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Kant and the Possibility of the Sublime in the Visual Arts

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Abstract
Whether Kant's critical aesthetics accommodates the possibility of art eliciting the sublime is a lively debate in the literature. Those who defend this possibility have generally based their account on Kant's theory of "aesthetic ideas" (Pillow 1994, Wicks 1995, Tomasi 2005, Vandenabeele 2015). I argue that this common strategy fails. I propose an alternative positive account. First, if art is to elicit the Kantian sublime through its form, the viewer is required to adopt a particular mental condition such that they perceive the artwork as sheer magnitude or power, abstracting from that it is a human artifact, what its purpose may be, and what it is supposed to represent. Second, if art is to elicit the Kantian sublime through its content, it can do so in a second-order manner, through the representation not of natural objects which would directly elicit the sublime, but the sublime experience itself (of another subject).

Keywords
Kant, artistic sublime, natural sublime, aesthetic ideas, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

0. *Introduction*

Kant's theory of the sublime has enjoyed an immense amount of interest in the literature especially in the last three decades, roughly since the first book-length treatments of the topic by Crowther (1989) and Lyotard (1991). One question that has received increasing attention is whether Kant's theory can accommodate the possibility of artworks eliciting the experience of the sublime. This question is naturally motivated by the curious lack of an account of artistic sublimity in Kant's primary aesthetic treatise, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* [hereafter *Critique*], where Kant presents his theory of the (natural) sublime as well as his theory of (beautiful) art. While some scholars have argued that Kant is indeed justified in not offering an account of artistic sublimity in the *Critique,* because his respective theories of the sublime and art

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significantly problematize the very possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime (Abaci 2008, Brady 2012, 2013), others have offered various ways in which a case for a Kantian artistic sublime can be made (Clewis 2010, Vandenabeele 2015, Guyer 2015, Küplen 2015, Hall 2020, Kvokačka 2021).

In this paper, I intend to engage with this ongoing discussion, and offer a nuanced position which both recognizes the challenge that specific textual and philosophical problems pose for a genuinely Kantian artistic sublime and delineates a conceptual room, albeit constrained, for the latter. I will first detail what I take to be the most pressing problems with the very idea of a Kantian artistic sublime, and map the various possible interpretive options in light of these problems. I will then discuss a positive account of Kantian artistic sublimity, which has gained the most traction in the literature over the last few decades, and argue that this account is implausible and even incoherent. I will then conclude by laying out two alternative positive propositions as to how and under what restrictive conditions artworks can elicit Kantian sublime.

1. *What the question of a Kantian artistic sublime is*

Before any discussion of the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime, it is crucial to clarify the notion of the sublime that is relevant to our aesthetic-theoretical purposes here. The "Analytic of the Sublime" in the *Critique* is concerned with how certain natural objects and phenomena can elicit an aesthetic experience (and/or judgment) of the sublime. This is distinct from the question of what *things* are to be appropriately called sublime. The latter is what Kant seems to be more interested in in his precritical essay, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* [hereafter *Observations*], though with a view to offering more of an empirical inventory of what particulars are sublime (as opposed to beautiful, ugly, or comical) and less of a theoretical analysis of the predicate "sublime". The *Observations* offers a very long and diverse list of sublime things, including natural objects (2:208), artworks and artifacts (2:210, 211, 255), virtues like friendship and truthfulness but also vices and moral failings like wrath (2:212, 215), not to mention brown and black eyes, older age (2:213), the night (2:209), a long duration (2:210), understanding and boldness (2:211), male sex (2:228), and so on.[1]

[1] I provide author-date citations for all authors except Kant. Kant's works are cited according to the Akademie edition, except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which is cited according to the standard A/B pagination. I adopt the following abbreviations: *CPR=Cri-*

Offering such an inventory of sublime things does not at all fit with Kant's theoretical ambitions in the *Critique*, even though one can find remnants of the *Observations* in the *Critique*, where Kant still occasionally uses the term "sublime" in a loose manner as a predicate of things (e.g., General Remark, 5:272), including artworks (e.g., §49, 5:316). This leads some to the hasty conclusion that Kant's position in the *Critique* allows artistic sublimity. However, in light of the clarification above, Kant's calling an object sublime does not warrant that he holds that that object can elicit the experience of the sublime, the phenomenology of which he lays out in the Analytic. And it is the latter that I am concerned with when I raise the question of the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime: can an artwork elicit the experience of the sublime as it is described in the Analytic?

