a disabled person, but will perform a negativity that lay in wait to be realized and be effective by an other(ly) relation outside him/herself. According to the criticism of disability studies it is the frame-

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. P.77-87, critique of Sartre, Especially p. 80, 87, 88..

²¹ ———, *Phenomenology of Perception*. p. 124,130. Cf the article. Francois Lapointe, "The Evolution of Merleau-Pont's Concept of the Body," *Dialogos* 10 (1974).p.145,141,151

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the College De France 1950-1960* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970).P.82

²³ Cf “void” in Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. P. 80, compare 88: “ One does not arouse being from nothingness, ex nihilo, one starts with an ontological relief where one can never say that the ground be nothing, .. A philosophy of the negative cannot start from “pure negation”.

work of restrictions ranging from individual prejudice to institutional discrimination that makes us see others as unable to take charge of what is common to the community.²⁴

People with disabilities do not experience themselves as unable citizens. The framing of disability into an appearance of not-able- bodies is ontologically false. If we take Merleau-Ponty's criticism as analogous to the critique of the negative framing of disability in political culture, negative possibility, is not dualistic to possibility, but is part of the world's structure.

How can it be that nothingness in modernity is made totally empty? As mentioned above, Sartre saw the impasses of the modern discourse that conflated body with corpse. To Sartre, one of the reasons for why the body becomes negated is secularization. Sartre first considered this as a progress, but saw also the dysfunctions and losses it provoked.²⁵ The political taxonomies that take possibility as equal to its actualizations, easily occupy the place of religion. When how the structure of the lived body falls apart for the sacred, we feel a loss of humanity. For this reason he sought to find repairs, but was soon cast into aporias.

According to Sartre, the body of mine makes its appearance, *negatively*, and only subsequently to the encounter with 'the other'.²⁶ 'The other' is ontologically prior to the appearance of any ontological dimension of the body.²⁷ Sartre states: "*If the essence of the appearance is an "appearing" (un paraître), which is no longer opposed to any being, there is a legitimate problem of the being of this appearing"....so that this "being of the phenomenon, cannot itself be the phenomenon of being".*"²⁸ If one by the essence of an appearance means 'substantia', Sartre says, it itself would never appear. All one can say is that its being is: "It is". Its only manner is *to be*".²⁹ In Sartre's terminology the phenomenon of being is transphenomenal and more fundamental than knowledge. The being of the appearing cannot be identical with the appearing itself. Hence, appearances themselves speak of an other reality available.³⁰ Sartre is of the opinion that consciousness of a phenomenon encounters a being which it is not, but other, so that possibility rests on our passivity. Cit: *The shock of the encounter with the Other is a revelation in emptiness of the existence of my*

²⁴ Mark Priestley, "In Search of European Disability Policy: Between National and Global," *ALTER, Revue européenne de recherche sur le handicap* (2007).P, 64.

²⁵ J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Methuen & Co., 2003 [1958]). P.20

²⁶ Cf. the commentary to Sartre in: Richard M. Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body*, *Phaenomenologica* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).P. 60

²⁷ Ibid. P.58-59

²⁸ Ibid. Cit from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. P 14

²⁹ Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment Some Contributions to a Phenomenology of the Body*.P.61

³⁰ Ibid.P. 62

body,....”³¹ Sartre comes in these passages to see possibility as relative to an anonymous emptiness (void, my addition) that awaits an Other. Sartre does not frame ‘body’ into a self-contained ability, but sees ‘actualization’ as preceded by ‘negative possibility’ (my notion).

However, in his most insistent chapters, Sartre can say that no-being is a product of human subjectivation of being. When we consider a blind to lack sight, it is by operation of construction. No-being does not exist, it is not a gap of being, but a product of culture.³² According to the critique of Sedan, the aporia of Sartre’s argumentation, is double: “*he reifies non-being, claiming that it is, and second, he identifies it with “human consciousness itself....”*”.³³ That is why his attempt failed. A question that remains unanswered is the relation to religion and the Other. Could we, from Merléau-Ponty and Sartre, proceed to think the void, the texture, that is not empty, in a theological key? This is what Richard Kearney tries to do.

3.0. Richard Kearney’s civilizational discourse of appearances – a new politics.

For Kearney, religion has the prerogative of making appearances into a device for thinking possibility and therefore also anthropology. Kearney knew Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and worked in their environment, but came through Ricoeur, proponent of religion and theology to consider appearances through a religious phenomenology. First: There is the Other that refuses to be framed into analogies of any appearance and disrupts our dreams of negating her/him. Second: The other is not absolutely other and distant, but intervenes in a relation and can be half-way conceived by analogous imagination. Third: By a dialogical criticism that traverses between otherness and the discourse of the sacred as manifest in the often neglected everyday appearances, we can retrieve a phenomenology of possibility that is not oppressively dualistic to marginalized persons or groups.

