

Hammer Strokes

Europe's numerous bell foundries are dependent for their existence on the demand for bells for churches. While the design of the bell body has changed over time, the type of bell used in church towers today goes back some 500 years. The sugar loaf-bell, originating in Asia, was brought to Europe during the 13th century crusades. This design formed the basis of the distinctive ship's bell, which was introduced during the 14th century and has changed very little since. Bell manufacture involves decisions on such issues as the profile of the bell, the bell's fittings, the shape and weight of the clapper, the composition of the alloy, the design of the inscription and the ornamentation. Bell founders' assiduous efforts to produce church bells that were more harmonious and had longer reverberation times resulted, around the year 1600, in the smooth, symmetrical shape which persists to the present day. This type of bell is the starting point for Henrik Plenge Jakobsen's public artwork *Die Glocke*.

Die Glocke consists of a cathedral-style bell mounted on a brick base. The bell, cast in bronze at the German bell foundry Eifeler Glockengießerei in Brockscheid (in business since 1620), weighs 1700 kilos, has a diameter of 140 cm and a strike note of D. The inscription on the bell is a quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche: *Gott ist tot! Gott bleibt tot! Und wir haben ihn getötet! Wie trösten wir uns, die Mörder aller Mörder?* This quotation comes from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* of 1882 and is believed to be the first recorded proclamation of God's death. The typeface used for the inscription is an equally original choice since it's a replica of that used for printing the first mass-produced book, namely the Gutenberg Bible of 1454.

Die Glocke – installed in an open square next to Paderborn Cathedral – is a fairly sturdy piece of work. Offhand, it might well strike some as a send-up of the notion of public art. Not only is it a public sculpture of substantial scale and volume, but it is also cast in bronze, a traditional sculptural material. Moreover, the references to canonical figures such as Nietzsche and Gutenberg lend it further gravitas. On the other hand, the bell is, in a sense, a kind of readymade. Although produced specifically for

the Tatort Paderborn exhibition, the shape and workmanship of the bell doesn't differ from that of bells commissioned for churches over the last 500 years. The same can be said about the quotation from Nietzsche: so familiar as to have the marks of a readymade. The fusion of ready-mades – both in terms of the form and the symbolic import of the sculpture – means that Die Glocke comprises a more intricate dynamics than does the traditional public sculpture. It disrupts any straightforward perception and interpretation of the work that would baldly construe it as a doomsday bell or an atheistic assault on Christianity. It also suggests more complex relationships, under the influence of Nietzsche's philosophical stance.

The bell is one of the simplest sound-making devices invented, being a percussion instrument that emits tones when struck. Traditionally, the Christian church bell is used to mark the time of day or to summon worshippers to Mass, a funeral or other services. However, given the trenchant quotation from Nietzsche that it carries, this bell, when struck, harbours a further dimension. While a bell resonates upon being struck by the clapper, Nietzsche, by the same token, employs 'the philosopher's hammer' to sound out hollow belief systems and fossilized moral laws. To philosophize with the hammer is to uncover the hollowness and emptiness of our idols – just as when the piano hammer hits the string and you can hear if the note is off-key. At the same time, the destruction wreaked by the hammer also opens the way for the new, for new values. Instead of unfurling an ideal, unchanging world, Nietzsche's philosophy stresses transformation, process and becoming. So while on the one hand, Nietzsche, philosophizes with the hammer, smashing away and calling for a revaluation of all values, on the other he proclaims, 'the will to life', arguing that the world is in a continual state of becoming.

Viewed in that perspective, Die Glocke – a bell assailed from within by its own inscription – symbolizes the shattering of categories, concepts and mummified belief systems. Not in pursuit of a nihilistic agenda, but in an attempt to question and subvert the underlying genealogy of our values.

For now, Die Glocke is quiet. It's a sculpture and a bell invested with potential. It might be the new bell for the Cathedral ... But for now it is resting, only to sound again, to shatter again.

Pernille Albrethsen