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The History of British Art and the Burkean Sublime

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In 1757, London philosopher Edmund Burke proposed the concept of "the sublime" in his text, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful*. This idea of the sublime describes the feeling one experiences when they observe something in the world around them that is so great in size and terror that it makes them feel extremely small and insignificant in comparison, but in the best and most awe-inspiring way possible, rather than a solely negative sensation.¹ For example, when a subject views a gigantic range of mountains, and has an entirely encompassing feeling of being dwarfed by them, in admiration of creation. Or if one stared at the night sky and is overwhelmed by the sheer number of stars above our heads, dizzied by that unimaginable sum. The idea of the sublime has not been something solely isolated to philosophy, as it has spread into several other avenues of thought, specifically within art. Burke's concept was very quickly adopted into the aesthetics tradition as artists grappled with the question of "... how can an artist paint the sensation that we experience when words fail or when we find ourselves beyond the limits of reason?".² This concept was particularly well received by British artists, spanning from the Baroque period onwards, leaving an indelible impression on art history and philosophy. Burke's concept of the sublime evolved from being a philosophical construct to an aesthetic theme etched into the British history of art, exemplified in the works of Enlightenment artists like Philip James de Loutherbourg to contemporary scholars like Eugenie Shinkle.

The definition of the sublime has been interpreted in several different iterations over the centuries, and often times gets easily confused with beauty, but in Burke's original text he

¹ Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful*. R. and J. Dodsley, 1757. Page 51.

² Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn, 'British Art and the Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>, accessed 23 November 2017.

clarifies the separation between these two. Burke makes it clear that the notion of the sublime does not always originate within admiration as beauty does, although it certainly can be related to beauty, he focused on the sublime's distinct traits involving danger:

"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner of analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is the product of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."³

Burke believed that pain ultimately would override feelings of pleasure, so he focused on that aspect of human sensation when he described what exactly encompassed the sublime. Burke believed that danger and pain could cause just as much delight as the beautiful could, as long as there was some aspect of distance involved.⁴ Burke set specific sensations associated with the sublime in relation to this theory of pain over pleasure in order to more clearly identify it: darkness, limiting the sense of sight; obscurity, something that confuses judgement; privation, pain is a more powerful feeling than pleasure; vastness, beyond comprehension; magnificence, causing awe; loudness, that which is overwhelming; suddenness, which shocks us to the extent of paralyzing us.⁵ While these symptoms of the sublime may not sound terribly pleasurable to experience or see, or very visual to easily depict as an artist, British creatives took these criteria set by Burke and rendered the sublime symptoms into wonderful and thoughtful works of art.

³ Burke Page 39.

⁴ Burke. Page 40.

⁵ Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn, 'British Art and the Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>, accessed 23 November 2017.

For example, in Philip James de Loutherbourg's *An Avalanche in the Alps*⁶, de Loutherbourg created his own rendition of the Alps, a scene that would have been very familiar to British travelers, into an image of sublime greatness.⁷ De Loutherbourg's piece is a well developed example of how Burke's list of criteria can be seamlessly interwoven into a painted work. He juxtaposes the rugged massiveness of the mountains with diminutive figures fleeing the scene, adopting Burke's definition of an overwhelming loudness, as we see these people overwhelmed by the severity of their doomed situation.⁸ The panicked nature of the figures, with one even praying in desperation, solidifies this notion of danger and privation, and also evokes a sense of empathy from the viewer, as we can see their encroaching fate, and the audience can almost feel just as helpless as the victims do, as they feel incapable to do anything to prevent their tragic deaths. There is a sense of limited sight just as the figures in the painting would be experiencing in this moment, as the masses of snow are encroaching, neither the viewer nor the travelers can see past the natural disaster, can see no route of escape. De Loutherbourg also adopts vastness in this piece, as both the viewers of the painting and the subjects of the piece are unable to comprehend the sheer size of this avalanche in relation to themselves, a grand mass of nature and fear. This particular piece is a prime example of the darker undertones that the sublime held for much of British art history. While the viewer marvels at the enormous power of nature, the artful representation of the sublime also depicts the danger of these forces and points directly to the viewer's own mortality.

