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Four Moves for Beauty as Super-Natural Concrescence

Articulating tradition and beauty requires at least four successive moves. First, a historical movement back to the past. Beauty was (supposed to be) intimately linked to tradition in (so-called) “traditional” societies: the standards and canons of beauty were mostly inherited from the past, defined by and within a certain tradition, indebted to a certain origin. The second movement would thus lead us to reject this association for our own age: (what we [used to] call) “modernity” defined itself by an urge to emancipate itself from the constraints of tradition. Its art developed contempt for “beauty”, an obsolete notion to be overcome by the values of novelty, transgression, shock, disruption, displacement, etc. A third movement could suggest to distance ourselves from the modernist attitude: what if debunking beauty from its reigning throne did not oblige us to discard it altogether? The beautiful could be maintained as one among many forms of esthetic experience—along with the sublime, the shocking, the puzzling, the zany, the cute or the interesting. Instead of being defined by *the* (dominant) tradition, beauty would develop itself within *a* tradition (among others). As a fourth move, one could then encounter tradition, not as what is “carried” (*tradere*) ready-to-use from the past into the present and the future, but as what needs to be constantly translated (*traductor*) and betrayed (*traditor*), in the process of gaining concrescence through time, evolutions, adaptations, resistance and becomings.

What would have been discarded, along these four successive moves, would not be the link between beauty and tradition, but the presumption that the beautiful was in any way “natural”, i.e., inherited from a commanding origin. What we will still experience as beautiful, even after the rise and collapse of modernity, will be a certain feeling of *consistence*, perceived among the heterogeneous materials of a certain block of reality—a consistence that would have no existence nor subsistence if it had not been coagulated, densified and carried through a certain process of concrescence, a process which is always “cultural”, i.e., *super-natural* (while in no way *un-natural*).

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