



Melville and Scale

Transcendental Topology and the Quantum Sublime

Melville's hallmark is a ship of people "moving toward an unknown horizon" on a "journey without maps"

– Albert Camus, 1952, p. 125

Groton CT, 16 Jun 2025

Slides: <http://slideshare.net/LaBlogga>

Melanie Swan, PhD, MBA
DIYgenomics.org (Research Lead)
University College London (Research Associate)



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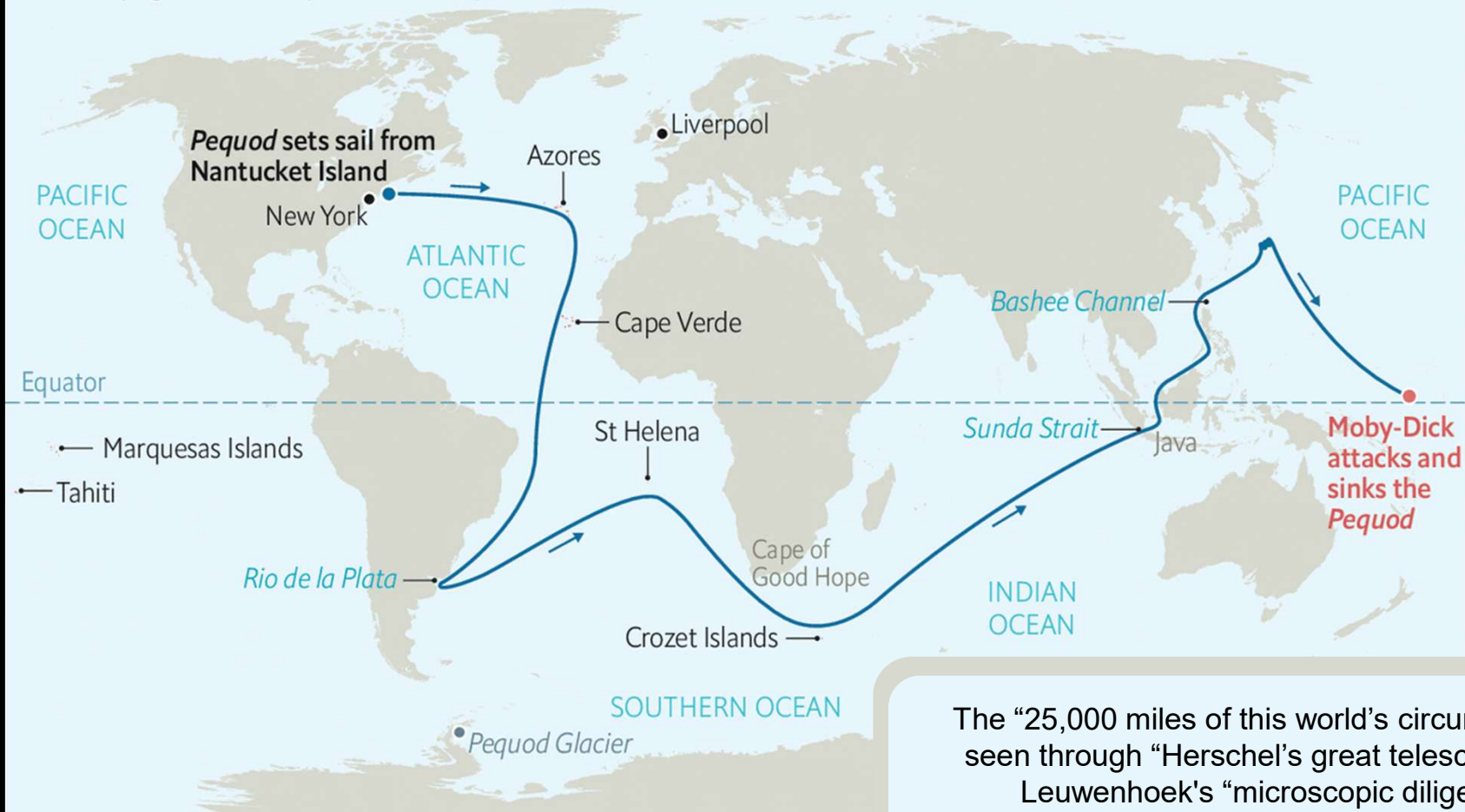
Rolling fields like seas and Mount
Greylock (the Leviathan)

