

The Sapphic Sublime of Frederick Sommer

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Signed Declaration

I, John Timberlake, affirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Abstract

The central focus of my thesis is the aesthetics of the sublime in the work of Frederick Sommer (1905-1999), beginning with, but extending beyond, an encounter with Sommer's Arizona landscape photography of the World War II period. Sommer's oeuvre is notable for its cross disciplinary character, with no single element – photography, collage or drawing (this latter could as easily be described as painting) accorded primacy, and the thesis acknowledges this aspect as central to reading both the works individually and Sommer's practice collectively. The multifarious aspect of Sommer's practice has resonances with my own artistic concerns in relation to photography, drawing, montage and landscape.

Taking Sommer's desert floor photographs of 1940-45 as a starting point, I problematise the Kant-derived conceptions of the sublime in what is, to date, the most prominent monograph commentary on Sommer. I argue that the radical nature of Sommer's work of this period does not conform to the descriptions offered by Kant, and, moreover, that what is significant about the works of this period are the formal challenges to the figure/ground dyadic relationships associated with depictions of the Kantian sublime. The thesis goes on to explore the sublime affect in Sommer's oeuvre, as a whole, and I discuss the affective tropes of fragmentation and immersion that are constitutive of it. Reviewing some of the writing on Sommer's work to date, the thesis draws upon a close reading of Sommer's photographic prints and technique in the context of his wider practice, alongside work done over the past four decades in Literature, Women's Studies, Lesbian and Gay Studies and Classical Studies, to propose that a model of the Sapphic Sublime as appropriate to Sommer's work of this period. To this end, throughout the thesis and my

reading of Sommer, I draw upon theories pertaining to literature as much as visual art.

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Introduction

Landscape and the Sublime

As the title suggests, the central focus of my thesis is the aesthetic experience engendered by the work of Frederick Sommer. As I demonstrate, this extends well beyond landscape *per se* – the present thesis extends to consider other genres visited by Frederick Sommer – but it was an encounter with Sommer’s landscape work 1940-1945 which instigated this project, and through which I first made a connection with issues in my own work. As the title suggests also, I have drawn comparisons between the visual work of Sommer and the lyrical work of Sappho of Lesbos. I have made such connections through comparison and contrast, having established commonality on the basis of similarities in terms of form, content and affect, which I have evaluated in relation to criteria and conditions that I set out in the course of my thesis.

Landscape has remained a recurrent theme in my practice for most of my artistic life, pre-dating my time as a BA student. This thesis arises out of that engagement, and, in particular, the work that I have done since 1999. Having said that, it is, of course, not an account *per se* of that work. Rather, much of the thrust of the thesis can be described as having been formulated in relationship to my studio practice in such a manner that at times the thesis is as much corollary as it is proposition.

For a significant time, the attraction for me as an artist to landscape lay in its dyadic relationships: that is to say, between what was regarded as natural and unnatural, between figure and ground, and the relation between the viewer and the viewed. Thinking and writing about Frederick Sommer’s work in relation to discourses of the sublime prompted me to consider the limitations of these predicates. In his 1994 essay, ‘The Effects of Landscape’, Charles Harrison argues that any limitation of a discussion around figure /ground relations in landscape depiction to those images which contain the human figure would be to miss the point:

Clearly the significance of figure-ground relations in painting is not restricted to the matter of how human figures are represented in pictorial spaces [...] what is at issue is the relationship of the notional spectator to that which the picture shows – or to that which is conceived as picturable. (1994:217)

Moreover, Harrison goes on to argue:

“an inclination to question the relations of figure to ground can be considered a telling qualification for the spectator of a modern painting *only to the extent that figure ground relations serve pictorially to symbolize real relations*” CH emphasis (1994: 218).

It is in the light of this second quote that I found my engagement with the work of Sommer yielding interesting channels of enquiry: Harrison’s phrase ‘*only to the extent*’ gestures towards a corollary around which, it might seem, the unsettling absences in Sommer’s landscapes – not only of represented figures, but also the difficulty of positioning an imagined spectator ‘to that which the picture shows’ – are constituted. The work of Frederick Sommer, which I focus upon in this thesis, tests the limits, and goes beyond, that extent defined by Harrison. If this thesis therefore, spends considerable time discussing the nature of figure ground relations in the context of photographs that seem to formally dispense with such, it is with just cause; namely to establish where that work can be placed, and what is at stake within it, in relation to one of the key compositional devices – and assumptions of viewership – within the genre of landscape.

In his seminal book and television series *Ways of Seeing* of the early 1970s, the art critic and writer John Berger makes a special historical case for landscape painting. Berger argues that prior to what he terms ‘the recent interest in ecology’, ‘aspects of nature were objects of scientific study, but nature as a whole defied possession’ (1972: 105). Berger argues that the intangibility of skies and horizons – the stuff of landscape – served no pressing social or economic need, nor could they be used to reflect social status. At its inception, therefore, landscape as a genre held no privileged status. Of course,

paradoxically, those same characteristics allow landscape to be viewed as transcendent in traditions such as European Romanticism. Although he does not phrase it precisely as I am about to, what Berger seems to argue is that as capitalist economies and social relations emerged and developed, this transcendent aspect of *natural* landscape was expressed in particular ways. Firstly, landscape is ‘natural’ in that it is taken for granted, it is seen as a ‘given’ beyond that which is fabricated by humans. Secondly, this perception of landscape and nature focuses upon individual experience, for the sovereign individual is constituted and differentiated at the very point that it is counterposed to and distinguished from the boundlessness of the ‘rest of’ nature. That is to say, when nature is noticed, it is seen in relationship to, but separate to each individual’s experience. This is the point at which a ‘landscape’ is constituted, and it is also the point at which landscape and what is natural are seen as one and the same thing, so that the means of that constitution are erased. As W.J.T. Mitchell (1994:1) has demonstrated, the struggle to reverse that erasure entails seeing the very word ‘landscape’ not as a verb but a noun. As an artist my feeling has always been that if there is ‘something to be had’ for artists today in the genre of landscape, it lies in the engagement with, and manipulation of, that nexus of relations, or, indeed, the interrogation of that nexus through some formal device. In many of the art histories of the twentieth century, such a radical formal device is found in montage. For Peter Bürger, (1984: 79) montage as it emerges in Dadaism, Surrealism and early modernism calls for a critical hermeneutics that can discern the ‘fragments of the real’ as discrete elements, and also as a coherent whole. Therein lies montage’s ability to problematise the *Schein* (appearance or ‘figuration’) of the ‘organic’ work of art, which, as per Kant, appears ‘clothed in the appearance of nature’, but also allows for the work’s processes of production and its origins in a wider social context, to be evidenced in the work. Bürger’s description of the demands posed by montage is constitutive of a dynamic tension both in the work and in the viewing subject. I argue in this thesis that Sommer’s work embodies such a tension, but my focus is that aesthetic and affective price such exacts. Further, by drawing upon the work of Sappho of Lesbos (6th Century BCE) and literature around and commentaries around her work I argue that in the context of the work’s character and concerns with both landscape and body, this tension in Sommer’s work creates a play of affect that can be described as ‘the Sapphic sublime’.

Arguably, landscape also evinces another dyadic relationship to that of figure and ground: namely, that between the evocation of space and the implication of time. In this thesis I do not seek to treat this issue separately to what I have already listed above. Rather, I argue that the temporal aspect of landscape is, again, constitutive, and I account for it in my thesis on Sommer's work and the Sapphic Sublime accordingly. Perhaps the poignancy in making landscape pictures lies in the sense that, as a representational endeavour ostensibly engaged primarily with representing the spatial, it nevertheless attempts to straddle at least two senses of the temporal: the historical and geological. To this might be added a third, namely the subjective sense of time, something which Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderers* and *Moonwatchers*, which I discuss below in Chapter 3, perhaps reflect most famously. It is the sense of subjective time in landscape which leads us directly back to the question of the subjective space of landscape, namely that of the viewer, whether doubled within the picture as an ideal, or implicit in the combination of picture's framing and the implied position of the camera or painter; and it is within this context, that of the subject, that the idea of *rupture* becomes central to another aspects of this thesis – the sublime.

To this end, perhaps, Frederick Sommer, whose practice is the central object of study for this thesis, had frequent recourse to montage, both in its classic photographic form of photomontage, in which the discrete elements are re-photographed upon the copy stand, and also, later in his career, in collages of found images. Yet, significantly, Sommer's challenge to normative landscape conventions also appear in very different form, in a series of non-montage photographs of the Arizona desert between 1940-1945. I argue here that what is significant in these works constitute an inversion of the montage technique – in so far as the fragmentation is not to be found in the picture surface, but in a sensation within the viewer suggestive of psychic fragmentation.

Chapter outline of the present thesis

In Chapter 1, I introduce and discuss in detail the work of Sommer, looking at the formal character and composition of works from various points in his career pertinent to my thesis. I evaluate and critique some of the both contemporary and recent writing and scholarship around Sommer, drawing in particular upon that of Ian Walker, whilst looking at a description by Keith F. Davis of the rocks in Sommer's Arizona landscapes as 'sublime as the starry skies'. I suggest this quote, which draws directly upon the Kantian conception of the sublime, does not adequately describe the experience of looking at Sommer's landscapes. This leads me to argue that Sommer's radical interpretation of the landscape genre embodies a sense of fragmentation, tension and multi-positionality, first observed by the critic Jain Kelly in 1973, which bears close similarity to the description of the Sapphic Sublime contained in Philip Shaw's *The Sublime* (2006).

In Chapter 2, I set out in detail the correlations I perceive between Sommer's work and the Sapphic Sublime, and, in turn, the correlation between the tropes of the Sapphic Sublime and the Kleinian account of the pre-Oedipal. I propose the Sapphic Sublime as a moment of crisis not satisfactorily resolved in the fashion outlined by Kant, which correlates with the deflationary or 'abridged' experience of intensity associated with Eliot. In the course of making this correlation between sublimity in Art and that found in Literature, I look closely at the work of a range of late twentieth century literary critics on the sublime, as well as contributions drawn from the fields of Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, Women's Studies and Classical Studies. Through the writings of literary theorists Barbara Clare Freeman, Yopie Prins, John J. Winkler and Paige Du Bois, I trace and define the conception of the Sapphic Sublime. I go on to look at the influential work of Thomas Weiskel in relation to these literary theorists, examining his analogue between the transcendent Kantian sublime and the tripartite model of the psyche found in psychoanalysis, and, again drawing upon recent scholarly work, I look at the implications of the Sapphic sublime upon such an analogue, drawing further upon literary papers that have used Weiskel, particularly in relation to T.S.Eliot's work *The Wasteland*. In so doing, I

suggest that the 'Sapphic Sublime' might occupy a position of alterity to the more hegemonic description of the sublime associated with Burke and Kant.

In Chapter 3, I return to the figure / ground dyad within landscape, examining its supercessionary persistence and mutations as a trope. I consider two influences in my own art practice in relation to a figure in a landscape witnessing the Sublime event: my work around the Imperial War Museum photographic archive showing documentation of British nuclear tests, and my own experience of witnessing the events of 11 September 2001 whilst I was living in New York City. After reconsidering the implications of figures in landscape pictures that became sources within my own practice, I go on to suggest ways in which the recurrence of the figure in landscape shifts in its constitution as subject, both in its centred, de-centred and abolished form. This in turn, leads on, away from figures *per se*, to further reflection upon the figure / ground relation in landscape. I consider Sommer's use of the word 'landscape', alongside his formal challenges to what was normative to that genre - in the context of Leo Marx's 1991 essay 'The American Ideology of Space' and Joel Snyder's 1994 discussion of the dialectic between Timothy O'Sullivan's pioneering topographic survey photographs and the picturesque work of his contemporary Carleton Watkins.

Charles Harrison's 1994 remarks cited above are drawn from an essay in which he discussed the horizonless landscape of Georgia O'Keeffe's *Red and Yellow Cliffs* (1940), contemporaneous to Sommer's desert photographs, and it is in this light that I consider ways in which O'Keeffe's work differs from those of Sommer. By comparing and contrasting the different ways in which the figure is constituted in my chosen examples of landscape picturing relevant both to my own practice and the contexts for Frederick Sommer's photographs of the 1940s, I also make the link between the figure and the representation of time in landscape, and I discuss the implications of this in relation to the sublime. I propose that the sublime experience must have implications for our perception of time, as well as space. By way of comparison and contrast, I look at the work of Louis Marin in relation to time and the sublime ruin, and consider Anthony Vidler's related use of the Burkeian sublime in relation to architecture. It is in this context that I propose the collapsing of figure / ground relations in

Sommer's desert landscapes creates a radical sense of 'timelessness' in the pictures which, rather than based upon the representation of human ideal, is predicated upon tensions, evacuations and fragmentations within the overall image.

Having posed the relationship of time to space in landscape in Chapter 3, in Chapter 4 I consider how the question of time and timelessness might be posed in relation to Sommer's work in more detail. By briefly revisiting Thomas Weiskel's schema, and looking at the writings of Freud and Klein and later psychoanalysts, I consider the Psychoanalytical conception of the Unconscious as a site of both drives which become dialecticised through conscious desire, and the a site of timelessness which becomes dialecticized though the subject's sense of the temporal. I also consider the role of excess in relation to lack or absence within Sommer's work, and its fragmented representation of both spatial and temporal references, drawing upon the feminist psychoanalytical critique of Eliot's Objective Correlative and Herz's account of Longinus and Benjamin. Aligning temporality with my earlier consideration of positionality in Sommer's work through a Klein-inflected account of the Sapphic Sublime, I consider this in relation to those works of Sommer that make affective play around the destabilized relationship of these elements. This leads me to explain what I propose as the key differences between that type of discourse and the one I am proposing in relation to time in relation to Sommer's work. In the context of landscape as an amalgam of space and time, I look at the wider implications of the Sapphic Sublime in Sommer's work, examining its contemporary relevance and its pertinence to political and cultural theory. Drawing upon contemporary accounts as well as Klein's own writing and that of her later Structuralist and post Structuralist interlocutors, I differentiate the crisis of the Sapphic Sublime in art from that of complete subjective disintegration.

I should, also by way of introduction, make a few comments about my methodology. Although this thesis focuses on the work of two people, namely Frederick Sommer and Sappho of Lesbos, it deliberately presents a biography of neither. My interest in the Sublime began as a structural citation in a body of my own work. Thereafter, and throughout this thesis, the issue of what might be readable as a structural citation inevitably raises the question of what is

structurally citable. The passage of millennia means Sappho's legacy is structurally citable whilst her actual biographical details are not. In reading across between Sommer and Sappho, it seemed only defensible that they be accorded some degree of parity. Therefore, where I do, later, draw a few biographical inferences regarding Sommer's work, I do so parsimoniously, and only having first firmly established my reading in structural terms, wherein the chief emphasis continues to lie.

Notes

Berger, J., (1972) *Ways of Seeing* London, BBC

Bürger, P. (1984, transl. Michael Shaw) *Theory of the Avant Garde* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press

Harrison, C., 'The Effects of Landscape' in Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed., 1994) *Landscape and Power* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press. pp 203-239.

Mitchell, W.J.T., *Landscape and Power* pp 203-239, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

Chapter 1

The Desert and The Sea

“Vistas of rock and cacti become as sublime as the starry night sky.”

Keith F. Davis, *Living Art: The Sources of Frederick Sommer’s Work* (2005:19)

Keith F. Davis’s essay on Frederick Sommer, quoted above, remains one of the few sustained scholarly engagements with the legacy of this intriguing artist who sustained a practice simultaneously engaging painting, drawing, photography and collage. In an essay of around thirteen thousand words, however, Davis spends only slightly more than two hundred discussing the landscape photographs Sommer made between 1943 and 1945. Nevertheless, Davis interestingly suggests that what he calls Sommer’s “notorious” *Untitled (Amputated Foot), 1939* – with its intimations of what Davis terms the “a fragment [recalling] the violated [...] sculptural body” (2005:18) albeit recorded with the “dispassionate curiosity worthy of Leonardo” engage a set of related ideas to those of the landscapes.

Original 10x8 prints of some of these landscape works – two Arizona Landscapes from 1943 and one from 1945, are held in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, along with eight other works from this period. Close inspection of the prints reveals sharply focused planes of granular detail, which, as Keith Davis observes, are “remarkably radical in formal terms” (2005:18). Davis goes on; “The even overall structure of these photographs creates a strange, pictorial duality, at once static and agitated. [...] These views avoid traditional compositional devices – there is no obvious centre of interest or pleasing balance of subordinate forms”. Following these observations, however, Davis moves on to other work which Sommer made between 1946 and 1955.

In the course of my own practice, Frederick Sommer's work first came to my attention in the course of making a series of works on paper collectively entitled *Colony*, in the years 2006-7. The work took the form of digital prints made from 5x4 transparencies, with sections of those prints digitally removed and drawn in pencil. The *Colony* pieces were an attempt to re-think some of my formal concerns with landscape, mixed media and collage following an earlier body of work made between 1999-2001, entitled *Another Country*. The *Another Country* series had drawn together imagery transcribed from the Imperial War Museum's archive of British atmospheric nuclear test photographs, with the conventions of Romantic painting, photographed with a fixed axis medium format camera in the form of a model diorama with painted backdrop. As such, the *Colony* series rapidly developed away from the structural citations of *Another Country* (an horizon with sky being viewed by a human figure with his back to the picture viewer). The form the subsequent *Colony* work took – horizonless landscape photographed as if from above – was an attempt to signal both a provisional sketching or re-imagining of what a different form of landscape picturing might offer. I first learned of Sommer's Arizona photographs from a gallery visitor during an exhibition of the *Colony* work at New Art Gallery Walsall, in January 2007. It was at that point that I began to research Sommer's work, and reflect on the implications of Davis's remark. In the present chapter, therefore, I propose to spend some time on a close reading of Sommer's Arizona landscapes, and, further, to explore, problematise and hopefully clarify some of the notions – namely that of the relationship between this formal radicality, and notions of sublimity and the fragment – which Davis briefly refers to.

Studying Sommer's work caused me to reflect on what I saw as the *immersive* character of the photographs, and this experience caused me to reflect upon another metaphor than that of the sky – the sea. In her essay on Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Barbara Claire Freeman presents the sea as a perpetual background roar which gradually comes to the fore in the lives of both authors' characters. Woolf's stated intention was that the 'the sea is to be heard all through it' (Woolf, 2008, xi). In this chapter, I want to argue that this sense of the presence of something constant in the background, which in both Freeman's commentary and in Woolf's text,

threatens to overwhelm or in Woolf's case, threatens 'engulfment' (2008:17) by the background, is equally attributable to repeated elements in Frederick Sommer's photographs, drawings and collages from his desert photographs of the 1940s through to his collage work of the late 1990s. Underpinning my claim here is what I would argue is an inherent instability in the relationship between foreground and background in Sommer's work, which repeatedly de-stabilizes – and in some cases completely collapses the normative dyadic relationship between the two. I will begin with Sommer's desert floor photographs, 1939 – 1945, to which the above quotation by Keith F Davis refers, although ultimately my argument is located within an assessment of Sommer's work and practice generally.

As hinted at above, my argument commences from the difficulties I encountered in satisfactorily reconciling the characteristics of the Kantian sublime to the sublimity attributed to Sommer's desert floor images by Keith F. Davis. Kant specifically relates 'the system of the Milky Way; and the immeasurable host of such systems, which go by the name of nebulae [sic]' to the 'mathematically sublime of nature' which he formulates as the

aesthetic estimation of magnitude in which we get at once a feeling of the effort towards a comprehension that exceeds the faculty of imagination for mentally grasping the progressive apprehension in a whole of intuition. (2007: 86-87)

Likewise, and following that, the field aspect of Sommer's work, I would suggest, works on the viewer by eliciting the sense of no one position being prioritised over another: in Sommer's work of this period and in sharp contrast to, for example, the landscape work of Ansel Adams, there is no sense that, compositionally, one view point is preferable to another. However, contrary to Keith F. Davis's remark, cited at the start of this chapter, neither can the sublime aspect of Sommer's photography of the 1940s be the same as that of a starry sky. It cannot, in other words, be found in the surfeit of details which the mind and eye cannot calculate (Kant's Mathematical sublime); we know, after all, that the desert floor, is not infinite, and we know that the portion of rocky ground, unlike the stars, is not immeasurable. One might answer in response to this

assertion that such a statement is obtuse: after all, the rocks might *seem* innumerable or immeasurable. However, if Kant's mathematical sublime is predicated upon (firstly) an initial encounter with the sublime object, followed by (secondly) a failure of imagination to comprehend the inestimable and limitlessness of the universe, and (finally) an acceptance of reasoning that elevates the viewer, Sommer's choice of subject matter might seem to present us with a 'foregone conclusion' – that is far from elevatory. Rather, Sommer's choice of subject matter stages such tropes of innumerability in a context which is deflationary. Unlike Kant's contemplation of the stars in the universe, there is no final elevatory triumph of reason in Sommer's rocks because there is nothing at stake that requires such a triumph of reason over the inestimable. Rather, we are drawn back to the rocks themselves, and immersed in the disordered, reasonless disorder. In these photographs, Sommer's emphasis fall upon incoherence within an area defined by an estimable act of photography, not reasoned comprehension of an inestimable whole.

The figuration of stony rubble is hardly alien to Modernism any more than all-overness: at its most radical and challenging, such tropes were at the forefront of its armoury of rupture and negation. Nevertheless, in their radical photographic application, and their pre-dating of analogous moves towards 'all over-ness' in abstract painting, I would argue Sommer's Arizona landscapes emerge in the first half of the twentieth century when the very notion of the sublime had been thoroughly rejected by the avant garde – in Ezra Pound's famous line as 'wrong from the start'¹ – yet the unfolding of a second world war already required something other than the contemplation of beauty. Here, after all, is the stony rubbish and dead land of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*: a straining for coherence, but in a form that avoids the pictorial conventions of Sommer's more famous – but compositionally more conservative – contemporaries in the field of landscape photography. I would stress here that this goes far beyond the obvious iconic analogues between Eliot's stony wastelands and Sommer's rocky deserts; there is an attenuated stretching for coherence within the various idioms Sommer chose to work, that is never resolved².

Precisely what is at stake in Sommer's Desert photographs of the early 1940s, however, might be elucidated by consideration of one of Sommer's more conventional photographic compositions that immediately preceded them. In a

photograph that dates from the year before, *Petrified Forest* (1940), an ancient dry river bed landscape of rocks and distant escarpments seems to swelter under an unfiltered white sky, of which only a narrow band at the top of the picture is visible. Viewed from an elevated vantage point, the dark stumps of fossilized trees are exposed as distant dark specks and clumps, whilst to the right a strange fin-like outcrop juts strangely. *Petrified Forest* might appear as a template for the work that follows: a meditation on the representation of time as well as space. The seemingly random, sample-like choice of framing for the exposure, the unfiltered sky, in stark contrast to the red or yellow filtering of Adams, instead harks back to the work of nineteenth century wet plate camera pioneer photographers such as Timothy O'Sullivan, and all of it set against the vastly greater sense of geological time evidenced by the striations on the fin and elsewhere, left by aeons of accretion and sedimentation. There is also a rather arbitrary scattering of forms: other photographers might have looked to make the strange, shark's fin rock the centre piece, or focused more closely on the ancient trees which give the work its title. As it is, even when viewed as a 10x8 print³ the petrified forest requires an act of scrutiny and recovery on the part of the viewer, since it is almost lost amidst other things. The landscape works thereafter continue further in this vein, and are given a descriptive title which points out as little as possible.

Time is clearly important in the photography of Sommer, and not just in relation to the blink of the camera shutter. One might see the photograph of the Petrified Forest as presenting three modes of time: the split second of the exposure; the human time scale of the viewer, located uncertainly somewhere overlooking the vista; and, along side both those moments, that vast expanse of geological time which fossilizes wood or accretes and erodes rocks. In the his titles for the work which followed, Sommer would avoid the specificity of place that locates the Petrified Forest, and points to its status as a US National Monument: subsequent titles equated a general, non specific sense of place – for example, 'Arizona' with a particular genre ('Landscape') and time simply as a year – for example '1943'. According to those who knew him and worked with him, Sommer's earliest prints tended to have a greater indication as to place, but as he developed the work, the titling became less specific, to the point where Sommer eschewed any reference to specific viewpoint, and would simply

denote the region, the genre (landscape) and the year. In so doing, Sommer establishes a sense of equal stress upon notions of place, genre and moment that maintains a sense of the arbitrary, but also a sense of interchangeability, as multiple images share the same title, for example in the Arizona Landscapes of 1943 and 1945, and the Colorado River Landscapes – Sommer expressly resisted the term ‘Grand Canyon’ – of 1940³.

