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# *Duality and Temporality: Evoking the Sublime through Pictures*

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Abstract
Pictures pose a particular problem for the question of the representability of the sublime (in Kant's sense). Their dependence on a limited and immobile picture carrier seems to prevent any depiction of the sublime from the outset. The present contribution first asks what preconditions must be met in order to be able to speak of a successful evocation of the sublime. On this basis, it is explained why the choice of pictorial motifs that can be experienced as sublime in nature is not an adequate solution to this problem. Instead, the paper proposes that the mobilization of specific properties of pictures, i.e., their duality and their temporality, could render the evocation of sublime sensations conceivable. This approach is finally illustrated by reference to the examples of Caspar David Friedrich and J. M. W. Turner.

Keywords
Sublime; duality of pictures; temporality of picture perception

## 1. *Sublime Art? The Particular Case of Pictures*

With his contribution *Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity*,[1] Uygar Abaci initiated a productive discussion of the artistic representability of the sublime in the Kantian sense.[2] Is it possible to integrate artistic representations into Kant's theory of the sublime, or does the sublime ultimately remain inaccessible to the arts? In addition to the question of how Kant himself thought about this issue, it is above all the underlying systematic problem that deserves attention. Are works of art capable – independently of Kant's own opinion – of succeeding as representations or evocations of the sublime that do justice to the core of Kant's theory? The discussion

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[1] See Abaci 2008; Clewis 2010; Abaci 2010; Doran 2015, pp. 275-285; Vandenabeele 2015; Crowther 2016, pp. 57-78; Guyer 2018; Hall 2020; and Kvokačka 2021.

[2] This contribution has been prepared within the framework of the Collaborative Research Center SFB 1288 "Practices of Comparing. Changing and Ordering the World", funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), subproject E02, "Comparative Viewing of Pictures: Practices of Incomparability and the Theory of the Sublime".

concerning this question has by no means been completed and continues to be stimulating. It obviously does not merely touch on a peripheral detail of Kant's theory but also contributes to putting into question and improving our understanding of central provisions of his concept of the sublime.

In more recent contributions to this discussion, reference has been made to various arts – partly by drawing on examples that Kant already provided in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. As far as I can see, the question of whether different arts might be suitable for the representation or evocation of the sublime to different degrees has not yet been asked systematically. Kant himself referred to architectural examples such as Egyptian pyramids and St Peter's Basilica in Rome (KU § 26, AA 5:252).[3] But the question also arises in relation to literature, music, and the visual arts.[4] The latter, especially painting, raise particular questions because of their specific nature. Since pictures (setting aside film, video, and the like) are motionless and silent and since their dimensions are also usually clearly limited, they seem to be particularly ill-suited to depicting or evoking the sublime.

It is noteworthy that even 18th-century theorists writing before Kant were skeptical of pictorial representations of the sublime, although they took it for granted that other arts could do so.[5] Edmund Burke explicitly appreciated the possibilities of poetic language in this regard but strongly opposed the idea of trying to express the sublime in paintings. Since pictures are limited and would present everything visible in excessive detail within the chosen section, he considered this form to be inappropriate for expressing sublime ideas (Burke/Boulton 1958, p. 174). In a short note published posthumously in 1788, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing outlined the refutation of an idea based on which Alexander Gerard had previously argued for the pictorial representability of the sublime. Gerard (1759, p. 24) had suggested choosing the scale relations within the representation in such a way that it would be possible to incorporate immensely large dimensions into the picture. However, such a procedure – according to Lessing's criticism – would not change the fact that the picture itself always remains manageable at a glance (Lessing/Barner 1990, pp. 266-267).

The stipulations that went hand-in-hand with Kant's theory made it even more difficult to think about pictorial representa-

[3] Citations of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (KU) are to the fifth volume of the so-called 'Akademieausgabe' (AA 05) edited by the Prussian Academy of the Sciences.

[4] For the case of literature, see especially Guyer 2018.

[5] See Grave (in print). For the British discourse, see Ibata 2018.

tions of the sublime. These difficulties were highlighted particularly clearly when thinkers who had trained on Kant's *Critiques* thought about the consequences that his philosophy might have in the field of art theory and practice. In the first years of the 19th century, Christian August Semler and Carl Ludwig Fernow took up the definition of the sublime that Kant had given in his *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.[6] Both theorists had to concede, however, that in view of the finite extension of pictures and their immobility, at best an indirect, mediate, or symbolic representation of the sublime in painting was conceivable. Semler and Fernow deserve interest because their reflections suggest that a theory of painting that is also intended to include representations of the sublime presupposes an aesthetic of reception that grants the viewer an active role. Both thinkers outline – in the sense of Kant's shift of the sublime into the subject – approaches in which the desired effect can only be achieved with the participation of the viewer's imagination.

