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Crowther and the Kantian Sublime in Art

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Paul Crowther, in his book, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*,¹ has worked to reconstruct Kant's aesthetics in order to make it more coherent, more plausible, and thereby more relevant to contemporary aesthetic concerns. Crowther's reconstruction is intended to sidestep Kant's specific metaphysics and epistemology, but still benefit from Kant's insights into our appreciation for the sublime. Within the framework of this reconstructed Kantian aesthetics, he lays out four basic varieties of the sublime in art: the "cognitive" sublime, the "artefactual" sublime, the "personalized" sublime, and the "expressive" sublime.² The first of these varieties, the "cognitive" sublime, differs from the other three in that it is the closest to Kant's original formulation of the sublime, and in that it resides in *nature* as much as it does in art. The remaining three varieties, however, are *specifically artistic* strains of the sublime, and are extensions – new varieties – that Crowther adds to Kant's original exposition of the sublime.

My goal here³ will be to remain (for the most part) within the area covered by Crowther's "cognitive" sublime – the sublime in its more traditional Kantian sense – to show that, even while remaining within this (as it were) "pure" area, there is much space for expanding upon Kant's examples and varieties of the sublime, particularly in art. The idea here will not be to *refute* Crowther's new varieties, but to show how, *before*

1 Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

2 Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime*, Part III, Ch. 7, 152–174.

3 This piece was presented in an earlier form as "Kantian Varieties of the Artistic Sublime", delivered at the "(Re)Discovering Aesthetics" Conference in Cork, Ireland (July 9–11, 2004), on Sunday, July 11, and utilizes material from my doctoral dissertation, C. E. Emmer, *Possibilities for a Non-Ocular Aesthetics in Kant's "Critique of Judgment"* (New York: Stony Brook University, 2002), in particular Chapters IV and V. References to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* [*Kritik der Urteilskraft*] (1790) will provide the German abbreviation (KU) and will provide the section number, usually followed by the page number from vol. V of the "Akademie-Ausgabe". As a guide to the English, I have referred to the Pluhar translation: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

we venture beyond more strictly Kantian borders into what Crowther calls “specifically artistic”⁴ varieties of the sublime, there is already much rich territory for exploration.

My own explorations of this territory originated in questions about the role of the senses in Kant’s mature aesthetics.⁵ Searching for answers to those questions revealed that, although Kant’s mature aesthetics does express a pronounced preference for sight over the other “objective” senses (particularly in the case of touch), a more self-consistent reconstruction of his aesthetics would allow much more space for the other “objective” senses (hearing and touch)⁶ to serve as conduits for the beautiful and the sublime in their Kantian varieties – certain unavoidable dis-

4 The phrase “specifically artistic” appears e.g. on p. 154 of *The Kantian Sublime*.

5 Some of this work has been published as C. E. Emmer, “The Senses of the Sublime”, in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung: Akten des IX. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, ed. by Volker Gerhardt, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and Ralph Schumacher (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), Vol. 3, 512–518.

6 I am here using Kant’s distinction – from his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [*Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*] (1798/1800), *Akademie-Ausgabe* Vol. VII – between the “objective” senses (sight, hearing, and touch), which relate to the cognition of physical objects, and the “subjective” senses (taste and smell) which refer to sensual, chemical, and intimate relationships which have no objective content (see § 16 of the *Anthropology*, AA 07: 153–154). Kant’s own preference for sight over hearing and touch, and these above smell and taste, has a long line of precursors; see for example Plato’s praise for sight in the *Timaeus* (where sight has pride of place over hearing in revealing the divine cosmic order, but touch receives no such distinction), or Aristotle’s discussion of the senses in the *Nicomachean Ethics* at ii, 10 (1118a1–1118b7) and x, 5 (1176a1–4). On the other hand, however, one cannot ascribe a monolithic preference for sight to the history of philosophy, since some periods have rested on a challenge to that preference. Some examples include the ancient atomists and stoics (favoring touch), the Lutheran attack on the oculo-centric “theology of glory” (favoring hearing, a theme later adopted to a certain degree by the romantics and Heidegger), and the modern empiricists and materialists, who reduce all senses to touch (even the “rationalist” Descartes does so in his *Dioptrics*). Aristotle himself remarks on this haptocentrism in regard to the Presocratics: “Democritus and the majority of natural philosophers who discuss perception are guilty of a great absurdity; for they represent all perception as being by touch” from *De Sensu* (4: 442a29), cited in Raven Kirk and Schofield (eds.), *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed., updated bibliography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 428. On Luther’s critique of the “theology of glory”, see John van Buren, *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the hidden king* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), and John van Buren, “Martin Heidegger, Martin Luther”, in: Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (eds.), *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in his earliest thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 159–174.

