

Women on the Edge of Modernity

How can you be content to be in the World like Tulips in a Garden, to make a fine shew and be good for nothing . . . ?

—Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694)¹

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HEN Kant tries to explain the relation of genius to taste in the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) he finds that he needs the help of a beautiful woman:

1 M. Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Parts I and II* [1694, 1697], ed. Patricia Spingborg, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997, p. 7.

2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, New York: Hafner Press, 1951, §48; *Kritik der Urteilskraft. Kant gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 5, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1900, §48 (further references will be cited in the text).

3 It would be possible here to slide into the well-rehearsed history of Kant's tendency to like his aesthetics both gendered and patriarchal. In the early

In such a case, e.g. if it is said 'That is a beautiful woman,' we think nothing else than this: nature represents in her figure the purposes in view in the shape of a woman's figure. For we must look beyond the mere form to a concept, if the object is to be thought in such a way by means of a logically conditioned aesthetical judgement.

In einem solchen Falle denkt man auch, wenn z.B. gesagt wird: 'das ist ein schönes Weib,' in der Tat nichts anders als: die Natur stellt in ihrer Gestalt die Zwecke im weiblichen Baue schön vor; denn man muß noch über die bloße Form auf einen Begriff hinaussehen, damit der Gegenstand auf solche Art durch ein logisch-bedingtes ästhetisches Urteil gedacht werde.²

Up until this point, Kant has had little occasion to appeal directly to a woman as an example. And when she does make this noticeable appearance in association with the beautiful, she returns in all her stereotypic exemplarity.³ That Kant, or any other eighteenth-century aesthetician for that matter, would position a woman as the exemplar of beauty comes as no surprise; it is practically a cliché.

At first glance, Kant's example hardly seems one that would provoke a favourable assessment on the part of feminism. Feminism has long been

committed to a critique of stereotypic examples of women in patriarchal discourse. And examinations of the aesthetic constraints that proceed from notions of beauty have certainly figured large in such critiques. In this regard, feminism has often understandably distanced itself from aesthetic discourses of beauty and has been keen to see what it could offer by way of alternatives.

Yet to suggest that alternatives are possible raises the question of whether feminism itself can altogether avoid the trap of turning women into stereotypes, turning the specific example of woman into a universal model, in its own efforts to represent women. How would it be possible to negotiate the limitation that models, that examples, impose through the very necessity of their use? Communication demands the particular; it is not possible to refer to everything at once. At the same time, judgements that arise from the use of those particulars are always to some extent faulty—inaccurate or incomplete, too particular or too general. This applies as much to aesthetics (models of beauty) as it does to politics (another matter of representation). What is at issue here is the entire problematic of inclusion and exclusion, whether in politics or aesthetics.

Given these concerns, it would be a mistake to dismiss Kant's beautiful woman too quickly. While Kant's particular example may indeed seem, at first glance, too familiar or even too marginal, a careful reading of this passage reveals that, at the end of the eighteenth century, Kant unfolds a problem relevant to a feminism taking its own millennial turn into the twenty-first century.⁴ Significantly, feminism has made a recent shift away from its earlier tendency to dismiss representations of women's beauty as always universally objectifying, as always a ploy on the part of patriarchy to keep women for men's eyes only. Kant stands to be useful for feminism here in so far as his text helps to clarify how representations of women are treated and deployed by telling us something important about the status of woman as an example. What becomes apparent in Kant's text is that the problem of the example cannot be solved by striving for the perfect representation of woman—either an inclusive aesthetics or a fully representational politics—or even by overcoming the use of examples altogether. Taking 'woman' as an example, in the way Kant does, stages both aesthetic and political questions that can give feminism, for all its sophisticated assessment of the status of women in modernity, additional insight into how its own practices can avoid repeating the very injustices it has tried to redress.

To see how the *Critique of Judgement* is helpful to feminism requires understanding the precise nature of the services that Kant calls upon the example of a beautiful woman to provide. And, at least initially, this proves to be a bit tricky, for the one thing she does not do is give herself up with a simple explanation to the reader. To get beyond a mere acknowledgement of the potentially clichéd associations of women with the beautiful, to understand what else is at stake here, we need to look carefully at how Kant

Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime [1764–66], trans. John T. Goldthwait, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, Kant repeatedly associates women with the beautiful, men with an allegedly superior sublime. The *Critique of Judgement* (1790) leaves these explicitly gendered parallels behind, although some commentators have suggested that it nonetheless carries a hefty weight of allegorical baggage.