Not only does the *Critique* not offer, at least explicitly and unambiguously, a theory of how art can elicit the experience of the sublime even, say, in its detailed discussion of art, but it also does, at times, quite explicitly, exclude the possibility of art evoking *pure* and *aesthetic* judgments of sublimity. In a somewhat perplexing move, right after citing the Egyptian Pyramids and St Peter's in Rome as examples of objects occasioning the feeling of sublimity in their viewers, Kant seems to radically qualify the theoretical significance of his own examples:

> [I]f the aesthetic judgment is to be pure (not mixed of with anything teleological as judgments of reason) and if an example of that is to be given which is fully appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, then the sublime must not be shown in products of art (e.g., buildings, columns, etc.) (*CJ*, §26, 5:252).

Of course, one could argue, along with, for instance, Wicks (1995), Clewis (2010), Guyer (2018), that impure (or "adherent") sublimity also constitutes a genuine case of sublimity, and that Kant's remark about the impurity of artistic sublimity is not really surprising given that he also holds that artistic beauty is impure (and yet genuine) beauty (*CJ*, §16, 5:229; §48, 5:311). However, Kant's remark here points not only to the unavoidable impurity of any possible artistic sublime, but also raises doubt as to the aesthetic relevance of any possible judgment of sublimity that would be evoked by artworks or human artifacts in general, implying that what elicits the sublime experience and/or judgment must be nature for that experience and/or judgment to be an aesthetically relevant one. I will revisit this point later on.

tique of Pure Reason, CPrR=Critique of Practical Reason, CJ=Critique of the Power of Judgement, G=Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, MPölitzL1=Metaphysik Pölitz, Anth=Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View.

At any rate, the difficulty with the notion of a Kantian artistic sublime is not just a matter of an architectonic gap or the lack of an explicit presentation in the *Critique*. In fact, Kant's aesthetic theory presents the notion with significant philosophical problems that seem to make it inherently unfeasible to pursue.

2. *The Problems with the very notion of a Kantian artistic sublime*

Here are some of the most pressing problems for the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime.

2.1. *The phenomenology of the sublime*

The Analytic of the Sublime presents a very specific phenomenology of the experience of the sublime, wherein the magnitude or power of a (natural) object exceeds the imagination's perceptual limits of comprehension of the object in one unified representation, and this failure of the imagination, negatively, makes vivid the demand of reason for unity, the unconditioned, and infinity, and thus the existence of a human faculty that can actually entertain such ideas that cannot be instantiated or presented by anything in sensible nature. This results in a sort of revelation or self-realization of the subject's rational (cognitive and practical) freedom from nature. This whole experience is felt, by the subject, as a movement between displeasure and pleasure, intimidation and relief.

The question here is whether an artwork can set this kind of phenomenology in motion. Based on Kant's note that the sublime is found in the "formlessness" or "limitlessness" (*CJ*, §23, 5:244) of natural objects (as opposed to the beauty that is found in the form of an object), some, like Brady (2013, p. 123), suggest that art cannot elicit the sublime because artworks have ultimately definite forms and limits in space and time. However, I think that "formlessness" should not be understood literally, as all objects of nature are informed and limited too. Kant's point is rather that the object that stretches the imagination of the subject beyond its maximum capacity of comprehension occasions the feeling of a lack of a unified form and limit. So, the more appropriate worry with regard to the possibility of artworks stretching the imagination beyond its limits of comprehension must concern the magnitude or scale and power. Even if artworks could *represent* the kind of magnitude and power that we find in nature as requisite for the phenomenology of the sublime, they would lack those physical attributes themselves.