Moreover, the landscape of *Petrified Forest* is presented to us as passive in form, a happenstance assortment of features and forms, barely drawn together by composition. What figure / ground relation is to be had therefore seems slight: that which is figured does not soar above us into a deep toned clear sky, nor bear down on us in its physical form, wreathed in clouds, as, say, in Adams’s photographs of Yellow Stone National Park, or Kant’s “mountains ascending to heaven, deep ravines and torrents” (2007: 99) presenting rather a scattering of forms, partly ringed in the far distance by barren terraced hills. *Petrified Forest, 1940* presents a vista in which the random stuff of landscape and its disparate timescales is re-emphasised, and in which the anthropocentric ordering of the Symbolic is challenged.

In contrast to the conventions established by Caspar David Friedrich and his successors, in which the sublime background vista is ordered and given meaning by the figure, or Adams’s Yellowstone images, in which the ordering and composition of the conventional placements of horizon subject the mountainscapes to the ordering of the photographer, Sommer’s *Petrified Forest* begins that move away from any sense of ordering which culminates in the desert floor images executed in the following six years. The viewer looks down on a sequence of scattered and broken fragments, and his/her presence would seem to make no difference. It is primordial in so far as it suggests an indifference to any latter-day human constructs of reason or transcendence, remaining ‘before man’ temporally, but obdurately not (laid) before man as compositionally assimilable. This is an incidental ‘background’ brought to the fore: an obviation of figure / ground convention by way of emphasis upon content (pre-human terrain) and form (the avoidance of anthropomorphizing or anthropocentric compositional tropes). This obviation of figure/ground dramatically reoccurs in one Sommer’s portraits of the later 1940s too, but this

time by way of collapsing the two: his portrait *Max Ernst* (1946) shows Ernst fading away or emerging from the textured weather beaten barn door against which he stands half naked, as if the subject is unable to maintain his corporeal presence in the midst of his surroundings, and further more, appears relaxed and sanguine about the consequences of this. Later 'Figures', such as the female nudes executed in 1962 and 1963 conform to the compositional traditions of studies by Stieglitz *et al*, but are deliberately and completely out of focus: in what might seem a subversive act in relation to the conventions of the time, the female forms emerge from and submerge back into the grey tones and shadows that are the traditional stock-in-trade of monochrome nudes. Figures that are caught at the moment of emerging or fading away suggest a sense of transience of course, but also collapse the space between figure and ground. This blurring echoes the words of Andrew and Prue in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*:

'It's almost too dark to see,' said Andrew, coming up from the beach. 'One can hardly tell which is the sea and which is the land' said Prue. (2008: 113)

The extent to which we are able to identify with even named subjects such as Ernst is delineated by the sense that our own position is both transient and uncertain: does Ernst fade from our view as our understanding of him eludes completeness, or do we see him from the time frame of the old and abraded door behind him, as a fleeting momentary presence that is nothing compared to the slow cyclical erosions of wind, sun and rain?

Whilst in his writing Sommer stressed themes of continuity and unity (1984: 25) time and again in Sommer's work, there appears a deliberate negation of the normative conventions and ordering of imaging seen in his contemporaries, whether it be in drawing (which often takes the form of a mimesis of musical notation or unintelligible handwriting) collage (which variously and transgressively utilizes severed human limbs, offal and eyeballs of animals and fowl, and religious engravings and bas reliefs) or landscape photography. There is no ordering of hierarchy of, say, drawing over photography or collage being an end result. The micro and macro are often treated in the same manner photographically, so that canyons kilometres in length bear startling

compositional similarity to images of rocks, stones or dried mud on the scale of a few square metres. Sommer's use of his large format camera movements to effect the suspension of the plane of focus, present the viewer with apparently arbitrary blurring of the nudes or the insubstantiality of Ernst in *Max Ernst*. The effect of this uncertainty and its attendant lack of resolution goes beyond a state of confusion alone, to one that effects a sense of alienation. As Thomas Weiskel remarks:

Alienation also presupposes the bathetic collapse of the signifying relations which make a social order. When the significance of things is no longer "natural" or *immediate*, when making sense requires the mediating intervention – as opposed to the assumed immanence – of a transcendent idea, the world is being understood rhetorically, at second remove.' (1976: 36).

Sommer's *Arizona Landscape, 1943* (V&A catalogue number E1001-1993) presents a horizonless view down a small desert gorge, dotted here and there with small rocky outcrops. In the form in which these works were intended to be shown – that is to say, of the black and white 10 x 8 print, these outcrops appear as apparently randomly distributed slight fluctuations in an otherwise even distribution of mid tone speckles and spots of the desert floor, and the short thin vertical slashes of cacti stems. Apart from small patch of lighter ground just below the centre of the picture, the predominant tones are mid greys, that is to say, in the parlance of the I – X Zone calibrated exposure, development and printing system devised by Ansel Adams, and in which Sommer, as an associate of the *f*64 Group, would have been versed, between Zone III and Zone VII. Lower Zone values – for example the shadows cast by the cacti, figure minimally, suggesting the photograph was taken at around noon, perhaps for the very purpose of limiting these darker tones. Again, at the other end of Adams's scale, the specular highlights of Zone X are entirely absent. The print therefore presents a field of abundant pin-sharp detail, within which no single object in particular holds a remarkable position in relation to any other, except perhaps for the small patch of lighter earth mentioned earlier. However, none of these features can be seen to have been 'placed' by the photographer in accordance with any of the traditional compositional rules of photographic composition –

neither the so called ‘rule of thirds’ or the ‘golden section’: indeed, two other rocky projections – one in the top most right hand corner of the print and the other placed slightly lower in the top left hand corner, do nothing in terms of framing or compositional balance. On the contrary, these features merely add to the difficulty in establishing a clear sense of recessional depth in the picture: the adjusted plane of focus and maximum depth of field, militates against providing the viewer with any strong sense of recessional Renaissance perspective and effectively eliminates any shifts in focus that might assist the viewer in reading the picture easily in accordance with such conventions. Indeed, it would appear that the only considered act of ‘placing’ taking place in the execution of the picture was that of what Adams would refer to as the placing of tonal values on the Zone scale.

Arizona Landscape, 1943 (V&A cat. E998-1993) is darker overall than E1001-1993, and is perhaps even more challenging. Each cacti stem, naturally darker at the tip than at the base, presents as a miniature scale of the grey tones used in the rest of the image; again, a random, overall scattering of vertical slits across a darker grey speckled, horizonless broad incline. As with E1001-1993, the all-over distribution of features, the surfeit of pin sharp detail, the optimum depth of field and plane of focus creates the sense of a deliberate refusal of the established codes of photographic composition.

Arizona Landscape, 1945 (V&A cat E1000-1998) presents an overall lighter mélange of horizonless grey stony ground, lightly marked by two small scale ravines, presumably dried stream beds, and a scattering of cacti which are more numerous in the top half of the frame than in the bottom portion. As with the 1943 pictures, this work seems to be of nothing in particular, although it perhaps could be said to make more concessions to conventional reading by virtue of these topographical peculiarities.

Given the dates at which photographs were produced, one is perhaps drawn to compare these perplexing works with the canonic landscape vistas of Ansel Adams; indeed, the sun bleached clapboard, empty window frame and conservative composition of Sommer’s *Taylor, Arizona* (1945, E89-1977) suggests something of a knowing, casual-yet-virtuoso nod to Adams’s oeuvre.

Yet Adams's work of this period and after does not dispense with the conventions which Sommer so provocatively and persistently disavows. In Adams's work, an adjusted plane of focus and optimized depth of field – are used to ensure that foreground details are effectively rendered as clearly as those on an ever present horizon, and to create a dramatic perspectival sweep, the effect of this latter feature being to create the illusion that the viewer may step into the picture. Despite the absence of the Friedrichean *Rückenfigur* (i.e. the back of a depicted idealised spectator *per se* gazing into the picture, the precise object of which is obscured by that same figure), in most of Adams's landscape work, the perspectival framing and the positioning of the viewer/photographer and the landscape presents an effective conceptual doubling of viewership from a privileged spot. Indeed, whilst the eclipsing mechanisms of Friedrich's *Rückenfiguren* are not present in Adams's photographs, there is a sense in which Adams's self conscious uses of the limitations of the photographic medium – for example, the absence of colour, and the expressive range but also limitations of the Zone system, pushed to their sublime extreme in *The Black Sun, Owens Valley California* – represent that which remains unknowable or overwhelming. In Sommer's Arizona landscapes, by contrast, the precise opposite might seem to be the case; one is not invited to take one's standpoint with the photographer in the landscape, since the plane of focus is used effectively to *prevent* a clear sense of what one is standing on: in Sommer's photographs, one might just as easily be suspended above the landscape as having any secure or stable foothold on the ground – again, 'placing' seems difficult in these works. In considering the works' challenges to the established photographic canon of the time, Sommer's 'place comma date' titling convention seems deliberately obtuse; it follows the convention of its peers, only to render an entirely different effect.

Moreover, it might be seen that whilst clearly problematising positionalities of time, place, viewpoint and so on in this manner, Sommer's work of this period does something *with the time which the viewer spends with the image*. As already observed, there is a sense that one is forced to focus and concentrate on the photograph as a *field* rather than the more usual figure/ground dyad of this period. One effect of this is that, if the viewer wishes to read these works as topographic landscapes – that is to say, if one wishes to force the conventions of Renaissance perspective on this work – then s/he is forced to spend extra time

patiently scrutinizing the material surface of the photograph for points of interpretation which allow this. And to do so is not an easy task. One finds oneself not so much *viewing* as if from afar so much as *scanning* and *foraging*, with no clear sense of where one is supposed to stop or start in such a reading.

It maybe that a sustained reading of Benjamin's spark of contingency offers some sense of what is at stake in this portion of Sommer's work. Pictures such as *Constellation, Arizona* (1943) or *Bloody Basin* (also 1943) do invite the viewer to scan the picture for the famous "here and now". But, there is also a strong sense, I would suggest, in which these and other pictures offer a loss of scale and position which becomes dizzying, so that the eye fails to seize upon a particular point or absorb the detail required to see the picture as whole, to fail to register a spark in any particular detail because the detail is overwhelming and, at some level, undifferentiated. This points to Michael Fried's remark regarding the appositeness or otherwise of Ruskin's insistence upon the necessary incompleteness of depiction. Faced with Menzel's *Rear Courtyard and House* of 1844, Fried suggests that "simply to inventory the representational content of this picture requires a sustained effort of close looking" (2002:76) and, I would suggest, this is the first demand on the viewer made by Sommer's photographs. Taken with a large format 10x8 camera with movements, one is struck by such technical virtuosity as the adjusted planes of focus and small aperture exposures evidenced throughout these images maximize both the detail and depth of field. *Glass* (1943) is extraordinary in this respect, as an undulating mound of countless fragments is sustained in focus through its shifts in distance from the lens. *Glass* presents the viewer with a plethora of detail which is sustained in its formal acuity whilst constantly disrupted by its circumstance: the truncated labels, lettering and broken forms of bottles and jars, the bisecting planes of plate glass slicing into the mound whilst simultaneously projecting, threateningly, out at the viewer; the absence of horizon or end on either side of the picture plane preventing us from establishing how big, small, stable or precarious this pile of shards is.

This might seem counterintuitive to my opening reference to Benjamin, particularly in relation to an image such as *Glass*: here, after all, are the fragments or shards of the world which, infinitely differentiated, are one in that

they nevertheless owe their existence to a common original form. *Glass* presents us with the pile of wreckage left by a plethora of little histories, which, either through the recycling kiln or our revelatory seeing of some artless moment within the picture frame, can be made anew: Photography, as Benjamin would have it, is dialectics standing still, presenting not the promise of a transformatory future so much as the possibility that *this* moment, here in the picture frame, might remind us of the unlimited potential of every second, since only the present moment as it is lived can be regarded as truly infinite. But there is a sense in which the Benjaminian project of viewing becomes difficult precisely because of the surfeit of detail: one imagines oneself, in the manner of some latter day Roland Barthes manqué, endlessly changing one's mind about where the *punctum* actually lies, or what particular childhood trauma one or another broken bottle invokes. And so it is with other works by Sommer: we are invited to scan the surface of such pictures because, I would suggest, they elicit a sense akin to the Levinasian horror of the night: that *there is* rather than that there is not. And it is the sense that '*there is*' – what, who or where remaining all the while undefineable, indiscernible or relationally undifferentiable – which creates an ethical hiatus in the viewer. The confusion which arises from looking at these small prints – the wonderment of what one is looking at, of where one is viewing from, the surfeit of detail, the tonal uniformity, the frustrating denials of conventional spatial devices or indicators, leads to a sense that the viewer can *become* lost, or that what it means to be a viewer of a photograph, has to be broken up and reassembled in much the way that the surface appears as a scattering of rocky fragment, plant forms indistinguishable from one another and relentless, pin-sharp granular detail. This is not a sublime of overwhelming figural *spectacle*: it is a sublime of break up, of disintegration and imbrication.

What is at stake, it would seem, in Sommer's desert floors, canyon systems and close up work is an 'all over' quality of repetitive motifs and detail which not only precedes the developments within modernist abstraction by a decade or so, but also eschews the figure / ground dyad of conventional modernist photographic documentary composition. I make this remark with all due qualification, however, since there is clearly much to differentiate this form of 'all-overness' from that of abstract painting of the subsequent decades, not the

least being their size and form *as photographs*, which Sommer never shies away from: obviously, as an accomplished multi-media artist, Sommer could have chosen to obviate the specificity of photography and its attendant effects should he have so wished, by simply choosing other media. I will return to this issue of the formal specificity in relation to questions of ‘all-overness’ shortly. However, and more generally, it is worth noting that despite their indisputable status as unalloyed photographic prints, the work provoked argument about their merits as photographs, but also Sommer’s status as a photographer. Edward Helmore (1999) refers to contemporary critics’ view of Sommer’s work as “unpleasant” but more significantly “unphotogenic” and it is these senses – the senses that these works did not ‘make a good photograph’, that they were of subjects that in some way were not ‘visually attractive photography’ and that by inference there is a dialectical tension within them which negates the categories of beauty - which warrants further discussion in relation to the category of the Sublime. I say this because the sense in which Sommer was *not* a photographer stalked a career which embraced a range of visual practice from collage to drawing (see obituary by Edward Helmore, *The Independent*, 1999).

Immersion and its consequences: Positionality, Ethics and Equivalence in Sommer’s work

Ian Walker’s 2008 essay on the photographic work of Frederick Sommer, “As if one’s eyelids had been cut away” (2008) is a fine addition to the relatively slim amount of scholarship on this most interesting artist, but limits itself, in a game very much of two halves, to an historical account of the artist, his production and circumstances on the one hand, and, subsequently, the writer’s personal impressions of encountering different versions of the prints in their respective archives. To state the latter baldly is in no way to denigrate the significance or worth of such an account – in many ways, any appreciation of Sommer’s work – and it remains very much a minority past time – has to offer a formal account of the 10x8 prints of the Arizona desert, not the least because it is in a formal appreciation of Sommer’s skill so evidenced, that one is able to grasp the radical rupture the work presents in its seeming randomness of composition and the pieces’ formal challenge to the then emergent American modernist canon.

Positionality is repeatedly problematised in Sommer's oeuvre, and not only in his depiction of the desert, nor his out of focus nudes of the early 1960s, nor his motion-blurred friezes from his visit to the V&A, nor his portrait of Max Ernst, but in his own marginalized position as an artist. There are several 'problematisations' of his position as a photographer – one that most famously had him excluded from exhibitions on the grounds of his works' 'unphotogenic' qualities and, in a moment that privileged specialisation, his position as an artist, in a practice comprising at least three recognisable categories – (drawing, photography, collage) there is quite clearly an avoidance of privileging or subordination of any to another. Indeed, it is important to remember that from 1943 onwards, whilst taking such photographs as *Glass* and the series of *Arizona Landscapes*, Sommer was also producing drawings, some redolent of musical notation, others inspired by the movement from one place to another of dancers: evocations of both figure's multipositionality and the aural immersiveness of art made with sound. At the time, these drawings work also bore the formal distinction from the photographs of using colour, and the marks Sommer makes seem to shift seamlessly from one colour to another.

As Jain Kelly, once wrote:

Partly because of Sommer's limited output, it is not possible to trace a recognisable "evolution" characterized by trial and error and endless variation. Rather, Sommer appears to employ esthetic problems as departure points for a number of radial solutions, many of which intersect with solutions emanating from other points, as an attempt to establish what he calls "linkages" among different fields. Often this method entails working out his problems on an intellectual, rather than a visual level, an approach that might seem at first glance to result in gaps in style and content. (1973:94)

Ian Walker briefly cites Jain Kelly's 1973 review in his essay, but does not reference or comment upon the quote I have just taken. Yet I want to suggest here that the implications of Kelly's remark above are profound in its articulation of positionality in Sommer's work, situating, as it does, the diverse

elements of Sommer's *oeuvre* in an equivalent and non-hierarchical relation to one another. As Kelly observes,

Underlying Sommer's work is a strong preoccupation, even obsession, with structural relationships. In his vocabulary, the very word "image" is defined as "positional display" referring to the juxtaposition of objects which comprise our visual reality (1973:93)

I will develop my reading of Sommer's *Nude* photographs further below, but prior to that it is, I suggest, worth expanding upon this notion of equivalence, which resonates with Sommer's earlier, 1943 work *Glass*. As Page Du Bois (1995:59-62) has commented in relation to their symbolic role in ancient Greek society, it is the *interchangeability* of shards, their denotation of both equivalence and difference drawn from common origin which places them at an originary nexus of democracy, monetary exchange and figurative speech in Ancient Greek culture. As Dubois has pointed out, historically, the poet Sappho of Lesbos is positioned, contemporaneously, at that same point of emergence – the 6th Century BCE, and it is in her lyrical poetry that we find what J.J.Winkler (1990:167) has terms 'the field effect' or *poikilos* of both a distinctly Sapphic conception of landscape and a distinctly Sapphic conflation of body and landscape. This, I would suggest, is pertinent both to Kelly's observations about 'positional display'. I want to suggest, here that the complex relational ethics that begin to arise in Sommer's work of the 1940s continue and develop in his approach to photographing that most ethically charged subject, the nude, in the 1960s.

Lee Nevin, the young daughter of Lorna Nevin, an Arizona neighbour, became Sommer's model in January 1961⁴. Hers is the body we see disrobed in many of his nude photographs. During the next four years, Sommer photographed her in the studio, using a 35mm camera rather than the 10x8 large format equipment used to make the desert landscapes. Unlike the pinsharp focus of the desert landscape, these nudes – and significantly, a clothed image I shall return to later – were printed out of focus. Despite the frankly unpromising premise of a man in his mid 50s photographing a young woman naked in this way, I want to

suggest here that this blurring is something considerably more than the bashful soft focus of some amateur pornographer.

This is not only because the blurring of these pictures is far more pronounced than one would find in kitsch, but also because, despite the considerable differences in location and equipment I want to suggest it might be possible to consider the blurring of Sommer's nudes of the early 1960s as having an analogously heterodox character to the rocky landscapes and shards of two decades earlier. Moreover, I want to suggest that the blurring of the nudes is significant in particular ways which shed light upon the other elements in Sommer's work, and what, as a result, might be discerned from Sommer's project as a whole.

Blurring is not unusual in the art of the second half of the twentieth century – one might immediately think of Gerhard Richter's paintings, or Andy Warhol's screen prints. Nevertheless, Sommer's nudes are blurred in a manner distinct to that found in either of the above. Whereas the blurs of Richter and Warhol are the result of a sideways, mechanical movement of the squeegee or the flicker of the fan brush across the surface of the picture and parallel to its plane, Sommer's blur is a movement at right angles to it: the movement back and forth of the enlarger towards and away from the base plate as the focussing knob is turned by the artist, in and out of focus. I want to argue, here, that the implications of this discrepancy in mechanical effect are profound, and I want to suggest that Emmanuel Levinas's work around images can have a particular pertinence in reading Sommer's nudes. Firstly, however, and in order to elucidate more fully the differences I have hinted at above, I want to briefly describe the significance of blur in the work Gerhard Richter and Andy Warhol.

In his 1996 book *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster notes that there are two readings of Warhol: (1) the poststructuralist simulacral reading ("What pop art wants is to desymbolize the object" – to release the image from any deep meaning into simulacral surface.) (2) the referential reading – often associated with critics who tie the work to other themes – fashion, celebrity, gay culture, the Warhol factory, that argues (cf Thomas Crow) that underneath the glamorous surface lies the reality of suffering and death. "He was attracted to

the open sores in American public life”. Foster argues that “both camps get the Warhol they deserve; no doubt we all do. And neither projection is wrong, but that what is needed is an account which allows the work to be both “referential and simulacral, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless, critical and complacent? I think we must, and we can if we read them in a third way, in terms of *traumatic realism*”. In this model, Warhol is presented as ‘embracing the compulsion to repeat, put into play by a society of serial production and consumption’ by Foster who quotes Warhol: “When you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn’t really have any effect” (1996:131)

Foster sets out to demonstrate that pop is related to surrealism as a traumatic realism, in that repetition (which Foster, following Lacan, distinguishes from reproduction, and identifies as the result of trauma – the missed encounter with the Real, which of course cannot be represented) . In Foster’s Lacanian model, the repetition of Warhol “serves to *screen* [ie to produce a locus of mediation produced by the gaze and the cone of vision of viewing subject] the real understood as traumatic” (1996:132)

In a significant shift from Barthes’s conception of the punctum being located in the content of photographs, Foster argues that the punctum of Warhol’s screenprints is found in the byproducts of technique – “the slipping and streaking, blanching and breaking, repeating and coloring of the images [...] just as the punctum in Gerhard Richter lies less in details than in the pervasive blurring of the image, so the punctum in Warhol lies less in details than in this repetitive “popping” of the image” (1996:134)

The blurs, defects and machinic repetition of both Warhol’s and Richter’s images have variously, and too easily, been attributed to the artists’ pronounced absence of emotional or ethical investment in their relationship with the mediated and commodified imagery surrounding them; in short, that the supposed random selection and virtuoso replication of source imagery reflected a cynical triumph of technique over meaning. Just as Foster’s case militates against such a reading of Warhol, Richter, in person, expressly denied the notion of detached randomness in relation to his work:

R[ichter]: The motifs were never random; I had to make too much of an effort for that, just to be able to find photos I could use ... Perhaps it was good if it seemed as if everything had been accidental and random.

B[uchloh]: What were the criteria for the selection of photos in your iconography?

R: They very definitely were concerned with content. Perhaps I denied that earlier, when I maintained that it had nothing to do with content, that for me it was only a matter of painting a photo and demonstrating indifference. (Harrison and Wood, 1992:1036)

It would seem that here Richter is seeking to disavow accusations of ambivalence, in favour of some ethical specificity. However, whether one sides with Richter on this account, or maintains the sort of scepticism here voiced by Benjamin Buchloh, Richter's blur stands as a signifier of mediation – that the object of the image is derived from a source other than direct observation by the artist, and, therefore, the object of the artist's transcription is the image itself, not whatever might be figured iconically within the image: it is a way by which his oil paintings can be read as reflective of, and pertinent to, the artist's appropriated imagery in a televisual age. Richter's blur therefore functions as iconic – the blur itself is accepted as 'looking like' some sort of interceding veil of distortion in the image's passage from its original source to the viewer – effecting, and asserting, in Benjamin Buchloh's words, that 'content can no longer be communicated by iconographic portrayal' (1992:1037). Somewhat akin to Barthes's discourse of loss and the punctum in *Camera Lucida*, this has been argued as indicative of loss – a morbid longing for an original thing no longer present. As Richter says:

Perhaps it's just a little exaggerated to speak of a death thematic there. But I do think that the pictures have something to do with death and with pain. (1992:1036)

As Richter's paintings became paradigmatic of a defining moment in post Modernist painting, so the sideways slur in his canvases came to be accepted as

short hand for, variously, the ‘ghosting’ of badly tuned monochrome television sets, the grainy indistinctness of black and white documentary, reportage or snapshot photography, or the fugitive colouration of CMY printing. In this sense they rely on an iconicity: that of appearing like various forms of mediation.

