

# The Ugliness of Banal Truths

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The paper deals with an analysis of the controversial novel *Truismes* by Marie Darrieussecq. In this work, the author sensitively maintains an oscillation between the plausibility of truth, hidden behind metaphors and symbols, and the implausibility of the whole story in its individual components. The occurrence of ugliness as a decisive aesthetic dimension is continual, graded into almost all its shapes and forms, until it finally fills in the entire space and time of the fictional story. The astonishing horror of the author's aesthetic world does not lie in the brutality of the language she uses, but rather in the similarity of the real and the imaginary, in the way she makes cruelty appear visible though the fictional narrative. The paper thus shows that classical aesthetic views fail when used as tools for understanding the nature of the aesthetic world modelled by Darrieussecq. | *Keywords: Banality, Everyday Aesthetics, Marie Darrieussecq, Truismes, Truth, Ugliness*

When we feel the being of certain objects in our mind, we say we are seeing beauty... when we then feel the feeling of being in itself (sense), we call it the feeling of sublimity, we then call the sublime what causes the effect of this sense, i.e., the observation of the feeling of the being itself of a certain object that we feel.

## 1. Introduction

These words by the Slovak aesthetician Karol Kuzmány capture the essence of the aesthetic experience and the process of artistic creation. The artist shares with the audience her journey in the aesthetic world in a comprehensible way and thus offers recipients an opportunity to undergo the process of aesthetic experience, not only by feeling truth through beauty, but also by sensing their own transformation into human beings.

What can the philosopher grasp from accepting the offer to live in an aesthetic world constructed by an artist? How will she be able to feel the existence of the objects represented, embodied, marked, symbolized by a work of art? How does

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she cope with the 'truths' she must at first uncover via beauty? What will she think after she observes her own state of consciousness? Will her consciousness and thinking change? Will the philosopher heed the warnings of contemporary art or will she say once again: 'postmodernism has failed'?

In 1996, the controversial and scandalous book *Truismes* by the young author Marie Darrieussecq was published in France. Already the title evokes the 'game' that the author engages with her readers. In French, *la truie* means the sow, while *truism* is a philosophical term denoting a banal, self-evident truth a philosopher should not even deal with as she should be interested in the truths of being. The book's title in English is *Pig Tales*. Everyday truths, composed into a fictional story, are expressed in everyday language. Even the very essence of the story – the transformation of a human being into an animal, is nothing original in the history of literature. It has always metaphorically referred to a being, for whom it was impossible to be or become a human being. The author creates a stock story that depicts possible fragments of everyday life for thousands of people. It is a metaphor of a person who lives an insignificant, uninteresting life, bordering on elemental survival – even though the story takes place in a luxurious environment. The person as well as her life are simply 'out of the interest'. The reader is getting a signal: this story is about someone else, it is not about me.

## 2. Aisthēsis and Participation. Real and Unreal

What is the nature of the aesthetic world created by the author of the novel? Her colloquial, ordinary language refers to well-known, banal 'truths' that can occur every day, anywhere and to anyone in the world: humiliation, physical and psychological violence, political terror, an Orwell-like organized society, the loss of human dignity, the consequences of 'playful rationality' in the form of power and its victims, the abuse of people and the taking away of their 'human face', the exclusion of these (non)people and their being confined to the margins. So far, it is the real world, known and understood by the author, symbolically represented by a constructed story. Its fictionality and improbability arise when a common metaphorical labelling of a human being through an animal term (pig) begins to take place in the story by gaining new physical changes. The transformation of a human being into an animal in the literal sense is unrealistic, but in the context of fiction it acquires logically necessary contours. The reader distances herself from banal truths by entering the logic of fiction. The distance felt by the recipient is reinforced by the personal traits of the protagonist, who is poorly educated, pretty, and unaware of the 'rules' of life, and naively refuses to earn money for her beauty and youth, is unwilling to make a 'career', to sacrifice and lovingly fulfill the needs of her loved ones and to complicate other people's lives with her selfish interests. She is a *healthy girl*, according to her partner Honoré, a junior high school teacher of philosophy, who preferred her to clever and complicated high school girls. The author sensitively maintains an oscillation between the plausibility of truth, hidden behind metaphors and symbols, and the

implausibility of the whole story in its individual components. Every time the author directs the readers to consider the truthfulness, possibility or credibility of the situation, emerging from the individual experience of the readers, and forces them to compare and to try to place the real situations (of particular people, real space and time) into the indicated, thus incomplete, space and time, she leads them back to sense the implausibility of the story depicted and confirms its fictionality with new unreal details related to the transformation of a person into an animal.