4 In 'Writing from the Broken Middle: The Post-Aesthetic', *Women: a cultural review* 9/1, 1998, 62–96, Isobel Armstrong also argues for the continuing relevance of aesthetics and is especially concerned to address questions of gender in the name of feminism. She concludes that 'the deconstruction of the classical aesthetic texts of Kant and Hegel should prompt us to redescribe the aesthetic rather than giving up on it as an obsolete hierarchical category expressive of the bourgeois self' (94).

defines beauty, how beauty is figured in a woman. Most generally, Kant calls on her example as a way to mark the differences upon which the relation between genius and taste depend: the difference between natural and artificial beauty, between free and adherent beauty, and finally between adherent and artificial beauty. The beautiful woman is not the exemplar of all types of beauty. Rather, the different types of beauty are all held in relation to one another by being in relation to 'the shape of a woman's figure' (*Gestalt die Zwecke im weiblichen*); they differ from one another as they differ in their relationship to her.

To some degree, then, the beautiful woman's entrance is timed at precisely the moment that the relationship between the different types of beauty stands to become confused and requires clarification on Kant's part. Kant has just proposed a distinction between natural and artificial beauty, and he turns to the example of the beautiful woman, to her difference, to set straight what he means by artificial beauty. But the help that Kant requires from her is itself not straightforward and requires a backward glance to the earlier discussion of the distinction between free and adherent beauty. For one of the unarticulated problems here—and one of the potential causes of confusion—stems from determining the precise relation that natural and artificial beauty have to the earlier distinction between free and adherent beauty.

To begin with, natural beauty is the instance of beautiful things in nature, and Kant's explanation of it is derived from his discussion of free beauty in §16–17. Effectively, a natural beauty has free beauty. Without dwelling on this point for too long, it is worth recalling that free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) is ascribed to objects about which it is possible to derive pure aesthetic judgements of taste. In this case, we judge on the basis of the *form* of the object alone. 'No concept of what the object ought to be' is presupposed; no purpose is in view. Significantly, only nature affords objects which we would judge, through judgements of taste, to be examples of free beauty. 'Flowers', for example, 'are free natural beauties'. Part of the reason for this becomes clearer in a footnote, in another marginal aside, when Kant expresses an interest in a tulip: 'A flower, e.g. a tulip, is regarded as beautiful, because in perceiving it we find a certain purposiveness which, in our judgement, is referred to no purpose at all' (§18n31). Free beauty is a finality without end.⁵

Noticeably, the beautiful woman does not figure directly in Kant's discussion of free or natural beauty. As we shall see, women are not examples of free beauty, are not beautiful things in nature like tulips. The beautiful woman exemplifies difference from free beauty, from natural beauty. In effect, then, beautiful women are not on an equal footing with tulips when it comes to matters of pure aesthetic judgements. If we seek free beauty, a natural beauty, we should pursue wild tulips rather than beautiful women, even if they are wild.

5 Derrida, who himself exhibits a great interest in Kant's fondness for flowers, especially when it comes to tulips, remarks that 'the wild tulip is, then, seen as exemplary of this finality without end, of this useless organization, without goal, gratuitous, out of use' (*The Truth in Painting* [1978], trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 87 (further references will be cited in the text)).

But if we seek to *produce* a beautiful *representation* of a thing ourselves, then we seek an instance of artificial beauty, which requires that we possess genius, the talent for beautiful art. Or to put this another way, artificial beauty is the beauty of art produced by genius. And unlike natural beauty, artificial beauty both has a purpose and relies on a concept. The purpose of artificial beauty, of beautiful art, is to represent the perfection of the beautiful thing, and there must therefore first of all be 'a concept of what the thing is to be' (§48).

The role perfection plays is crucial and must be taken into account by both genius and taste. That is to say, perfection features in both the production and judgement of artificial beauty. First, artificial beauty is created out of genius's striving for perfection. Second, when we judge this created artificial beauty, once again 'the perfection of the thing must be taken into account' for the judgement to be possible.