To understand the depth of this position we must take into consideration how postmodern theology makes a new critique of how “orthodox theologies” have imagined God. Classic Western theologies often attributed to God a specific essence (substantia), conflating with the political form, and came to betray the other placed at “society’s” underside. The primordially of appearances became subordinated to an explanatory discourse of God as the beautiful perfect self-actualizing power. As God is the emblem of

³¹ Ibid. p. 103 cit Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Cit p.419

³² Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale an Essay on the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960). P.141

³³ Ibid. P.140

self-contained able perfection, the political doxa that comes to characterize citizenry surrenders disability to the metaphysics of inability. Hence, in recent theology there is a sharp division between theologies that put God as emblem of actualized self-empowered possibility and theologies that see God as ineffable, weak, kenotic, and emptying his power into the world by a desire for carnal relation.³⁴ Thus, the use of negation, expresses the process of finding a way to prevent theology from becoming one more flattened expression of the finite. The discourse of kenosis, the emptying of own powers, divine and human, is aimed to avoid “*a polarizing of inaccessible divine substance and manifest persons.*”³⁵ New theology tries to omit the discourse of divine analogy that conflates God with the ideology of the self-actualized perfect, with other frames and scripts. Sartre’s argument (above) that appearances cannot proceed from ‘substantia’ can be considered as a supplement to this critique. But for the same reason he did not see the resource that religion might supply.

To Kearney, what is absent from the discourse that makes God into an emblem of political power and perfection, is the notion of God turned towards us through the weak and vulnerable. In Kearney’s philosophy of religion, the sacred appears in everyday epiphanies, in faces or facial relations, so that God becomes a primordial event beneath us, asking for help, but also transfiguring us. Hence, we must interpret negative possibility otherwise.

To explain this position, we must recall how Nicolaus Cusanus, an author that Kearney relates to, applied the noun and verb “posse” (n. ‘possibility’ v. ‘to be able’) in combination with ‘esse’ (lat.: to be), to create the theological neologism ‘possest’ to frame ‘possibility’.³⁶ To Cusanus, God is infinite in the sense of being the actualization of all possibility, yet is ‘ineffable’ as such. Cusanus combined a thinking of the sacred in everyday life, with a vision of actuality where God appears in the plural possibilities of existence. This is combined with an affirmation of religion as universal phenomenon that gives a practical wisdom of embodied life. The central notion of Cusanus is how ‘posse’ is placed above the god of esse or substance (actuality). Possibility exists eternally within God and since it is *prior to its actuality*, God, as ‘possest’ is “everything” which is able to be.³⁷

³⁴ Cf, Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (Routledge London and New York, 2002)..P.

³⁵ Oliver;Turner Davies, Denys, ed. *Silence and the Word Negative Theology and Incarnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2002).P.134

³⁶ Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978). P.39-40,

³⁷ Ibid.P.133-135,151,especially p. 79

For Kearney, if we supply this original thinking, with the thinking of how God empties himself in a kenotic movement, we can give a different interpretation of 'possibility'. Making a slight twist to Cusanus' theology, Kearney reads the saying, in Ex. 3.14, in a different key. While "orthodox theology", often reads it in a substantial way, as "Ego to on", (Gr : "I am Being itself"), and so the guarantee of every terror of actualized analogy that we idolize, Kearney omits the reading to mean: "I am who is able to be".³⁸ With eschatological possibility separated from its present actualizations the way is open for thinking negative possibility, kenotic movement, and the primordially of embodied existence together. With negative possibility as the primordial relation, God can be thought of as that which calls and summons us from the seemingly empty places of the least and the vulnerable; Cit: *The divine always comes and summons through the face of the most vulnerable, in the cry of the smallest of these, so that God become dependent on our help and care to transfigure others.*³⁹ Ethically, the summoning power of God is an occurrence that is primordial to being and anything that is and becomes valued to be an actualized appearance. Following Cusanus' original intention, Kearney is of the opinion, that the religions entail a wisdom of embodied life as the negative space for the sacred to appear in. Like Merléau-Ponty's notion of the political, 'community' is the embodied relations that exceeds nationhood.⁴⁰ For Kearney, religion is emphatic of a politic organized around embodiment as an unfulfilled reality and inter-subjective mode of experience that structures a practical wisdom.

To cope with the admonition that the discourse of the sacred is only strictly religious, Kearney takes an argument from Merléau-Ponty. While the phenomenologist regularly is interpreted as an agnostic, Kearney shows how Merléau-Ponty could affirm this religious language of kenosis, eucharist communion and everyday phenomenology in a strictly agnostic manner. From a philosophical viewpoint the phenomenologist offers an intriguing interpretation of Eucharistic embodiment as recovery of the Divine within flesh. He quotes Merléau-Ponty to say: "*There is a sort of impotence of God without us, and Christ attests that God*

³⁸ Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*.p.75-78, Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2003).p.207.27,227-8..Kearney, *The God Who May Be a Hermeneutics of Religion*. See especially Richard Kearney, "The God Who May Be," in *Questioning God*, ed. Derrida;Dooley Caputo, Mark (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).P.153-163

³⁹ Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*.Cit p.228 the smallest of these do not signify any social status, but is a metaphor of sacredness, that relocates people in the networks of appearances