The theoretical positions on art adopted in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that have been briefly mentioned here leave no doubt that painting faced special challenges when confronted with the sublime. Even if one – like many of Kant's contemporaries – considered the sublime to be a potential object of the arts, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that paintings would be suitable for its representation. In the following, this problem will not be pursued historically but rather systematically. We will not ask whether Kant or individual contemporaries saw the possibility of a pictorial representation or evocation of the sublime. Rather, we will examine whether a solution to the outlined problem can be found in principle under the guidelines of Kant's theory. The question to be asked thus pertains to the type of understanding of pictures and their reception that such a solution would require. The fact that, in the following, we do not take up positions from the history of art theory is the result of a conscious decision. For it does not seem impossible, at least, that the question implicitly raised by Kant can be answered differently and more accurately based on our contemporary understanding of pictures. In so doing, however, we will concentrate solely on the mathematically sublime, since the attempt at a pictorial representation of the dynamically sublime seems to be even less promising in view of the motionlessness of pictures. The following considerations therefore focus on the question of whether limited and motionless pictures are capable of representing or evoking the mathematically sublime.

[6] See Semler 1800, vol. 1, pp. 187-192, pp. 310-312; Fernow/Georgi 2020, pp. 46-49; and Grave (in print).

## 2. *What Should Pictures that Represent or Evoke the (Mathematically) Sublime Achieve?*

Kant defines the mathematically sublime as something "which is great beyond all comparison" (KU § 25, AA 5:248) or as that "in comparison with which everything else is small" (KU § 25, AA 5:250). Accordingly, the sublime is characterized by the fact that no suitable scale can be used to estimate its size. Kant immediately states that this quality does not belong to any object or phenomenon in nature in the strict sense. However, "it is the disposition of the mind resulting from a certain representation occupying the reflective judgment, but not the object, which is to be called sublime" (KU § 25, AA 5:250). He therefore concludes that what should actually be characterized as sublime is that "which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses" (KU § 25, AA 5:250). Nevertheless, this "disposition of the mind" can be stimulated by the sensorial perception of objects and phenomena, which then prove to be the *occasion of* a sensation of the sublime without themselves being sublime.

Objects that overburden the "aesthetic estimation of magnitude" (KU § 26, AA 5:251) represent such an occasion. Such is the case not only for infinitely large objects but even for situations in which something *appears* infinitely large to the subject. Kant describes this case in remarkable detail, since the sublime's ability to be more than a purely hypothetical phenomenon depends on it. The estimation of magnitude is based on a combination of "apprehension (*apprehensio*) and comprehension (*comprehensio aesthetica*)" (KU § 26, AA 5:251), the interaction between which ensures that an object can be measured in its entirety. The aesthetic estimation of magnitude reaches its limits when, as the "apprehension" of an all-too-large object progresses, the "comprehension" thereof fails because the imagination is no longer able to grasp the newly added "partial representations" alongside the impressions already gained as a whole:

> For when apprehension has gone so far that the partial representations of the intuition of the senses that were apprehended first already begin to fade in the imagination as the latter proceeds on to the apprehension of further ones, then it loses on one side as much as it gains on the other […]. (KU § 26, AA 5:252)

While a mathematical estimation of magnitude poses no problem in such cases, the aesthetic estimation is overcharged. Moments of this kind are not necessarily based on an encounter with

a phenomenon that is actually infinite and exceeds every measure, even mathematical measures. Rather, other examples include "appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of its infinity" (KU § 26, AA 5:255), if the efforts of the imagination towards "comprehension" in the aesthetic estimation of size fail. Namely, the notion of a "magnitude of a natural object on which the imagination fruitlessly expends its entire capacity for comprehension" leads the subject "to a supersensible substratum" (KU § 26, AA 5:255). This effect is owed to reason, which is able to produce that wholeness that could not be secured in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude. With the sensation of the sublime, therefore, "the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility" (KU § 27, AA 5:257) becomes apparent.

