

Kant's notions of the sublime and cosmopolitanism in the 21st century

O sublime e o cosmopolitismo de Kant no século XXI

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Abstract

In today's political conjuncture, Kant's cosmopolitan thinking stands in some unique relation to his notion of the sublime. The present paper aims to articulate (i) how the Kantian sublime is re-appropriated in analyses of the mediated images of social disasters in this century, (ii) how a cosmopolitan thinking can be registered as an aesthetic experience which restores the lost moral dimension of the classical sublime and lastly (iii) what constitutes the nature of this new cosmopolitan structure that is temporary and different in its occurrence from what is suggested by many forms of new cosmopolitanism(s) in the discourse of social and political sciences.

Key words: cosmopolitanism, Kant, sublime, distant suffering.

Resumo

Na atual conjuntura política, o pensamento cosmopolita de Kant está em uma relação única com sua noção do sublime. O presente artigo tem por objetivo analisar (i) como o sublime Kantiano é reapropriada na análise das imagens mediadas de desastres sociais neste século, (ii) como um pensamento cosmopolita pode ser registrado como uma experiência estética que restaura a dimensão moral perdida do sublime clássico; (iii) qual seria a natureza dessa nova estrutura cosmopolita que é temporária e diferente em sua ocorrência do que é sugerido por muitas formas de cosmopolitismo(s) novo no discurso das ciências sociais e políticas.

Palavras-chave: cosmopolitismo, Kant, sublime, sofrimento distante.

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Introduction

In his philosophical system, Kant does not seek to establish a relationship between the disinterested aesthetic judgment and the impartial political judgment. Therefore, his aesthetics as it appears in the *Critique of Judgment* does not have any direct contact with his political approach represented best in his short political essays. This inclination was also reflected in Kantian scholarship until the late 1990s. In man's endeavor to comprehend what happened during WWII, the 20th century mind detected a peculiar interaction between aesthetics and politics. The horrible images of the suffering caused by the war started endless discussions on the effects of mediation on human imagination. In the discussions, one particular philosopher and a specific kind of aesthetic judgment has become popular: Immanuel Kant and his theory of aesthetic judgment of the sublime.

In the classical Kantian sense, the judgment of the sublime corresponds to a twofold feeling of both pain and pleasure which results from the inability of the imagination to estimate the size or the might of a natural grandeur. At first the subject feels pain because of this inconvenience of the imagination. However, recognizing the superiority of the human mind due to its moral capacity, in the end s/he feels pleasure. For Kant, this bitter-sweet and essentially aesthetic experience is triggered merely by nature and it necessarily culminates in a celebration of humanity and rational capacities.

In the 20th century, however, the sublime feeling in its Kantian rendition has been used to redefine the feeling that results from the most immoral human acts. It has been re-appropriated in the context of two separate horrific acts of violence during WWII: the Holocaust and Hiroshima. The classical sublime is applied to indicate the shock of the human imagination in the face of unspeakable violent acts perpetrated by men. It addresses the *unpresentable* element inherent in these extreme cases of violence inflicted by humans. Therefore, the new face of the sublime evidently lacks the classical Kantian principle of pleasure. In this sense, the new sublime seems to be crippled and unfortunately it has been a theoretical frame to point out solely the shock/pain of human imagination in the encounter with unspeakable or unimaginable scenes of violence.

In recent times, the concept of the sublime has been taken up again in analyses of some international terrorist incidents. The latest examples are the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. The Hollywood-like footage of the attacks together with the shock it caused once more brought to mind the classical concept of the sublime (Kearney, 2003; Silverman, 2002; Bleiker and Leet, 2006). My concern here is to construe how the classical sublime has been appropriated in critical discourse with respect to the mediation of this specific incident.

Today the media keeps us in touch with the farthest corners of the world especially in an encounter with such terrorist acts or big catastrophic events. I believe that due to their moral and political significance the mediation of disaster news described as the sublime generates a cosmopolitan feeling which is practiced momentarily by spectators through the broadcasting of the images of the events. The extensive connectivity presented by the media provides the empirical support for Kant's 18th-century remark that the world entered into a universal community and a violation of rights is felt in the farthest corners of the world. Today it has been carried further since a violation of human rights might be *witnessed* by people from all around the world almost simultaneously via live broadcast. In contemporary spectatorship, during the exposure to the scenes of distant suffering, a momentary, ephemeral, singular and subjective experience of a cosmopolitan sensibility or feeling flourishes in people's minds. In this paper, I will try to elucidate the nature and the

possible role of this passing moment, the trace of this fading experience in relation to the contemporary understanding of the sublime.

Due to the complex structure of the debate around new cosmopolitanism(s)² in contemporary social sciences, it is almost an unattainable task to reach a consensus on a single normative principle or a set of principles. Yet, I think, the cosmopolitan feeling I address here carries a contemporary opportunity to challenge strictly normative approaches. The opportunity lies in seeing this cosmopolitan feeling as the lost component, the lost moral aspect of the events that are described as sublime.

My contention is that today cosmopolitanism may not be only a normative ideal to be achieved in the future. In the contemporary events of a sublime nature, the awe and fear caused by excessive violence and atrocity are turned into a temporary feeling of cosmopolitan sensibility. This indicates that a cosmopolitan vision which is of an aesthetic nature in Kant's sense can be registered and addressed as an alternative ground for claiming a cosmopolitan solidarity in a non-normative way.

