The Sublime

Course ID: SEM-UG 1788    Fall 2014
1 Wash Pl. #527    Thurs 6:20-9:00
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Office hours (please schedule in advance):
Tues (2:00 to 3:30) and Thursday (2:00 to 5:30)

Course Overview

Art of the sublime stirs up strong emotions and competing evaluations. Often labeled “indescribable,” the sublime and has been a concern for centuries amongst writers, poets, artists, and philosophers. The concept goes back to classical Greece, but it became particularly important in the eighteenth century Europe. At that time the sublime was applied in relation to the creative arts to describe aspects of nature that instill awe and wonder such as mountains, avalanches, waterfalls, stormy seas, or the infinite vault of the starry sky.

In the wake of the French Revolution, the sublime for the Romantics became a secular route to spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural transcendence through contact with the unbounded and the supersensible. In our contemporary world, where culture and gender difference, psychoanalysis, postmodern theory, technology, neuroscience, and neoliberal spectacle seem to eclipse former concepts of nature and transcendent experience, the characteristics of the sublime are perhaps more fuzzy than ever.

Yet, the term and the debates remain very much alive and relevant to contemporary aesthetic, philosophic, and spiritual concerns. This course will examine theories of the sublime in writers and artists from ancient to postmodern, including Longinus, Burke, Kant, Schiller, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Whitman, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Newman, Rosenblum, Lyotard, Chopin, Freeman, Oliver, and Viola.

Texts

Morley: The Sublime (bookstore)
Tank and McQuillan: Bloomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics (bookstore)
Bloom and Hobby: The Sublime (Bloom’s Literary Themes) (pdf available on line)
Whitman: Song of Myself
Rosenblum: Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko
Chopin: Awakening (bookstore)

Schedule
1. (9/4) Introduction

Tate: The Art of the Sublime
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/project-overview-r1117556
de Botton: Art as Therapy

2. (9/11) A Genealogy of the Sublime

Morely: Introduction from The Sublime
Longinus: On the Sublime (Anthology of Aesthetics)
Chignell and Halteman: Religion and the Sublime (NYU Classes)
Stace: What is Mysticism? (NYU Classes)

3. (9/18) Addison and Burke

Addison: The Spectator 412 and 413 (NYU Classes)
Burke: …the Sublime and the Beautiful (Anthology of Aesthetics) p. 163-186

4. (9/25) Kant and Schiller

Kant: Critique of Judgment (Anthology of Aesthetics) p. 246-286 (especially p. 265-273)
Schiller: On the Sublime (NYU Classes)

5. (10/2) Wordsworth and Coleridge

Wordsworth: Prelude: Book First, Second, Sixth, and Fourteenth (NYU Classes)
Wordsworth: Tintern Abbey (NYU Classes)
Wleck: Wordsworth and the Sublime (NYU Classes)
Coleridge: Kubla Kahn (NYU Classes)
Evans: The Sublime in Coleridge’s Kubla Khan (NYU Classes)

6. (10/9) Whitman and Poe—professor away

Whitman: Song of Myself (NYU Classes)
Hope: The Sublime Self (NYU Classes)
Poe: The Fall of the House of Usher (NYU Classes)
Hobby: The Sublime in Edgar Alan Poe (NYU Classes)

7. (10/16) Painting in the Romantic Tradition
Rosenblum: Part I and II p. 10-46, 65-100, 101-115 (Friedrich, Blake, Van Gogh, Munch)

8. (10/23) Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer: *World as Will and Representation* (*Anthology of Aesthetics*) p 331-345
Schopenhauer: *World as Will and Representation* (NYU Classes) chapters 30-32, 37, 39, 40
Cooper: Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy (NYU Classes)
Hardy: *Return of the Native* Intro (NYU Classes)
Contemporary Sublime: Mehldau: Coltrane, Hendrix, Beethoven and God (NYU Classes)

In class: Beethoven and Coltrane selections

9. (10/30) Nietzsche

Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Anthology of Aesthetics*) p 347-366
Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* continued from *Nietzsche Reader* (NYU Classes)

In class: Wagner *Tristan and Isolde* selections

10. (11/6) Contemporary Sublime: Unpresentable

Belsey: Very Short Introduction to Poststructuralism (Intro)
Foucault: *This is Not a Pipe* (*Anthology of Aesthetics*) p. 474-483

11. (11/13) Painting in the Romantic Tradition Cont.—Professor Away


12. (11/20) Contemporary Sublime: Feminine Revisioning

Chopin: *Awakening*
Freeman: The Awakening: Waking Up at the End of the Line (NYU Classes)
Oliver: *American Primitive* poetry selections (NYU Classes)
Graham: “Into the Body of Another” (NYU Classes)
Ullyatt: “…Buddhist Mindfulness in Mary Oliver’s Poetry” (NYU Classes)

(11/27) Thanksgiving Recess
13. (12/2) Contemporary Sublime: Transcendence

Morley: *The Sublime: Transcendence* p 70-105
Arya: Bill Viola and the Sublime (NYU Classes)
Jewett: Seeing the Mind, Stopping the Mind, the Art of Bill Viola (NYU Classes)
Doty: *Heaven’s Coast* selections (NYU Classes)

In class: James Turrell and Bill Viola video


*The Sublime: Nature* p 106-128
Brady: The Environmental Sublime (NYU Classes)
Murphy: An Ecological Feminist Revisioning of the Masculine Sublime (NYU Classes)
White: Damien Hirst’s Shark: Nature, Capitalism and the Sublime (NYU Classes)

**Course Requirements**

Grades are based on three parts: attendance/participation (20%) and 2 papers (40% each). Late papers are graded down. There will be an opportunity to rewrite the first paper if you desire. The attendance/participation grade is composed of weekly class attendance and participation. On most days, class will begin with a short lecture on the material for that week. We then move to class discussion initiated by student selections from the material. To prepare for this part of the class, designated students will type a quote which they have comments or questions from each week’s readings (include page numbers so we can find your quotes). We will initiate discussion from the quotes selected. Your quotes for each half of the class are turned in with your papers.

The papers are 6-7 pages type written, double spaced. Please use the material from the class to develop the topic question I hand out. Back up your thesis with arguments and examples from the class readings (include internal citations with page numbers and a reference list at the end).

A good paper demonstrates that you have integrated the material from the class discussions and readings and can use it to analyze your topic. Use the bulk of your energy reading closely and thinking seriously about the materials you have (rather than doing outside research). Also, be sure and give your paper a title.

The grading scale for the class will be as follows: 93-100% (A) 90-92 (A-), 87-89 (B+), 83-86 (B), 80-82 (B-), 77-79 (C+), 70-76 (C), 63-69 (D), and below (F).