⁶ See Appendix Image 1

⁷ Philip James De Loutherbourg, *An Avalanche in the Alps* 1803, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-james-de-loutherbourg-an-avalanche-in-the-alps-r1105560>, accessed 25 November 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

This mortal side to the sublime was what was in the forefront of artists' minds during the earlier depictions of the concept. During the eighteenth-century, one would have been more likely to hear the word 'sublime' along those that in a contemporary context tend to have negative connotations, like 'awful' or 'terrible', rather than alluding to something beautiful.⁹ This word association between the sublime and what is found to be tremendous or terrifying drove artists like de Louthembourg to depict such heartbreaking and lovely scenes in their work. The sublime would not begin to be defined as anything lighter than tragedy until the idea returned back to fashion after the Victorian era, wherein artists were more enamored with the beautiful than the sublime.¹⁰

The concept of the sublime had been explored before Burke published his *Philosophical Enquiry*, though Burke was the one to create a distinct and specific interpretation that would become the foundation for the rest of sublime British art. Before Burke, there were no specific ties between the sublime and terrible or the sublime and beautiful, it was simply seen as a spectacle, or something that evoked a strong emotion from the viewer.¹¹ It was only when Burke later elaborated on the specifics of the sublime would it then become a more concrete concept, expanding further than simply the relationship between the viewer and a work of art. The pre-Burke focus of the sublime was on drawing a certain emotion or sensation out of the viewer,

⁹Christine Riding and Nigel Llewellyn, 'British Art and the Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-riding-and-nigel-llewellyn-british-art-and-the-sublime-r1109418>, accessed 23 November 2017..

¹⁰ 'The Romantic sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/the-romantic-sublime-r1109221>, accessed 08 December 2017.

¹¹ Lydia Hamlett, 'Longinus and the Baroque Sublime in Britain', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-longinus-and-the-baroque-sublime-in-britain-r1108498>, accessed 10 December 2017.

which went very easily hand-in-hand with the Baroque notion of the “intense relationship between the composer, their art, and the audience.”¹² This definition of the early Baroque sublime aiming to create a powerful reaction from the viewer was what mainly fed the sublime before Burke was able to define it.

An example of this rendition of the pre-Burke sublime was the writings of Johnathan Richardson and his analysis of Anthony Van Dyck’s portrait *Countess Dowager of Exeter*.¹³ Richardson thought that portraiture in and of itself was a sublime genre, if the artist had enough skill in order to take the subject they had in front of them, and turn that person into a character that had a significant effect on the audience, it was a sublime skill.¹⁴ Richardson developed his own point system as to how he judged whether a painting was capable of this sublime effect, where he scored a piece on categories such as expression and composition, and how these related to the character in the piece.¹⁵ For Richardson’s scoring of Van Dyck’s piece¹⁶, while the piece did not get a perfect score in each category, Richardson still declared it as ultimately sublime. Richardson believed that the portrait earned a sublime ranking for merely demonstrating many of the qualities he was judging upon, and also that the piece depicted the subject so poignantly that

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Appendix Image 2

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Richardson, Jonathan. Two discourses. I. An essay on the whole art of criticism as it relates to painting. Shewing how to judge I. Of the Goodness of a Picture; II. Of the Hand of the Master; and III. Whether 'tis an Original, or a Copy. II. An argument in behalf of the science of a connoisseur; Wherein is shewn the Dignity, Certainty, Pleasure, and Advantage of it. Both by Mr. Richardson. London, 1719. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. 10 Dec. 2017.

<<http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=s1185784&tabID=T001&docId=CW106417178&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

¹⁶ See Appendix Image 3

the “mere sight of her [the widow] can make the spectator into a more moral being.”¹⁷ Not only is this critique representative of the early Baroque definition of the sublime, it also illustrates the need that was felt to give a specific definition to the sublime, reflected in Richardson’s own scorecards.

