

Beauty as a four-fold paradox

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In this study we will attend to the problem of the beautiful as it is posed in Kant's philosophy, where it is closely associated with the problem of the form. First of all, however, it is appropriate to make a problem out of the beautiful, that is to say, to point out the »problematical« status of the beautiful.

The paradox of the beautiful arises above all from the fact that »scientific analysis« is of no use on this territory. Beauty does not stand the definition as long as the latter means positive determination of what makes something beautiful. – If such a definition of the beautiful were available, we would have missed what we call the »specifics of art«: by following certain rules or instructions anyone could produce beauty. The whole prestigious status, charm and spell of beauty is due to its quality of something that cannot be »captured«, to the fact that it cannot be reduced to the »actual« description of a certain object.

Nevertheless, beauty is something we discuss extensively, make judgments about it, and try to articulate theoretically one way or another. We are concerned here precisely with the possibility of a theoretical articulation of the beautiful – bearing in mind that beauty eludes the fundamental apparatus of theory, i.e. the concept. One of the most productive attempts to pursue such a theoretical articulation is Kant's analysis of the beautiful, in which the very impossibility of the classic definition of the beautiful is taken as a positive starting point of the theory. As we are about to see, Kant tries to approach the beautiful in four steps, with four paradoxical definitions, the essential part of which is »the signifier of the lack«, the word *without*. (Beauty is »a liking without interest«, »universality without concept«, »purposiveness without purpose«, and »necessity without concept«.) The essential twist that Kant's analysis achieves is his conception of the lack, which is not tied only to our knowledge of the beautiful, but turns out to be in some intimate and irreducible relation to beauty itself. This is not simply the question of »some« lack. If we look a bit closer at the definitions quoted above, we will soon discover that with formulations as »X without Y« Kant always deprives the first concept (X) exactly of that (Y) which is regarded as its *essential* characterization. – Is it not the essence of every liking that it is bound with interest, is it not the essence of universality that it is based upon concept, is it

not the essence of purposiveness that it has a purpose...? On the grounds of these paradoxical »descriptions« we could formulate Kant's »project« in the following way: *we can achieve the qualities of the beautiful only by way of following the effect of beauty itself on these very qualities* – what happens to a liking when it is tied to the beautiful, what happens to universality when it is tied to beauty...? This also represents the mode of our reading of Kant's theory.

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Although the beautiful as a domain of the aesthetic is on the one hand defined as the third link, the link between theory and practice, it could, on another perspective, be read as the fourth moment: if the first three are sensibility, understanding and reason. Kant's theory of the aesthetic is based upon the concept of sense, but nevertheless it cannot be reduced to it. Aesthetics in the third *Critique* is not the theory of sensibility. When Kant introduced the concept of »transcendental aesthetics« in the first *Critique* he pointed out the double use of the word aesthetics. The difference between aesthetics as a theory of sensibility (which is the original meaning of the Greek *aisthesis* and which is at stake in *Critique of Pure Reason*) and aesthetics as a theory of the beautiful or a theory of judgements of taste is in the following: for sensibility as such it is possible to find a priori principles (space and time as a priori forms of sensibility) but this is altogether impossible for »sensibility« appearing in the phenomenon of the beautiful (a priori conditions of the beautiful cannot be defined). This is the main problem of the third *Critique*: what do we base the discourse of the beautiful on if there is no defined (a priori) concept, law or purpose to rely on. – If, therefore, we can neither rely on theory nor practice, how do we then define the phenomenon of the beautiful? In the following pages we will follow Kant's analysis from § 1 to § 22, in which Kant tries to approach the definition of the beautiful in four steps, each representing a peculiar paradox.

»Pure pleasure« or primacy of the form

A formulation as »pure pleasure« or »pure liking« (*Wohlgefallen*), *Wohlgefallen* without any interest, seems to be in general – and especially in terms of Kant's philosophy – *contradictio in adiecto*. Did not *Critique of Practical Reason* teach us exactly that the essential component of any pleasure is its being pathological, i.e. its being »non-pure«? Nevertheless, Kant uses this very formulation for the first definition of the beautiful, the definition in terms of quality. Pure pleasure, liking without any interest, without any desire in the common sense of the word, is the first condition for aesthetic judgements to exist at all and for »critique of taste« not to be dissolved into the puddle of *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Pleasure in the beautiful is pleasure without interest, enjoyment or representation (*Vorstellung*) of a concept. First of all, this means that we can comprehend and judge an object