Born 200 years ago, Herman Melville was globalisation's first great bard

The sailors hunting the White Whale with Captain Ahab are avatars of modernity

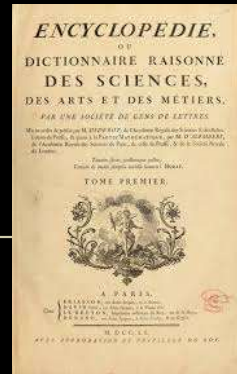
Cruising with Ahab

The voyage of the *Pequod* in "Moby-Dick"



The "25,000 miles of this world's circumference" seen through "Herschel's great telescope" and Leuwenhoek's "microscopic diligence" (*Moby-Dick*, 368; 202; 216)

Moby-Dick (1851)



- Singular genre of poetry and praxis
 - Captures heart and intellect through the imagination
- Melville:
 - Praxis: “The whaling voyage is a strange sort of a book; blubber is blubber tho’ you may get oil out of it”
 - Poetry: “The book is a romance of adventure, founded upon wild legends in the Southern Sperm Whale Fisheries”

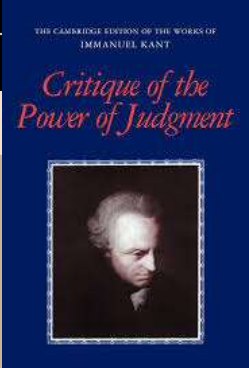


The Colossus of Rhodes



Column, Colossal, Monstrous

“almost too great for our faculty of apprehension” (§26, p. 136)



The Column

Purposiveness

Easy to comprehend



The Colossus

Purposiveness

“Almost too” much to comprehend



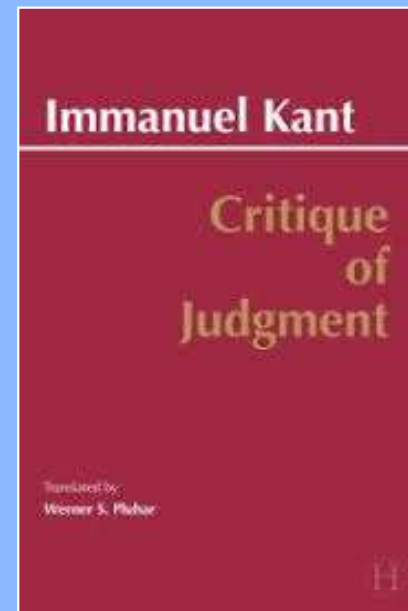
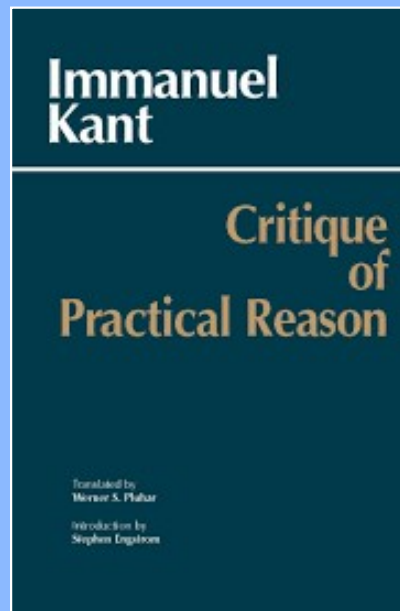
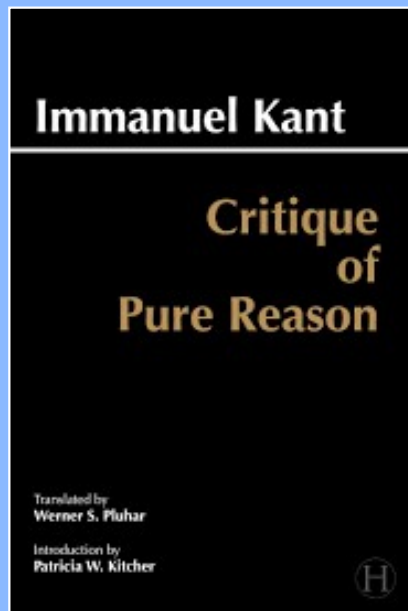
The Monstrous

