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INTRODUCTION: THE SUBLIME AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NETHERLANDISH ART¹

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Bram van Oostveldt, Stijn Bussels

Rembrandt & Ruysdael zijn subliem en voor ons evenzeer als voor hun tijdgenooten.

Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, July 21, 1882.²



Fig. 1 Willem van de Velde (II), *A Ship on the High Seas Caught by a Squall*, known as *'The Gust'*, ca. 1680, oil on canvas, 77 x 63,5 cm. Rijksmuseum (artwork in the public domain, photo Rijksmuseum, SK-A-1848)

- 1 When thinking about art and the sublime, most people would spontaneously bring to mind Romantic landscapes or marine paintings by Joseph Vernet, Caspar David Friedrich, or Joseph Mallord William Turner or modern abstract paintings by Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, or Barnett Newman. Theorized in the second half of the eighteenth century as an aesthetic experience, the sublime excites conflicting emotions of awe and fear, of horror and fascination. For Edmund Burke it often deals with the human insignificance vis-à-vis the overpowering effects of nature. For Immanuel Kant the sublime *sensu stricto* does not refer to an object in nature but to an inner state of mind. He sees it as a violent experience of the inner sense that destabilizes human subjectivity, while at the same time it makes us overcome the fear it evokes in us.³ Jean-François Lyotard in his reinterpretation of the Kantian sublime calls it a decisively modern mode of sensibility that signals the limits of representation and shaped modernist avant-garde art in its move away from the beautiful toward a general feeling of the unsettling.⁴
- 2 Looking at seventeenth-century Netherlandish art from the perspective of the sublime sketched

above seems at least a bit odd. Especially the art from the Dutch Golden Age is often perceived as a eulogy on everyday life, on its concrete material objects and on the proud burghers who collected them. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century art history presented the arts from the Republic as the product of a stable national identity rooted in Protestantism, austerity, and the Dutch entrepreneurial spirit.⁵ More recently, Svetlana Alpers emphasized the uniqueness of seventeenth-century Dutch art as “descriptive,” as product and agent of a visual culture that “maps” the outer world, as opposed to the narrative mode of Italian Renaissance art.⁶ Likewise, Mariët Westermann characterized Dutch seventeenth-century painting as a distinctively worldly art with “an unprecedented concern for a reality effect.”⁷

- 3 From those different points of view, the perfected realism—or perhaps we should speak of the hyperrealism or even *schijn realisme* (apparent realism, a term coined by Eddy de Jongh)—of Dutch seventeenth-century portraiture, still lifes, landscapes, or genre painting seems to have little in common with the disturbing nature of the sublime experience. Dutch art’s notorious lack of spectacularity, its prosaic character, its appeal to calmness, order, and neatness, and its moralizing emblematic messages would at first sight appear to be the entire opposite of the overwhelming and transporting capacities of the sublime.
- 4 Even Kant himself thought so. In his *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1768) he writes that “the Dutchman is of an orderly and diligent disposition and, as he looks solely to the useful, he has little feeling for what in the finer understanding is beautiful or sublime.”⁸ No doubt Kant was expressing here no more than the clichés of his own time on the characteristics of different nations, but his harsh words would seem to preclude any discussion of Dutch seventeenth-century art in terms of the sublime. When even the godfather of the sublime thinks it absent from Dutch art, why pursue the topic?
- 5 Nonetheless, we think that there are good reasons to discuss seventeenth-century Dutch art from the perspective of the sublime. First of all, as a concept that arouses conflicting emotions of horror and fascination or that deals with the overwhelming effect of art on the beholder, the sublime corresponds to the increasing interest in the role of the emotions in seventeenth-century art in the Netherlands. This interest was most recently presented to a large public in Gary Schwartz’s exhibition “Emotions: Pain and Pleasure in Dutch Painting of the Golden Age,” held at the Frans Hals Museum in 2014–15,⁹ but emotions have been on the art-historical agenda for quite a while. In a most innovative way, art and cultural historians like Herman Roodenburg, Eric Jan Sluijter, and Gregor Weber have related the painterly practices of expressing emotions to ancient and early modern literature, to literary criticism and art theory, and to the Southern Netherlands, with special attention to the reception of Rubens’s work in the Republic.¹⁰
- 6 Secondly, in recent decades scholarly interest in the sublime’s “prehistories” before Burke and Kant has changed its nature and scope drastically. The sublime as it has been theorized since the early seventeenth century appears here as a most fruitful concept for addressing the unsettling or overwhelming effect of seventeenth-century art, including seventeenth-century Netherlandish art. As the different contributors show in this special issue of *JHNA*, early modern conceptions of the sublime were crucial to understanding—as a theoretical enterprise—and to producing—as a painterly practice—the disturbing or enchanting effect of a work of art.

7 Although we do not wish to deny the specificities and characteristics of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish art, we hope to show how the arts from the Netherlands and the theoretical reflection they engendered did not occur in isolation but interfered actively and originally with a pan-European debate on the overwhelming and transporting possibilities of the arts in which the sublime played a major role. In order to make this clear, it is necessary to first give a brief overview of the sublime's career in the early modern period and how the concept affected ideas about the visual arts.