In order to substantiate this claim, the paper firstly discloses the present relation between Kant's cosmopolitan vision and the sublime by examining (a) Kantian cosmopolitanism in its original version, (b) the Kantian sublime and its transformation after 1945.

Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism

A fervent defender of human freedom in the age of the Enlightenment, Kant was a liberal against any patriarchal government. According to him, political freedom evolves from the definition of man and it is definitely a – philosophically – provable right of man. He also believes that the idea of the state must not be derived from any particular example but from the *absolute ideal* of living together under rightful laws (Kant, 1991, p. 174). The idea of state as an absolute ideal and freedom as an innate right emphasize the *a priori* character of Kant's approach. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that there is a strong link between his critical philosophy and political writings. Indeed, according to Hans Reiss practically, Kant's political essays "grow organically out of his critical philosophy" (1991, p. 3).

In order to have an opinion about Kant's cosmopolitan vision it is best to examine the essays "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose"³ and "Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch"⁴, as they are the best-known representatives of his cosmopolitan thinking.

Dating back to 1784, *Idea* propounds a progressive understanding of history through nine propositions. In this essay we can clearly notice the aforementioned link between his metaphysics and his social and political approach. According to the essay, man has peculiar capacities to develop and these natural capacities are closer to be fully realized with every future generation. The key to constant improvement and realizing this end, i.e., actualizing all innate potentials, lies in achieving a just

² The distinction between the old and new cosmopolitanism(s) is grounded on the unique position the latter occupies between universalism and pluralism. New cosmopolitanism receives many labels: vernacular cosmopolitanism (Homi Bhabha), discrepant cosmopolitanism (James Clifford), rooted cosmopolitanism (David Hollinger), actually existing cosmopolitanism (Bruce Robbins), national cosmopolitanism, and situated cosmopolitanism. All these cosmopolitanisms variously discuss the old cosmopolitanism in comparison to the new transnational face of the world, which brings up issues of diversity and particularity. A closer look at different kinds of new cosmopolitanism shows that the new cosmopolitan thinking does not see diversity as a problem as the old universalist approach does. Thus, the common aim is to develop a new cosmopolitan framework in which it is possible to cope with the unavoidable diversity of cultures in the experience of living.

³ Here after *Idea*.

⁴ Here after *Perpetual Peace*.

civil society because the highest objective in such a civil society would be providing its members with the greatest freedom possible in so far as it *co-exists with the freedom of others*. In addition to a civil constitution, the “external relationship” with other states is to be achieved by any state. This external relationship evolves into a *cosmopolitan existence* when a respect for the unitary structure of each state is obtained. A cosmopolitan existence, which is the ultimate end in international relations of the states, also conforms to the moral duty that is imposed on us only by practical reason without any external constraint.

The other famous essay of Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (1795) delineates the possible conditions of a perpetual peace among states. According to the essay, unless there exists a “secret reservation of the material for a future war”; “standing armies”; interference in another state’s affairs; hostility that can shadow a prospective peace; and lastly, unless a state claims another state by “inheritance, exchange, purchase or gift”, then a perpetual peace can be hoped for (Kant, 1991, p. 93-96).

According to Kant, a state of peace is different from a state of nature, which in general involves a risk of war because it lacks order or lawful application. Thus, the state of peace should be formally instituted. It follows that the men who ever have the slightest possibility of a mutual relationship must be subjected to one of the three civil constitutions: *Ius civitatis*: a constitution which concerns a nation and protects the civil rights of the individuals of that nation; *Ius gentium*: a constitution which considers the international right of states in mutual relationship with one another; and *Ius cosmopolitanicum*: a constitution which is grounded on the cosmopolitan right of the citizens of a universal state constituted by both individuals and states of the world (Kant, 1991, p. 98-99).

Kant contends that a federation of states is necessary to achieve perpetual peace among states. It is a “particular kind of league, [...] a pacific federation (*foedus pacificum*)” (Kant, 1991, p. 104). This federation’s primary aim is to preserve the freedom of the confederated states while it tries to prevent war. According to Kant, “this idea of federalism, extending gradually to encompass all states and thus leading to perpetual peace, is practicable and has objective reality” (1991, p. 104).

Kant’s progressive understanding of cosmopolitanism cannot be encapsulated in a few lines and surely I cannot do justice to his cosmopolitan vision in this paper. Neither I am concerned here with evaluating the success or return of Kant’s thought to social sciences. Yet, it is significant to remind the reader that quite a number of theorists evaluate, appropriate or deconstruct the Kantian cosmopolitan elements in the context of contemporary politics. For the scholars who think that an appropriation is possible, all discussions around cosmopolitanism and its Kantian model that deals with the new forms of social relations of nations gained currency through the United Nations, international courts, the idea and preservation of human rights and mechanisms for rendering peace (Fine, 2007, p. 4).⁵

The reason why I brought up his cosmopolitan thought is that Kant’s progressive understanding of history with a cosmopolitan end *empirically* failed in the face of WWII. As a result, the progressive thinking of universal reason is destroyed and now it is evident that Kant’s belief in perpetual peace as the end of history is not valid anymore. However, I think Kant’s mode of cosmopolitan thinking is still