Whereas, for example, the sideways swipe of Richter and Warhol’s is to offer the equivalences of rapid stream of deracinated mediated images in which the staged interchangeability suggests some chain of equivalence through stylistic affectation, it is less easy to see this in the case of Sommer’s blurring. Sommer’s movement in or out of focus negotiates a subjective Levinasian threshold between the artist and the representation of the Other. Sommer’s blurs result from a deliberate absence of resolution. They are *unresolved*. If we are to understand the normative relations between artist and model in the genre of the nude to be one of the artist gaining knowledge of the model through scrutiny, then the blurring of Sommer’s nudes and ‘the pulling away’ their making involves, embodies the ‘I – Thou’ described by Emmanuel Levinas in his essay ‘Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge’, in so far as “The I-Thou relation is nothing but a realization of the meeting. The Thou has no qualities which the I aspires to have or know” (1989:69). As Kelly observes, “His [Sommer’s] work relates intimately to the exploration and dissolution of boundaries between territories whether intellectual or corporeal” (1973:94). In his 1948 essay ‘Reality and its Shadow’ Levinas argues that ‘the phenomenology of images insists on their transparency’. For Levinas, this is what distinguishes images from signs or symbols. The ‘intention’ of the viewer goes straight through an image as if through a window, into the world the image conjures, and aims at an ‘*object*’.[Levinas’s italics]. In asserting this, however, Levinas is quick to point out that such a world – such an ‘*object*’ - is far from unproblematic:

Yet nothing is more mysterious than this term ‘world it represents’: representation expresses the function of an image that *still remains to be determined*. [2003:134, my italics]

Significantly, Levinas groups signs with words, whereas it would appear that what is at stake for him in the iconicity of an image – as distinct from the

conventions of signs, which one reads across, either left to right or right to left – is a motion *towards*. Elsewhere, Sommer's deserts seem to turn away from any visual grouping: here, the photographically unresolved character suggests Sommer had already reached what Levinas, in his 1948 essay *Art & Criticism* terms 'saturation' (2003:131). Levinas then argues that the theory of transparency is a reaction to [what he terms] the theory of mental images of an inner tableau which the perception of an object would leave in us.

In what way does an image differ from a symbol a sign, or a word? By the very way it refers to its object: resemblance. But that supposes that thought stops on the image itself; it consequently supposes a certain opacity of the image. A sign, for its part, is pure transparency, nowise counting for itself. Must we then come back to taking the image as an independent reality which resembles the original? *No, but on condition that we take resemblance not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image*. Reality would not be only what it is, what it is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image. (1989:135, my emphasis).

Significantly also, then, for Levinas the encounter with an image involves a different role for the thought processes: not a comparative 'reading across' but one that involves a movement towards, and once 'through the window' a negotiation with the movement which engenders the image.

The act of focussing a camera lens involves a movement towards or away from the subject: the lens extends or retracts. However, Sommer's blurring in these images was not the result of the camera being subsequently exposed out of focus. Rather, Sommer's images were made from negatives that were exposed *in* focus, but then later printed out of focus. It is not, therefore, possible to argue that Sommer's blurred photographs of Lee Nevin present an indexical trace of the artist's unwillingness to resolve such a negotiation *in the presence* of the model. However, it does demonstrate an 'unwillingness' of a different kind – a deliberate turning away – from the granular corporeal scrutiny of photographic

realism when faced with the opportunity provided by the in-focus negative in the photographic darkroom, in favour of other aims. Nowhere could Levinas's notion of the viewer's motion 'through the window' that is to say, the notion of thresholds and boundaries, of the space of the picture and the space of the viewer, be more evident than in the photographing of another human being, naked. Sommer's images conjure up states of feminine nudity in the traditional poses of Western nudes *en deshabille*, with an averted gaze. The position of the camera and its plane of focus has been established, suggesting that the camera has been set up to receive the light reflected from the model, but the penultimate act of photography, - and a declarative act of ostention on the part of the photographer - that of scrutinising the fine focussing, the depth of field, and establishing the point of maximum clarity, all resolved, only to result in an ultimate gesture back towards indeterminacy, and irresolution, leaving the ultimate location of such a window, threshold or boundary in question, not so much for Nevin (as say, an interrogative or intrusive intimacy might imply) but for the viewer and photographer.

As I describe in Chapter 2, one of Sommer's photographs of Lee Nevin is not a nude. However, *Lee Nevin (1963)* is the only one that bears her name as a title. *Lee Nevin* therefore presents us with a named person, rather than an archetypal form, and suggests an interior life and mental state that is both compelling, immersive, and unknowable, unable to be interpreted. Like the montage *I Adore You* discussed earlier, *Lee Nevin (1963)* shows a young woman gazing out of the photograph. However, the object of the woman's gaze is not us, nor is the cause of it easy to determine. As if cradling a baby, she is pictured with either a violin or viola (it is difficult to determine which) her fingers fanned out around the instrument to cradle rather than clutch, whilst her wide eyes seem to stare transfixed at some unseen object on the ground before her. That it is not clear what she is looking at - but that it is, following the angle of her gaze, somewhere outside the picture, in our space, as it were - is mirrored by the fact that it is not clear what we are looking at either: like the untitled nudes, the photograph is printed out of focus. What is suggested, however, through what can be discerned of the intensity of the model's expression and gaze, is a complete immersion - something of the order of fascinating horror, or a complete absorption into some private reverie, such as might be seen in a person

recalling some formative experience. So there is a curious indeterminacy about this image – but also a mirroring. The object of our gaze is diffuse, just as the object of her gaze is indeterminate. The shadows of her eyes and lips, extended by the blurring, suggest a comic grotesqueness akin to clown's mask, and yet also suggest that the woman may be modishly beautiful for her time – she appears somewhat gamine in the fashion of Audrey Hepburn. The lack of details on her hands combined with the extension of the fingers suggests they could be both limp and lifeless, or strained and tense. In fact, it is the ambiguity that contributes to a separate tension not what we might speculatively interpret in the model's hands, nor her facial distinction or supposed expression, but rather in the interpretative hiatus the image provokes in the viewer.

Like Sommer's other out of focus photographs, the film was exposed in focus, then printed out of focus. However, in so far as the camera's capacity to capture incidental detail is its axiomatic characteristic – and that such detail should be a key foundation of photographic interpretation and the attribution of meaning – this photograph cannot tell us precisely how excessive. The chilling aspect of Sommer's photograph lies in this sense that we can discern an expression of inordinate, disturbing intensity – but that we cannot clearly evaluate this with any precision. This uncertainty, of course, is a way in which Sommer's picture effectively plays itself off against nineteenth century photographic taxonomies of 'types' and 'cases': 'hysterics' 'malingerers' 'criminals' and so on, determined by phrenological measurements and the intertwined discourses of eugenics and racism, where photography's indexical function was insidiously combined with its unparalleled capacity for iconicity to manufacture consensus and re-inscribe prejudice. Such photographs are also characterised by the clear distinction between viewer and viewed: the former is the auditor with the encyclopaedic purview of the archive, whilst the latter is a captured specimen. Sommer's portrait of Nevin deliberately obviates these conventions. The unknowable intensity of the supposed emotional state collapses the certainties, and boundary becomes permeable. The lack of certainty around Nevin – her assumed role, the object of her gaze, the precise details of her expression, the relevance of the violin and so on – are mirrored in the viewer's uncertainties.

In this chapter, I have sought, through an initial close reading of Sommer's remarkable work, to establish a sense of what is at stake in some other model of the Sublime to that proposed in Keith F. Davis's essay, and to think through some of the implications – both ethical and aesthetic – of the tensions and fragmentations in Sommer's work. It is through comparisons of form, content and affect so described, that I will, in the next chapter, set out the case for an alternative model of the sublime for Sommer's work, namely the Sapphic, which accounts for the immersive, fragmentary and multi positional qualities in his work

Notes

1. Indicatively, the opening verse of Ezra Pound's 1920 poem '*Hugh Selwyn Mauberly Part 1*' contains the lines: "For three years, out of key with his time / He strove to resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"/ In the old sense. Wrong from the start -" Apropos the discussion here, however, it is, I would suggest, worth noting that Pound's reference to the sublime is qualified with the words 'In the old sense' suggesting, perhaps, a new sense, at that point yet to be defined.
2. Steven Vine (University of Swansea): paper entitled *T.S. Eliot's Criterion of Sublimity - The Wasteland*, delivered at 'Wrong from the Start: Modernity and the Sublime' Tate Britain, London, 30/11/09. Vine located his discussion of Eliot's poem in the context of Weiskel's 'second phase'. Vine argues that Eliot's sublime is one in which the self is exiled from coherence, whilst reaching for such coherence. Eliot's poetry find the sublime not in the subject but in the *intensity* of modern form. Vine also argues that Eliot uses the phrase 'intensity' to speak of the sublime, the etymological roots of which lie in *intensus* (Latin) meaning 'stretched', or reaching to the limit. However, Vine argues that this 'stretching for coherence' is found in the poem, not in the history of the poet, which is in contrast to my argument here for the Sapphic sublime, which I locate in the Weiskel's second phase, but also simultaneously, apropos Prins, in the fragmented history of Sappho as a disimbricated, partly recovered, partly evacuated subject-position.
3. Email exchange between John Timberlake and Jeremy Cox of the Frederick & Frances Sommer Foundation, August 2012.
4. The details of this are in 'Sommer Chronology' by April Watson, in *Frederick Sommer: Photography, Drawing, Collage*, Yale U.P.(2005: 215-240)

Chapter 2

The Fragmenting Subject and the Fragmenting Vision

A Mutable Category

My previous chapter left a number of questions. Firstly, my argument that the Kantian conception of the sublime does not accurately describe Sommer's work naturally raises questions as to what might be posited as an alternative.

Conceptions of the Sublime during the twentieth century can be seen to have been subject to a number of critiques and revisions – from Psychoanalysis, Feminism or indeed Modernism, a movement which from its inception incorporated influential voices such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot who were openly hostile to conceptions of the sublime, as I referenced in the previous chapter. Cornelia Klinger draws attention to what she sees not only as the periodic emergence and submergence of the concept, but also its transformations, referring to she terms 'the striking discontinuity' in the usage of the notion of the sublime in the history of Western thought:

Long intervals lie between its first occurrence in late antiquity and its several revivals. Yet in spite of many intermissions there is an equally notable perseverance [...] (in White & Pajaczkowska, 2009:92)

Questions might therefore seem to arise, firstly as to whether such "intervals" and "intermissions" constitute unbridgeable gaps that render any correspondence impossible; and, secondly, whether that which re-emerges with "equally notable perseverance" after such interregna can be regarded as identical to that which has gone before.

As Gene Ray has argued, thinking about the category of the sublime as somehow immutable, even as a ‘feeling’ – needs to be resisted:

The challenge is to think the category as a category in motion, as a process that unfolds within changing social conditions and therefore changes along with those conditions. We need to resist the tendency to assume that the sublime is a feeling or experience that remains constant over centuries and the workings of which were described once and for all in the eighteenth century. (2009: 133)

The answer to both these questions, I want to suggest, lies in an understanding that the nuances and emphases placed upon the experience and affect of the sublime experience might not simply change with different historical epochs, but be constituted around different subject positions within any given epoch.

Allowing for the mutability of dominant or pre-eminent conceptualisations of the sublime in any given epoch – for example, that of Longinus, or that of Kant, allows us to think about synchronous but marginalised accounts of such, and allows us to think through the possibility of historicising accounts of the sublime in this context – is not therefore an exercise in antiquarian study of a category in isolation, but rather to think through the manner in which hegemonic accounts of the sublime emerge in relation to – or are bound up with – those which are marginalised, how those different accounts variously emerged, and how they might be relevant now. For example Shaw (2006:7-8) points out in relation to the work of the contemporary architect Daniel Libeskind, that the sublime emerges in his work most obviously *via* Lyotard and Derrida; nevertheless, as Shaw goes on to point out, the themes of disruption, elegy and the monstrous which are also to be found in his work can be traced through Dionysus Longinus, Burke and Kant. However, it would of course be obtuse to thereby ignore the Levinasian and Benjaminian elements that inform Libeskind’s position as a Jewish architect born into the post-Holocaust Twentieth Century, for to do so would be to deny the specific weight accorded to the symbols and references within his work, and deny, at the very least, the specifics of the

sublime affect upon Liebeskind's ethnic and historical heritage, which mark him as someone other than the Kantian subject. Moreover, as with Steven Vine's argument in relation to Eliot, (and as I will demonstrate in this chapter), what becomes important is not only the different emphases placed upon the different stages of the sublime experience, but, moreover, the recognition that the extent to which the subject can actually identify with the pleasures that (for example) Kant or Longinus identify is dependent upon that subject's position. If the sublime of Frederick Sommer leaves an unresolvable tension between incoherence and convergence equitable with Eliot's 'intensity' it does so by corresponding to a sense of the sublime experienced by a subject unable to fully identify with the resolution proposed by Kant, or Longinus, or able to conform to the archetypes they respectively propose, and which throw such long cultural shadows.

Sappho

Indeed, as Shaw (2006:12) also observes, most accounts of the sublime – for example, in philosophy, those of Kant or Burke, or in literature, Milton and, for the purposes of the present thesis I might add, in visual art Caspar David Friedrich – owe something to Longinus – or, more precisely, the unknown author and theorist of rhetoric who wrote *Peri Hypsous* ('On the Sublime'), who is generally referred to by that name.

As both Shaw (2006:13) and Barbara Claire Freeman (1995:18) point out, the influence of Longinus in relation to the subsequent dominant conceptions of the sublime can be seen in terms of its tropes of both mastery, submission and the achievement of unity. As such, they are predicated on the clash of opposing forces, and the subjugation of one by the other. These themes – of a victorious battle or combative struggle culminating in mastery, re-emerge in various forms in subsequent epochs, for example Burke's political conservatism, or Kant's appeal to Reason. Alongside this, and constitutive, as Shaw (2006:13) has pointed out, sits Longinus's conception of the sublime as something 'unteachable' and therefore reliant upon innate genius. It is partly through Longinus that the Other to that seminal construction comes to us albeit in a

distorted form: namely, the Sublime associated with the Lyrical poet Sappho (6th Century BCE).

However, as Barbara Claire Freeman has also argued, (1995:19), Longinus, in comparing Homer and Sappho, misrepresents the latter. Sappho, Freeman argues, is not concerned with strife or combat, nor

[...]dominance, in which one identity subjugates another, but a merger in which usually separate identities conjoin.

At the same time however, it also

[...]foregrounds what Longinus and subsequent theorists ignore: the deployment of agency to intensify and underscore the wish for dispossession, and to recognise in the scene of self dispersal a site of self-empowerment [...] the need for “the unlimited in which to lose herself”

Moreover, there is a refusal of ‘any binary formulation of life and death’ – again, a rejection of those antinomies that form the foundational conceptualisation upon which the tropes emanating from Longinus are predicated. (1995:19)

Despite Longinus’s mediation, Sappho enters this discussion as a subject for whom the sublime experience does not constitute “mastery, submission and the achievement of unity” but rather, whose experience of the sublime offers no such resolution. As Shaw would have it:

In [Sappho’s poetry] the emphasis falls neither on unity or fragmentation, on the assembling of the body or its dispersal in death, but on the tension between the two. The sublime, in other words, is a result of the co-implication of seemingly natural opposites: life and death, unity and fragmentation, God and man. (Shaw, 2006:25)

Significantly also for the present thesis, as we shall see, Sappho is generally credited with the first sophisticated conflation of body and landscape – a

multipositional collapsing of figure and ground. I want to argue that the pertinence of the model offered by Sappho to my thesis therefore takes on a variety of aspects or facets, namely:

1. The Sapphic sublime constitutes a momentary immersion that presents a dialectical tension without guarantees: without the certainty of pleasure in the safety of reason, without the vouchsafed restitution of an unquestioned symbolic order. In this it is differentiated from the Kantian model.
2. The conflation of body and landscape in Sappho negates the figure ground dyad associated with Friedrichian picturing. A Sapphic conception of landscape is one which, by contrast to the privileging of one position found in the Friedrichian picture, is multipositional.
3. As with the marginalized and fragmented character of Sappho's own practice, point 2 extends to the position and practice of the artist him/herself.

As I seek to demonstrate throughout this thesis, Frederick Sommer's practice as an artist also presented such dialectical tensions and negations, and arose from and reflected its own marginalized position as a practice.

Therefore in order to develop the notion of a Sapphic Sublime in my proposed context of landscape further, it is perhaps necessary first to expand on what is meant by 'Sapphic', and what can be understood by a peculiarly 'Sapphic landscape', as well as the Sapphic sublime, and to look at the contexts of the term's contemporary usage but also to capitulate what is known of Sappho in terms of her historical epoch, cultural position and, indeed, personal mores, in order to understand how such tropes such as 'intensity' 'tension', 'fragmentation', 'incoherence', 'merging' (or 'imbrication' as Prins, 1999, has it) and so on, might bear upon such a radically different experience of the sublime.

For the most part, the work done on Sappho can be defined as occupying one or more of the following categories: Classical Greek studies, poetics and literature, or studies of gender and sexuality, in particular those arising from the work of Michel Foucault and Luce Irigaray. Whilst to date the majority of academic writing on the Sapphic sublime has been located within this Foucault-Irigaray nexus around gender debates of the 1990s, and moreover a good portion of it has been located within literature rather than visual art, I would argue that formal

aspects of the description of the Sapphic sublime is not only transferable to, but also appropriate to my discussion of the work of Frederick Sommer.

Given that her work survives only as fragments, Sappho's posthumous career is transmitted to the reader through specific mediatory discourses, Longinus being the first established case in point. Given the paucity of accurate historical information about Sappho, it is perhaps somewhat inevitable that other re-emergences of Sappho take the form of fashionable tropes, largely determined by perceived relevance to the various discursive turns in the fields mentioned above. The most extensive scholarly case-specific study of one such re-emergence of interest in Sappho to date is Yopie Prins's *Victorian Sappho* (1999) which examines in depth the uses (or abuses) of Sappho as a rhetorical idiom – or 'empty vessel' – by nineteenth century lyrical English poets, but a case can be made that other citations of Sappho have been as figurative or metaphorical: J.J.Winkler's *The Constraints of Desire* (1990), which I cite below, seeks to construct a study of Greek sexuality in part determined and differentiated by the discourses of AIDS activism and Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender politics, as one might expect given the time in which it was written.

My point, here, is not to dismiss such studies, but rather to construct and outline by extracting common delineative characteristics in order to understand what might be understood as a Sapphic conception of landscape as it is commonly understood. Indeed, the significance of re-examining this debate in the context of this thesis lies in understanding the manner in which writers such as Winkler, and Classicists such as Paige Du Bois, who I cite below, are able to locate Sappho historically whilst attributing trans-historical significance to her work and times.

Subsequently, following an examination of contemporary conceptions of the Sublime, I will examine how the term Sapphic might qualify or specify a conception of the Sublime in relation to Sommer's work. Before I do that however, one might pose the question as to whether the contexts and framing of Sappho's work in the 6th Century BCE are too specific to be transferable to a 20th Century photographer such as Sommer.

There are, of course, precedents for such transfers, but it is important they are

examined carefully. In her discussion of the nineteenth century lyric poetry of 'Michael Field' – the collaborative authorial *nom de plume* of Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913) - Prins (1999) discusses Field's description of the Lesbian / lesbian *topos* both in terms of the idylls of the island of Lesbos, and, metaphorically, as a 'landscape' of lesbian perspectives, through the Victorian reconstructions and translations of the fragmented poetry of Sappho herself. Prins first of all focuses upon a piece given the scholarly reference of 'Fragment 2' in which the singer engages the goddess Cypris to enter a scented idyllic landscape of apple trees temples, meadows and roses, in which each surviving stanza nominates a place before shifting to another. The effect, as Prins observes, is one of "increasing immediacy" (1999:97) in which a performed ritual urges the visiting goddess to "Come here" – "And here" – "and here". This sense of multipositionality in the body / landscape amalgam might seem pertinent formally to the issues I have raised in relation to Sommer's photographs, nevertheless, Prins effectively adds a caveat: her argument, whilst allowing for historical transference, argues for specific particularism in terms of Sappho's sexuality. The extent to which this maybe obviated or otherwise is obviously important for my argument, in so far as Sommer's own subject position is so radically different to that of Sappho, and Prins makes the subject position of Sappho crucial to any wider reading of her poetry.

Citing John Winkler's(1990) argument that this invocation of any number of different places constitutes "an extended and multi-perspectived metaphor of women's sexuality" Prins seeks to 'lesbianise' (or re-lesbianise) this conception of a *topos* arguing that what is at stake here is not simply women's sexuality but specifically the sexuality of female same sex relationships: "Sappho also circumscribes a highly eroticized space that blurs the boundaries between public and private, communal and personal outside and inside." This statement would appear to overlook Winkler's discussion of Nausikaa and Odysseus, in which Nausikaa emerges very clearly as an object of female sexual desire, and that Winkler explicitly states that the eroticism expressed by Sappho is "both subjectively and objectively woman centred" (1990: 187). However, I would argue that Prins's attempt to resist any wider reading of Sappho's significance on the grounds of her sexuality is misplaced on two other accounts. Firstly, as Winkler notes, the very concept of lesbianism as it is construed and enunciated

now would not have been understood in the Ancient Greece of Sappho. Any account of Sappho as a lesbian in the contemporary sense of the word risks an idealization of same sex relations, which, as André Lardinois (1989) has recognised, is highly problematic. Of Sappho's oeuvre, fragments 71, 16, 22, 68a, 96, 131, 213, all allude to affectionate feelings for women. Lardinois evaluates the various sources of evidence and anecdote regarding Sappho's sexuality, both in the context of shifting contexts, social mores and judgements amongst later commentators towards the particular social and sexual norms of early Greek culture. As Lardinois records, fragment 94 is a lament for a girl who has left Sappho, mentioning 'soft beds on which she would satisfy her longing', and fragment 99 mentions a dildo, but the reference is ambiguous: beyond that, Sappho is not explicit about actual sexual activity, but neither were contemporaneous male poets in their descriptions. Since in Sparta at the time of Sappho, it was the norm for highborn ladies to form short lived sexual relationships with young women in a manner which mirrored the institutionalised pederasty in male initiation rituals – something reflected in the language of the time (*aītis* = girl involved with older woman *aītas* = boy involved with older man) Lardinois draws the conclusion that something similar may have been the norm on Lesbos:

...that in the case of Sappho we are dealing at the most with short relationships between an adult woman and a young, marriageable girl. To call these relationships 'lesbian' is anachronistic. Whether the word applies to Sappho herself, her inner life, is impossible to assess. Actually it constitutes a nonsensical question. Even if by modern standards Sappho were to be considered lesbian, her experience must have been very different, living as she did in a different age with different notions of sexuality.
(1989:30)

In this light, I would argue that Prins's accusation that Winkler somehow 'de-lesbianises' Sappho in terms of how the contemporary world might view her might therefore seem an example of transfiguration with its concomitant implication of idealization.

However, what Winkler goes on to describe are a number of key and distinct *formal* characteristics and concerns arising from Sappho's work, which, whilst they undoubtedly emerge from Sappho's subject position as marginal to dominant cultural forms of the time, are transferrable to other practices and practitioners in other epochs. These are; (i) the marginal, occasionless situating of her lyric poetry (1990:165) insofar as it was probably even by her time (the early 6th Century BCE) an archaic form which was not sung for patriarchal civic or devotional purposes, but rather in Sappho's own words "to delight the women who are my companions" (Fragment 160); (ii) the many mindedness – the dappled, changing and complexity of the Greek *poikilos*, or what Winkler terms the "field effect"(1990:167) of Sapphic lyric; (iii) that there is no *simple* sexual imagery in Sappho, but rather a complex conflation of the eroticised body with a landscape, which simultaneously speaks about "a more complete consciousness, whether of myth, poetry ritual or personal relationships"(1990:185).