After Burke’s publication, the nature of the sublime experienced its first shift in its content, changing from this sole experience of the spectator to more of a representative theme in art. This then translated into the Romantic sublime, one that took on a more natural, landscape oriented turn, rather than the previous emphasis on solely the audience. British artists like Joseph Mallord William (J.M.W) Turner found specific motifs within nature and adopted them into a Burkean representation of the sublime. For Turner, he focused mostly on a sublime motif of water. One of his first pieces to have been exhibited that embraced the sublime theme was *Fishermen at Sea*¹⁸, depicting a boat full of fisherman on a luminous sea, hauntingly peaceful as they are surrounded by dark and foreboding clouds. Some critics reprimanded Turner for depicting two pools of water lit by the moon, when it would not have been physically possible for that to occur.¹⁹ Others praised him for using this specific detail to employ Burke’s sublime obscurity, how the observer of this scene would not have been able to see clearly through the dark gloom, and would have had a confused judgement as to the motion of the scene.²⁰ Turner also uses Burke’s sense of darkness to further experiment with the depth of the depiction, as the

¹⁷ Lydia Hamlett, ‘Longinus and the Baroque Sublime in Britain’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-longinus-and-the-baroque-sublime-in-britain-r1108498>, accessed 10 December 2017.

¹⁸ See Appendix Image 4

¹⁹ Sarah Monks, ‘“Suffer a Sea-Change”: Turner, Painting, Drowning’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/sarah-monks-suffer-a-sea-change-turner-painting-drowning-r1136832>, accessed 11 December 2017.

²⁰ Ibid.

audience can only see the turbulent boats clearly, and everything else beyond is veiled in dark clouds, with just a hint of a silhouette of land in the back, almost flattening this scene. The sky Turner chooses to depict also evokes Burke's sense of vastness and magnificence, as these massive black clouds drape themselves across the sky, seeming nearly endless, yet there is one brilliant gaping hole in the cover illuminating the scene. This piece from Turner revels in the Burke sublime, as it continued to develop up until the Victorian Era, and is emblematic of the signature landscape style that would come to rule this era of the sublime.

Around 1850, there was again a shift in the sublime, while this was not one of definition, it was one of popularity. The concept fell out of favor, as artists and their audiences gravitated towards the beautiful rather than the sublime.²¹ After Turner's immense success in rendering the sublime in his works scholars like John Ruskin began to question Burke's definition of the sublime as too cruel a vision of nature, or lacking any sort of divinity.²² Ruskin bashes the sublime as a whole, basically saying that it's nothing special or to draw attention to, in his writing *Modern Painters*:

“The fact is, that sublimity is not a specific term,—not a term descriptive of the effect of a particular class of ideas. Anything which elevates the mind is sublime, and elevation of mind is produced by the contemplation of greatness of any kind; but chiefly, of course, by the greatness of the noblest things. Sublimity is, therefore, only another word for the effect of greatness upon the feelings. Greatness of matter, space, power, virtue, or beauty,

²¹ Alison Smith, ‘The Sublime in Crisis: Landscape Painting after Turner’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/alison-smith-the-sublime-in-crisis-landscape-painting-after-turner-r1109220>, accessed 11 December 2017.

²² Ibid.

are thus all sublime; and there is perhaps no desirable quality of a work of art, which in its perfection is not, in some way or degree, sublime.”²³

Attitudes like Ruskin’s were widely held during this Victorian era within the circle of art critics, so society began to shift attention toward the secular, and as technological and industrial advances continued to grow, the focus of creators began to shift from relatively inaccessible ideas to focusing on more the the experience of common life.²⁴

The sublime re-emerged as the Modern era took hold, once again adopting a new context and a new, and fragmented, definition. During the previous Victorian era, the sublime had become part of an everyday syntax, having had its rich connotations seemingly forgotten according to artists like James Abbot McNeill Whistler.²⁵ Whistler sought to reinvigorate the sublime, to revile its simpler definition in favor of one that interpreted Burke’s ideas into a new context. During a public lecture Whistler gave in 1885, he implored “How dutifully the casual in Nature is accepted as sublime, may be gathered from the unlimited admiration daily produced by a very foolish sunset.”²⁶ About ten years before giving this lecture, Whistler created a piece entitled *Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Cremorne Lights*²⁷ that initially seems to be exactly the kind of piece he is criticizing in his lecture. The initial Victorian lens lends itself to a familiar view, which in Whistler’s case was the River Thames, an obviously very familiar scene to his

²³ Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. 1843.

