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Research in Practice

In 2024, a brief experience of homelessness challenged everything I thought I knew about myself and the world around me. It was during this period that I discovered the concept of the sublime- not only in expansive landscapes but also within the microcosms of everyday life. Due to the immobilised life I was experiencing, fleeting reflections on rain-soaked pavements or the subtle interplay of light through an orange peel captured my attention, each revealing a delicate moment of transformation. I soon realized that these scenes were not mere passing images; they would lead directly to my next practice in this course, marking a pivotal shift in my artistic journey.

Transformation emerged as a central theme in my inquiry, a process that began when the sudden upheaval of my normal life stripped away my familiar perceptions. That challenging period forced me to confront harsh realities head-on, compelling me to abandon the comfort of routine and reexamine my sense of self, stability, and vulnerability as a young adult. As Edmund Burke famously noted, "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, is sublime" (Burke, 1757). The disruption was not solely an external event- it sparked an internal change where the painful suspension of certainty gradually gave way to an openness toward creative possibility. Without the protective layers of contemporary comfort, I started noticing the smaller, often overlooked aspects of life. Whether it was the glimmer of light reflecting off rain puddles under city lights or the delicate shimmer on wetted surfaces, each fleeting insight narrated a subtle story of change and hinted at layers of complexity beneath what we casually dismiss as mundane.

This emerging awareness soon saturated my artistic practice. Determined to capture these microcosms of the everyday, I began to document the hidden elegance- and at times, the stark harshness- of my surroundings. The act of photographing these small details evolved into a ritual. It was a way to archive transformation that, although born of hardship, was also imbued with hope and promise. Immanuel Kant expressed that the inherent feeling of the sublime arises when we are confronted with the enormity of nature, often leaving us with a sense that exceeds our capacity to conceive it (Kant, 1790). What Kant is expressing here is the inherent feelings of the sublime through overwhelming encounters that lead to transformation. In my case, experiencing homelessness for the first time forced me to confront the world around me along with the transformation that occurs in the path that I take. I experimented with techniques that emphasized subtle shifts in light, unusual

compositions, and textures that are often overlooked. In doing so, I strived to create a visual dialogue between the turmoil of my present and the emerging vision of my future.

The concept of transformation carries significant theoretical weight, too. Historically, both artists and philosophers have maintained that genuine change does not arise without encountering difficulty. In facing the transient nature of existence, one discovers that transformation is as much about deconstructing old narratives as it is about constructing new ones. This duality, the tension between loss and the emergence of something new- has become a guiding principle in my work. I have come to see transformation as a enigma: it balances the erosion of what was once familiar with the gradual emergence of meaning. Rather than diminishing my creative vision, the discomfort and vulnerability of that period led me to embrace every subtle shift in perspective as a building block for renewed artistic demonstration.

In summary, transformation in my work is both a process and a destination- a continuous cycle of deconstruction and reimagination. This exploration challenges the notion of permanence, inviting viewers to find beauty in the transient and the evolving. Rather than clinging to fixed ideas of stability, my practice celebrates the dynamic nature of life itself. Ultimately, this inquiry lays the groundwork for understanding how personal experiences- especially those born of adversity- can forge a continuous dialogue between the self and an ever-changing world. I aim to bridge the gap between personal hardship and a broader journey toward renewal.

In contrast to the sweeping narrative of transformation, the microcosm offers a mass of subtle reflections that open up a hidden universe. While I once believed the sublime was only found in vast landscapes and dramatic space, I gradually discovered that the true intensity of beauty and intimacy can reside in the minute details that are ordinarily overlooked by the majority. The microcosm is not simply a mirror of the larger world; it is a domain of its own, rich with visual textures, unexpected reflections, and hidden narratives that invite a more deliberate kind of seeing.

Drawing on my renewed awareness after the challenges I faced turning age 21, I started to view these overlooked details as full-fledged subjects rather than mere backgrounds. My approach to capturing these moments has been both technical and

intuitive. By experimenting with extreme close-up and microscopic photography, I honed techniques that play with depth of field, focus and macro lighting. It was through the use of shallow depths of fields that allowed me to isolate tiny elements, encouraging the viewer to put the pieces together in their own way. I adjusted the aperture and unnatural lighting to reveal not just the physical characteristics of the subject but also the ephemeral quality of time. In the images I was producing, the inherent dynamics of everyday surfaces came to life, suggesting that nothing is static- even what we deem as insignificant.