Fragments and Fragmentation

I recount Lardinois's research in some detail for two reasons. Firstly, because of its pertinence to the wider questions of framing Sappho and her works as an historical subject, and how we might think of framing that fragmented subjectivity in the context of the apparent similarity and marked difference. Secondly, however, there is the sense in which the poet herself appears to us in fragmented form. This phenomenological aspect of one's encounter with Sappho is shot through with tensions and inversions. This, again, has its echo in Sommer and his work, as I demonstrate in both the previous chapter and the next. In thinking through the fragmented trace of Sappho, this piquant, shocking combination of recognition and estrangement recurs over and over. Although she does not name this process as 'sublime', I would suggest the process which Du Bois describes as an aesthetic response to reading Sappho's work-in-fragments corresponds to such a description:

The reader's pleasure comes from an appreciation of the disintegration the poet describes, the undeniable pain of eros, of a disordering desire that shatters the tongue, that brings the

“I” to a place near death, but also from the security of that “I” that speaks the poem, the voice that gazes retrospectively at the experience of fragmentation, and from it creates a crossroads, a poem and a self. And there is further the historical dimension of our reading, a sense of distance from the fragments of Sappho’s work, a sense of another distance, internal to the poem in which the Homeric body serves as a figure for the lover. (1995:75)

DuBois defines the Homeric body as one that can be seen as an assemblage of limbs, and in that sense predates it to a more recent conception of a somatic whole, perhaps suggesting dis-imbrication as a corollary of perceiving the body in such a way, and also suggesting, later in her text, that the distancing between our time and the time of Sappho she describes above is echoed in Sappho’s own acknowledgement of time in work such as Fragment 16 (*Anactoria*):

The poem [ie Fragment 16, *Anactoria*] like others in the Sapphic corpus, plays with time, moving the listener from the past into a vividly realised present, a present that, the poems stress, is really itself the creation of memory. (1995:104)

Nevertheless, common to the arguments of both Winkler and Prins is the conception of the Sapphic being multi-perspectived, and it is this point I wish to extract, which is of value to my argument here, and to which I will return. Moreover, the insightful historicising work of Paige du Bois (1995), establishes both historical context – but also *significance* – for Sappho in terms of cultural understandings of time, of the body and the wider significances of the trope of fragmentation, placing her at what she terms “the beginnings of the philosophical project itself” (1995:99) at a moment when conceptions of the body, from the Homeric to the Socratic, and the individual as a societal being, were in flux. As such, du Bois identifies a tension in the individual between two movements which threaten to tear that individual apart, that is grounded in profound societal, cultural and philosophical shifts that had lasting resonances, and which Sappho, through her work and social position, was perhaps uniquely placed to reflect:

The emergence of the individual in lyric poetry is an extraordinary, even “world-historical” event in Western culture. Yet even as the individual becomes differentiated, emerges in his or her particularity in the aristocratic poetry of Sappho’s day, the intellectual movements travel in the opposite direction, away from specificity and detail toward abstraction [...]. Sappho’s poetry stands at a moment of transition, in which the specificity of the particular is still visible, in which a particular object, a headband, a field of flowers, exists in all its particularity, but in which at the same time that process of individualization that will allow for the equivalency among all citizens of ancient democracy to be constituted. (1995:109)

As DuBois makes clear, it is this tension, this “moment of transition” which gives rise to a new understanding of particularity and abstraction in philosophy, as they exert a cultural dual power not previously experienced. This, in turn, allows for the possibility of equivalence, a new understanding of the possibility of ‘merging’ and imbrication, but also of exchange, with all that implies in terms of the possibility of multiple positioning:

In Sappho’s fragment 16 the transition from parataxis to hypotaxis, from parallel example to example as part of general proof, joins an assertion of personal desire, of the celebration of an individual’s erotic preference [...] We can see rhetorical change, the evolution of hypotactic logic, the production of new forms of selfhood and identity, and an effort toward a philosophical project, some definition of the most beautiful [...] in the transition from tribal social structure to the ancient city, modes of thinking change. Sappho’s ability to move towards abstraction, toward definition, and the positing of one term that subsumes a variety of examples, coincides, perhaps is even enabled by contemporary phenomena in the culture she inhabits. One of

the most striking of these is the invention in the eastern Mediterranean, in nearby Lydia, of coined money. (1995:111)

DuBois's achievement is her contribution towards an understanding of the relevance of Sappho's work both in its historical specifics and its account of how Sappho's artistic voice continues to resonate through the tensions she describes.

Psychoanalysis and the Sublime – the work of Thomas Weiskel and Neil Hertz

Both the internal and external pressures which were thus expressed in Sappho's lyrical work, and which produced her particular expressive accounts of the fragmented body, resonate with what Malcolm Bowie terms

the means by which the individual retains an active memory of his earliest sense of physical disarray. The body once seemed all over the place, and the anxiety associated with this memory fuels the individual's desire to be possessor and resident of the a secure bodily 'I' (1991:26)

Of course substantial recent scholarship on the Sublime has, to a considerable extent, coalesced around and drawn upon the discourses of twentieth century Psychoanalysis. The discursive background for this can be categorised as twofold: on the one hand, Lacan's redescription of the Freudian categories of Id, Ego and Superego in terms of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and the consequent recognition that the Real can only *present* itself, and not be *represented*, recalls the question of *Darstellung* (presentation) versus *Vorstellung* (representation) which occupied eighteenth and nineteenth century German philosophy from Kant through Hegel to Marx. This fundamental opposition is echoed in the opposition between the Real and the Symbolic - the middle category, the Imaginary, effectively being the product of the other two – demonstrates the extent to which Kant's influence continues to be felt.

Although the intervening years has seen a substantial body of work emerging through the fields of feminist, gender and Marxist literary studies - particularly in the 1980s and 1990s - attribution of the correlation between Psychoanalysis and the Sublime in literary studies is generally accredited to the critic Thomas Weiskel in his posthumously published study *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976). Although critical of some of the linkages Weiskel made between Freudian thought and the legacy of Kant, Neil Hertz, himself the author of several influential essays in the field, remarked in 1985:

It is Weiskel's distinction to have seen that the poetic and philosophic language of the primary sublime texts could be made to resonate with two quite different twentieth century idioms, that of psychoanalysis and that of the semiological writings of Saussure, Jakobson and Barthes. (1985:49)

As if in response to those who might argue that the entire concept of the sublime is no longer relevant or that to transpose it to contemporary critical thinking is to commit some form of category error, Weiskel begins his book with the question and answer:

Can the sublime be construed at all outside the presuppositions of idealism – whether Platonic or Kantian, theological or simply egotistical? It is possible, I believe, to preserve the dichotomous structure of Kant's formulation in a "realist" or psychological accent. (1976:23)

Weiskel's gloss on both Burke and Kant's accounts of the Sublime argues that they presuppose a homeostatic principle at work in the mind (1976:25), and takes the form of three stages:

We call an object sublime if the attempt to represent it determines the mind to regard its inability to grasp wholly the object as a symbol of the mind's relation to

a transcendent order. It is convenient to unfold this definition in terms of a sublime moment whose temporality is in the last analysis fictional or merely operative. The sublime moment, so understood, seems to consist of three phases or economic states. (1976:23)

Weiskel's schema overlays the three stages of what might think of as the 'normative' sublime experience – the event itself, the rupture of Kant's 'violence to the imagination', and the subsequent recourse to reason – with the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic of Lacanian Psychoanalysis.

In the fourth chapter of his 1976 book *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure of Romantic Transcendence*, entitled 'The Logic of Terror', Weiskel thinks through the second and third phases in relation the ambivalence of the sublime, "which opposes the imagination's feeling of defeat to the reason's awe of itself [...] The cause of the sublime is the *aggrandisement of reason at the expense of reality and imaginative apprehension of reality*" (1976:41, Weiskel's original emphasis). This sequence – in which the the sublime object effects a defeat of the sense of self (the ego), so profound that its solace can only be found in reason and what he terms later as "a positive identification with the super ego" (1976:97). Weiskel's second phase effectively rehearses a moment wherein the ego is fragmented and pre-Oedipal, to one in which the Symbolic order is re-entered. This is, of course a *rehearsal* of the Oedipal drama, and as a result its experience is infused with, and evokes, feelings of recollection – of both trauma and gratification - that the subject associates with the original event in infant development:

In the second or traumatic phase of the negative sublime, the mind is overwhelmed, but because this state has been associated with gratification it is unconsciously and irresistibly attractive. This is why a diffuse melancholy predisposes to the sublime. The melancholic is in need of "narcissistic supplies" – self esteem – from his superego, in which an original deprivation is likely to have been institutionalized. (1976:105)

Significant to my discussion here and my the exploration of Klein later in this chapter, however, slightly earlier, Weiskel raises the possibility that such a triumphal return to the Symbolic order by way of the super ego might, in some circumstances, be indefinitely postponed:

On the other hand, the obsessional derivatives of the traumatic sublime mark a failure of positive identification with the superego, and thus the delight is never really experienced. If you do not recover from the second phase, you are likely to replay the precipitating occasion in an involuntary repetition compulsion (like the Ancient Mariner), a disorder Burke finds frequent in madmen. (1976:97)

I would suggest this foreclosure of the ‘third phase’ – and the compulsions, fragmentations and melancholia implied by such curtailment – bears directly the Pre-Oedipal fragmentation I discuss below, and is a central component of, but not a summary description of, the Sapphic sublime, for it is a sublime moment that does not attain either the succour or triumphant identification of the symbolic order. Moreover, as can be surmised, the conception of such a sublime shorn of the transcendent triumph of the identification with the Law gestures towards a sublime in which *eros* and *thanatos* are conflated and the subject desires both inundation *and* fragmentation amidst unspeakable excess.

For his own part, Neil Hertz’s *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* discusses, in his essay ‘A Reading of Longinus’ Sappho in the context of Longinus’s *Per Hupsos*, noting that what Longinus appreciates in Sappho’s fragment *Phanetai Moi* – namely, ‘the way in which she brings everything together’ (1985:5) – when, in fact, the opposite seems clearly to be Sappho’s intention, since the poem “speaks of a moment of self-estrangement in language that captures the *disorganised* quality of the experience” (1985:5). The sense as Hertz therein notes, is that for Sappho there was no recuperative, unifying moment, but that Sappho’s aesthetic ‘chafes against the Longinian doctrine of organic unity’ (1985:5), thereby inscribing a sense that, free of the mediation of Longinus, Sappho’s voice – and, I would argue, her sublime – is

one “of a moment of self-estrangement in language that captures the *disorganised* quality of the experience”. (*ibid.*)

In a subsequent essay ‘The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime’ Hertz considers the notion of excess in the context of the psychic economy:

Until now to the extent that both the mathematical and the dynamical sublime could be rendered as affirmative of reason – that is, of the superego – it had been possible to think of excess in terms of Freud’s discussion of excessive identification, of that supererogatory strength of investment that turns the superego in to a harsher taskmaster than the father upon whom it is modelled. But there may be other forms of excess associated with the mathematical sublime that are not so easily accounted for [...] (1985:51-52)

It is this conception of excess, indicated here by Hertz, which was to subsequently concern a generation of feminist critics. Hertz’s discussion, in particular, has been critiqued extensively by both Barbara Claire Freeman (1995) and Christine Battersby (2007), particularly in relation to the work of Luce Irigaray.

The Sublime and Excess: Feminist Literary Criticism

In this chapter, one of my aims has been to explore those moments when a sublime can be delineated which does not conform to the Longinian or Kantian tropes. Since traditionally, the category of the Sublime has been associated with the masculine as beauty has been associated with the feminine, the concept of a feminine – or, as one particular critic would have it, a *female* sublime – therefore inevitably has a subversive quality. I will look, therefore, in some detail at competing conceptions of the ‘feminine sublime’ (Freeman, 1995) and ‘female sublime’ (Battersby, 2007) and their implications for the work I am undertaking here. As I have already indicated, much of this work has been focused on the literary field. There are some exceptions to this, some of which I

will look at in relation to some recent critical writing of Christine Battersby (2007), who relates her notion of the female sublime to the work of A.K. Dolven, and Joanna Zylińska (2001), who has written about the musical work of Laurie Anderson. It is therefore my aim to trace and expand upon some of the pertinent aspects of these predominantly literary critiques and examine the extent to which they might legitimately be applied to visual art, and to define those elements of feminist descriptions of the sublime which are relevant to the discussion of visual art.

Significantly for this thesis, however, the work of these two critics focuses exclusively on literary contexts for the sublime. Battersby (2007) also brings visual art into her purview, although I will argue in the course of this chapter that her examples are problematic. Freeman begins her discussion around an early Twentieth Century American novel, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, which it posits as a key moment in women's literary engagement with the Sublime. Early in her discussion of this work, Freeman notes that Chopin's treatment of the sublime is distinctly non visual, and in this Freeman distinguishes it from the Kantian / Longinian tradition. Freeman notes that despite Chopin's heroine being visually aware and a skilled artist, her encounter with the sublime is not a visual moment; rather, she notes that it is aural. If, as writers such as Freeman (1995) and Battersby (2007) have argued, the masculine gendering of the sublime has prioritized the visual, this emphasis on a non-visual sublime is arguably one of the key tropes of a recuperative re-gendering of the concept, along with the the concept of excess.

In her book *The Feminine Sublime* (1995) Barbara Clare Freeman explores this aspect of excess, beginning with a critique of its Romantic form. What is significant about Freeman's work in respect of the present thesis is that, building upon the analyses of both Weiskel and Hertz, she seeks to stress the 'second phase' of the sublime, and in doing so seeks to problematise the traditional Romantic conception of the sublime moment culminating in the supremacy of what she terms the "self's domination over its objects of rapture":

“For Kant [...] the sublime moment entails the elevation of reason over an order of experience that cannot be represented. Typically, the sublime involves a moment of blockage followed by one of heightened lucidity in which reason resists the blocking source by representing its very inability to represent the sublime “object”: it thereby achieves supremacy over an excess that resists its powers. Thus the central moment of the sublime marks the self’s newly enhanced sense of identity: a will to power drives its style, a mode that establishes and maintains the self’s domination over its objects of rapture. I certainly do not wish to domesticate the sublime by defusing its profound and important connections to the realms of power, conflict, and agency, or suggest that the feminine sublime is merely another more intense version of the beautiful: yet rather than represent the object of rapture as a way of incorporating it, as the traditional sublime of domination does, the feminine sublime does not attempt to master its objects of rapture. It is my conviction that another account of the sublime lies hidden within and is repressed by metaphysical theories of sublimity, and that the story of this other sublime has yet to be written. (1995:2-3)

Freeman, following the work of Neil Hertz (1985), and building upon his concept of ‘blockage’, comments upon Longinus, Burke and Kant, and in so doing critiques the gendering of the Sublime. Freeman’s reading of Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in combination with Edith Warton’s *The House of Mirth*, which deals with the life and times of Lily Bart, an extraordinarily beautiful woman who has been raised to regard her beauty as a ‘weapon’ ‘asset’, ‘property’ and ‘charge’ (1995:57) provides a startling example of a female figure who is ‘excessive’ because of the way her social and sexual power – proactive, transformative - remains uncontainable to the men and society around her. Warton’s heroine understands that her beauty (an aesthetic category traditional gendered as feminine, and thereby supine and controlled by masculinity) is ‘only the raw material of conquest’. As Freeman observes, as such, Bart’s beauty, ‘like any commodity’ has mutable value, and she markets herself

accordingly, constructing herself as beautiful and in so doing does for Burke's conception of beauty per se. Moreover, Bart derives her ethical stance as valorisation of risky speculation: "An action whose outcome can be calculated in advance is ethically inferior to one whose results are unknown" (1995:56) Pertinent to Barbara Clare Freeman's discussion of Wharton's Lily Bart, Frederick Sommer's piece *I Adore You*, a photo-montage made in 1947, presents shifting planes of imagery repeatedly featuring *belle époque* courtship, marriage, adolescence and motherhood, bleeding beyond the frame, as if presenting a fragment of an infinitely expanding patchwork or tapestry of limbs, torsos, kisses, averted eyes and matrixial gazes at the centre of which a beautiful woman is looked at by a man, whilst she, ignoring him, gazes steadily out of the frame at us whilst drawing back her cape. Alone in piercing the plane with her gaze – all other eyes gaze along the planes of the picture – the image of the woman – slightly smaller than those around her – seems to recede from us just as her gaze projects forth, as if in search of something other than the reciprocal dynamics of those around her. Sommer's female subject recurrent and restless, refuses to remain supine, and in doing so becomes something more than beautiful.

As Freeman also observes (1995:58) Burke believed that he could eradicate uncertainty and confusion in life even as he found them productive of delight in art – Burke's distinction between what becomes, in the hands of the German Idealists, *Darstellung* (presentation) and *Vorstellung* (representation). Like most theorists of the sublime Burke also applied taxonomies of gender in distinguishing the beautiful from the sublime. Furthermore, as Freeman observes, in his statement 'We dread the operation of money' Burke gestured toward what Lyotard centuries later would identify as *sublime* in the workings of capitalist economy (1995:59). However, as Freeman observes, in generating speculation, risk and confusion around herself Lily Bart not only represents that side of capitalist culture which risk averse reason and Burkeian Conservatism seeks to repress, but becomes a figure of excess, more sublime than beautiful:

'She is at once the commodity upon which she encourages others to speculate, the object of their interest and desire, and the creator of that

object, simultaneously her own author, director, producer and publicist.’(1995:59)

The character of Lily Bart, as described by Freeman, would seem to presage many contemporary theories of the subject. Lily Bart’s response to the interpellative call is excessive. Notably, Freeman herself does not describe her conception of the sublime as ‘Sapphic’ but rather ‘feminine’. Below, and in subsequent chapters I will propose differentiations between the two. I want to argue here that the figure of Sappho is one of excess; that akin to Bart, Sappho remains a figure of confusion and excess. Sappho’s subject position as described by Winkler and Prins, presents, socially and artistically, a response that is *excessive* to the interpellative call of her time and convention. This is not an argument about priorities or about clarity of intention, but about how the ideal subject position might be one of sublime excess. Sappho’s subject position is always a radically incomplete one, ‘completed’ at different times and different mediators.

Responding to Hertz (1985) in relation to Longinus’s treatment of Sappho, Freeman critiques Neil Hertz’s conception of Sappho’s body as ‘victimised’. In so doing, Freeman looks at Hertz’s notion of ‘blockage’ in *The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime*” (1978) which attempts to deal with aspects overlooked in his earlier essay, ‘A Reading of Longinus’ (1973) namely, that which as Derrida would have it ‘Cannot be brought home to the father’ (1995:22) but goes on to state that:

“The magnitude that cannot be “returned to the father” leads to the territory of the mother. Although Weiskel does not use the term “pre-Oedipal”, his explanation for this new anxiety of the sublime calls up an invocation of the desire and terror at work in the (maternal) pre-Oedipal phase, in which the infant is still bound in symbiotic union with its mother. [...] Becoming a self, in this scenario, requires the transfer of libidinal energy from the mother to the father, as if the mother were herself the threatening agent, that, without paternal intervention, would interfere with the formation of a child’s separate identity.” (1995:24)

In contrast to Freeman, however, Christine Battersby (2007) critiques not only the masculinism and sexism of Kant and Levinas, but also feminist writers such as Freeman, Cixous and Joanna Zylińska because of their use of the term 'feminine' which she counterposes to a concept of 'femaleness':

[...] in Kant femaleness is bound up with that which is merely material and hence *beneath* personhood, not the kind of excessive 'otherness' that is bound up with infinity of the cosmos or nature that acts as a horizon for - and a threat to - the (male) self. Zylińska's emphasis on the feminine sublime does - like traditional aesthetics of the sublime that it seeks to subvert - leave materiality behind as it privileges that which is 'other' to and 'beyond' the masculinised self. Fleishy difference and other material and culturally specific forms of exclusion also disappear through the adoption of a Levinasian frame which operates at too abstract and universal a level to capture the philosophical problems which are posed by thinking of the self as not detached from his or her familial social and historical relationships, and also as not contingently embodied.(2007:104)

My key point here in relation to the above, however, is that Battersby effectively limits her discussion to the extent to which the categories and concepts of the Feminine and its relationships with the language and terms of reference of Kant and his heirs has worked to exclude women and 'femaleness' from the discourse of the Kantian Sublime, but does not offer any challenge to the basic structure of the sublime *per se* as proposed by Kant. This is most evident in the art which Battersby proposes as a model of the sublime: noticeably the artist A.K.Dolven's work in which single and multiple naked bald female *Rückenfiguren* seem to face into the picture, across an interminable calm seascape. Battersby suggests that Dolven's work

[...] picks up and reverses view of nature and of femininity that is characteristic of the Romantic or Expressionist artists [...] but then uses temporal spatial or behavioural incongruities to render strange the framework which the observer employs to make sense of what she sees. [...] the white body and hairless head of the young woman remind us of the precarious health of a cancer victim, but also of the possibility of allowing female baldness to function as a badge of defiance and of courage. (2007:153)

I would argue here that merely repeating the Kantian/Friedrichian dyad with female viewers does not effect any paradigm shift or radical new reading of the sublime, whether involving a ‘flesh-and-blood femaleness’ of Battersby or the ‘feminine’ of Freeman, Joanna Zylińska et al, since Caspar David Friedrich used both male and female figures singular and in groups, as *Rückenfiguren*. Similarly, whilst the specific intimations of mortality in the form of baldness might be unique to Dolven’s female figures, a sense of both the precipitous, of courage and of mortality are common themes in Friedrich’s work also: one might think of his painting of different generations viewing receding ships in the mist, or the woman confronting the unforgiving light of day at the cruciform window frame. Battersby’s approach here, via Dolven’s work, is to re-inscribe the Kantian model as the only paradigm of the sublime, albeit arguing, despite Friedrich’s efforts to the contrary, that women have been effectively excluded from the pictorial form of this tradition. In so doing she appears to defend a sense of a Kantian ‘constant’ in the face of those writers mentioned above, who conceive of the sublime as a temporal and mutable category that changes dramatically.

Whilst developing the traditions of Levinas, Lyotard, Derrida and Irigaray to posit the notion of a feminine sublime as “not only a new aesthetic arrangement, but, first of all, an ethical proposal” (2001:4) Joanna Zylińska, like Barbara Claire Freeman, locates her conception of the feminine sublime in what Weiskel might have recognized as his second phase, speaking of “Embracing that excess which is restrained and controlled in the sublime of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant” (2001:4) and looking toward that shattering moment with

“which the feminine sublime opens itself to an incalculable difference which threatens the stability and self-sufficiency of the modern subject.”

Zylinska goes on “The feminine sublime I delineate here does not, in turn, capitalise on difference in order to enhance modern selfhood with its founding institutions and economies; instead, it constitutes an ethical moment in which an absolute and indescribable otherness is welcomed” (2001:4).

Zylinska avoids any mention of Sappho however, and, as with Battersby, her book is primarily concerned with debates internal to feminism, and the discourses of ethics difference that draw their geneology from Levinas, and therefore outside the remit of the present chapter. However, two points remain pertinent here:

- 1) The extent to which recent debates between feminist theorists are located within the territory of the Weiskel’s ‘Second Phase’ again confirms a consensus of this moment in the sublime experience being one of rupture with, or a traumatic estrangement from, the Symbolic order, the re-assertion of which constitutes Weiskel’s third phase, and therein the demarcation between the Pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal is delineated.
- 2) Whilst Battersby’s account of a ‘visual’ female sublime (via the work of Dolven) retains what might be thought of as a Friedrichian-Kantian character (a figure(s) / ground construction, which I explore in more detail in the next chapter) both Zylinska and Freeman locate their own accounts of the Feminine sublime in literary and aural contexts (Freeman via Chopin’s and Woolf’s respective writing on the sea, and Zylinska in Levinasian ethics and her discussion of Laurie Anderson’s music).

What I want to argue here, therefore, is that despite the differentiations made in the dialogues between Battersby, Freeman et al above, the potential that is peculiar to the conception of a *Sapphic* sublime lies elsewhere to the ground specifically delineated by those debates. I want to suggest that we might differentiate the distinct areas of the Female and the Feminine Sublimes on the one hand from the Sapphic on the other by focusing upon the uniqueness of Sappho, and, *apropos* Prins, this uniqueness lies in Sappho’s particular subject position as a *marginal* figure – despite her privileged background – whose

sexuality, choice of audience, chosen form of practice as a poet, and readings of the landscape around her delineate a sublime more appropriate for *visual* art which deals with the fragmentation that Steven Vine¹ has referred to as ‘the Wasteland motif’ in reference to T.S.Eliot’s epoch making poem, which of course opens with a description of a ‘dead land’ full of ‘stony rubbish’ redolent of Frederick Sommer’s photographs of the 1940s.

Psychoanalysis and Fragmentation: the work of Melanie Klein

In turning to address this question of fragmentation and the sublime in more detail, I propose to draw on three sources: again I will return to Alenka Zupancic’s *The Ethics of the The Real* (2000), but also George Hartley’s *The Abyss of Representation* (2003) and the work of Melanie Klein. My reasons for choosing this approach are threefold:

Firstly, both Hartley and Zupancic locate their exploration of the sublime in nexus of subject formation and the unconscious. Both Hartley and Zupancic acknowledge the enduring legacy of Kant in their work and its intellectual genealogy, and both share areas of discursive commonality, drawing not only on the work of Kant, but also Hegel, Lacan and Western Marxism. As such their work represents a move away from the discourses of gender and power of Foucault and Irigaray which I mentioned above, instead drawing upon - and consolidating thematic continuity with - the areas of concern, informed by the Kantian legacy which I mentioned in the previous chapter, and which remains germane to a discussion of landscape for reasons I have already outlined in Chapter 1 and will continue to develop hereafter. Secondly, both Hartley and Zupancic locate the sublime in subject formation and the Psychoanalytical discourses around the Unconscious, and the central Lacanian concept of ‘lack’. Thirdly, Melanie Klein’s work on the formation of the Ego (what, in Lacan’s revision of Freudian discourse becomes the Imaginary) in early infancy emphasises what she repeatedly refers to as the splitting, disintegration and fragmentation process common to both healthy and schizoid states – in other words, that same ‘earliest sense of physical disarray’ referred to by Malcolm Bowie which I mentioned above. Klein links this process with loss and lack. Crucially, I would argue, for my discussion around the Sapphic *topos*, Klein also

sees this process of infant relations with the mother's body – a thing which, Klein explains, the child experiences as dis-integrated - as involving the phantasy of movement or traversal – in Klein's terms, 'flight' from what the infant perceives as bad or persecuting objects towards good ones. For Klein, this process is bound up with splitting and states of disintegration within the infant psyche.