No Purposiveness

Cannot comprehend

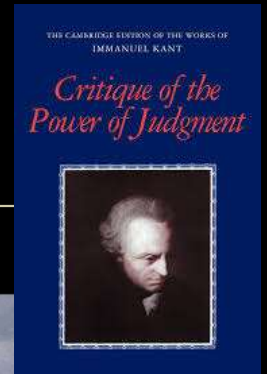


Kant's Three Critiques



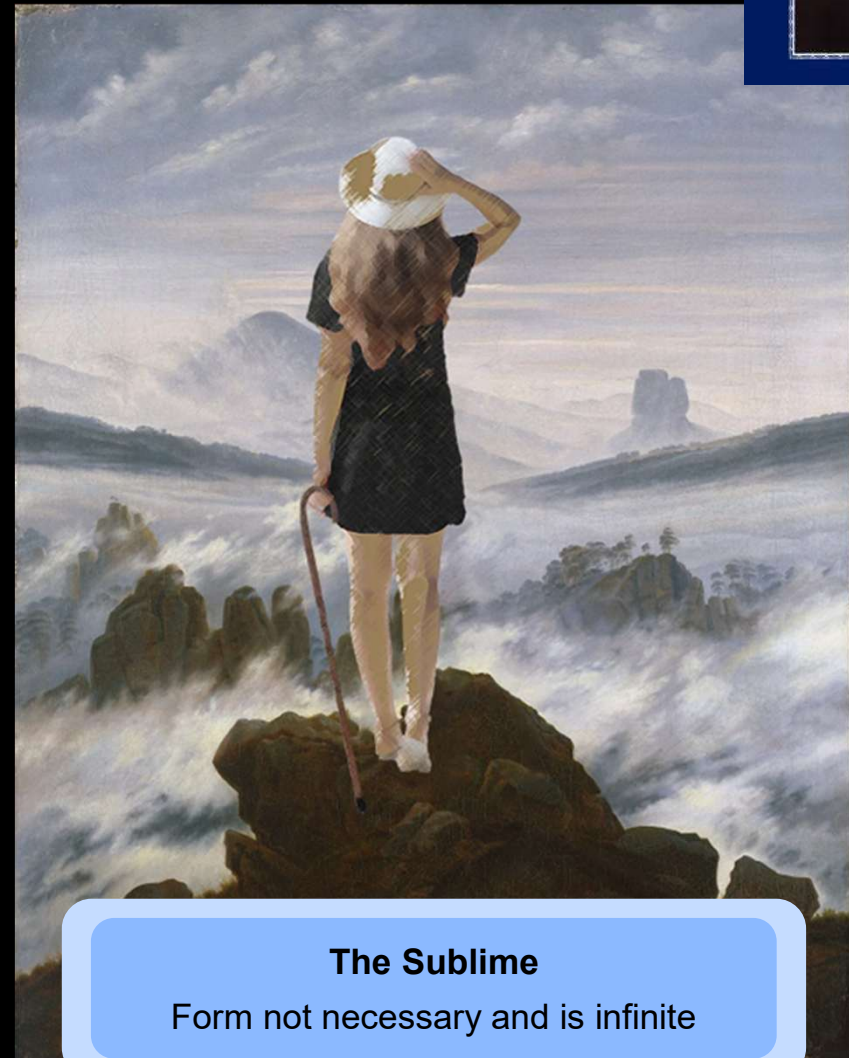
The three critiques treat pure reason, practical reason, and reflective judgment: what the world is, how we should respond, and the bridge between them for new situations in which a concept does not pre-exist and we make an on-the-spot reflective judgment in the aesthetic experience of beauty (in the finite form) or the sublime (in the infinite formless)

Beautiful vs Sublime



The Beautiful

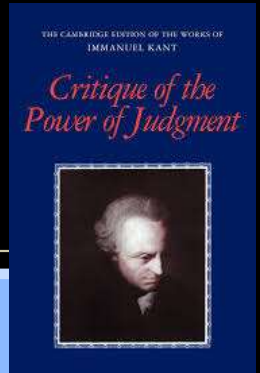
Form is necessary and is finite



The Sublime

Form not necessary and is infinite

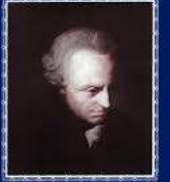
The Analytic of the Sublime



“We call sublime that which is absolutely great,” namely beyond all comparison in size or magnitude (§25, p 131)

“Hence it is the disposition of the mind resulting from a certain representation occupying the reflective judgment, but not the object, which is to be called sublime. Thus we can also add this to the foregoing formulation of the explanation of the sublime: That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses” (§25, p 134)

For since the feeling of the sublime brings with it as its characteristic mark a **movement of the mind** connected with the judging of the object, whereas the taste for the beautiful presupposes and preserves the mind in calm contemplation, yet this movement is to be judged as subjectively purposive (because the sublime pleases), thus this movement is related through the imagination either to the faculty of cognition or to the faculty of desire, but in both relations the purposiveness of the given representation is judged only with regard to this faculty (without an end or interest): for then the first is attributed to the object as a mathematical, the second as a dynamical disposition of the imagination, and thus the object is represented as sublime in the twofold manner intended. (§25, p. 131)