Following Kant's phrase that the sublime is "great beyond all comparison" (KU § 25, AA 5:248), the situation thus outlined can also be described as a particular form of a failure of comparison. The attempt to compare what appears to be incomprehensibly great breaks down less because an unsuitable scale is chosen than because, in comparing, it is not possible to preserve the wholeness of the *comparatum*. That which is to be compared disintegrates into "partial representations" in the very process of comparison because the power of imagination is no longer able to exercise its "comprehension". This situation can lead to the combination of "displeasure" and "pleasure" (KU § 27, AA 5:257) that characterizes the sublime – in Kant, as previously in Burke. The "feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole" (KU § 26, AA 5:252) provides the subject with a basis for experiencing the fact that reason is able to remedy precisely this deficiency. What the imagination is no longer able to grasp as a whole, reason can think as an entirety.

If pictures are to prompt sensations of the sublime, they must be able to make a perceptual offer that brings the sensibility and imagination of the subject to their limits.[7] The experience of this excessive demand should also be suitable to stimulate the subject to "abandon sensibility", to secure the wholeness that escapes the imagination through the use of reason, and "to occupy itself with

[7] I understand this premise more specifically than it has been understood by those authors – e.g., Pillow 1994; Wicks 1995; Tomasi 2005; Vandenabeele 2015; and Kvokačka 2021 – who attribute sublimity to some works of art because of their capacity to express or stimulate 'aesthetic ideas' that themselves, based on their inexhaustibility, seem to suggest an analogy to the infinity of the mathematically sublime. With its inexhaustibility, the 'aesthetic idea' does not bring sensibility and imagination, but rather the intellect, to its limits.

ideas that contain a higher purposiveness" (KU § 23, AA 5:246). Infinite size is not necessarily required in this context, as demonstrated by Kant's reflections on the aesthetic estimation of magnitude, which can also be overburdened by phenomena that are too large but nevertheless limited. However, the question of whether and, if so, how pictures could provoke the overtaxing of the imagination described by Kant remains unanswered.

Before we turn to this question, we should address a problem that emerges on a somewhat different level. This problem seems to imply a fundamental objection to the possibility of a pictorial evocation of the sublime. When Uygar Abaci justified his skepticism against any artistic representation of the sublime in Kant's sense, he referred, among other things, to Kant's hint that the sublime should not be exhibited "in products of art (e.g., buildings, columns, etc.), where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude […]" (KU § 26, AA 5:252). Somewhat later, Kant varies this argument once again: "A pure judgment on the sublime, however, must have no end of the object as its determining ground if it is to be aesthetic and not mixed up with any judgment of the understanding or of reason" (KU § 26, AA 5:253). Abaci (2008, pp. 246-247) noted that a use of artistic means of representation for the purpose of evoking the sublime would conflict with the requirement stipulated by Kant: "If there is to be (a judgment of) artistic sublimity, it is necessarily impure, because artworks are irreducibly objectively purposive" (Abaci 2010, p. 172).

On closer inspection, this conclusion is perhaps less compelling than it might initially seem. The objection pertains to artworks insofar as they are perceived as works of art. Kant's analogous considerations of the judgment of beautiful objects (KU § 48, AA 5:311) suggest that it is possible to think of cases in which a purpose in the cause must not necessarily be presupposed in the judgment of an object, insofar as this object is not perceived as a work of art. Thus, the problem outlined by Abaci does not arise in the same way when a work of art is decidedly not perceived as a work of art but rather, for example, as an object of nature or as a picture without artistic ambition. But, more importantly, Abaci's argument does not take into account the fact that the artistic purpose may not be the cause of all the properties and qualities of a work of art and that its reception can be detached from such a purpose. When Kant writes that in the work of art, "human end determines the form as well as the magnitude", this claim does not already indicate the degree to which this determination shapes the work. The contingencies of

the production of works of art, the inevitable as well as productive indeterminacy of the works themselves, and the comparatively wide scope of reception make it seem to be quite possible that such works, in addition to the purpose addressed by Kant, also have other characteristics that are not significant with respect to the purpose itself and that can, as it were, take on a life of their own in reception. Even during the creation of a work, coincidences can play a productive role, such as when, during the work on a watercolor, the not fully controllable properties of the material or the inherent logic of the picture in interaction with the artist lead to the emergence of a solution that goes beyond the guiding artistic idea. Kant, as his reflections on the concept of genius (KU § 46-50, AA 5:307-320) suggest, may have been open to such considerations, which is why he does not emphasize a specific concrete purpose for the arts but rather a "purposiveness without an end" (KU § 15, AA 5:226). Kant's skepticism regarding an evocation of the sublime by means of works of art "where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude" may therefore fall short because this idea ties works of art and their formal properties too closely to a specific artistic purpose. Even if one concedes that it would be contradictory to create works that aim at the purpose of evoking sensations of the sublime, it is not possible to exclude completely cases in which works that are capable of evoking sublime sensations occur more or less unintentionally and independently of the artist's aims.