Early Modern Theories of the Sublime

- 8 The sublime is a rhetorical concept that finds its main original source in the treatise *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*), probably written in the first century AD by an anonymous author, who is generally referred to as Longinus. The importance of *Peri hypsous* resides in the fact that it deals with the strong persuasive and emotional *effect* of speech or literature on the listener or reader. It addresses the question of how language can move deeply, how it can transport, overwhelm, and astonish. "For the true sublime," Longinus writes, "naturally elevates us: uplifted with a sense of proud exaltation, we are filled with joy and pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard."¹¹ Already here, the sublime appears as a profoundly liminal concept that transcends the boundaries between representation and reality. It creates a close contact, or even a clash, with the object represented, while it also establishes a deep, indeed intimate, communication between an author and a reader or listener through a text.¹²
- 9 Outside the field of early modern studies, it is still too often assumed that the sublime appeared on the stage of modern criticism only after Nicolas Boileau's canonical 1674 French translation of Longinus, *Le traité de sublime, ou du merveilleux dans le discours*. However, already in the 1950s scholars like Bernard Weinberg and Jules Brody showed how the reception and dissemination of *Peri hypsous* fueled rhetorical and poetical discussions from the mid-sixteenth century onward.¹³ The interest in the concept's prehistories and genealogies has increased rapidly since the 1980s. Marc Fumaroli situated the early modern reception of Longinus within a larger humanist tradition of rhetoric and poetics.¹⁴ He even considered *Peri hypsous* as a kind of "shadow-text" that from the very beginning accompanied the reception of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the Republic of Letters.¹⁵ The translation of Longinus by Boileau is, as Fumaroli and later scholars have argued, by no means a beginning that would be completed by Burke and Kant but a culmination of earlier ideas on the sublime and the effect of literature.¹⁶
- 10 All the studies mentioned above respect the original rhetorical context in which Longinus's text appeared or subscribe to Boileau's statement that the sublime is the excellent and sovereign perfection of discourse. In the last few years, however, the historiography of the early-modern sublime has taken another turn, expanding the concept to a larger field than discourse or literature alone. Eva Madeleine Martin, in a recent and programmatic essay for future research, argues that we should look at the prehistories of the sublime from an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective. Seventeenth-century interests in the sublime and in Longinus "fit into an array of preoccupations broader than technical questions of writing, spanning unorthodox religiosity, politics, the visual arts, and the sciences," while it equally crosses national and linguistic boundaries.¹⁷

- 11 Especially for the visual arts, this broadened perspective makes perfect sense. Painters, sculptors, and architects, strongly imbued with the doctrine of *ut pictura poesis*, used poetical and rhetorical concepts to theorize and describe the overwhelming and transporting effect of art.¹⁸ Louis Marin and Clélia Nau have connected the Longinian sublime to Nicolas Poussin's landscape paintings.¹⁹ Both argue that Poussin's landscape paintings show us a fascination with the antagonistic relation between order and disorder that bears great similarities to the Longinian sublime. Like Fumaroli in the field of literature, they propose then to look at the pictorial influence of Longinus in the seventeenth century not as something opposed to classicism but as a constituent part of it.
- 12 In *Translations of the Sublime*, a recent collection of essays to which we both contributed, a similar approach was followed, albeit from a more historical and contextual perspective.²⁰ The task undertaken in that volume was to look at how the Longinian sublime clearly acts as a concept that "travels" or is "translated" from rhetoric and poetics to the visual arts, architecture, and the theater, while equally addressing questions of religion, politics, and philosophy. Within those complex and interrelated fields of different genres and different genealogies, the volume was dedicated to art, architecture, and theater in early modern Italy, France, and Britain. This special issue of *JHNA* continues this path of inquiry and investigates for the very first time the importance, the possible meanings, and functions of the sublime in the context of seventeenth-century Netherlandish art.
- 13 The broad field in which the Longinian sublime in early modernity operated poses some methodological concerns that are essential to this present issue. First of all, looking at the spread and use of the sublime in the seventeenth century requires a multidisciplinary approach that draws on art historical scholarship, literary studies and the history of philosophy, religion, and politics. Second, it demands an open and comparative perspective on the concept's genealogies and forces us to look at "neighbouring" concepts. Notions such as *je-ne-sais-quoi* (or *ik-weet-en-niet-wat*), *meraviglia* (wonder), *ekplēxis*, *deimos*, and mystical experiences of rapture are closely related to the Longinian sublime and are often referred to next to one another in the experience of the arts.²¹ In this respect one should also be aware of a too Longinian-centered perspective on the sublime in the early modern period.²² Longinus's influence cannot be denied and remains a most valid departure point for understanding the visual arts in terms of the sublime. But, as several authors claim in this issue, other antique writers such as Lucretius, Demetrius, Hermogenes, and the Philostrati, as well as Christian notions of rapture and transportation, as influentially expressed by Augustine, also fueled the early career of the sublime.

The Sublime in The Netherlands

- 14 In this multilayered network of different sources and related terms, the first question that pops up is to what extent the sublime was a known concept in the Netherlands. Here again, the reception and appropriation of Longinus makes a telling case. Contrary to what is often assumed, the dissemination and reception of Longinus cannot be framed within a straight geographical itinerary from Italy across the Alps to France and then farther up north. Its paths are much more unwinding, following detours and alternative routes. The Netherlands, north and south, proved to be especially fertile ground in the early dissemination, reception, and appropriation of Longinus. As Wieneke Jansen found out only recently, in the first half of the seventeenth century one out of

seven book catalogues in the Republic mention a copy of *Peri hypsous*.²³ For the Southern Netherlands we do not have such figures, but as Walter Mellion, Ralph Dekoninck, and Annick Delfosse argue in their contributions, the lively presence of Jesuit culture together with the fact that Antwerp and Leuven remained important centres of humanist scholarship, allow us to believe that Longinus must have been known there as well.