advantages to touch notwithstanding.⁷ At the same time, these explorations led me to a number of observations that I hope to be able to bring to bear presently on the question of the Kantian sublime in art.

I should say at the outset that, in general, I find Crowther's work in his *The Kantian Sublime* very congenial. Crowther manages to give Kant's theory a sympathetic but nonetheless perceptive and critical reading, a reconstruction which argues for the continued relevance of Kant's theory. In addition, Crowther is very good at anticipating possible fields of application for his reconstruction, leaving us with a reading that promises many avenues of further exploration in the field of human artifice.⁸ With these in mind, what I would like to do in this piece, then, is simply make sure that additional possible areas of exploration for the Kantian sublime (also within the artistic realm) are not overlooked.

Let us then quickly review Crowther's basic approach and results. The last part of his book, part III, which deals with questions of the artistic sublime, is divided into two chapters. The first chapter of part III is devoted to his reconstruction of Kant's understanding of the aesthetic,⁹ and the second chapter of part III provides the expanded varieties of the sublime he is able to generate on the basis of this reconstruction. Specifically, in the first chapter of Part III (Ch. 6), Crowther is concerned (as previously mentioned) to ensure that we do not allow an uncritical dedication to a 'history of ideas' approach to trap us in weaknesses in Kant's theory of faculties, and so develops a reconstructed Kantian theory that does not depend upon reference to the faculties. In addition, he wants to move away from what he sees as the unfortunate and limiting centrality of the moral to Kant's idea of the sublime. This reconstruction turns on a

7 For most of the history of philosophical discussion of beauty, preference has gone to sight (and, to a lesser degree, to hearing) over touch. Given the usual criteria in question (complexity, clarity, and in a certain sense, stability), these privileges for sight (and, to a lesser degree, hearing) are justified. In Kant's case, his conception of beauty privileges complex forms, and this preference places touch at an unavoidable disadvantage, particularly since a certain level of complexity appears to touch merely as *texture*, not form. Nonetheless, in my dissertation I argued for certain restricted conditions under which touch could serve as a conduit for beautiful form, and also for acoustic and haptic conduits for the occasion for the sublime (some of which will be briefly discussed below).

8 Crowther's reconstruction also offers a ready tool for the use of critics and artists.

9 The "aesthetic" will always refer in this paper to Kant's aesthetics (his theory of beauty, sublimity, and art) as laid out in the KU, and not to his "transcendental aesthetic" (or theory of pure sensibility) of the *Critique of Pure Reason* [*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*].

broader definition of the aesthetic that jettisons Kant's "moments" of *necessity* and *universality* and retains only the elements of *disinterestedness* and *subjective purposiveness* (the felt harmony of the cognitive faculties). Crowther argues that, ultimately, this combination better shows how *both* the beautiful and the sublime are aesthetic.¹⁰

Within this new, Kant-inspired framework, then, in the second chapter of Part III (Ch. 7), Crowther provides us with four basic varieties of the sublime: what he calls the "*cognitive*" sublime, the "*artefactual*" sublime, the "*personalized*" sublime, and the "*expressive*" sublime. To summarize:

- Crowther's "*cognitive*" sublime essentially turns on the same occasions for the sublime as Kant's mathematical and dynamical sublime – objects, whether natural or man-made, which serve as occasions for the feeling of the sublime due to their suggestion of infinite size or power.¹¹ The remaining three of Crowther's varieties of the sublime, as mentioned before, are found only in art, and so are "specifically artistic" varieties of the sublime, not merely varieties of the sublime which happen to (also) have artistic locations.
- Crowther's "*artefactual*" sublime refers to sublime-like feelings that are occasioned by great works of human productivity, a recognition (or "realization") of the great scope of human productive ability – in his words, "an authentic astonishment at what human creativity can achieve". Crowther refers to Kant's example of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, pointing out that, though it may occasion the "cognitive" sublime, it may also be the occasion for the "artefactual" sublime – not simply focusing on the building's impressive command of space, but its testament to the power of human capacities to physically transform the world. Crowther mentions a particularly striking example of this recognition in the sort of clear awe at the power and sweep of capitalism in transforming the entire earth that one finds for example in Zola's novel *Germinial*.¹²

10 See Part III, chapter 6 of *The Kantian Sublime*, 139–151.

11 He explicitly names it as such on p. 162 of *The Kantian Sublime*.

12 *The Kantian Sublime*, 153 (due to what must be an oversight, it is listed as "artifactual" sublime in the index). For the remarks on the power of capital, see 163–165 – I think Crowther's remarks hold especially of the discussion of the power of capital found in the *Communist Manifesto* (he does mention "the images and sentiments used in and aroused by the political writings of Marx, Bakunin, and others" at p. 164). Compare Edmund Burke's discussion of "difficulty" in his

- Crowther's "*personalized*" *sublime* also refers to a recognition of the "scope of artistic creation", but in this case in an artistic product that has especially personal significance for the person appreciating it (this variety of the sublime is thus the furthest from Kant's idea of universality).¹³
- Crowther's "*expressive*" *sublime* refers to an artist's ability to "[penetrate a simple human truth] so effectively [that we are immersed] in associations pertaining to this particular instance of it".¹⁴ In the "expressive" sublime, the power of an artist to effectively capture an aspect of human reality strikes us in a particularly forceful way. (This is closer to Kant's idea of genius.)¹⁵

In all of these, then, there is still in common with Kant's sublime (or the "cognitive" sublime) a recognition of the power of some human capacity, albeit in each case a more specific capacity than that involved in the "cognitive" sublime – say, the power of the human race as a whole to transform the earth and its elements, or the power of a particular artist to touch or move us personally.

In my own attempts to correct for Kant's tendencies to overemphasize sight (or, conversely, his tendencies to underestimate the possibilities for the other senses) in his treatments of both the beautiful and the sublime, I arrived at a number of new varieties of the Kantian sublime that turned on these neglected senses. Again, I should re-emphasize that, here, the varieties in question would all fall under what Crowther calls the "cognitive" sublime – that sublime which rests on reflection on the human subject's rational capacities (as spectator), and therefore *not* "specifically artistic" varieties of the sublime. To put it in other words, I will here be looking to that part of Crowther's discussion that does *not* explicitly *add* to Kant's varieties of the sublime, so that I can show where further possibilities for the sublime overlooked by Crowther might be considered. Briefly, these varieties can be organized according to whether (on the one hand) the dynamically sublime or the mathematical sublime is in ques-

A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757/1759), Part II, Section XII.

13 *The Kantian Sublime*, 158.

14 *The Kantian Sublime*, 159.

15 Crowther himself puts this relation to genius in terms of "follow[ing] up a [...] clue provided by Kant" (*The Kantian Sublime*, 158), namely, Kant's discussion of the aesthetic idea – "material for a harmony of reason and imagination which could have led Kant to a distinctively artistic notion of the sublime linked to genius. But he does not thus develop it" (159).

tion, and (on the other hand) what particular “objective” sense is the avenue for the occasion for the sublime.¹⁶

For example, when considering the *dynamically* sublime, one might think of the *acoustic* varieties of the dynamically sublime which Kant has passed over in his discussions of the sublime.¹⁷ *Hearing* the sounds of a pounding storm from inside a house or the power of a waterfall’s rushing roar heard from a bridge provide acoustic analogs for the *sight* of those powerful natural phenomena which we see at a distance, from a safe place. Likewise, one might apprehend the vibrations of the powerful rumble of a volcano or the crushing power of an avalanche at a distance through the sense of *touch*.