2.2. *Nature as the indispensable component of the sublime*

What is revealed by every instance of the sublime experience is human (transcendental or supersensible) freedom from the magnitude or power of (outer) sensible nature. Moreover, the same contrast is also reflected at the level of mental faculties, between reason and the imagination (as the sensible nature in us). It is worth underscoring here that the cognition or awareness of one's own freedom, whether it is theoretical/cognitive or moral/practical, is an important philosophical problem for Kant. Here Kant's account of the sublime offers an intimate way in which we "feel" our freedom, both cognitive and practical. That nature should elicit this feeling is particularly meaningful, as Kant understands freedom as freedom from natural-causal determination and limitation.[2] All of this makes nature not only the appropriate context for the occasioning of the experience of the sublime, but also the indispensable structural component of this very experience itself. Nature is built into the notion of the Kantian sublime.

Both Clewis (2010, p. 167) and Moore (2018, p. 371, n19) argue against the indispensability of nature for the sublime based on Kant's account of "subreption" and claim that what is truly sublime is not any object of nature that might elicit the experience of the sublime but human reason or an idea of reason (*CJ*, §26, 5: 257). Yet what they do not seem to recognize is that the sublimity of human reason is still defined in contradistinction with the limitedness of sensible nature inside and outside us. For what is sublime about human reason is its capacity for ideas of the supersensible and its cognitive and moral autonomy from sensible nature, as opposed to our sensible faculties that are in fact part of nature and thus are subject to its limitations.

There is a broader approach that tends to dismiss both the specific phenomenology of the sublime and the indispensable role of nature by emphasizing the end product of the sublime experience: the revelation of human freedom and/or the rational, transcendental, supersensible aspect of humanity.[3] Accordingly, any experience that involves or leads to such revelation or presentation would be called sublime, and such revelation is not tied to a specific phenomenology or a specific context of objects. This approach obviously opens up conceptual space for artistic sublimity, but it does so at the cost of trivializing the content of the Kantian sublime, in which

[2] *CPR*, A541/B569, A553/B582, A803/B83; *G* 4:446; *CPrR* 5:29, 5:97; *MPölitzL1* 28:257.

[3] Consider, for instance, Lyotard's broad definition of the sublime as the (sensible) "presentation of the unpresentable" (Lyotard 1982).

a specific phenomenology necessarily connects with sensible nature (outside and inside us). It is, however, precisely this phenomenology that makes the experience in question aesthetically relevant, at least, insofar as Kant's aesthetic theory goes. While other objects might lead to such revelations, or to feelings of awe or wonder, Kant would recognize sensible nature as the only sort of thing capable of producing the phenomenology of the sublime.

2.3. *The Purposiveness of Art*

Art is a purposive activity, aiming at pleasing the viewer, according to Kant. As noted earlier, this would make artistic sublime at best impure or "adherent" (*CJ*, §26, 5:252-3). While impure sublime can still be genuine, the problem here is how art, if its purpose is to please, can be "contrapurposive" and displeasing, which is a requisite for the elicitation of the Kantian sublime. Another related worry here is that art, as the embodiment and expression of the artist's intentions and freedom, could not serve the revelation of the viewer's own freedom, which is always a self-reflexive and first-person cognition for Kant. Zuckert (2019, p. 117), I think rightly, points out that the revelation in the sublime is not that of a fact (i.e., that we have a reason or that we are transcendentally free), but "a first-personal sense of what it is to 'inhabit' reason" and be a free agent.[4]

2.4. *Art as Beautiful Representation*

Kant asserts that "art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully things that in nature would be ugly or displeasing" (*CJ*, §48, 5:312). So, even if art represents sublime themes or content, i.e., objects that would naturally elicit the sublime without the mediation of art, it must have a beautiful form (*CJ*, §52, 5:326; *Anth*, 7:241). This introduces a clear distinction between the *representation* of the sublime and the *elicitation* of the sublime: the latter does not necessarily follow from the former.