And this is actually the moment in which the greatest possibility for confusion lies: what precisely does Kant mean by 'perfection' in this particular discussion? In his explanation of natural beauty, Kant, as I have already suggested, relies heavily on this previous discussion of free beauty. Given that free beauty and natural beauty are parallel, and since free beauty was earlier defined in contrast to adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*), the move that seems so tempting here is to look for the answer by drawing a similar comparison between adherent beauty and artificial beauty. Both adherent and artificial beauty differ from free beauty in so far as they have a purpose and presuppose a concept of perfection. In each case, the form is determined by its function; 'it presupposes a concept of the purpose which determines what the thing is to be' (§16). But we do not need the beautiful woman to explain that. 'A building (be it church, palace, arsenal, or summer house)' would do equally well, says Kant (§16). In this respect, artificial beauty is potentially a type of adherent beauty with a specific function: the function of being a beautiful representation of a thing (in nature).

However, the complete conflation of adherent and artificial beauty is indeed a mistake, and it is in anticipation of this potential error that Kant's argument most needs a beautiful woman to make a difference. It is the very fact of her existence that matters most here, that will distinguish her example from that of the tulip, the building and the work of art. Indeed, the beautiful woman on display is very revealing; she has 'her purposes in view' (§48). But this is not necessarily a sexy statement on Kant's part. It means that we view her purposes in her form. We move past a judgement merely of form to a consideration of a concept, which will be a concept of perfection. She is effectively another example of adherent beauty.

Yet the important difference here, the difference that she exemplifies, is moral. In the woman, in the human form, beauty combines with the good. So when we look at her, we see her moral purpose in her form; her body makes

visible ‘the moral ideas that rule men inwardly’ (§17). We have thus moved outside the remit of judgements of taste, since the purpose of existence is determined by reason. The judgement of the human form can never be a pure aesthetic judgement of taste. The recognition of moral ideas in a bodily manifestation requires a union of teleological judgement (reason) and judgements of taste (imagination).

Positioned as the perfect example, the beautiful woman shows that the concept of perfection is not identical for both artificial and adherent beauty. Striving for the perfection of the beautiful representation of a thing—striving, that is, for the perfection of the thing—artificial beauty requires only an aesthetic judgement. However, the perfection towards which the adherent beauty of woman aims is a moral perfection, the perfection of humanity (§17)—what Kant has earlier called ‘ideal beauty’ (§16–17)—and it requires both a teleological judgement and a judgement of taste.⁶

If the beautiful woman is a ‘perfect example’ for Kant, it is also precisely because she fails to achieve perfection on two counts. First, she fails to represent free and natural beauty. While we can take the beautiful woman as our example, she will never be exemplary when it comes to pure judgements of taste. She is unlike the tulip, because she is good for something. She has a moral purpose; she can strive for moral perfection, while the tulip is a free and natural beauty, good for nothing. Thus, in the game of pure aesthetic judgements of taste: the free and natural beauty of the wild tulip trumps the artificial beauty of the garden tulip (cultivated with a purpose through the art of landscape gardening) (§51), which trumps the beautiful woman (compromised by her moral purpose, her relation to teleological judgement).

More is at stake here, however, than her failure to be like a tulip, and the second count on which she fails is one that counts twice, a double failure, as it were. This time the beautiful woman fails to represent ideal beauty. While the human form strives for the ideal of the beautiful, we will never be in possession of this ideal; ‘it can only be an ideal of the imagination’ (§17). Ideal beauty can never be represented because we can never be in possession of its presentation. And because of this, the beautiful woman is also exemplary in so far as she represents this inevitable failure of the presentation of ideal beauty. Hence the doubling of her failure: she both *fails to represent* ideal beauty and *represents the failure* of the presentation of ideal beauty.

