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The Sublime as a Mode of Address in Contemporary Environmental Photography

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This chapter explores the practice of environmental photography within contemporary art, and its engagement of spectator empathy in order to highlight and critique unethical industrial practices. This can be charted via the methods of the photographers themselves, how their work is perceived, and how the sublime can be understood as a mode of address that is a call or action as well as a reflection on unbounded nature and human development. It is through the sublime in Kant that we can understand how photographers resolve the contradiction presented by the ravaged environment as one of sensational, spectatorial pleasure and immense fear, and how they seek to turn this toward a communication on globalization that can be understood by the viewer. 'Environmental photography' (Peeples 377) is a term used here to describe a politically engaged subgenre of landscape and humanist photography that has emerged from a narrative and documentary practice for publication, into one of producing cinematic-scale, high definition prints for the gallery. Genre conventions have shifted from the close-up portrait that suited the portable cameras of the 1930s-1970s towards the distanced, widescreen perspectives and high definition resolution that invite comparisons with epic cinema and the veracity impressed on the viewer by the assault of data (Stallabrass 83).

Popular interest in environmental photography has much to do with public concern about the effects of globalisation and post-industrial change. Such images, Milbourne observes, "shape international discourses surrounding sustainable environmental practices" (116). The features of globalisation are perhaps well known: borderless capitalism extended by information technology; economic control that supersedes military control; the outsourcing and offshoring of manual labour; the development of flexible and casual labour

(including intellectual labour); and above all, a reflexive engagement in this change by consumer and critic alike. It is a point of irony, and of hope, that the artists and artworks crucial to a sustained critique of globalised capital are enabled by many of the same features of the network, even as they reflect on its seemingly uncontrollable impact. Many of the artists discussed here are aware of this, and some are acutely aware of the politicized way in which their work will be seen, and also the impotence they feel as individuals in the face of awesome natural and human-made forces. Artists are routinely seen as agents of political change, or at least of a heightening of sensibilities towards issues that would overwhelm us in scale should we look up from our own small, everyday acts. Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that some aspect of the sublime might naturally be invoked in images of global catastrophe. However, this still leaves us with the question of what is being shown to us in environmental photographs and whether the mediated image of the photograph can truly present us with the sublime as a meaningful experience. There is no doubt that the ravaged environment can offer visual pleasure, and that there is a temptation to feel "nobler' in gazing sympathetically upon it, even whilst we proclaim impotence or innocence of the crimes that have caused the devastation (Milbourne 21).

In what follows I would like to propose a new perspective on this contradiction, one that does away with the notion that photography cannot represent the sublime. Photographers exploit the technology at their disposal to create images that situate and arrest the spectator and that, in some cases, can be argued to have a sublime effect. Such images do not attempt to express the sublime but instead the photographer's experience of it through the photograph as an exclamation. This more accurately matches Kant's concept of the dynamically sublime as an ability to judge nature without fear, and in the context of our ability to overcome it as an awesome power (either as nature or as natural catastrophe). Environmental photography, I argue, is an attempt to communicate both aspects of this judgment – that this catastrophe is

boundless and horrific, but that we also have the capability to overcome or ameliorate it (Kant §28/264). In this sense, we can approach the sublime as a mode of address – direct communication – for which representation of the sublime is a tool. The nature of this communication is, in most cases at least, a cry of emergency that is both declarative of the horror of environmental catastrophe and a call to action.