The worry here is not that the artistic sublime would have to be a mixture of beauty and sublimity, something Kant calls "splendid" or "magnificent" in the *Observations* (2:209), but that our aesthetic response to artistic representation even of the sublime content would be to the form or manner of representation and thus

[4] One could also compare this kind of sui generis realization with that of the "fact of reason" (*CPrR*, 5:91-93), which is more of an immediate first-personal awareness of our free and normatively-bound agency than a cognition of an object or a fact.

yield judgments of taste (beauty), and not of sublimity. I admit that Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas complicates this, by suggesting that our response to (representational) art should also take its "content" into account. I will return to this point below, in the context of my discussion of a positive account of a Kantian artistic sublimity.

3. *Interpretive options*

In light of these difficulties and constraints regarding the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime, a number of interpretive options come to the fore.

i. Art cannot elicit the sublime (of any kind), and it makes sense that Kant does not offer any serious consideration, let alone a full-blown theory, of artistic sublime.

ii. Art can elicit the same kind of sublime as nature, but perhaps not as "purely" (though as genuinely) as nature. In this case, Kant would be guilty of neglecting an important avenue of aesthetic experience in his major treatise on aesthetics. This narrative is both inherently implausible, given Kant's overall architectonic obsessions, and needs to be complemented by a list of solutions to the problems listed above.

iii. Art cannot elicit the kind of sublime laid out in the Analytic, but perhaps a sublime of a different kind. The question is whether our judgment on this different kind of sublime would be a genuinely aesthetic one, say, in the Kantian sense. What we have at hand is the fact that Kant does not offer a theory of a kind of sublime elicitable by art. This means that he either does not at all consider this kind of sublime or does not find it worth theorizing, as opposed to, for instance, artistic beauty. It is then quite possible that Kant does not think that the judgment on this hypothetical artistic sublime would be aesthetic and relevant to his project in the *Critique*. Brady (2013, p. 119), for instance, claims that only the original sense of the sublime, i.e., the kind elicited by nature, is aesthetically relevant.

iv. Since a set of constraints on the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublimity (i.e., both art's purposiveness and its having to represent content beautifully) is rooted in Kant's fairly restrictive conception of art (as representational and aiming to please the subject), one strategy to side-step these constraints would be to resort to a non-Kantian, e.g., post-modern, contemporary, or avant-garde, conception of art, which would allow the artist to displease, discomfort, and even disgust the viewer and thus could

in principle elicit the Kantian sublime. Lyotard (1982, 1984), for instance, argued along these lines when he claimed that some contemporary artworks can elicit the Kantian sublime by "presenting the unpresentable".[5] More recently, Küplen (2015) and Vandenabeele (2015) have also suggested that the Kantian sublime (or some modified version of it) could find a more suitable home in contemporary art.

4. *A Positive Account: Locating the Artistic Sublime in Aesthetic Ideas*

(i) and (ii) are not satisfactory options. While (iii) and (iv) may be valuable approaches from the viewpoint of theories of aesthetics and art in general, they do not live up to the real challenge here, but evade it by modifying either the notion of the sublime or that of art in question. The real challenge for those who defend the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime is to offer a positive account which is based on, or at least compatible with, Kant's text and can address the problems that have been pointed out above. One attempt at such an account that gained significant traction in the literature (Pillow 1994, Wicks 1995, Tomasi 2005, and Vandenabeele 2015 to some extent) finds room for artistic sublimity in Kant's theory of aesthetic ideas.

Aesthetic ideas are imaginative presentations of artistic genius: they occasion boundless content of thought, express what is not expressible through determinate concepts, and present the supersensible (i.e., rational ideas) through various compositions of sensible elements (imagery, colours, sounds etc.) (*CJ*, §48, 5:313) This presentation of the supersensible is the essence of the Kantian sublime. Accordingly, the argument goes, one and the same artwork that is the product of artistic genius elicits the experience of beauty and the experience of sublimity at once: our response to its form yields a judgment of taste, and our response to its representational content (i.e., its aesthetic ideas) yields a judgment of the sublime.[6] Pillow puts this succinctly: "Within one and the same artifact, the aesthetic idea possesses a sublime interior content recommended

[5] See Zukert (2021) and Kvokačka (2021) for a favorable, and Crowther (1993, ch. 8) for a critical, take on Lyotard's claim.