⁵ In 1995, the anniversary year of Kant’s essay “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Skeetch”, it was a common view among the majority of scholars that the cosmopolitan ideal was still relevant both in a theoretical and practical sense (John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Martha Nussbaum, James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann). For instance, in 1997 Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann, in their introductory piece to a group of essays they edited – and which were written by the mentioned scholars – write that although the normative aspects of Kant’s cosmopolitanism are both challenged and defended, the one thing that many agree is that the modern ideal of peace must be positive and cosmopolitan in Kant’s sense (Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann, 1997, p. 6).

relevant to our time, although his normative cosmopolitan approach is indefensible. Kant wrote in 1795 that "violation of rights in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*" (Kant, 1991, p. 107-108). In the 18th-century world this might have sounded like a naive prayer of the philosopher. Yet, interestingly, in contemporary times, by means of the mass media, an act of violation of human rights is not only *felt* but also *witnessed* alive by spectators all around the world. As we will discover in the following sections of the present study, the cosmopolitan feeling that Kant once addressed now endures in a form that is very different from Kant's normative thinking could have ever imagined, but before articulating the nature of this feeling, we must introduce the conditions of its occurrence. This brings us to the transformation of the classical sublime into a contemporary tool for analyzing political incidents beginning in the 20th century. Thus, in the following sections, first we will revisit Kant's original rendition of the judgment of the sublime and then we will see how world politics has transformed the notion of the sublime into the locus of a contemporary kind of cosmopolitan experience.

The Kantian sublime in the 18th century

Kant wrote on the sublime in the context of his famous discussion of aesthetic judgment or judgments of taste. Judgments of taste pertaining to the beautiful and the sublime in nature constitute the core of Kant's third Critique, i.e., *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). According to Kant, an awe-inspiring natural grandeur such as scenes of a volcano, a hurricane, or a rising ocean can evoke the feeling of the sublime. In a famous passage Kant depicts the scene that leads to the sublime as follows:

Bold, overhanging, and, as it were, threatening cliffs, thunder-clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightening and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison to their power (Kant, 2001, p. 144).

At such moments, the massive size of a cliff or the extreme might of a hurricane appears as *absolutely great* or *absolutely mighty*. Kant categorizes the former under the title of the mathematically sublime and the latter under that of the dynamically sublime. In Kant's philosophy, *absolute* measures belong to the jurisdiction of pure reason.⁶ And reason, as the highest faculty of the mind, is the faculty of ideas⁷ and it always seeks for the representation of *absolute totality* as a real idea.

In an attempt to present the size of an *absolutely great* natural grandeur, the imagination is bound to progress *ad infinitum*. Such an operation calls for the Idea of infinity. However, as we know, Kant writes the following in *The Critique of Pure Reason*: "By an idea I mean a necessary concept of reason for which no congruent

⁶ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (CPR), Kant writes that "pure reason reserves for itself solely the absolute totality in the use of the concepts of understanding, and seeks to take the synthetic unity thought in the category up to the absolutely unconditioned" (Kant, 1999, p. 371).

⁷ Kant writes: "By an idea I mean a necessary concept of reason for which no congruent object can be given in the senses. Therefore the pure concepts of reason, which we are now examining, are *transcendental ideas*. They are concepts of pure reason; for they consider all experiential cognition as being determined by an absolute totality of conditions. They are not arbitrarily invented; rather, they are imposed by the nature of reason itself and hence refer necessarily to the entire use of understanding. Finally, they are transcendent and surpass the boundary of all experience; hence no object can ever occur in experience that would be adequate to a transcendental idea" (1999, p. 371).

object can be given in the senses." Furthermore, the ideas of pure reason are "transcendent and surpass the boundary of all experience; hence no object can ever occur in experience that would be adequate to a transcendental idea" (Kant, 1999, p. 371). Therefore, in the sublime experience the imagination is given an impossible task because the ideas of reason cannot be represented as any other sensible object. In accordance with this fact, Kant describes the sublime as follows: "it is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think of the unattainability of nature as a presentation of ideas" (Kant, 2001, p. 151).

How does the sublime experience proceed, then? Knowing that it does not have the authority to operate beyond sensibility, the faculty of imagination still strives towards its worldly limit trying to represent some object that it cannot *represent*. This causes a state of distress and a feeling of *pain* with respect to this faculty. In such a discomfort, reason comes forward and enables the imagination to *extend* itself (mathematically or dynamically) in order to represent what seems to be unattainable. However, the presentation of an absolute by the imagination would not be a positive but only a *negative presentation* which would not correspond to a sensible object. This ordeal of the imagination which is a source of both pain and pleasure merits the name *negative pleasure*, as Kant calls it. In the end, due to this double feeling, the subject judges the object as the sublime.

Kant writes that both the discomfort and extension of power of the imagination belong to

a presentation of the subjective purposiveness of our mind in the use of the imagination for its supersensible vocation, and compels us to think nature itself in its totality, as the presentation of something supersensible, subjectively without being able produce this presentation objectively (Kant, 2001, p. 151).