The retention of fictionality and implausibility evokes the necessary distance and 'disinterestedness' of the reader, which is, in Kant's spirit, disinterestedness in the real existence of objects. The transformation into an animal cannot really happen. However, the author does not allow disinterestedness to turn into indifference. The fictional story shocks the reader's experience. What causes stress is that the author is moving on the edge between the everyday truth that is metaphorically depicted – affecting everyone as everyone has their individual and unique experiences with everyday truth – and the fictional horror that is shockingly described, which emerges slowly and sneakily in the daily banal situations of the protagonist's existence. The setting of the story is only hinted at and little specified. Although the perfumery boutique has a name, the imagination and experience of recipients is necessary as it is not localized. Similarly, no other places are located (the protagonist's apartment, her birthplace, the psychiatric hospital, the clinic, the cathedral, the city, etc.). Uncertainty and impersonality are also present in relation to characters who do not have names, and thus are faceless – e.g. the mother, doctor, customers, co-workers, or random people entering the story. Only her two partners, Honoré and Yvan, have names, as well as Edgar, a politician who embodies power through its debauchery and arrogance. There is also the character of an African marabout, a guardian of faith, a shaman who has a symbolic and at the same time metaphorical designation. Neither space or time are specified. It is only at the end of the story that Paris and the end of the third millennium are mentioned. Filling in the missing information unnoticeably 'engages' the recipient and forces her to unconsciously change her attitude: from a 'disinterested', non-participating observer who is not affected by the story, she becomes a participating one. By completing the missing information, the reader creates her own experience of the novel. At first in small things: the readers imagine a luxury perfumery; Aqualand – a place for relaxation and entertainment – then the election campaign; the posters; the winners, but also the rules set by the new authorities; a psychiatric hospital; a cathedral; catacombs. Eventually, readers are faced with a detailed description of the forms of humiliation and abuse they 'know about' from movies, literature and made-up or real stories told by television. Helplessness, injustice, cruelty, violence, etc. also have their records in the reader's experience. The perceiver gradually participates in the formation of the real-unreal story. Page by page, the reader creates her own 'experience' by complementing possible and fictional information. The position of the reader as a non-participating observer changes to a participating co-sufferer, and the banal truths of 'others' begin to affect the reader intrinsically.

It does not matter whether the recipient moves in the discourse of reality or in the discourse of fiction, whether she only wants to 'fill in' the missing information with the known reality, or let herself be carried away by fantasy and continue to multiply fictional and unlikely situations. The effect of horror, disgust and ugliness is the same.

The author fundamentally changes the valence of aesthetic experience with respect to traditional aesthetic approaches that recommended not to cross the borders between the two types of discourses, the theoretical and the aesthetic, or more precisely, between cognition and aesthetic assessment. Either the recipient finds herself in a world of observation and cognition and applies the corresponding 'rules', or she finds herself in a fictional aesthetic world. The released emotions of both worlds had a different basis, intensity and also outcome. Darrieussecq envisages a different approach. By creating an effect of resistance and disgust, that e.g. Carolyn Korsmeyer takes to be not aesthetic emotions but real emotions (1999, p. 53, 57), she moves the reader's experience to a position of constant switching, i.e. to the oscillation between real and aesthetic discourse, to the constant transition between a possible world and an unlikely, fictional and unrealizable world. The result is not only an increased intensity of the aesthetic experience, but also a mental attunement, and finally an awareness of the similarities and differences of the world of truth and the world of beauty (it is rather ugliness in this case). Released emotions of disgust and resistance acquire an aesthetic and noetic dimension. They are characteristic emotions in both the real and the fictional discourse, because they accompany the experience of a real as well as a fictional world. The distinctiveness of both worlds is enhanced by the author's playing with the ambivalence of meanings that are tied to both real and unreal discourse. The author deconstructs the fluidity of the ideas of both the literal meaning of a 'sow' and the metaphorical designation of a 'sow'. In the European cultural context, the meaning of the word 'pig' is linked to the designation of a source of pleasure of various kinds, but also to a greedy man, a man longing for power who does not shy away from using any practices to achieve the very egoistic goals. M. Darrieussecq's 'sow' deviates from the usual contexts. The sow is rather a victim of the piggish treatment of people's depraved selfish tastes, and the human being becomes an animal only physically. Although the author leaves rapists and executors of 'piggish' practices physically in human form, she sharpens the insurmountable contradiction between the physical form of a human being and an animal, between piggish tastes and beastly behaviour. Both lines lead to the 'death' of the human being. Even selfless, kind, non-egoist behaviour is rewarded by the loss of the human being and selfish, predatory, violent, brutal behaviour is completed by the loss of humanity.