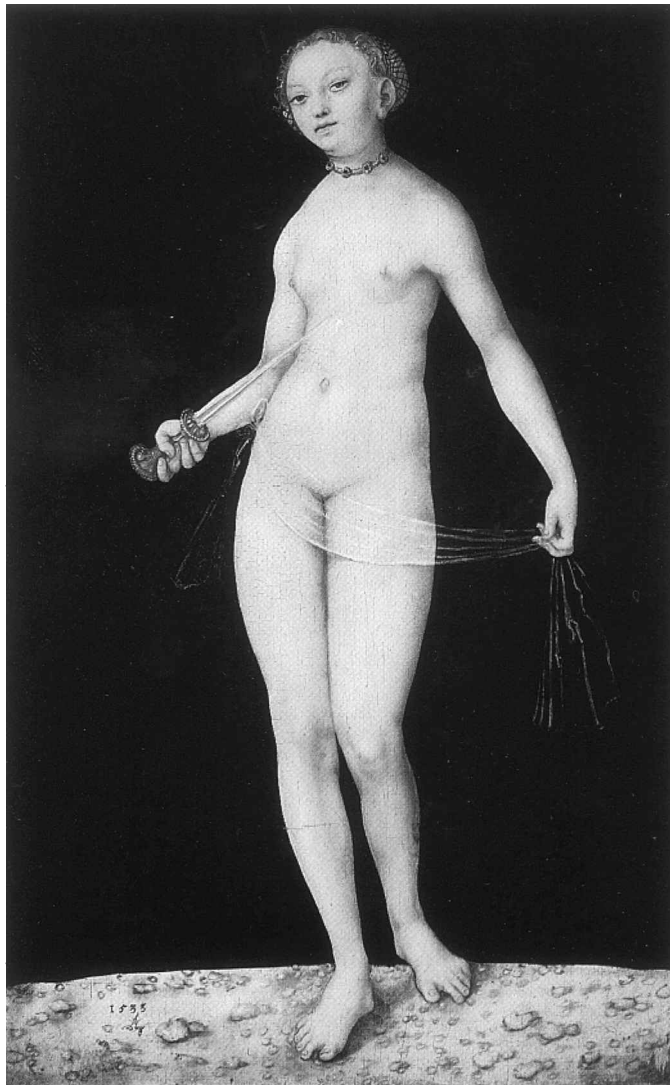
THE beautiful woman, so exemplary in her failure, is now set to make her exit. Kant ushers her out, remarking that ‘beautiful art shows its

6 Kant’s discussion veers into yet another distinction: ideal beauty versus the mere aesthetical normal idea of beauty, where the latter is an individual intuition that is culturally specific and has recourse to a notion of the average. It would be possible to question whether Kant, in marking the cultural specificity of normal human beauty, offers an early version of multiculturalist aesthetics, or yet another racist discourse of modernity.

7 Lynda Nead also takes an interest in what Derrida's notion of the *parergon* might have to say about the representation of the female body. Rather than focusing on what is particularly at stake in Derrida's use of Cranach's *Lucretia*, Nead insightfully concludes that 'the female nude is the border, the *parergon*, as Derrida also calls it, between art and obscenity. The female body—natural, *unstructured*—represents something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgement; but artistic style, pictorial form, contains and regulates the body and renders it an object of beauty, suitable for art and aesthetic judgement' (*The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 25).

superiority' to her when it comes to aesthetic judgement. And yet, for the sake of a beautiful woman, let us linger a little longer on her figure. What exactly do we see when we look at her figure? What precisely constitutes her form? What are its limits, its contours, its boundaries? Kant earlier makes clear that form is to be understood as perceived structure and, in the case of aesthetic judgement, that all ornament and finery should be excluded from the figure as unnecessary surplus. But he offers no further illustration.

It is this very problem of determining the form of an object, the structure of a figure, that attracts Jacques Derrida's attention in his reading of the *Critique of Judgement* in *The Truth in Painting*.⁷ And we find a curious



Lucas Cranach, *Lucretia*, 1533 (courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie)

8 Significantly, as modernity moves on, aesthetic modesty makes a comeback. Hegel, by contrast, preferred his women clothed. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe points out, according to the terms of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, 'femininity is only beautiful, ideally, when veiled'; 'female nudity simply falls within the province of sensuous beauty', which is the poorest mode of apprehension (139). A sense of *shame* calls for the figure of woman to be covered up. Male nudity, however, can be shown because 'masculinity is the unveiling of the spiritual' (142) (P. Lacoue-Labarthe, 'The Unpresentable', trans. Claudette Sartillot, in *The Subject of Philosophy*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

9 In this context, Lucretia's figure also projects a certain instability. Poised as if on the edge of the earth, we cannot be certain whether she is moving forward or about to fall back into the void of the black background. Her veil rests precariously on her right hip and is held up by a bow that seems attached to nothing. Her right elbow is awkwardly if not impossibly placed close to her side; her right hand holds the dagger at an improbable angle.

coincidence here. While Kant's concern for a tulip will later hold Derrida's attention for some pages, on this matter he too cannot resist enlisting the help of a beautiful woman, and he calls on the services of Cranach's *Lucretia* (1533). From the outset, Derrida's introduction of the example of *Lucretia* challenges the coherence of Kant's argument. Derrida reminds us that if, as Kant suggests, 'aesthetic judgment *must* properly bear upon intrinsic beauty, not on finery and surrounds', we must know 'how to determine the intrinsic': what is indeed essential to her figure, proper to her structure (Derrida 1987:63). Yet is this really possible? While 'we think we know what properly belongs or does not belong to the human body', the more we look at *Lucretia* the less certain we may become (Derrida 1987:59).