aesthetically only when its *existence* is put in parentheses. – Namely, Kant defines interest as liking that is associated with representation of existence of an object. I am »interested« in something if its existence means something to me. I do not like »only the object but also its existence. If an object is pleasant for me and evokes contentment in me, this is usually connected with desire for that object. Pure pleasure, though, is pleasure that is not the pleasure of satisfaction. The fact that our senses or our reason are pleased with e.g. a piece of art does not make it beautiful. The beautiful is not what our senses revel in, nor what our understanding would enjoy, nor is it connected with reason's concept of the good. Although a piece of art could consist of all three components, what we call the beautiful cannot be reduced to any of them. After Kant develops the difference between the concept of the good, the sensation of the agreeable and pure liking, the only sensation connected with the beautiful, he concludes: »*Taste* is the ability to judge an object, or a way of presenting it, by means of a liking or disliking *devoid of all interest*. The object of such a liking is called *beautiful*.«¹

There are different readings of this thesis of Kant. For example, Manfred Frank² attaches it to Sartre's thesis from *L'imaginaire*, in which Sartre emphasizes that the aesthetic object is a kind of *irréel*. There are the results of brush strokes, the saturation of canvas with colour, the grained structure of canvas, the gloss with which we cover the colours, which are real. But all this, says Sartre, does not at all form the object of aesthetic evaluation. On the contrary, the »beautiful« is a being which is not offered to perception and which is in its own nature separated from the world. The artist's aim is to create a totality of *real* shades of colour, which enable the manifestation of that unreal.

According to this interpretation the aesthetic judgment does not refer to a »real« exhibit, an object, but to something in this object that cannot be reduced to its »existential description«. Attractive as this interpretation may seem, its range is nevertheless rather limited. It offers no basis, on which we could conceptualize that »unreal« and above all its relation to the subject that »evaluates aesthetically«. We are only told that Beauty is an X, some paradoxical surplus of all the material and »real«, of everything that can be »objectively« stated e.g. about the quality of a painting. Above all this interpretation cannot save Kant from the accusation of not being consistent in his theory. The essential question remains: what authorizes Kant suddenly to introduce the sensation of pleasure as *pure*, non-pathological, when all his previous theory has demonstrated quite the opposite? In comprehending the beautiful, how could we eliminate the sensibility of our senses, which are in fact our only approach to the beautiful? Does Kant not require an

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1987, p. 53.

2. Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1989.

impossibility? Is there not a lie of some artificial »spiritualization« hidden in this requirement? And does Kant's insistence on pure pleasure not mean that before each comprehension of the beautiful one should go through an infinite process of purification of one's senses and one's »pleasure«?

In this respect, Lacan's interpretation is much more farreaching, i.e., his commentary on Antigone, which is not just a commentary on Antigone but also a commentary on Aristotle's and Kant's aesthetics.

Let us take turns. At first Lacan avoids the slippery and often obscure field of distinctions between the real and the unreal by establishing some other distinction, a split between reality and the real, between existence and ex-sistence. From this perspective, beauty has at most to do with the real, and at the same time, it cannot be something attained through description of reality. This is not only a correction in terminologically-cosmetic terms. The real is – as opposed to the unreal – concept; concept in terms of which also that mysterious X gets its name: *objet a*, the object-reason of desire. Hence one can derive the subject's basic relation to the beautiful, a relation which is guided by the dialectic of desire. In Lacan's perspective, it is the subject's desire that plays an essential role in the »sensation« of the beautiful. But the way – and this can be seen as Lacan's interpretation of Kant's pure *Wohlgefallen* – taken by Lacan in his commentary on Antigone is the very way of distinguishing between two components of desire: desire *for something* and »pure desire«, desire in »pure condition«, the way, if we may say, of purification of desire.