### 3. Ontology of Ugliness

This increased aesthetic effect is caused by the fatal conflict between beauty and ugliness. The unsolvable opposition between beauty and ugliness, beauty, ugliness and good, beauty, ugliness and truth is the dominant aesthetic reality emerging from the background of the possible reality that the author offers to

the recipient. The consequences of external beauty (the physical beauty of the protagonist, her appeal: “[...] Honoré said that with a body like mine and such a blooming appearance, I would get all the ritzy boutiques I wanted” (Darrieussecq, 2000, p. 8)) as well as mental beauty (modelled by her ethical attitude, refusing to degrade her love as a source of income, or to take a side income for her work) are terrifying or even monstrous. Beauty evokes degrading and violent reactions from the environment. It irritates power, provokes possession, brutal treatment, destruction and leads to the brutal ‘Neronian’ murdering of young and beautiful people by representatives of power out of sheer entertainment. The entrance of ugliness as a decisive aesthetic dimension is continual, accurately depicted, graded into almost all its shapes and forms. It begins with unnoticed physical changes and ends in terrible disgust, monstrosity and even devilishness. Ugliness is equally created physically and mentally, until it finally fills in the entire space and time of the fictional story. In this case, the author guides the readers very precisely. She draws their attention to details, to individual shades of ugliness, lets readers enjoy all the emotionality that follows, makes returns to the already described ugliness, which she enhances with a small novelty and does not allow them to achieve a new harmony or even to overcome ugliness in their consciousness via a new beauty and form. Paraphrasing Adorno: “Powerlessly the law of form capitulates to ugliness” (Adorno, 2002, p. 46). In the grey everydayness, the effect of banal truths changes the norms of external and internal beauty. The protagonist firstly observes the loss of body shape by fattening. The shapeless body acquires an inhuman colour – pink. The deformed proportions of her body are complemented by hairs, by walking as a quadruped, by a characteristic ‘smell’, etc. These forms only confirm deviation from human norms: her face turns into a snout, she acquires a tail, instead of hands and feet she has trotters and she loses fingers. In line with these changes, she loses her sense of inner stability and identity, and with each humiliation and abuse, she becomes more and more a sow and identifies more and more with her animal form. Any attempt of the protagonist to make a change to a human being (e.g. with the help of new clothes from Honoré and a visit to Aqualand; working on Edgar’s pre-election poster as the embodiment of the pre-election slogan ‘*for a healthier world*’; in the privacy of the hotel Formula 1 with the help of a dumb understanding of a nameless African immigrant; reading books in the attic of the psychiatric hospital as an escape from life threatening situations; in the crypt of the cathedral) is ‘rewarded’ with a new and even more brutal humiliation. Returning to a human form has its formal features: she regains speech and human bodily curves, her hair begins to grow, she loses weight, washes regularly, stops stinking, and becomes physically and mentally human. However, the beauty she only can gain with considerable effort, becomes again an obstacle for her and thus is cruel and monstrous. Overcoming ugliness in a new form and harmony – by restoring the order of beauty – is impossible. On the contrary, a new form of ugliness reinforces and develops. In contact with people, the protagonist always takes the form of a sow and is also humiliated like a sow – she burrows in rotten and wormy meat, eats her own vomit, digs into excreted excrement, causes disgust and fear in the surroundings with a

defensive reaction (either in a shelter for animals, a prison or a psychiatric hospital), or she escapes to the catacombs between rats and crocodiles or to the crypt of the cathedral.

