

Kant's Sublime in Context: The Historical Sources and Impact of Kant's notion of the Sublime

Tom Giesbers
Faculteit Cultuurwetenschappen
Open Universiteit  

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/kant.104447>

Received:14-08-2025 • Accepted: 01-09-2025

ENG Summary: Kant's sublime is a complicated concept because it occupies an often contested position in the final volume of Kant's critical philosophy. Adding diachronically to the substantial body of scholarship on the systematic significance of the sublime within Kant's critical philosophy this paper aims to demonstrate the degree to which Kant's sublime is inspired by a complicated set of historical antecedents. It reconstructs the sources that led Kant to the attributes of his sublime, strengthened by an overview of the attempts to modify this concept among Kant's contemporaries. Ultimately this paper provides a historical vantage point for placing Kant in the history of the concept of the sublime that goes beyond established general historical overviews of the history of aesthetics, because it reconstructs the way in which Kant constructs and transforms the concept as well as the ways in which his contemporaries took his conception of the sublime to be significant.

Keywords: Kant, Burke, Sublime, history of aesthetics

Biographical note: Tom Giesbers is an assistant professor in philosophy at the Open Universiteit in The Netherlands. His expertise is German eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy and French twentieth century philosophy. He wrote a dissertation on German realism in 2017 with the title *The Wall or the Door: German Realism around 1800*. His publications focus on topics where theory and practice meet, such as drive, 'Drive as a Constitutive Element of Practical Action in Jacobi and Fichte' (2020), safety, 'The Shackles of Freedom: The Modern Philosophical Notion of Public Safety' (2024), review practices, 'New Frontiers in Reviewing: Experimental German Philosophical Review Practices around 1800' (2025), and nihilism, 'Obereit's Nihilism: Inventing or Diagnosing a Social Sickness?' (2025). He is also the author of several handbook entries on realism, Jacobi, Krug and Malabou. tom.giesbers@ou.nl

Summary: Introduction. 1. A Brief History of the Sublime. 2. Burke's notion of the sublime. 3. German and French influences on Kant's notion of the Sublime. 4. Kant's Pre-Critical and Critical Reception of the Sublime. 5. Immediate responses to Kant's notion of the sublime. 6. Conclusion. Bibliography

How to cite: Giesbers, T. (2026). Kant's Sublime in Context: The Historical Sources and Impact of Kant's notion of the Sublime. *Con-Textos Kantianos. International Journal of Philosophy*, 23, 159-170. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/kant.104447>

Immanuel Kant's notion of the sublime, or "das Erhabene", as he called it, which literally translated means "the elevated", holds an unusual position in the reception of Kant's philosophy. The early orthodox Kantians of the 1790's virtually ignored it, while many of the German idealists dutifully incorporated the notion into their approach to aesthetics, in part no doubt as a way of showing that they considered themselves to be Kant's heir (Schmid 1795, p. 198-9; Reinhold 1794, p. 381, 385, 377-8, 386, 390; Fries 1818, p. 204-207).¹ During the first half of the Nineteenth century the early neo-Kantians generally preferred Kant's theoretical philosophy over aesthetic notions like the sublime. It was not until the Twentieth century that some philosophers came to appreciate Kant's notion of the sublime for the unique aesthetic experience it represented and its supposed potential to be applied to modern works of art (Dessoir 1906; Lyotard 1994; Nancy 2003; Saint Girons 1993).

¹ Schmid briefly describes Kant's concept of the sublime. Reinhold briefly describes it in his expositions of Kant's concept of taste and the foundation of reason. Fries devotes a brief section of his textbook on practical philosophy to Kant's concept of the sublime.

One of the reasons for this idiosyncratic reception is undeniably the fact that the sublime's systematic purposes were not immediately clear. In part this is due to the difficulty of interpreting Kant's intentions for the sublime. An important way of grasping these intentions is to understand the type of discussions of the sublime that Kant was responding to. The problem with this approach is that Kant is not particularly forthcoming here. He only mentions Burke, who is one of his most important discussion partners, but who must also be understood in terms of his own philosophical discourse.

In this paper I will explore this reception in two senses. My main thesis is that the sublime addresses a very specific philosophical problem for Kant that we must understand historically, in the continuity of a specific philosophical discussion which will allow us to explain the disparate components of the sublime that Kant ultimately brings together with his notion. In order to demonstrate this fact, I will, in sections 1 through 4, discuss the historical development of the notion as it reached Kant, in order to elucidate the systematic "baggage" that was attached to the notion, as an essential component of Kant's reception. This will compensate for the fact that Kant did not make his influences clear. I will draw on previous scholarly discussions of these influences, but I will also postulate a novel source. It is, of course, not possible to conclusively prove that any of these authors have influenced Kant (save of course for Burke), but I believe that all of these authors contribute attributes to Kant's notion of the sublime that are otherwise inexplicable.

In demonstrating this, I will forego the usual approach of showing the importance of the sublime within Kant's philosophical system in general and the *Critique of Judgment* in particular. I believe this account has been sufficiently provided in recent scholarship (Allison 2001; Ordenes Azúa 2023; Clewis 2015). There is still significant scholarly merit in situating Kant within a *historical framework of philosophical problems* to which his philosophical works are, in part, addressed. Far from invalidating internal systematic explanations such as Allison's, a historical account of the sublime as a philosophical problem can show why exactly Kant chose to address *this specific problem* over any other. In short, it explains the *occurrence* of the sublime within Kant's work, rather than its significance for the broader Kantian works. Only through this historical reconstruction of its sources can we fully understand why the sublime is important for Kant.

I cannot expound on the wider significance of the sublime in the classical German philosophical history of aesthetics, although I believe that Beiser provides an important observation when he argues that the sublime offered a challenge to the aesthetics of perfection that was put forward by many of Kant's rationalist contemporaries (Beiser 2009; Clewis 2024). The sublime became an issue in German aesthetics during the 1740's, but was popularized by Mendelssohn, whom we will discuss in section 3 (Beiser 2009, p. 218).²

Secondly, I will show, in section 5, that Kant's notion of the sublime actually had an under-examined yet lively reception, in that it sparked select authors to modify the notion to apply it more broadly to a greater variety of situations. This account will counteract the general view of Kant's notion of the sublime as relatively unimpactful in the Nineteenth century German language context. The exploration of these direct responses in the context of the account of the sublime as a philosophical problem will show which attributes of Kant's sublime were considered to be useful and which were generally judged to be too restraining. This will, by virtue of the attempts to modify the notion, emphasize the importance of Kant's choices in defining and restricting his notion of the sublime, which will provide the opportunity to remark on how we must situate Kant's sublime within a historical problematic of the sublime.

Both of these approaches, one focusing on the development of the sublime up to and including Kant, and the other focusing on the immediate development of the sublime based on Kant's notion, show the outlines of the Kantian notion of the sublime in a way in which an internal systematic account cannot. I utilize this juxtaposition as a way of showing how a historical account can elucidate systematic concerns that are not necessarily articulated within a philosophical text as such. Kant's sublime is a particularly good case for this approach because its specific attributes cannot wholly be explained through Kant's text.