»By crossing this field, this area, the ray of desire is here reflected and refracted, thus giving us this extraordinary effect, this most basic effect that we call the effect of the beautiful on desire. It is to see what duplicates desire on its way. We can by no means say that by comprehending beauty, desire completely fades away. Desire goes its own way, but here it is more than anywhere else accompanied by the feeling of deception, in some way displayed by the field of ray and glitter, into which desire has allowed itself to be misled. On the other hand, there is its non-refracted, but reflected, rebounded unrest, about which desire knows that it is as real as possible. But there is no object anymore. From there stems two sides of nature or fading away of desire in view of beauty, on which some scholars insist, such as Thomas Aquinas, whom I previously quoted. On the other hand the breakdown of every object originates here, the breakdown on which Kant's analysis insisted in Critique of Judgement.«

Lacan thus interprets Kant's insistence on the breakdown (of existence) of any object when we enter the territory of beauty. Concerning the problems and questions which were revealed above and were brought forth by Kant's introduction of pure, non-pathological liking, the following Lacanian emphasis is essential: this breakdown of an object or of our interest is already an *effect*

of the beautiful. Not that we must purify our »pleasure« of all pathological impulses and inclinations, interests, to be able to sink in pure contemplation of the beautiful. On the contrary, this pureness of pleasure or desire is already a sign that we have encountered the beautiful, is already »the effect of the beautiful on desire«. Kant alone emphasizes that pleasure is the effect of and not the cause for our comprehension of beauty (cf. 9). An »indicator« of our dealing with beauty is the very fact that we cannot enjoy (uživati) it, that we cannot consume (užiti) it. We are dealing with beauty only when it is accompanied with the threat »do not touch the beautiful...!« in our conscience. This is the moment completely overlooked in Derrida's interpretation³, which is preoccupied with the search for »clean cuts«. So the formulation used by Derrida himself, namely »fascination without desire«, is for him merely an inscription of the clean cut on the way of searching for a coherence of the system. And it leaves aside the possibility that fascination may actually have such, that is the rebounding effect on desire: that I can never come too close to what really fascinates me, that beauty is something to which the subject himself responds by a »clean cut«, that a clean cut is not merely a theoretically-metaphysical instrument.

Furthermore, Kant's insistence on the suspension of existence may be related to what we could call »primacy of the form« and to a specific meaning of the form itself. The beautiful is a form. However, a form, »the pure form of a liking«, does not here mean the shape (which is meant in some other contexts), but, as M. Frank has already pointed out, above all the absence of every consideration of the existence of matter of representation. Or, more precisely, it is exactly what is left if we, for example, subtract all – if we may say so – that can be »seen« in the picture. Form is not simply the (beautiful) shape of matter, it is more than this: it is something that »deprives« matter of the character of materiality and an object of the character of object, the character of something accessible. We may say that it is the object which has lost the character of being object, that is beautiful. The form is not something beyond matter but matter itself which has lost its materiality – it is »sublimated matter«. Here is this coexisting attraction and repulsion of the beautiful: what seems to be a beautiful body, an enticing body, turns into, turns out to be »beauteous body« – and exactly in the sense we use formulation *luminous body*. The body is here only to make light visible. The turned-off »bulb« is »the bulb«, but the turned-on »bulb« is no longer »the bulb«, it is light itself, which, such as it is, keeps us at a distance – if we touch it, we meet only hot matter, too hot for us not to be burnt. In this sense beauty is »the breakdown of an object« and in this sense *Wohlgefallen*, which is dealt with in beauty, is pure, it is without any interest in the object – for, as Lacan says, »there is no object anymore«. It may not be irrelevant to note that Lacan

3. Jacques Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, 1978.

here uses the word object in its usual sense and not of *objet a*. The words above could also be understood like this: *objet a* »frees itself«, distracts itself from every particular object with which it may otherwise inhabit the subject's fantasy. The moment of catharsis is also connected with this, the moment which cleanses our feelings of all that is »pathological« – that is of fixation to any particular object which is supposed to promise satisfaction. Antigone is beautiful but she is not the »object of lust«.

Universality without concept, necessity without concept

A further problem that Kant tackles in his analysis of the beautiful is the problem of universality. What is in my aesthetic judgment that makes it more than mere opinion? This is not a small dilemma. It seems to be insoluble in terms of Kantian paradigm, as is stated in *Critique of Pure Reason*. If we start with a division between objective and subjective judgments in the strict sense, then the case is so to say lost. Aesthetic judgments cannot be objective judgments since that would mean that they arise from pure concepts of understanding as *a priori* concepts. If this were true, it would be possible to list in advance all conditions that something has to satisfy in order to be beautiful.

Aesthetics would become science and art mere technical implementation, realization of pure concepts. But if aesthetic judgments were merely and purely subjective, then they would lose all validity. They would not be judgments anymore but expressions of opinion. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. Aesthetic judgments are neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori*, they come neither from law (or concept) nor from (past) experience. Then what are they? Kant's solution to this problem is extremely elegant. It simply assumes that besides the *a priori* universality of the law, there also exists some other universality – symbolic universality, the universality of »symbolic pact«.

