

Day Conference on the 21st Century Sublime
Tuesday 17th July 2018

Department of Film & Television Studies, Millburn House, University of Warwick



This day conference will focus on the ways in which the sublime is re-emerging as a significant aesthetic and ethical category in the 21st century as profound planetary and social changes force us to re-imagine our relation to the non-human and also to the Earth itself. Contributors will explore new genres of the sublime by drawing on philosophy, Earth sciences, and the critical humanities (including decolonial and feminist film theory), as well as cinema, television and the visual arts.

Structure

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| 9.30-11.00
Room A0.26 | Welcome and opening plenary (chaired by Catherine Constable)
'The Sublime at Sea: From the Infinity of Surface to the Oceans of the Anthropocene', Christine Battersby |
| 11.00-11.30 | Coffee break in foyer |
| 11.30-13.00
Room A0.26 | Panel session I (chaired by Matt Denny)
'The Cornish Sublime', Rachel Moseley
'Organs Become Metaphysical: Deleuze's Sublime Cinema and the Contingency of Thinking', Laurence Kent
'Reading the Unidentifiable: The Case of Ufology', Jake Edwards |
| 13.00-14.00 | Lunch in foyer |
| 14.00-15.30
Room A1.27 | Workshop: 'Decolonising the Sublime', Rachel Jones |
| 15.30-16.00 | Tea with cake in foyer |
| 16.00-17.15
Room A1.27 | Panel session II (chaired by James Taylor)
'360-degree Visions: From a Panoramic to a Planetary Consciousness', Tiago de Luca
'Getting Above Herself: Transcendence in <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i> and <i>Gravity</i> ', Catherine Constable |
| 17.30-18.30 | Reception drinks in Arden House |

'The Sublime at Sea: From the Infinity of Surface to the Oceans of the Anthropocene', Christine Battersby

This paper will engage with Stacy Alaimo's (2017) challenge: "*The concept of the Anthropocene compels us to think the temporal and spatial reach of the human in vast, and predominantly geological, dimensions. But what would it mean to take the Anthropocene out to sea?*". I am interested in looking at the intersection between the thematics of the sublime and the oceans of the Anthropocene, and considering how contemporary images of the ocean might help guide our imaginations towards a deepened grasp of mankind's spatial and temporal positioning in the Holocene and beyond. The paper will open by sketching in the claim that we are now living in a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. I will also indicate briefly some of the objections to this label, as well as some of the disagreements as to its dating. The focus will, however, be on looking back at the history of the sublime in the 18th and 19th centuries, insofar as philosophers and visual artists link the ocean to the sublime, together with a consideration of how those traditional approaches are taken up by—and are altered by—21st and late 20th-century artists who link the thematics of the ocean with the sublime in a variety of artworks involving photography, digital imagery, film, sound, and also through the use of "found" and manufactured objects. The three traditional philosophical accounts of the sublime that I will outline are those of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. Examples of sublime seascapes relating to their theories will include paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, Thomas Cole, John Martin and J.M.W. Turner, amongst others. I will then move on to consider examples of recent artists who engage with the sublime and/or the themes of oceanic anthropurbation, marine pollution, plastification, loss of aquatic species and also the effect on our seas of climate change. I will consider examples of artworks by Mariele Neudecker (born 1965 in Germany, based in Bristol); Minerva Cuevas, (born 1975, Mexico); Daniel Beltrá (born 1964 in Spain, based in Seattle); Hans Haacke (born 1936 in Germany, based in New York); Edward Burtynsky (born 1955, Canada); Chris Jordan (born 1963 in USA, based in Seattle). I will end with some thoughts on the Anthropocene, the sublime, environmental crises and the question of scale and its relation to shock.

'Organs Become Metaphysical: Deleuze's Sublime Cinema and the Contingency of Thinking', Laurence Kent

The sublime is not solely an aesthetic category in Gilles Deleuze's reading of Kant's concept; it provides support for the transcendental faculties. The sublime marks an important step in the communication between faculties, confronting us with a direct subjective relationship between imagination and reason. What makes this relationship important is that, unlike the free play of imagination and understanding that takes place in the judgement of the beautiful, the sublime brings the faculties into a discordant harmony. The sublime points to the genesis of the faculties' accord in discord, undermining the presence of a stable ground or natural harmony between our thinking faculties. We thus find violence at the birth of thought, a traumatic encounter with an outside that cannot be assimilated. This is something that can only ever be problematic to thinking: thought's fundamental contingency. My paper will connect Deleuze's reading of the sublime to his demarcation of the variants of the sublime—dynamic and mathematical—in the cinema of pre-war France and Germany. Cinema, with its ability to manipulate space-time, can be instrumental in the sublime undermining of common-sense whereby our "organs become metaphysical."

'Decolonising the Sublime', Rachel Jones

Since its inception in the early eighteenth century, the sublime has not only bound together the aesthetic, the ethical, and the political, but has been bound up with the colonising logic of western modernity. This logic manifests across a wide range of places and practices, including the colonisation of nature; the gendered, racializing colonisation of bodies; the incursions of settler colonialism and destruction of indigenous peoples and their ways of life (where the sublime appears in the figure of *terra nullius*); and the transatlantic slave trade and concomitant production of black (non-)being as the constitutive Other of racializing capitalism. In the background of this workshop are the texts of Burke and Kant, in which the sublime was constituted through gendered conceptual frameworks and inseparable from the production of the concept of race. However, the sublime has since been critiqued from feminist, critical race and decolonial perspectives, has been mobilised to disrupt colonising logics, and has been allied with projects that seek to reclaim previously abjected female, black, and hybrid bodies (see the work of Christine Battersby, Barbara Freeman, and Paul Gilroy). By reading such projects as resistant responses to colonising modernity (what Luce Irigaray calls the 'Logic of the Same' or Sylvia Wynter conceptualises via the figure of Man2), we will ask to what extent it is possible not only to decolonise the sublime, but to render the sublime as a decolonising movement or set of relations. As one possible site for this work, we will focus in particular on excerpts from Daniel Maximin's *Les fruits du cyclone* (2006), asking to what extent this 'geopoetics of the Caribbean' both decolonises the sublime and reveals the ways in which such decolonisations are dependent on the manifold resistant matters that constitute the earth and the diverse bodies that inhabit it, displacing the split between what the West has separated as 'nature' and 'culture' without simply collapsing them. While recognising the historical complicity of the sublime in the force of a colonising logic, this workshop will ask (borrowing from Christina Sharpe) whether it is possible to de-colonise the sublime so as to reveal that 'we [human, nonhuman and more-than-human] are not *only* known to ourselves and to each other through and by that force.'