1. A Brief English History of the Sublime

Kant referred to the "Erhabene" and not to the "sublime".³ However, Kant's word "Erhabene" is directly derived from a translation of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* or at the very least from an early translation of the title in a review, as we will see in section 4. Therefore, these words are more closely linked in the history of philosophical aesthetics than by a mere whim of translation, and form a direct line of reception which has led to the commonly accepted translation of Kant's "Erhabene" with "sublime". It is useful to briefly examine the semantic context of "sublime" in the Eighteenth century English literary context, leading up to Burke. This will show that Burke was in fact drawing on a rich semantic tradition, which should not be neglected, and which had some impact on the German philosophical discourse.

Around 1600, "sublime" became a popular term in English language literary texts. Its most direct origin seems to be a literary metaphor for a process in alchemy, which would later also be incorporated into chemistry when that science became established in 1661, through Robert Boyle (Boyle 1661).⁴ Applied as a literary metaphor, a specific emphasis is placed on the transformative aspect (Chapman et al 1903, p. 81).⁵

² Beiser further contextualizes earlier claims by Hettner and Hammermeister.

³ The word "sublime" derives from the Latin "sub" and "limen", together meaning "above the limit".

⁴ To "sublime", as a verb, or the process of "sublimation" in the alchemical tradition, is the act of transforming a substance from one state to another, for instance from solid to gaseous.

⁵ In the stage play *Eastward Hoe* (1605), the term is used to describe a deceptive and shrewd process, by which a goldsmith chemically treats copper to make it look like gold.

During this period, “sublime” is also used to describe a noble state of mind, which would become the most enduring semantic content. However, it should be noted that the word was originally used metaphorically, indicating not so much the elevated state of mind as such, but the process of reaching this state.⁶

While the fascination with the literary metaphor of the sublime seems to have originated in England, it would only take a few decades for the French to become interested in the notion. This is likely the origin of the poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux’s interest in translating Longinus’ (or Pseudo-Longinus’, as some scholars maintain) text on the sublime: *Peri Hypsous* (Boileau-Despréaux 1701, p. 15-105).

It is important to note that this Greco-Roman influence on the semantics of sublime becomes of note after the sublime was introduced as a chemical metaphor in English literature. Most accounts of the development of the sublime credit Boileau-Despréaux’s text as the earliest influence on Kant (Allison 2001, p. 302; Zelle 1989). The brief semantic history presented in this section aims to enrich and expand on this account, while also explaining Burke’s influences. Although Boileau-Despréaux’s translation also conceives of the sublime as a raising to a higher state, it does seem to be the first text to directly discuss the attempt to *create* the sublime as an aesthetic response, specifically in rhetoric.

All of these uses of the sublime, while they, over time and different linguistic contexts, slowly shed the metaphorical origins of the term, in chemistry have a specific structure in common: they refer to a process or an experience that raises one above the limited constraints of experience, showing that there is something unexpected or valuable *beyond* these limitations, be it an elevated state of mind or a scholarly practice like speculation.

Much of this semantic context can still be found in the Eighteenth century, when Burke and Kant take up the notion (Dennis 1939, p. 222; Shaftesbury 1999, p. 203; Addison 1712). For an extended discussion of the English aesthetic tradition in general, see Paul Guyer (Guyer 2004). One of the most common examples of the sublime originates in the works of English authors. They had visited the Alps and considered it to be sublime.

2. Burke’s notion of the sublime

Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) (hereafter *PE*) is the most commonly accepted influence on Kant’s notion of the sublime.⁷ It is perhaps not surprising that Burke devotes more pages to the analysis of the sublime than to the analysis of the beautiful.⁸ He first describes it as ‘the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling’ (Burke 1758, p. 58-9). Kant would not agree with Burke’s assessment of the sublime as occurring wholly in the register of *affect*, but Burke is the first to conceive of the sublime explicitly within the constraints of the human subject (rather than in the material world or a chemical substance) and his cognition: we have an *experience* that we call sublime.⁹ This sublimity is conceived of from the experiential perspective, rather than by attributing the sublime to physical objects.¹⁰ Similarly to Kant, Burke first introduces the idea that the sublime experience depends on a specific *distance* between the observer and the object that evokes the sublime: Burke refers to something that might be ‘too near’ to be sublime (Burke 1758, p. 59). Like with Kant’s dynamic sublime, Burke claims that distance is an important factor for the sublime experience, which is essentially a terrifying danger.¹¹ The threat of bodily harm and our inability to extricate ourselves from this immediate danger are necessary pre-requisites for having a sublime experience, in Burke’s view. We can see analogues to these observations in Kant’s attempt to isolate the sublime experience in specific distances of perception (Kant 1903, 5:252).

Burke incontrovertibly connects his notion of the sublime to obscurity. Terror, as the effect of the sublime experience, stems from the fact that some aspect of our experience is obscure to us (Burke 1758, p. 99). Here it is useful to compare the account of the sublime with Burke’s account of obscurity in experience. One can have two kinds of obscurity, in Burke’s view. *Obscurity of vision* relates to sensory obfuscation, for example: at night we might be terrified because we do not know what threatening thing is hiding in the darkness. *Obscurity of ideas* relates to those ideas that are terrifying because we do not exactly know the extent of their application to experience. For this, Burke provides the example of the goblin, a folkloric creature that reaches us only through second hand interpretation, such as a story or an illustration. Because of this, we do not know how a goblin could emerge in our actual experience and what it might be able to do (Burke 1758, p. 99). These two examples are fascinating because Kant will point out that they *both* concern a reflective judgment, wherein we imagine a threat in our direct sensory experience that is not, at that moment, directly perceived. This is

⁶ We find exactly this emphasis on the literary metaphor of an uplifting process in Francis Bacon’s *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* (1605), in which Bacon describes the sublime as a raising of oneself above the natural and empirical. One of the examples that Bacon provides connects the sublime firmly to philosophy: speculation is the sublime state of raising oneself above the natural. *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human* (1605). Retrieved from the 1640 edition, p. 84.

⁷ Burke is also the first to explicitly counterpose the sublime with the beautiful. While novel, this approach is part of a specifically English scholarly tradition of counterposing two concepts to raise the standards of analysis of both through the act of counterposing.

⁸ Burke’s second edition in 1759 adds a preface and an introduction.

⁹ I use cognition here in the modern sense, as relating to all kinds of mental content. This sense is of course different from Kant’s *Erkenntnis*, which is generally translated in English as ‘cognition’ in paragraph 1 of the *CJ*, which relates more to content than form.

¹⁰ This is a noted difference from Mendelssohn’s earlier views, which at times seem to place the sublime in the objects themselves. Burke’s perspectivism therefore prepares the way for Kant’s idealist approach of the sublime. Cf. Beiser (2009), 219-222.

¹¹ However, Burke also holds that we cannot have an explicit idea of danger attached to the sublime experience. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1758), 252.

one of many cases in the *PE* where Burke's examples evoke a much more complex cognitive process than the merely physiological which he generally focuses on. In both cases it is obscurity which enables the mind to expect terror or perhaps conceive of the bare outlines of a terrifying experience.

