The Contemporary Condition

The Age of the Anthropocene



The Age of the Anthropocene

Anthropocene – A Geological Epoch – The Age of the Humans

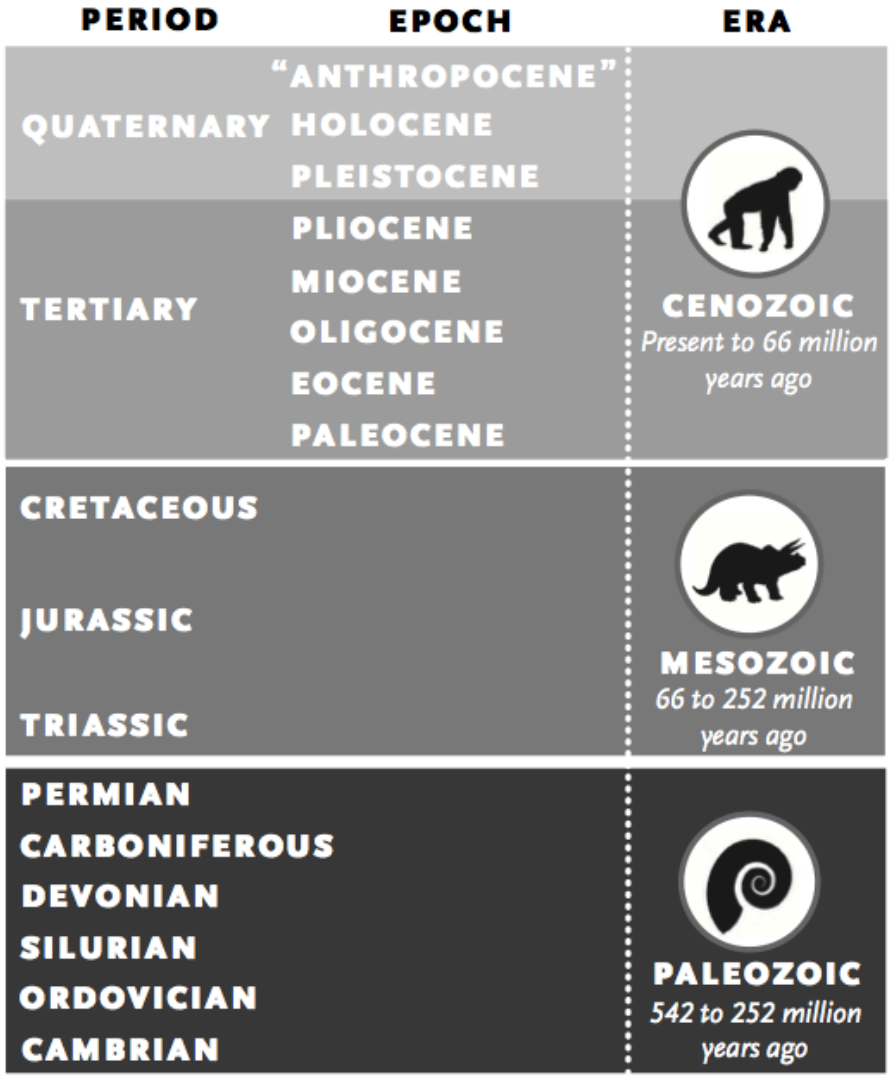
- **Human** (‘Man’) Versus **Nature**
- The Age of the **Enlightenment**

Humanity’s impact on the Earth is now so profound that a new geological epoch – the Anthropocene…

The current epoch, the **Holocene**, is the 12,000 years of stable climate since the last ice age during which all human civilization developed.

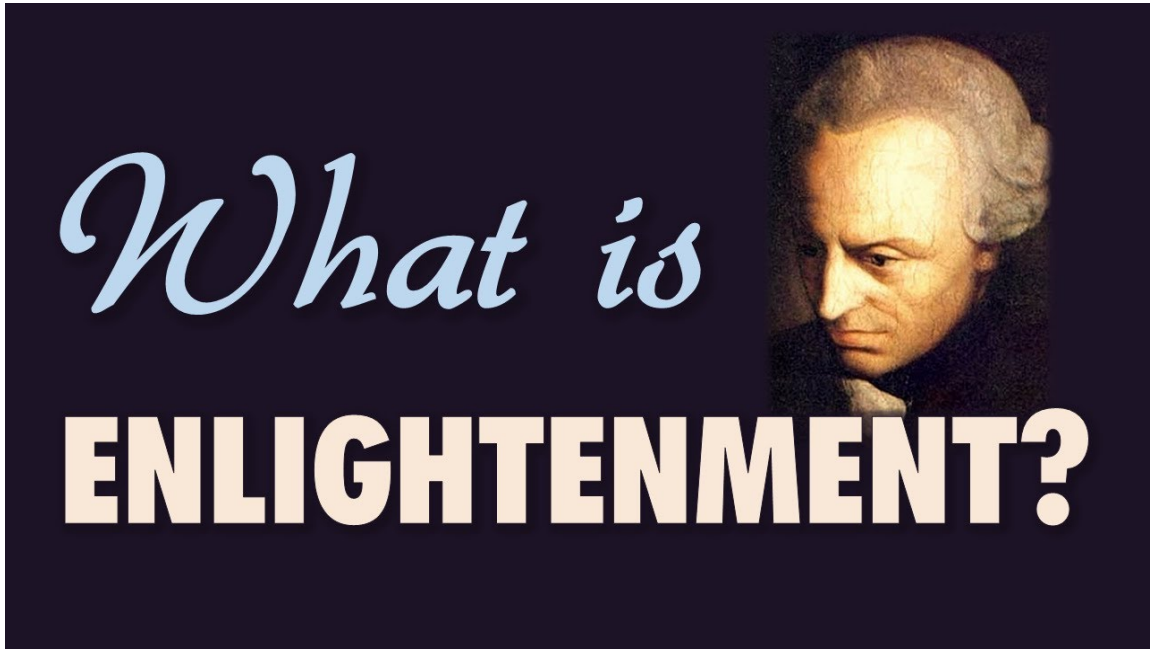
But the striking acceleration since the mid-20th century of **carbon dioxide emissions** and **sea level rise**, the **global mass extinction of species**, and the **transformation of land by deforestation** and development mark the end of that slice of geological time.

The Earth is so profoundly changed that the Holocene must give way to the Anthropocene.



The Age of **Enlightenment**

The **Enlightenment**, also known as **the Age** of Reason, was a philosophical movement that took place primarily in Europe and, later, in North America, during the late 17th and early 18th century. Its participants thought they were illuminating human intellect and culture after the "dark" Middle **Ages**.



- The Scientific Revolution – Isaac Newton
- French Revolution – Politics and Ideology
- The Industrial Revolution – James Watt…steam engine
- The ‘Death of God’ – The Age of Rationalism, Skepticism
- Theory of Evolution – Charles Darwin

In his essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' (1784), the German philosopher Immanuel Kant summed up the era's motto in the following terms:

'Dare to know! Have courage to use your own reason!'