For Kant, the judgment of taste is an unique act of interpellation:

»He must not call /the object/ beautiful if he means only that he likes it. Many things may be charming and agreeable to him; no one cares about that. But if he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. That is why he says: The thing is beautiful, and does not count on other people to agree with his judgement of liking on the ground that he has repeatedly found them agreeing with him; rather, he demands that they agree.«⁴

The judgment of taste »lays claim to the agreement of everyone«, »it does not postulate everyone's agreement, it merely *requires* this agreement, as instance of the rule«.⁵ Derrida's reading of Kant sees in this a kind of simple »legalization of suppression«, which is of course in itself »bad« enough, and

4. Kant, p. 55.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 59, 60.

therefore he does not try to discover the theoretical interest of the mentioned Kant's assumptions. (Except, of course, that »universality without concept« is again a clean cut, incorporated in the word *without*.) Here we will rather start from the question, what is in this »clean cut« which separates universality from the concept and a priori laws that may be of theoretical interest? As already mentioned, we do not arrive at the universality of judgment of something as beautiful on the basis of (former) experience, nor on the basis of the a priori concept of the beautiful, but through a kind of *speech act*. Thus we arrive at the moment we usually refer to as »how to do things with words«. In this context *Urteilkraft* could be translated quite literally as *power of judgment*, power of judgment to constitute a symbolic universe of validity of this judgment.

But the »speech act« that is characteristic of aesthetic judgments is quite specific. Let us look at it closely. Judgment of taste is a demand with which the subject refers to others. Thus it has to contain in its own form a place, *the place of all others*, wherein every singular subject has to recognize himself. This is, says Kant, the constellation »*eines jeden für jeden anderes*«. – Although we can draw from this the conclusion that everyone is with his judgment the *first Judge* (which means in other words that there is no first Judge) the whole thing is worth reconsidering. It is not simply a particular subject, a particular »I« that utters the demand, wherein all the others have to recognize themselves. On the contrary, »every one«, everyone that utters the judgment »this is beautiful«, already recognizes himself as the addressee of this very demand as the demand of the Other, of some symbolic place. The essential step we have to make is then in the following: it is not that I as I »impose«, that I attribute my judgments to others. In my judgment I myself already speak as the Other, I do not refer to »all the others« with my demand, but with the demand of the Other himself, the Other as the place, on the basis of which universality of judgments of taste is possible and only on the basis of which may I ask for consensus from all the others. Let us try to explain this by means of Kant's examples. Kant resolutely insists that judgments such as »I think this is beautiful« or »this is beautiful for me« are *contradictio in adjecto*. I may say »I like this« but I cannot say »this is beautiful for me«. If something is beautiful, says Kant, then it is beautiful precisely because it is not beautiful *for me* as a particular subject. The aesthetic judgment is therefore constituted in the transition from

»I like this«

to

»This is beautiful«.

We can immediately see what happens by means of this transition: the judgment is »desubjectivized«. The inscription of the subject of the announced disappears, but the subjectivity is »removed« to the predicate (the

beautiful is the subjectively-universal concept). And this is how 1.) the subject of annunciation, the Other and 2.) the empty place, where »all the others« may recognize themselves as agents of annunciation, are inscribed in the judgment. Of course, the subject of annunciation is inscribed in the judgement precisely as absent. The statement seems to come from »nowhere«, and that is why (every) addressee can recognize himself as the source of it. It is now time to answer the question of what legitimizes my judgment that something is beautiful: the assumption that this is beautiful to the gaze of the Other. It is not that in my judgment I take into consideration »all the others«, what the others will say. I take into consideration the Other as a symbolic entity which only enables me as I to utter the universal judgment »this is beautiful«. What is in the beautiful thing »given to the universe«, is the way the look of the Other has already been inscribed in it. This answer is still partial. In the first place, it refers to the linguistic mechanism which makes this paradoxical universality possible where there is neither concept nor law. It has to be read together with Kant's fourth definition of the beautiful, which says that the beautiful is »necessity without concept«. Here Kant goes into the detail of that moment of the second definition (»universality without concept«), which says that in our judgment we *demand* consent from others. Kant lays stress on »exemplary« necessity, necessity that stems from a particular example from which I in my judgment make *an instance of the rule*. In the final analysis, it is only an example – entirely different from an object – that makes transmission possible in the category of the beautiful.⁶ And it is the example that is the inscription of the Other, constitutive of the symbolic place, which gives *my* judgment *more universal* validity and opens the dimension of truth in the register of discourse about the beautiful.