In contrast with Kant, Burke does not conceive of the sublime experience as a co-occurrence of pleasure and pain, but rather as one that is mentally painful.¹² On the topic of the imagination, in encountering the immeasurably infinite, however, Burke very much prefigures Kant when he describes the sublime effect in the imagination as one which has no 'check' to impose limits (Burke 1758, p. 130; Kant 1903, 5:252). As with Kant's notion of the mathematical sublime, this means that a *perceived* limitlessness acts as if we perceived real infinity. One could compare Burke's notion of obscurity within the sublime experience as a failure of the imagination, with Kant's discussion of the disconnection between the understanding (as measurement) and the imagination, which undoubtedly suggests that Burke inspired Kant to conceive of a certain kind of sublime experience in terms of a failure of the imagination, which Kant would call the mathematical sublime (Kant 1903, 5:252).

Burke's failure to connect his notions of obscurity to the examples he provides in his account of a *non-reflective* physiological experience of the sublime emphatically shows the advantages of Kant's later choice to place the sublime wholly within *reflective* judgment, rather than Burke's immediate experience. For instance, one could argue that Burke's example of the poisonous animal which evokes a sublime experience requires some level of cognitive reflectivity. For one: a concept of poison, its effects and a reflective judgment that allows us to identify animals that utilize poison as a defense (Burke 1758, p. 97). Similarly, Burke's example of the ox as a safe and serviceable domestic animal versus the sublime bull is heavily dependent on a set of cultural and personal concepts that at the very least require a partial reflective attitude (Burke 1758, p. 112-3). We can read Kant's relatively enigmatic remarks in the *Critique of Judgment* (hereafter *CJ*) on culture and rational ideas being a requirement for a sublime experience as an attempt to solve this problem (Kant 1903, 5:264, 5:245; Zuckert 2024, p. 659).

Ultimately, Burke is still somewhat in line with the English literary use of the sublime, since he conceives of the experience as one which suspends all other activities of the mind, although, presumably, only the conscious functions, eliminating all possibility of thought or reason (Burke 1758, 95-8). Put succinctly, according to Burke the sublime lifts us to a higher state of mind. As we will see, Kant sharply breaks with this aspect of the tradition of the sublime, by explicitly conceiving of the sublime as a *reflective* cognitive experience which brings to the fore certain ideas of reason (Kant 1903, 5:210, 5:244). In that later sense we can still discern the overall thrust of Burke's view of the sublime as a lifting to a higher state of mind.

Following Burke's notion of the sublime experience as a suspension of the regular mental faculties, another marked difference between Burke's and Kant's sublime is the fact that Burke leaves no recourse through which one could have a sublime aesthetic experience of art. He conceives of the sublime as a physiological experience, which is anathema to reflection. This becomes abundantly clear in his description of encounters with 'serpents and poisonous animals' as a sublime experience, despite the reflective implications I have pointed out (Burke 1758, p. 97-8, 246-9). Burke would dismiss all cases in which we experience the sublime by proxy, for instance through a character in a Greek tragedy. While Kant would no doubt agree, his reasons for this dismissal of the sublime by proxy are different. For one, artistic products and our experience of them do not fit neatly within Kant's two types of the sublime. Nonetheless, the fact that Kant construes of the sublime as a reflective judgment has led some of his contemporaries to modify his notion of the sublime to apply to art (see section 5). While Kant is not explicitly interested in sublime art, his examples of manmade objects that are suitable for a sublime experience, such as the pyramids, leave some room for these efforts (Kant 1903, 5:252). The physiological status of Burke's notion of the sublime, on the other hand, makes it difficult to understand how the sublime can be experienced with works of art. Although Burke clearly believes that artistic expression can create a divine experience, for instance when he argues that, depending on artistic depiction, a horse can be sublime, he does not sufficiently explain how this artistic expression could rival the threat and suspension of thought that accompanies the sensory physiological experience of a real animal that evokes the sublime (Burke 1758, p. 113).

Finally, one of the clearest components of the sublime that Kant adopts from Burke is the fact that the sublime experience involves not just pleasure but also displeasure, which explains some of the ambivalence in the history of the sublime as a philosophical problem, as well as its clearest demarcation from the experience of the beautiful (Kant 1903, 2:208, 5:245, 5:258).

3. German and French influences on Kant's notion of the Sublime

The German discussion of the sublime prior to Kant's critical writings occurred primarily in response to Burke's *PE*, which was translated in 1773 by Christian Garve (Garve 1773). This publication cemented the connection between the English word "sublime" and the German word "Erhabene"¹³ and was the first version of the *PE* that Kant could read. At that time, the German reception of Burke's notion was well underway. Kant was, in all likelihood, most intimately aware of the discussion between Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) and Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), due to his sustained interest in these authors and their status as eminent Enlightenment philosophers.¹⁴

¹² Ibid, 110-1, 246-9.

¹³ As Guyer observes, Baumgarten translated "sublime" as "aesthetic magnitude" (Guyer 2003, p. 333).

¹⁴ Guyer argues that one of Mendelssohn's essays during this time is a likely source for Kant's later distinction between a natural and moral variety of the sublime (Guyer 2004, pp. 361-2).

An exchange of letters between Lessing and Mendelssohn most pointedly shows Lessing's main disagreement with Burke. As early as 1758, one year after the publication of the *PE*, Lessing, who at the time was working on translating the text, wrote to Mendelssohn (Kenkel 2001, p. 551):

[Burke's] foundations are not good, although his book, as a collection of all manifestations and perceptions that the philosopher must assume to be in accord, is tremendously useful.¹⁵

This is an assessment that Kant must have agreed with, since he does not comment on Burke's foundations, but does make use of many of the examples of perceptions that Burke catalogues. Instead, Kant saw fit to furnish his own foundations for the sublime. Lessing is especially dissatisfied with Burke's assumptions concerning the passions:

The author must have a very rare notion of the soul. And this he does. The passions for him are something that God has placed in our soul. Something that does not stem from the essence of the soul, from a certain class of representations, but something that God has given to the essence of the soul from above.¹⁶

Lessing demands a more critical examination of how our passionate responses are evoked by our experiences and concepts. This sentiment is also echoed in Lessing's review of the *PE*, where he criticizes Burke's description of aesthetic experience as the suspension of conscious cognition, because it causes us to lose all sense of self-identity, to the degree that we cannot distinguish between ourselves and another person, a distinction we might want to retain when judging dramatic works of art (Lessing 1898, p. 220-225).

Lessing wants to retain *sympathy* as a category of aesthetic experience, allowing for a more conscious and reflective aesthetic experience.¹⁷ He criticizes Burke for allowing aesthetic experiences which involve the confusion of our own identity with that of another or a fictional character (such as uncritically feeling for a character in a play). On these grounds he would take issue with Burke's notion of the sublime as a suspension of thought. Although Burke did not explicitly discuss the sublime experience of a work of art, Lessing clearly believes that this experience, at least in as far as Burke conceives of it, cannot truly be part of an aesthetic art criticism, because it suspends thought and with it all possible cognition that could be utilized for critique.