The Sublime as Indirect Address

Environmental photography as a practice of landscape emerged early in the history of photography, and includes work by Timothy O'Sullivan in the 1870s, Ansel Adams and the Sierra group in the mid-twentieth century, as well as photographers grouped by the landmark exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* in 1975-76. The more recent wave came in the wake of 1980s Reaganite and Thatcherite capitalism, and includes Sebastião Salgado and Andreas Gursky, who work on the subject explicitly, and also Sophie Ristelhueber and Jem Southam. At the forefront of this group is undoubtedly the work of Edward Burtynsky, whose "large-scale photographs of vast, unnatural terrains created by the machines, excavations and accumulated detritus of modern civilization" have brought the impact of globalisation to a wide public audience (Diehl 118). Burtynsky's epic photography has focused on the impact of human development on nature in terms of transport, communications, and industrial development, leading to major books and blockbuster shows, including *Manufactured Landscapes* (Pauli) and *Edward Burtynsky: Oil* (Schubert and Roth). It is Burtynsky's work that has attracted the most critical attention with regard to the sublime, provoking a reconsideration of the sublime as a natural force that pre-exists human intervention (Zehle; Lowe; Shore). Indeed, the sobriquets "toxic sublime" and "industrial sublime" with respect to Burtynsky's photography have now entered the academic lexicon (see Peeples n1; Schuster). Despite the contemporaneity of the subject matter, the debt to art

history and the figuring in painting of industrial change is something we can observe

repeatedly in environmental landscape photography, including Burtynsky's, suggesting not

only that the subject meets head on our collective experience of industrialisation, but also that

a certain knowledge of art and iconic images is necessary to read these works (Diehl 121).

For example, *Rock of Ages #4, Abandoned Section, Adam-Pirie Quarry, Barre, Vermont*

(1992) uncannily recalls Timothy O'Sullivan's *Ancient Ruins in the Cañon de Chelle, N.M.*

in a Niche 50 Feet Above Present Cañon Bed (1873) in both composition and in scale.

Such a debt to art history, which often also includes inclusion in the museum, can

have its dangers. As Lowe notes, Burtynsky's critics argue that the artist's "formal approach

aestheticizes degradation and fails to provide a social critique that properly historicizes its

subjects" (112). This is an issue that deserves further exploration, not least since it appears as

a common criticism of environmental photography and something that complicates any

pretence to political action or intervention. It does evidence, however, an acknowledgement

of a material difference between the sublime as a direct experience of nature, and the sublime

as experienced through the medium of photography. Thus, Schuster talks of what he calls the

"double sublime" in Burtynsky, referring to the fact that "his photographs at first glance draw

awe at the blown-up, crisp, glossy print (as big as 100×150 cm) and again with the scale of

environmental devastation that wracks the large image" (194). For Schuster, Burtynsky's

work is a necessary framing of environmental issues, and this framing can be a valid form of

communication, even if the stated aims of the photographer fall short of direct intervention or

political action. Peeples goes a little further, asserting instead that "Burtynsky's aesthetic

choices capture/create the sublime in the toxic" but this also suggests a nervousness in

deciding whether the sublime we see in the photograph is the sublime of nature or of artistic

creation (378).

Political interest in the subject matter of such work has brought Burtynsky and his contemporaries to wide public attention, almost always in the context of globalisation. In his discussion of Gursky's work Ohlin suggests that the Divine power of God has been replaced or superseded by globalisation, not least because as individuals we only ever catch glimpses of its magnitude and complexity through small, personal acts of consumption:

[T]he network works mysteriously, transecting the world, even as it impinges on our daily lives in specific ways […] [W]hen we buy an inexpensive cellular phone at a local superstore, there is an entire complex of global factors (economic variables, international trade, technological developments) that bear on the transaction and that we may never consider, or even grasp. (23)

For Ohlin, Gursky's is something of a documentary project – photographing stock exchanges, shopping malls, apartment blocks – but also an attempt to "invoke the sublime" in that built structures (and the networks they represent) mimic the boundless scale of nature in order to produce a "delightful terror that is our response to the sublime" (24). For Nanay there is no invocation or representation, and the formula is instead more simple: "Gursky's sublime is supposed to be different from Kant's and Burke's … inasmuch as he depicts the human-made world, and not nature, which was the prime example in the eighteenth century" (92). This perhaps is too easy a solution to the problem of whether the sublime as nature in Kant and Burke can be expressed through photography as a medium, or mimicked through painting (and Gursky's post-production of images draws them closes to painting). The notion of photography 'invoking the sublime' as an empathetic response in the viewer is perhaps more convincing, and is closer to the Kantian notion of the dynamically sublime. It is, therefore, worth considering whether there is a more instrumental aspect to this invocation,

one that is intended to express and communicate horror specifically. This is not an act of mimicry or even a representation of the sublime, but a specific call as an act of direct communication.