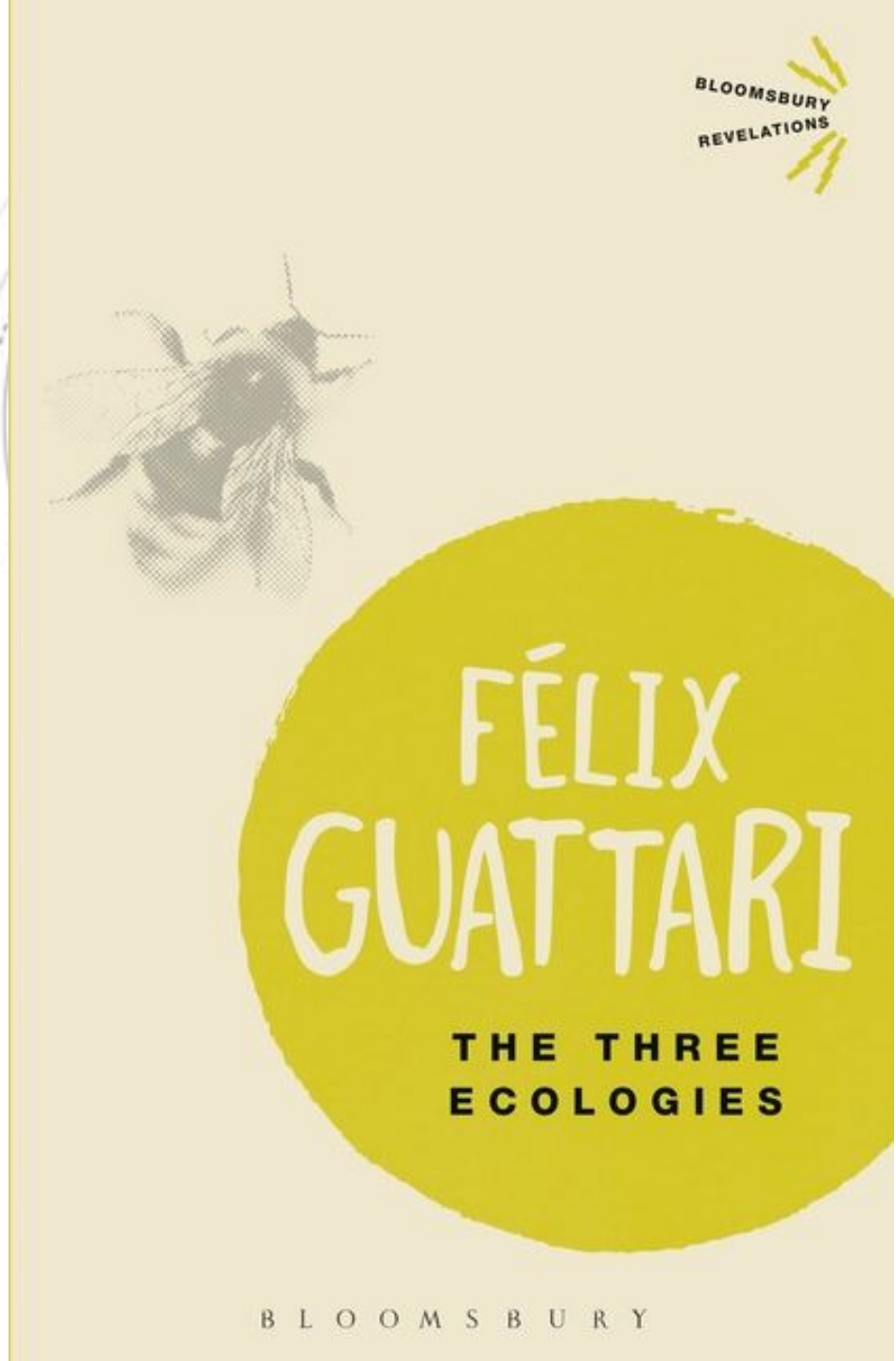
The Three Ecologies

By Felix Guattari



Even though ***The Three Ecologies*** was published in 1989, and offers some approaches to the global ecological crisis, most of the problems it highlights still continue today, some have even become more amplified as we persist to collectively commit *ecocide* as a species.

In this book, Felix Guattari re-defines the dictionary meaning of the word **ecology**, traditionally limited to the natural world, and extends its meaning to include **human subjective ecologies and socio-political ecologies.** *The main problem with the crisis of our era he asserts lies in the separation of these three registers.*



The Sublime

In aesthetics, the **sublime** (from the Latin sublīmis) is the quality of greatness, whether physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual, or artistic. The term especially refers to a greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation.



Shock and Awe

The Sublime in the Age of the Anthropocene

Nature versus Culture – we are part of both and there are complex relationships between them



The Industrial Sublime | Edward Burtynsky

Curating the Shock and Awe Exhibition

An Exhibition around the Eco-sublime to be hosted at the Tate Modern – Boiler Room

What is the Sublime?

A word that is much used and abused….

A word whose common usage has been trivialised…

The Sublime -Theory developed by Edmund Burke in the mid eighteenth century, where he defined sublime art as art that refers to a greatness beyond all possibility of calculation, measurement or imitation



Representation of the Sublime

Artists have been striving to re-present the sublime for centuries

The sublime should be experienced first hand

Once, Turner had lashed himself to the mast of a ship for several hours, furious a furious storm, so that he could later paint the storm. Obviously, it was not the storm itself that Turner intended to paint. What he intended to paint was a representation of the storm. One's language is frequently imprecise in the that manner, I have discovered.



JMW Tuner | The Bell Rock Lighthouse | 1819

Long Live Longinus!

On the Sublime

…the sublime landscape even touches upon the divine.

"Nature has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves"

(Longinus). [1st Century AD Roman-era Greek]