## 3. *Sublimity by the Choice of the Represented Subject?*

These considerations, however, do not yet decide whether the specific medial conditions of pictures perhaps exclude their suitability for the sublime. The motionless stasis of pictures does not allow changes and sequences of events to be visualized directly.[8] That *dynamis,* which is indispensable for the dynamically sublime, is not part of their repertoire of expression. Instead of considering how the incomparably great forces of the dynamically sublime could nevertheless be expressed in pictures in an indirect, mediated way, we will therefore limit ourselves in the following to the question of whether pictures are at least suitable for the representation or

[8] At this point, it is not possible to elaborate on the fact that paintings, too, have time and again been conceived as dynamic and vivid. However, such an understanding of a dynamics of paintings implicitly presupposes the act of reception with its own temporality. For a detailed consideration of this issue, see Grave 2022.

evocation of the mathematically sublime. In so doing, we must first examine whether a skillful selection of the subject to be represented in the picture can contribute to solving this problem.

A solution that seems obvious at first glance, i.e., that of capturing something infinite in the picture, proves to be of little help on closer inspection. The central perspective that has been common and widely used since the Renaissance maintains that lines extending parallel to each other at an angle of 90° to the picture surface into the depth of the pictorial space intersect at the vanishing point. The vanishing point has therefore often been understood as an image of that place in infinity where this convergence of parallels occurs. Even on this understanding, however, the infinite can only be made vivid in this way by means of a geometric construction, not in the sense of an aesthetic estimation of magnitude. The vanishing point may be infinitely far away from the viewing subject, but it nevertheless does not offer an opportunity to overcharge the aesthetic estimation of magnitude in the manner described by Kant. For, due to the increasing perspectival shortening of distances in the depth of the pictorial space, the possibility of allowing the "apprehension" to progress continuously in the estimation of distances is soon exhausted. The size estimation must therefore cease – not because the "comprehension" no longer succeeds, but because the "apprehension" cannot be continued. Strictly speaking, we only *know* that the vanishing point is infinitely far away; we cannot *apprehend and comprehend* this infinite distance vividly. The central perspective and vanishing point, therefore, do not seem to be suitable for awakening sublime sensations.

Similar problems might be posed by the attempt to push the viewer's imagination to its limits by depicting an extremely large object very far away in the depth of the pictorial space. In this case, it would not be a matter of making the infinite appear. Rather, the viewer would be challenged by the fact that she or he is confronted with both extremely long distances and exceptionally large dimensions. This extensive distancing would also allow the central object to appear to be extraordinarily large despite the limited surface of the picture. Ernst Ferdinand Oehme's painting *Das Wetterhorn* (fig. 1) obviously plays with precisely this effect.[9] The immeasurable size of the mountain almost ruptures the format of the picture, as the mountain peak reaches the picture's border. Simultaneously, however, Oehme has placed the mountain – unlike in a watercolor (fig. 2)[10] – conspicuously far away in the pictorial space. In view of this distance, which can hardly be measured in its own right, the mountain

[9] On this painting, see Bischoff 1997, p. 190, no. 76.
[10] For information on this watercolor, see Bischoff 1997, p. 185, no. 48.

1. Ernst Ferdinand Oehme, The Wetterhorn, 1829, oil on canvas, 141.5 x 184.5 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie.

2. Ernst Ferdinand Oehme, The Wetterhorn with the Rosenlaui Glacier, probably 1825, pen and brush, 23.8 x 33.5 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett.

must once again appear much larger. Oehme's pictorial strategy – of which, by the way, we cannot say with certainty that it was intended to evoke the sublime – is very suitable for pushing the viewer's aesthetic estimation of magnitude to its limits. But it is difficult to judge whether it is capable of triggering an effect that corresponds to the uninterrupted progression of the "apprehension" described by Kant alongside the simultaneous overcharging of the "comprehension". For, in this case, it is not actually the wholeness of the extraordinarily large object that seems to be in question but rather the continuous functioning of the "apprehension" that is prevented.