- 15 Longinus's text did not lead a silent life on the shelves of Dutch or Flemish libraries. After Italy, the Netherlands were the first to debate and appropriate *Peri hypsous* in poetics and writings on art. In his *De constitutione tragoediae* (1611) Daniel Heinsius explicitly introduces Longinus as "cujus de sublimitate scriptum Tragico poetae ediscendum putem".²⁴ But even earlier, in his *Prolegomena ad Hesiodum* (1603), Heinsius used the Longinian sublime to discuss the importance of inspiration and the genius of the author in achieving an overwhelming effect on the reader and listener.²⁵ Heinsius influenced not only Dutch authors, such as Joost van den Vondel, but also foreign authors—the German poet Opitz, the English poets Jonson, Milton, and Dryden, and the French literary theorists Guez de Balzac and Chapelain heavily relied on Heinsius's ideas.²⁶
- 16 It was also a Dutch scholar, Franciscus Junius, who for the very first time in art theory used the antique concept of the sublime. In his *De pictura veterum* of 1637, dedicated to ancient thought on the visual arts, Junius discusses *Peri hypsous* to clarify how a painter can use powerful mental images or *phantasiai* to overwhelm the beholder. This appropriation of Longinus's theory led to new ideas on the role of the visual artist and influenced a wide range of discourse on the visual arts throughout the whole of Europe. But it was not only artists like Rubens and Van Dyck who responded enthusiastically to Junius's art theory. As Colette Nativel has convincingly shown, Junius's writings were also discussed in France among art theoreticians such as Charles du Fresnoy and Roger de Piles. Junius's English translation gave the treatise an important afterlife in Britain and influenced artistic discussions by among other theoreticians, including William Sanderson in the seventeenth century, Jonathan Richardson in the early eighteenth century, and Joshua Reynolds in the late eighteenth century.²⁷
- 17 In 1641, Junius published a Dutch translation of *De pictura veterum* as *De schilder-konst der Oude*. As Thijs Weststeijn recently argued, the importance of Junius's writings for the arts in general and the arts of the Netherlands in particular was substantial, although often overlooked today.²⁸ Samuel van Hoogstraeten, Joachim von Sandrart, Arnold Houbraken, and Gerard de Lairesse all named Junius as an indispensable source in understanding the arts of antiquity. In fact, his ideas became a major point of reference for anyone in the Republic and beyond who was interested in the afterlife of antiquity, including scholars, writers, and painters.

Theorizing the Sublime in Painting: From "Presence" to "Ekplèxis"

- 18 Given Junius's importance as a "smoking gun" in our search for the influence of Longinus and other theories of the sublime in the visual arts, we would like to start this volume by revisiting his work. In his contribution Thijs Weststeijn presents Junius as the first art theoretician to explicitly deal with the position of the viewer as a constitutive element in the artistic experience. The "beholder's share" in the creation of an artwork is based on *presence* (or *teghenwoordigheyt*), in the sense that the impact of a work of art always depends on the beholder's capacity to imagine himself into the represented scene. In explaining the process of the strong emotional empathy a

work of art can evoke in the viewer, Junius refers explicitly to Longinus's notion of *phantasia* as something that enters the mind of the beholder with irresistible perspicuity and has an enduring effect. The work of art acts thus as a stimulus for the imagination, evoking in the beholder the ability to experience the represented scene as pure presence and even inviting him or her to take part in it as if he or she was an actor. In his formulation, Junius clearly echoes Longinus's ideas on the sublime as the overwhelming and transporting effect that transcends representational boundaries and establishes a deep contact between a beholder and a work of art and its artist.

- 19 Although the reference to Longinus in Junius is undeniable, Weststeijn also argues that Junius's ideas on the strong and overwhelming effect of art on the beholder are idiosyncratic and followed other paths as well. To conceive the work of art as an effect of presence in the beholder's imagination, Junius equally drew on other antique sources, such as the ekphrastic writings of the Second Sophistic. Weststeijn closes his contribution by stating that Junius's ideas on the overwhelming effect of art were not a purely theoretical stance but resonated in contemporary painting as well. Using Rubens's *Bound Prometheus* and Rembrandt's *Blinding of Samson* as examples, he shows how the transporting effect of painting as an invitation to the viewer to imagine himself within the fictional realm of the painting can have a profoundly disturbing, if not terrifying, effect.
- 20 Caroline van Eck proceeds on this path of the terrifying effect of art. In her contribution she states that the influence of Longinus on the early modern arts is most often discussed as aligning with the rhetorical concept of *enargeia*—bright and irresistible visualization in the mind of the beholder. Through vividness in images, the beholder is led to believe that what he or she sees is a firsthand experience that creates an effect of “living presence.”²⁹ But as van Eck argues, Longinus did not see the sublime only in terms of *enargeia*, he equally draws the attention to the more striking, paralyzing if not petrifying, aspects of the sublime, which he defines as *ekplèxis*. Etymologically, *ekplèxis* is derived from *ekplètto*, meaning to strike, to confound, or even to render somebody beside themselves with fear, while at the same time exciting fascination.
- 21 This mixture of horror and fascination is especially present in some seventeenth-century Netherlandish representations of Medusa in painting and sculpture, among others by the Antwerp masters Rubens and Quellinus. Focusing on the notion of *ekplèxis* van Eck presents Medusa as “Pygmalion's dark double.” By her gaze and even by her figuration in the reflection of Perseus's mirror, Medusa can be considered “the first sculptress” who petrifies in the blink of an eye and turns living beings into lifeless statues. This Medusean model exemplifies then the highly ambivalent relation between images and their beholders. It shows us how works of art have the agency over viewers, striking or transfixing them in a set of conflicting and disturbing emotions that preludes Burke's understanding of the sublime as a mixture of “horror and fascination.”