Photography's apparent *indirectness* in presenting the sublime is actually a facet of its direct communication. Consider the viewer in a gallery standing in front of a photograph by Burtynsky or Gursky, and consider how their experience captures the moment of reflection in Kant:

> We can … consider an object *fearful* without being afraid *of* it, namely if we judge it in such a way that we merely *think* of the case where we might possibly want to put up resistance against it, and that any resistance would in that case be utterly futile. Thus a virtuous person fears God without being afraid of him. (§28/264) [emphasis in original]

Having the ability to walk away from the artwork, the viewer can choose to be either engaged or disinterested based on their knowledge and understanding. It is thus the inheritance of art history in these works that produces the sublime, first for the photographer who reads the scene, and then for the viewer of the photograph, which is a communication of the photographer's experience. This is the *modality* of the judgment of the sublime since, as Kant continues, "what is called sublime by us, having been prepared through culture, comes across as merely repellent to a person who is uncultured and lacking in development of moral ideas" (§29/265). This would suggest that some of the power of the sublime in environmental photography comes from its necessary repetition of previous art history, and that it needs to appeal to the visually literate – gallery visitors – in order to have any personal (or political) effect.

The Sublime as Intervention

Although largely based in landscape photography, the practice of environmental photography also inherits many of the political and formal elements of humanist photography, and particularly documentary portraiture. Given the extraordinary human cost of globalisation and post-industrial change, photographers have turned their attention also to the dehumanizing effect of modern building programmes, industrial offshoring, waste collection and processing. Milbourne, for example, surveys African photographers who engaged in the representation of the human subject within industrial waste and whose work has reached prominence at festivals and in publication. Focusing on the work of Mikhael Subotsky and Pieter Hugo, Milbourne foregrounds the motif of the figure in the landscape, often framed centrally within a milieu of toxic waste and post-industrial decay. Such landscapes drift off into the distance, suggesting endless square miles of devastation, within which the human figure offers an absurd parody of the bucolic imagery of nineteenth century painting. So it is that Subotsky's *Residents, Vaalkoppies (Beaufort West Rubbish Dump)* (2006) echoes Jean-François Millet's *Les Glaneuses (The Gleaners)* of 1857. Both present us with one of the humblest of tasks of the working class, sifting through the detritus of industrial production and consumption for meagre pickings. Both attempt an empathetic depiction of (mostly) women's work amongst the industrial underclass, and both express tragedy in the depiction of the oppressive vastness of the landscape around the subject. Other series to emerge from this group of African photographers include Pieter Hugo's work on the Agbogbloshie Market refuse area for electronic and computing waste in Accra, Ghana (Hugo) and Ed Kashi's photography of the Trans Amadi Slaughterhouse, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, for the open access project *World of Matter*[1]. Both focus on the individual, and small groups of individuals, within the landscape, evoking both Millet's painting and Gustave

Courbet's more famous (and now lost) *The Stonebreakers* of 1849. In this respect, different sensations are engaged from within the image, particularly those of smell (refuse fires used to cook questionable meat in Kashi) and especially the physical oppression of heavy, manual labour, as teenage men hulk carcasses, or stoke fires built up from melting computer equipment. As with the stonebreakers, male industrial activity is reduced to its most basic, analogous to prison labour, but in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries this labour takes place to extirpate the waste products of consumer lifestyle, rather than produce the raw materials of infrastructure. Agbogbloshie market is where home computers go to be broken apart and recycled – what cannot be sold is burnt, and hence the industrial calamity of their manufacture is mirrored by the calamity of their disposal. The images force us "to consider the links between the choices we make and the lives and landscapes we influence" (Milbourne 135).