It was this act of looking closely that transformed into an almost ritualistic practice, where I, the observer can slow down and focus on the intricate rather than the bigger image. I found that by training myself- and, by extension my audience- to pause and really notice the details of form, texture and colour, I could evoke sensations that are both emotional and tactile in their approach. In contrast to the overwhelming or dramatic scenery typically found in the sublime, these images rely on a quiet accumulation of detail to make an impact. They ask us to appreciate the inherent beauty of subtlety, a message that goes against the modern urge for immediate, rapid stimuli.

Furthermore, this focus on the microcosm provides an opportunity to rethink the notion of scale. Often, we assume that meaning requires expansiveness, that only wide landscapes or large-scale compositions can evoke the sublime (Gernsheim, 1962). However, my practice shows that an intimate investigation of detail can be just as compelling. By observing the minute intricacies of a surface can reveal patterns and structures that resonate with the complexity of larger phenomena such as space or biological patterns seen in sentient life. Through this way, the microcosm becomes a metaphor for the intricate interconnections that underly our existence- a counterpoint to today's simplistic idea that only the obvious or enormous carry significance. In my work, it is this deliberate choice to spotlight these small-scale moments that serves as an invitation to reflect. It is a call to slow down in a fast-paced, visually overloaded world. By focusing on what is often ignored, I aim to provoke a reconsideration of what we designate as beautiful or meaningful. The details I capture challenge viewers to reconsider their perceptions and include their own personal experiences in order to create meaning.

In summary, exploring the microcosm in such a way has reshaped my practice, urging me to seek out the smaller narratives hidden in the everyday. By pushing past the

conventional reliance on scale, I have come to view these subtle details in moments as conveyors of emotion. To me, they are a reminder that while grandeur might be dramatic, true beauty often lies in the quiet, unseen details that continuously shape our lived experience.

In today's world, especially as a younger male, vulnerability is often dismissed as a weakness. But for me, it has become a driving force behind authentic self-expression and transformative art. My recent experiences pushed me into an emotional box where facades were no longer and the raw core of my identity was to be found. In those moments, I found that embracing the vulnerability was the way forward- a way of opening up to both uncertainty and the beauty that lies beneath struggle.

In the world of art and photography, vulnerability is not about oversharing painful experiences or details but rather about candidly engaging with one's fragility. It is a deliberate choice to sacrifice perfection in favour of an honest portrayal of emotion. For me, vulnerability emerged as a creative invitation to capture untamed essences of life. Rather than striving for control in my images, I began to see the potential in moments of unrefined exposure- moments that capture the inner openness in which I was feeling and the potential for inner meaning created by viewers.

On a technical level, I experimented with photographic techniques that mirrored this sense of open-endedness. Methods such as allowing imperfect framing or compositions, mixing ambient lighting, motion, and softer focus' allowed me to create an environment where emotions could materialize. And in doing so, I discovered that the boundaries between subject and photographer could blur. Each image was a shared space where vulnerability and chance converged. The result being less about a controlled aesthetic and more about allowing the inherent uncertainty of life to speak for itself.

Emotionally, this vulnerability acted as a mirror to my internal state. In confronting the stark realities of the unstable life I was living, I was forced to question both my own and societies assumptions about strength and protection. I began to see that fortitude did not lie in the absence of weakness, but in the willingness to be exposed to change. By casting aside the need for constant control, I allowed myself to be transformed in each stage of genuine expression. This not only redefined the way I was approaching my work but also how I

viewed photographic expression as a whole. I knew that creating an honest portrayal of impermanence can create a space where viewers feel understood and validated in their own experiences.