Practicing the Sublime in Painting

- 22 In his contribution, Jan Blanc addresses another aspect of the sublime that reminds us of later Burkean and Romantic conceptions. Using Nordic landscapes by Allart van Everdingen as an example, he shows us how seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painters, and by extension marine painters, were attracted to the overwhelming powers of nature as a life-threatening danger but also as a thrilling spectacle. In doing so they were following a long and international tradition of portraying wild nature in terms of a terrifying and fascinating experience that could be labeled

sublime.

- 23 Blanc's essay also poses some questions of historical and methodological importance concerning the accessibility and knowledge of sublime theories by visual artists. Although several early modern artists (e.g., Michelangelo, Poussin, Salvator Rosa) have recently been related to the Longinian sublime, those artists do not reveal a conscious or thorough knowledge of *Peri hypsous*.³⁰ This is also the case for van Everdingen, who, although issuing from a milieu with intellectual ambitions, does not refer to antique authors such as Longinus, Lucretius, or Demetrius. But instead of looking for a *sublime culture* that deals with the early modern reception of the sublime in the visual arts in terms of hard facts or explicit references, Blanc proposes to speak of a *sublime sensitivity*. This sensitivity was equally fueled by the lived experience of facing the dangers of the sea or of nature and by the painterly tradition employed to capture that experience in a visual repertoire that extended to the very beginning of landscape painting as a distinctive genre in the Netherlands. The repertoire of wild landscapes and stormy seas shows that these artists incorporated the sublime in their works not through a conscious and discursive conceptualization but rather used painterly practices as a way of "doing theory."
- 24 Joanna Sheers Seidenstein's contribution links "doing theory" to Rembrandt's *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* (1653). Although there is no hard evidence that Rembrandt was acquainted with Longinus or with Junius for that matter,³¹ Seidenstein convincingly shows that *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* can be read as a visual comment on the ongoing debate over the preference of genius over rules, a debate that was closely linked to Junius and Longinus. Against the backdrop of an increasing neo-Aristotelian emphasis on rules for the creation of art, Longinus appears throughout the seventeenth century as a major point of reference in defending the importance of natural talent in the creation of truly great art. According to the Greek author, the two most important sources of the sublime—the capacity to conceive great thoughts and the compelling treatment of emotions—arise from genius and can never be captured in a set of rules. In *De pictura* Junius explicitly refers to this Longinian praise for the artistic imagination, while he also puts forward the neighboring notion of *grace* (*gratie*) as this innate, indefinable, and special quality of the artist to move the beholder.
- 25 By the 1650s, however, the Dutch intellectual and artistic scene faced a trend toward a more doctrinal classicism, which would culminate in the sixties and seventies in the writings of Joachim von Sandrart and Andries Pels. It is within this context that Rembrandt, as Seidenstein argues, presents Aristotle at a moment of recognition that his rules are ultimately insignificant in comparison to natural genius, which his forebear Homer above all possessed. By juxtaposing Aristotle with Homer, Rembrandt positions himself within this debate, expressing the belief that in the pursuit of artistic and creative excellence one ought to bind oneself to nature—the true source of the sublime—rather than to codified rules.

The Sublime and the Nature of History

- 26 Longinus's treatise is not only about the overpowering effect of representations; it also contains cultural critique, an aspect often overlooked by modern scholars. In the last chapter of *Peri hypsous*, Longinus deals with the interdependence of morality, politics, and the sublime. He posits that the deplorable state of morals due to general greed, insolence, and hedonism in his time

explains the rarity of truly great and elevated minds. This moral subtext of the sublime returns in the poetics of Heinsius and the art theory of Junius. In his dedication of *De pictura* to Charles I, Junius writes how the monarch has secured a safe and fertile climate in which elevated minds can flourish.