These elements, I will argue, taken together, constitute a description of the Sapphic Sublime.

Central to the work of Melanie Klein was a conception of the development of what she termed 'object relations' and ego development – a process she regarded as proceeding in tandem - in early infantile development:

As regards normal development, it may be said that the course of ego development and object relations depends on the degree to which an optimal balance between introjection and projection in the early stages of development can be achieved. (1991:185)

In the young child who has not yet formed a sense of self, this takes the form of a developmental process of introjection and projection, in which good and bad emotions towards objects – principally the body of the mother experienced as fragments, since the child has as yet no conception of her as a whole person:

[...] the attacks on the mother's breast develop into attacks of a similar nature on her body, which comes to be felt as it were as an extension of the breast, even before the mother is conceived of as a complete person.[...] in so far as as the mother comes to contain the bad parts of the self, she is not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be *the* bad self. (1991:183, Klein's original emphasis)

In her 1946 paper, *Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms*, from which the above quotes are taken, Klein argued that the process of splitting – a phrase which, along with disintegration, she returns to repeatedly in the description in *Notes* - is central to early ego development. Concurring with a paper published a year earlier (1945) by D.W.Winnicott, which she cites, Klein states:

I would also say that the early ego largely lacks cohesion, and a tendency towards integration alternates with a tendency towards disintegration, a falling into bits. I believe that these fluctuations are characteristic of the first few months of life.

In a phase of development in which individuation between mother and child is not complete, Klein's description - which, as a "superb clinician" (1991:30) she based upon direct observation in the therapy setting - establishes the process of splitting, disintegration and re-integration as "as one of the earliest ego mechanisms and defences against anxiety" (1991:181). Klein linked this process to the dual processes of introjection and projection (ibid.) which are, obviously, fluid in a situation where the infant's sense of self is not fully formed, and continues to be combined with its fragmented experience of the mother's body, where, for example, the same breast might be experienced as a hateful enraging bad thing (in the case of an unsatisfying feed) or as a gratifying, and ultimately idealised object. For Klein, the infant progresses from a state of paranoid schizophrenia to a depressive position by this process of splitting, but the process is not without its dangers or terrors:

In the baby, processes of introjection and projection, since they are dominated by aggression and anxieties which re-inforce each other, lead to fears of persecution by terrifying objects. (Mourning and Manic-Depressive States, 1991:150).

Moreover, Klein also argues that the mental states of the infant – are states which can be regressed to by adult minds under extreme mental stress. As Klein herself puts it:

The various ways of splitting the ego and internal objects result in the feeling that the ego is in bits. This feeling amounts to a state of disintegration. In normal development, the states of disintegration which the in fact experiences are transitory. Among other factors, gratification by the external good object that again and again helps to break through these

schizoid states. The infant's capacity to overcome these temporary schizoid states is in keeping with the strong elasticity and resilience of the infantile mind. If states of splitting and therefore disintegration, which the ego is unable to overcome, occur too frequently and go on for too long, then in my view they must be regarded as signs of schizophrenic illness in the infant [...] In adult patients, states of depersonalisation and schizophrenic dissociation seem to be a regression to these infantile states of disintegration." (1991:184-5)

What is to be stressed here is that Klein is not, in describing this process of 'splitting' and disintegration, positing symptoms peculiar to states of illness *per se* as much as developmental stages which are effectively posited as ahistorically universal to subject formation. Klein describes a process in which good feelings and persecutory ones are both *projected* onto the mother's [fragmented] body and internalised – *introjected* – in the process of ego formation. Significantly whilst her work concentrated on the early infantile development, Klein's stagism was not one of discrete consecutive episodes, but overlapping phases which cast long – albeit ultimately faint – shadows. In addition to her allusion to adult psychiatric illness above, and in her description of early ego development, Klein argues:

We are, I think, justified in assuming that some of the functions of which we know from the later ego are there at the beginning. (1991:179)

Whilst later:

During the second half of the first year the infant makes some fundamental steps towards working through the depressive position. However, schizoid mechanisms remain in force, though in a modified form and to a lesser degree, [...] The working through of the persecutory and depressive positions extends over the first few years of childhood and plays an essential part in the infantile neurosis. In the course of this process, anxieties lose in strength; objects become both less

idealized and less terrifying, and the ego becomes more unified. (1991:189-190)

As Klein argues, the infant ‘phantasies’ (in accordance with Freudian tradition, Klein uses the ‘ph’ spelling to denote the Unconscious) movement – ‘flight’ - from those parts of the maternal body it fears or feels persecuted by, to those parts it feels gratifying, and which, as a consequence, it might come to mourn and idealise in later life.

One characteristic feature of the earliest relation to the good object – internal and external – is the tendency to idealize it. In states of frustration or increased anxiety, the infant is driven to *take flight* to his internal idealized object as a means of escaping from his persecutors. [...] the *condition of flight* to the unassimilated ideal object necessitates further splitting processes within the ego. (1991:184, my emphases).

Arising from Klein’s description above is therefore, a sense of the maternal body being, in phantasy, traversed by the infant as it negotiates good and bad objects in alternating states of integration and disintegration – a flux which it feels to be internal as well as external. I want to suggest therefore that there is a fruitful connection to be made here between the forms of fragmentation Klein describes here and the Kantian ‘violence to the imagination’. Furthermore, I would suggest that the experience of the Sapphic Sublime might be one in which those infantile terrors and delights are at least in part recalled from the Unconscious, at the very moment that an act of ‘violence to the imagination’ presents itself in such a way as to engender feelings of fragmentation or disintegration.

Representation, loss and inadequacy in Sommer’s work.

It could be argued that the a conception of the Sapphic Sublime might best be sought in the fragmentary, multi-sensory new media installation environment presenting, say, a fugue of female voices or the dismembered female body, or a

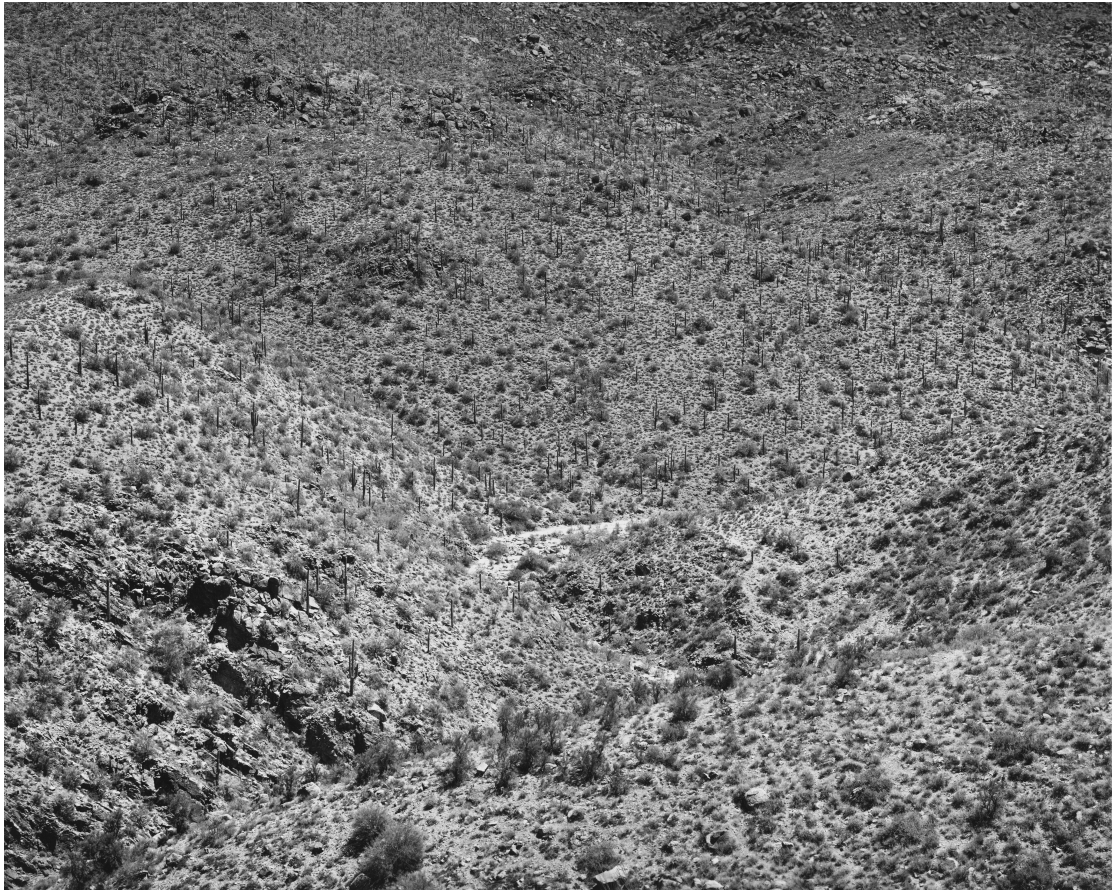
virtual web based environment in which elements alternate between states of disintegration and imbrication. However, there is no reason why this should be so. Arguably, attempting such a symphonic, maximalist *gesamtkunstwerk* is to fail to acknowledge the sense in which the inadequacy of representation is a constitutive element of what is at stake here. In part, the task of *formalisation*, as Zupancic (2000:171-172) elucidates in her discussion of Lacan's engagement with tragedy, and Hartley recognizes in his discussion of the *Darstellung/Vorstellung* dyad, is also the task of recognizing the constitutive and necessary role of inadequacy in representation. As both Hartley and Jacqueline Rose have argued, the core lack at the heart of the Lacanian subject – the 'space left' by the *objet petit a* does not remain buried in the psyche so much as present in the field of vision, simultaneously the lost object and, dialectically inverted, the object of loss, but it would be an error to conflate that *representative* art object with the idealized lost object itself.

Sommer's compelling work engages and entralls whilst, as small photographs, never suggesting as a project it aspires to anything other than the effect Hartley (2003: 4) describes as "staging its own failure from its own subjection to time". There is, in Sommer's work a tension between the *disintegration* of the landscape and the *integration* of the print as an object. In Sommer's landscape work, this tension remains sustained and unresolved. This presents a formal challenge to the conventions of Gestalt readings of photographic composition. In Gestalt terms, looking at Sommer's work is a task with no sense of closure or resolution. Whilst the present thesis is not an exercise in Gestalt psychology, it is worth noting that, as Richard Zakia (2007) remarks, in Gestalt theory, 'Unfinished tasks (non closure) can cause tension and frustration.' (2007:28). This follows from the Gestalt 'Laws' of *proximity*, *similarity*, *continuity*, and *closure*. As such, Sommer's radical break with the precepts and expectations of such laws in favour of such 'tension and frustration' places him as a precursor to those later practitioners of contemporary art who have sought to work not only with tropes of transgression and deflation, but also a sense of radical incompleteness.



Frederick Sommer: *Arizona Landscape* (1943)

Permission Frederick & Frances Sommer Foundation



Frederick Sommer *Arizona Landscape* , 1943

Permission of Frederick & Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona



Frederick Sommer: *Petrified Forest National Monument, Arizona*. 1940

Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Frederick Sommer, *Max Ernst* (1946)

Permission Frederick & Frances Sommer Foundation



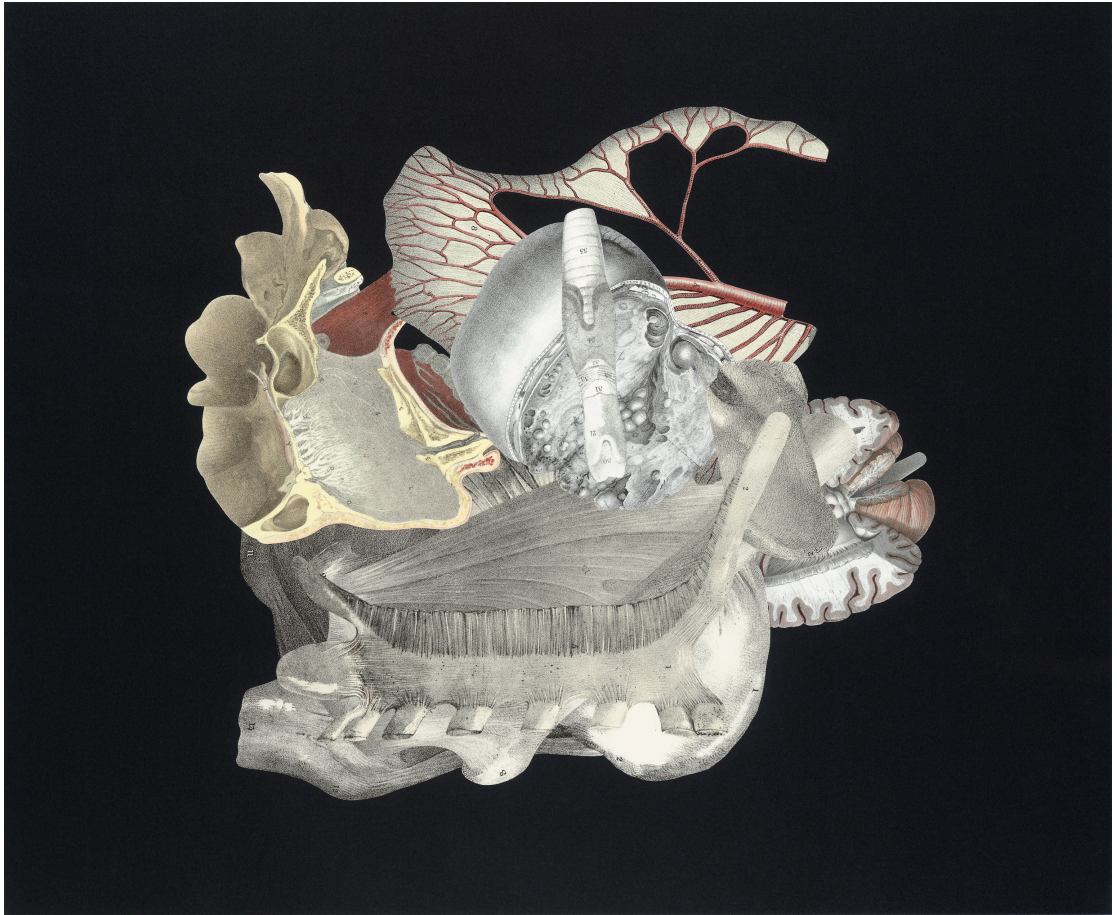
Frederick Sommer: *Glass*, 1943

Permission of Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona



Frederick Sommer: *I Adore You*, 1947

Permission Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona



Frederick Sommer: *The Discovery of Brazil*, 1994

Permission Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona

p. 72: Frederick Sommer, *Lee Nevin*, 1963

Permission Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona





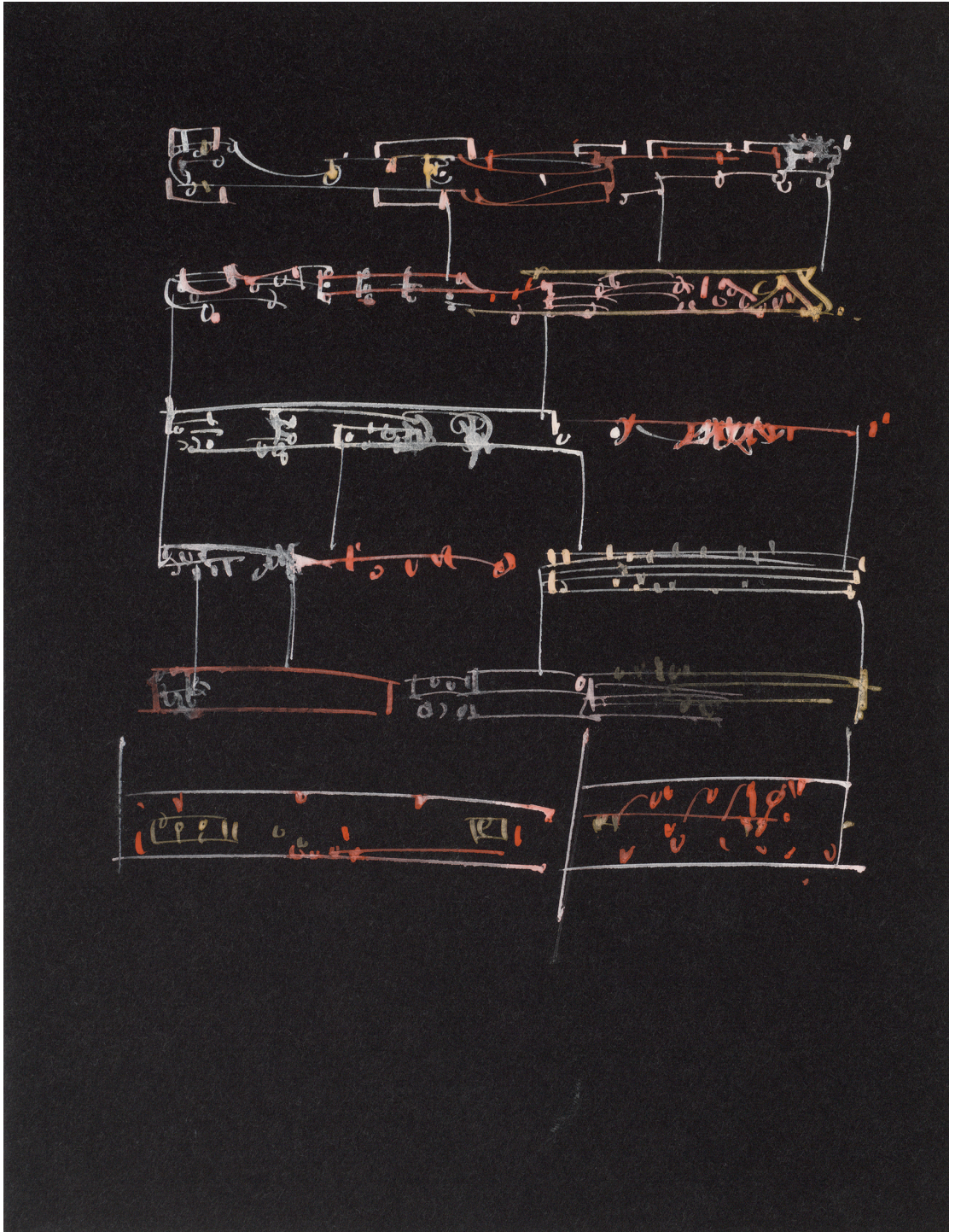
Frederick Sommer: *Coyotes*, 1945

Permission Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona



Frederick Sommer: *Virgin and Child with St. Anne and the Infant St. John*, 1966

Permission of Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona



Frederick Sommer: (no date)

Permission of Frederick and Frances Sommer Foundation, Arizona

Chapter 3

The Absence and Presence of Figures in a Landscape

Both my claims for the radical form of Frederick Sommer's landscape work, and my critique in the previous chapter of Christine Battersby's writing on the artist A.K. Dolven, arguably pose wider questions of what is at stake in the presence or absence of figures in landscape, whether such figures are explicitly inscribed or positioned (as Dolven's work) or implied by the point of view (as in the landscapes of, say, Ansel Adams). I will therefore begin this chapter with a consideration of what, in both Kantian terms and Psychoanalytical terms respectively, a figure in a landscape *does*, and, indeed, how one might see it as *necessitated* in certain forms of landscape imagery, both of Kant's period and in later epochs. As will become clear, my aim in doing this, is ultimately, to explore the implications of the radical form of Sommer's work, both formally in their radical points of departure from such conventions of practice and genre, and in his challenging insistence upon these works as 'landscape'.

At the outset I should say that, following the analogues between the Kantian sublime and Psychoanalysis that I posited in Chapter 2, below I argue that the figure presented in a landscape in its conventional form is analogous to the mirror stage. As such, the figure in the painting provides a point of identification, for the viewer, but also lacunae within the field of vision. I therefore will begin by considering an archetypal figure in landscape, and that which is arguably most closely associated with the Kantian sublime. Of course, positing such analogues is arguably to run the risk of overlooking the profound gulf that obtains between Kantian philosophy and Psychoanalytic discourse, or to belittle the transformations through which any supercessionary Kantian remnants have undergone. My discussion of the scholarly work done in relation to Kantian legacies and Psychoanalysis seeks to explore this question in relation to psychoanalytical and philosophical discourse germane to this point.

However, in specific relation to the question of the depiction of landscape, my further response would be twofold: firstly, one of the purposes of my discussion in this chapter will be to take account of such ruptures both in discursive content and form, and secondly, the particular juxtapositions I make – for example that of Caspar David Friedrich’s *Wanderer above the Sea of Clouds* and the figures in nuclear test photography, or that of Timothy O’Sullivan and Frederick Sommer, are similarly those of rupture and supercessionary transformation. To construct meanings, deeper understanding and insights through such juxtapositions is at the heart of critically informed reading.

In this chapter, I propose therefore, to begin by looking closely at the presence and absence of figures in landscape, and describe the pertinence of such to Sommer’s work and my own art practice. The trope of the *Rückenfigur* appeared in my own work in the course of the development of the series of photographs entitled *Another Country* in 1999-2000. In the course of researching archival photographs of atmospheric nuclear tests, initially those conducted by Britain and the US in Australia and in the vicinity of Christmas Island in the period 1957-1962, I noticed correspondences between these archival photographs, which often showed figures with their backs turned to the camera, and the compositional devices of Caspar David Friedrich. On reflection, it struck me that a similar analogue might be at play there to that between the Kantian sublime and the homeostatic movements denoted by psychoanalysis: for at once the anonymous collective subjectivities of the nuclear cloud watchers simultaneously seemed both to occupy the place of, but also invert the pictorial function of Caspar David Friedrich’s *Rückenfiguren*.

Caspar David Friedrich’s paintings might be seen as the visual embodiment of Kantian conceptions of the sublime. Michael Fried suggests there is a temptation to associate Friedrich’s *Woman at the Window* as the Kantian ‘I think’, due to both the figures centredness and its inwardly reflective quality (2002:88). Likewise, Joseph Leo Koerner notes that “Friedrich locates sublimity not in the object itself, but in its subjective effect on the viewer” (1990:181), before going on to remind us that it was Kant “who first located sublimity purely within the beholding subject” (ibid.). Fried (2002) counterposes the painter Adolph Menzel to Friedrich by virtue of the de-centred dispersal within the former’s paintings:

the depopulated obliqueness of *Balcony Room* (1845) to Friedrich's centering of the *Rückenfigur* of his wife Caroline in *Woman at the Window* (1822). For Fried, Adolph Menzel's so called 'Private pictures' such as *Rear Courtyard and House* (1844), which I referred to in Chapter 1, offer not only oblique stretches of land and the shifting of positions reflected in the painter's transcription which Fried terms 'lived perspective' (2002:78) but, moreover, a radical break from the modes and formulae of such classical centred composition which, he argues, continue elsewhere unchallenged - for example, in French painting even into the era of Impressionism. These 'private pictures', suggest to Fried, that 'we are dealing with another order of conceptual difficulty' (2002:88-89).

I do not want to argue that there is a direct correspondence between Menzel's obliqueness and the 'all over' or 'field' effect of Sommer's landscapes; the concerns of each are particular to their time and reflect the contingencies of each accordingly. However, via the Menzel analogy, I do want to argue that Sommer's work is a significant rupture from what had gone before (and in many cases since) in ignoring the compositional devices of Modernist photography, even when compared with the oblique dynamics and scatter-patterns of, for example, Rodchenko's pioneering 35mm work, or Margaret Bourke-White's late 30s aerial photography. As such Sommer's work too, represents an attempt, in its own way, to deal with 'another order of conceptual difficulty'.