The reimagining of vulnerability in my practice evolved overtime- each encounter, whether captured in an unplanned snapshot or a deliberate soft-hued composition, reminded me that vulnerability is and always will be intertwined with creativity. This approach challenges the cotemporary conventional pursuit of flawlessness. Instead, it aims to elevate the value of imperfection and spontaneity. The almost ephemeral quality of the images make them resonate on a deeper, more personal level for both me as the photographer, and those who come across them. It is beyond the technical and personal that the exploration of vulnerability invites a broader reflection on our collective cultural narratives. In a world saturated with images that celebrate perfection, my work stands as a counter-narrative- one that honours the beauty of exposure, uncertainty and the ever-changing narrative of existence. By revealing these aspects of my life, however raw and unfiltered, I hope to encourage others to see vulnerability not as an endpoint, but as a dynamic process capable of creating inner growth.

To summarise, this idea of vulnerability within my artistic practice is the deliberate embrace of life's unguarded and unpredictable moments. It is the willingness to capture the imperfect and turn it into something profound that I really focused on when creating my own work inspired by the sublime. I hope that in the future, I can realise that the work I have created is the first step toward my own creative freedom and deeper understanding.

Art and Imagery have the power not only to reflect cultural ideologies but also to reshape our inner selves. In my creative practice, several artworks have profoundly influenced my understanding of transformation, the microcosm and vulnerability. Now, I will analyse and compare three artworks- each a representation of different facets within the sublime, while explaining how they have helped redirect my photographic approach.

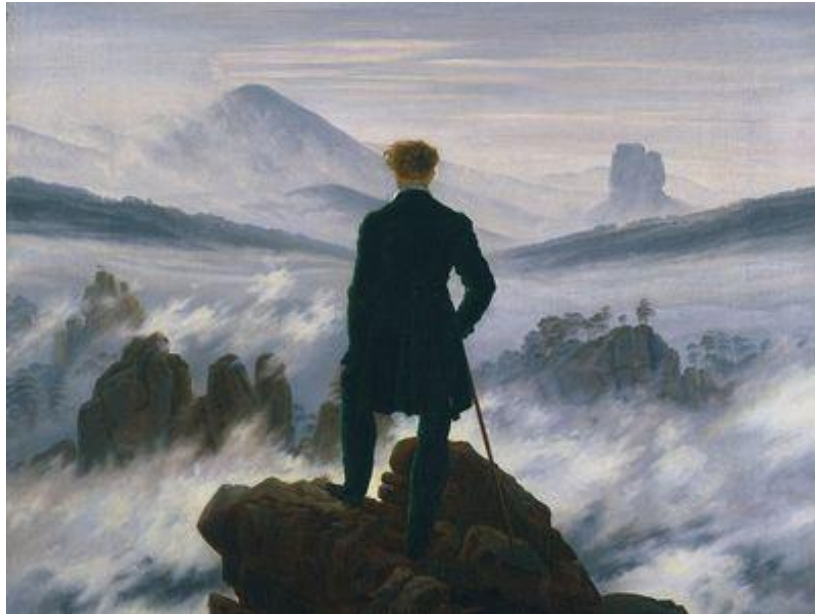


Figure 1

Caspar David Friedrich's iconic painting titled *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, displays a solitary male figure standing at the edge of precipice. He looks out over a vast, cloudy landscape with his attention directed away from the viewers point-of-view. This specific piece of art embodies transformation in an expansive form, the figures positioning evokes both a feeling of isolation and possibility. Uncertainty is also displayed through the large areas of cloud and mist. This artwork inspired and influenced my own practice by encouraging me to consider how even a single, solitary moment can capture tension between feelings of insignificance and hope- it is a reminder to maintain that balance of grandeur with personal introspection.



Figure 2

Furthermore, I find Edward Weston's 1931 depiction titled *Cabbage Leaf* to be essential to my photographic study. In the image, the organic curves and intimate textures of a single cabbage leaf are displayed in high-contrast black and white shades. Moments of exploration through texture, form and decay are meticulously displayed through the imagery. The fluid and delicate motion of the single leaf reveals narratives of beauty and transformation- echoing a moment of vulnerability. This single image itself has taught me that the microcosm, when examined from unique perspectives can hold profound meaning created by individual ideologies. I believe that this image serves as a powerful symbol of fluidity in motion through a solitary, immobile subject. This is an aspect I wanted to replicate when exploring the sublime through my own eyes.