But what also emerges from Milbourne's survey is an acute awareness of the complexity of the journey such images make from the moment of capture to the place of exhibition and distribution. Many of these works are shot for the gallery, so to speak, which puts a different perspective on the work. Agbogbloshie market had been visited by Nyaba Léon Ouedraogo previously, and Port Harcourt by George Osodi. Similarly, industrial waste produced by asbestos mining has been the subject of major series by both Santu Mofokeng and David Goldblatt. Some have won major prizes and awards for achievement – Hugo's work won a major prize at *Recontre de Bamako* in 2011 – and many have been purchased for major art collections or representation by contemporary art galleries. Whilst Kashi's work was part of a collective research project on the effects of postindustrial expansion, Subotsky's is part of the Saatchi collection. Milbourne describes the danger inherent in commodifying the subject matter and the subsequent complicity of photographer and viewer. At one and the same time the photograph of industrial catastrophe is an admonition of our consumer

lifestyle, an intervention on our behalf, and an alibi proffered so that when we turn away and *still consume* we nevertheless feel better. This is perhaps due to the fact that the political has become a common criterion of judgment in the museum and the gallery. Szeman and Whiteman turn to this in a discussion of the natural benefit of politically engaged environmental photography being in the gallery, since such images are likely to have an "activist intent" regardless of the intentions of the photographer (554). Images can powerfully engage the receptive attitude that viewers adopt within the gallery space. On the other hand, they can also become merely illustrative of globalisation rather than reflective or politically assertive, and provide an alibi for the viewer (as if to say that, in an exhibition of mixed political works, here is the one on race, here is the one on gender, here is the one on consumerism and globalisation). The result can be a moralising one, merely confirming what one already suspected: the scale of global processes outstrips anything we might be able to do about it. The result is not knowledge leading to politics, but rather an encounter with art resulting in the comforts of cynical reason (Szeman and Whiteman 555).

This is not a new story, and it is one that is symptomatic of the problems inherent in the humanist photography tradition that has been critiqued by Rosler, Solomon-Godeau and Tagg, among others, interested in the role of the museum as an institution in supporting and promoting photographers in their attempts to raise awareness of social and environmental issues, as evidenced by the rising career of Sebastião Salgado, whose stark and beautiful black and white work includes series from Brazil (goldmines) and Iraq (postwar clean-up) which appeared in his landmark exhibition and book *Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age*. Whilst shooting for the gallery provides a freedom not offered to photojournalism, Salgado's insistence on working in black and white gives it a retro look that only exacerbates the potential to see these series as a commodification of disaster, with a

genealogy that reaches back to the valorisation of mid-century humanist photography. This led Stallabrass to describe this mode of address as "fine art photojournalism":

> Photojournalism and documentary photography often concentrate on people who have been passed by—or who have refused—the commodity culture in which its audience is immersed. […] Photography brings these people in their pristine state to the image market as commodities; their likenesses are distributed in books, magazines and newspapers, or as fine prints sold in limited editions to edify the wealthy. (139)

Such a critique has its corresponding analogy in the ethical complexity for photographers when faced with human suffering in their choice of intervention versus detached observation. A simple account of this dilemma asks whether a photographer confronted with individual human suffering should intervene as a human or observe and call for viewer's attention (and intervention) as an act of humanism. In such cases the focus is on the human tragedy as an individual, contained experience, even when the individual represents or stands for a wider population facing extreme hardship or trauma. The human subject engages empathy on the part of the viewer but this is nonetheless an indirect experience of pain. For the photographer this can mean an experience of impotence in the face of natural disaster that is difficult to overcome emotionally and that can prompt feelings of resignation.

This is the experience of David Goldblatt, who shot landscapes in order to express a specific human tragedy on an unimaginable scale that is otherwise difficult to contextualise through portraiture – the visual experience is a direct address to the viewer through the formal landscape photograph. Goldblatt's landscapes focus on the waste created by the poorly regulated mining of riebeckite, or blue asbestos, in the Northern Cape province of South Africa. Long term exposure to the microscopic fibres thrown up by riebeckite mining