- 27 The political and moral agenda of the sublime is also addressed in Lorne Darnell's essay on Pieter Saenredam's *The Old Town Hall of Amsterdam* (1657). Although this painting seems at first sight to be an unlikely candidate for inclusion in a discussion of the sublime, Darnell shows us how the painting, in interacting with its original context of display, exercised a specific agency that could be labeled moral elevation. The *Old Town Hall* hung in the burgomasters chamber of Amsterdam's splendid new Town Hall opposite Huygens's dedicatory poem to the new building, thus creating a dialogue between the painting and the poem, the new and the old building, that evoked questions of political and moral importance in relation to Amsterdam's past and present. Darnell argues that Saenredam's painting and Huygens's poem both address contemporary criticism of the new Town Hall, which condemned the building's scale and expense as an impious break with the past. It is their combined presence that mended this break and created an effect of the sublime by invoking the values of Amsterdam's past and encouraging the burgomasters to virtue in governance. Painting, poem, and building evoked a "historical sensation" that is not to be understood so much in terms of a disturbing or even traumatic rupture, as later defined by Johan Huizinga and above all Frank Ankersmit,³² but more in terms of continuity and remembrance that must guarantee the morally and political elevated status of the city and its rulers.
- 28 In Frans-Willem Korsten's contribution on Frans Hals we can find another perspective on the "sublime" nature of history. Korsten starts with the intriguing question of whether we can relate the sublime to the comic. Although there are some instances in ancient rhetoric that combine the sublime with the comic, the ironic, or even the grotesque,³³ the European trajectory of the sublime regarded both notions to a large extent as awkward partners. However, in the work of Hals the two are brought together, provoking the question of how the sublime can be related, in terms of form and content, to happiness and joy.
- 29 On the basis of Frans Hals's work Korsten defines a distinctly Dutch baroque art in which the treatment of laughter cannot solely be explained through a Calvinist and moralizing perspective, as is still too often attempted. This distinctly Dutch baroque prepared the ground for later discussions by Spinoza and Leibniz on the nature of history and the actualization of worlds. In many of Hals's portraits the figures are looking outside the picture frame, addressing another reality, which seems to signal in an awkward way the momentous splitting of different worlds. Unlike Darnell, in whose contribution the sublime effect of Saenredam's painting of the Old Town Hall was treated in terms of historical continuity, Korsten looks at how Hals recognized history much more as a fragmented process that could have turned out entirely differently. In Hals, this split-second and overwhelming moment when simultaneous realities touch is not always met with fear and anxiety; it can also be met with laughter and inexpressible joy, a phenomenon that Korsten labels the "comedic sublime."

The Sublime Experience of God's Wonders

- 30 We should also take into account the religious dimensions of the early modern sublime, with its

strong effect of rapture and transportation. For both Catholics and Protestants the sublime in its different expressions was often used to signal contact with God as an overwhelming experience of his infinity, magnanimity, and even terror. At the same time, however, the sublime was considered, in rhetorical terms, as *technè* that functioned as a particularly persuasive instrument for spreading the word of God.³⁴ The Jesuits, in particular, as major players in Counter-Reformation politics, were among the first to recognize the importance of Longinus's treatise and other concepts closely related to the sublime and to include them in their theological, pedagogical, and artistic program.

- 31 In his contribution Walter Melion focuses on the *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (1595), which appropriated the format of the emblem to spread and enforce the Catholic faith. Thanks to the close cooperation between the Spanish Jesuit J ronimo Nadal, as author, and the Wierix brothers of Antwerp, as engravers, not to mention the multiple editions put out by the Antwerp printer Joannes Moretus, the book achieved exceptional and worldwide success. Melion looks at the use of the term *sublimis* in this work and relates it to the *genera dicendi*; *sublimis* is used in the *Adnotationes* to refer to the impact of *Christus rhetor*, whose divine utterances surpassed the different styles used by orators, most specifically in the events during and after the Passion. The power of Christ's speeches is found in the fact that while he used the simple style to discuss the mysteries of faith he achieved the overwhelming effect of the grand style.
- 32 Longinus and Hermogenes, as well as Augustine, discussed this paradoxical combination of the two styles, using the famous example of the biblical *fiat lux* passage in the *Peri hypsous*. The *Adnotationes et meditationes* functions here as (what we today would call) a complex and exceptionally powerful speech-act. Everyone hearing the words of Christ receives his blessings. At the same time in Christ's speech the *verba Christi* coincide with the *Verbum Dei*, since in his speech Christ shows himself as God becoming flesh. Melion relates this to Longinus's concept of *phantasia* and discusses how the *Adnotationes et meditationes* encourages the worshipper to make God present in mental images and thus create for him- or herself an extremely powerful experience that evokes the transubstantiation in a most penetrating way. Form and content; text, image, and mental image; worldly and divine; all so strongly merge into one another that during their reflections on what they read and see the readers are totally overwhelmed and their faith is deeply enforced.
- 33 Ralph Dekoninck and Annick Delfosse focus in their contribution on how Jesuit festive culture in the Southern Netherlands was able to enforce faith by bringing together different media in such a way as to overawe their audience. More particularly, in their analysis of the festivities organized in 1622 for the canonizations of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier, they relate Longinus's elevated experience of the sublime to the much older religious tradition of *sacer horror*—the astonishment and disorientation that strikes the faithful when confronted with the divine mystery. They maintain that the early history of the sublime cannot be properly understood unless this religious history is taken into account.
- 34 Dekoninck and Delfosse argue that this festive culture was a multimedia spectacle that was more important for what it produced in the minds of onlookers than for what it actually meant or communicated. By using complex and emblematic imagery, ornamentation, light and sound, the Jesuits sought to create a synaesthetic and purely sensuous effect that infused the beholder with

a sensation of respect mixed with fear and wonder. In creating this *sacer horror* Jesuit religious spectacles became vehicles for a genuine religious experience that unveiled the majesty of God and elevated the mind of the believer toward the divine.