The "comprehension" that is involved in the process of aesthetic size estimation seems to be more significantly undermined by pictures that show only a part of a subject with particularly large dimensions. If, for example, a mountain that appears to be very high and massive is shown comparatively far away from the viewer and, moreover, if only a section of it is visible, the aesthetic estimation of size is confronted with an aggravated problem. In such a case, it is not only difficult to gauge the dimensions of the mountain; rather, a perception of the wholeness of the extraordinarily large object is also denied. Caspar David Friedrich may have followed such an idea when working on his painting *The Watzmann* (fig. 3) – although there is some evidence to suggest that it was not his intention to paint representations of the sublime.[11] Despite its large format, his painting shows only a part of the mighty mountain, as, among other things, the vegetation, which remains sparse even at the lower edge of the picture, undoubtedly indicates. As in Oehme's picture, it is difficult for the viewer to determine the distance and the size of the mountain. In addition, however, the "comprehension" that occurs in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude is also prevented here since the mountain is not entirely visible. It is obvious that this situation poses nearly insurmountable problems for size estimation. However, even this form of representation probably does not fully meet the requirements that Kant stipulated for occasions of the sublime. The defect that the wholeness of the exceedingly large object remains elusive to the contemplating subject is not due to barriers of our sensibility but rather to the limits of the picture. In this case, sublimity could at best be evoked if the viewer tries to supplement what is missing in the picture through his imagination and if, during this process, the "comprehension" becomes overtaxed as the "apprehension" progresses.

[11] On the painting, see Börsch-Supan & Jähnig 1973, pp. 397-398; Verwiebe 2004; and Grave 2012, pp. 195-197. On Friedrich and the theory of the sublime, see Grave 2001 and Grave 2012, pp. 187-199.

3. Caspar David Friedrich, The Watzmann, c. 1824/25, oil on canvas, 135 x 170 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie (on loan from DeKaBank).

## 4. *The Duality of the Picture and the Temporality of Picture Reception*

Sensations of the mathematically sublime, as Kant understands them, presuppose temporal processes. They are divided into a sequence of initial "displeasure" and subsequent "pleasure". The displeasure, in turn, arises from the failed attempt to ensure the "comprehension" in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude alongside the successively advancing "apprehension" simultaneously. Displeasure thus implies in itself a process in which the overburdening of the imagination can come to light. Since pictures (if one excludes moving images such as films or videos) are motionless and do not exhibit any changes of their own accord, only one temporal process could serve as the situation that gives rise to the sensation of the sublime: the temporal performance of viewing the picture. From the perspective of Kant's theory of the sublime, this idea is only logical, because in the strict sense it does not place an external object at the center but rather the process of sensorial perception and thinking stimulated by that object. With regard to our interactions

with pictures, though, this thought is not quite so self-evident since we rarely consider the intrinsic value and significance of the temporality of picture perception. Without taking this temporality and processuality into account, however, it is not possible to produce a promising assessment of whether and to what extent pictures can evoke the sublime. The question is therefore whether pictures can influence the process by which they are perceived in a way that stimulates or favors sensations of the sublime.

As these considerations indicate, it is difficult to arrive at a representation that can serve as an occasion for sublime sensations solely by means of the well-calculated selection and perspectivization of pictorial motifs. However, pictures would be considerably underestimated if they were to be reduced solely to what is depicted in them. Unlike the contemplation of an impressively high mountain in nature, the depiction of such a natural spectacle always raises the possibility of turning one's attention to the painting as an object with its own physicality and materiality in addition to the view of what is depicted in the painting. Every contemplation of a picture offers the viewer not only the things within the depiction but simultaneously the picture itself as a thing.[12] In many cases, this circumstance seems to be trivial or irrelevant to us. Regarding works of art, these two offers of perception are sometimes understood as correlates of different forms of viewing: an interpretive reception concentrating on the depicted content or a contemplation that focuses on aesthetic qualities or stylistic aspects. But even such a distinction of modes of perception underestimates the significance of the fundamental duality of the picture, which is associated with far-reaching potential. If a picture is designed in such a way that it specifically encourages the viewer to pay attention to both aspects of the picture's duality, the temporal process of viewing the picture is shaped in a decisive way. Namely, only in the temporal performance of seeing can both aspects of the duality of the picture come to the fore. This potential is likely to contribute significantly to our tendency to ascribe to pictures a 'power' or 'agency' that is capable of limiting the sovereignty of the viewer.[13]

[12] At this point, it could be discussed how the fundamental duality of the picture can also be asserted for non-representational, abstract or monochrome painting. In picture theory, it is disputed whether non-representational paintings can be considered pictures; see, e.g., Asmuth 2011, pp. 94-95. For my argument, it should be sufficient that pictures enable references to extra-pictorial reality. Such references would already provide a minimal basis for making the duality of the picture experienceable. Presumably, the expectations and reception practices of the viewer are as important in this context as the properties of the painting.