With the help of this supersensible vocation we have the "courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature" (Kant, 2001, p. 144). According to Kant, this feeling of a supersensible vocation is of a *moral foundation* (Kant, 2001, p. 172). Thus, the sublime entails a feeling of *respect* which arises by "virtue of the dominion which reason exercises over sensibility" (Kant, 2001, p. 154). This remark expresses a significant characteristic of the Kantian sublime: the relation of it to the moral self of the subject. This relation is what makes the sublime a valuable subjective experience. Nature triggers the sublime feeling in the subject and in the end of a bitter escapade the subject is relieved and the superiority of reason and the moral self over sensibility is assured. In this sense, the Kantian sublime is a two-fold, a bitter-sweet undertaking of the subject which ends in a celebration of the ultimate principle of humanity, i.e., reason.

We will soon discover how this two-fold experience is treated in the late-modern era. However, for the present purposes, it will be useful to discuss the Kantian sublime in relation to suffering from nature.

In the vast history of the concept, there is one particular natural disaster that is accepted to have influenced the thought on the sublime deeply: the Great Lisbon earthquake of 1755. It was a mega thrust earthquake with a range of 8.5-9.0 in magnitude and affected a large area causing the death of thousands of people. It was neither the greatest nor one of the greatest earthquakes in measure of destruction in world history back then. However, it was a disaster which deeply influenced Europe. Furthermore, it is accepted that it led to the emergence of seismology due to endless scientific speculations following the disaster (Larsen, 2006; Ray, 2009; Sliwinski, 2009).

Astonished by its might and effects, Kant wrote three separate essays on the Lisbon earthquake. According to Larsen (2006), the earthquake influenced Kant so

deeply that he did not only leave theological accounts of the notion of infinity but also changed his value system. In these three essays, he tried to explain the disaster scientifically rather than supernaturally (2006, p. 362).⁸ Abandoning all reference to providence, Kant stripped man's freedom off divine intervention and redesigned it as limited only by incomprehensible nature.

The notions of the sublime and the free human subject who exercises his power in the face of enigmatic and incomprehensible nature might have well be grounded on the profound effects of the earthquake on the philosopher (Larsen, 2006, p. 365). Still, it is significant to note that Kant never described the Lisbon earthquake as sublime later in his third Critique. This attitude shows that Kant's sublime is never attributed to a natural catastrophe, let alone a social disaster, even if it is mighty enough to erase cities from the map. One possible explanation for this is that perhaps Kant saw the earthquake as more of a destructive moment than a simple trigger of a feeling. The might of it was so destructive that, for the unfortunate people who witnessed the event, it was a complete defeat against nature. To put it in another way, it was an experience of pure terror for the victims. When the news of distant suffering reached other parts of the world, the immediate effect was a great shock to the human imagination. Sharon Sliwinski suggests that the Great Lisbon earthquake is the disaster that "marks one of the first instances in which subjects became spectators faced with the ethical and political implications regarding distant suffering" in Europe and "the circulation of eyewitness reports and images appears to have produced an intense affective climate that provided fertile ground for the notion of a singular humanity" (2009, p. 31). Kant seems to have overlooked these social consequences, since he was so engaged with the possible scientific explanation for the debacle and its future prevention. This particular disaster carried his thoughts from the idea of God to a potent incommensurable nature. However, he never wrote on the social aspect of the disaster and never explicitly linked it to his notion of the sublime.

Therefore, distant suffering was never an issue in Kant and obviously he did not consider the possible effects of this phenomenon in detail. Yet, in this century, the idea of cosmopolitanism has a critical dimension for the cases of distant suffering caused by nature or social disasters. We already know that cosmopolitanism has been seen as an ideal for centuries and it has recently been criticized widely for not having an empirical value or due to its assumption that the real world strictly operates according to universal principles of human rights. While the discussions persisted, not surprisingly, after WWII, the empirical hope for the ideal has completely faded out. Together with the ideal of humanity, the cosmopolitan ideal was severely damaged. Living on the same world or carrying the "essence" of humanity did not help us recover from the traumatic effects of the war. Parallel to a loss of faith in a progressive history, universalistic frameworks for interpreting the horrifying events left their place to some radical approaches. The most important one for the present purposes is the application of the Kantian sublime in critical scholarship with respect to the broadcasted face of the war. This at the same time marks the return of the Kantian sublime in such a fashion that it may never carry merely aesthetic implications any more.⁹

⁸ Larsen writes that "the speculative methods and sarcastic rebuffs of the logical deficiencies in the arguments of other scholars have disappeared in favour of meticulous reports on empirical details of the widespread effects of the disaster across the continent together with cautious suggestions of causal explanations" (2006, p. 362).

⁹ In this paper I concentrate on the sublime nature of distant disasters. Yet, the possible political value or potential of the Kantian sublime has been discussed by many scholars in social sciences from the late 90s onwards. For the relevant discussions see, Readings (1992); O'Gorman (2006); LaCapra (2010).

The sublime in the 20th century

WWII invalidated the assumption that by the authority of universal reason there exist universal political norms that provide the well-being of all peoples in the world. The ideal of humanity, respect for civil rights, and inherent dignity of humanity were all negated first by the news of the Holocaust and then Hiroshima towards the end of the war.