²⁴ George Eliot. *Adam Bede*. 1859.

https://books.google.com/books/about/Adam_Bede.html?id=eK6tz0Lwjp0C&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button

²⁵ Philip Shaw, ‘Modernism and the Sublime’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-modernism-and-the-sublime-r1109219>, accessed 11 December 2017.

²⁶ Whistler, James McNeill. "Mr. Whistler’s Ten O’Clock." Lecture, Prince’s Hall, London.

<http://www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk/miscellany/tenoclock/>

²⁷ See Appendix Image 5

British audience. The focus through this lens seems to be on the stretch of water, and the beauty of this portion of the river, but closer analysis reveals a sublime context closer to Turner's Romantic sublime, and Burke's original definition. The two embankments seen on either side of the river represent the Cremorne Gardens and the polluting mills of Battersea, coming together on the horizon, which were not geographically accurate.²⁸ This artificiality parallels Turner's choice to inaccurately depict two pools of light in *Fishermen at Sea*, enabling him to evoke the Burkean sublime. Whistler's choice to mirror this technique in *Cremorne Lights* brings a sense of Burke's obscurity and darkness, as this inaccuracy confuses the audience's judgement and asks viewers to question their visual perception of the scene. These two themes of Burke's also tie into the vaguely body shaped silhouette lurking in the river, alluding to the darker notes of Burke's sublime in mortality and suddenness, as closer inspection reveals the more sinister connotations of the scene. Whistler's scene with death lurking directly beneath the surface is a perfectly subtle interpretation of the sublime, rather than earlier more blatant iterations of the concept.

As some artists like Whistler sought to return back to earlier eras of the sublime and reinvent it into their own, portions of their peers sought to reject the concept all together, leading to a muddled and relatively unclear modern definition of the sublime. One of the loudest anti-sublime voices in Europe was German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who in his text *The Joyful Science*, proclaimed the sublime to be no longer useful, and that it should no longer be explored:

²⁸ Philip Shaw, 'Modernism and the Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-modernism-and-the-sublime-r1109219>, accessed 11 December 2017.

“How the theatrical scream of passion now hurts our ears, how strange to our taste the whole romantic uproar and tumult of the senses has become, which the educated mob loves, and all its aspirations after the sublime, lofty and weird! No, if we convalescents still need art, it is another kind of art...”²⁹

This anti-sublime sentiment was deeply rooted in the resentment of the Victorian sublime, where Nietzsche and other critics felt that this concept was used to justify the superior attitude of wealthy European society with its lofty connotations.³⁰ They felt that the sublime mindset was one that was miserable. For example, one of Nietzsche’s biggest inspirations Arthur Schopenhauer, felt that Shakespeare, through his tragic story of *Hamlet* “is supremely sublime because he sees into the ‘horror’ of existence, and leads he audience towards despair,” and that Shakespeare’s seeming pessimism was “a really *wicked* way of thinking.”³¹ This perception of the sublime as something solely and inherently depressing, and as something claimed by the upper classes, led to a fragmentation of what the sublime meant in the modern era. Other factions of European artists including cubists like Paul Klee, sought to explore the sublime in the Modern

²⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. *The Joyful Wisdom*. 1918. https://search.library.pdx.edu/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_hathi_trustuiug.30112052111751&context=PC&vid=PSU&search_scope=all&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US

³⁰ Christine Battersby, ‘Behold the Buffoon’: Dada, Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* and the Sublime’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/christine-battersby-behold-the-buffoon-dada-nietzsches-ecce-homo-and-the-sublime-r1136833>, accessed 11 December 2017.