Lessing's position is representative of the widely shared German sentiment that the aesthetic appreciation of art must be a conscious reflective process, of which we can consider Kant's *CJ* to be the culmination. It is typical that Lessing is so concerned with art appreciation and the sublime, since we will see in section 5 that many other German authors shared this concern in response to Kant's notion of the sublime. While there is no historical evidence that Kant had any knowledge of Lessing's assessment of the *PE*, this general approach to art was popularly put forward by Lessing and Mendelssohn in the journal *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend* which appeared between 1759 and 1765 and was immensely popular among scholars.¹⁸ It is then not altogether surprising that Kant would follow Lessing's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the *PE*, even if he did not learn of them directly. Although it is not always immediately evident when reading the *CJ*, much of Kant's reception of the *PE* follows the critical thrust of what was put forward by many of his contemporaries.

A heretofore unknown influence on Kant's notion of the sublime is Louis de Jaucourt's 1751 French article 'Le Sublime' in the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Jaucourt 1751, p. 566-570).¹⁹ Given the reputation of the *Encyclopédie* as the seminal document of the Enlightenment it is highly likely that Kant read Jaucourt's text. That Kant was intimately familiar with the *Encyclopédie* can be demonstrated by the fact that he recommended that Johann Georg Hamann translate some lesser known articles to German in 1759 (Kant 1900, 10:7). It also stands to reason that Kant would consult the *Encyclopédie* on topics that he was writing on in order to gain a broader perspective of how it was viewed by fellow Enlightenment authors.

Some of the key ethical innovations that Kant's notion of the sublime introduces, such as the idea that it has ethical relevance and the idea that it offers a certain reflective standpoint on oneself or the human vocation, most likely first occurred to him through Jaucourt (Kant 1903, 5:262). For instance, Jaucourt describes sublime sentiments as 'almost above the human condition' and as showing 'the weakness of humanity' (Jaucourt 1751, p. 567). Jaucourt also prefigures Kant's distinction between largeness and absolute largeness by making a similar distinction between the great on the one hand and the grandeur of the sublime on the other (Jaucourt 1751, p. 567; Kant 1903, 5:250).

In part drawing on the rhetorical context of the sublime, which was introduced by Boileau-Despréaux, Jaucourt writes:

Any discourse that raises the enlightened soul with admiration above its ordinary ideas of greatness and gives it a higher opinion of itself is sublime. (Jaucourt 1751, p. 566)

¹⁵ As related by Lisa C. Roetzel, 'Aesthetic Experience as Imaginary Experience: Masculinity and the Regulation of Sentiments in *Emilia Galotti*' (1996), pp. 93-4. This particular (re)translation is my own.

¹⁶ Ibid, 94.

¹⁷ In many ways he is following the example of John Dennis. Cf. Zelle 1989, p. 65.

¹⁸ For an analysis of the ways in which this journal set the standards of criticism, see Giesbers (2025).

¹⁹ French was one of the few foreign languages that Kant could read, especially since it was the official language of the Prussian court.

This formulation and those cited above will sound familiar to anyone acquainted with Kant's notion of the sublime. According to Jaucourt, the sublime is the experience of something that is great beyond measure and gives one a cognition of our limitations, the above-mentioned weakness of humanity. The sublime experience introduces a reflection on one's own potential, of which we then have a higher opinion. In Kantian terms, we gain a respect for humanity's potential. Jaucourt, like Lessing and Kant, emphasizes the reflective aspect of the sublime and describes the cognitive process behind the sublime experience. What he introduces is the ethical significance of the sublime, wherein we experience a reflection that leads us to an appreciation of the potential of humanity. It should be noted that these ethical aspects of Kant's notion of the sublime have broader systematic relevance for his ethics, but that their inspiration in terms of relating the sublime to a cognitive insight that has greater ethical significance cannot be found in any other author than Jaucourt.²⁰

4. Kant's Pre-Critical and Critical Reception of the Sublime

Before turning to the *CJ*, we must first briefly consider Kant's pre-critical notion of the sublime in order to point out one last unexamined influence on Kant's notion of the sublime. In 1764 Kant published a text whose title is remarkably close to Burke's *PE: Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* [*Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*]. The fact that Kant adopted Burke's distinction between the beautiful and the sublime relatively quickly, even though he had not read the *PE*, is likely due to Lessing and other contemporaries' discussion of the sublime, but above all due to the influence of his friends in Königsberg. Many of these, like Christian Jakob Kraus, Joseph Green and of course Hamann, were voracious readers of English philosophical texts.

Beyond his utilization of the binary opposition between the beautiful and the sublime, there is not much of a systematic structure to Kant's *Beobachtungen*, marking it as one of the popular publications of his pre-critical era. Kant utilizes Burke's binary opposition between the sublime and the beautiful as a heuristic method to distinguish a wide range of topics without providing an extensive justification of this method.

One of the most extended applications of this binary is in the field of social psychology. Kant describes various ethnic and national identities as either beautiful or sublime. Overall, he does not isolate the sublime as an aesthetic experience, nor as a kind of reflection and does not seem interested in examining the sublime itself, but rather in the phenomena that he can examine through this binary lens. This sublime is more in line with the pre-Burke English language use, since it is essentially metaphorical. We can therefore conclude that Kant had not, at this point, taken up the sublime as a philosophical problem in itself, but merely as an interesting way of classifying phenomena.

Hamann, who is now primarily known to Kant scholarship for his being the first reviewer of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter *CPR*), reviewed the *Beobachtungen* in the April 30 1764 issue of *Königsbergische Gelehrte und Politische Zeitungen*.²¹ It is possible that the two have previously discussed Burke's sublime in person and that Hamann's account of the distinction sparked Kant's early adoption of it (since Kant did not read English). At the very least, Kant certainly read Hamann's review of his own book. The principal criticism that Hamann levels against Kant's observations is, interestingly enough, that it does not consistently distinguish between sublime in our perceptions and the sublime as a state of the object (Hamann 1952, p. 289). We now take this distinction between perception and objects in themselves to be one of the essential contributions of Kant's critical philosophy, and it is also the single most important transformation in the history of the sublime as a philosophical problem. Burke had already adopted an experiential perspective, but had by no means applied this standard coherently. Kant acknowledged this distinction from the outset, but over the course of the book, Hamann maintains, the sublime and the beautiful are only 'predicate' (Hamann 1952, p. 289). It is highly significant that Hamann recognized the importance of Kant's early distinction between perception and object and fostered his further development of the distinction in his philosophical writings. Hamann bases some of these criticisms on his assessment of Burke's *PE*, which might have been an important early source of Kant's understanding of Burke's more subtle distinctions (Hamann 1952, p. 290).

In the *CJ*, Kant still contrasts the sublime and the beautiful, but these are not as inextricably connected as they were in this pre-critical publication, since this contrasting occurs primarily in order to better understand the sublime as an interesting philosophical problem. We can then conclude that Kant had long been interested in sublime phenomena but that the sublime as an important problem for philosophical reflection would not be fully developed until the *CJ*. Some of these problematic aspects might have been suggested by Hamann.