[13] The considerations regarding the duality of the picture, the corresponding specific temporality of picture perception, and questions of the *agency of* pictures are dealt with in

Against this backdrop, the question emerges of whether pictures can influence their reception in such a manner that they lead the viewer's imagination to its limits in the way described by Kant. Is it possible by a specific design of the picture to cause the viewer to emphasize the duality of the picture in the temporal process of reception by repeatedly alternating between looking at what is represented and paying attention to the picture as a thing in its own right? At the very least, it is conceivable for a painting to make use of two strategies at once to challenge the viewer. As we have seen in the examples discussed above, the painting can present the viewer with a pictorial motif of extraordinarily large or wide dimensions, so that the viewer is stimulated in a particular way towards an aesthetic estimation of size. Simultaneously, however, such a painting can also make its own fabricated and artificial nature so conspicuous that the gaze is frequently drawn away from the pictorial motif and towards the picture as a thing. In such a case, a permanent and incessant conflict between fundamentally different objects of perception would emerge, namely, between the spatial depth of what is depicted and the surface of the image carrier, between the scarcely measurable dimensions of the pictorial subject and the limited size of the picture itself, between the illusion of a view of something that is not itself physically present and the sheer material presence of the painting. In this way, the aesthetic estimation of magnitude would face particularly far-reaching problems. On the one hand, it would struggle – as might be the case with the paintings by Oehme and Friedrich – to achieve a successful interplay between "apprehension" and "comprehension" in confronting the central motif of the painting. On the other hand, however, a permanently successful "comprehension" would also be prevented by the fact that the phenomenon, whose wholeness is to be ensured by the imagination, is subject to constant shifts and thus eludes definition. The sensorial perception of the observer would not be able to grasp an entirety since the object of perception would constantly change due to the alternation of these aspects of seeing. In this case, a focus on the duality of the picture would oppose any attempt to unify what has been seen within one coherent imagination.

Whereas the starting point of Kant's mathematical sublime is an incommensurability that is rooted in dimensions which exceed the possibilities of an aesthetic estimation of magnitude, the case just outlined would be based on an incommensurability of a different kind. Due to the change between an emphasis on what is repre-

detail in Grave 2022. In this book (pp. 86-101), I also consider the objections that seem to arise from Richard Wollheim's concept of *twofoldness*.

sented on the one hand and a focus on the means of representation and the image carrier on the other, two incommensurable objects of perception would compete with each other. It would make little sense to estimate the size of each of these objects of perception separately and then compare them with each other. If, however, there were multiple or even constant changes between these two perceptual offers, the viewer's sensibility and imagination could be overcharged, which would be comparable to the effect described by Kant.

What I have thus far formulated only tentatively and hypothetically can be illustrated by reference to particular examples. In the following, I examine two paintings by Friedrich and Joseph Mallord William Turner in further detail, albeit without claiming that these artists were actually striving to evoke the sublime. On the contrary, in the first case, i.e., the painting *The Monk by the Sea* (fig. 4), there is some evidence to suggest that Friedrich was skeptical regarding a theory of the sublime in Kant's sense.[14] This unusual marine painting, which already fascinated and provoked his contemporaries, is characterized by the fact that only one small pictorial motif provides a sense of scale: the figure with its back turned towards us, who stands on the beach and seems to look out over the vastness of the sea. This enormous expanse of water, like the depth of the sea, cannot be measured by the viewer. When working on the painting, Friedrich deliberately erased three ships that had been sketched in the preliminary drawing, so that not even a boat or ship enables us to estimate the distances involved. The distance to the horizon must remain entirely immeasurable, since no clues are provided that would allow us to estimate, in the sense of a comprehensible perspective construction, the dimensions of what stands before the monk's eyes and our own. Moreover, the lack of framing elements within the landscape has the consequence that no border of the scenery can be discerned towards the sides of the painting. Only the edges of the picture's surface and the frame cut off the view.

As a result of the painting's radically reduced composition, the contemplation of the picture is not exhausted solely in an immersive focus on a pictorial illusion; rather, the painting also attracts attention due to its own materiality, flatness and limitedness. Clemens Brentano, who was able to see the painting when it was first presented at the exhibition of the Berlin Art Academy in 1810, vividly describes how the desire to enter the depicted

[14] On the painting, see Börsch-Supan & Jähnig 1973, pp. 302-304; Grave 2011, pp. 63-90; and Grave 2012, pp. 145-169 (with further references).