Like Friedrich's paintings such as *The Wanderer above the Sea of Clouds*, or the *Moonwatchers*, photographs taken during the development of nuclear weaponry by the US and Britain often feature figures turning into the picture, with their backs to the camera, looking into the sublime spectacle. Such pictures were ostensibly record pictures: documentary evidence of the size of the explosion, the shape and character of the resulting fireball and mushroom cloud. Yet the inclusion of the figures seems to be habitual to the point of remarkable. Again, like Friedrich's work, these figures are precipitous; whilst in the case of Friedrich, this might be reflected in the form of a mountain ledge (the *Wanderer*) the shore of a calm ocean (or even the edgy flirtation with either hetero - or homoeroticism (*Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon*, c1824, and *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* c. 1825-1830 respectively), the figures in nuclear photography are on the edge of an area regarded as reasonably safe,

but not absolutely so. The compositional device of placing the viewing figure turned into the picture, back turned to the viewer, creates an aporia within the picture. Effectively, the precise object of the depicted subject's gaze remains obscured by the 'doubling' of the idealized viewing subject in the form of its inscription into the painting. In *Wanderer*, the precise area of the cloudscape and mountaintops being gazed upon by the figure of the Wanderer is unknowable. Moreover, whilst the clothing of the figure is discernable, the light tones of the surrounding vista creates a contrasting gestalt effect of the depicted figure as a dark area of paint at the centre of the light filled canvas. Whilst in other works such as the *Moonwatchers*, the precise object of the gaze is visible (insofar as the title denotes the moon which is visible in the picture) the combination of silhouette against bright sky and the actual viewer's inability to see the precise direction of the gaze of the depicted viewers creates a similar sense of occlusion.

The device of the turned away figure in Friedrich (*der Rückenfigur*) is necessitated not by the demands of the vista itself, but rather by the need to establish that vista as not completely knowable by the *actual* viewer(s) of the painting. *Rückenfiguren* invariably seem *mentally immersed* in the scene they gaze upon, but notably not *bodily*: alone, their stillness is not necessarily suggestive of passivity or submissive, but rather an active viewer whose act of viewing occupies them totally. The exact opposites of Manet's *Olympia*, they do not acknowledge the presence of the viewer, nor do they share what they see. William Vaughan (1994) points out that the woman standing in the foreground in *Woman in the Morning Sun* (c1811) is not "at one" with the light, but is "hiding its source from our gaze" (1994:142). As such, Vaughan argues, "Friedrich painted precisely the paradox [the earlier Romantic] Runge wished to resolve: man's yearning for the infinite and his perpetual separation from it." (*ibid.*). Likewise Panse (2006), citing Vaughan, refers to the *Rückenfigur* operating "both as a stand-in and barrier for the viewer". Moreover, Koerner (1990) points out that the *Rückenfigur* predates Friedrich considerably, nevertheless speaking of it gaining particular pertinence during Friedrich's time such that he becomes its exponent *par excellence*. "[T]he sublime", Koerner argues, "as something concealed and revealed demands that there be a seeing subject" (1990:193), pointing out that not only does "the turned traveler hide

with his body the very thing repeated” [ie the spectator] but that the fog above which he stands only “lifts here and there to reveal fragments of a vast panorama” so that “coulisses rising from and enframing a void” prevents any imagined uninterrupted gaze on the part of the figure in the painting. This, I would argue, is the Kantian schema within Friedrich’s painting: the uncontainability is signaled by the mystery of what is occluded – the precise sublime focus of the gaze, which is formally contained and implicitly internalized – within the body of the *Rückenfigur* which occludes it. *Rückenfiguren* simultaneously present themselves at a moment of triumphant rational appraisal of the world, whilst shielding both the sublime object of the gaze and their facial expression - reflecting as it would have to, were we able to see it – a shift from the moment of violence to the imagination, to a satisfactory surrender to the laws of reason. The anonymity of the figures within nuclear test photography is different, but analogies remain, albeit in a transformed context. The anonymity of nuclear test observers could be seen as an expediency of Cold War politics, or mere happenstance, but these are constitutive elements rather than satisfying explanations offering interpretative closure. Whereas in the nuclear test photograph the figure does not occlude anything of significance within the picture (that is to say, none of the details of cloud or fireball) they remain ciphers of scientific authority and mysterious military intent. What they are gazing at may be self-evidential; but what they *know* – and their ethical choices in the face of the impossible – remain occult. In these photographs, the sublime object becomes human capability itself, signaled by a combination of the monstrous rising cloud on the horizon, and the occlusion of identities, provenance and implicit intents of the latter day *Rückenfiguren* in the foreground. What is important for my argument here is the centrality of the depicted viewer as a cipher for the unrepresentable sublime, and the mechanisms whereby this effect is brought about. For it is within Kant’s account of the sublime, I would argue, that these figures are necessitated as pictorial devices, both in their occlusionary and representational function.

In my development of the *Another Country* work I was concerned with the iconic resemblance or re-appearance, of this convention in relation to the photographing of new and terrifying technology. This was because the documentation of the nuclear clouds – ostensibly a non-artistic project – seemed

to show, through their composition, their inclusion of *Rückenfiguren* and so on, artistic aspirations on the part of the unknown photographers. Moreover, the tropes of the Friedrichian / Kantian sublime seem to be referenced almost as a structural citation.

The question of the ostensibly non-artistic documentary photography, distinct from the picturesque artistic composition, having artistic value is to be found in relation to an earlier epoch specifically in relation to the desert landscapes Sommer would subsequently photograph. Here again, we encounter the figure of the expert, at its point of emergence. In his essay 'Territorial Photography' (1994) the photographic historian Joel Snyder contrasts the C19th century US photographer Carleton Watkins with that of his compatriot and contemporary Timothy O'Sullivan. According to Snyder, whereas Watkins and other small private commercial photographers were primarily concerned with establishing and producing a saleable American picturesque of views along the routes of the advancing railroad, O'Sullivan, an employee of the US government, produced pictures of a bleak and inhospitable landscape as part of government surveys.

Taking aim at those critics such as Rosalind Krauss, who have sought to categorise O'Sullivan's work as 'scientific views' irrelevant to discourses of art photography *per se*, Snyder makes an effective case for the works' inclusion in such histories and discourses, arguing that the doubtful utility of O'Sullivan's work as 'science' was already well understood both by O'Sullivan himself and by the government agencies involved in his commissioning. Rather, Snyder argues, O'Sullivan's work marks the entry of the photographer as 'technical expert' accompanying the expedition, but nevertheless an artist of landscape. Snyder's point, therefore, is one that differentiates O'Sullivan's practice as one which, effectively liberated by state sponsorship from private commercial pressures, presents a landscape of the American West that does not conform to the picturesque conventions of contemporaneous commercial work of the same region; and, by doing so, is able to present a landscape not only unfamiliar, inhospitable and terrifying, but, in Snyder's words '*unaddressable* [my emphasis] in terms of the evolving practices of photographic landscape' (1994: 199). In contrast to the invitational view of the emergent American picturesque, Snyder describes O'Sullivan's work as 'uninvitational' and a set of 'no entry

signs'. It's also worth noting here that Snyder mentions the sublime in relation to O'Sullivan's work, although he does not make an explicit link between that and this interesting conception of the unaddressable (which sits well alongside that which we might think of as 'unspeakable'). Snyder goes on to say that O'Sullivan's works,

mark the beginning of an era – one in which we still live – in
which expert skills provide the sole means of access to what
was once held to be part of our common inheritance
(1994:200)

For if, as Snyder suggests, we can think of the 19th century topographical survey photograph as the location of the technical expert, I want to argue that it is also worth considering the extent to which Sommer presents as an inversion to this: less the 'technical expert' as an engaged technically proficient amateur, who has trespassed, without state or, for that matter commercial sanction - across those 'no entry' signs, laid down by O'Sullivan, and, with his view camera, selected areas of ground, sometimes feet across, sometimes miles across, to record. As noted earlier, the emphasis in many in Sommer's works of this time on an all over uniformity, an undifferentiated patterning of rock, scrub vegetation and cacti, coupled with the sense of dislocation, that this seemingly random lack of privileging view point gives us, presents us with an effect of *field* rather than figure and ground. It is in this context that Sommer's practice, I suggest, presents us with a radical refusal of the tropes of landscape found in the likes of Ansel Adams and the emergent American canon (and I will return to the landscape as zone later in this paper) but moreover, I want to stress here that in addition to those points, Sommer presents us with a radical transformation of the role and location of the professional expert as performed by O'Sullivan.

Because at this point, I want to suggest, Sommer presents us with the possibility to bring the artist back to the centre of the landscape, but in an inverse, decentred form – that is to say, wherein the *interior* creative life of the artist is *exteriorised* as a nexus of artistic practices and discursive ruptures. In relation to O'Sullivan's legacy, it is, I would suggest, at that moment that, in Sommer's work, we see the position of the photographer as 'technical expert *located* in the

landscape' in a dynamic tension with an artistic practice as a moment of *dislocation* and rupture across 'landscaping' as a set of stabilised forms.

As such, Sommer's images seem to recognise the desert as unaddressable in terms of the established practices of the photographic landscape and the imported legacies of both the European Sublime and the English Picturesque, whilst his titles might seem to be deliberately challenging us to read one American tradition - that of Timothy O'Sullivan, through the cited conventions of another – that of Carleton Watkins.

Figures in landscape can be seen as ciphers of time – specifically human time. In Poussin's later landscapes for example, the comings and goings of shepherds, travelers, washer women and such present a network of human actions, activities and narratives across a topography formed by bygone ages and sublime forces. In his book *Mapping Mars* (2002), which traces the influence of depictions of the Arizona desert on past and contemporary understanding of the Red Planet, Oliver Morton argues that despite previous landings and orbital probes, it was the arrival of the first robotic Mars rover, *Sojourner*, in 1997 which, through its movements,

...brought time to the land, and time is as necessary to a sense of place as space is [...] tracks in the dust [...] made the landscape a place of purposeful activity, rather than just a site for disembodied study (2002:230)

As if to confirm this fact, the cover of Morton's book shows a photograph of the *Sojourner* rover taken by a camera mounted on its parent lander, parked up against a Martian boulder.

The portrayal of figure(s) – whether robot or human - in landscape as ciphers of time seems particularly poignant in relation to the *Rückenfigur*. For, although the *Rückenfiguren* are invariably still, their stillness is a pronounced *momentary* stillness, a stopping of time, by way of the pause, which is to say it is a moment of time defined by movement that came before and that will come after. In the

landscapes of Friedrich, this pause in human action is that which allows natural time – the movement of clouds, of heavenly light across the mountainside or over the cloud tops – to be reflected upon. By contrast, in landscape paintings by other artists which do portray movement – for example, again to use my example of the late landscapes of the neo-stoic painter Poussin – it is caught as a moment which sets the fleeting timescales of the daily affairs of human life against the seasonal, meteorological and geological cycles of the natural world.

Human time, the Ego and Mortality

To set ‘human time’ against the ages of landscape through the cipher of figures in this way inevitably brings us to the intimations of death that I touched on in relation to Battersby’s discussion of A.K.Dolven in Chapter 2. People figure in a landscape as precipitous insofar as they are presented as transient, resigned stoically or rationally to their own mortality, thereby inviting us to consider the moment in which we, too, are vanquished. Although she does not discuss figures in landscape, a discussion how what she terms ‘self vanquishment’ and ‘the hint of death’ is found in Alenka Zupancic’s *Ethics of the Real* (2000). Presenting an alternative way to think of the relationship between the Kantian sublime and Psychoanalytical discourse generally, Zupancic spends some time discussing the relationship between ego and superego relation to the legacies of Kantian ethics.

Like Weiskel, Zupancic’s book seeks to establish correspondences between the transcendental Kantian subject and the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytical subject, but in this case, primarily in relation to ethics. In distinction to Weiskel however, Zupancic’s discussion specifically begins from the recognition of the profound rupture between Kantian philosophy and psychoanalysis, recognizing from the outset what she describes as ‘the double blow of disillusionment’ (2000:1) first from Freud, then from Lacan, which Psychoanalysis dealt to Kantian concepts such as the Categorical Imperative. Zupancic’s work is therefore primarily focused upon establishing a foundation for ethics which goes beyond self preservation, in an epoch without recourse to what Lacan described as the ‘Discourse of the Master’ .

However, as part of this broader ambition, Zupancic’s discussion of narcissism (2000:149-160) focuses upon the relationship between the ego and the

experience of the sublime, within a Kantian framework. Zupancic argues that identification with the moral law – with Reason, and the Superego – which is associated with the third, pleasurable stage of the sublime, is a process of ‘triumphing’ over oneself, or, moreover, ‘vanquishing’ oneself, founded upon a moment of what she describes as ‘alienation’. For Zupancic,

the feeling of the sublime, the reverse side of which is always a kind of anxiety, requires the subject to regard a part of herself as a foreign body, as something that belongs not to her but the ‘outer world’ (2000:152).

This Zupancic links to narcissism, death, and the Lacanian mirror stage:

What we are calling ‘narcissistic satisfaction’ here is in fact closely connected to the Selbstschätzung [self estimation] that emerges with the feeling of the sublime [...] Kant’s exposition of this point comes quite close to Lacan’s account of the ‘mirror stage’ [...] In order for me to form an image of myself ‘from outside’ in a space that belongs to the Other (for example, in the space of a mirror). (2000:152-153)

In this light, Zupancic goes on to argue that narcissism contains a ‘hint of death’: the dialectic of narcissism, she argues, revolves around the possibility of the death of the subject, since there can be no narcissism without a moment of alienation ‘through which the subject can refer to herself as if she were simultaneously someone else’. For Zupancic, there can be no vanquished self without some other self, looking on. Zupancic argues that this doubling is implicit in Kant’s text.

The account offered by Zupancic again stresses the double-sided aspect of narcissism: the ‘love of oneself’ is also bound up with destructive, aggressive impulses directed against that same self (2000:153). Stephen Frosh sums up this tension succinctly by describing the Narcissistic subject as ‘exaggeratedly self important but inwardly devastated’ (1999:185). Like Zupancic, Frosh argues that this process involves ‘a kind of alienation’ (1999:145).

Insofar as it is possible, then, to align the transcendental Kantian subject with Friedrich's *Rückenfiguren*, and, in turn, to align the *Rückenfigur* with the Lacanian mirror stage, I argue that it has to be upon the basis of that which Stephen Frosh has described as a 'specious representation of integrity' (1999:143), namely, following Lacan, the presentation of the Other's vision of integrity to the viewer, not one resulting from the viewer's own drives. This is a departure from an assumption of Klein's, towards Lacan. As Frosh argues, 'the self that is thought of as the most intensely personal part of the individual is actually constructed by means of identification with something external, fundamentally other than the subject itself'. Moreover, the narcissism involved in this is not that which Frosh refers to as 'primary narcissism' (1999:145) and which Zupancic refers to as 'the narcissism of the ego closed in on itself' (2000:153), but, rather, the method by which 'she or he takes up position in a signifying chain [...] to move from the primary narcissism of the Imaginary to a position from which an outside Other can be predicated and spoken to' as Frosh, citing Lacan's *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, puts it (1999:145).

If it is the capacity to imagine this 'outside Other' which allows an integrated vision of the self, it follows that it is also the incapacity, uncertainty or inability to identify with such, which is at stake in those landscape images which do not have a figure or figures present in them, or have no place in which a figure can be imagined. In such a situation, the process of vanquishment is begun in a state where such identification is neither secure or complete, and where identification with the superego ideal is thus foreclosed. In such a situation, it is not only therefore the supposed topographical position of the idealized viewer which becomes unhinged, but by implication the *time* of the picture also.

Landscape = Space + Time; Space = Landscape – Time

As I have previously noted, Sommer's use of the title of 'landscape' in his work acts as a challenge to the viewer, precisely because his work conforms to so few of the conventions of landscape. Arguably, some of Sommer's desert images only contain one element of a normative 'landscape' – the ground – and where we as viewers might be placed in relation to it is not clear. This suggests almost

a deliberately reductive approach on Sommer's part to what a landscape might be: a deliberate unpacking and elimination of the constituent elements of the genre accompanying his own challenges to the photographic conventions and refinements of his contemporaries. In a catalogue essay published to accompany the exhibition *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1991) entitled 'The Ideology of Space', Leo Marx differentiated the notion of space from that of landscape, arguing that the former specifically applied to American ideologies of land. Leo Marx argued that 'landscape' - which he traced etymologically to the Dutch word 'landskip' is specifically tied to the emergence of that particular genre of painting in Holland (1991:62). Leo Marx makes clear, the crucial ideological role of a conception of Space as opposed to landscape in relation to a continent under colonization is to exclude whatever was there prior to its discovery by European settlers, and to facilitate a utilitarian approach to the territories being demarcated.

As can be deduced, such utilization and exploitation of the land under European colonization and settlement is predicated upon the exclusion and suppression of all extant senses of time and its indicators in the sight of the settlers (for example, the histories and activities of other cultures already inhabiting the continent). The framing of space in this way creates a space which is timeless and unknown – the blank map of *terra incognita*.

That the construction of landscape conflates space and time perhaps reaches some sort of culmination in W.J.T. Mitchell's suggestion (1994:1) that the word landscape be considered as a verb, rather than a noun. As I have indicated in the paragraph above, the corollary of this might be that the destruction of landscape is predicated on the separation of the two. It is in that context that Mitchell asserts that landscape 'doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power' thereby describing landscape as an action in time.

From the above it follows, therefore, that a sublime experience of landscape must, entail a rupturing sense of time as well as space.

9/11

Any act of imaging involves a process of framing. At the point at which 'violence is done to the imagination' such framing cannot take place in the usual way, since the imaginative capacity of the mind to do so is blocked. In pursuing my argument here I want to emphasize four areas of concern from Zupancic. Her reading of Kant's analytic of the sublime experience centres on two points: (1) the feeling of our insignificance as far as the 'whole of the universe' is concerned (we are but a speck in the immense universe) (2) the fact that what functions as the centre of gravity of our existence in our ordinary life suddenly strikes us as trivial and unimportant. Both of these might be described as immersive sensations. From this flows two other points which she attributes to Kant: (3) the emergence of moral agency (insofar as making an aesthetic judgement relies not upon postulate but on a request - for agreement from others - a Kantian element or remainder within Freud and later psychoanalytical descriptions of the superego) and (4) the link she makes between Kant's emphasis upon spectatorship (that one 'watches' a sublime event, but is the victim of an horrific event) upon a staging of powerlessness and mortality, and Lacan's 'window of fantasy' (2000:158). I will return to this issue of a window of fantasy, and propose another possibility in relation to its possible interpretation, later. Zupancic goes on to describe Kant's conception of the supplanting of initial feelings of anxiety with those of elevation associated with the sublime (*das Erhabene*) as one of resolution, in which an awareness of corporeal smallness is juxtaposed to that of conscious detachment, whereby the consciousness has already been removed to a place of safety, a process which converts discomfort to pleasure. Zupancic relates this to Freud's conception of humour (which she distinguishes from the comic or jokes in that pleasure is substituted for suffering). For Freud, humour was differentiated from jokes by its triumphant narcissism, and the interplay between an inflated super-ego (the 'detached consciousness removed to a place of safety') and the etiolated ego, trivialised to the point of insignificance. For Zupancic, this is the basis of the oft cited sublime/ridiculous antimony: "what is sublime from the point of view of the superego is ridiculous from the point of view of the ego" and the subject's

feeling of the sublime is effectively contingent upon the strength of the superego. (Zupancic, 2000:154-155.)

For Zupancic, the sublime "consists not only in its indication of the proximity of the Thing", but through the inflated role of the superego, it is at the same time a way of avoiding a direct encounter with it.

I would propose, however, that a form of framing takes place around the overwhelming moment of traumatic experience at the moment at which everyday experience of the symbolic order is disrupted, and the subject's sense of lived normality is shoved aside. In this sense I look back to Barthes's remarks upon the monstrous nature of photography's still image, or Benjamin's remark about 'dialectics standing still', not in terms of the photographic document per se, but insofar as the image of the sublime experience marks the point at which previous life is closed out. For it is in the moment of its emergence that the sublime experience presents itself as an overwhelming, *engorged* and *monstrous* effect, which forecloses on normal everyday alternatives as a lived possibility, and by obscene inversion renders them fantastical and extraordinary.

Writing as a practitioner I find it difficult to separate this experience from picture-making, since my experience of the sublime event, the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001, was intermittently through a camera lens. Elsewhere, professional photographic documentarists have complained about the 'amateur' nature of the photographic record of 9/11, suggesting this was the norm amongst those able to watch, rather than those unfortunate to be actually fleeing the event (and therefore not actually experiencing the dynamical sublime).

Some sense of sequence as I recall experiencing it is perhaps necessary at this point; a witness statement of sorts.

Yesterday, it had been an intensely humid grey morning, and the clouds had obscured the tops of the towers, reminding me of the cover of Don DeLillo's novel Underworld. We had walked to the studio in Williamsburg. This morning

I mistook the grey of the mosquito mesh over the window – a remnant of the Nile infestation the previous summer – for another grey sky. It was after I had eaten a bowl of cereal, folded up the bedding, lounged and read for a while, that I glanced out again and saw the rolling cloud moving above the skyline, not realizing it had come from the building, but noticing it because it was detached from the sky as a different sort of cloud, and I thought of my own work of that period, Another Country. I looked past that, then, and saw the north tower, on the extreme right of the window frame, with metal struts blown outwards, and stuff hanging down, like Bishopsgate. I shout “Fucking hell James look at this”. Then he’s there breathing over my shoulder I don’t know him that well he’s a friend of my girlfriend and then without a word we both scramble out the door and up the stairs, through the top door and onto the roof. It’s a beautiful clear blue sky not grey and there’s a helicopter and a siren but it otherwise seems still and curiously empty, like we’re the only ones watching. It is a beautiful sunny morning it’s not muggy and I’m here, in America, which is surprising, and today’s the seminar which is going to be great. 3pm. We are talking about it as a bomb because from where we are we cannot see the entry hole that the first plane has made. We’re watching the smoke getting thicker and worse. We can see the fire is spreading onto other floors. But the helicopter will have a line or something.

Then there’s some other bloke from downstairs and they’re talking about the woman across the street who walks around her apartment naked. An old French bloke joins us and he’s pulling my leg about being English. I go and get my camera. I take a picture of the smoke, now a big, wide and high plume across the city, which makes the heart sink. It’s grey, moving slowly. And there’s a shimmering glitter up and down the sides of the north building and James says it must be the windows popping out, papers and stuff, catching the morning sunlight as they fall. That word ‘popping’ stays with me. They must be able to see it for miles out at sea and stuff. Then there’s a flicker of light on the left side of the other tower, a shower of sparks –something big flew out there in the middle - and there’s shouting from the other roofs and dust as a tangerine shape emerges. Something white hit it. I take more pictures as the fireball takes its time, expanding like it should, like a nuclear fireball, rolling out at the top as it rolls in underneath, and again lazily, ugly and arrogantly, with whitish grey

spilling over the top of the boiling orange and some of the concrete's falling and some of the dust is being sucked up just as it would as another burst of fire billows out from halfway down the tower, and the whitish grey has turned black and the orange fire is disappearing, so that now it's a dark grey pumice mass above and to the left of the building, which is still connected to it by all those grey and black tendrils of smoke running up the side, and it's still climbing and I'm taking pictures at that same manual pace I have been, click and wind on with the thumb then click again, only now I have to suddenly lean backwards, as the cloud is away and up in the sky. The French bloke is shouting that something hit it. I'm swearing, and then I stop. That's incredible; they're both on fire. And people who went to work are burning and possibly falling. That shimmering glitter is now up and down the sides of both of them. I want to look the other way, but it seems more obscene to do that than to look on. It is obscene to look at the clear blue empty normal sky in that direction when thousands of people over there are burning. I'm crying as I write this.

They're saying there's another plane unaccounted for, and I say they've got to shoot it down. Others say it too. But I did, and I can never unsay it, or insert some compunction I didn't feel then.

It goes on and on, all day. There's no stopping it. Everything else now moves at its pace. It dictates, and all else is clearly going to be cancelled and indefinitely postponed. There is no other life than this. There is no alternative. Perhaps they'll demolish the top parts when they've put the fire out. But they seem to be leaning apart now. I have to 'go to the bathroom', because it's America. The telly is on it must have been James. When I come back the South Tower is falling, reminding me of a grey spider plant my mother had years ago, pumping up a column of smoke like a Wild West steam train, and the scaffolding on the block behind us is swaying with the tremor. I don't remember the noise, just the movement, and the column of dust and smoke standing there in its place for a moment after it had fallen.

No one thinks the North Tower will fall. They'll do something. But it looks bent, and the top half is all black now like a cigarette stood up on its filter and left to burn. I turn back towards the door again and James grabs my arm,

spinning me round to look and photograph as the radio mast keels over and then it all goes down, in the same fashion as its twin. And suddenly they're not there anymore, and everything has now changed, permanently. There's a huge slanting column of white grey smoke rising up from the ground. The air smells like burning plastic and CFCs.