Classical aesthetic theories allowed art to depict the ugly. Aristotle and, reacting to him, Lessing or Rosenkranz (see Rosenkranz, 1990) emphasized the importance of portraying the ugly as a way of intensifying the effect of art. The ugly, perfectly depicted by art, loses its effects in the whole of the work of art. It is only an 'imperfect' beauty, an intermediate stage, which eventually results in the confirmation of beauty. All the forms that Rosenkranz describes in his 'metaphysics' of the ugly (deformation, disharmony, formlessness, disruption of the unity of form, incorrectness and disruption of the conformity of the idea with reality, etc.) are aimed at this. Greguš also conceives the ontological status of the ugly as the opposite of beauty (respecting aesthetic principles of form but also content). According to him, "whatever is confused and imperfect, and in relation to us disturbs the harmonious activity of our mental powers and insults the feeling of senses, but also of reason and even more the moral and social feeling, rightly deserves to be called 'ugly'. Therefore, there is no beauty in obscenity and depravity..." (Greguš, 1998, p. 166). Greguš envisages not only an artistic, a fictional depiction or creation of the ugly, but also the (real) existence of the ugly. Both evoke resistance against and abolition of the harmonious action of mental forces.

In a sense, Darrieussecq goes beyond these classical conceptions and questions their productivity. For example, she enhances the ugly so much that it becomes a surplus or a deficiency (as in William of Auvergne) in the form of a thing, in its expediency. The protagonist of Darrieussecq's novel either loses some shape and elements of the human figure and expressions or shows increasing animal physical symptoms. She also testifies to Augustine's idea that the ugly is only a loss of the good in a thing. The author depicts the loss of good embodied in a person, in human behaviour, or in an action in a way that substantiates ugliness itself as something necessary, independent, irrevocable, insurmountable by another harmony or by the possibility of 'gaining some more good'. Like beauty, 'good' is put into question. The good deeds of the protagonist are 'balanced' by an increase in violence and abuse, the verbally declared 'good' by the powerful represent a refined arrogant brutality. Ugliness exists on its own. The author gives it a shape, form, faces, situations, she gives it existence but also a form of being. The effects of ugliness do not disappear either in the integrity of the work, in the perfection of artistic language, or in response to aesthetic experience meant as a 'promise' of a new harmony. In this sense, the book is a continuation of the thinking of modernity. In this context, Adorno writes: "The harmonistic view of the ugly was voided in modern art, and something qualitatively new emerged. The anatomical horror in Rimbaud and Benn, the physically revolting and repellent in Beckett, the scatological traits of many contemporary dramas, have nothing in common with the rustic uncouthness of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings. [...] That is how completely dynamic the category of the ugly is, and necessarily its counterimage, the category of the beautiful, is no less so." (Adorno, 2002, p. 46). Just as modernity has become 'disliked art' compared

to the ideals of classical aesthetics, so should Darrieussecq's work be 'disliked'. Its 'indecent' lies not only in the fact that the well-known truths are shouted out in public, thus violating the norm of a 'decent' society (and society punishes the perpetrator of the taboo appropriately!), but also in preventing the possibility to overcome the ontological status of ugliness. Postmodern art, to which *Truismes* belongs, is cruel. "But ugliness and cruelty are not merely the subject matter of art. As Nietzsche knew, art's own gesture is cruel. In aesthetic forms, cruelty becomes imagination: Something is excised from the living, from the body of language, from tones, from visual experience. The purer the form and the higher the autonomy of the works, the more cruel they are." (Adorno, 2002, pp. 49–50). The astonishing horror of the author's aesthetic world does not lie in the brutality of the language she uses, but rather in the similarity of the real and the imaginary, in the way she makes cruelty appear visible through the fictional narrative.

#### 4. Reinterpretation of Existentialism

The transformation of the protagonist into a sow is in many ways reminiscent of Kafka's novella *Metamorphosis*. But it is neither a paraphrase of nor an allusion to it. In Kafka's work, the metamorphosis into an insect causes a shock to the changing individual and people around him. It happens unexpectedly, all at once, without warning and it disrupts any possibility of communication with the world, real life and people. The man-insect remains alone, thrown into an existential, unsolvable situation, without the chance to communicate. The insect's condition is a borderline situation in which the man-insect retrospectively searches for the possible causes of the transformation, but does not understand them. The state of the man-insect disrupts former identities, ties, and communication. It is a state in which a hidden, long-acting truth is revealed to the insect-man. Here too, however, the path to uncovering the truth is mediated by the abolition of beauty (the human form) and intense experience of ugliness, disgust and resistance. In the borderline situation, the insect-man can no longer make decisions like a human. He decides like an insect.