It is important here that Kant distinguishes between the example and the ideal. The example does not and cannot have the role of the ideal, it is the agent of a symbolic and not imaginary function in the register of the aesthetic. The difference between the two might be most simply explained by means of the question of the »form«. The example is »pure« form, while the ideal is linked with the imaginary of a certain »content«. Let us try to explain this in particular. Lacan's analysis of Antigone is one of the clearest illustrations of the analysis of the beautiful that takes the beautiful as an example, namely as a »form«. Lacan interprets Antigone's beauty as the result, as the effect of a certain formal, symbolic constellation – of the fact that Antigone will be buried alive, confined in the tomb, condemned to »eternal suffering«. Her beauty is the effect of her being in the field »between two deaths«, and this gives her this mysterious ray that fascinates us (aesthetically). Therefore the beautiful is here the result of a certain entirely »formal« constellation and not

6. Lacan takes this basic Kantian premise as a starting point for his commentary on Antigone, Antigone as an example.

the collection of some positive or visible characteristics that Antigone may possess. This is what makes access to universality possible: we may say that we will perceive the mysterious ray of beauty in every being which turns up in the constellation of such an »instance of the rule«. On the other hand, the ideal of beauty, which always aims at a certain »content«, at the imagery of the image itself, functions as an exception or the point at which we are only approaching infinitely, as an inaccessible »model«. The analysis of the beautiful in the context of ideal is more or less always based upon fantasy, while the analysis of beauty as an example reveals the very mechanism and the role of fantasy (e.g. the fantasy of »eternal suffering«) in our understanding of the beautiful.

Purposiveness without purpose

Purposiveness without purpose (also »formal purposiveness«, »subjective purposiveness«) is the third step in Kant's analysis of the beautiful, the third crucial moment of the beautiful. It could be defined most simply like this: formal purposiveness does not concern things (in their relation to purpose), but the way we conceive these things. We could comprehend the thing as purposive by being led not by representation (*Vorstellung*) of a certain purpose, but by the pure form of purposiveness itself. The beautiful corresponds to something whose concept is not known. M. Frank interprets this moment through Sartre too, more precisely through Sartre's interpretation of the grace (*grâce*) of movement, which he defines as the surplus of mechanical movement. A gracious body is »the instrument that manifests freedom«. Sartre's interpretation here follows the paradigm, which we have pointed out above in reference to the problem of form: in gracious movement »the nudity of flesh is entirely present, but it cannot be seen«. ⁷ This interpretation rather belongs to the interpretation of the first question, the question of »the quality« of the experience of the beautiful. Later, Frank actually connects it with the moment of the »unreal« in the aesthetic object. But the definition »purposiveness without purpose« brings into discussion about the beautiful also another, new dimension that cannot be reduced to the concept of the »ideal object« of art, whether understood as »unreal« or »real«. It introduces the *dimension of sense*, which was developed in detail by Eric Weil in his text »The sense and the fact«. ⁸ Although we may not agree with all the conclusions drawn by Weil (especially that in this way the gap between theory and practice is abolished), his argument is well worth summarizing. His starting point is that – in accordance with Kantian's diction – there are two elementary, irreducible *facts*: the fact of understanding or the fact of science on the one hand and the fact of reason or the fact of moral law on the other. He adds a third »fact«, namely that mere fact in itself has no sense. Our

7. J.-P. Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, Paris 1943, p. 470.

8. Eric Weil, »Sens et fait«, *Problèmes kantien*s, Vrin, Paris 1990.

thinking as such has the character of contingency. For Weil the third *Critique* is written exactly as the answer to this question, the question of sense. The new fact introduced by this critique, is sense, *Sinn*, and not only *Sinn* as sensation, but also and above all as *meaning*. If we say this with Weil's words, »la *Critique de la Judiciaire* veut comprendre les faits sensés ... à présent, le sens est un fait, les faits ont un sens, voilà la position fondamentale de la dernière *Critique*.«⁹

It is of course purposiveness that introduces the dimension of sense into the discussion. Beauty is beauty only if it is contingent, if we know that it does not serve any purpose, that it is not created with any particular intention. That is why, for Kant, elementary examples of the beautiful are natural creations. But what some natural creation makes beautiful is at same time what evokes in us the feeling *as if* nature *knows* what it is doing, as if this contingency has meaning. Kant calls this effect »purposiveness without purpose«. The expression »without purpose« which is inscribed in Kant's persistent repetition that this purposiveness or necessity is itself contingent, has the same consequences for the status of sense which it introduces: in this context the moment of contingency by definition attaches to sense.