After the Holocaust became known to the world, the shock was colossal. The chain of events was contrary to all kinds of humanistic ideals or the authority of sound reason. It marked the epic failure of reason and universal thinking. Hence, to *represent* or even to *speak* of the event required a new set of criteria or concepts.

At the end of the war, Hiroshima hit the human imagination deeply once more as the other incomprehensible disaster the war had generated. After the Holocaust, the destruction caused by the atomic bomb *Little Boy* represented the other event that changed the conception of extreme violence in modern history. According to Gene Ray, even if these two events are not identical or equivalent crimes, there is a “persistent linkage between the two names [that does] imply a shared political and ethical failure, as well as a common legacy of diminished human dignity and increased insecurity that all latecomers will have to bear” (2005, p. 21). Not surprisingly, after almost seventy years, the effects of these events still linger and people are still trying to *contemplate* the unimaginable.

In modern times the disappointment that these events cause on the human imagination is best described by Adorno’s words on Auschwitz:

Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after the holocaust is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation (1983, p. 34).

Adorno also condemns the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And in a radio talk he states that “one cannot dismiss the thought that the invention of the atomic bomb, which can obliterate hundreds of thousands of people literally in one blow, belongs to the same historical context as genocide” (Adorno, *in* Ray, 2005, p. 21).

Lytard is another influential mind whose interpretation of Auschwitz is also razor-sharp as he writes: “The historian asks: What is human? What impossible? The question we must answer is: Do these words still have a meaning? Shouldn’t we believe the inhumanity reported by the testimonies of Auschwitz?” (1988, p. 18). He refuses all possible narrative representations of the event and states that the name Auschwitz is surrounded by a *silence*, a silence that implies a *différend*, a wrong (*tort*) which by its nature cannot be put into words or cannot be attained other than through a feeling (1988, p. 56). According to Kearney (2001, p. 494), Lyotard’s interpretation carries Adorno’s dictum a step further as the philosopher demands *silence* for the representation of the incommensurable, unspeakable, unimaginable terror revealed in Auschwitz.

Describing Auschwitz or Hiroshima as sublime in the strict Kantian sense would be a misinterpretation because the incidents did not carry any positive transcendental goal for the moral self of the subject as Kant’s sublime promises. Yet, in the above remarks of these two thinkers, the preliminary alterations in the late modern notion of the sublime could be noticed. The impossibility to comprehend

and speak of Auschwitz was the most challenging state for reason. In the encounter with the horrific images of the war, the shock and the helpless state of the human imagination assigned a radical limit to the faculties of the imagination and judgment with respect to violence inflicted by humans. In attempts to express the effects of the event on the human imagination, the notion of the sublime in its Kantian rendition supplied a theoretical ground to *address* that which cannot be conveyed by classical representation.

In its classical version, Kant's sublime entails a *negative presentation* which is neither a representation of a sensible nor the representation of nothingness. According to Kant, the sublime "must in every case have reference to our way of thinking" and the mode of presentation in it can only be negative with respect to the sensible. The *presentation of the infinite* that the imagination desires in accordance with its wish, i.e., "thrusting aside of the sensible barriers" could merely be a *negative presentation* (Kant, 2001, p. 156). Therefore, if we are to talk about a representation in the sublime experience, it would not mean indicating or exposing an object of representation but merely *addressing* the existence of something that cannot be *positively* represented.

The delicate representation of Auschwitz is thought in this way both by Adorno and Lyotard. According to Gene Ray, Adorno favored the Kantian sublime in terms of the negative presentation it offers because:

For Adorno, [this] method of evoking without invoking, consistent with the traditional Jewish ban on images [...] would be central to his theorization of an "after Auschwitz" ethic of representation. It is thus one figure of thought in which he links, albeit indirectly, Auschwitz and the sublime (Ray, 2005, p. 22).

For Lyotard, the negative presentation of Kant's sublime suggested the fact that there is something that cannot be presented. According to Lyotard, "the silence that surrounds the phrase Auschwitz was the extermination camp is not a state of the mind, it is the sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined" (1988, p. 57). Thus, for Lyotard, the fact "that there is an unrepresentable" can only be presented "negatively" (Ray, 2005, p. 22).

In the particular example of Auschwitz, we can detect significant deviations of the late-modern sublime from the classical sublime. Firstly, the trigger of the sublime feeling is altered. It turns out that in the 20th century the "traumatic power and the violence of social forces displace nature as the site and trigger of the sublime" (Ray, 2009, p. 139). Therefore, it lacks the complementary part of the classical sublime that offers the reassurance of the power of human reason and a feeling of pleasure. The feeling of absolute terror strips off the pleasure principle. Secondly, the beholder in the classical Kantian sublime now corresponds to the spectators of distant disasters whose experience is indirect or mediated. Victims simply do not have the position to cherish their own capacities over nature like in the earlier version of the experience of the sublime. Due to the immense damage caused by social disasters, they usually suffer from a lethal impact as real witnesses. Therefore, the spectator is the only witness whose imagination is struck by the mediated images of the violence and terror released by the sublime event.