Mathematically vs Dynamically Sublime

“But one division is necessary in the analysis of the sublime which that of the beautiful did not require, namely that into the mathematically and the dynamically sublime”
(§25, p 131)

Mathematically Sublime

Ongoing awe

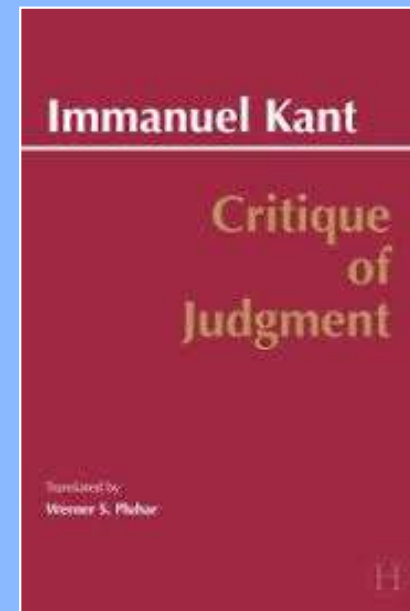
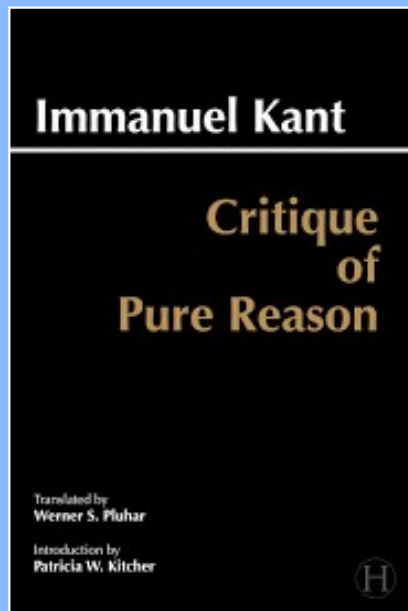


Dynamically Sublime

Episodic fear



Kant's Three Critiques



The three critiques treat pure reason, practical reason, and reflective judgment: what the world is, how we should respond, and the bridge between them for new situations in which a concept does not pre-exist and we make an on-the-spot reflective judgment in the aesthetic experience of beauty (in the finite form) or the sublime (in the infinite formless)

Colossus: The Giant, 1818, de Goya



Hegel

- Historical eras of artistic development

Symbolic Age

Egyptian pyramids

Idea-form not fully reconciled



Classical Age

Greek sculpture

Idea-form reconciled



Romantic Age

Lyric Poetry

Inexpressibility of the infinite
(idea) returns



Prometheus (Goethe)

Sublime



Father Mapple's Pulpit



Moby-Dick: Spouter Inn

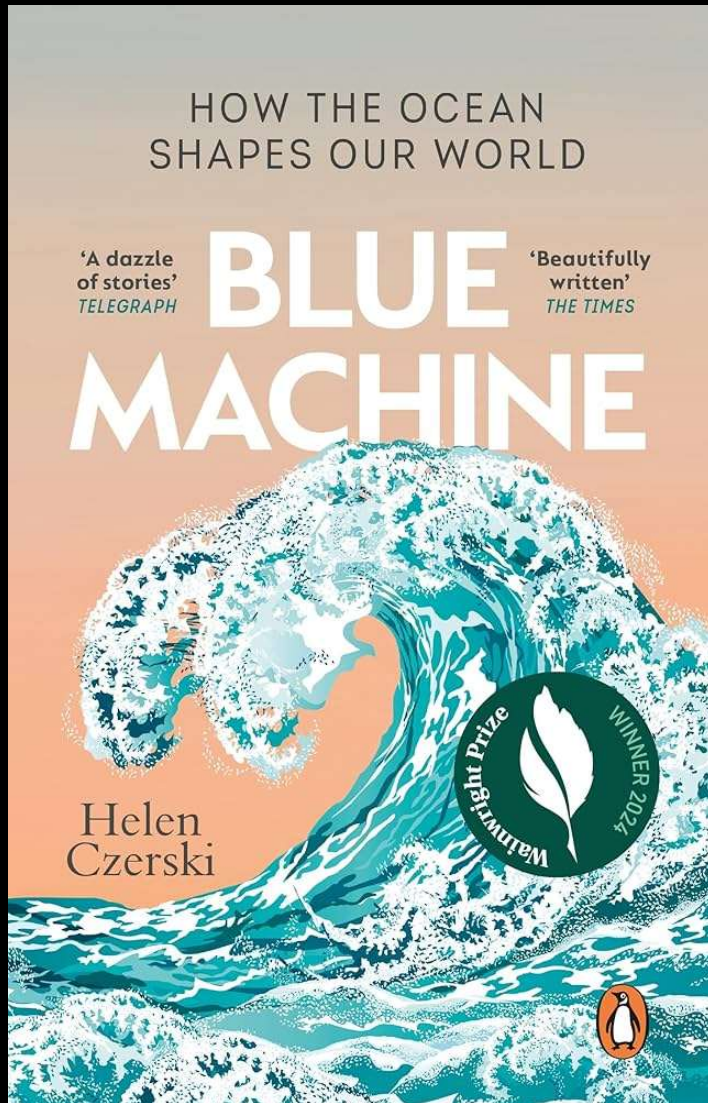
- A portentous, black mass of something hovering in a nameless yeast. A boggy, soggy, squitchy picture truly...