[6] Vandenabeele (2015) diverges from the Pillow-Wicks account by arguing that the judgment of the sublime does not just respond to the content of the artwork but also how that content is expressed through the form, though this divergence results from Vandenabeele's particular interpretation of the notion of an aesthetic idea as involving the manner as well as the content of artistic representation. See especially Vandenabeele 2015, pp. 37, 38.

to us by its outwardly beautiful form. For this reason, the work of fine art which exhibits ideas demands for its judgment two distinct modes of aesthetic reflection. Both beauty and sublime inhabit the work of art" (1994, p. 456).

5. *Problems with the Positive Account*

Despite taking on the challenge directly, this account has serious problems of its own.

i. First of all, this account leads to the extremely implausible consequence that all (beautiful) art is sublime.

1. Art is beautiful representation (*CJ*, §48, 5:311, 312).
2. Beautiful art is art of genius (*CJ*, §45, 5:307; §48, 5:311).
3. The product of genius employs aesthetic ideas (*CJ*, §49, 5:314), or beauty is the expression of aesthetic ideas (*CJ*, §50, 5:320).
4. All (beautiful) art employs aesthetic ideas. (1, 2, 3)
5. Art elicits sublime through aesthetic ideas (The Pillow-Wicks thesis).
6. All (beautiful) art elicits sublime.

Perhaps in order to avoid this conclusion, Wicks (1995, p. 192) qualifies his thesis as that only the "best" or "greatest" works of art can elicit beauty and sublime at once, though without explaining why the elicitation of beauty and sublimity at once would amount to better art or why better art has to be better at eliciting both beauty and sublimity. Vandenabeele (2015, p. 45), on the other hand, seems to recognize the inevitability of this conclusion but also admits that this is no longer a Kantian sublime: "unlike Kant, I no longer define the sublime as a feeling that is transcendentally distinct from the beautiful but as an aesthetic category that refers to an *excess* that is perhaps always, somehow, inarticulately present in the feeling of beauty."

ii. One motivation for this account is that a judgment of taste is about the form. Yet this is not entirely true in the case of art. Even though Kant says the beauty of art consists in its form, his theory of aesthetic ideas suggests that the judgment of taste on art is about form, content, and the relation between the two, i.e., "expression" (Guyer 1994).

iii. While the sublime (as laid out in the Analytic) involves the failure of the imagination (in living up to the demands of reason), the production and appreciation of the aesthetic ideas involves an impressive success of the imagination (in creatively presenting what

cannot be given in experience through empirical elements in the work). As Allison (2001, pp. 340-1) notes, if there is any failure in our aesthetic response to art, it belongs to the understanding, which cannot produce concepts that can capture the boundless contents of aesthetic ideas. As I claimed earlier, the failure of the imagination in the sublime is not a contingent element but is emblematic of our rational superiority over (inner and outer) sensible nature. We cannot simply generalize this failure and claim that any exhaustion of a cognitive faculty of ours leads to the same effect.

iv. Not every presentation of the unpresentable (rational ideas) should be called sublime or the concept of sublimity would lose its usefulness for aesthetic theory. What makes the Kantian sublime a useful aesthetic category is its specific phenomenology. Our response to aesthetic ideas involves a very different kind of cognitive process (i.e., the creative power of imagination overwhelming the understanding).

6. *Two Propositions on the Possibility of a Kantian Artistic Sublime*

In light of the above considerations, I propose that if art is to elicit the Kantian sublime, its form would be a better candidate than its content for such capability. This requires a particular mental condition on the part of the viewer: the viewer must perceive the artwork as sheer magnitude or power, by abstracting, at least temporarily, from the fact that it is a human artifact, from what its purpose may be, what it is supposed to represent or signify. Only then can the artifact elicit the experience of the sublime in the way nature itself can do.