In his discussion of Auschwitz, Lyotard takes up the difficult example of the victim who cannot offer the evidence of people put into the gas chamber because there is no eyewitness who is not dead and victim at the same time (1988, p. 12). It also marks the shift from eye witness/victim to witness/spectator. The spectators of this event who see the images of the camps as the evidence of extreme violence are as safe as Kant's subject is in the encounter with nature that will

lead to a judgment of the sublime. Kant writes in the third *Critique* that a lethal fear cannot be a source for the sublime feeling because “it is impossible to find satisfaction in a terror that is seriously intended” (Kant, 2001, p. 144). Following this, it is evident that what we mean by the sublime in social disasters does not correspond to the lethal terror that the victims suffered. Nor does the thrill of the spectator culminate in a negative pleasure. In the 20th-century sublime experience “the terror of the sublime becomes permanent ghastly latency, compounded by the anguish of shame” (Ray, 2005, p. 5). In this sense the sublime can only be a theoretical frame which can at best sympathize with the shock of the imagination in the encounter of such violence. Lyotard gives an account of this particular inability through the following example:

Suppose that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force. The scholar claims to know nothing about it, but the common person has a complex feeling, the one aroused by the *negative presentation of the indeterminate* (1988, p. 56-57).

This “complex feeling” is what constitutes the nub of Lyotard’s argument. I think in contemporary times this feeling corresponds to the power which transforms the spectators into cosmopolitan agents who, as the spectator of the mediated experience of social disasters, are eager to respond in cosmopolitan terms.

More recently, in the field of international relations, the sublime is applied as a framework to interpret international terror attacks. Amongst the unfortunate events generated by contemporary global politics the one that held the title “sublime” is the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. It is not the only instance of international terrorism but it is reported as the biggest in death toll among recent attacks. Furthermore, the range of the shock is amplified by the fact that the attack was performed against the country with the most formidable intelligence services. The news of the attack had a broad repercussion in the press. Images of the collapse of the Twin Towers left the world struck with consternation. In the endless debates around the event, it is regarded as an instance of terror which has an effect on the imagination much like the Kantian sublime (Bleiker and Leet, 2006; Kearney, 2003; Ray, 2009; Silverman, 2002).

As indicated above, the late-modern sublime does not entail a verification of universal reason or a feeling of pleasure. However, in the particular example of the 9/11, interestingly, the shock and awe that Americans endured was channeled by the Bush administration into a war against terrorism all around the world. In other words, as Bleiker and Leet rightly put it, “the experience of dislocation wrought by the sublime is countered immediately with heroic and masculine understandings of the political, which seek to mobilise the unleashed energy for projects of mastery and control” (Bleiker and Leet, 2006, p. 714).

In most of the cases of international terrorist attacks, spectators are almost the only witnesses who can register distant suffering. This brings us to the third deviation from the classical sublime. Now, the terror the victims suffered is experienced through mediated images staged by live broadcasts. It is such that the spectatorship of such events is inherent in today’s sublime feeling. This recognition corresponds to the significant role of the media in the discussions of the contemporary sublime. Furthermore, in relation to the sublime experience and distant suffering, the media appears to promote a contemporary kind of cosmopolitan experience. Let us now turn to the analytics of this experience.

Distant suffering, the sublime and the cosmopolitan ideal in the 21st century

In today's world a late-modern subject can notice two significant facts. Firstly, international politics is defined as almost a locus that produces awe and fear and it is seen as the very nature of global politics (Bleiker and Leet, 2006). Secondly, the contemporary world is defined by transnational experiences in all fields, and the media is held responsible for the mobility of transnational information all around the world. The late-modern sublime that I try to indicate in the present paper emerges at the intersection of these two conditions. The most apt example for the late-modern sublime, then, is the bombing of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. On that day, images of the collapsing Twin Towers left the world struck with consternation. Nearly 3,000 people died and, not surprisingly, the news of the attack had a broad repercussion in the worldwide media.

Due to "a very explicit aesthetic dimension" (Bleiker and Leet, 2006, p. 717) and a shocking effect on our imagination, the attacks are regarded as "quintessentially sublime" (Silverman, 2002, p. 1) though it is not wrong to hesitate for a moment before calling the event the sublime due to "the hideous nature of pain and loss involved" (Kearney, 2003, p. 41).

In the particular example of the 9/11 attacks the late-modern sublime deviates from both the classical Kantian sublime and the sublime aspects of the Holocaust and Hiroshima at least in one crucial aspect. Only after three minutes of the first plane crash against the North Tower of the World Trade Center, the moments of terror was broadcast live worldwide on TV. This caused a bizarre kind of shared experience of disaster and, not surprisingly, blurred the distinction between direct witness and spectator. This particular example of mediation of the 9/11 attacks altered the existing state of news of distant suffering that was usually performed following the event. In the televised experience of the 9/11, the spectatorship is so embedded in the event that the 9/11 attacks cannot be thought without the fact of its being "televised instantaneously around the world" (Bleiker and Leet, 2006, p. 715). The media carried moments of real terror simultaneously into our homes while we remained "the spectators at a safe distance". According to Kearney (2003, p. 41), this kind of televised experience generated a feeling of "suffering 'as if' [spectators] were present to the terror" and he defines this both as "modern America's first traumatic experience of alien Terror on its own soil" and as a feeling of "detachment by virtue of their real absence from the scene itself (as when Bush said to Congress, 'We are a Nation awakened to danger')".