In Darrieussecq's novel, the transformation into a sow is gradual, visible in every new detail. The change is recognized by the protagonist as well as by the people around her. Some even sympathize with her, warn her of the 'goal' of her transformation and give her advice on how to deal with it. Each new trifle that brings the protagonist closer to a sow is noticed by the protagonist herself, as for example the blue spots or bruises that, after being stung by customers, gradually change into more breasts or dugs, the thickening of the skin, the decreased sensitivity of fingers and increasingly deformed small hooves, the loss of articulated speech, or the emission of unarticulated sounds.

These slowness and continuity of changes denote the insignificant, barely perceptible, but as a result of the complete transformation, frightening effect of banal truths in their monstrous ugliness. The problem is that this almost unnoticeable change, even if perceived (a pink spot on the cheek, the hair

growth, a bruise on the chest) does not cause any corresponding action or activity on the part of the protagonist. The next day she performs exactly the same activity as before. She communicates with the environment in exactly the same way, does not change her attitude towards her own existence nor towards people. It is a slow, detailed 'killing' of the human entailing a 'disinterested' observation from the victim herself. From a psychological point of view, it is the position of a 'victim' of violence, who is not able to say 'no' to the abuser, and is only passively 'watching' the 'increase' of the manifestation of violence on her own body and soul. From the distance provided by her self-reflective attitude, she observes the 'simulacra' of humiliation, use and abuse, and killing.

The author offers two forms of metamorphosis of the human being into an animal. In a sense, these forms of metamorphosis metaphorically designate two possible options for solving terrifying existential situations. The first is an involuntary, gradual and willingly uncontrollable and unstoppable transformation resulting in a reconciliation with a new identity. The price is reasonable and can metaphorically be understood as the death of the human being. It is based on escaping from society, on total isolation. Although the identification with the new, animal identity is the acquisition of freedom, of independence from the rules of torture and humiliation, it is a path of loneliness, loss of beauty and acceptance of ugliness as its starting point. The second metamorphosis is an early recognition of the danger of the transformation; the person can control it with her own will, so that only from time to time does she allow herself to escape from the prison of human rules and become a bloodthirsty, free animal. This is represented by Yvan's transformation into a bloodthirsty wolf, killing an innocent man. The wolf does not carry the hidden pains of man. He is a wolf in the true sense of the word because his communication is killing. The sow escapes from the human world, but does not endanger the human world in any way, nor does she endanger the new animal world. The bloodthirsty wolf is a threat to humans. While the female sow feels like a human in both physical forms, the male wolf in the form of an animal feels like an animal whose only way to communicate is to kill people. Yvan turns to the moon once per month to put on wolf's fur and get terrible fangs. The woman-sow turns to the moon once per month in the denouement of the narrative to find her human form for a while and to be able to write her 'ordinary' (?) story.

The method of metamorphosis (the loss of the original identity and acquisition of the new one) has an existential dimension too. It is a borderline situation that is not coming suddenly but 'dragging' slowly. It is rather a sequence or multiplication of existential situations whose smallness (although they are observable) does not evoke any necessary knowledge that would become the basis for free choice and action. 'Small' truths are not recognized as 'Truths'. They are negligible. Everydayness dictates that we do not pay attention to them, that we do not react to them, that we only notice them. The author re-raises the question of the relationship between truth and Truth, existence and Being, evidence, observation and Knowledge, knowledge and Action. She



recalls Sartre's understanding of truth, which is based on the premise that truth is human, because "[k]nowledge of whatever form is a relation between man and the world around him, and if man no longer exists this relation disappears" (Sartre, 2004, p. 26). The transformation of a human being into an animal (as a symbolic expression of a person's death, forced by existence, ultimately chosen) can mean an escape from those truths that are unbearable, ugly, hurtful. "Existence precedes essence", writes Sartre (2007, p. viii) and it is therefore necessary to proceed from subjectivity. Can a change in subjectivity also mean a change in 'truth'? Darrieussecq offers a cruel opportunity to change the protagonist's identity as the only way to free herself from devastating truths: her death as a human being and her exclusion from community, a complete loneliness, and the acceptance of new animal identity but in isolation from people. Sartre purposely espouses subjectivism. He says that "[s]ubjectivism means, on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject to choose what he will be, and, on the other, man's inability to transcend human subjectivity" (Sartre, 2007, pp. 23–24). According to Sartre, truth is actually 'people's event', it is formed by them by totalization, unification or synthesis of individual experiences. Darrieussecq ironizes and deconstructs a similar reasoning. In the logic of her fiction, truth as 'people's event' is ugly, dramatic, disgusting and nasty, and it is a source of humiliation and violence. Both 'truth' and 'good' kill people directly, or indirectly as accomplices. Elsewhere, Sartre recalls that both knowledge and truth are a dialectical process that presupposes the 'internalization of the external' on the basis that the subject becomes a part of the object (and vice versa) and this experience is "the very experience of living, since to live is to act and be acted on" (Sartre, 2004, p. 39). In Darrieussecq's case, this existentialist position is reinterpreted. In her understanding, too, existence precedes essence and truth depends on the experience of life, on existence. However, it is possible to destroy (or come to terms with truth) not by 'fluid rationality', or by a manifestation of Dialectical Reason (Sartre, 2004, pp. 19–20) but by leaving the human world, by transformation and by a new identity. The world of Beauty and Truth are strictly distinguished by Sartre. Beauty is possible only in the imagination and is cancelled by the onset of the discourse of reality or Truth. Darrieussecq also questions this alternative of thinking. Her aesthetic world parasitizes on the real in such a way that the real world is fulfilled almost with an unreal, fictional world. Completing reality with fiction fundamentally changes the status of Beauty, Good, Truth and the subject itself.