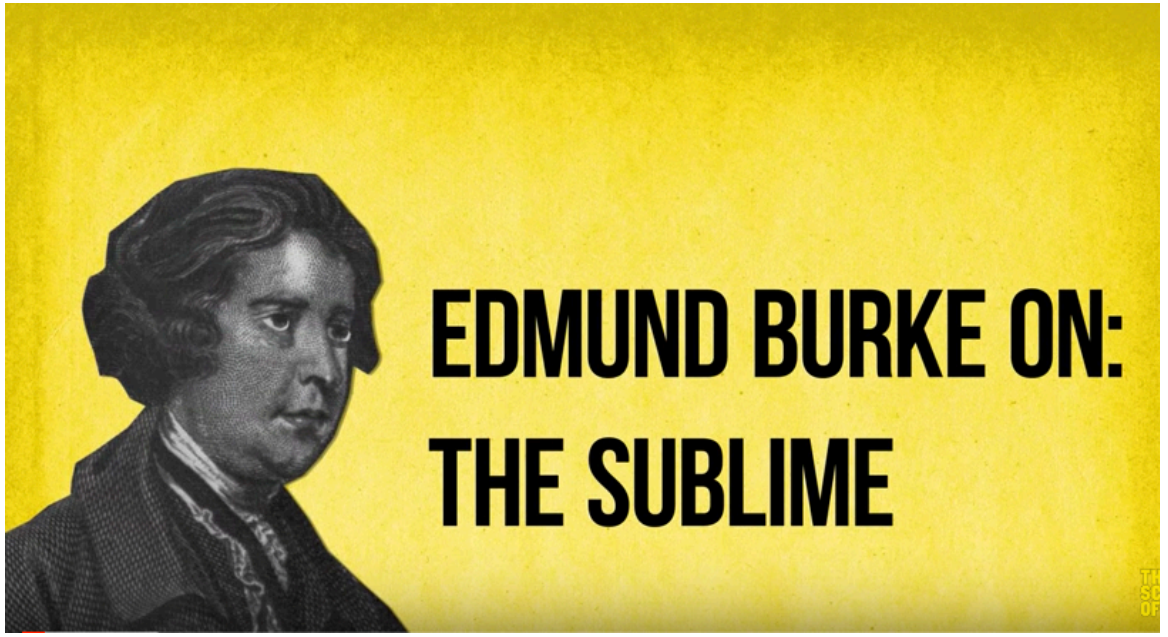


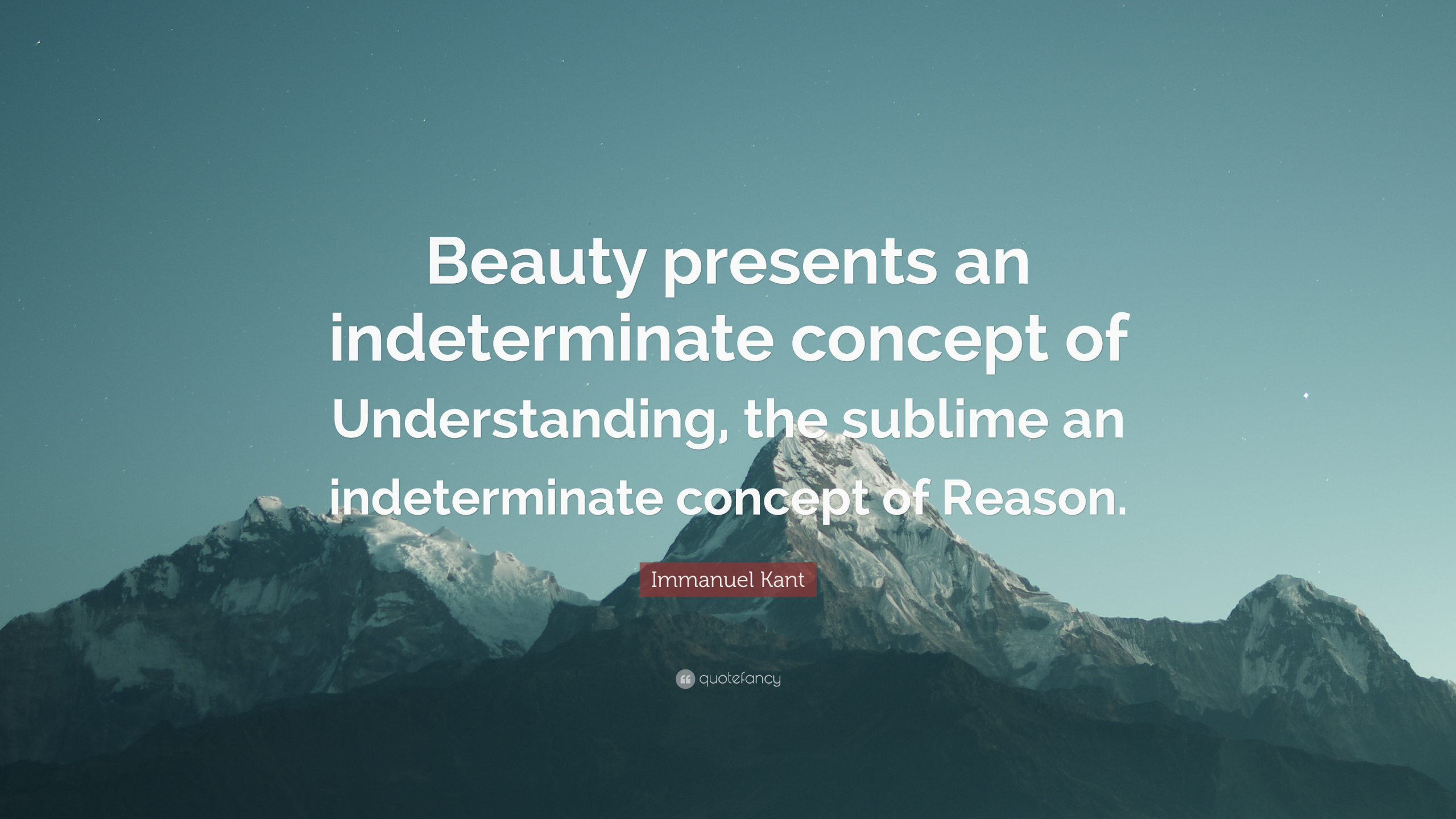
Edmund Burke

The theory of sublime art was put forward by **Edmund Burke** in ***A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*** published in 1757.

He defined the sublime as an artistic effect productive of the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling.

He wrote ‘whatever is in any sort terrible or is conversant about terrible objects or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime’.




Beauty presents an indeterminate concept of Understanding, the sublime an indeterminate concept of Reason.
Immanuel Kant
quotefancy

The Moral Influence of the Sublime

Aesthetics can influence Ethics

Art/Nature ‘moves’ People

Humility

inspiration

Transcendence

insight

Negative Pleasures

The dynamic sublime evokes both awe and fear; it induces a 'negative lust' in which attraction and repulsion melt into one ambiguous experience.



Martin’s paintings with their dizzying detail and macro-perspectives, were the ‘IMAX films’ of their day…

John Martin *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* 1852 Oil on canvas 136.3 x 212.3 cm
Courtesy Laing Art Gallery, Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums

Wright emphasises the drama of the erupting Vesuvius through contrasts: between the tranquility of the sea and the violence of the volcano, the cool light reflected from the moon and clouds with the hellish spewing of fire and lava. In comparison to the volatile power of the volcano, the tiny foreground figures stress man's insignificance before the sublime grandeur of nature. Wright did not witness the eruption of Vesuvius in 1777, but it clearly spurred his imagination. He returned repeatedly to the subject, and produced over thirty views of the volcano.