In a similar manner, one can imagine *acoustic* avenues for the *mathematically* sublime. These are more varied. In particular there is what I call the “acoustic estimation of magnitude” (involving such things as echoes in canyons or the sounds of objects falling into deep crevices) and what I call the “acoustic infinite”, which involves an impression of infinity from attention to the *silence* out of which sounds emerge (though I am perhaps more skeptical about this variety than when I first formulated it, mainly because I now incline to think that, on the one hand, space may be more powerfully felt in hearing distant, mediated *sound*, than in silence, and that, on the other hand, silence is apprehended more as an oppressive plenum than as an empty space).

In addition, one might posit what I have called “autosublimity” – arriving at the feeling of the sublime *without* having a vast or powerful object physically before us. Crowther comes close to suggesting this when he mentions the possible sublimity of a mirage:

[S]uppose that while in the desert we experience a mirage of a vast mountain range and that this encounter is experienced in terms of a feeling of sublimity. Suppose also that we then become aware that the mountain range *is*, in fact, a mirage. Would this discovery have any bearing on the grounds of our pleasure? In the strictest sense, it ought not to. For the scope of rational cog-

16 I discuss these varieties in more detail in “The Senses of the Sublime”, in *Kant und die Berliner Aufklärung: Akten des IX. Internationalen Kant-Kongresses*, cited above.

17 Granted, Burke’s empiricist theory discusses acoustic avenues for the sublime, such as regular cannon shots or the oppressive sound of crowds and marching bands, but the question here is whether Kant – not Burke – has overlooked acoustic varieties of the sublime (for Kant, of course, Burke’s examples would not be, properly speaking, sublime, since they turn on active fear).

inition can be ‘realized’ just as much by the appearance of vastness and power, as it can by the vastness or power of a real object.¹⁸

I basically agree with Crowther on this point, though my thought experiments have dealt more with *imagined* objects than illusory or hallucinated ones. And, as it so turns out, though it is not necessary to have such conditions, this imaginary sublime or “autosublimity” often arises in us when we have a *small*, physically *unpowerful* object before us (I will return to this idea presently).

Let me talk a bit more about Crowther’s “cognitive” sublime. One might be confused by Crowther’s discussion of the “cognitive” sublime and “artefactual” sublime – taking them both to be art-related – because the “cognitive” sublime can also be found in artworks.¹⁹ One has to remember that occasions for the “cognitive” sublime are found both in artworks and in nature, so that its turning on art is contingent, and not “specifically artistic”. However, when discussing the “cognitive” sublime in its artistic manifestations, it should be noted that Crowther mentions (but does not truly thematize) the fact that the “cognitive” sublime (whether mathematical or dynamical) can be either a sublimity hinging on the art object *itself* or a sublimity hinging on *its subject matter*. In other words, the sublime in art can be either instantiated *in the art object* or *represented* by it. I like to call these alternatives the “embodied” and “depicted” sublime.²⁰

This distinction – between the “embodied” and “depicted” sublime – is also touched upon, though not named in this way, by Crowther in his

18 *The Kantian Sublime*, 149 (he immediately mentions the connection to representations *of* occasions for the sublime in art – as opposed to sublime representations).

19 There is also the fact, to which I myself initially fell prey, that Crowther discusses his varieties of the sublime at length without naming them all, and only fully christens them when he summarizes them at p. 162. For example, the “artefactual” sublime is first clearly defined on p. 153, but not named as such until p. 162. This delay in clearly naming his varieties of the sublime could lead to confusion. As was mentioned before, Crowther himself discusses another possible source of confusion, namely, the fact that the varieties of the sublime do not mark out separate classes of objects – one and the same object could be the occasion for the “cognitive” sublime and the “artefactual” sublime (153) – though I do not believe he himself remarks specifically on its possibility to confuse.