##### **5. Criticism of Traditional Aesthetics from the Position of Art**

Darrieussecq irreversibly breaks the classic myth of the unity of truth, beauty and good. Beauty is monstrous, it evokes rather a mythical horror, and its consequence is not only a 'loss of the good in man' (Augustine), but his irreversible liquidation. If we, in the mental attunement that the author deliberately evokes in her work, applied a classic aesthetic knowledge of the type: beauty is in the father's ratio to good (Plato), beauty and good have the same basis (Aristotle), beauty is an exposition of the truth of being

(Heidegger), the truth of the self-conscious absolute spirit is embodied by art (Hegel), the idea of the absolute and relative beauty of Diderot, or beauty as a convention in Descartes, etc., we would only exacerbate the destroying irony. Classical aesthetic views fail when used as tools for understanding the nature of the aesthetic world modelled by Darrieussecq. The cruelty of her aesthetic construction lies in the drastic gesture of destroying this myth, which has always served as a hope for human beings to recognize the various forms of evil and truths of human existence and being. As an ideal and a hope, this myth has enabled people to cope with the cruelty of truisms, to overcome their ugliness by striving for harmonization and humanization. In the newly acquired form, i.e., in beauty, a human being can find an impulse to create, to live, to reveal the very meaning of being. In *Pig Tales*, 'beauty', combined with renewed love and marked by ugliness, is the same as disgust and brutal violation of all 'normal' norms. The protagonist's partner Yvan acquires a beautiful physical body during the transformation from wolf to man. He is also physically 'beautiful' in the wolf's skin, but he cruelly and brutally kills people. He loves the protagonist both as a sow and as a human. The bestial wolf and the sow are playing in bed. In relation to such a 'reality', Adorno's claims seem more effective, when he says that art "must take up the cause of what is proscribed as ugly, though no longer in order to integrate or mitigate it or to reconcile it with its own existence through humour that is more offensive than anything repulsive. Rather, in the ugly, art must denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image." (Adorno, 2002, pp. 48–49). The author creates 'almost' a reality (Feitosa, 2001, p. 44) that is not justifiable even as an aesthetic phenomenon.

Darrieussecq undresses truth and changes it into the ugly and evil. The truth in her 'game' acquires an unexpected 'added value'. It is (or becomes?) ugliness in itself, in its essential destiny, not only as the opposite of beauty – form, but as the embodiment of being itself in its truth. Even 'Dasein' is disgusting, brutal. Truth is rolling in the dirt, and just as a new order of beauty cannot be established, so a mythical order of truth that could be uncovered into beauty and good cannot be established.

## 6. Change of Understanding of the Tragic, the Sublime, the Comic

*Truisms* do not give the reader a chance to experience catharsis, although several layers of the text create tragic conflicts. A dominant conflict is that between the individual and an Orwell-like organized society, where everyone watches everyone. It is an ironic completion of the ideal of 'freedom' and individualism. It is a society that wants to get rid of all the 'small', inadaptable, 'ignorant' to participate in the 'games'. The position of the individual is not given by individual free choice, but by the 'fatal' and thus unchangeable action of the invisible hydra, whom everyone serves, everyone is afraid of, and who can ultimately destroy everyone – the former rapist as well as his victim. Powers alternate but, according to the rules of 'playful rationality', they are producing new victims all the time. Even the marabout