- 35 Equally important to the experience of the divine is the Stoic belief that the divine can be found in nature itself, even in its smallest details. Translated into the Christian tradition, this belief became the idea that nature functions as a second Bible, the close scrutiny of which can also lead to the divine. Coming closer to God through the contemplation of nature is of particular importance for the art and activity of painting. In his *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst* (1678), Samuel van Hoogstraten states that the art of painting “in the continued mirroring of God’s wondrous works, brings its practitioner, through his sublime contemplation, closer the Creator of all things.”³⁵
- 36 That close contemplation of the details of the natural world can lead to an experience of the sublime is addressed in the last contribution for this special issue. In her essay Hanneke Grootenboer questions whether the tiny pictures of Adriaen Coorte can evoke a sense of the sublime in the viewer. Although his unspectacular scenes of fruit, vegetables, or butterflies appear at first sight to be the entire opposite of the grand and overwhelming effect that is generally attributed to an aesthetic of the sublime, his scenes nonetheless provoke a mixture of feelings that can be explained as the *je-ne-sais quoi* of painting. Already in Junius’s Dutch translation of *De pictura*, the unsettling and inexplicable quality of art is explained in terms of *ik-weet-en-niet-wat*, while van Hoogstraten refers to it as this “inexpressible joy” combined with a “terrifyingly inner struggle.” According to Grootenboer, even in their tiny size (or exactly because of it), Coorte’s paintings do possess an abyssal quality that disturbs the viewer. Without claiming a direct link, she shows how the scenes in Coorte’s paintings resemble what Blaise Pascal called man’s position at the intersection of the infinitely small and the infinitely large, a view from the edge of the abyss which fills us with wonder and horror at the same time.
- 37 To sum up, in this special issue of JHNA we ask ourselves how the sublime can function as a fruitful concept that allows us to gain more insight into the effect and agency of seventeenth-century art in the Netherlands. With the help of art theory, poetics, laudatory poems, fragments from diaries, biographical data, and theological concepts, the contributors show that by using different theories of the sublime in analyzing specific works of art we can better understand their precise impact. With examples from divergent painterly genres, emblematic works, and spectacle the authors point at the capacity of overwhelming art to accentuate the exceptional position of the artist, elevate the onlookers morally, or offer them ways to deal, in the secure space of the representation, with deep-rooted fears, divine magnanimity, and superhuman infinity.

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² “Rembrandt and Ruisdael are sublime, for us as much as for their contemporaries.” See Letter 249, Van Gogh letters, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let249/letter.html>.

³ See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, ed. James T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pt. 1, chapt. 6, p. 38; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 261–62; see also Baldine Saint-Girons, *Fiat Lux: Une philosophie du sublime* (Paris: Quai Voltaire, 1993); James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005); and Timothy M. Costelloe, ed., *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, “Le sublime et l’avant-garde,” in *L’inhumain: Causeries sur le temps*, ed. Jean-François Lyotard (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 101–18.

⁵ Two famous examples are Conrad Busken Huet, *Het land van Rembrandt: Studiën over de Noordnederlandsche beschaving in de 17e eeuw*, 2 vols. (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1882–84); Johan Huizinga, *Nederland’s beschaving in de zeventiende eeuw, een schets* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1941). For a thorough discussion on art of the Dutch Golden Age and nationalism in the Netherlands, see Frans Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen, ed., *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1992); compare the Uhlenbeck lecture by Gary Schwartz, *How Vermeer and His Generation Stole the Thunder of the Golden Age* (Wassenaar: Nias, 2014), 7: “The assignment of a set of unique and essential characteristics to the various art centers of Europe is little more than a historiographical by-product of the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century.”

⁶ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), xvii–xxvii, esp. xxii.

⁷ Mariët Westermann, *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic, 1585–1718*, 1st ed., 1996 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 7. Westermann’s and Svetlana Alpers’s focus on “the reality effect” as the emphasis upon the figural instead of the discursive corresponds with Roland Barthes’s famous essay “L’effet du réel” from 1968, on strategies in nineteenth-century French literature, in which he treats authors such as Michelet and Flaubert, who manifest themselves in descriptions that resist

meaning and discursive reading. Interestingly, in one of his first, but rarely mentioned, essays, “Le monde-objet” (1953), Barthes deals with seventeenth-century Dutch painting in a way that foreshadows this later fascination with the descriptive nature of Dutch art. See Roland Barthes, “Le monde-objet,” *Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 1*, 1177–1184; Roland Barthes “L’effet du reel,” in *Roland Barthes: Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. 2*, ed. Èric Marty (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), 483–97. See also Mieke Bal, *Verf en Verderf: Rembrandt lezen*, (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1990), 105–15.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldwaith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 105.

⁹ Gary Schwartz and Machiel Keestra, *Emotions: Pain and Pleasure in Dutch Painting of the Golden Age* (Haarlem: Frans Hals Museum, 2014).