There is textual basis for this proposition. For this kind of abstraction is precisely what Kant seems to have in mind when he describes the experience of the spectator gazing at the Egyptian Pyramids from a certain vantage point or when "first entering" St Peter's in Rome, as exemplifying the experience of the natural (and not artistic!) sublime (*CJ*, §26, 5:252). The spectator is captivated and bewildered by these objects qua mere objects of perception, independent of and prior to any possible further reflections on what kinds of things they are. This does not exclude any subsequent aesthetic response to their beauty, but the experience of the sublime elicited by artworks requires a temporary (and perhaps, involuntary) suspension of any judgment of taste.[7]

[7] Tomasi (2005, p. 552) and Guyer (2018, p. 322) both mention the possibility of such abstraction in passing.

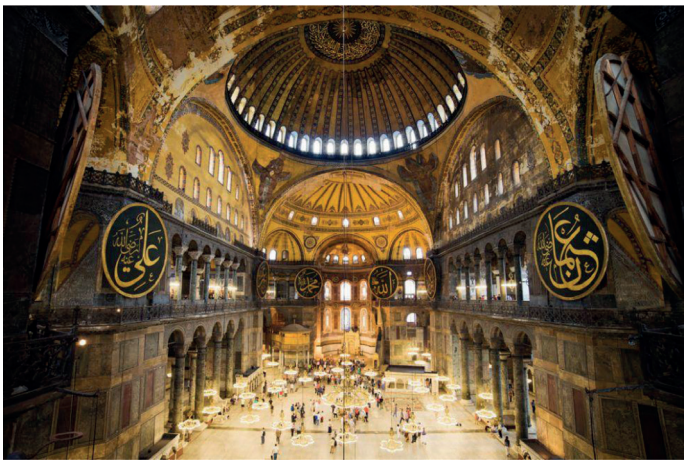
I believe that if my proposition regarding the possibility of the temporary abstraction or bracketing of taste in our response to an artwork is psychologically feasible, then it can successfully address the most pressing conceptual problems for a Kantian artistic sublime, i.e., art as necessarily beautiful representation and art as having the purpose of pleasing. However, there is an important caveat to consider here. One might rightfully ask whether we would really be responding to the artwork *as an artwork* in a state of abstraction from its objective status as an artwork. The worry is that if we could indeed achieve such abstraction and perceive the artwork as, say, a mere magnitude, then we would not be engaging with it qua an artwork anymore. This seems particularly problematic given that Kant emphatically states that "[i]n a product of art one must be aware that it is art, and not nature" (*CJ*, §45, 5:306).

Two points can be raised here against this worry. First, Kant's statement is explicitly and specifically about the beauty of art and the judgment of taste in response to it. For just below the above quote, he notes that "Nature was beautiful, if at the same time it looked like art; and art can only be called beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature" (*CJ*, §45, 5:306), and reiterates that "beautiful art must be regarded as nature, although of course one is aware of it as art" (*CJ*, §45, 5:307). This does not mean that the "awareness" condition would have to apply to all kinds of aesthetic engagement with artworks.

Second, while Kant seems to hold that an aesthetic response to an artwork is preceded by a logical/determining judgment that it is an artwork (and this could be facilitated, if not warranted, by the physical setting of presentation), he clearly does not think that this logical judgment (or cognitive awareness) should be the basis of the aesthetic response. On the contrary, the response is aesthetic precisely when it is not determined by the concept of art or that of what the artist aims to do, though Kant also suggests that the latter is important insofar as the "perfection" of art lies in the degree to which the artist accomplishes their intentions (*CJ*, §48, 5:311). More importantly, the mindset that I propose would make it possible for art to elicit the sublime does not entail a genuine or pretended lack of awareness of the fact that the object in question is an artwork, but a temporary abstraction from it as forced by a state of bewilderment and awe such that the subject perceives it as sheer magnitude or power.