20 One important caveat here: as Kant points out, the *object itself* is, technically speaking, never sublime. Therefore, when I use the term, “embodied” sublime, this only means that the aspects which serve as the *occasion for* the sublime are embodied; not the sublime itself.

discussion of the artefactual sublime. He gives the example of science fiction movies where great expanses of space and technology are served up – *depicted* – to the viewer in an awe-inspiring spectacle.²¹ Examples of this (epic or science-fictional) depicted sublime have only increased since Crowther's book came out.²²

Crowther's central examples of what I am calling the "embodied" sublime are also Kant's: Saint Peter's Cathedral, the pyramids, etc., all of which are human productions. Though, technically, the natural sublime is also (almost by definition) an "embodied" sublime, it is precisely because of this almost unavoidable embodiment that the word means much less in the natural context. In the realm of art, the sublime need not be embodied, for (as has been pointed out) in art the sublime can also be depicted. These examples are all architectural; but we might pause, briefly, to consider one example of a non-architectural type.

A particularly striking contemporary example of the embodied sublime in its dynamic mode might be found in the work of Richard Serra, which (in one phase of his work) generally consist of large plates of metal that are sometimes leaned against each other in such a way that they are free-standing constructions. Structurally, some are not unlike the houses of cards people build on their coffee tables, only that Serra's works are on a much greater scale and are very *heavy*. His works almost inevitably pull the viewer into comparing their physical presence to that of the sculpture, to size themselves up against it. Given his work's great size and *weight*, one can tell that it almost insists upon being taken as an occasion for the sublime, particularly the dynamically sublime. Famously (or infamously), his sculptures have twice (1972 and

21 *The Kantian Sublime*, 165. Crowther also discusses what I am calling the "depicted" sublime on p. 155 ("Kant now [sc. in the example of the inscription upon the temple of Isis at KU § 23] clearly concedes that representational artworks *can* have a content or subject-matter which *in itself* is in some sense sublime.") and pp. 160–161 (where Crowther distinguishes between sublimity of expression and sublimity of content).

22 Again, as noted earlier (and by Crowther himself), the very same object which serves as the occasion for this "artefactual" sublime could also serve as the occasion for a depicted "cognitive" sublime. One could simply attend to the great size or power of these depicted things, as opposed to their production by human beings. (One might additionally distinguish between being impressed with the *filmmakers'* ability to produce cinematic spectacles of such awesome scope or being impressed with the human creative power present *in the fictive world* of the film. In *this* distinction, it should be noted, we seem to have the distinction between "embodied" and "depicted" sublimity itself elevated to a meta-level.)

1981) fallen and injured or killed workers in the process of installing or de-installing them.²³ Especially with this knowledge, would not the overwhelming – possibly fatal – power of these pieces attest to their embodiment of the dynamical sublime?²⁴

The “depicted” sublime, on the other hand, is a “specifically artistic” mode of the sublime, and I would like to end my paper with a few observations on “specifically artistic” varieties of the sublime, or at least varieties of the sublime which *approach* the “specifically artistic”, since that was the realm which Crowther could count most justifiably as his special extension of Kant’s considerations of the sublime.

Staying with the “depicted” sublime for a moment: I mentioned before that the occasion for “autosublimity” (the sublime in the absence of a vast or powerful object physically before us) often happened to occur when we have a *small*, physically *unpowerful* object before us. Granted, ultimately “autosublimity” leads to a sublime encountered in the absence of any object before us at all – a purely internal or imaginary occasion for the sublime. Nonetheless, in its less extreme forms, “autosublimity” is usually occasioned by art objects, and it seems to me, literary ones in particular. At the very least, this seems to be the occasion which was most vital to Kant himself! It has always struck me that most of the examples of the sublime which Kant discusses (whether in nature or art) seem to have been delivered to him while reading books in the confines of his room. At one place he not only mentions sublime *descriptions* of natural

23 I do not mean to disparage Serra’s work, ability, or intentions by mentioning these incidents. In at least one of the two cases, it was ruled that worker incompetence was involved (one worker was illiterate and was therefore unable to follow the written instructions for handling the piece) – this according to the summary in Lynn Powers, *Killer Art: Art that Has Maimed, Killed, or Caused General Destruction through the Centuries* (New Orleans: Pontalba Press, 1999), 33–34. Powers’ work, the only printed source I was able to access by the time of writing, is not an especially scholarly book; it is more of a sensationalist coffee-table production (it fulfills its function as a conversation piece admirably well, however). Her sources are Don Terry, “A 16-Ton Sculpture Falls, Injuring 2”, *The New York Times* October 27, 1988, section II, p. 1, col. 3, and Carter Ratcliff, “Making Truly Dangerous Art”, *Newsday* December 9, 1988, 92. Powers also discusses the 1991 incident in which one of [Javacheff] Christo’s umbrellas from his piece, *The Umbrellas: Joint Piece for Japan and USA*, was blown over and killed an onlooker, but Christo’s *Umbrellas* (at least, judging from photographs) do not seem to have the *aesthetic* effect of power; rather, they look more decorative than imposing.