The possible relation of the Kantian cosmopolitanism and the sublime that I try to address here is grounded in this mentioned alteration in the state of spectatorship. Recall that Kant's cosmopolitan vision presupposed as early as the 18th century that we have entered a universal community and a violation of rights can be felt in the farthest corners of the world. I think Kant's foresighted remark is *empirically* validated in the mediation of the news of the attacks on the Twin Towers. Kant never writes about the nature of this feeling but I believe that now in the very example of this unfortunate event we have a chance to scrutinize the cosmopolitan feeling that Kant once addressed. Moreover, surprisingly this feeling is engaged with the philosopher's understanding of the sublime.

Describing the 9/11 attacks as the sublime certainly suggests that the world's experience of the event is aesthetic rather than cognitive or logical. The first reaction of the world was not logical, either. The media, gone mad by the possible repercussions of the attack, took over the reality of the incident and transformed it into a

media event. Following the 9/11 attacks, people who turned on their television in order to get timely factual information saw a ghastly sequence and replay of the images of blasting planes, collapsing of the two giant towers or unfortunate victims jumping one by one to their death to escape the flames. I believe that between the first and almost simultaneous experience of the attacks and the rerun of horrific images over and over again, a cosmopolitan feeling is evoked. It is similar to what Kant meant when he wrote that a violation of rights is felt in the far away corners of the world. I think we can see this cosmopolitan attitude in the registered immediate reaction of spectators which is usually accompanied by collective grief and commemoration of the victims.¹⁰

To substantiate this claim I would like to draw upon Lillie Chouliaraki's *The Spectatorship of Suffering*.¹¹ Chouliaraki observes different attitudes in the news text in relation to both the portrayal of the sufferer and the narration of the suffering on screen. She proposes a hierarchy of disaster news as *adventure*, *emergency* and *ecstatic* news. As to their relation to a cosmopolitan attitude, each type of news indicates different levels of global relations of power. Among these, *ecstatic news* presents us a *truly historic time* by unfolding the event *moment by moment*. Furthermore, it emphasizes a demand for action in the relationship between the spectator and the victims and, thus, causes an immediate cosmopolitan sensibility (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 377). Chouliaraki offers the mediation of the 9/11 attacks as a typical example of ecstatic news due to the undecidable character of the attacks. According to her, their undecidability follows from "a dialectic of openness and closure, a dialectic with space and time dimensions. In terms of space, the event is mediated simultaneously as a local tragedy and as a global political fact. In terms of time, the event is mediated simultaneously as contingent, as news, and as making history" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 158).

Chouliaraki's example of an eight-minute shot of the Manhattan skyline burning exposes the mechanism of the mediation of the images as the sublime. She describes the aesthetic quality of the scene as a *tableau vivant*. According to her,

The camera's gaze centers on the fumes covering the city and, simultaneously, couples two image themes – the grey sky and the clear turquoise seawater. In aesthetic terms, the camera couples the horror and awe of the sublime with the domesticity and friendliness of the beautiful (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 173).

According to Chouliaraki, considering the analytics of the mediation of ecstatic news brings us to the fact that the time in the mediation of the events such as the 9/11 corresponds to what Heidegger calls *ecstatic temporality*. According to Heidegger, in order to know something, say a sensible event, one must go out of the event as a requisite for finite knowledge. Such an act of knowing is at the same time a constant 'standing-out-from' the event. This is what Heidegger calls *ecstasis*. Relying on this, we can say that the ecstatic character of the mediation of disaster news indicates both a going-out and standing-out-from the broadcast event.

¹⁰ There are basically two sides that evaluate the possible effects of the media on cosmopolitan thinking. The optimist approach claims that as globally broadcast events, distant disasters gather nations around empathy or pity towards the victims. This basically shows the potential of the media in cultivating a cosmopolitan sensibility (Thompson, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999). The pessimists, on the contrary, accuse the media and in particular television of distancing spectators morally from the sufferers (Habermas, 1989; Robins, 1994). See Thompson (1995); Tomlinson (1999); Habermas (1989); Robins (1994).

¹¹ Surely, my selected example of Chouliaraki's approach of ecstatic news does not capture the full dynamic or all sides of the mediation. Nor I intend to consider a detailed account of it. For the sake of a philosophical enquiry of the cosmopolitan feeling that I plan to expand, here I restricted my account to the sublime aspect of the mediation of the 9/11 as ecstatic news.

In the relation of the media to the disasters, this distancing or spacing addresses the inevitable loss of the presence of the event itself.

What Heidegger's concept of ecstasy implies is that mediation only provides a *horizon without fixing knowledge*. In Heidegger's words, as the condition of finite knowledge, the "standing-out-from [...], precisely in the standing, forms and therein holds before itself—a horizon" (Heidegger, 1990, p. 84). This implies that no fixed framework can be decided for what will be the spectator's response to the spectacles of suffering, before any account of the diversity of local media and manifold cultural contexts in which such spectacles or images are received.