¹⁰ Eric Jan Sluijter, “Rembrandt’s Portrayal of the Passions and Vondel’s ‘staetveranderinge,’” in *The Passions in the Arts of the Early Modern Netherlands*, ed. Stephanie S. Dickey and Herman Roodenburg, *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 60* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 283–301; Claudia Fritzsche, Karin Leonhard, and Gregor J. M. Weber, eds., *Ad fontes! Niederländische Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts in Quellen* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2013), see especially the chapters “aenschouwer,” “hartstochten,” “tooneel,” and “verwondering”; Herman Roodenburg, *The Eloquence of the Body: Studies on Gesture in the Dutch Republic* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2004); Eric Jan Sluijter, “How Rembrandt Surpassed the Ancients, Italians and Rubens as Master of ‘the passions of the Soul,’” in *Batavian Phlegm? The Dutch and Their Emotions in Pre-Modern Times*, ed. Herman Roodenburg and Catrien Santing, special issue, *BMGN–Low Countries Historical Review 129, no. 2* (2014): 63–89; Eric Jan Sluijter, “Rembrandts Jeremia treurend om de verwoesting van Jeruzalem en een tragedie van Guiliam van Nieuwlandt,” in *De verbeelde wereld: Liber amicorum voor Boudewijn Bakker*, ed. J. E. Abrahamse, M. Carasso-Kok, and E. Schmitz (Bussum: Toth, 2008), 127–40; J. M. Weber, *Der Loptopos des “lebenden” Bildes: Jan Vos und sein “Zeege der Schilderkunst” van 1654* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1991).

¹¹ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, ed. D. Russell, trans. W. H. Fyfe (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 178–79 (chapter 7.2–3).

¹² Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature* (London: Legenda, 2006), 1.

¹³ The *editio princeps* of *Peri hypsous* goes back to 1554 and was published by Francesco Robertello, six years after his influential comments on Aristotle’s *Poetics*. The first surviving Latin translations appeared in the 1560s, while vernacular translations were made in the first half of the seventeenth century. Despite its status as the first French translation, Boileau’s version of *Peri hypsous* was predated by an incomplete anonymous French translation that was probably made in the close circles of Cardinal Mazarin around the middle of the seventeenth century. All those different versions give us an idea of the importance of *Peri hypsous* in the European Republic of Letters. See Bernard Weinberg, “Translations and Commentaries of Longinus, ‘On the Sublime’ to 1600,” *Modern Philology* 47, no. 3 (1950): 145–51; Bernard Weinberg, “Une traduction française du ‘Sublime’ de Longin vers 1645,” *Modern Philology* 59, no. 3 (1962): 159–201; Emma Gilby, ed., *Pseudo-Longin: De la sublimité du discours; Traduction inédite du XVIIe siècle* (Chambéry: L’Act Mem, 2007), 12–28.

¹⁴ Marc Fumaroli, “Rhétorique d’école et rhétorique adulte: Remarques sur la réception européenne du traité ‘Du Sublime’ au XVIe et au XVIIe siècle,” *Revue d’Histoire littéraire de la France* 86, no. 1 (1986): 33–51. This essay was also published in Marc Fumaroli, *Héros et Orateurs: Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes* (Geneva: Droz, 1996), 377–98. References are made here to this last edition.

¹⁵ Fumaroli, *Héros et Orateurs*, 389.

¹⁶ Sophie Hache, *La langue du ciel: Le sublime en France au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2000); Lawrence Kerslake, *Essays on the Sublime: Analyses of French Writings on the Sublime from Boileau to La Harpe* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2000); Nicolas Cronk, *The Classical Sublime: French Neoclassicism and the Language of Literature* (Charlottesville, Va.: Rockwood Press, 2002); Gilby, *Sublime Worlds*; Dietmar Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene: Eine Argumentationsfigur von der Antike bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 2006); Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Eva Madelein Martin, “The ‘Prehistory’ of the Sublime in Early Modern France: An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” in *The Sublime*, ed. Costelloe, 101.

¹⁸ Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetorics and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁹ Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1998); Clélia Nau, *Le temps du sublime: Longin et le paysage poussinien* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005).

²⁰ Caroline van Eck, Stijn Bussels, Maarten Delbeke, and Jürgen Pieters, eds., *Translations of the Sublime: The Early Modern Reception and Dissemination of Longinus’ Peri Hupsous in Rhetoric, the Visual Arts, Architecture and the Theatre*, Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 24 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

²¹ On *le je ne sais quoi* see Cronk, *The Classical Sublime*, 51–76; Richard Scholar, *The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); On wonder, *meraviglia*, *le merveilleux*, and the sublime, see Lorraine J. Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Paolo Cherchi, “Marino and the Meraviglia,” in *Culture and Authority in the Baroque*, ed. Massimo Ciavolella and Patrick Coleman (Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 63–72; Bram van Oostveldt and Stijn Bussels, “One Never Sees Monsters without Experiencing Emotion: Le Merveilleux and the Sublime in Theories on French Performing Arts (1650–1750),” in *Translations of the Sublime*, ed. van Eck et al., 139–61; On *ekplèxis* and *deinos* (also *terribilità*), see Eugenio Refini, “Longinus and Poetic Imagination in Late Renaissance Literary Theory,” in *Translations of the Sublime*, ed. van Eck et al., 33–51; Hannah Gründler, “Orrore, terrore, timore: Vasari und das Erhabene,” in *Translations of the Sublime*, ed. van Eck et al., 83–116; J. Bialostocki, “Terribilità,” in *Stil und Überlieferung in der Kunst des Abendlandes*, Akten des 21. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Bonn, 1964 (Berlin, 1967), 3:222–25; Baldine Saint-Girons, *Le sublime de l’antiquité à nos jours* (Paris: Desjonquères, 2005), 50–53; on the religious sublime, see Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950); David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972); Andrew Chignall and Matthew C. Halteman, “Religion and the Sublime,” in *The Sublime*, ed. Costelloe, 183–202.