is eventually the victim of a game of power and turns into a horse. Edgar, the embodiment of power, is defeated and turns into an elephant and a mentally insane becomes a guardian of the faith. The 'stability' of values, morals and the socially desirable good is guaranteed by mass media, controlling people and manipulating their behaviour in accordance with Orwellian power. Institutions such as 'Animal Rights' or 'For a healthier world' have a similar 'impersonal' status, guiding people's 'moral' action into well-defined and predetermined lines. The institutions take care of the 'cleanliness', or more precisely, of the liquidation of all those who are 'out'. For example, the institutions do not provide food or caregivers to the psychiatric hospital, in which the 'waste' of society is concentrated, and spend the saved money on programmes such as 'For a healthier world', 'Animal Rights', etc. It is here that the conflict between beauty and ugliness ironically escalates, but it also dramatically breaks the classic unity of beauty, truth and good. The protagonist finds herself in a psychiatric hospital as the only way out of total degradation. But even here and in the form of a 'sow', she must defend herself from becoming food for starving convicts and from losing her newly acquired identity in 'usability'. The author 'intensifies' the existential experience of tragicness, for example by eliminating the tragic turn and removing its suddenness and unexpectedness. The author does not rely on an unprepared and surprised victim. On the contrary, the victim can slowly observe her own murder, her own killing, every day. The time when the subject can realize the 'borderline' of the situation as well as the possible turn, and thus the denouement of the tragic conflict, is left to herself. The sow herself must determine which 'changes' announce the borders of the transformation into another identity (the death of the human being). The transformation into a sow (the human death) does not really come as 'a tragic climax of the narrative tension', but as 'a necessary, practically obvious consequence of destinies' (Marcelli, 2002, p. 76). Would death be less tragic only because it concerns the 'most ordinary' people? The whole 'banal' life of the protagonist is tragic, shamefully and slowly moving towards a tragic end. Eventually, her attempt to seek solace in her mother, who constantly urges her to return in the broadcast (as an attempt to return to some stable and undeniable value), is devastating. The protagonist's fatal mistake is that for a while, in loneliness after the loss of her only beloved being (the wolf-human), she believes in humanity, only to eventually be turned to a new greed again. Her being and her existence in the tragic conflict makes her a murderer. She kills her mother and the deviser of her humiliation – she is a murderer and a victim at the same time. It is her final death in the form of a human and her final departure into the animal kingdom. Matricide as the climax of the tragedy represents purgation. However, this purgation is not aimed at the recipient, as in classical aesthetics based on classical art, but at the protagonist of the story. It is a 'Sartre's trap' for the recipient. Catharsis is impossible: neither as an establishment of a new harmony (of beauty, form, arrangement, unity), nor as knowledge of the truth, nor as a possible 'addition' of the good in things, nor as a renewal of the 'tragic spirit' by establishing the dominion of metaphysical truths.

The postmodern re-modelling of essential ugliness has not only tragic but also noble dimensions. The truth of being has traditionally been revealed (or uncovered) by beauty thanks to which it gained its shape and form. It descended in beauty from its infinity into an observable form through which it could be sensed for a moment (see: Kuzmány, 1838). In the sense and in the feeling of this sense, the subject can emerge from the boundaries of existence, her own unique experience, and transcend the finite or temporal. In the aesthetic world of Darrieussecq, truth is uncovered through ugliness. The oversizedness, absolute size, majestic monstrosity in the versatility of this world represent an overlap. The sublimity here lies in the temporary unrecognition of the new form, in the impossibility of establishing a new order of beauty–truth–good, but also in the signs of an increased disruption of the harmonious activity of the mental forces (see: Greguš, 1998). It is the overlap (or fall?) into... nothingness. The only meaningful ‘answer’ to such ‘transcendence’ is irony. Only irony can somehow allow the subject to step out of her own subjectivity (pace Sartre!) and reorganize her own experience at an ironic distance. (Compare in more detail: Sošková, 1998). But this is the task the artist assigned to the recipient.

