KRITIKE METAPORIKA DENKBILD (SEPTEMBER 2026) 1-3

Trope

Aesthetic Snapshots

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> What the *Denkbild* embodies is the precarious principle of hope: that in our infinite conversation, the last word will not have been spoken.[1]
>
> - Gerhard Richter

I wish to think the singular. I wish to think what is irreducibly unique—what can never be represented, reproduced, repeated. And so, I dream of thinking what cannot be thought. But how many magical possibilities this impossibility keeps presenting!

The singular is a world in each thing—a world for which we yet have no language. One senses these worlds—and one endlessly violates these worlds by speaking in old tongues about them.

The impossible task of the artist: to remind us of the violence language does to the singular without repeating this violence in reminding us about it.

The impossible task of the artist: to invent a new language for each thing and thus, to grow mute in order to speak.

The beautiful is still necessary in art despite more than a century of criticism and attacks. Without beauty what would compel us to learn an entire language for the sake of just one, single thing?

The impossible task of the artist: to locate the frontier where the singular allows for expression without being lost in expression.

Kant's aesthetics has always troubled me. I have always felt much too interested in beauty to meet Kant's demand for utter disinterestedness. But what, I ask, is beauty for the cool-hearted and for the perfectly disinterested mind? Is it still beautiful? I follow Kant on his guided aesthetic tour from one flower and one wallpaper to the next feeling increasingly lost. He stops in front of a picture frame, and he wants me to admire the frame instead of the picture. Then he takes me to see a beautiful sculpture but all he discusses at

[1] Gerhard Richter, *Thought-Images: Frankfurt School Writers' Reflections from Damaged Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

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length is its garments. What is it he wants me to see? The universal at work in beauty, I am told. *Sensus communis*. Purposiveness without purpose. Don't we all agree? But surely, he is not interested in my opinion now that everything has been so needly settled. Legislation requires sacrifices—if necessary, even the sacrifice of the very thing that the investigation aims to find.

What about the wild and untameable side of beauty? How it resists domestication and every attempt of control? The control of the beauty industry, the control of the culture industry, the control of the museum industry, just to mention a few. Production, collection, storage of beauty—the privilege of the privileged. And yet, with what ease beauty eludes and mocks all these attempts: the daily and effortless presence of beauty outside and beyond any command.

Beauty is entirely unapologetic. It makes no excuses for itself. Where there is beauty, it is always evidently there: in faces, in landscapes, in poems. One doesn't gradually approach beauty or find it at the end of some long and contorted road. Beauty appears in a flash. The faces, the landscapes come later—almost like an afterimage, an afterthought.

I am compelled to think of beauty as a sort of celebration, although I am not entirely sure what this celebration is about. I hear the cheers; I see the smiles but without having had the privilege of watching the game.

A beautiful woman must be forever foreign to her own beauty and to the attention she receives—a mystery in the middle of the mirror, an uncertainty following her around. She is celebrated in spite of her and yet she is inseparable from this very celebration—sometimes mercilessly so. Her beauty is possessed as a dispossession—and still she will feel it as *her* loss once it is gone. On the outskirts of comprehension, she will have shined for a while, being to herself and all others a perfectly open secret, an enigma as deep as her skin.

Kant famously connects beauty with freedom—the free play of imagination and understanding, the happy play of our mental faculties. Personally, I have always found beauty more arresting than liberating—capturing me rather than setting me free. In front of great beauty, I am brought to a standstill, consumed by what I see. Who or what is now being played with? Am I still the one playing this game?

Beauty connects me with nothing and no one. I see no basis for a community here. What is beautiful to me might not be beautiful to you. Why should this be a problem?—unless the purposiveness without a purpose is indeed supposed to serve a particular end.

Beauty is highly selective and extremely discriminating. It elevates one thing at the expense of all others. It makes us forget everything but the singular, the particular, the one: how this face outshines and eclipses

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everything around it. For a moment I see nothing else. Beauty and monomania go hand in hand—a short or long-lived obsession—a preoccupation with irreplaceability itself. Each encounter with the beautiful means a new entry into the realm of the one. Herein lies the source of much pleasure as well as pain.

Perhaps beauty celebrates singularity the same way ugliness demeans it? In each case the singular is emphatically singled out. Beauty as well as ugliness brings singularity to its extremes—the highest or lowest point of uniqueness.

Beauty is always beyond comparison, outstanding. All measures and coordinates are momentarily suspended. It stands alone in the field of perception; it stands out to the point of eclipsing the field. Beauty thus gives me a figure without a ground—ungrounded, untied, undoing all relations. The possibility of new relations and new grounds can now be caught in a glimpse.

Perhaps beauty leads us in the very opposite direction from what Hegel imagined—not towards a higher unity but towards a grander multitude and dispersion? But one would then need to accept that beauty brings neither knowledge nor progress but continuously distances us from them.

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