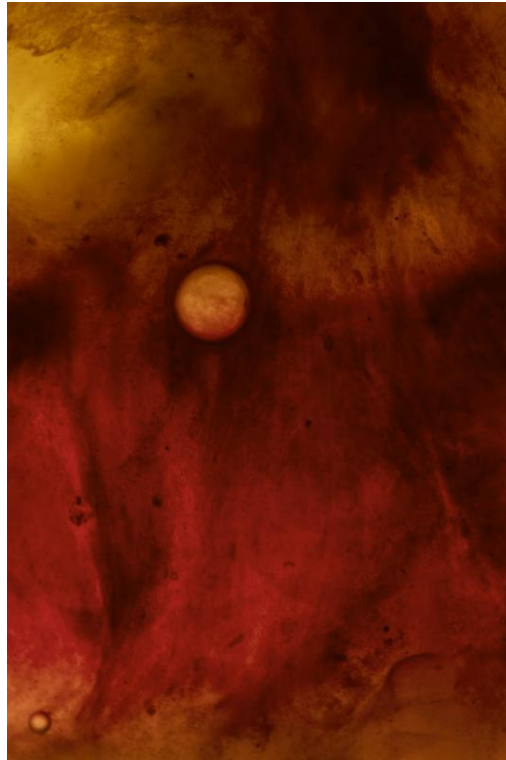


Figure 3

Another example of photography that inspires my own approach to the sublime is Stephen Gill's *Please Notify the Sun* (2017). As described by Gill himself, "I began to have an inkling that a single fish might contain a universe of infinite proportions and how amazing a journey within its body could be" (Gill, 2017). Although rooted in experiments, the work evolves into a broader discussion on exposure and transformation. Using a subject that is prone to decay, Gill's images balance scientific curiosity with human spontaneity- a motion and process that is highly resemblant of my own. It is through this body of work that Gill demonstrates how the sublime is not solely reserved for overwhelming landscapes and grandeur, instead it is a portrayal of hidden beauty and vulnerability in landscapes that resemble that of grandeur but are, in fact, micro and unassuming (Hatfield, 2018). For my own artistic practice, it serves as a reminder that genuine expression often emerges from embracing the unexpected.

These three examples reveal a spectrum of unique approaches to the sublime; Friedrich's expansive vision invites viewers to confront the grandeur of the vast or unknown while making transformation as a key, monumental journey within oneself; Weston's *Cabbage Leaf* (2017) rather focuses onto the unassuming, creating grandeur from something

as boring as a cabbage leaf (Labrija 2017); While Gill's photobook combines scientific approaches to observation with self-expression- suggesting the presence of vulnerability in creative practice. It is these artworks that have collectively reshaped my understanding of the sublime. They are constant reminders that personal expression and transformation will never be confined to a framing of dramatic landscapes, but can be introduced in the quieter nuances that surround modern day life. From this, my own approach to the sublime has become that of a balance between planned compositions and unforeseen moments and it is my own vulnerability that fuels the sublime.

By connecting these threads of transformation, the microcosm, and vulnerability- a new understanding of the sublime in everyday life is born. Transformation captured how personal disruptions can lead to creative reinvention; the microcosm reveals that even the smallest details can encapsulate a universe of meaning; and vulnerability emphasises the act of embracing truth as an integral part of artistic expression. It is when I synthesise these themes that I have to ask: How does the sublime, as revealed through subtle micro details, contribute to personal transformation by reconfiguring our understanding of vulnerability? It is my aim within this proposed essay and my future imagery to challenge conventions of aesthetics by arguing that the intensity of lived and shared experience can be just as powerful in its capture in that which is small and/or transient. To add, my investigation will explore how embracing moments of ephemerality and fragility not only jumpstarts internal transformation but also informs innovation in approaches to visual storytelling.

Further directions for inquiry that I wish to explore include different emotions portrayed through the sublime. Is it possible that most or even all sentient emotions can be evoked through the microcosm? Is the power and grandeur of the sublime only inherent in personal adversity or experience? I hope, from this moment onwards, that these questions will shape my creative practice as a photographer.

How does the sublime, as revealed through subtle micro details, contribute to personal transformation by reconfiguring our understanding of vulnerability?

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Image Sources:

Figure 1, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. [Image Link](#)

Figure 3, *Please Notify the Sun*. [Image Link](#)

Figure 2, *Cabbage Leaf*. [Image Link](#)