What indeed is integral, intrinsic or essential to her figure? Does it include her clothes? Her jewellery? Does a woman's figure need to be well accessorized to be complete? Kant has already offered some help in so far as he explicitly excludes 'the draperies of statues', like 'a golden frame', as unnecessary ornament, as mere finery, that injures genuine beauty (§14). Kant privileges the value of naturalness on all counts, and the human form is no exception. The beautiful woman is beautiful in her nakedness.⁸

Given Kant's position, Derrida concerns himself with the 'decorative dilemma' posed by Lucretia's necklace, dagger and veil. Are these examples of mere ornament and decoration or, in Derrida's terms, 'parerga': inscriptions of something extra, supplements to the proper field, exterior frames of some sort? The necklace seems not to be part of her naked and natural body. Nor is the dagger, 'whose point she holds turned toward herself, touching her skin . . . in the middle of a triangle formed by her two breasts and her navel'. And what, he goes on to wonder, 'to do with absolutely transparent veils' like the one Cranach drapes 'in front of her sex'?⁹ Is this mere drapery and, if it is, how do we determine where the filmy covering ends and her body begins? In effect, the question is 'where to have clothing commence?'—a question that plays in a double register, for it also asks what constitutes the very category 'clothing'. Derrida asks 'would any garment be a *parergon*. G-strings and the like' (Derrida 1987:57).

For Derrida the questions the figure of this beautiful woman raise call attention to 'the criteria engaged in such delimitations'. What indeed constitutes an inessential addition to the object? A total representation? And why would we need *parerga* in the first place? Are *parerga* added because of an internal lack? And, specifically, 'what is it that is lacking in the representation of the body so that the garment should come and supplement it?' (Derrida 1987:57–8). Derrida does not answer his own questions directly; he only offers, by way of an example for readers to see for themselves, a reproduction of Cranach's painting. Lucretia stares out of the page, as if she too wonders about her own figure.

Yet if Derrida relies on a beautiful woman to trouble Kant's text, her example also raises questions about the framing of his own argument. In this regard, her regard is far from passive and calls us back to look at her more carefully. So to linger once again: what of her example does Derrida reveal? What 'shape of a woman's figure' is put on view here? Which frames does Derrida impose on her and which does he toss aside as inessential ornament, as not at issue in her relation to the *Critique of Judgement*?

To begin with, at stake here is what parts of the woman's figure should be considered and how they should be put on display. The example of Cranach's *Lucretia* is as much about what we don't see—what indeed we are reminded that we don't see—as it is about what is actually shown. The veil, as Derrida describes it, is 'in front of her sex'; hers is a body simultaneously revealed and concealed, not unlike the figures adorned by some current *haute couture* fashion. The beautiful woman is eroticized by means of concealment: we are drawn to look but cannot quite fully see.

Such eroticization of her figure must also be had at the expense of her full figuration. Parts of her form are not allowed fully to figure, are not figured fully. Cranach and Derrida alike draw the viewer's attention to Lucretia's genital area which is, thanks in part to the veil, represented here as a *tabula rasa*, as a blank space without pubic hair and only the barest of anatomical detail.¹⁰ Fully formed genitalia are not, by the criteria of this painting, considered essential to a beautiful woman's figure; more precisely, it is essential not to represent them. This comes as no surprise within the conventions of early modern figural painting, and Freud has already pointed out that it is secondary and not primary sexual characteristics to which so many societies have ascribed beauty.¹¹ The horror, the horror of genitalia: missing from Kant's text, erased in Derrida's.

10 Luce Irigaray's description of Greek statuary must also be remembered here: 'woman's genitals are simply absent, masked, sewn back up inside their "crack"' ('This Sex Which Is Not One', in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 26).

11 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Standard Edition, vol. 21, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961, p. 83.

THERE is, of course, another question of framing at issue here, in so far as to speak in terms of primary and secondary sexual characteristics presupposes established criteria that make such a division possible in the first place. We might even be led to wonder why some parts must be marked as more essential, more important than others. The choice of example might be more revealing than Derrida imagined. What if we were to put Cranach's *Lucretia* to one side and consider instead Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866), or Michel Duchamp's *Etant données* (1946–66), or Nobuyoshi Araki's and Zoe Leonard's more recent close-up photography of female genitalia?