Obviously, while grandeur is not a conceptual necessity for this proposition to apply, this kind of effect is much more likely to be caused by large-scale non-representational works in architec-

ture (e.g., *Hagia Sophia*, Istanbul), sculpture (e.g., Richard Serra's *Inside Out*), land or earth art (e.g., Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*). It would be particularly difficult to attain this effect in painting.



Hagia Sophia (537 AD)

Inside Out, 2013-14

Spiral Jetty, 1970

There is, however, one possibility that is worth considering with respect to representative visual arts like painting. As opposed to Pillow's claim that sublime (representational) art is not constrained by sublime themes, I hold that if art is to elicit the Kantian sublime through its content, it must depict sublime themes. This restriction on the content blocks the problematic conclusion that every (beautiful) artwork is sublime, which, as we saw earlier, the Wicks-Pillow thesis cannot avoid. However, as many have rightly noted (Abaci 2008, p. 247; Clewis 2010, p. 169; Kuplen 2015, pp. 129-130; Vandenabeele 2015, p. 41), sublime representational content is not a sufficient condition of eliciting the sublime experience.

Now, I propose that if art is to elicit the Kantian sublime through its content, it is more likely that it can do so in a second-order manner, through representing not sublime content (natural objects or phenomena such as mountains, vast landscapes, storms, which would directly elicit the sublime) but the sublime experience itself (of another subject). And this is what romantic painters of the sublime like Caspar David Friedrich and Johan Christian Dahl seem to have tried to achieve when they have portrayed human beings' encounters with the sublimity of nature. Especially notable examples would be *Wanderer above the Sea Fog* (1818), *Monk by the Sea* (1810), *Woman before the Rising Sun* (1818), *Moon Rising over the Sea* (1822), *Sunset* (1830-1835), *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1830-1835) by Friedrich, and *Two Men Before a Waterfall at Sunset* (1823) *and An Eruption of Vesuvius* (1824) by Dahl.

To be sure, these paintings can be said to represent first-order sublime themes. For, first, the viewer still sees the sublime natural landscape. Second, the viewer is directly shown the human-nature encounter. However, the setting is also configured to represent what might be called a second-order sublime: we, as viewers, are located behind a subject or multiple subjects, gazing at a scene that would elicit the sublime experience in us if we were in their place. So, we are invited to have a perceptual empathy or identification with the depicted subject(s), and to imaginatively reconstruct what they would be perceiving and how they would be responding to it.

Monk by the Sea (1808-1810)

Sunset (1830-1835)

Two Men Before Waterfall at Sunset (1823)

An Eruption of Vesuvius (1824)

There is one important advantage of this kind of second-order representation of the sublime over the first-order representation of the sublime in terms of the possibility of eliciting the Kantian sublime: the former gives more freedom to the viewer as the subject of aesthetic experience. As I noted in section 2 above, the real worry

regarding the purposiveness of art is not that it makes any possible artistic sublimity impure, but that art, as the expression of the artist's intentions and freedom, might not serve the revelation of the viewer's own freedom. The kind of imaginative reconstruction that is evoked by paintings that offer a second-order representation of the sublime is relatively free from the painter's instructions. With the use of the rear-view image of the subject(s) in the painting, we are transferred or plugged, as it were, into the scene and encouraged to imagine the real perceptual effect that the sublime scene would have upon us. In a way, the two-dimensional, spatially-limited artistic medium removes itself and leaves the viewer confronting the sublimity of nature.

7. *Conclusion*

In this paper, I argued that the possibility of a Kantian artistic sublime comes with inherent conceptual difficulties, most of which stem from Kant's original constructions of the concepts of the sublime and art in the *Critique*. I articulated these difficulties and mapped the interpretive options they leave open. I then demonstrated that the most vocal positive account in the literature, which takes on the challenge of finding room for a Kantian artistic sublime in Kant's text, is unviable, at least, without radical modifications of Kant's concepts of the sublime and of art, respectively. I concluded with two alternative propositions, one locating the Kantian sublime in the form, the other locating it in the representational content of art.

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