³¹ *Ibid.*

era, despite the fact that it seemed that there was still no definitive consensus of how Modern artists should interpret the sublime.^{32 33}

Klee decided to attempt to interpret the sublime in an abstract, cubist context, and in 1923 made a postcard entitled *The Sublime Side*³⁴ for that year's Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar.³⁵ These postcards were meant to be emblematic of the ideas that the very first Bauhaus exhibition were going to be exploring, and to share these ideas with whoever received one of those postcards.³⁶ Klee's postcard depicts various geometric shapes stacked on top each other, ultimately building up a pedestal holding up the Bauhaus exhibition, with the top of the building having an eye-shaped roof. This image of a towering monument of art seems to evoke a sense of bewilderment at the advertised immensity of the coming exhibition. The postcard, as it was used as an announcement of the very first Bauhaus exhibition, would have brought a sense of obscurity and magnificence, since the exhibition was still in the future, and no one knew what it would be like, since it was an unprecedented event in the art world of the time. Bauhaus, as can be seen in retrospect, has heavily influenced Modern art throughout Europe and Britain, with teachers from this original exhibition emigrating to teach what they had learned from Bauhaus,

³² Philip Shaw, 'Modernism and the Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-modernism-and-the-sublime-r1109219>, accessed 11 December 2017.

³³ Philip Shaw, 'Kasimir Malevich's Black Square', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459>, accessed 12 December 2017.

³⁴ See Appendix Image 6

³⁵ "The Sublime Side Postcard for "Bauhaus Exhibition Weimar 1923" (Die Erhabene Seite Postkarte Zur "Bauhaus-Ausstellung Weimar 1923") 1923." Museum of Modern Art. Accessed December 12, 2017. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/67160>.

³⁶ Popeson, Pamela. "Having a Wonderful Time at the Bauhaus Exhibition in Weimar, 1923." Museum of Modern Art. June 25, 2015. Accessed December 12, 2017. https://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2015/06/25/having-a-wonderful-time-at-the-bauhaus-exhibition-in-weimar-1923-3/.

like Walter Gropius to Britain in 1934.³⁷ Klee's postcard would have been emblematic of the lessons these teachers were bringing with them after Bauhaus, keeping ideas like the sublime talked about. While Klee's *Sublime Side* may not initially seem like a sublime work of art, within the context of its creation and of the cubist perspective, it lives up to its name. While Klee's postcard doesn't offer a distinct definition of the Modern sublime, it does show that it remained a relevant concept on the forefront of artistic exploration in the Modern era in major artistic events of the time like the Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar.

Now, in a contemporary context, how to define the sublime within the current era has only become more complicated as technology advances at an exponential pace. As Eugenie Shinkle writes,

“The distinction between hardware and software, body and machine, visual, material, and conceptual artifacts is deliberately unsettled here [...] which posits that a feature of the technological sublime in the digital age is the absence of a consistent and uniform boundary between the self and the machine.”³⁸

Not to mention the incredibly large sum of works attempting to tackle this concept can be more widely shared than ever before with the internet, it makes a contemporary definition of the sublime nearly impossible to come to a general consensus on. While there may be no clear cut definition, the lack of boundaries to the contemporary sublime may indeed be the thread through the varying works on it. While Burke and Richardson sought to create objective and quantifiable

³⁷ "1919-1933." Bauhaus-Archiv. Accessed December 10, 2017. https://www.bauhaus.de/en/das_bauhaus/48_1919_1933/.

³⁸ Eugénie Shinkle, 'Video Games and the Technological Sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/eugenie-shinkle-video-games-and-the-technological-sublime-r1136830>, accessed 12 December 2017.

definitions to the sublime, the total diversity of the sublime and lack of uniformity seems to be the only commonly shared aspect of the contemporary sublime.

An example of contemporary interest and exploration of the sublime in British Art can be seen in the Tate Museum's project *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art, and Language* that began in 2007.³⁹ The Tate states that their project has been shared in order to allow the public to, "Explore the history of the sublime and its expression in individual artworks, and discover what the sublime means today."⁴⁰ The Tate's investment of time and funding into such a large project signals not only that a contemporary public interest in the sublime still exists, but exists in one of the most prominent and respected British arts institutions of the contemporary world. While Tate may not be the ultimate voice on the contemporary sublime, much yet establish a specific definition of the contemporary sublime, they propose that,

