

The Beautiful and the Sublime

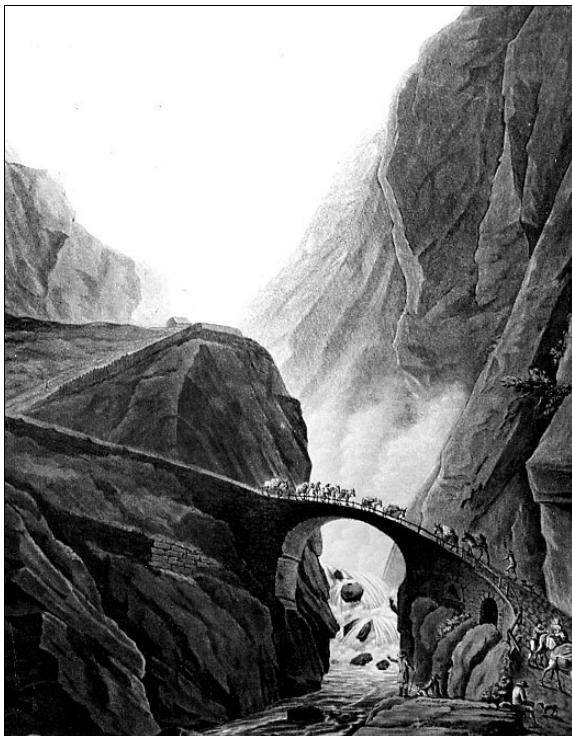
The meaning of “the beautiful” and “the sublime” as an aesthetic lingual duo is rooted in discourses on language, nature, literature and visual art. [...] The Oxford English Dictionary defines “beautiful” as “(1) excelling in grace of form, charm of colouring, and other qualities which delight the eye, and call forth admiration, (2) affording keen pleasure to the senses generally, (3) impressing with charm the intellectual or moral sense, through inherent fitness or grace, or exact adaptation to a purpose, and (4) relating to the beautiful; æsthetic.” The OED defines the adjective “sublime” (in terms of “things in nature and art”) as “affecting the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur.”

When these definitions are applied to the relationship between “beautiful” and “sublime,” they can be boiled down to the following: being pleasing to the senses in some way (beautiful), and evoking an overwhelming loftiness or vastness, either in ideas, art, nature or experience (sublime). [...]

[...]

Edmund Burke’s conceptualisation of the beautiful and sublime is split into fairly distinct categories. In his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Burke categorises “objects of experience” by the way in which they impact the senses (Kelly, 1998, 4, 327). Burke associates qualities of “balance,” “smoothness,” “delicacy” and “colour” with the beautiful, while he speaks of the sublime in terms such as “vastness” and “terror” (Burke, 1757). For Burke, the terms work almost in opposition to each other; the sublime is certainly not part of the beautiful in the Burkeian world. [...]

[<http://humanities.uchicago.edu/faculty/mitchell/glossary2004/beautifulsublime.htm>] (18 Dec 2007)



A terrifying alpine scene: the Devil's Bridge on the St Gotthard Pass.