⁴⁰ Richard Kearney, "A Pilgrimage to the Heart," *Religion & the Arts* 12, no. 1-3 (2008).

is not above, but beneath us, meaning that we do not find him as a suprasensible idea, but as another ourself, which dwells in and authenticates our darkness..."⁴¹

Surprisingly, he also quotes Sartre to have seen a conflict between his atheist understanding of appearances and his friend's, Merleau-Ponty's. The quotation signals how Sartre may have acknowledged the incongruency between taking 'being' as not containing its own being *and* subjectivation as a power that negates our being.⁴² Kearney quotes Sartre to say: *"Didn't Merleau- from time to time, think he perceived some sort of transcendent mandata "hidden in immanence" within us. He congratulates a mystic for having written that God is below us, ,,, He dreamed of this almighty that would need men...Everything is there: the discovery and risk of being below us, a gigantic beggar woman clad in rags, we need only an imperceptible change for her to become our task: God, the task of man."*⁴³

4.o. Disability, social repair, the politics of appearance.

To me, this argumentation is neatly fit for a project of social repair. In distinction to a framing of appearance that takes the ensemble of citizens as constructed through the actualization of beauty and able bodies, we have a choice. With possibility relieved from actualization, possibility floats free from the "is's of being and what we normally acknowledge as to "take charge of the common"(Rancière). With God being a tacit power beneath us asking for our care and transfiguration of the other, the other draws nearer in facticity so that our political future depends on how we relate. Here, embodiment entails the meaning of an unavoidable facticity and is both a sacramental texture and the empty space that none is privileged to occupy. By how possibility dwells in each instant as "a may be", no matter how lowly, religious, or profane, the framework to conceive of disability and to conceive of a politics of appearance is radically changed. If negative possibility entails a "may be", for us all, and primordial embodiment not at first established corpses self-contained with possibility, disability will not fall under the level of ability. With 'posse' placed before any actuality, and intrinsic to negative possibility, any way of taking possibility as equal to its political actualization, *will impoverish political culture.*⁴⁴ Ability is not a property of persons or bodies, more for some than for others, but is first to be rendered as

⁴¹ ———, "Merleau-Ponty and the Sacramentality of the Flesh," in *Merleau-Ponty at the Limits of Art, Religion and Perception*, ed. Kascha;DeRoo Semonovitch, Neal (London,New York: Continuum, 2010). Cit. P. 155.

⁴² Cf the above meaning of Sartre page this essay.

⁴³ Kearney, "Merleau-Ponty and the Sacramentality of the Flesh." Cit. P.158

⁴⁴ de

negative, awaiting to be realized as ‘a may be’, as Kearney says. Democracy is not the ensemble of self-contained agents, participating for letting their desires be fulfilled. Rather, by how “the may be” is actualized in multiple forms, ability can appear in what form whatsoever, what we can possibly imagine, and beyond it. Or to quote Cusanus: *“In Him not-being is everything which is possible to be. And so, He creates not from any Other, but from Himself; for He is everything which is possible to be.”*⁴⁵

This is to suggest a new definition of the political. If we take negative possibility as the primordial ontological situation, the ‘conditio humana’, that politics relate to, we can propose democracy to be that empty place in culture nobody is privileged to occupy. If the divine proposes ability to become actual in whatever possible form, the divine does not favor a beauty, one notion of possibility, to be stated against what one takes as freak, ugly, sublime or monstrous. For God there is not monstrosity or deformity. For God there are empty places, non-justice, non-grace waiting to be filled with self-emptying, powerless, kenotic and carnal love, by giving a space for it.

By first recognizing our powerlessness, vulnerability, brokenness we find ourselves summoned to recognize God in whatever possible structure of the world that materializes before us, appears, inconclusive of sickness, madness, impairment, all the frailty weaknesses, so that we continuously have to reconsider practices. We have to let the vocabulary of distinction of social differences and fragmentation, privileges and misfortune be tested and re-conceptualized a thousand times. The personification of appearances as inscribed into a political (and religious) field is only possible to grasp through innovative imagination that confronts appearances negated to conform with political idolization of the beautiful able or whatever we try to fit into our notion of how others should appear and charge the political. It is the task of political culture, the stage, to comprise so many thought experiments as possible. Democracy is a place for human appearances to “may be”, manifest in the yet indefinite, become being in time and space. And “to let be”, we must see persons through the mirror of the sacred, not only in the religious “form”, but by a phenomenology that takes the eschatological structure, the plurality of the not yet, of wordliness into us. As Arendt implied, political judgment is best when it is mostly mundane and takes the plurality of wordly facticity into its judgments. If God is kenotic immanent, the wordly, or profane, is not that area emptied of sacred texture, but is the place where subdued selves and non-

⁴⁵Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa*. Cit P. 151

realized "may-be" becomes the textured 'void', the political point of departure, for charging political possibility as such. Hence, to dissolve orthodoxies of appearance and to retrieve the different voices subdued under a too biased politics of appearances, religion is an indispensable part of the postmodern politics of repair.

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