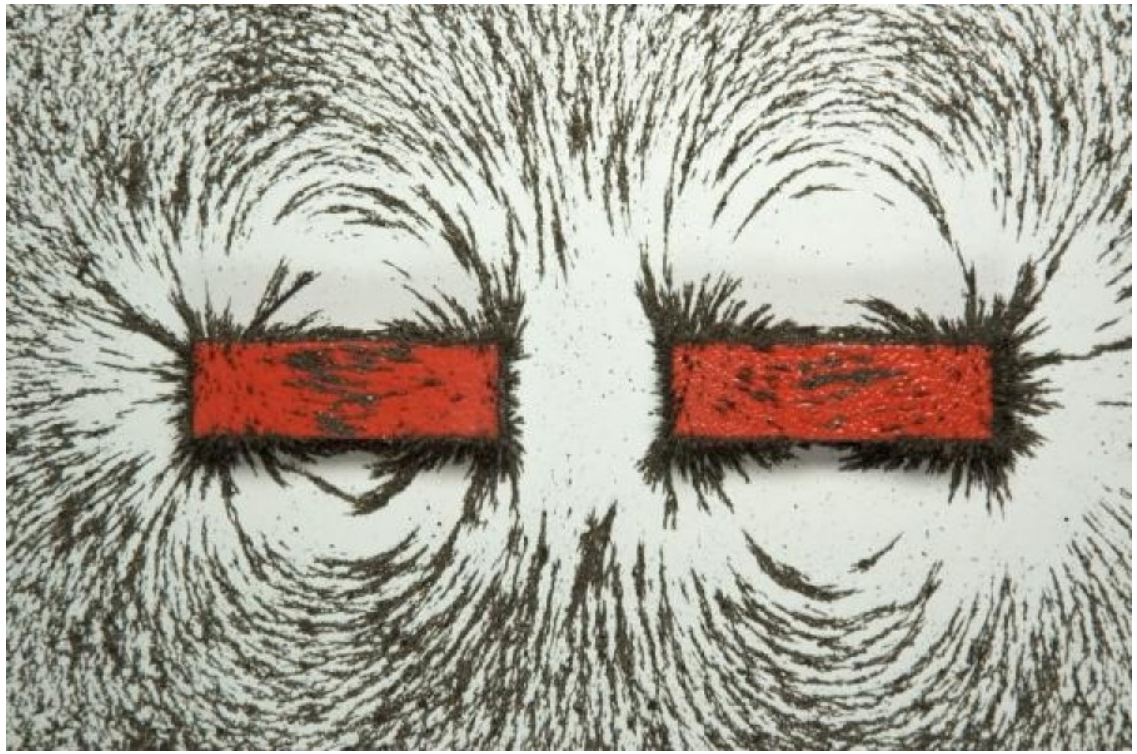
Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples
c.1776–80

The ‘Magnetism’ of the Sublime

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant argued that the *sublime* involves both a sense of **attraction** and **repulsion**, in contrast to the *beautiful*, which contained only **attraction**.

The simultaneous experience of awe and terror



The beautiful attracts

The sublime attracts and repulses

The Romantic Sublime

Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757) connected the sublime with experiences of awe, terror and danger. Burke saw nature as the most sublime object, capable of generating the strongest sensations in its beholders. This Romantic conception of the sublime proved influential for several generations of artists.

Immanuel Kant, in his Critique of Judgement (1790), also set out to explore what happens at the borderline where reason finds its limits. He characterized three types of sublimity: the awful, the lofty and the splendid, and continued and deepened the shift of focus initiated by Burke, by asserting that the sublime was not so much a formal quality of some natural phenomenon as a subjective conception – something that happens in the mind.



Joseph Mallord William Turner
Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth exhibited 1842



Joseph Mallord William Turner
Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth exhibited 1842

Turner was friends with the scientists Michael Faraday and Mary Somerville

The Sublime in Crisis: Landscape Painting after Turner

In the latter half of the nineteenth century some artists abandoned the pursuit of the sublime for reasons of taste, others because of an increased interest in beauty and scientific realism.

Nevertheless, the sublime still held great importance for many Victorian artists, even as they distanced themselves from the sublime of the Romantic era.



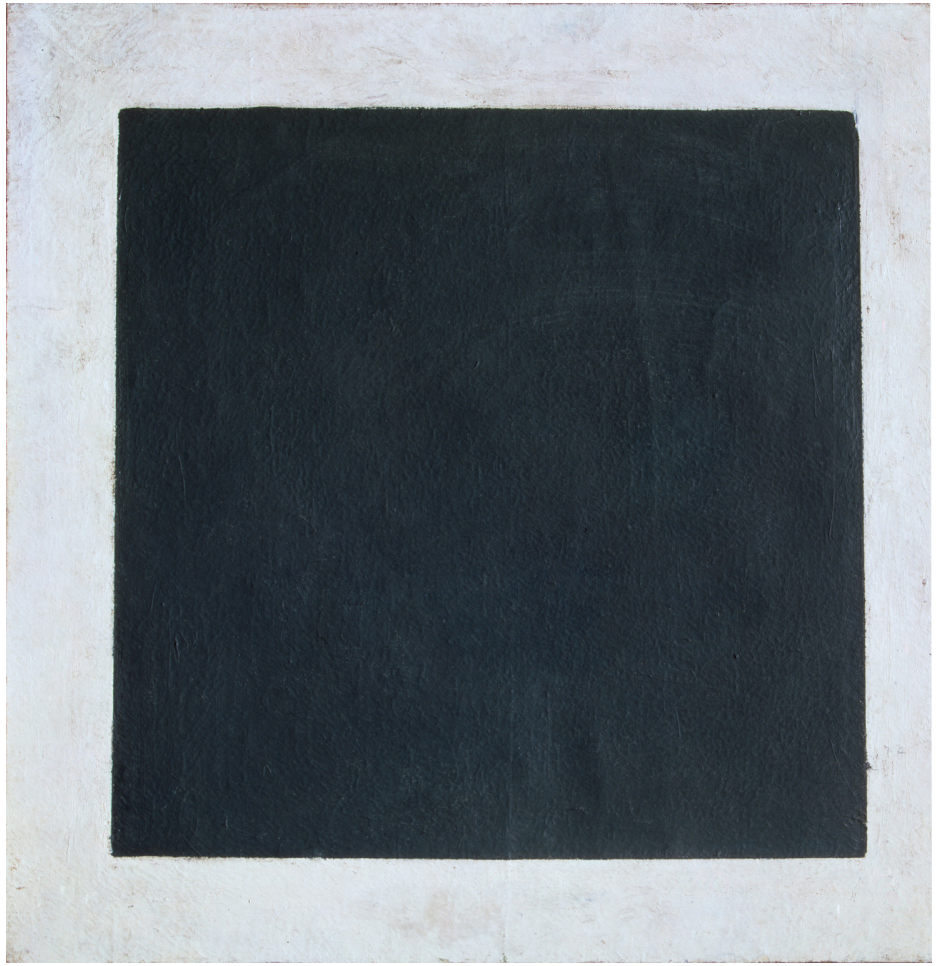
Landscapes of Immersion:



John Brett | *The British Channel Seen from the Dorsetshire Cliffs* 1871

FINITUDE

THE LIMITS OF REASON | THE LIMITS OF COMPREHENSION



Kazimir Malevich | *Black Square* 1930 | Oil on canvas

The Contemporary Sublime

STARING INTO THE VOID

THE LIMITS OF PERCEPTION

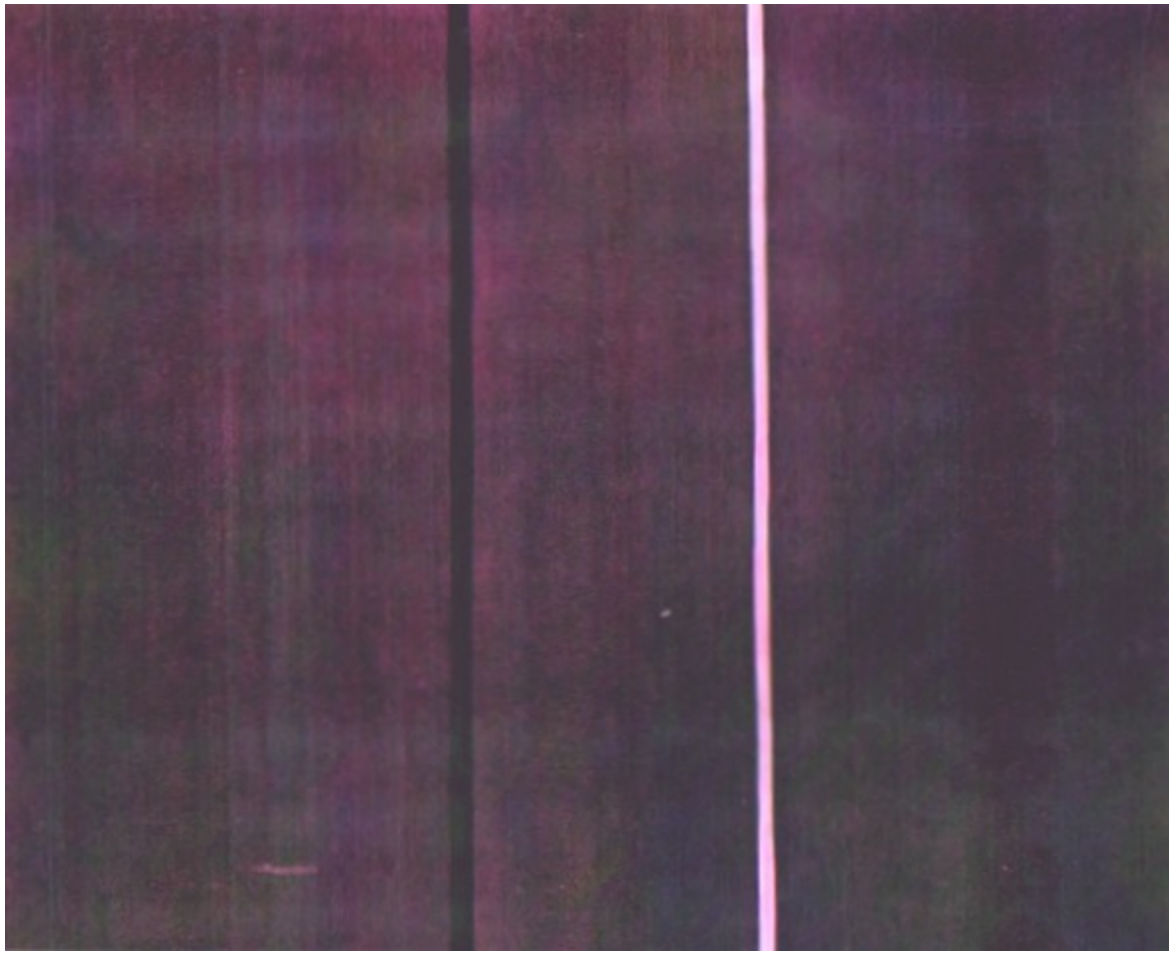
The Sublime is Now

Barnet Newman 1948 – 'The Sublime is Now'

The sublime is a term that has been heavily employed in art writing over the past twenty years. Too heavily, it may be.

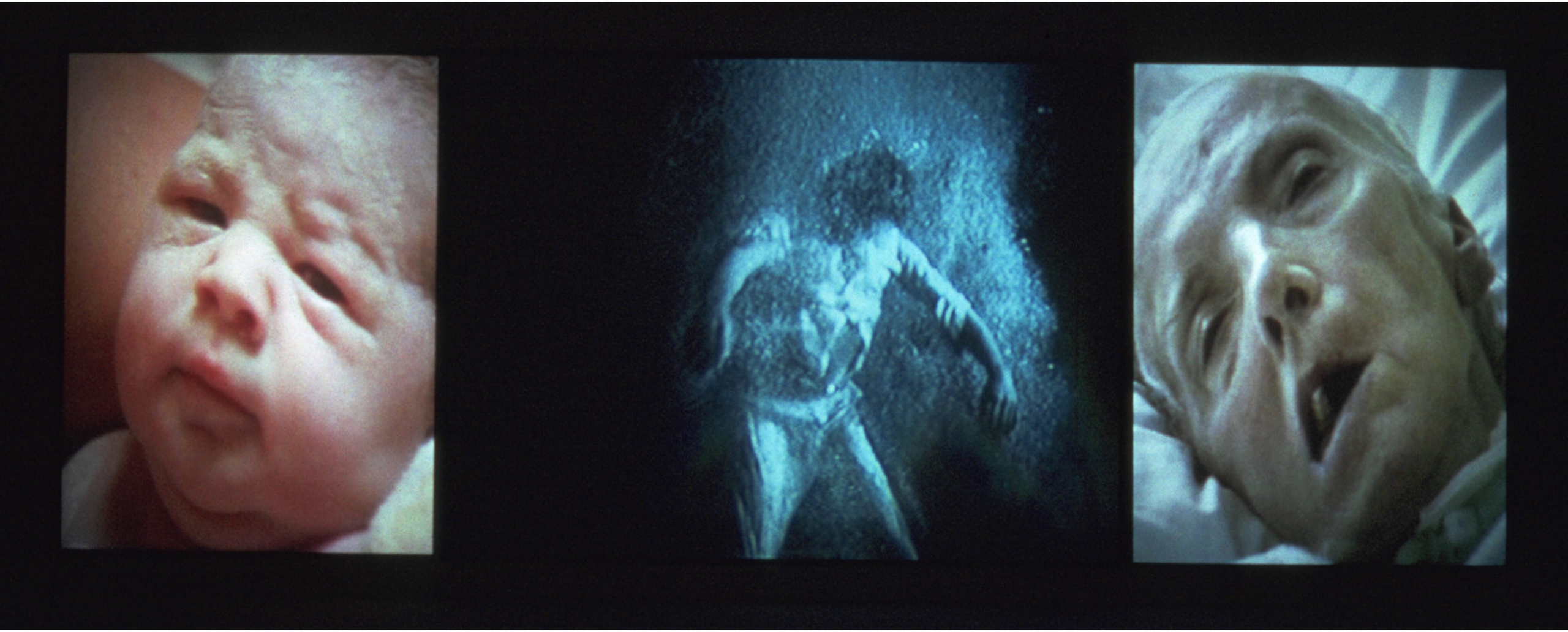
References to it have come from so many angles that it is in danger of losing any coherent meaning.

We have been offered everything from ***'the techno-sublime'*** and '***the eco-sublime'*** to ***'the Gothic sublime'*** and ***'the suburban sublime'*** : anything from *volcanoes and vitrines to still life's and soft toys may be sniffed at for sublimity.*



'the impulse of modern art' resides in the 'desire to destroy beauty'.

Visual Theology |Bill Viola and the Sublime



Nantes Triptych | 1992

RA

Royal Academy of Arts

Bill Viola Michelangelo

Life Death Rebirth



26 January – 31 March 2019

Exhibition organised by the Royal Academy of Arts, London in partnership with Royal Collection Trust and with the collaboration of Bill Viola Studio

SCALE

MACRO-PERSEPCTIVES | MICRO-PERSPECTIVES

Ansel Adams and the Sublime

Wilderness to Wasteland: The Sublime, the Picturesque and the Uncanny in the Photography of the American West

American landscape and wilderness photography has lived under the aegis of the aesthetic, and in particular, under the sign of the **sublime and the picturesque,** for some time. Ansel Adams' photographs of towering mountains and canyons are arguably major expressions, exemplars and evokers of the **sublime** in photography.