"Contemporary artists have extended the vocabulary of the sublime by looking back to earlier traditions and by engaging with aspects of modern society. They have located the sublime in not only the vastness of nature as represented in modern science but also the awe-inspiring complexity and scale of the capitalist-industrial system and in technology."⁴¹

Tate's highlighting of the diversity of contemporary sublime thought demonstrates how technology has shaped the idea of the sublime, and how it is an impossible task to come to a

³⁹ Nigel Llewellyn, 'Project overview', August 2012, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/project-overview-r1117556>, accessed 9 December 2017

⁴⁰ 'The Art of the Sublime', Tate Research Publication, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime>, accessed 9 December 2017

⁴¹ 'The contemporary sublime', in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, Tate Research Publication, January 2013, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/the-contemporary-sublime-r1109224>, accessed 9 December 2017

specific definition of the sublime as it now spans so much content. Tate's forefront voice on contemporary British art is emblematic of the current sublime dilemma, and of artists who today are still grappling with Burke's concept, just like others have been doing for hundreds of years.

Edmund Burke's establishment of a definite aesthetic sublime has generated a conversation between artists and their audiences in British art for centuries, and it has challenged creators to question the concept within the contexts of their own time. A seemingly simple idea of awe directed towards our environment has been transformed over nearly every era of art since Burke, changing the perspective of how artists view their respective spheres. Burke's sublime has withstood the test of time, being adopted and questioned and rendered since 1757, with no end in sight.

Appendix

Image 1

Philip James de Loutherbourg, *An Avalanche in the Alps*. 1803

Image 2

William Faithorne after Anthony van Dyck. *Francesca Bridges Filia Domini Cavendish et Dotissa Exoniae Comitissa*. 1650-1663

Image 3

(70)

Countess DOWAGER of Exeter.		
V. DYCK.		
OCTOBER the 16th, 1717.		
FACE.		
<i>Composition</i>	10	18
<i>Colouring</i>	17	18
<i>Handling</i>	17	18
<i>Drawing</i>	10	17
<i>Invention</i>	18	18
<i>Expression</i>	18	18
<i>Grace and Greatness</i>	18	18
<i>Advantage</i>	18	<i>Pleasure</i>
<i>Sublime.</i>		16

The

Johnathan Richardson. Scoring of *Countess Dowager of Exeter* by *Van Dyck*. 1719.

Image 4

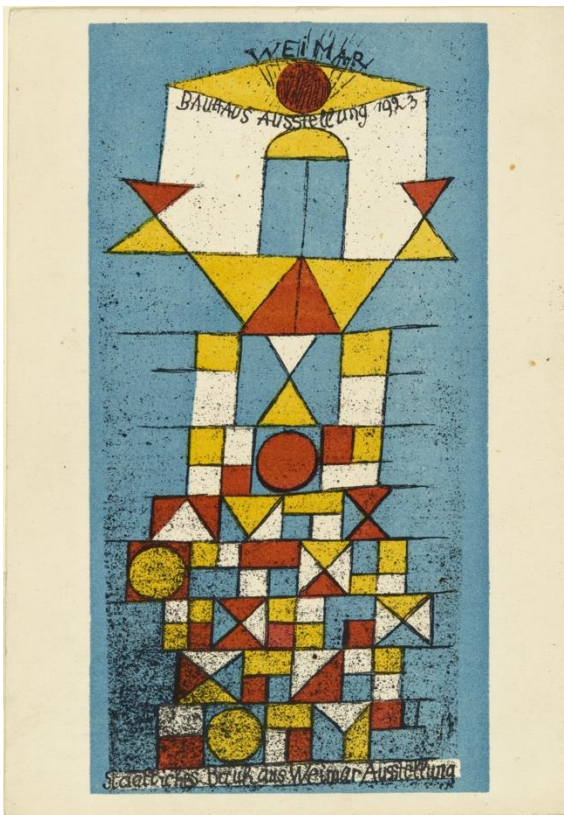


Joseph Mallord William Turner. *Fisherman at Sea*. 1796

Image 5

James Abbott McNeil Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver- Cremorne Lights*. 1872

Image 6

Paul Klee, *The Sublime Side*. 1923.

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