Chouliaraki admits that the sublime would also lead to a denunciation of suffering. Yet she still contends that the sublime with its aesthetic aspect *moralizes* the spectator. Moralization is achieved through symbolic meaning. Two strategic inversions constitute the core of the moralization of the spectator: an *inversion in time* (*anachronism*) and an *inversion in space* (*anatopism*). With an inversion in time, a past reference is produced. In the case of the 9/11, the suffering in Pearl Harbor is linked to the attacks in an "eternal flow of history". With the inversion of space, separate locations are equalized and a close proximity is enabled. Thus, with both an *anachronistic* and *anatopic* structure, the sublime "construes a moral horizon" (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 174).

The cosmopolitan thinking that I would like to address is generated by this moral horizon in the mediation of suffering. It requires to be defined as an aesthetic experience, since it follows from the sublime as its moral component. Therefore, the cosmopolitan feeling here is not intellectual or rational as in Kant's reason-based cosmopolitan view. It is of a different kind, an aesthetic kind. In this sense, the aesthetic experience I address here also differs from the discussions of existing cosmopolitanism(s) that seek for normative principles.

In order to analyze cosmopolitanism as an aesthetic feeling similar to the sublime, I would like to take recourse to a fundamental distinction between experience as *Erlebnis* and experience as *Erfahrung*. Simply put, *Erfahrung* is an empirical or cognitive experience which refers to learning or an abstraction. On the contrary, *Erlebnis* corresponds to life experience. More importantly, while *Erfahrung* has to do with generality and thus, universal thinking, *Erlebnis* refers to a kind of experience that is by its nature individual and singular. Following this distinction, we might say that the kind of cosmopolitan experience which is at stake here recalls *Erlebnis*.

Then, how do we understand the singularity of experience here? What do we mean by it? In order to comprehend this, the relation of this experience to the sublime nature of the event needs to be emphasized. Jean-Luc Nancy's understanding of the sublime might be of help at this point. In his account of the sublime, Nancy makes a distinction between representation and presentation. Representation is a signification, which requires conformity or agreement. Contrary to this, in presentation what is at stake is "the event and the explosion of an appearing and disappearing which, considered in themselves, cannot conform to or signify anything" (Nancy, 1993, p. 2). What I tried to address in this essay is this kind of *explosion of appearing and disappearing* of a cosmopolitan aesthetic feeling as the complementary part of the late-modern sublime. Thus, the core of my argument can be formulated as follows: today the self-enjoyment of reason or the self-presentation of the imagination in the classical sublime is lost in the encounter with the mediated images of catastrophic events that is now accepted to trigger the sublime feeling. There is an attempt to compensate the inhuman (and often also immoral) images through a cosmopolitan feeling or '(e)motion', as Nancy might say. This feeling is experienced as a limit experience.

In the 21st century, it is not the limit of sensibility, as in the classical sublime, but that of humanity that is confronted. The spectator-subject, who shares the

unimaginable terror through some mediated images at the limit, encounters a cosmopolitan horizon instead of the self-enjoyment of reason. In the classical sublime, reason saves the imagination from crisis by recalling the ultimate principle of humanity, whereas the very occurrence of the contemporary sublime is triggered by a scene of inhuman violence. This time overcoming the distress is not as easy as reviewing the mental capacities of man as in Kant's sublime. And yet, as the damage strikes humanistic thought, reason has to apply to a cosmopolitan feeling that would remind us of the idea of living in the same world and, thus, restore the moral principle of humanity. Due to the humanistic nature of reason, a cosmopolitan feeling is *expected* to be felt by any spectator in the encounter with a distant suffering in the form of a violation of rights. In other words, this feeling demands to be represented in some communal sense which would later culminate in a cosmopolitan action. However, what Bill Readings wrote about the Kantian sublime applies here to this cosmopolitan feeling: it "demands to be shared but it cannot be the object of a social representation" (1992, p. 414). It cannot be permanently represented or enter into an economy of reproduction because it appears as the complementary, moralizing part of an aesthetic (sublime) experience. In other words, it cannot be abstracted or rationalized as some rationales. Hence, it is inevitably and merely experienced as a *horizon* at the limit, through the limit.

Conclusion

In this paper, first I remind that in the 20th century, the sublime feeling in its Kantian rendition is used to refer to the feeling that results mostly from immoral human acts. Due to this historical fact, the classical sublime has lost the aspect of moral feeling which used to complement it. I argued that today, due to the necessarily transnational structure of the world, in the convergence of the sublime, its mediation and the state of distant suffering, cosmopolitanism is offered as the alternative moral feeling that would restore the lost moral aspect of the sublime. I also argued that cosmopolitanism as a moral feeling that would partner the contemporary sublime is of an aesthetic origin in accordance with the sublime. Moreover, it is an individual experience of a spectator-subject and thus cannot be represented *positively* in a normative form. Thus, in the end we cannot claim for this mode of cosmopolitan feeling more than what Kant argued for the presentation of the infinite in the classical sublime: a *negative presentation*. This implies that cosmopolitanism should not be represented as some universal concepts or regulations. It is rather a feeling, an attitude, which admits singularity. Lastly, if we are to ask what can be inferred from a cosmopolitan aesthetic experience, the answer can be that it creates a cosmopolitan spectator whose identification with the images of distant suffering carries a potential to be transformed into a cosmopolitan solidarity. In this sense, I believe that the relation between the sublime as distant suffering and its potential link to cosmopolitan thinking that I tried to articulate cannot be exhausted here but, on the contrary, it triggers further philosophical and sociological research on the topic.

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