Kant further develops the reflection-based framework for aesthetics that Lessing had suggested in his criticism of Burke, but also incorporates Burke's idea of the failure of the imagination in what Kant now called the mathematical sublime. Of course, Kant formulates his account of aesthetics within the critical philosophy that was already set up by the *CPR*, which famously shifts focus from the attribution of characteristics to real objects towards the attribution of these characteristics to our mental construal of the object. Henceforth, objects are not, strictly speaking, sublime, but it is rather our cognitive apparatus which evokes the sublime, given certain experiential parameters (Kant 1908, 5:250, 5:256). In Kant's words, objects are 'suitable'

²⁰ There are some indications that Kant was looking for a specific moral feeling associated with the sublime in Herder's notes to Kant's lectures in 1762-4. These remain scant and fairly underdeveloped. It is possible that these lectures mark the point of exposure to Jaucourt. Cf. AA 27:31.

²¹ For a more extended account of the reception of Burke in the German speaking region, see 'The Reception of the Enquiry in the German-Language Area in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: August Gottlieb Meißner and Johann Gottlieb Herder' (2017) by László Kontler.

[tauglich] for presenting the sublime (Kant 1908, 5:245). Through critical philosophy, Kant solves an inherent problem with Burke's account. We have seen that this further elaboration might actually have been suggested by Hamann, as a particularly effective strategy for bringing the canonical examples of the sublime into the fold of a comprehensive aesthetic theory.

For Burke, the sublime is an immediate suspension of all thought and reason. However, many of his examples seem to presuppose sophisticated cognitions, as discussed in section 3. Kant describes the sublime as:

the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger. (Kant 1908, 5:245)

While Kant agrees with Burke that the sublime experience initially stops all thought and reasoning dead in its tracks, he builds upon Jaucourt's suggestion that it is this very suspension that allows for an *intensification* of the vital forces (which presumably includes reflection). It is this state of affairs that allows for a description of the sublime as both a disarming and debilitating experience in which we momentarily lose ourselves (after Burke) and an aesthetic experience that evokes reflection (after Lessing and Jaucourt), offering a synthesis between the two positions.

Kant's two types of the sublime, the mathematical and the dynamic, fit within a broader framework of critical philosophy since they refer to two separate ideas of reason. Within the history of the sublime as a philosophical concept, we can characterize these types of the sublime as Kant's attempt to understand Burke's notion of the sublime consistently, by streamlining the experiential parameters and elaborating on the cognitive processes involved. Burke, for example, insufficiently distinguishes the experience of the sublimity of a bull from that of the sublimity of the starry sky. Although Kant would likely object to the example of the bull, he solves this problem by arguing that both the dynamic and the mathematical types of the sublime are a specific problematic relationship between the imagination and the understanding, but involve different measurements: absolute largeness in cases where we cannot perceive limits to spatial phenomena (a failure of the imagination), and superior power in cases where our own estimation of the possibility to resist this power is, at first, insufficient and then infinitely amplified through our realization that the humanity in our person cannot be 'degraded' (an elevation of the imagination) (Kant 1908, 5:261-2). The distinction between the great and the violent is most likely derived from Bodmer, which Kant recasts as two different types of sublime (Beiser 2009, p. 115).

Kant's elaboration on Jaucourt's ethical notion of the sublime finds its highest expression in the argument that the sublime is immensely significant because it shows our wish to find the ideas of reason as *real* ideas (Kant 1908, 5:250). This is, for Kant, a sign of our 'vocation' [Bestimmung], which introduces an ethical dimension to the sublime experience (Kant 1908, 5:257). This is Kant's version of Jaucourt's raising oneself 'with admiration above' one's 'ordinary ideas of greatness', which already suggested higher ideas (Jaucourt 1751, p. 566).

In the previous sections, I have elaborated on the history of the sublime as a philosophical problem in so far as it relates to Kant's reception of this problem. In addition to the reception of Burke specifically, we have seen that the aesthetic project of Kant's contemporaries was significantly marked by the importance of reflection, that Kant was enamored with the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, which was enriched through an important criticism by Hamann, and that Jaucourt introduced a specific ethical perspective of rising above oneself to the sublime that would become one of the more arcane elements of Kant's notion of the sublime. In the next section I will focus on the ways in which Kant's contemporaries took up his notion of the sublime.

5. Immediate responses to Kant's notion of the sublime

Although the sections on aesthetics in the *CJ* garnered very few responses from early Kantians, there were others who contested Kant's notion of the sublime and even attempted to diversify the two types of sublime. Authors who were generally interested in aesthetics, such as Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling and Jean Paul Richter, embraced Kant's account of aesthetic phenomena, and sought to modify it in order to encompass more phenomena and to make it more applicable to the production and criticism of works of art. It is possible that this general project was sparked by Herder's empiricist criticism of Kant's sublime, which attempted to shift the focus of the sublime to works of art (Zuckert 2003).²²

A second set of authors, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer, sought to incorporate the sublime within their system of philosophy as an imperfect, more subordinate and intermediate form of the subjective stance.²³

Although this section cannot present an exhaustive account of the responses to Kant's notion of the sublime, it aims to draw attention to several overlooked aspects of these responses, with a focus on the attempts to modify the notion to focus more on the role of reflection in art criticism that Lessing initially put forward as a response to Burke. This offers an interesting contrast with Kant's influences, who also tend to focus more on works of art.

²² This avenue of criticism can be seen as a part of Herder's period of Jacobian realism, see Giesbers (2017, 2020, 2023).

²³ A third strategy can be found in Friedrich Schlegel's lectures in 1800/1801. Schlegel was interested in the subjective experience of the sublime, applied to poetry, but does not explicitly respond to Kant. Cf. Dietrich Mathy, *Poesie und Chaos. Zur anarchistischen Komponente der frühromantischen Ästhetik*. (1984), 415. For a situating of Ludwig Tieck within this *frühromantik* adoption of the sublime see Brian Haman, 'Notions of the Sublime: The Unquiet Mind in Tieck's *Über das Erhabene* and *Der Runenberg*' (2018).

Schiller and Schelling both respond to the fact that Kant does not explicitly allow for works of art to evoke the sublime, at least, not in the sense that the artist can manufacture the sublime experience through artful composition. It is, of course, not completely out of the question that a work of art, especially a modern one, can evoke Kant's sense of the sublime, but the Eighteenth century project of aesthetic art criticism requires a more robust connection between the artist's intention and production process on the one hand, and the aesthetic experience of the work of art on the other, in order to actually be able to speak of a sublime work of art, rather than an accidental effect. The specific examples that come closest to works of art within Kant's account are the pyramids and the inscription above the temple of Isis, but these are not described as works of art that are designed to evoke the sublime, most likely because this authorial process, that was so important for Eighteenth century aesthetics, is missing in these instances (Kant 1908, 5:252, 5:316).

Allison argues that the sublime has a limited place in fine art (Allison 2001, p. 337). The exploration of the early attempts to allow art more resolutely to be sublime reveal some of the reasons behind Kant's original insistence on a limited use. It is, after all, surprising that Kant would forego a possible avenue of enlightening the people through cultural products. If aesthetic criticism would be able to identify works of art that evoke the uplifting effect that Kant had in mind for the sublime, this could increase the practical utility of the sublime.