## 7. The Emergence of the Philosophical World from the Aesthetic–Art World

By embodying multifaceted forms of the ugly, the author has intensified the aesthetic expression of the artificial world she has created and strengthened the aisthēsis. The ugly in its ontological status exists on the border between the real and the fictional, and its constant retention in the work of art by a multiplication of various and yet similar manifestations requires the recipient to transcend the real and the fictional discourse, what fundamentally changes the character of aisthēsis. The reader’s journey into reality reveals a total failure of beauty as a positive value, a desired ideal, a form by which the certainty of truth is confirmed, which leads her to scepticism and to question classic explanations of existence and being of truth itself. This sense of uncertainty and the inability to find a satisfactory answer lead the reader to confirm the doubts she has in the real world by participating in fiction. But even a journey in the fictional world, which could have been a hope for at least an ‘aesthetic’ confirmation of the traditional certainty of truth (in its beautiful form and good action), does not bring any ‘knowledge’. The failure of beauty and the revelation of its inability to show truth and good is confirmed and complemented by aesthetic fascination in fiction. Noesis, loosened by the fictional discourse and leading to the same conclusion, reinforces the experience of horror and ugliness in their essence. In the intensity of the experience of ugliness, the reader finds out the ‘similarity’, probability, ‘truthfulness’ of the two different worlds, which prevents or disrupts the possibility of the flow of philosophical thinking in a traditional way, as if the philosophical solution of the truths of life and the truths of Being did not exist. The philosophical understanding of beauty as a value is ironized; the good, as a rational realization of truth, is in its essence a violence that breeds both the

abuser and the victim. The philosopher must erase, disrupt the order of her thought experience, and start again. She has to get to the very sources of her thought, so that she can at least resolve the relationship between the individual and the universal, the unique and the general, the relationship between the truth of existence and the truth of being and discover the sources of free mind and free action. Notorious truisms are appalling. If she does not want to realize that truth is dirty, ugly, disgusting, and that truth is the evil that degrades a human being deep under the situation of an animal, she has to distance herself (and thus to acquire an aesthetic position!) from the world modelled by Darrieussecq. Notorious truisms can happen to anyone. They happen in ordinary everydayness. We can even observe them. Neither the tragic nature of aesthetic expression, nor the aesthetic intensity of ugliness, nor the ironizing play with ideals that the author offers allow the reader to experience catharsis. The banal truths that philosophy has excluded from its interest, by considering them 'low', or by tabooing them, have become 'metaphysical' in Darrieussecq's fictional world as she has given them sense. The artist 'puzzled' the philosopher: How is it possible to deal with 'small' truths, 'small' lives, destinies, 'small' evils, tiny violent manifestations? At which point do these banal truths turn into metaphysical ones, small life into universal destiny, and insignificant death into tragic resolution? The philosopher has to deal with it again from the beginning, i.e., post-historically. That is why Darrieussecq's work is, in the true sense of the word, post-modern. The completion of the reader's self-transformation cannot take place in the same way as in the classical work during its perception by cathartic purgation in contemplation. Self-transformation requires action. Not an imaginary, fictional, imagined, or thought act but a real one. The reader knows that to restore the order of truth, beauty and good can be done only by real (banal?) action.

When Krug was explaining Kant's importance for aesthetic and philosophical thinking, he emphasized that aesthetics is a propaedeutic to philosophy. With that in mind, we could contend that Darrieussecq's artistic creation was informed by her own aesthetic experience of reality (through the a priori forms of sense, space, and time), which made the free 'play' of fantasy, imagination, thinking and sensation possible in the first place. Only the aesthetic ideas she experienced in this way were embodied in the work of art. The world of art is then the 'marking' (through form) of the aesthetic world that is created. It is the embodiment of the reflective power of judgment, in which judgment is no longer only about sensations, but about the connection of the individual and the particular, and about communication, expression of concepts as well as ends and feelings. According to Kant, "[f]or beautiful art [...] imagination, understanding, spirit and taste are requisite" (Kant, 2000, p. 197). In art, it "must not be a pleasure of enjoyment, from mere sensation, but one of reflection; and thus aesthetic art, as beautiful art, is one that has the reflecting power of judgment and not mere sensation as its standard" (Kant, 2000, p. 185). This is why art can prompt us to transcend the world of aesthetic (subjective) judgments and lead us to the world of cognition, as well as to the world of reasonable action in the form of a moral maxim. Darrieussecq's book *Pig Tales*, in the embodiment of aesthetic ideas, frees the need for a philosophical knowledge of truth, good and beauty, but

at the same time represents a challenge to create and rationally justify a moral imperative that could guide particular human action. However, both philosophical knowledge and the norms of moral conduct are outside the work of art – in the attunement of the mind of the philosopher and the recipient and their readiness to act.

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