The **sublime** involves the formlessness of uplifting spectacles and produces feelings of awe and terror. By contrast, Carleton Watkins's photographs of mountains reflected in still lakes express the **picturesque** in photography. The **picturesque** presents well-formed depictions of serene scenery and produces feelings of pleasure.



Sublime



Ansel Adams, *Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite Valley*, 1942

Picturesque



Carlton Watkins | View from Camp Grove, Yosemite



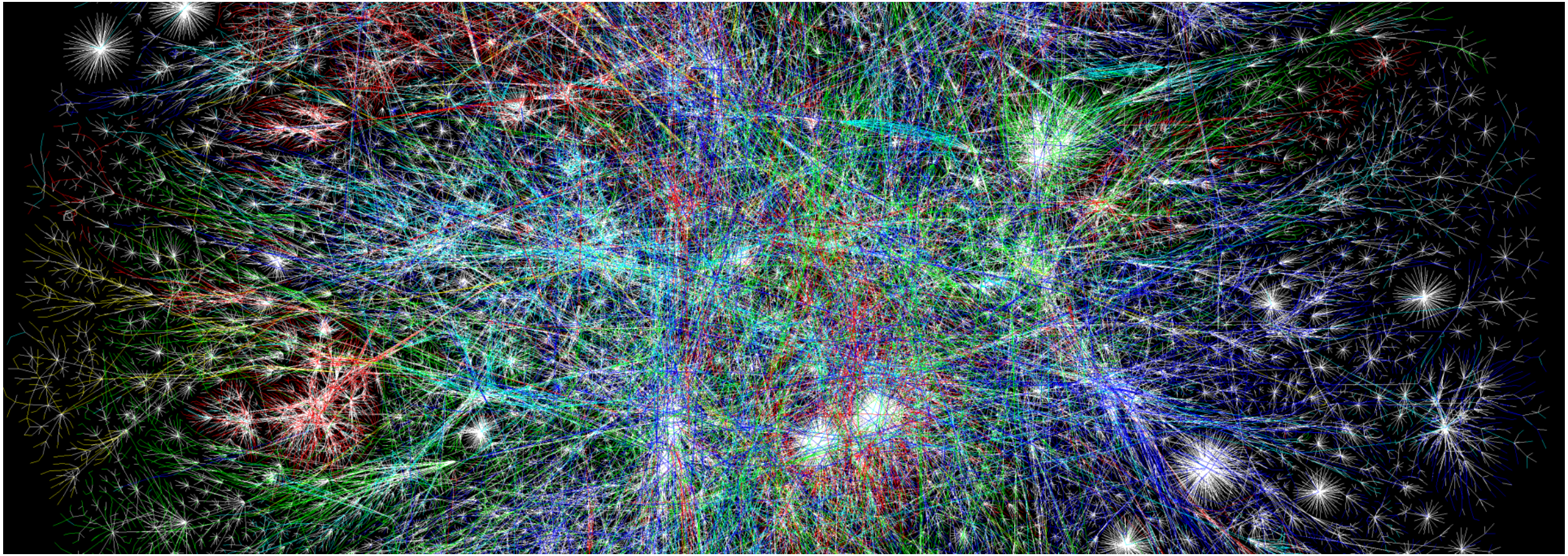
Thunderclouds | Lake Garnet | Ansel Adams

The Technological Sublime

…awesome but a a bit boring...

The sublime is an aesthetic concept of 'the exalted,' of beauty that is grand and dangerous. Through 17th and 18th century European intellectual tradition, the sublime became intimately associated with nature. Only in the 20th century, did the technological sublime replace the natural sublime. Have our sense of awe and terror been transferred to factories, war machines, and the unknowable, infinite possibilities suggested by computers and genetic engineering?

The Internet – The Networked Society



The contemporary technological sublime finds expression in an affective combination of elevated emotion and banality – a combination in which the subject also **encounters the limits of the self.**

TERROR

FORBIDDEN PLEASURES

AFTER 9/11: PHOTOGRAPHY, THE DESTRUCTIVE SUBLIME, AND THE POSTMODERN ARCHIVE

"9/11 wicked but a work of art, says"
Damien Hirst

The events of 9/11, he'd enthused, were "the greatest work of art imaginable for the whole cosmos." Karlheinz Stockhausen

Both artists later apologised for there remarks, although both of them were articulating the dark ambiguity of the sublime







Top: Thomas Cole, *The Course of Empire: Destruction*, 1836.

Below: A photograph of the aftermath of the attacks, September 2001.