4. Caspar David Friedrich, The Monk by the Sea, 1808/10, oil on canvas, 110 x 171.5 cm, Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie.

landscape in order to experience a sense of longing is thwarted and the painting itself emerges in its concreteness: "[…] that which I should have found within the picture I found instead between the picture and myself, namely a claim that my heart made on the picture, and a rejection that the picture did to me […]."[15] Indeed, Friedrich's painting causes the two-dimensional image carrier to become particularly conspicuous, especially since its boundaries alone define the field of the visible. By dispensing with all the usual principles of landscape composition, the artist reduced the seascape to three pictorial elements, the beach, the sea, and a large section of sky, which can also emerge at any time as two-dimensional stripes. The line of the horizon, which runs straight and without any curvature in an uninterrupted manner, reveals itself as a parallel to the upper and lower edges of the picture and thus incorporates characteristics of the picture carrier into the representation. It has been noted repeatedly, with good reason, that the eye is also drawn to the painting as a two-dimensional and limited artefact. Simultaneously, however, the suggestive perception of space is not permanently suppressed. The juxtaposition of the colored surfaces with which the beach, sea and sky

[15] Brentano & Arnim 2021, p. 37. For the German original, see Schultz 2004, p. 41.

are depicted creates a spatial impression, and the subtly nuanced color gradients additionally reinforce this impression of depth, without the resulting spatial effect approaching the measurability of a perspectively constructed space.

In this way, Friedrich has created a painting that already presents an immeasurable spatial expanse on the level of what is represented within the picture. Beyond that point, however, his landscape painting seems to be particularly well suited to entrap the viewer in a process of reception that switches several times between two fundamentally different offers of perception: between a view of the seascape on the one hand and a view of the painted image carrier on the other. When and how these changes take place is not solely up to the viewer. This characteristic explains why Heinrich von Kleist, when editing and supplementing the text by Brentano, was able to note that precisely this painting – that is, a picture that, as Brentano had noted, allows its artificiality to become conspicuous – acquires an unusual power over the viewer: "[…] and since in its uniformity and boundlessness it has no foreground but the frame, the viewer feels as though his eyelids had been cut off."[16] With these words, Kleist highlights the fact that the picture poses fundamental challenges to the sensorial perception of the viewer.

Turner's painting *Shade and Darkness. The Evening of the Deluge* (fig. 5) may stimulate similar reflections.[17] Even the unusual bipartite title indicates that here, too, the viewer's gaze is drawn both to the scene depicted in the painting and to the means by which that scene is represented: *The Evening of the Deluge* refers to the biblical scene of the onset of the Flood, which emerges for the viewer only slowly and dimly from the whirl of color in the painting, while the words *Shade and Darkness* address fundamental questions of light, shadow, dimness and thus visibility or invisibility. The companion piece that Turner created for the painting adds an explicit reference to this aspect: *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory). The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*. Turner was thus referring to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Theory of Colour* (1810), which had only recently been made accessible in an English translation by Charles Eastlake in 1840.

[16] Kleist 2021, p. 41. For the German original, see Schultz 2004, p. 44.

[17] On the painting, see Butlin & Joll 1977, p. 229, no. 404; and Wilton 1979, p. 287, no. P404.

5. Joseph Mallord William Turner, Shade and Darkness. The Evening of the Deluge, 1843, oil on canvas, 78.7 x 78.1 cm, London, Tate Gallery.

Turner's painting of the eve of the Flood reveals, on prolonged viewing, that a lengthy procession of animals leads from the foreground across a diagonal in the right half of the picture to the ark, which can be seen in the middle of the picture in faint blue-grey colors on the horizon. Like an echo, a flock of birds in the sky corresponds to this procession, which seems, alongside the cloud formations and the animals, to form a vortex in the lower half of the picture. In front on the left, reclining, probably sleeping people are visible, who, according to an inscription in verse that Turner added to the picture, are ignoring the impending Flood.