²² See James Porter, double review of *Translations of the Sublime* and *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, *Rhetorica* 32, no. 4 (2014): 419–23; James Porter, “Lucretius and the Sublime,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, ed. S. Gillespie, P. Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167–85. On the influence of the Lucretian sublime, see also the beautiful essay by Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

²³ Wieneke Jansen is working on a PhD project on the dissemination and receptions of Longinus in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic as part of the ERC starting program “Elevated Minds.”

Results from her research will be published in the forthcoming special issue of *Lias, Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources*, ed. Stijn Bussels, Bram van Oostveldt, and Wieneke Jansen (forthcoming winter 2016). The issue is devoted to Longinus and humanist theory in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.

²⁴ Longinus, *On the Sublime*, chapter 17.310: “whose treatise on sublimity every tragic author must learn by heart” (our translation).

²⁵ Wieneke Jansen, “‘Something overlooked’: The Reception of Ps.-Longinus’ Ideas on ‘Rules and Genius’ by Daniel Heinsius and Franciscus Junius,” in *Lias, Journal of Early Modern Intellectual Culture and Its Sources* (forthcoming winter 2016).

²⁶ For Martin Opitz, see Janis L. Gellinek, “Further Dutch Sources Used by Martin Opitz,” *Neophilologus* 53, no. 1 (1969): 157–75; Theo Weevers, “Some Unrecorded Dutch Originals of Opitz,” *Neophilologus* 23, no. 1 (1938): 187–98. On Heinsius’s influence on English authors, see Paul R. Sellin, *Daniel Heinsius and Stuart England* (Leiden: Oxford and Leiden University Presses, 1968). See also Mark Somos, “Enter Secularisation: Heinsius’s *De tragoediae constitutione*,” *History of European Ideas* 36 (2010): 19–38; Edith Kern, *The Influence of Heinsius and Vossius upon French Dramatic Theory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949).

²⁷ See Colette Nativel, “A Plea for Franciscus Junius as an Art Theoretician,” in *Franciscus Junius F.F. and His Circle*, ed. Rolf Hendrik Bremmer (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1998), 19–33; Colette Nativel, “Ut picture poesis: Junius et Roger de Piles,” *XVIIe siècle* 61 (2009): 593–608; Colette Nativel, “Le traité ‘Du sublime’ et la pensée esthétique anglaise du Junius à Reynolds,” in *Acta conventus neo-latini hafniensis: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Copenhagen, 12–17 August 1991*, ed. Rhoda Schnur (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 721–30; See also Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl, introduction to *Franciscus Junius, The Painting of the Ancients, according to the English translation (1638)*, in *The Literature of Classical Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), lxiv.

²⁸ Thijs Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity in the Netherlands and Britain: The Vernacular Arcadia of Franciscus Junius (1591–1677)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 1–9.

²⁹ See Caroline van Eck, “Living Statues: Alfred Gell’s Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime,” *Art History* 33, no. 4 (2010): 642–59; Caroline van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence: From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Berlin and Leiden: De Gruyter and Leiden University Press, 2015).

³⁰ On Michelangelo, see G. Costa, “The Latin Translations of Longinus’ Peri Hupsous in Renaissance Italy,” in *Acta conventus neo-latini bononiensis: Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Bologna, 26 August to 1 September, 1979*, ed. R. J. Schoeck (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1985), 224–38; Refini, “Longinus and Poetic Imagination,” 35–36; Gründler, “Orrore, terrore, timore,” 87–89; On Poussin, see Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, and Nau, *Le temps du sublime*. For Salvator Rosa, see Helen Langdon, “The Demosthenos of Painting: Salvator Rosa and the 17th Century Sublime,” in *Translations of the Sublime*, ed. van Eck et al., 163–85.

³¹ See Weststeijn, *Art and Antiquity*, 136–38; Nativel, “A Plea for Franciscus Junius,” 31–33. For a negative evaluation of Junius and his influence on Rembrandt, see Jan Emmens, *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* (Utrecht: Dekker & Gumbert, 1968).

³² See Johan Huizinga, “De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis,” in *Verzamelde werken* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1950), 7:71–72; Frank Ankersmit, *The Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 109–39.

³³ In her contribution to this volume, Caroline van Eck refers to the influential treatise on style from the second century bc, long attributed to Demetrius of Phaleron, in which the overwhelming and ravishing effect of style (*To deinos*) is connected to the comic, the ironic, and the grotesque. See Caroline van Eck in this volume paragraph 12-14 and note 14.

³⁴ Longinus was one of the few pagan authors who referred to the Bible, and his famous citation of the *fiat lux* as a forceful example of the sublime resounded during the entire seventeenth century. The *querelle du sublime* between Boileau and Pierre-Daniel Huet at the end of the seventeenth century departed from this example, questioning whether the sublime is a purely experiential category or only an effect of rhetoric. See Saint-Girons, *Fiat Lux*, 46–49; Till, *Das doppelte Erhabene*, 193–206.

³⁵ Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding in de hooge schoole der schilderkonst: anders de zichtbare werelt* (Rotterdam: François van Hoogstraten, 1678), 346; see also Thijs Weststeijn, ed., *The Universal Art of Samuel van Hoogstraten: Painter, Writer, and Courtier* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 31.

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