SHOCK AND AWE

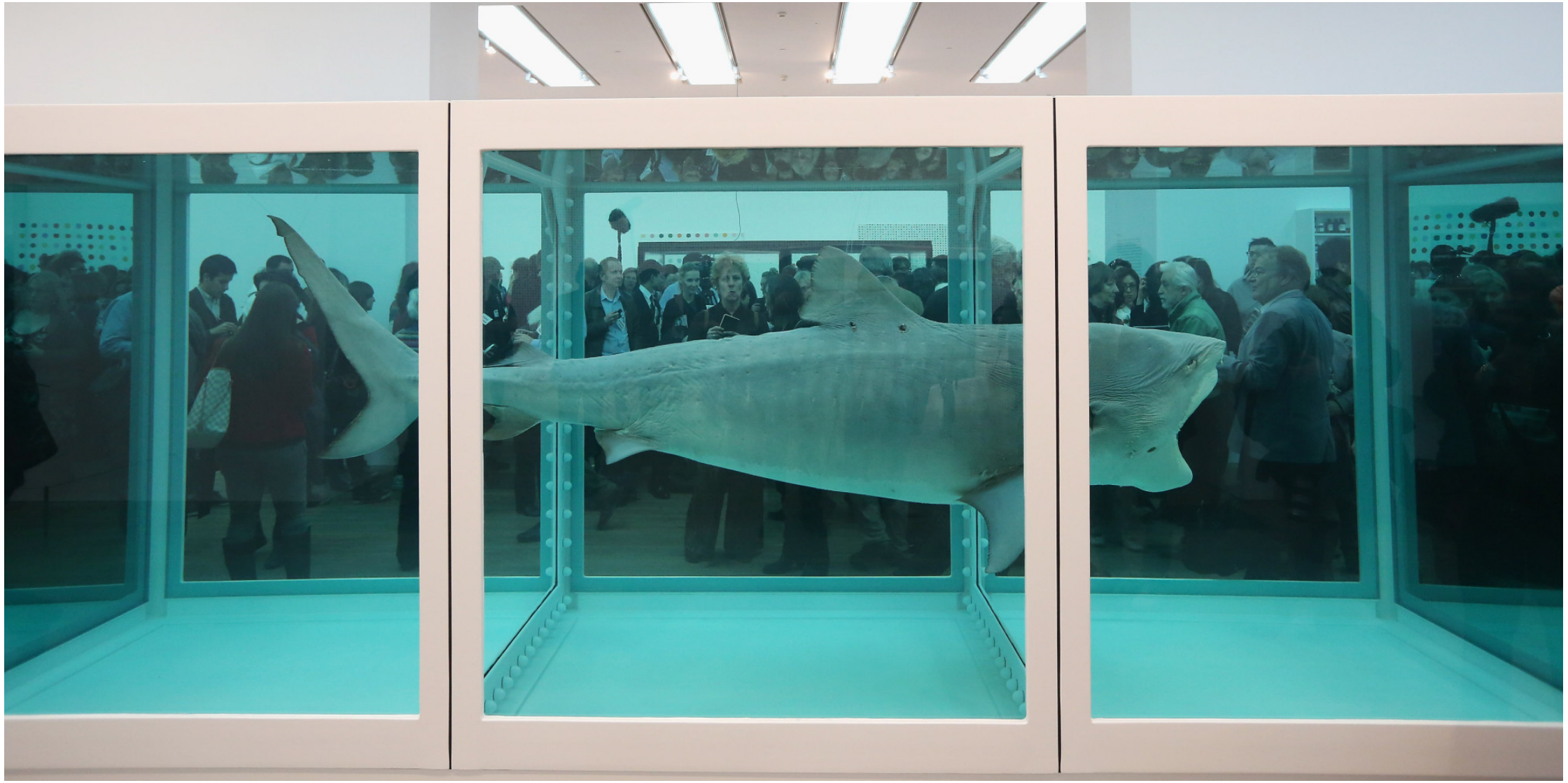
BEAUTIFUL BOMBS

The terrible and the sublime

Edmund Burke







The Capitalist Sublime

The nature we meet in Hirst's art work is transformed…
a terrible sublimity of this new conception of nature.

GURSKY

The German photographer Andreas Gursky takes pictures of enormous spaces stock exchanges, skyscrapers, mountain peaks-in which crowds of people look tiny and relentless, making their presence felt in the world, like a minute, leisurely colony of ants.

Also like ants, these people appear to spend little time examining their own encroachment-architectural, technological, and personal-on the natural world.

In their determined, oblivious way, the people in his photographs make clear that there is no longer any nature uncharted by man. In place of nature we find the invasive landmarks of a global economy.

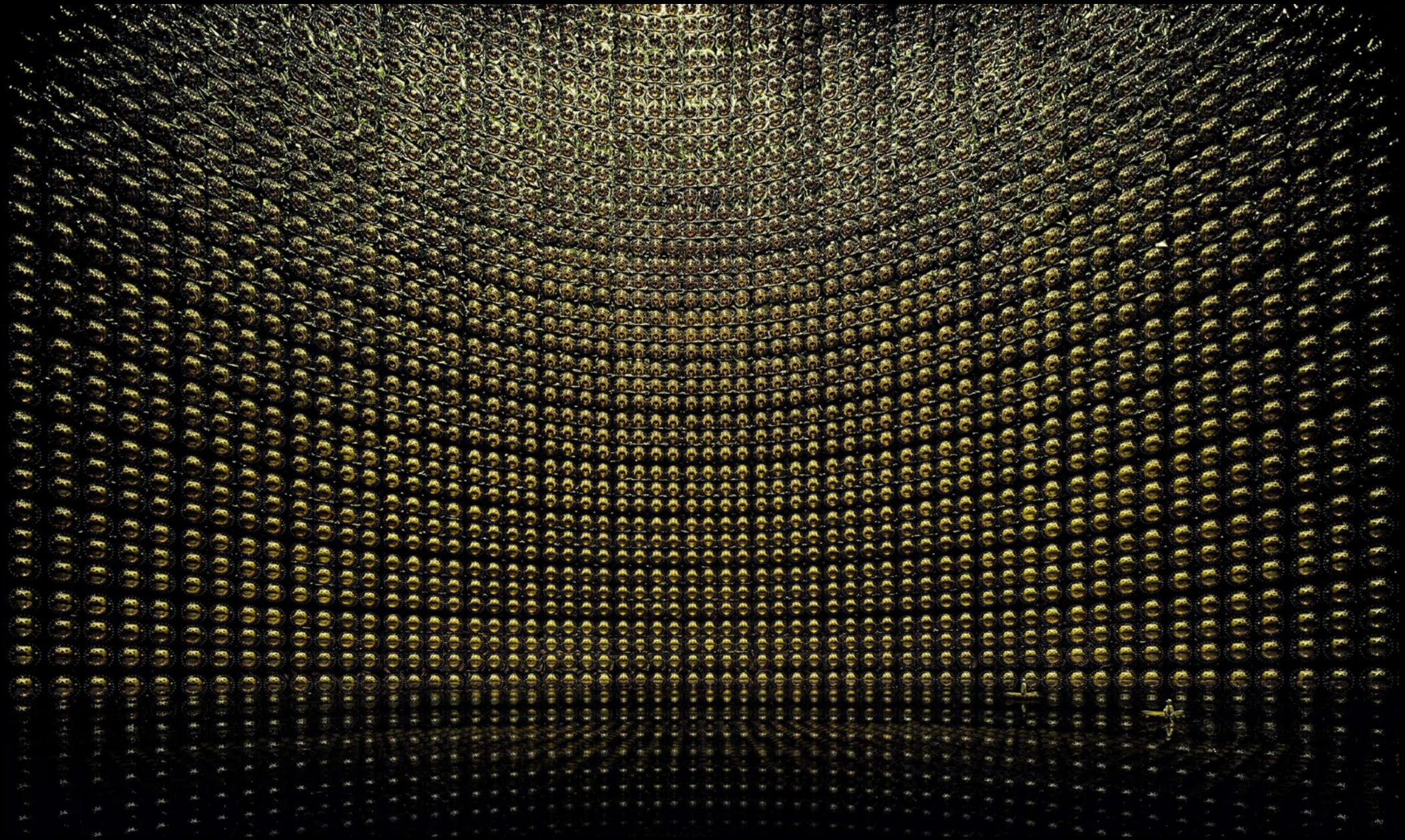
Taken as a whole, Gursky's work constitutes a map of the postmodern civilized world.



It's the inhumanity isn't it that suggests the sublime. We interpret the people as tiny and akin to making their presence felt in the world, like a minute, leisurely colony of ants. Is this not a landmark of a global economy and does not this work constitute a map of the postmodern civilized world?



https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/hayward-gallery-art/andreas-gursky



Subjugating the micro for the macro. Contriving the reality for the purpose of the image. Gursky



© Andreas Gursky/DACS, 2017?