The Great Wave off Kanagawa, 1831, Ura



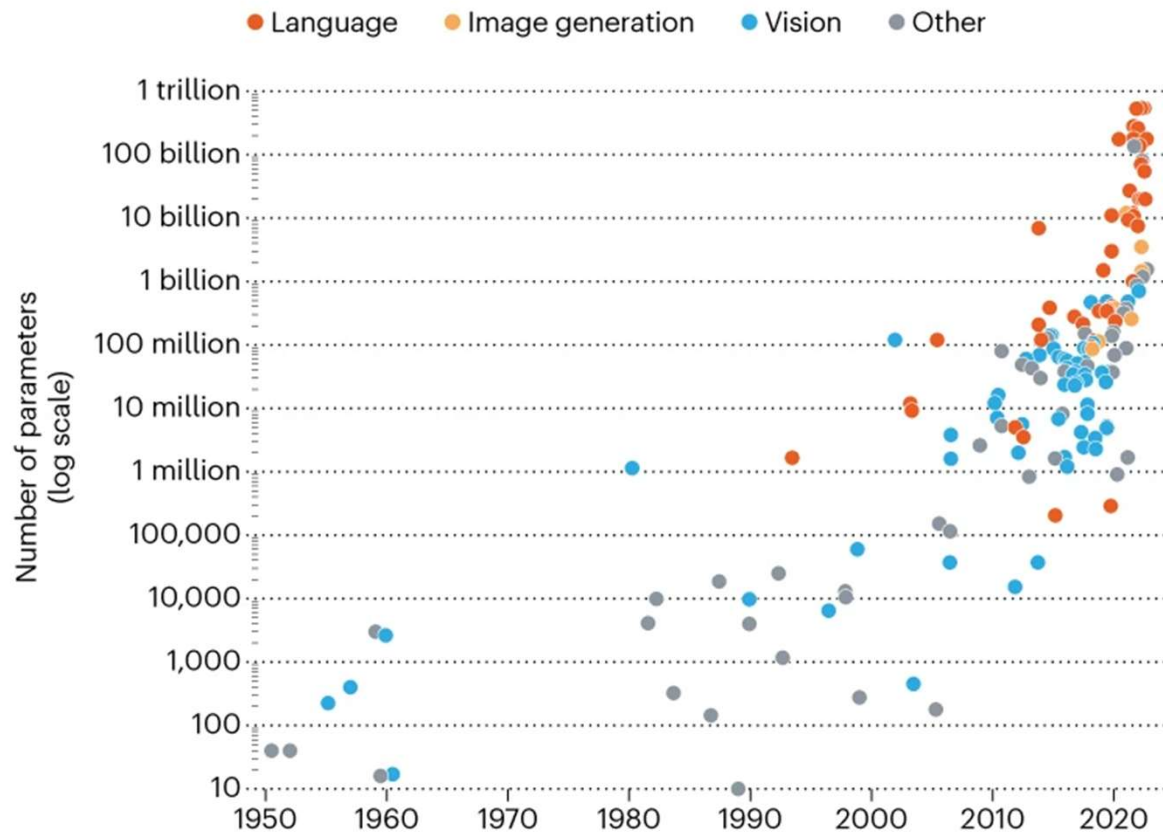
The Ocean is a Machine



The Scale of AI

THE DRIVE TO BIGGER AI MODELS

The scale of artificial-intelligence neural networks is growing exponentially, as measured by the models' parameters (roughly, the number of connections between their neurons)*.



*'Sparse' models, which have more than one trillion parameters but use only a fraction of them in each computation, are not shown.

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*Thank you~!
Questions?*



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