Turner's depiction obviously attempts to encompass extremely large and wide dimensions and, in this respect, might be reminiscent

of 16th century world landscapes. The work combines the depiction of barely measurable expanses with a formal design and painterly execution that obscures the individual pictorial motifs with clouds of color which span all the objects in the painting, thus making spatial orientation difficult. The viewer's eye takes an unusually long time to distinguish different objects in what at first glance appears to be a nearly formless chaos of colors. Glaringly bright areas and heavily darkened parts further restrict the sensorial perception of the picture. Familiar forms of pictorial spatial representation that would allow us to estimate sizes and distances with some degree of reliability are thus avoided. Turner may have been aiming to accomplish two goals with this composition. On the one hand, he produces an equivalent to the process of evening twilight, which increasingly reduces the visibility of the things that surround us. On the other hand, this approach conveys the global, cosmic dimensions of the events depicted, which were not limited to one place.

Turner's formal design and material execution of the painting, however, also has the consequence that – as in the case of Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* – attention is repeatedly drawn to the artificiality and materiality of the painting. In many parts, it is difficult to distinguish between the contour lines of the depicted animals, people, or objects on the one hand and brush marks or spots of paint on the other. Precisely because the scene depicted in the painting is so difficult to recognize, the viewer is brought close to the picture plane, where she or he encounters the painting's own materiality all the more vigorously. In this case, too, the design of the picture encourages the spectator to switch several times between different objects of perception: the depicted image and the picture itself. This switching is all the more noticeable because the painting's original octagonal format and its integration into a pair of pictures additionally directed the viewer's gaze to qualities that are inherent in the painting as a physical thing rather than in the subjects that are depicted in it. Turner's landscape thus also confronts the viewer with fundamental challenges. He too attempts to encompass immeasurably large dimensions in his representation without running the risk of reducing those dimensions to measurable distances through the use of linear perspective. Simultaneously, he also pushes the viewer to perceive the image carrier and the means of representation in their materiality. As in the case of Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, the representation of the immeasurable is combined with the fact that the viewer's gaze is constantly stimulated to switch between what is represented and the picture in its materiality.

In both cases, the aesthetic estimation of magnitude is pushed to its limits in a way that poses fundamental problems, especially for the "comprehension" in Kant's sense. In this respect, both paintings can be understood as explorations that investigate the possibilities of evoking the sublime by means of a picture. While in Friedrich's case, such an understanding of his painting *The Monk by the Sea* would probably be at odds with the artist's intentions, Turner reveals greater affinities with the theory of the sublime, although for him, the conception of Edmund Burke was clearly closer at hand.[18] It is noteworthy that both artists related their paintings to great, elusive ideas. In a brief commentary on his painting, Friedrich directly addressed the solitary figure depicted in the painting, whom he evidently viewed as a representative for an overly far-reaching, presumptuous claim to rational understanding: "With overweening conceit, you think to become a light for posterity, to unravel the darkness of the future, to finally know and understand clearly what holy intuition ("Ahndung") only is, what can only be seen and recognized in faith" (Friedrich/Zschoche 2005, p. 64). He was thus concerned with fundamental questions of faith and with the fact that human understanding must inevitably fail in such matters. *Ex negativo*, an idea of God appears here, which accounts for the limited possibilities of the human individual. Turner, on the other hand, hinted at references to the global event of the Flood and thus to God but also to basic questions of light, darkness, visibility, and invisibility already in the cumbersome title of his picture. In both cases, therefore, the artists seem to have already assumed that the sensorial overload caused by the picture could stimulate a reflection pointing to a destiny of man that is not exhausted in sensibility and imagination. The great and simultaneously vague thoughts to which both painters referred seem to strike a chord with Kant's understanding of the 'ideas of reason' or 'pure concepts of reason' "that are never given in any possible experience whatsoever, hence […] concepts whose objective reality (that they are not mere fantasies) and […] assertions whose truth or falsity cannot be confirmed or exposed by any experience" (Pro. § 40, AA 4:327). The thoughts that both paintings are supposed to inspire refer, for their part, to something unconditional, the unrepresentability of which can precisely reveal "the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility" (KU § 27, AA 5:257).

[18] On Turner and the sublime, see, for example, Finley 1979; Wilton 1980; and Ibata 2018, chapter 9.

Friedrich and Turner gave the landscapes depicted in their paintings an impression of immensity. Simultaneously, they played on the duality of the picture so decisively that the viewer can be stimulated to engage in a temporal process of reception that, through the multiple changes that occur in the object of perception, undermines any attempt to perform an aesthetic estimation of magnitude based on successful "apprehension" and "comprehension". Both artists seem to have used this pictorial strategy to convey the experience that something eludes pictorial representability. If we can assume that these artists had such an intention and considered their attempts to be successful, these examples would provide a possible explanation for how pictures – precisely by emphasizing their specific, seemingly limiting characteristics – are able to evoke sensations of the sublime.

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