Yet such an argument risks ignoring part of the historical context that frames the beautiful woman's figure. Kant's remarks about the beauty of the

human form are made in the wake of an increasing interest in modern scientific mappings of the body. And, on this count, Kant would no more have shared Cranach's anatomical understanding of the human body than Derrida would Kant's. Above all, as Thomas Laqueur argues, in the eighteenth century 'reproductive organs went from being paradigmatic sites for displaying hierarchy, resonant throughout the cosmos, to being the foundation of incommensurable difference.'¹² Has Derrida, by turning to Cranach's *Lucretia* for his example, introduced an anachronistic detour into Kant's text? And should we therefore presume that, as Kant would have understood it, to view the shape of the woman's figure, to judge her beauty, we must be able to see her full difference, view the full shape of her figure?

And should we necessarily stop with her outward figure, the only figure considered so far? Jonathan Sawday makes the case that the early modern period marks the moment when science increasingly took an interest in exteriorizing the interiority of the human body. We could speculate, for instance, whether Kant might have encountered Berrettini's revealing 1618 female figures, which Petrioli engraved in 1741. These take us some distance from *Lucretia's* delicately veiled sex, for, to use Sawday's description, 'Berrettini's figure peels back the surface tissue of her body, and, in so doing, she appears to create grotesquely misplaced genital labia, as though her body is no more than the vehicle for a vagina which dominates the complete abdomen.'¹³ If this should not be enough, the 1741 engraving adds a detailed insert of an enlarged uterus with a tiny foetus *in situ*, 'which covers its eyes as though in recoil from the act of disclosure to which it and she are subjected.'¹⁴ The suggestion made here in the name of science is that woman's figure is not fully figured until she has been given a supplemental foetus.

The aesthetic integrity of the beautiful woman's body will not, however, be an issue that, according to Kant, science can ever resolve. Kant states very directly that 'there is no science of the beautiful, but only a critique of it; and there is no such thing as beautiful science, but only beautiful art' (§44). There are no scientific proofs for what constitutes the beautiful. Neither rules for the beautiful, nor beautiful rules. Aesthetics is a matter of judgement (reflection) not knowledge (cognition).¹⁵

If science cannot answer the question of how a beautiful woman's figure is to be viewed, what parts of her figure should be seen, could that not be the very function of art? Is that why Derrida includes Cranach's painting and not a scientific drawing as his own supplement to Kant's text? The answers to these questions raise issues of fidelity. First, if we are to be faithful to Kant's argument in the *Critique of Judgement*, we should remember that he introduces the example of the beautiful woman partially in order to indicate beautiful art's superiority. The beautiful woman is an example of adherent beauty, while beautiful art exhibits artificial beauty, which is capable of perfecting things in nature, of creating beautiful representations out of things

¹² T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 149.

¹³ J. Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 223.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ In this regard, Kant's aesthetics could even be understood as challenging science's claim to display and control the body.

that may appear ugly or displeasing in nature (§48). The connections Kant draws are: genius produces beautiful art; the beauty of art is artificial beauty; ‘artificial beauty is a *beautiful representation* of a thing’; and a beautiful thing is a natural beauty.¹⁶ This equation noticeably does not include adherent beauty, even distances itself from it. So were art to take the human form—a woman, for instance—as its subject, it could not be said to represent the natural beauty of the human form, because there is none to represent.

The representation of a beautiful woman in art thus poses a problem: if we judge her to be beautiful, then she cannot be a representation of a *woman*, because the figure of the beautiful woman does not possess the free and natural beauty which is artificial beauty’s remit to perfect. The representation of a beautiful woman can only be *an example* of artificial beauty if ‘she’ represents something other than a woman. She is always effectively a metaphor. When we look at the representation of her form in art we must, if Kant’s argument is to hold, see something very different than what we see when we look at her form directly. Her beautiful form, in this instance, is not the beauty of her figure. ‘The Furies, diseases, the devastations of war, etc., may [even regarded as calamitous] be described as very beautiful, as they are represented in a picture’—a picture of a woman, for instance (§48).