BURTYNSKY



Edward Burtynsky
Oil Spill #2, Discoverer Enterprise, Gulf of Mexico, May 11, 2010
Digital, colour print on paper



Edward Burtynsky
Oxford Tire Pile #8, Westley, California, USA 1999
Dye coupler print
68.6 x 86.4 cm
Courtesy Flowers Gallery, London © Edward Burtynsky






A FILM BY JENNIFER BAICHWAL, NICHOLAS DE PENCIER
AND EDWARD BURTYNSKY
ANTHROPOCENE
THE HUMAN EPOCH
NARRATED BY ALICIA VIKANDER
mongrel



JAMES TURRELL

COSMOLOGICAL | ASTRONOMICAL SUBLIME

James Turrell | Roden Crater

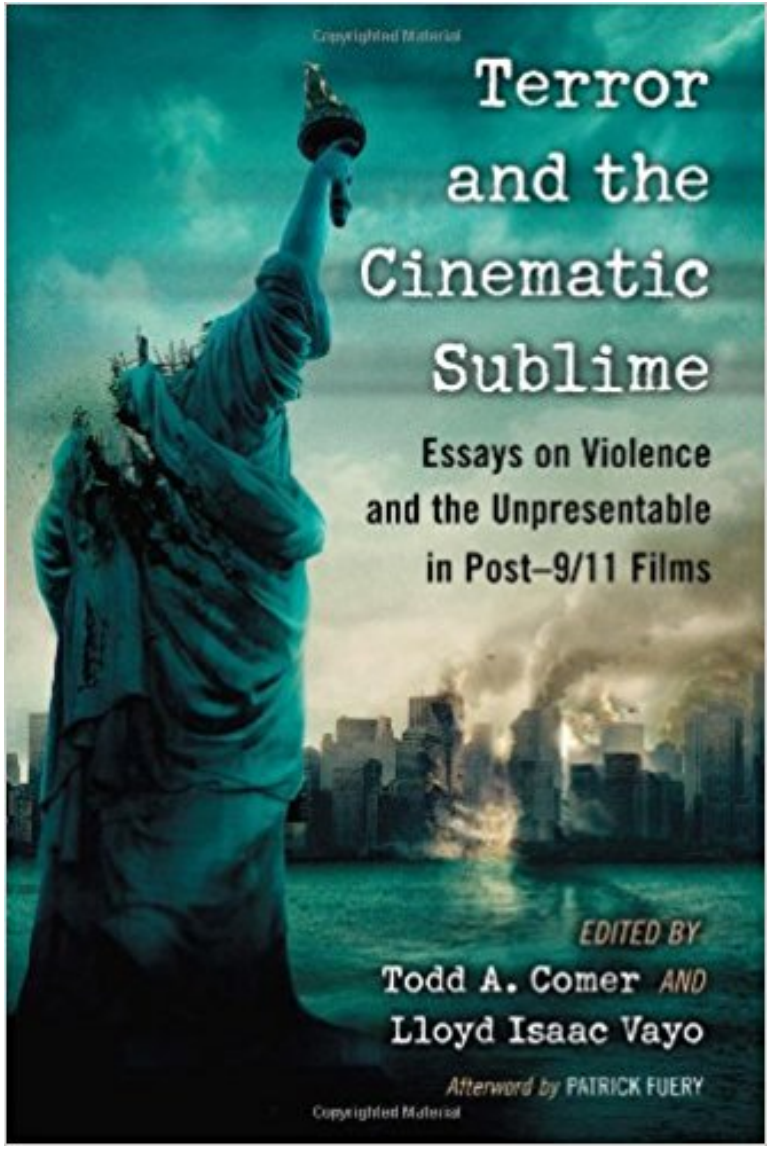


"My desire is to set up a situation to which I take you and let you see.
It becomes your experience."



Roden Crater | James Turrell

CINEMATIC SUBLIME







The Sublime - Evolving within Historico-cultural Context

The sublime as concept and cultural practice has played a central role in western understanding, engaging aesthetic, spiritual and ethical values ranging from the mid seventeenth-century translations of **Longinus, to Burkean and Kantian** sublimes of the proto-Romantic and Romantic periods, via nineteenth-century concerns with science and theology to recent theoretical writing.

However, there is still much to be investigated in the spaces between art, language and nature.

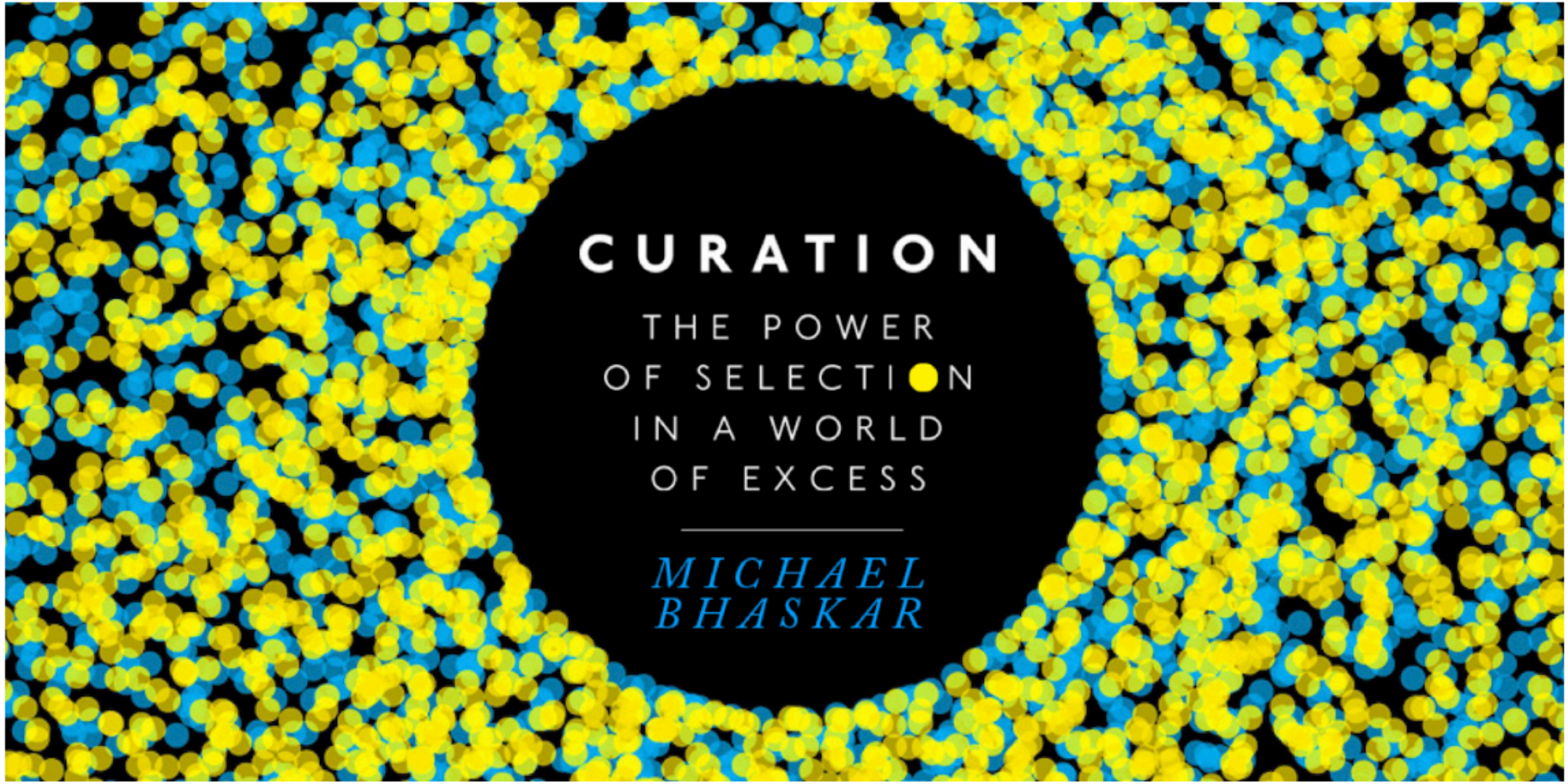
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Curation : *n*. using acts of selecting and arranging to add value

HANS ULRICH OBRIST