leads to their inhalation into the lungs, from which they cannot be expelled. The most common illness caused by this is mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the internal organs, which is almost invariably fatal. The scale of this catastrophe is unbearable not only in terms of the physical size of the area or the tonnage mined, but also in terms of the hideous temporal dimension of its impact. Blue asbestos was mined by men but sorted and packed by women and children. Waste products, known as tailings, were dumped without treatment where children play. Added to this exposure is the widespread use of the material in infrastructural projects and a significant, wicked factor: mesothelioma takes 30-40 years to manifest itself, leading to a huge intergenerational health problem likely to spike in intensity over a significant period. *Blue asbestos fibers on a tailings dump at the Owendale Asbestos Mine. Postmasburg district, Northern Cape* (2002) confounds vision as an expression of the unearthly, and makes a more visceral connection between the material and the sensational than even the most shocking of images of disease. The scale and composition of the photograph is conventional – an empty landscape of landfill and slag, shaped by mechanical vehicles, stretches out beyond the frame. But our knowledge of this material, its consistency and its danger, makes the fibres seem alive, and they engage our sense of touch through their silky, ethereal presence. This is a haptic experience of straining against the asbestos fronds, opening up the instant of the photograph to a sensation of time stretching painfully, and of choking as a tortuous death throe.

Proceeds from sales of the images go towards healthcare provision for victims, but this is an extremely limited intervention. Worse still, Goldblatt acknowledges that his political activity is necessarily limited by convention, and the power of the work is 'neutralised' by the conventions of the gallery (Milbourne 129). This echoes Burtynsky's acknowledgement that there is only so much of an intervention that a photograph can make. Burtynsky's work, and also Salgado's, requires some cooperation from the companies

engaged in the work he photographs, and Burtynsky has noted with irony that some companies have bought and hung his work in their board rooms (Burtynsky 2008, 156). Burtynsky has argued for amelioration rather than cessation of industrial practices, sustainability rather than a return to the premodern, perhaps for these very reasons.

The Sublime as Engagement

It is a commonplace to say that the act of photography, and the image it produces, forces the viewer to see details in their daily lives that they would normally avoid giving any attention. The visual strategies of Allan Sekula and Andreas Gursky work on this principle. In representing the architectural vastness of capitalism Gursky's images reflect a distinctly first world experience of globalisation. The fact that he uses additive technologies – digital and photomechanical manipulations to extend (but not stretch) his vistas of housing developments, shopping malls, and supermarkets – seems appropriate to networked, digital globalisation. Through this processing of images Gursky also engages different sensations in the viewer. In his photograph *99 cent* (1999) packed rows of cheap foodstuffs, piled high above the heads of the shoppers, are framed geometrically by a camera positioned way above them, so that they take on the shape of breakers on the shoreline rippling in the far distance and eventually crashing over the heads of swimmers near the shore. The scale of the photograph – it is over three metres long – enhances this effect to include the viewer poised in front of it. Gursky's photographs are routinely large scale, as are many of Burtynsky's, to an extent that they dwarf most traditional, post-Renaissance landscape painting. Instead, they take on the scale of Renaissance frescoes and murals, many of which used *trompe-l'œil* and perspective distortion to change the shape of the viewed interior. By this token, Nanay observes that Gursky is not the first painter to utilize both the macroscopic and the

microscopic in order to physically direct and situate the spectator within a specific field of vision:

> [I]f one observes the spectators at a Gursky exhibition, this is exactly what they in fact do: walk away from the print to take in the entire composition and then walk closer to check some details and then walk back again, and so on. Gursky's photos must be among the pictorial works of art that require the most legwork. (93)

The photographs thus involve a physical engagement of the spectator even whilst the images themselves are often tightly composed to express a physical compression or a sense of infinite expansion that reflects or inheres the forces of globalisation. The array of stockbrokers in his *Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Diptychon (Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Diptych)* (1994), suggests the horrific symmetry and closed system of the movement of capital within one giant space. Alternatively, in one of his most famous works *Paris, Montparnasse* (1993), a vast exterior photograph of the 1960s housing scheme by Jean Dubuisson, employs a sense of struggling containment. As the ends of the building bleed off the image only the white sky is visible as a runner along the top, emphasising the uniformity of scale and construction prized in this example of archetypal modernist, post-war housing. Thus the feeling of compression remains despite the scale and the forced perspective. This 'forcing' in digital and optic technologies is instrumental to Gursky's representation of globalised modernity. Begg suggests that Gursky's photographs reflect the collective experience of modernity as one of an uneasy fit between the imagined spaces of experience and their actual, corporeal existence (634). The work is instrumental in being Gursky's imagined view, since no single viewpoint can capture the image. This is suggested in the

diptych works, each of which consists of two separate images but enacted in the digitally conjoined image.