24 My discussion of Serra here is lifted wholesale from my doctoral dissertation, *Possibilities for a Non-Ocular Aesthetics in Kant’s “Critique of Judgment”*.

phenomena, but states that the charge of the sublime is carried *in* the books themselves. Indeed, given that it is carried in books, Kant goes so far as to say that *the sublime can actually be purchased*:

In fact that which we, prepared through culture, call sublime, seems merely repellant to a person untutored in the development of moral ideas. [...] Thus (as Mr. [Horace Benedict] de Saussure relates) the good, and furthermore reasonable, Savoyard peasant called without pause all lovers of glaciated mountains fools. Who knows if he would not be unjustified, had our reporter [sc. Saussure] taken on these dangers [...] merely [...] for sport? But, in point of fact, his intention was the instruction of humanity, and that excellent man in addition got and provided the soul-elevating sensation [sc. the sublime] to the readers of his travels in their purchase.²⁵

25 [In der That wird ohne Entwicklung sitzlicher Ideen das, was wir, durch Cultur vorbereitet, erhaben nennen, dem rohen Menschen bloß abschreckend vorkommen. [...] So nannte der gute, übrigens verständige savonische Bauer (wie Hr. v. Saussure erzählt) alle Liebhaber der Eisgebirge ohne Bedenken Narren. Wer weiß auch, ob er so ganz Unrecht gehabt hätte, wenn jener Beobachter die Gefahren [...] bloß [...] aus Liebhaberei [...] übernommen hätte? So aber war seine Absicht Belehrung der Menschen; und die seelenerhebende Empfindung hatte und gab der vortreffliche Mann den Lesern seiner Reisen in ihrem Kauf oben ein.] KU § 29, AA 05: 265 (translation mine, turning on Pluhar).

I bristle at Robin Schott's contention that Kant's moral philosophy reduces human worth to market values. She writes that Kant's moral philosophy "mak[es] normative the objectifying social relations between persons and things that are generated in a world ruled by commodity production [...]. Nor only [does Kant's moral law] borrow its content from bourgeois society; the very formalism of the moral law reflects the phenomenon of reification" [*Cognition and Eros: A Critique of the Kantian Paradigm* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), x-xi and 143]. Her interpretation of Kant's moral theory seems to run counter to the very idea of the categorical imperative (especially in the formula of the "end in itself"), namely, that one should never treat people merely as things (see the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* [*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*], AA 04: 428) – indeed, Kant himself specifically rules out a reduction to market values: "That which relates to general human inclinations and needs has a *market price* [...] that, however, which constitutes the determination under which alone something can be an end in itself, has not merely a relative worth, i. e., a price, but rather an intrinsic worth, i. e., dignity" [*Was sich auf die allgemeinen menschlichen Neigungen und Bedürfnisse bezieht, hat einen Marktpreis [...] das aber, was die Bedingung ausmacht, unter den allein etwas Zweck an sich selbst sein kann, hat nicht bloß einen relativen Werth, d. i. einen Preis, sondern einen inner Werth, d. i. Würde*] (my translation, Kant's emphasis, GMS, AA 04: 434–435). Nonetheless, in Kant's discussion of "purchasing" the sublime, we have a passage of loose speech (perhaps overlooked by Schott) that could bolster her case. Technically, of course, Kant could only say that one can purchase the *occasion* for the sublime.

Crowther lays aside the universal import of the sublime in his reconstruction, but in the idea of “autosublimity” there might still be a remnant of that import in the universal referent of reason in all humans upon which “autosublimity” ultimately rests.