It seems obvious, then, that Derrida has not been faithful to Kant’s text, has not taken into account the distinction he draws between the appearance of the beautiful woman’s figure and the *representation* in art of a beautiful woman. For Kant, the figure of the beautiful woman is no more an aesthetic model than she is a scientific one. Coercive standards of normalizing beauty are not at issue here; there can be no subscription to rules for what constitutes the beautiful. Recall that Kant’s very introduction of the example of the beautiful woman was, in part, to make the point that the perfection of the human form (unrepresentable ideal beauty) is a matter of moral purpose, and the beauty of the human form, of the beautiful woman, is not a natural beauty perfected through art’s artificial beauty. Interpreting Kant’s logic in the strictest of terms, the artificial beauty in Cranach’s painting could not be the result of its faithful depiction of the natural beauty of a woman’s figure—because, again, there is no such thing. Rather, the beauty to be found must somehow lie in the allegory it depicts, a feature Derrida has failed to mention beyond his passing reference to the painting’s title: *Lucretia*.

Indeed, the subject matter of the painting is made conspicuous by the very absence of any discussion and the sheer idiosyncrasy of the selection in the first place. In the interests of beauty, Cranach’s numerous canvases depicting the Judgement of Paris would be even more obvious choices, and if veils and ornaments were the only concern, his larger paintings of Venus and Amor provide more easily seen examples of the same thing. Instead, Derrida is drawn to tiny *Lucretia*, a canvas measuring a mere 37.3 cm × 23.9 cm, and we are left to wonder about the relevance of her particular example.

16 Countless commentators have speculated that Kant therefore positions genius as superior to mere taste. Notably, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* [1960], New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1985, esp. pp. 51–5, and *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

LUCRETIA'S well-known story is one about beauty and fidelity, rape and subsequent suicide. Having proven her fidelity to her husband, Collatinus, the industrious and beautiful Lucretia is rewarded by being raped by her husband's jealous cousin, Sextus. Calling her husband and her father to her side the next day, Lucretia informs them of her rape and subsequently kills herself in front of them by plunging a dagger into her chest.

But what would such a tale have to say to Kant? What artificial beauty is being represented here, what thing in nature perfected? Does the mythological Lucretia metaphorically evoke the natural beauty that we see in flowers, in tulips, for instance? Or, to return to the examples Kant used for the perfection of artificial beauty, could we say that Lucretia's beauty is more like the Furies or the devastations of war? Her rape did, as the story goes, lead to a revolt of great consequence to Roman history. And how would mythological figures like Lucretia and the Furies be part of nature anyway? Is nature in their allegory, or is nature merely an allegory?

Kant offers no answers, and it is difficult to see how to continue the logic of artificial beauty. Figurative painting remains a problem to which the example of a beautiful woman calls attention. It suggests, for one thing, that she is in some fundamental way not a proper subject for art except in so far as her figure is not really hers. She appears as a mythologized figure of artificial beauty or as an eroticized image that in Kant's terms is not beautiful at all. On the latter count, Derrida's reading of Cranach's *Lucretia* calls attention to what has noticeably been left out of this discussion: any extended consideration of how desire and sexual pleasure enter into aesthetics. Kant, of course, was not interested in these issues. For him, the pleasure associated with judgement is the pleasure that comes from judging, not the pleasure of coming. When Derrida reads Kant, he implicitly, if not explicitly, introduces the pleasure of the spectator who eroticizes Lucretia's body—a disturbing move, given that in the myth of Lucretia 'pleasure' belongs to the rapist, who is himself a type of spectator, an appreciative viewer of Lucretia's figure.¹⁷

Lucretia's example underlines that desire and sexuality remain unaccountable here; her figure challenges the very limits, the very criteria, of aesthetic accountability. But lest we dismiss Kant too quickly as a result, it is important to point out that within the terms of the *Critique of Judgement* her example poses this challenge through its claim to particularity: Lucretia is not a model of beauty, a model representation of a beautiful woman; she is precisely an *example*. Figurative painting may represent the human form, but it can never represent what that form should look like, can never represent the aesthetic ideal, provide a model. The beautiful woman is, as Bloom says in *Ulysses* when he speculates on how the blind stripling might see a woman,

17 We could question as well the extent to which Cranach engages any of these issues through his particular representation of Lucretia. For instance, does Cranach's canvas depict a defiant Lucretia, confident in her proto-feminist pose and retaining control over her own body? Or are we looking at a conservative gesture that warns of the dangers of sexual desire and cedes to the normalizing views of Cranach's Lutheran reformist connections?