Schiller wrote two essays on the sublime, with similar titles: *Vom Erhabenen* in 1793 and *Über das Erhabene* (written between 1793 and 1795 and published in 1801).²⁴ In the first essay, which is more innovative and relevant for our purposes, Schiller makes a distinction between the beautiful fine arts and the sublime affecting arts, with tragedy specifically in mind as the sublime form of art.

In order to establish a division of the sublime that would allow for a sublime experience in tragedy, Schiller redefines the mathematical and the dynamic types of sublime as the *theoretical* sublime (dealing with the limits of representation) and the *practical* sublime (dealing with self-preservation) respectively (Schiller 1871, p. 127).

He further distinguishes two discrete subtypes of the practical sublime. The *contemplative* sublime is not as physiologically intense and concerns voluntarily imagined representations. Schiller refers to threats that do not immediately impact us, like an abyss before our feet, a remote storm at sea, a remote erupting volcano, but also more abstract topics of contemplation like time and moral obligation. In contrast, the *pathetic* sublime concerns actually destructive objects which involuntarily enter our imagination (Schiller 1871, p. 141-150). Schiller's primary example here is the experience of seeing someone suffer, such as a character in a tragedy. In order to fulfill the Kantian clause that aesthetic judgment must be devoid of interest, Schiller stresses that the pathetic sublime involves sympathy of a contemplative nature, rather than a physiological empathy. This sympathetic component makes the pathetic sublime distinct from the contemplative sublime. Schiller is attempting to formulate a type of dynamic sublime experience where it is not our own existence that is threatened, but rather someone else's.

The fact that Schiller stresses that this concerns an *involuntary* response is likely to obviate our knowledge that a character in a tragedy is not genuinely suffering. In a sense, this subtype of the sublime therefore exists within a suspension of disbelief, and might therefore apply to recent forms of art like cinema as well. We do not see the actor or a collection of lines in a book, but rather we involuntarily assume that there is a real person who suffers, even though this is actually an artful illusion. The pathetic sublime thus gives us no opportunity to contemplate the artificiality of the experience, which is most likely one of the main reasons why Kant explicitly avoided discussing potential sublime art. Doing so would leave an undetermined and undetected potential for manipulation on the side of the production of art. Today we are sensitive to the fact that artifice can serve the purposes of state propaganda, which makes the idea of practical enlightenment through art somewhat suspect. It is possible that Kant had similar concerns. In addition to this, the pathetic sublime occupies an uncertain role to the rationalist project of art criticism. Is the sublimity of a work of art actually impeding its critical assessment through the suspension of disbelief? Schiller also seems to violate the critical spirit in which the sublime is put forth. The sublime must always emerge in the constraints of experience, which would disqualify any kind of emergence in the imagination.

Schelling also attempts to apply the sublime to works of art broadly. In his 1802-1805 lectures on the philosophy of art, he declares that poetry is sublime, whereas art is beautiful (Schelling 1980, p. 105).²⁵ In motivating this claim, he argues that 'chaos is the fundamental intuition of the sublime', clearly attempting to evoke a more metaphysical version of the Kantian failure of the imagination as a root cause of the experience of the sublime (Schelling 1980, p. 109). Schelling attempts to bridge the gap between reality and perceptions by arguing that what is seemingly sensibly infinite, but is actually the result of the workings of our imagination, becomes a *symbol* for the true infinite (Schelling 1980, p. 108).²⁶ This invocation of symbolism is Schelling's attempt to avoid the rather complicated relationship between Kant's ideas of reason and their potential or actual reality (Kant 1908, 5:268). For example, the claim that the sublime experience of absolute formlessness evokes a symbol of absolute form for us leads Schelling to claim that the depiction of Greek gods in art,

²⁴ For an analysis of the difference in the approaches between Kant and Schiller, see Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (1996), pp. 129-162). For a more recent analysis of Schiller's aesthetic essays in a broader context see Frederick Beiser, *Schiller as a Philosopher* (2008).

²⁵ While it makes sense for Schelling's account to separate the (plastic) arts from written works of art, for my purposes I make no such distinction in applying the label "art". This helps us frame Schelling within a line of reception that explores the potential of the sublime as a descriptor of experiences of works of art.

²⁶ This theme of sublime chaos might originate with Herder, see Zuckert (2003, p. 223).

which paradoxically evoke both a limited physical form and the infinite power of divinity, should be considered sublime works of art (Schelling 1980, p. 109). This seems to bypass Schelling's earlier observation that works of (plastic) art are beautiful, and not sublime. Evidently, the symbolic sublime can intervene in the otherwise beautiful art through the sublime experience. Schelling thereby recasts the sublime experience as a *symbolic experience* in which a limited form can suggest potentially non-sensible meaning, which allows him to describe symbolic works of art and which arguably also includes the vast symbolic potential of poetry, as sublime works of art. It also has the virtue balancing Kant's claim that the beautiful is a symbol for the ethically good with a version of the sublime as a symbol (Kant 1908, 5:352). It seems that Schelling's version of Kant's claim that human beings have a propensity to seek the ideas of reason as real ideas is that this can only occur through a symbolic relation between idea and real object. Interestingly, Schelling's attempt to expand the sublime to works of art is also an attempt to make the sublime isomorphic with the beautiful, suggesting the ethical potential of the sublime also occurs through symbolism. We can read this as a defense of Kant's sublime experience against Herder's methodological objection that the sublime cannot be pleasant because it confronts us with the impossibility to realize the ideas of reason in nature (Zuckert 2003, p. 219). Schelling's attempt to go against the letter of Kant seems motivated by the desire to systematically rebalance the beautiful and the sublime as the contrasting opposition that Burke established, with a typical German focus on art criticism.

Jean Paul Richter, the author of many popular novels under the penname Jean Paul was well-known in Kant's time. Jean Paul included some critical remarks on Kant's notion of the sublime in *Vorschule der Ästhetik* (1804), the published version of his lectures on aesthetics. Jean Paul refers to some of his own novels as extended illustrations of the phenomena he is discussing, making it a valuable catalog of his aesthetic repertoire, opening it up to art criticism. Jean Paul highlights an aspect of aesthetic cognition that remained under-examined by Kant. He fully agrees with Kant that the sublime cannot be located in physical objects, but stresses the importance of the specific sensations of the senses in the sublime experience. In the case of the dynamic sublime he argues that it is not the eye that supplies the initial fear of thunder, waterfalls and lions, but the ear (Jean Paul 1990, p. 106). It is for this reason that silence can also be sublime, in Jean Paul's view. He argues that Kant was overly focused on visual stimuli when discussing the sublime. Kant likely avoided discussing input by specific senses in order to drive home the internality of the sublime experience (which was necessary to maintain its ethical significance), but Jean Paul rightly brings attention to the fact that any discussion of examples upon closer examination inevitably leads to separation into various senses. Jean Paul is writing in the tradition of Hamann, Herder (under whom he had an apprenticeship of sorts) and Jacobi, so he is not susceptible to Kant's greatest fear behind invoking the senses, namely the temptation of naïve realism, the position that sensory experience, no matter how differentiated through individual senses, has any conclusive relevance to grasping reality or real objects (in themselves).