Begg draws a comparison between the work of Gursky and the narrative photography of Allan Sekula. Begg puts these works into context in a discussion of the *multitude*, a concept he draws from the work of Antonio Negri, for whom the *multitude* refers to the workers whose lives are now shaped by global capitalism (Begg 628-631). Gursky's photographs reflect upon one element of this transition – the spaces and constructions that act as a technology of globalisation – whilst Sekula's photographs and video stills of the 2001 anticapitalist protests reflect upon another. Yet both use as a means of emphasis the notion of scale. The spaces of capitalism are overwhelming big, and highly structured, in a manner that expresses a wider network beyond the image. By contrast, the multitude is an expression of numbers beyond the facility of measure, beyond the description of groups as bounded by class, race, or social standing. Sekula's series, *Waiting for Tear Gas [white globe to black], 1999–2000* (2000) focuses on small moments, half seen and narratively complex, that are captured in still frames taken from video on the street, and that act as glimpses of the wider action of which the individual is a part.

These themes and strategies come together in Sekula's photographs and essays eventually published as *Fish Story* in 1995. In this work, Sekula uses documentary practice as well as historical and literary research to detail the "imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world" (202). Among humanist documentary images, however, is a photograph that stands out in its formal similarity to Gursky's, but which presents a wider expression of global capital that is intended to overwhelm. *Panorama. Mid-Atlantic, November 1993* (1993) is a wide view of a container ship, taken from its highest point and looking towards the bow, with the ship headed out to open see. The containers stacked on it obscure the vessel underneath and its familiar shape. The horizon stretches out before us and

in the far distance, off to starboard, the sun shines strongly through low cloud. The effect of this last feature is to evoke, once again, epic painting, but this is something of a distraction. The containers are the physical manifestation of the transport of commodities that we purchase on our laptops and tablets at the click of a mouse. Global capital has relied upon the oceans for the movement of commodities, people and materials (and of people as commodities and material) for many hundreds of years, and the post-industrial expression of this is the container, which standardises, protects, and hides its content for shipping and handling. The containers are a ubiquitous multitude that throws the political multitude into sharp relief, not least as time has passed and the culture of the container has emerged in full, post-industrial irony. Containers are increasingly repurposed as gallery spaces and workshops, including as a method of creating quick and portable (and removable) artist communities as a process of gentrification.[2] The presence of containers bulging atop the ships superstructure visualises the movement of commodities and also mirrors darkly their reuse as sites of bourgeois consumption for which contemporary art appears to have been co-opted.[3] The comparison with Gursky's *Montparnasse* is striking, not least through the seaward horizon that echoes the top of Dubuisson's apartment blocks, and although an immediate comparison might be made between the containers and the nearly identical dwellings, it is the sea that extends the horizon. It is a look out from beyond the containers and the dwellings toward the unlimited space of globalisation, unlimited not because it is endless space, but because this space is so open and utilizable.

The Sublime as Direct Address

What kind of expression are we talking about when we try to understand the mode of address that the representation of the sublime in this manner gives rise to? From what we have surveyed so far, a sense of horror or terror emerges which is felt by the photographer

and communicated to the viewer. What also emerges is that, in following the formal codes of landscape, the subject matter is likely to be removed from, or different from, the direct visualisation of human suffering. Nevertheless, reportage of human suffering does allow us to identify and extrapolate the moment of expression, and the type of expression, as the photographer turns physical experience and affect into a mode of address. Jurich considers this engagement of the viewer as a visceral one in an approach she takes from Susan Sontag and Ariella Azoulay, one that unifies spectatorial address as *sensus communis*. Photography of catastrophe, even when the event depicted is out of field, is an intentional engagement of the viewer "so that horror describes not only the image, but also the affective embodiment of viewers themselves. This [for Azoulay] is the basis for an 'emergency claim' that needs immediate treatment" (13). As Azoulay writes:

> An emergency is a situation involving calamity or mortal peril that demands immediate treatment. It is produced from a situation entangled in disaster, war, terrorist attacks, massacres, catastrophes, or accidents, but it also emerges from ongoing situations of poverty, misery, abuse or humiliation. […] An emergency claim testifies to three facts: that a disaster exists; that it is an exception to the rule, one that necessitates immediate action in order to terminate it; and that there is someone who wants to assume the position that allows immediate action to be taken in order to terminate it. (Azoulay 197-199)

A political relationship is, therefore, based in the emergency claim as both descriptive of the situation and prescriptive of action. It is a 'first step' towards political intervention that addresses the viewer in a way that provokes a universal affective response that undercuts differential readings of images based on conventions of viewing (Jurich 15). We can explore

this active engagement finally, as a tactic of description/prescription, by considering it through Kant's Dynamically Sublime and a further recent example of urban landscape.

Two images from photographer Wing Ka Ho's series of urban landscapes of Hong Kong won separately *both* the Sony World Photography Award (National – Hong Kong) and the Insight Astronomy Photographer of the Year in 2016. *Childhood, Choi Hung Estate, Hong Kong, 2015* (2015) is a bright and ordered photograph in which a teenager runs across a colourful basketball court in front of an apartment block brightly shaded in an ordered array of pastel. Palm trees interrupt the artificial environment, punctuating a façade that, like Gursky's *Montparnasse*, stretches beyond the frame as if to infinity. It is an example of how the imposing is made fair in countenance. Wing Ka Ho's winner for the IAPY competition could hardly be more different, yet still holds a debt to both Gursky's photograph and Sekula's container images. In *City Lights Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, 2015* (2015) a long night exposure cast upwards has caught the stars crawling across the sky, and has revealed in sharp detail the otherwise dark tangle of the inner courtyard of a different, more dystopian apartment block. Here the apartments push and jostle together, crowding out the night and threatening to crush the spectator. The image is redolent of the waste that is produced by consumption and the overcrowding of cities such as Hong Kong that have been the first to feel the effects of globalisation. It is as if, for lack of space, the gleaming city has become its own trash compactor.

However, if pleasure can be had from gazing upon ecological or even urban distress, how does this pleasure defeat the urge to look away, to be disgusted? How does it seduce enough, to hold attention enough, for the clamour to intervene to take hold? This is the "emergency claim" in Azoulay, which ultimately leads us back to the Dynamically Sublime in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Robert Doran reminds us that Kant begins his section on the sublime by concentrating on nature as arousing fear, but this poses a problem if we want to

understand the captivating power of nature. If nature is simply fearful, then we would not find it appealing in anyway and simply look for escape. If we are not afraid then nature has nothing of the effect of sublimity – it is weak. For this reason Doran contends that, "if it is to fulfil these paradoxical requirements, the experience of the Dynamically Sublime must include an element of virtuality" (241). This, as Doran describes, provides for Kant the added level of reflection needed to "describe the paradoxical experience of fear-within-safety" (240). We could argue that this virtuality also runs through the presentation of the sublime through mechanical, mediated means. Azoulay's description/prescription is an example of this virtuality, and we could argue that the presentation of the sublime is thus an aesthetic tactic on the part of environmental photographers to provoke in the viewer a cry of 'emergency.' This is the reality of judgment that is *both* aesthetic and moral (Kant §29/269) and that gives photography of the sublime its political energy, to be tapped by the spectator directly addressed by the photographer's emergency cry.

Notes

[1] *World of Matter*. Zurich University for the Arts and George Foundation. http://www.worldofmatter.net/ [Accessed 01/11/16]
[2] See, for example, Boxpark in London's east end, and the more controversial plans to create a pop-up container mall at Elephant & Castle.
[3] The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, for example, sells shipping container desk caddies: <https://www.mcachicagostore.org/mobile/products.cfm/ID/47816/name/shipping-container-pen-box->, Accessed 05/11/16.

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