It still goes on. Later we walk aimlessly. There's a queue to give blood so we'll try later. We try to get to Brian's apartment, but get waylaid making stretchers down at the bottom of Lafayette. The building workers have cut the locks on the site opposite, and are cutting up wood to make stretchers. It's all haphazard and anyone seems to be in charge. I think of the main theme from Sergio Leone's Once upon a time in the West, when Claudia Cardinale steps off the train to find no one waiting, and her new family all dead. There are barriers – those blue wooden police ones like joiner's trestles - but they'll let you through if you say you're volunteering. We make stretchers for a while, as do many others, in Thomas Paine Park, which is a grass traffic island with trees, but later it's clear it's just group therapy; because the sky is pinkish brown with that thick cloud now virtually overhead, and the sunlight keeps dipping and flickering, the sun itself turning red. They say Building 7 has collapsed now but I didn't hear it. There's thick grey powder everywhere, and I think of pulver – the German for powder. Waschpulver. It's on my boogaloos and over cars, on the leave and grass. There's a typewritten sheet of A4 paper with some sort of incredible stain on it in the gutter while the precipitate is like a curtain falling out at the head of Brooklyn Bridge. That's what's left of the bodies, and everything else: it's on the floor all around us. I feel as if anything could happen now.

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Of the photographs I took on September 11th, the first continues to fascinate. This was the point it might seem when the event was credible; an impact and fire in one building not two, a terrorist outrage, an event of the late twentieth century perhaps. Digitally scanning the negative eighteen months later, however, I notice with a sudden sense of shock a tiny grey speck in the blue sky between the skyline and the underside of the smoke, and shaking, think that this is probably Flight UA175, on its final seconds of flight towards the South

Tower. This is a photograph of what Tuesday 11 September 2001 might have looked like, had it not become 9/11, and as such, it might seem that those like me who took such photographs were taking the last pictures of another age, a global political settlement of sorts, which had obtained since the collapse of the Soviet Union until that moment, so that the limits of that first / last photograph are differentiated from the rest of the contact sheet.

The fantasy of alternative history is sometimes presented as an attempt to *image* the immanence of alterity, without recourse to the transformatory Hegelian-Marxist dialectic: an immobilization of time, but the opposite, as it were, to that immobilization of time ascribed and explored by Peter Osborne (2000:20-52 in his readings of Barthes, Benjamin, Peirce, Ricoeur and Deleuze – ‘the indices of historical time’ in the present – an overlaying or juxtaposition of different, conflicting timeframes. Osborne links this to Benjamin’s radical aesthetic of montage and imaging (2000:80):

For Benjamin, the temporality of modernity promotes a forgetting of history which – itself historical – can and should be contested from within

Considering Osborne’s description of the photograph in the context of the historical event perhaps most clearly resonates with Lacanian description (in Lacan’s Seminar VI, on Desire and its Interpretation) of the ‘window of fantasy’: namely, that the fantasy hinges upon the question of what does the Other want or require of the subject. The ‘window’ therefore implies that which is out of view or obscured, either by the wall or the frame within which the window is set. Faced with the sublime event, one’s imagined identification with the symbolic order relies upon the assertion that one can know and understand what the Other desires – by imagining there is some putative *meaning*, even if, at that particular moment, the precise character of that meaning is beyond our comprehension. In this sense, the photograph as a window of fantasy – the presence of the past in the present – offers a framing of time, but also the occasion, through that, of a fantasy of what might have occurred otherwise. To examine how the above bears upon questions of subjectivity, I would propose considering what might be the attraction of such a fantasy. For the

historical materialist subject, such a heresy as alternative history might arise at a point where the objective situation seems to foreclose the possibility of articulating a meaningful subjective intervention into politics, and thereby the 'historical process'. The privileging of temporality over spatiality is not, of course limited to avowed Hegelians or Marxists: indeed, with the exception of Deleuzo-Guattarians, it is universal in western philosophy. Deleuzo-Guattarian thought attempts to obviate both temporal and ethical relations by its notion of a non-arborescence; replacing a linear relationship between two points (of which the majority/hegemon is a molar entity) with a 'line of becoming', extending from the middle;

A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination [...]

A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two [...] (1998:293)

For others not convinced, however, an alternative history might constitute a fantasy of that which is lost; a fantasy which takes on the form of a 'realisation', and I want to distinguish this from the schema offered by Deleuze and Guattari, for I believe the two are distinct. What is central to my exploration here is the role played by conceptions of time. Wharf (2002:17-34) argues that imagined alternative histories re-emphasise the role of human action, "demonstrat[ing] the social construction of time". Wharf's central target is what he labels the determinist, Modernist approaches to history, which, through examples such as E.H. Carr, he argues were teleological. What, however, is also interesting about Wharf's position from the standpoint of the present chapter is the extent to which he himself does not manage to escape the teleology which he is critical of: whilst taking to task such classical Marxist 'functionalist' constructions "as in capitalism 'needs a reserve army of labour'" he nevertheless goes on to argue that Modernist discourse "imbue[s] the past, and the present with a coherence they do not deserve" (Wharf, 2002:31), effectively positing himself as a mountainside *Rückenfigur* gazing upon not so much the sublime, but the antimonies of Kantian ethical choices. In as much as such a notion of what the past, or present, might 'deserve' posits the viewing subject with some elevated

ethical obligation, it is pertinent to Barthes's reading of the photograph. For example, in the case of Barthes's *noeme*, the *that-has-been*, in so far as Barthes's realisation that Lewis Payne, photographed alive prior to his execution, might also constitute a fantasy of what might have been a life otherwise. By this I mean that the picture of Payne which pre-occupies Barthes in his description of the second *punctum*, is one which collapses the obvious temporal impossibility of he (Barthes) having met or known Payne in life, whilst constructing an illusory space within the image plane into which the former might imagine walking. And it is, of course, at the moment of such a fantasy that the late twentieth century democratic liberal Barthes-subject is confronted with an ethical responsibility to its Other, or, in Lacanian terms, the fantasy of that which the Other requires of the subject: 'what does one say to / how does one react to a nineteenth century Confederate assassin?'.

Equally important for what I am examining here, however, is the sense in which this description of the second *punctum*, the *noeme*, introduces a third, problematising element into Barthes's 'Kantian' dyadic opposition between the *studium* and supposed first *punctum*, *but fails to resolve it*. In Barthes's celebrated description, the first *punctum* stands as the other to the *studium* by way of it being unnameable. In so doing, Barthes establishes an opposition between the conscious, symbolized *studium* and an indecipherable element – the *punctum* - which disturbs the unconscious. This has, since Margaret Iversen's influential essay "What is a Photograph?" (1994) been widely associated with a Lacanian schematic. The introduction of the second punctum, the *noeme*, effectively problematises this dyadic opposition, by introducing an 'Other' to the Other, indicating, I would argue, an unresolved crisis in Barthes's thinking on the one hand, but which, I suggest, intriguingly corresponds to Zupancic's Lacanian reading of the idealized Kantian subject as the *petit objet a* which I cite above – suggesting perhaps a fleeting suppressed fantasy of Barthes's idealized self dissolving the barriers of time and death to commune with the doomed Paine. Peter Osborne obviates this problematic in Barthes by arguing that Barthes's second punctum is not a separate new punctum at all, but the 'metaphysical affect of the first' and that most of Barthes's second punctum – namely that Payne is about to die, and is now dead - is actually more accurately described as *studium* (2000:38). However, here I would suggest a slightly

different interpretation, namely that the exclusion from the dyad of the ‘first’ *punctum* and *studium* of the *noeme*, and Barthes’s inability, in *Camera Lucida*, to consistently name the same area or detail of the photograph as being the *punctum*, would suggest a point of crisis for interpretations of the photograph which rely upon a strictly antinomic opposition between the conscious and the unconscious, towards an interpretation which sees ‘experience and fantasy bound together’ in the manner inferred in Melanie Klein’s account. As such, whilst this might seem a necessary distinction between that which is coded and that which remains un-coded but dangerous to the viewer, does the photograph not operate more as a field of potential ruptures and disturbances, a dissolution of previously rigid categories of conscious and unconscious into a fluid, constellation of relations, rather than fixed binary oppositions referring to distinct locations?

What I would like to add to this fairly well understood sense of how pictures might produce an ethical response draws upon both this fantasy of alternatives, as well as an expanded notion of ‘framing’ as understood around the viewing subject’s positionality and the dynamical sublime. This is because, I would suggest, the sublime experience as it is accounted for in the Kantian model is one which consumes not only our sense of the visual (spectacle) but also our sense of the possibility of ordering things differently (our sense of agency, and of time). Therein lies the overwhelming aspect of the sublime experience in Kantian terms: a ‘dominance’ or ‘subjugation’ to use Freeman’s phrase I quoted in the last chapter, that eclipses all. For the viewing subject, this is a form of violent foreclosure. In its wake, the fantasy of how things might have been different, what normality might have been, *frames* our experience of this violent foreclosure, but as a phantasm or detached imagining, no longer rooted in possibility, no longer subject to agency or its possibilities..

The Parergon of Time: gazing on the inestimable past

Both spatially – in terms of positionality – and temporally, it would seem that Sommer’s work confronts us with a range of registers, simultaneously. This is immediately evident in his collage and montage work, but can also be said of his

landscapes. Subjectively, of course, time can seem to pass quickly or slowly; as such, subjective time might be as if ‘without end’ interminable – but it also might feel as if it were instantaneous. Subjective time, similarly, might seem without *ends* (pointless). All of these characteristics – and others one might wish to add to the list of course – delineate time experienced in the subjective space as something other than historical time. To understand what is at stake here, one might begin by considering the contrast between the role of time in Sommer’s work, and that in a more conventional depiction of time – an image of a person gazing on a ruin, for example, in a landscape by Poussin. The latter conception of the sublime in relation to time is one most closely aligned with Kant’s conception of the Mathematical Sublime – ‘not so much a greater numerical concept as a large unit as measure (for shortening the numerical series)’ (Kant, 2007:87). Centuries might be a good example of this – significantly longer than most human lives, but not beyond comprehension in human scale, it is the multiplicity of such units, when applied to something ancient, which overwhelms. Subsequently, thanks to the ontology of mathematics, we accept and resume our happy relationship with the Symbolic and the Laws of that father who, standing on windy hilltops, first ignored our freezing feet and lectured us at length about such things.

Kant’s commencement with the Mathematical sublime (as opposed to the Dynamical) is, as Derrida (1987: 134) arises from the problem of ‘*cise*’ – that is to say, the cut off point, or boundary, whereby something formless is given form, in order that its formlessness – colossal size, overwhelming nature and so on – is given unitary relation to the contemplating mind: the countless aeons, for example, which a mountain or a ruin are simultaneously understood to have endured, but which remain numberless or unimaginable, or the time that light spends travelling between the stars. Derrida introduces this in relation to the notion of *parergon* – the framing, as it were, of the sublime object, in order that a portion maybe viewed, and the unknowable surmised. As variation upon this, is, I would suggest, contemplation of the sublime ruin, as Louis Marin describes in his discussion of ichnography, evoking the traced aftermath of unknowable destructive forces:

We read in Vitruvius that one of the three modes of representation in architecture is ichnography: the design of the project, or the geometric rendering of the building.[...] The outline on the ground at the surface level is nothing but the trace that would be left by the building if it were to be destroyed by time, by the violence of meteors or men. (1999:143)

Marin's viewer gazes at the trace of a building, and ponders the inestimable and unknown forces which reduced something to a mere outline in the dust. This, again, I would suggest, might seem to be an issue of '*cise*', but within a specific archaeological mode. Marin suggests an outline which gives form to something formless (the long vanished building), and, moreover, a space or spaces wherein the imagination is given sway: 'we know it was this wide and this long, but how high? And who lived here? Such pondering progresses from the extant two dimensions of the ichnograph itself, through speculations on the (once) three dimensional aspect of the object, to a distanced regard for the temporal sublime. In so doing, Marin presents us with an account of figure / ground relations in the sublime that incorporates both space and time. However, Marin does this in a way which does not depart from what we might see as an extension of the Friedrichian dyadic relations discussed in previous chapters. Indeed, there is the sense, I would argue, that Marin here touches upon what Anthony Vidler (1992) describes in his formulation of the architectural uncanny as an outgrowth of the Burkeian sublime: the intrusion of something unknowable and alien into the domestic interior:

At the heart of the anxiety provoked by such alien presences was a fundamental insecurity: that of a newly established class not quite at home in its own home. The uncanny, in this sense, might be characterised as the quintessential bourgeois kind of fear; one carefully bounded by the limits of real material security and the pleasure principle afforded by a terror that was, artificially at least, kept well under control. (1992:3-4)

Despite his reference to Burke rather than Kant, both Marin and Vidler in this sense rely upon the framing of physical artefact – a fragment of architecture – to frame the unknowable hinted at by the trace of time on a (former) space. Reflecting similar anxieties to those described by Vidler, albeit from a different ideological perspective, Kurt Maetzig's 1960 Eastern Bloc film *Der Schweigende Stern* (Silent Star), based on a novel by Stanislaw Lem, tells the tale of an international team of astronauts from a world socialist utopia of 1970 who set foot on Venus and discover the ruined cities of an alien civilisation destroyed by its own nuclear weapons. However, in all these cases, I would argue, repeat a similar set of antinomic relations that are seen in figure/ground landscape images. Whether bourgeois comforts or Stalinist world government, the Law of the Father offers safe refuge and vantage point.

In contrast, to make images with multiple temporal references – some historical, some subjective, some pre- or ahistorical – and to use those as framing devices where association is blurred or contestable, leads to a more fragmented – and dialectical – image, in which multiple temporal reference points are collided together, creates an entirely different affect. It is in this way, I would argue, that we truly might grasp the context of Emmanuel Levinas's conception of time and the Other. As Peter Osborne has observed, it is the achievement of Levinas's work firstly that it offers a phenomenology of the constitutive role of the other in what Osborne terms 'human temporalisation'. It is in this context, that of accounting for the production of historicising time by the 'anticipation' by the subject of a timeless eternity, that Osborne uses Levinas's identification of infinity with alterity, to establish historical time as the mediation of nature (cosmological or geological time) with the social. Nevertheless, Osborne registers his exasperation with the nature of Levinasian dyadic opposition of time with alterity, which as he notes, actually poses religion and ethics in the place of the historical and the social, and leads to Levinas's eschatological opposition of infinity and totality, in place of questioning the role of the historical, social or unconscious in relation to time. In so doing, Osborne's critique concerns itself with the manner in which eschatological discourse places itself 'beyond' history, in a manner which, ultimately, cannot bear any relation to its other (1995:118-119). Clearly, the conflicts tensions and complexities of

Sommer's work is not germane to such a distant positioning, anymore than Marin's account of ichnography.

Yet in a world of circumstances, forces and events from which the viewing subject is distanced, made to feel 'outside the frame' or "insignificant as far as the whole universe is concerned" such a moment of crisis in positionality both spatial *and* temporal resonates with Giorgio Agamben's (2009) remarks on what it is to be 'with' time – in other words, to be *contemporary*:

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong in their time are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are, thus, in this sense, irrelevant. But precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time.

The 'violence to the imagination' described by Kant is distinguished by its 'blocking' action in two particular respects: the blocking of the will, and the blocking of the imagination. It is in these two respects that the dynamical sublime deprives the subject of sensibility – its openness to emotional impressions, susceptibility, sensitiveness - by means of overload. In this manner, the dynamical sublime presents the subject with a set of circumstances which disallows – or forecloses - the possibility of imaginative response, leaving only rational assumption. Such a blocking therefore presents the sublime event as a jealous and overpowering god - the only possibility in the mind of the viewing subject, since all alternatives are foreclosed. It is therefore also in this way that a conception of framing becomes central, since the sublime experience is one in which all others are pushed to the edges of a frame which is constituted not only *spatially* in terms of distance, but also, I would suggest, *temporally* in terms of alternatives, and, conversely, it is the rational assumption of this process on the part of the viewing subject – the point at which contingency and agency are surrendered - which renders the sublime event one which presents as simultaneously bizarre (visually) and suddenly inevitable (historically). It is at the point that the viewing subject finds the possibility of imagining anything else closed out, that agency on the part of the subject becomes *unimaginable*.

If, therefore, we are to see Sommer's desert photographs, informed by a peculiarly American ideology in which his use of the word 'landscape' chafes against the 'time-less' evocations of space, bereft of the certainties of singular positionality, then we can also see them as embodiments of a sublime tension between spatial and temporal elements. This is because, in Sommer's 'landscape' photographs, the conventions of representing space, time and the viewer's relationship to both are presented in a manner which is 'intensely irresolvable' – but in being thus, does not foreclose. The implications of this I will explore in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Subjective Space, Temporality and Excess: Reading Sommer through Sappho and Klein

In her essay ‘Sexuality in the Field of Vision’ Jacqueline Rose, taking as a starting point Freud’s commentary of a bungled and incomplete drawing of coitus by Leonardo Da Vinci, writes:

Describing the child’s difficult journey into adult sexual life, he [Freud] would take as his model little scenarios, or the staging of events, which demonstrated the complexity of an essentially visual space, moments in which perception *founders* [...] or in which pleasure in looking tips over into the register of *excess* (2005: 227, original emphasis)

In beginning this chapter, I want to suggest here that the ‘sense that one’s perception might founder in a complex visual space where scopophilic pleasure might tip over into excess’ is a repeated aspect of Frederick Sommer’s work also. It is this aspect, embodied in its multifarious radical forms, which creates a sustained tension in Sommer’s work that is left unresolved. Sommer’s work creates a shifting field of spatial and temporal juxtapositions upon which perception founders, and in which the resolution of scopophilic pleasure is curtailed. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, I also want to argue that this rupturing and fragmentation is temporal as well as spatial, and explore this in more detail. In so doing, and following on from the points I made around Melanie Klein in Chapter 2, I seek to read examples of Sommer’s later collage and montage work – which I describe below - through a Klein influenced understanding of the Sapphic Sublime.

As Rose elucidates, those who have opposed Melanie Klein on the basis that her supposed conception of infant development relies upon a biologically reductive conception of instinct on the one hand, and on the other, a conception of the ego which is overly coherent, have strayed from what Klein

actually argued. Rose argues that this, in part, is the legacy of Klein's famously fractious debates with Freud's daughter Anna, but also due to the out and out rejection of Klein's work by psychoanalytical institutions in the US, as well as the eclipsing dominance of Lacanian discourse in the humanities (1993: 139-150). For Jacqueline Rose, the key difference in the debates between Klein and Anna Freud was in the interpretation and strength attributed to the infantile superego, and how to deal with it. Arising as it did from a period of violent crises and schizoid fragmentation within the psyche, the Kleinian narrative posited the emergent superego in infants as inheriting the aggression of the drives it curtails, enforcing a coherence by inflicting terror upon the growing child:

For Klein, far from the childish superego being weak, it was fierce and inexorable, the produce of the internal rage attendant on the extravagance of the child's impulses and its thwarted being in the world. The task of analysis, child analysis included, was not to align with or re-inforce the superego, but to reduce and assuage the inexorability of its law: 'what is needed is not to reinforce this superego, but to tone it down'. (1993: 202)

In re-reading Klein, Rose asks whether, rather than the monolithic and prescriptive text described by critics and opponents, Klein did not instead produce a discursive space as 'creatively unmasterable' as that now widely attributed to Freud (1993: 139). For Rose, Klein identifies subjective space as a space of schizoid paranoia, and a space of oscillation (1993: 151, 163-164). In it, repetition links with introjection and projection, expulsion and devouring (the object relations described in Chapter 2 of the present thesis) so that infant development is pathological, and progression has a negative, destructive aspect, as well as reparatory or positive ones, so that 'successive stages of development have both a retrogressive and progressive function' (1993: 167). In describing the oscillating violence within these processes, Rose argues, Klein's account of object relations can be seen as constitutive, rather than exclusive, and, far from pre-supposing 'a coherent ego' in the way alleged by her critics, Klein posits an account of how subjective space evolves in relation to the infant's early interactions with the world, where fragments of the world

are lodged into cohering desires, and, on into adulthood, ‘knowledge always borders on fantasy, fantasy is always in part fantasy about the borders of knowledge’ (1993: 174).

The basis of exploring the marginalized artistic practices of Frederick Sommer, through a Klein-influenced account of the Sapphic Sublime in the manner I am proposing, therefore rests upon this dialectically open account of the tensions between a symbolized world and that space of oscillation and schizoid fragmentation. In this light, Klein’s recognition of the need to ‘tone down’ the Superegotic is a recognition, from the position of the clinical therapist, of the productive potential of that dialectical relationship.

Immersion in the fragmented, often grotesque imagery of Sommer cannot leave one with a pleasurable sense of resolve. Here, too, in Sommer’s work, as I have sought to demonstrate in the previous chapters and will seek to do here, are creative spaces that seem unmasterable, spaces of fragmentation and oscillation. As I noted at the end of Chapter 2, in Gestalt terms, this lack of resolution leads to frustration and tension. In formulating the character of the Sapphic Sublime, through Klein, in relation to Sommer’s work in the preceding chapters, I drew particularly upon the idea of tension (in Eliot’s terms ‘intensity’) second stage of Thomas Weiskel’s tripartite schema, making the point that “Weiskel raises the possibility that such a triumphal return to the Symbolic order by way of the super ego might, in some circumstances, be indefinitely postponed”. This emphasis upon the second stage, I argue, makes appropriate my use of Klein because of her therapeutically creative emphasis upon that ‘toning down’ or challenging of an all powerful superego, her recognition and rejection of the terror that it imposes, and the ethical position that implies. This is important in terms of my reading of the radical ethical possibilities and connotations within Sommer’s work.

To this end, I want to look at three particular works by Frederick Sommer from different points in his life, all of which, I propose, generate unresolved tensions between normative readings of space and time. The first, *Petrified Forest National Monument* (1940) is a photograph I have previously discussed in Chapter 3, wherein the split second of the camera, the historical time of

photographic tradition and geological time collide in a scattered, asymmetrical field of random features and objects. The second is a photomontage, *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John*, made in the mid 1960s, and the third is a collage *The Discovery of Brazil*, made in the last decade of the artist's life. As would be expected from Jain Kelly's (1973) description of his practice cited in the last chapter, collage remained a recurring aspect of Frederick Sommer's art throughout his life. In an untitled work dated '1943, 1997' a sequence of 6 Picasso-esque collaged drawings are arrayed in two rows, four white on black, two black on white, as if gesturing towards a process not only of repetition, but also reconfiguration, permutation, progression and reversal: a territory of concern traversed in different directions. In *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John* (1966) an amorphous blob of melted metal is photographed lying over a found engraving of figures sitting on and by a woodland bench, the metal so arranged that only the shoulder and feet of one adult figure can be seen, and the comical, laughing face of a child peeping out from the foliage. The resonant title of Leonardo da Vinci's 1499 chalk and charcoal cartoon, however, seems appropriate, given the uncanny partial resemblance of the puddled metal to a figure clutching an infant, albeit a modernist sculpture of such. Yet the juxtaposition of an amorphous, almost *formless* form over a detailed figured background proposes a strange, ambiguous space at the centre of the picture: this is, after all, a figure /ground construction, but one in which the central figure not only remains ambiguous in the manner of Friedrich's *Rückenfiguren*, but also belongs to a different epochal register: there is a sense that this nineteenth century engraving has been subject to a visitation which traverses other times, from the fifteenth century to the twentieth, and all to the delight of the conspicuous child observer, looking *out* of the picture, not into it. Whereas the 'field' of the 1940 *Petrified Forest* can be seen as an accreted layering of different timescales redolent of the sedimentary rocks it shows, In *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John* (1966) seems a querulous jumbling of coincidences across different timescales as artist and viewer might find them: the happenstance momentary freezing of the metal as it cools; the finding and keeping of the found print alongside the nostalgic resonances of the previous century; the momentary positioning of the assemblage and the click of the rostrum camera shutter on the

copy stand; whilst the lost age of Leonardo stretches across it all to the point of disintegration.