Whether we want to call this depicted “autosublimity” a “specifically artistic” variety of the sublime or not, I should end with a variety of the sublime which *is* “specifically artistic”, namely what we might call the “symbolic” sublime. (Here we are definitively leaving what could be situated under Crowther’s “cognitive” sublime.) In a wonderful discussion of Kant’s theory of art, entitled “Form and Content in Kant’s Aesthetics”, Kirk Pillow clarifies the distinct roles of the beautiful and the sublime in art for Kant.²⁶ Though there is no space here to lay out his argument for this thesis, his thesis itself can be summarized in the following way: though it may seem that Kant’s discussion of art mixes or confuses the beautiful and the sublime, what is in fact at heart in his account is that, in the greatest art, *sublime content* is expressed in *beautiful form*. This assertion deserves to be repeated: *sublime content* is expressed in *beautiful form*. In other words, *taste* forms or exhibits the content or “matter” supplied by the (artistic) *genius*. This sublime content might sound like another case of the depicted sublime, but (as Pillow himself points out) it is not. The sublime content in question is not the *depiction*

26 Kirk Pillow, “Form and Content in Kant’s Aesthetics: Locating Beauty and the Sublime in the Work of Art”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32.3 (July 1994): 443–459, later developed into part of his book, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000). As he puts it, “with some adjustments to Kant’s theory, one can interpret judgments of taste and of sublimity as forming two distinct but intimately related moments or stages of reflection on art” (*Sublime Understanding*, 92) – in other words, the mental state aroused by the artwork’s inviting beautiful form prepares one for the sublimity of its aesthetic ideas (see “Form and Content in Kant’s Aesthetics”). In 1995 Robert Wicks observed that in the Kantian theory “the combination of genius and taste necessary for the best art calls for a delicate alliance between artistic sublimity and artistic beauty” in his “Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53.2 (Spring 1995): 189–93, here 192. This, what might be called the “combination thesis”, has also appeared in a recent theological piece critical of Kant’s theory of the sublime and its reappropriation by postmodernists: “The greatest service of beauty, however, is that it makes room, through conceptual repose, for the imaginative mediation of reason and its supersensible ideas”. John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One)”, *Modern Theology* 21.3 (July 2005): 367–411, here 379–380.

of *sublime subject matter*,²⁷ but rather the *unbounded character* of the aesthetic ideas, an unbounded character which carries with it the suggestion of *infinity*.²⁸ In this, then, we have finally a “specifically artistic” sublime, what we might call the “symbolic” sublime, in a central point of Kant’s theory of art, namely, the aesthetic idea. (Kant’s exposition, it is true, obscures the primarily *sublime* import of the aesthetic idea, but Kirk Pillow’s careful work has retrieved it.)

With this, then, I hope to have shown that many unexplored possibilities for a Kantian sublime in art can be found even within the range covered by Crowther’s “cognitive” sublime. In addition, with the idea of the “symbolic” sublime, a further, “specifically artistic” sublime can be found.²⁹

27 The depiction of (traditionally) sublime subject matter and, likewise, what Kant refers to as “aesthetic attributes” [*ästhetische Attribute*] (KU § 49, AA 05: 315), is something Crowther sees as also problematic; Crowther worries that sublime subject matter can easily degenerate into clichéd conventions which, due to their hackneyed nature, will no longer be able to evoke a feeling of the sublime (*The Kantian Sublime*, 155 and 161).

28 Crowther discusses something analogous to this in his “expressive” sublime: “if a concept is embodied in an aesthetic idea, this can lead the imagination to try and grasp a sense of the innumerable totality of the instances which form the extension of that concept” (159). The difference however is that, for Pillow, what is involved is a feeling of the mind’s own expansion *in the observer*, and thus the unlimited quality of the human mind *itself*, whereas Crowther’s expressive sublime involves feeling the power of the human mind through recognizing the power of the *artist’s* mind (since the “expressive” sublime is a sort of wonder at the expressive power of the artist).

29 A chart summarizing the varieties of the sublime discussed here can be accessed at the following URL: <<http://www.sensus-communis.com/-emmer/sublime/chart.html>>.

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