‘kind of a form in his [and we should also say “her”] mind’s eye’, a phenomenological appearance that will never take an ideal shape.¹⁸ The particular example is always contingent, and the ontological ground of woman’s body is to be found neither in beauty nor in nature.

This might be a particularly satisfying place to end, with all its attendant contingency. However, it would not be fulfilling the promise that I made at the beginning of this essay: for, if we are to follow the example of the beautiful woman closely, what she leads us to is the very problem of the ‘we’. Her example in the *Critique of Judgement* opens up the question of who is the ‘we’ who hears the phrase ‘that is a beautiful woman’ and thinks about the shape of her figure? Who is entitled to claim this ‘we’? The question here is one about assent: the possibility of agreement, of shared judgement, of community.

In part, Kant tries to address these concerns by arguing that aesthetic judgement always appeals to a *sensus communis*, a ‘common sense’ that is a community sense, a sense of community. Aesthetic judgement, that is, cannot take place in the absence of a ‘we’. ‘When one judges, one judges as a member of a community’, as Hannah Arendt puts it.¹⁹ An aesthetic judgement presupposes consent from others; through the process of abstraction, we compare ‘our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgements of others’ (§40). Any aesthetic judgement—which is always a reflective judgement that moves from the example, the particular, to find the universal, the general—must be communicated and made with the assumption that others will share the judgement. We look at the example of the beautiful woman, and we should share the aesthetic judgement that results. Which is not to say that there is no possibility for error here: I may be wrong about my judgement (others may not actually share it); we may be wrong together about a judgement (a judgement we share may turn out not to be a correct aesthetic judgement despite the fact that we agree; consensus is no guarantee).

Kant’s claims for aesthetic judgement and the *sensus communis* have been increasingly criticized for their dependence on a false universalism. In the name of the autonomous subject exercising free will, Kant is understood as conjuring up a humanism that aims at universal inclusion, constituting an ever-expanding sameness at the expense of an erasure of difference. While I do not want to deny the validity of such critiques—the political philosophy of the Enlightenment has frequently led to precisely such problems—I want to argue for another way of thinking about the ‘we’ that aesthetic judgement presupposes. While the ‘we’ is indeed formulated through shared judgement, that shared judgement does not have to constitute a denial of difference. That ‘we’ agree on a particular judgement does not mean that the individuals who consent will have done so in the past or will necessarily do so in the future. Nor does it necessitate that ‘we’ must agree in all other cases of judgement.

18 James Joyce, *Ulysses. A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, 3 vols, prepared by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melachior, New York: Garland, 1986, U8, 1125–31. While these remarks could be taken to refer to Platonic forms, I find the Kantian interpretation more convincing.

19 H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 72.

20 Jean-François Lyotard has explored this possibility at length, while avoiding any over-simplification of a strict historical division between modernity and postmodernity. See, for example, his 'After the Sublime: The State of Aesthetics', in *States of Theory: History, Art and Critical Discourse*, ed. David Carroll, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 297–304; 'Answer to the Question, What Is the Postmodern?', in *The Postmodern Explained* [1988], trans. Don Barry *et al*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992, pp. 1–16, in which he also draws a distinction between a modern and postmodern sublime; and *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* [1991], trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994 offers an insightful commentary on the *Critique of Judgement*.

Each member of the community is not identical in every way to every other member of the community. Universality is not the goal, unity the precondition. Instead, this assumes a heterogeneity of community that is an uncommonness that does not deny difference. Difference precedes as well as follows from community, and the goal of community is neither to resolve all difference nor to make difference an ontological ground.

What I have said here is only the beginning of the briefest sketches, and it follows Arendt's lead in taking seriously the connection between aesthetics and politics in the *Critique of Judgement*. It also still leaves open the question of the ethical, of teleological judgement that involves moral purpose. Could a 'we' speak to the ethical effects of examples? Could a 'we' acknowledge the contingency of judgement and avoid returning to claims to know a universal ground upon which moral judgements are based?

As the new millennium begins, it might be tempting to believe that we are well in front of such problems that proceed from a moment in the *Critique of Judgement*. Some would say that modernity's concern for the beautiful and for form has given way to postmodernity's interest in the sublime and formlessness.²⁰ Yet we should be cautious about thinking that we know precisely where the edge of modernity lies, what example a woman might set, what 'we' could be claimed in future. The example of the beautiful woman may even offer a way to think about the challenges facing feminist formations of community in the attempt to articulate a politics of difference, where difference remains a problem that cannot be solved.