Jean Paul considers the sublime to rest not only 'on the wings' of the senses but also on fantasy (Jean Paul 1990, p. 107). Fantasy, as it is used by Jean Paul, is semantically more independently productive than Kant's imagination. This places Jean Paul more in line with Burke's example of the night that plagues us with the possibilities of some unseen horror lurking in the dark. Jean Paul would likely add that this example can only be a sublime experience if it is not a wholly intellectual exercise, since it must be provoked by some unexpected sensory stimulus, such as when one is thrust into the night and is overwhelmed by diffuse darkness and silence.

The reference to fantasy as that which produces a sublime experience raises potential problems within the Kantian framework. In neither the mathematical nor the dynamical sublime one can find the possibility of a sublime experience that results in an independently produced, yet involuntary *phantasma*. Kant prefers a dependently produced, voluntarily reflected upon idea of reason as the result of the sublime experience. We do not, after all, fabricate the ideas of reason on a whim. This makes Kant's and Jean Paul's conception of the sublime incompatible. We can well understand Jean Paul's intent here: to make the sublime a more broadly applicable experience, and perhaps bring it more in line with what was commonly thought to be a sublime experience, extending the types of sublime experiences to works of art. Be that as it may, Jean Paul's new division of the sublime reveals that he aims to incorporate Kant's types of sublime experiences, while supplementing other types.

Jean Paul delineates three types of sublime experiences: *external*, *internal* and *ethical* (Jean Paul 1990, p. 106-7). The external sublime relates to the senses, but its effect differs depending on which sensory organ is the catalyst. Within the external sublime, the eye is capable of evoking the 'mathematical-quantitative sublime', whereas the ear can evoke the 'dynamic-qualitative sublime' (Jean Paul 1990, p. 106). Jean Paul argues that a certain auditory sensation can invoke immediate fear, of the type that evokes a dynamic sublime realization of an overwhelming power. The eye, vice versa, is limited to the mathematical sublime experience of greatness. This is where Jean Paul emphatically disagrees with Kant: the dynamic sublime cannot originate in visual sensations. The examples of the stormy sea and the abyss therefore cannot be examples of the dynamic sublime if they are mainly evoked by the eye. It is rather the ear that makes an experience dynamically sublime, and in this case the stormy sea can still be an acoustic catalyst, and the same is true of the crashing water of a waterfall, and the roar of the lion (Jean Paul 1990, p. 106).

The internal sublime rests on a fantastic attempt to represent something that cannot be experienced empirically. The phantasma of immeasurability is quantitative and the phantasma of Godhood is the qualitative correlate (Jean Paul 1990, p. 106-7). In separating the external mathematical-quantitative from the internal immeasurable-quantitative, Jean Paul points out that the experience of not being able to comprehend limitations in something that we see is an experience that is distinct from the attempt to imagine

immeasurability, even though both are sublime experiences, in his view. Likewise, imagining Godhood is something very different from sensing overwhelming force, if we follow this line of reasoning. As previously mentioned, the distinction also lies in voluntary versus involuntary experience, which Kant would not recognize.

This division between sensation and fantasy implies, perhaps with some accuracy, that there could be sublime experiences that do not result in reflection on the ideas of reason, but which can still be called sublime experiences. This division also draws attention to the fact that Kant's notion of the sublime always forces the subject back into himself through a reflective act, whereas an attempt at a comprehensive account of the sublime like Jean Paul's might wish to retain sublime experiences of a mathematical or dynamic kind that do not accomplish this, as Burke did. Rather than a failed or insufficiently sublime experience, in Jean Paul's account this would simply concern a different type of sublime experience.

The ethical sublime experience, which is how Jean Paul would presumably classify Kant's sublime experiences, need not only result in a reflection on the ideas of reason, in his view. Perhaps a philosophical reflection on action could also be an ethical sublime experience. Jean Paul does not elaborate on the ethical sublime, nor does he provide examples, making it difficult to place this third type of sublime experience within his overall account and the history of the notion of the sublime in general. The fact that he includes this type of sublime demonstrates that Kant had, after Jaucourt, made it acceptable to think of the sublime experience as possibly having some ethical significance.²⁷

All in all, Jean Paul's approach to the sublime is mainly integrationist, bringing together Kant's sublime and Burke's fantastic sublime. It follows Schiller's and Schelling's attempts to draw the sublime further into the realm of art (criticism).

We will now briefly discuss Hegel and Schopenhauer, who view the sublime as something to be overcome through reflection, rather than as an experience that inherently includes a reflective moment. As a result of this assessment, their discussion of the subject is rather brief. Hegel places the sublime lower than the beautiful, as a less important iteration of the aesthetic experience, because beauty involves a complete reflection. Even among sublime experiences, Hegel argues that some are better than others for their effects on reflection. For instance, he identifies some historical forms of the sublime, which he calls historical pre-actions, for instance in Jewish poetry, which attempts to give an expression to the sublimity of God, and in oriental pantheistic poetry (Hegel 1986, p. 416). On the whole he relates the sublime to the field of religion, as a religious manifestation of the spirit, mainly because form and content are inadequately related. According to Hegel the latter is an improvement on the former because Jewish poetry is negative about the world since it separates it from God, while oriental poetry is affirmative about the world, because it raises ordinary things to brilliance (Hegel 1986, p. 472). Still, as a religious manifestation, the sublime is of a less elevated nature than art or philosophy. In this account, Hegel retains virtually nothing of Kant's notion of the sublime, save, perhaps the overall framework that the aesthetic experience is primarily significant for what it offers our own reflection.²⁸

Schopenhauer conceives of the sublime as a class of objects that is resistant to aesthetic reflection (Schopenhauer 1819, p. 301). These objects are hostile to the human will, either because of their vastness or because of their power. He argues that the sublime can be overcome by acknowledging the threat of the object and choosing to ignore it. While this includes a reflective moment, it is also one that completely discards the sublime experience as one to be overcome.

Hegel and Schopenhauer do feel the need to discuss the sublime, however briefly, presumably because this demonstrates to their readers that they have understood Kant's philosophy. We might also say that they recognize that the sublime experience has to be accounted for and that in this sense they are part of a larger tradition of the sublime as an experience that poses a philosophical problem, especially to a tradition of Classical German philosophy that believes in the importance of reflection in aesthetics and art critique. They do not seek to modify Kant's sublime to include works of art (although Hegel tacitly seems to assume that this is already possible), but rather place it within their reinterpretation of the aims and progress of human reflection, as something to be overcome by reflection.

6. Conclusion

The variety and complexity of the ideas surrounding the sublime that Kant brought together include the binary relationship with the beautiful, the importance of reflection, the ethical significance of the sublime and the two different kinds of sublime experience. I have also shown how Kant's reception of these components substantially differs from the English metaphorical notion of the sublime. I have underscored the significance of these components by examining early attempts to modify Kant's notion. While attempts to broaden Kant's sublime might be more intuitively valid, they threaten to clash with Kant's methodological commitments which, arguably, made his account of the sublime coherent and secured Kant's place in the history of aesthetics. On the other hand, these attempts bring to light aspects of Kant's methodology that are not directly apparent, such as the focus on visual stimuli, the lack of symmetry with beauty in terms of symbolism and the fact that the ideas of reason might not be so comforting if one is not already committed to Kantian striving.