So we come across form again. Due to formal purposiveness we are facing something that is purposive in terms of the form, but not in terms of the »content«, where the content simply means the description of the positive purpose which is to be served. In other words, it is the form of our vision which cannot see the gaze, *for which* this seeming purposiveness has a defined purpose. The absence of purpose generates our *assumption* that there is the gaze, for which this purposiveness follows some purpose. – We are dealing with the beautiful as long as this remains an assumption, as long as we cannot see anything but form itself. However, when this assumption turns into certainty, into knowledge of such a gaze and through it of some defined »content«, the object loses the charm of the beautiful and becomes a kind of »work of craftsmanship«.

The formal purposiveness which is at stake here, is not the work of a particular mind or a particular person, it is not the result of some activity, but simply is, we come across it, it always has the form of *an encounter*, of something we do not expect.

This starting paradigm has two interesting consequences, the first refers to the status of the subject and the second to the status of the thing in itself. Let us start with the second. According to problems of the sense of the relation between the thing in itself and the phenomenon, »the thing for us«, could be seen in a new light. The thing in itself is as such the field of a radical absence of the sense, it is the incorporation of non-sense. The thing is »in itself«

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

exactly because »for us« it has no sense. And the phenomenon is exactly the thing in itself, which has been given some sense. It is also the sense what makes of the world of phenomena something more than a mere conglomerate of causes and effects since it introduces a new dimension, the dimension of the symbolic which is not reducible to them. (Hence we could understand Kant's insisting that »practice« as the register of pure moral acts should be tied to the sphere of the thing in itself, noumenon, of that which escapes phenomena. The ethical act is never a »sensible« act. I perform an act only if I follow exclusively a pure, »senseless« form of the categorical imperative. The act draws its sense from remaining outside sense, from its being *hors-sens* in the strict meaning of the word. It is therefore not possible to say that by the inscription of the sense the gap between theory and practice, understanding and reason, is erased. On the contrary, only by this inscription does it gain its real dimension.)

What does this dimension of sense mean for the status of the subject, which, for example, comprehends something as beautiful?

It is well known that the third *Critique* deals with facts that do not provide the material to construct science in the classic sense of the word, which are not therefore a priori definable and legal, in a word, which are *contingent*. So we are dealing with a kind of nonsense which is found on the level of mere phenomena, but which nevertheless reveals some sense or, more precisely, to which we respond with sense. Our knowledge of nature (in a broader sense) remains »incomplete«, »non-whole«: and it is exactly this lack of knowledge that makes us the masters of sense. We are the masters of sense because we are not the masters of facts. It is the irreducible contingency, groundlessness, the absence of a cause of certain facts that generates the production of sense. Where the mechanism of causality fails, sense comes to take its place. And beauty is the effect of such a »missing link«. We could also place Lacan's thesis that beauty always arises from a certain lack or emptiness in this line of interpretation.

On the other hand, this lack of cause or purpose in the phenomenon of the beautiful is inscribed in this phenomenon as the impossibility of »knowledge of the beautiful«.

Scientific discourse can tell us everything about an object, everything but the reason for its being beautiful, – since its beauty is due precisely to the fact that it has no reason at all to be beautiful. The tulip has no reason to be beautiful, and this is its beauty. This »ignorance«, this lack of knowledge, the impossibility of finding the grounds of beauty, is necessary in terms of the structure, and it is not something that could be gradually »compensated for«. – This is precisely the conclusion at which Derrida arrives in his analysis.¹⁰ We

10. J. Derrida, *La vérité en peinture*, p. 103.

may know everything about the tulip, claims Derrida, everything but the reason for its being beautiful. Why it is beautiful is not something that could be accounted for some day by means of progress of knowledge, providing us with an ability to regard it as beautiful and to know why. Ignorance is a standpoint, the irreducibility of which enables the beautiful to exist.