²⁷ It is likely that ethics was simply not Jean Paul's forte, but it is significant that he recognizes the possibility.

²⁸ For an extended analysis of Hegel's use the sublime, particularly of its religious aspects, see Friedemann Barniske, *Hegels Theorie des Erhabenen: Grenzgänge zwischen Theologie und philosophischer Ästhetik* (2019).

Finally, I have shown that the German reception of the sublime later starts to focus more on the sublime as an obstinate challenge to reflection, rather than as something that is essentially related to art appreciation.

Bibliography

- Addison, J. (1712), "Pleasures of the Imagination.", *The Spectator* Vol. 3:540 no. 411-421.
- Allison, H. E. (2001), *Kant's Theory of Taste*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511612671.
- Azúa, P. M. O. (2023), *Teleologische Erhabenheit der Vernunft bei Kant: Ein paradoxer Beweis der Einheit der Vernunft aus der Dualität des Erhabenen*, De Gruyter, Berlin. DOI: 10.1515/9783110979916.
- Bacon, F. (1640), *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human*. Lichfield, Oxford.
- Beiser, F.C. (2008), *Schiller as a Philosopher*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. DOI: 10.1093/019928282X.001.0001.
- Beiser, F. C. (2009), *Diotima's Children. German Aesthetic Rationalism from Leibniz to Lessing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199573011.001.0001
- Boileau-Despréaux, N. (1701), *Oeuvres Diverses*, Denys Thierry, Paris.
- Boyle, R. (1661), *The Sceptical Chymist*, J. Cadwell for J. Crooke, London.
- Burke, E. (1758), *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. R. and J. Dodsley, London.
- Chapman, G. (1903), *Eastward Hoe*, D. C. Heath, Boston.
- Clewis, R. R. (2015), "The Place of the Sublime in Kant's Project", *Studi Kantiani*, vol. 28, pp. 149-168.
- Clewis, R. R. (2024), *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. DOI: 10.1017/9781009209403.
- Dessoir, M. (1906), *Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft: in den Grundzügen dargestellt*. F. Enke, Stuttgart.
- Dennis, J. (1701), *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, Rich. Parker, Baltimore.
- Fries, J. F. (1818), *Handbuch der praktischen Philosophie oder der philosophische Zwecklehre*, Mohr und Winter, Heidelberg.
- Giesbers, T. (2017), *The Wall or the Door: German Realism around 1800* [PhD diss.], Utrecht University. URL: <https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/351374>
- Giesbers, T. (2020), "Debatte über philosophischen Realismus und Fundamentalphilosophie", in G. Hartung (ed.), *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie. Die Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts. Deutschsprachiger Raum 1800-1830*, Schwabe, Basel.
- Giesbers, T. (2023), "Realismus", in B. Sandkaulen, S. Schick and O. Koch (eds.), *Jacobi-Wörterbuch Online*, Digital publication. URL: <https://jwo.saw-leipzig.de/articles/edbf8f9f>
- Giesbers, T. (2025), "New Frontiers in Reviewing: Experimental German Philosophical Review Practices around 1800", *Philosophical Reviews in German Territories (1668-1799): Volume 1*. DOI: 10.36253/979-12-215-0573-3.07.
- Guyer, P. (2014), *A History of Modern Aesthetics*, vol.1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781107110342.
- Haman, B. (2018), "Notions of the Sublime: The Unquiet Mind in Tieck's *Über das Erhabene* and *Der Runenberg*", *Oxford German Studies*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 439-456. DOI: 10.1080/00787191.2019.1548124.
- Hamann, J. G. (1952), *Sämtliche Werke Band 4: Kleine Schriften 1750-1788*. Verlag Herder, Wien.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1986), *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M.
- de Jaucourt, L. (1751), "Sublime", in D. Diderot & J. le Rond D'Alembert (eds.), *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 15, pp. 566-570, Les Sociétés typographiques, Paris.
- Kant, I. (1912) *Akademie-Ausgabe: Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2. Verlag Georg Reimer, Berlin.
- Kant, I. (1913), *Akademie-Ausgabe: Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, vol.5. Verlag Georg Reimer, Berlin.
- Kenkel, K. J. (2001), "Monstrous Women, Sublime Pleasure, and the Perils of Reception in Lessing's Aesthetics", *PMLA*, vol. 116, no. 3, pp. 545-561. DOI: 10.1632/pmla.2001.116.3.545.
- Kontler, L. (2017), "The Reception of the Enquiry in the German-Language Area the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: August Gottlieb Meißner and Johann Gottlieb Herder", in M. Fitzpatrick & P. Jones (eds.), *The Reception of Edmund Burke in Europe*, pp. 313-330, Bloomsbury, London. DOI: 10.5040/9781474217668.
- Lessing, G. E. (1898), *Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. XIV, G. I. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung, Leipzig.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1994), *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Mathy, D. (1984), *Poesie und Chaos. Zur anarchistischen Komponente der frühromantischen Ästhetik*, H. Weixler, München.
- de Man, P. (1996), *Aesthetic Ideology*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2003), *A Finite Thinking*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Reinhold, K. L. (1794), *Beyträge zur Berichtigung bisheriger Missverständnisse der Philosophen*, vol. 2, Mauke, Jena.
- Richter, J. P. (1990), *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, Meiner, Hamburg. DOI: 10.28937/978-3-7873-2318-0
- Roetzel, L. C. (1996), "Aesthetic Experience as Imaginary Experience: Masculinity and the Regulation of Sentiments in *Emilia Galotti*", *Lessing Yearbook*, vol. 28, pp. 93-4. DOI: 10.1632/pmla.2001.116.3.545.
- Saint Girons, B. (1993), *Fiat lux: une philosophie du sublime*, Quai Voltaire, Paris.
- Schelling, F. W. J. (1980), *Philosophie der Kunst*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, Darmstadt.
- Schiller, F. (1871), *Schillers sämtliche Schriften historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol.10, J. G. Cotta, Stuttgart.

- Schmidt, C. C. E. (1795), *Wörterbuch zum leichtern Gebrauch der Kantischen Schriften* (3rd Ed.), Erdker, Jena.
- Schopenhauer, A. (1819), *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.
- Shaftesbury, A. A. C. (1999), *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Clarendon, Oxford. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511803284
- Zelle, C. (1989), "Schönheit und Erhabenheit. Der Anfang doppelter Ästhetik bei Boileau, Dennis, Bodmer und Breitinger", in C. Pries (ed.), *Das Erhabene*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 55-73. DOI: 10.1515/9783050082899.
- Zuckert, R. (2003), "Awe or Envy: Herder contra Kant on the Sublime", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 61, no. 3, pp. 217-232. DOI: 10.1111/1540-6245.00108.
- Zuckert, R. (2024), "Kant on the Sublime", in A. Gomes & A. Stephenson (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Kant*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198854586.001.0001.