Unlike the photomontage of *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John, The Discovery of Brazil* (1994), is a collage. In the last decade of his life, Sommer stopped using photomontage – in which an arranged aggregate of images is re-photographed on the copy-stand – in favour of collage, under the influence of Stephen Aldrich, one of his assistants, who came to work at Sommer's studio in 1987 (2005: 236). Most of the collages of this period use imagery taken from 19th Century medical text books: cross sections of musculature, organs, respiratory systems. Sometimes, as in *The Discovery of Brazil*, or the slightly earlier *Through the Looking Glass* (1990), these images take the form of a dissected specimen, in which it is possible to speak of a figure and ground relationship once more emerging, albeit in a complex and qualified manner, since the ground remains a void: a membrane, envelope or sac is indicated by the perimeter of the figure, opened out to display its contents. Flesh tones, puce, arterial blues and bloody reds predominate against a deep unvarying black. In other, untitled works executed around the same time, hermetic, cochlea like closed loops alternate with arrangements of gible-like fragments suggestive of common origin, both laid out against the same black backgrounds. As with *Through the Looking Glass*, with its connotations of distortions of subjective experience, and attendant themes of reversal or inversion, the title *The Discovery of Brazil*, is evocative. Although born in Italy, Sommer's family moved to Brazil when he was in his eighth year, and he remained there until two months before his twentieth birthday. In this context, the title evokes a sense of subjective time: the years of childhood development experienced by the child subject as far longer than they would appear to an adult, conflated with the invasive opening out of something concealed and intimate. The visceral contents contained by skin, which of course, is endless when uncut, surrounding the entire organism, are exposed – discovered – in a way which delineates and 'frames' – both as a figure in front of a ground once more, and also stylistically, as a nineteenth century engraving. Similarly, the closed loops of the untitled pieces mentioned above suggest interminable circulation. So it is in these senses, I want to argue here, that Sommer's use of figure / ground counterposes two experiences of time: that of the historical, and

that of the subjective. The second of these, as I described in Chapter 1, is that which, encountered in the space evoked by trauma, is immersive and without end, haunted by the insistent and repetitive urges that cannot be articulated or defined within the Symbolic. As such this represents the other to that of symbolised and structured time: the time of history and language, which excludes and ignores what cannot be uttered.

Contemplating *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John* and *The Discovery of Brazil*, and the differentiation between subjective time and that of history, brings us to the question not only of ethics, but of politics.

In his book *The End of the Line* (1985) Neil Hertz compared Longinus, 1st Century CE author of *Per Hupsos* and the mediator of Sappho, with that of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Hertz writes:

Both would seem, at moments, to be writing out of a deep nostalgia directed ambiguously toward certain great literary works and towards the traditional culture out of which they sprung [...] Each finds a word richly equivocal enough to locate the peculiar quality of the texts he admires in relation to something beyond literature: so Longinus's word for the sublime, hupsos, is linked, in certain suspiciously eloquent passages (eg 35.2-35.4) with cosmic Nature itself, just as Benjamin's aura is made to participate in the ritual values of a lost culture. But then, strangely, each is drawn to texts that bear the marks of the disintegration of order [...] The comparison suggests that we cannot take either the critics' nostalgia or their structurings at face value; each evokes a catastrophe, yet each seems equally concerned with a recurrent phenomenon in literature, the movement of disintegration and figurative reconstitution I have been calling the sublime turn. This movement is not unrelated to their own method of writing, which consists in the more or less violent fragmentation of literary bodies into "quotations" in the interest of building up a discourse of one's own, a discourse which, in its turn, directs

attention to passages that come to serve as emblems of the critic's most acute and least nostalgic sense of what he is about" (1985:14)

I quote Hertz at length here because it seems to me he elucidates the relationship between Benjamin and Longinus as one of observing time and framing time, of personal subjective sensation and its inter relationship with ethical – and, in Benjamin's case at least - political obligation. In considering the work which plays on that relationship between the timelessness of the Unconscious, 'subjective time' and symbolised history, it is perhaps worth noting here Peter Osborne's description of Benjamin, that 'he appears in [Andre Breton's] wake as a gothic Marxist, preoccupied with historical questions about fantasy, representations and dreams.' (Osborne, 1995:183) Something similar, I would suggest, could be made about the relation between those temporal and spatial elements in Frederick Sommer's collage. For if Hertz's point about the time of the historical in Benjamin and Longinus leads directly to nostalgia, the reversal does something else. Although, in Sommer, we are not dealing with a Marxist, I also want to suggest, of course, that in looking back at his fragmented work now, the similarities Hertz draws between Benjamin and Longinus – and the 'gothic' characteristics ascribed to the former by Osborne - could also be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to an artist such as Sommer.

Arguably, the three works by Sommer I have discussed above 'begin' with a long (-ing) look into the past, whether in the geological forms observed in *Petrified Forest* or the nineteenth century engravings of *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John* (1966), or *I Adore You* or *The Discovery of Brazil*. However, in his practice too there appears an ambiguity in the 'direction' of this nostalgia, akin to the ambiguities of gaze I discussed in Sommer's pictures of Lee Nevin in Chapter 1. Additionally of course, it is impossible to know where Sommer 'began', and, faced with the finished work, the question is irrelevant. Of course, as an artist concerned with pictures, there is, in Sommer, the 'formal' framing that we see in all his works – the border of the picture – but framing in Sommer is always tendentious and strained, akin to that described in relation to Benjamin and Longinus, also occurs when the artist

draws our attention to the observed in the context of a particular thing associated with one epoch, in the context of another thing associated with a different one. This juxtaposition might, I am arguing here, involve subjective, geological or historical references. In Sommer, all these elements play off against one another, and in the lifetime of his practice, were never resolved. Yet to argue thus is not, of course, to relegate the importance of the temporal framing we can, as viewers, retrospectively inscribe either. If the aspects of equivalence and inter-changeability which I discussed, via Page Dubois and Jain Kelly, in Sommer's practice can be placed alongside the use of the 'richly equivocal' signifiers that Hertz can in retrospect see in Longinus and Benjamin, there there is also a sense in which Sommer, too, might 'violently fragment' his sources through quotations in a movement between disintegration and figurative reconstitution.

However, to end it there would be mistaken. What seems particularly pertinent in Hertz's account is the manner in which the gesture of either Longinus or Benjamin ends there: this is not a single movement from the particular to the universal as Alenka Zupančič (2008: 25) ascribes, via Hegel, to epic and tragedy – the forms one might associate with nostalgia for a lost epoch. Rather, what seems crucial here, is the sense in which, in Frederick Sommer's work, the movement continues, as if *through* the point of nostalgia for the lost thing or epoch, and on towards an embrace of the means by which the loss was effected – an affective embrace of the process of fragmentation and dispersal, which, continues to sustain a tension between meaning that threatens to tip over into an excess of meaninglessness. This, I would suggest, seems to be a recurrent aspect of Sommer's practice in its manipulation of form and technique, not only in the fragmentation and ruptures of his collages and photomontages, but, as I have argued, implicit in the juxtaposition of the title of 'landscape' bestowed upon works which challenge and problematise the conventions of landscape so radically. Following the logic of what I would suggest we think of as an ethical embrace of the *ends* of their respective roles and practices as writers, Hertz's parallel between Longinus and Benjamin results in a reflexive turn towards their own writing, and, the dialectical negation of the negation (that is to say, nostalgia, a phantasy of the past which occludes the present) in the process. In Sommer, this seems to happen on at

least two levels. As Jain Kelly observed, the ‘trial and error of endless variation’ in Frederick Sommer’s work produces not infinity, but its opposite – ‘gaps in style and content’ alongside shifts from making to ‘working out his problems on an intellectual level’, and the resultant ‘establishment of [what Sommer called] linkages between different fields’ (1973:92-94). Therefore we can see, in Sommer’s work, an *oscillation between* disintegration and figurative reconstitution both in individual images and the practice as a whole. Moreover, and in retrospect, we can see this facet of Sommer’s practice as a whole played out across his own time, but also simultaneously ‘establishing links’ with other times, or other conceptions of temporality.

The Space of Repetitive Compulsion and Art Practice

Such a discussion of Sommer’s shifting, oscillating practices leads us to consider multifarious perceptions of temporality and spatiality as they emerge in subjective space. In this context, I want to return to Thomas Weiskel’s formulation of the sublime that I quoted in Chapter 1:

On the other hand, the obsessional derivatives of the traumatic sublime mark a failure of positive identification with the superego, and thus the delight is never really experienced. If you do not recover from the second phase, you are likely to replay the precipitating occasion in an involuntary repetition compulsion (like the Ancient Mariner), a disorder Burke finds frequent in madmen. (1976: 97)

Again, I would argue that this passage repays further close attention. Weiskel argues that the precipitation towards madness is *likely*, but not inevitable. This presents interesting possibilities. Beyond the failure of positive identification with the superego, but short of madness, Weiskel implies something else is possible, that does not entail the madness found by Burke. This is important here for my thesis, since that which I propose can be gained by reading the work of Sommer through the conception of the Sapphic Sublime hitherto proposed is not a valorisation of ‘madness’ nor the pre-Oedipal.

Weiskel's formulation cited above, wherein he speaks of involuntary repetition compulsion, chimes with one of the principal themes of Freudian psychoanalysis, the compulsion to repeat. For Freud, repetitive compulsion was associated with his conception of the instincts or 'drives' which dominate the unconscious, but which crucially, remain un-named and unrecognised by the Superego. In Freud, there are two drives, the Sexual Drive and the Death Instinct – an unconscious drive to self destruction, not as in an instinct for pain, but rather an insistent instinct towards an absolute ending to it all, for eternal quiescence and absolute stillness. The endlessly insistent pressure exerted by these drives remains perpetual, exhibiting itself in unconscious habits or behaviour, unless symbolised in speech through analytical therapy. However, Freud also recognised that repetition in children – most famously in the account of a child repeatedly casting 'a wooden reel with some string tied around it' (2003:53) thereby 'abnegating his drives' – could result in positive and cognisant satisfaction. By rehearsing the loss and return of the reel, the child rehearses – and comes to control – emotions caused by his mother's absence. Freud's description of this moment in the child's development focuses upon this as a milestone – 'an immense cultural achievement' (ibid.) I would suggest here that Freud's description effectively – although he does not use the term – describes a moment of dialectical negation. Freud's phrasing, 'abnegation' is that of 'renunciation' rather than 'negation' per se, however, this reflects precisely those areas of Freud's practice which were subject to subsequent reformulation through Klein, referred to above, and in the accounts offered by Frosh (1999) below. The child, having been the passive object 'abandoned' when his mother leaves the room, effectively transforms himself into an active subject, 'abandoning' the reel, only to recover it later. Therefore although the drive itself is insistent and unconscious, its negative, destructive energies can be transformed by subsequent conscious symbolisation.

In Freud, adult play – the arts – are, in a manner in *some* ways similar to the play of the child, the site of the re-staging of earlier traumatic experience. It is the conscious expression of the drive to repetition:

We might also bear in mind that the form of play and imitation practised by adults, which in contradistinction to that of children is directed at an audience, does not spare its spectators the most painful experiences, for instance in the performance of tragedies, and yet may none the less be regarded by them as something supremely enjoyable. (2003:55)

Again, Freud immediately goes on to suggest that this process is, by this stage, transformative in its character:

There are ways and means enough for turning what is essentially unpleasurable into something to be remembered and to be processed in the psyche. (2003:55)

In later forms of psychoanalysis, compulsive repetition is, again, the revisiting of states or behaviours believed to have been used by the child to negotiate experiences – and so circumstantially, aided its development – which in adult life has become a destructive set of symptoms: an unconscious attempt to ‘bind the trauma’ and thereby return to a state of ante-natal quiescence - an impulse Freud identified as the Death instinct or drive.

In Lacan, who, as I have noted above, has become the pre-eminent psychoanalytical influence in arts criticism, as in Freud, a drive is unconditional, insistent desire. In Lacan’s original example, cited by Slavoj Žižek (1991:23) this is epitomised within the symbolic by Hamlet’s father insisting he be avenged for his untimely and unjust death, and the unacknowledged state of affairs which persist after his death. In the hands of contemporary theorists such as Žižek, it becomes the space of the undead of horror cinema, in so far as zombies purportedly inhabit a space between the actual death which stopped bodily functioning, and the symbolic death (the funeral) which for whatever reason has not been performed. His body disposed of with undue haste, Hamlet’s father, in Lacanian terminology, has been denied his own Law. In *Looking Awry* (1992) Žižek notes, however, that the

Lacanian conception of a drive, ‘is precisely a demand that is not caught up in the dialectic of desire, that resists dialecticization’ (1992: 21). In Žižek’s formulation, the two elements – the drive that remains undialectical, incessantly repeating, and the desire which is ‘dialecticized’ into consciousness, are nevertheless closely juxtaposed.

In terms of what we might think of as the ‘normative’ Kantian account of the sublime process described by Weiskel’s tripartite schema, then, the key aspect of the various descriptions outlined above is that moment of transformation whereby a positive or pleasurable experience can be derived from a destructive drive, through the positive identification with the superego, the Symbolic, The Law of the Father, which allows for an affirmative pleasure. As I have argued above, in talking about the Sapphic Sublime in Sommer’s work, we are describing an unresolved tension that results in a foreclosure of that third stage, recalled in the play of affect in works of art that offer no complete affirmatory resolution – resulting in an attenuation or fragmented, confused curtailment of the ‘third stage’. Likewise, as I have also argued here, a dialectical account of the relationship between demand and desire – in particular, the role played by phantasy – had to wait for a radical understanding of the work of Melanie Klein, championed posthumously by feminist theorists able to think beyond and outside such affirmative identification. As I have previously explained, my chosen emphasis upon Klein in this thesis, and my proposal of its relevance in relation to the Sapphic Sublime, begins in the complex way in which Klein posits intense destructive forces – splitting, fragmentation – and the significance she places upon this in the development of the mind. Anxiety, and violence within the ‘subjective space’ of the neo-natal developing ego, is, as Stephen Frosh points out, ‘more fundamental to Klein than the sexual impulses accentuated by Freud’ (1999:125).

As Frosh (1999: 123) also observes, in Kleinian discourse, even a ‘normal’ infancy

[...]presents the vulnerable and fragile neonate ego with a threat of annihilation that gives rise to tremendous anxiety. This anxiety is immediately taken up into the child’s object relations.

The intensity of these experiences in turn, leads to a particular role for phantasy within Kleinian discourse, in which real experiences are bound up with phantasy, collapsing any antinomic separation of the internal and external. As Frosh again argues, for Klein, phantasy is not projected into the future as an ideal, '[not] a substitutive response to external frustration, [but] the basic stuff of psychological functioning, without which there would be no mental processes at all' (1999:124). The Kleinian conception of phantasy, therefore, is one in which it is bound up with the experience of the present. Whilst the early schizoid infant defence mechanisms of introjection and projection – of splitting and fragmenting parts of reality and lodging them within phantasy – are gradually overlaid with the coherent strategies of the strengthening ego of child and then adult, as Frosh points out,

The paranoid-schizoid position is one which is held throughout life as a potentiality, and underpins adult schizoid functioning [...] it remains an important defence which is always available. (1999:132-134)

As Frosh argues, the radical implications of Kleinian theory do not end there. The emphasis upon fragmentation and phantasy in the work of Melanie Klein:

[...] refutes a simple individualism which begins with an integrated self and then examines what the social world makes of it. Instead, the (real) social world is experienced through a conflicting screen of internal forces, which alter and shape it powerfully [...] this allows the theory to become dialectical, positing contradictions within as well as between each element in the inside-outside divide.

In Kleinian discourse, therefore, a simple developmental move towards some ideal putative 'whole' at one with the (universal) law and an uncritical association with the superegoic, is not an option. In keeping with a theory which emphasises the developmental role of experiences of fragmentation, of destructive impulses as potentially productive, which criticises antinomies of

inside / outside, which resists the opportunities for deferment presented in ideals in favour of the complexities of concrete portrayals of infant development, Kleinian discourse attends to and describes those foundational moments of ‘violence to the imagination’ which occur – and retain the potential to recur – in the child’s development and thereafter.

Representation and Inadequacy: Excess in the Feminist critique of the Objective Correlative

The area of the psyche outlined above is one that entails a dynamic account of what we might term ‘subjective space’: that area forced into being as an uneasy, oscillating negotiation between the trauma of the Real on the one hand, and the dictates of the superego / Symbolic order on the other. As such, the subjective space is an articulated space of both unconscious drives which, dialectically transformed into conscious desires, become fantasies, and conscious thought and projection both in spatial perception, and temporal ones. Peter Osborne (1995:108) links the Unconscious and, specifically, the Death Drive, to timelessness. Again, in the context of my discussion about subjective space and the affective toll of Frederick Sommer’s work, the sense here is of timelessness of the Unconscious, and our various senses of temporality alongside one another, as if juxtaposed in a truncated sequence. Indeed, as I will explain below, Osborne argues that the two are constitutive.

Given that only a portion of subjective space can ever be consciously represented within the symbolic order, it is inevitable that the rest should remain circulating, as unconsciously driven repetition and habit, unarticulated gaps and elisions in that which is symbolized, in the manner redolent of the gaps, fragments and truncations in Sommer’s work.

To account for the pressures and effects of the subjective space described thus is to account for the Unconscious, as dynamically present and felt - as *affect* - in every day life. Sommer’s work elicits a play of affect which retraces that zone. Of course, implicit in such an account is the implication that there are gaps, absences which cannot be symbolized. Obviating any paradox of describing that-which-cannot-be-fully-described is most effectively done *via*

negativa: the space of the indescribable is delineated by the absences it creates within the Symbolic.

This question assumes an importance not only in the formal consideration of the absences and elisions in Sommer's work – in other words, how the sense in which the 'absences' or how one might think of as the 'subtractions' in Frederick Sommer's works, are *excessive*; as with Klein's approach to therapy, the question of how much one aligns one's practice – or indeed, restricts it – to re-inforcing the superego has an ethical dimension.

This is a point which has been explored in Feminist Psychoanalytical critiques of T.S. Eliot's conception of the Objective Correlative. Referencing such a critique of Eliot might seem an odd aside here. However, I referenced Eliot in Chapter 2, where I discussed Steven Vine's formulation of Weiskel through Eliot's use of 'intensity' as an avatar of the sublime, and there is an important ultimate differentiation, arising from that allusion, to be had between Eliot's journey *through* the intensities of his *Wasteland* on his way to a re-alignment with the Superegotic, and Sommer's own decision, as it were, to *stay amongst* the agglomerations of cultural rubble, of repetition and fragmentation – namely, in the absences and gaps that are left unresolved in Sommer. Jacqueline Rose's critical explanation of Eliot's adoption of the argument for the Objective Correlative indicates why this is so. As Rose (2005:123) observes, for Eliot the character of Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, was

not good enough aesthetically, that is, bad enough psychologically, which means that in relationship to the effect which she generates by her behaviour in the chief character in the drama – Hamlet himself – Gertrude is not deemed a sufficient *cause*.

Eliot's criticism – his ultimate rejection of the tension created by this lack of correlation leads him to adopt the notion that the characters in a play should respond to objective conditions set out therein, which, in turn, evoke particular emotional responses to the situation by the audience, without those emotions having to be described. The problem with Eliot's approach is that it presumes

there is a 'right and proper' type and level of emotional response to a given objective situation, which any audience will then collectively identify itself with. Eliot's position therefore assumes an emotional response entirely contained within the superegotic realm: an audience recognises a symbolised situation, attributes a particular meaning to it, and responds with a more or less uniform emotional response according to received modes of behaviour. Moreover, in Eliotic criticism, an ethical imperative is placed on the author to orchestrate this for the sake of formal unity. This effectively assumes an ability to create a lockdown within the symbolic order: as Stefan Collini (2012) has noted, there was a personal imperative for Eliot in this position, to build 'stockades' to protect him against 'economic, social, sexual or spiritual ruin', and as Rose notes, this is also found its expression in his political royalism. In the work of Frederick Sommer, in sharp contrast, there is no such formal unity, the play of the Unconscious is not expunged, and the tensions remain exposed.

An Excess of the Past and the Future in the Present: Fragmentary Tropes of Time in Sommer and their Ethical dimension.

The above has a direct bearing upon my discussion of temporality in the three works of Frederick Sommer I discussed above. Eliot's charging of the artist with specific ethical tasks hinges upon an argument about how such an artist should approach history: taking works such as his 1919 essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent' as examples, Rose argues that Eliot urged the artist to look to 'the world of dead poets' – which she reads as the Law of the Father – to avoid 'his own disordered subjectivity, and so transmute it into form' and, in so doing, 'escape oppressive individuality and enter into historical time' (2005:129). History in this sense is Symbolic time *par excellence*, from which other senses of time are to be expunged. In sharp contrast to Eliot, Sommer's treatment of history – is without awe nor does it promise such guarantees: it is quizzical and playful, remaining 'disordered and subjective'. In *Virgin and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John*, for example, the child's face appears from another past, as if cheekily questioning the modernist blob, belittled by it but impertinent. The past – an old engraving – is refigured as a young child, junior to the seniority of the possibly maternal blob which attempts to occlude it.

However, I would argue that this is *not only* a question of political application in relation to the subjective, or the Unconscious *per se*, but rather, in its preoccupation upon history as the realm of that which is ordered, linguistic and symbolic, Eliot's argument inadvertently raises the question of the role conceptions of time – historical and subjective – play in fantasy, which psychoanalysis recognises as coterminous with desire. More broadly, I would suggest it raises questions about how artist and viewer can conceive time, either as a space of flux and fragmentation in which, nevertheless, things can happen *now*, in all their complexity and contingency, or how they can be deferred towards an ideal and purified future, or exiled to a longed for past. As Rose (2005) has argued:

For historically, whenever the political argument is made for psychoanalysis, this dynamic is polarised into crude opposition between inside and outside – a radical Freudianism always having to argue that the social produces the misery of the psychic in a one-way process, which utterly divests the psychic of its own mechanisms and drives. Each time the psychoanalytic description of internal conflict and psychic division is referred to its social conditions, the latter absorb the former, and *the unconscious shifts – in that same moment – from the site of a division into the vision of an ideal unity to come. As if the tension between the unconscious and the image to which we cling of ourselves were split off from each other, and the second were idealised and then projected forward into historical time.* (2005:9, my emphasis)

The last portion of Rose's formulation here seems particularly pertinent: I want to argue here that if, in the syndrome Rose describes, the future habitually becomes the *site* of idealised unified subjectivity-to-come (a utopian moment), then the future *also* becomes, simultaneously, the staging of an *objective* disunity-to-come – the apocalypse. My point here is that Rose refers to the Unconscious as a *site*, and, indeed, one of tension. My reading of Rose's explanation here is one that describes a regrettable shift from an actual

place in the here and now, to a vision of an ideal delayed to some hazy, unspecified future time. The conscious ‘image to which we cling of ourselves’ is, as Rose understands, an incomplete and inaccurate one, precisely because it does not include those aspects which are unconscious. Moreover, the syndrome Rose describes tells us something about our conscious visions of time and the future. This is because the Utopian ideal of wholeness, purity and resolution of all conflict within any given individual – if such a thing were either possible or desirable – could only be constituted on the dissolution of all social life and interaction (witness any number of Charlton Heston films predicated on the ‘last true surviving man’ etc etc). Perpetually deferring desires to some future ideal moment, when everyone and everything is united, and, also, when objective circumstances are ripe, is a common enough trope in individual dreams, as well as the collective aspirations of certain forms of politics, whether of the Left or the Right, just as it is common place in certain forms of religion. Contrary to this approach, Rose argues, the task at hand is recognize the impossibility of such splits and ‘projections’ and, instead, to deal with the radically conflated present moment.

Indeed, it is not unusual for the idealised two to go hand in hand. Perpetual deferral to some future ideal moment of subjective unity and an opportune rupture of objective circumstance is a common enough trope in the collective aspirations of certain forms of politics whether of the Left or the Right, as in certain forms of religion or social discourse. The task at hand of course, as Rose makes clear, is to avoid such a split that projects that ideal ‘forward into historical time’ and instead to deal with the radically conflated present moment, in which the unconscious and self image are not idealised as a separate entities but re-inscribed, so that the problematic but dialectical tension is maintained within the present moment. This is precisely the character ascribed to the Sapphic Sublime by Shaw (2005) which I drew attention to in Chapter 3. In this context, Sommer’s *I Adore You* presents not only a tarnished, fragmented ideal of Victorian love and family, but re-presents it kaleidoscopically swirling and spilling untidily off the page, as if the fragments and tensions of life and love occur in the present to be made, unmade and re-made amidst the clutter of and untidiness of living, not as deferred ideal, but as imperfect moments.

As with the future, so with the past: one might, on the basis of the problematic thus described, and I argue, represented by Sommer's practice, think also of how subjectively we relate to the past, the future, and time generally - how, for example, nostalgia functions, either as an idealised unity that Eliot expounded, an attempt to stop time or shut out the contemporary, or as something brought into the present to effect a radical re-reading of both, in which phantasy is brought into play in order to re-articulate our perception of the present, which is the theme of my reading of Sommer's collage and montage work. This, of course, is the realm of art, as much as perhaps politics. It posits a Symbolic Order as haunted and abraded, quite incapable of any lockdown, but rather, hammered at repetitively, and not only by Žižek's zombies. As Osborne, through Laplanche, argues (1995:108) the 'timelessness of the unconscious, the timelessness towards which the Death Drive drives, appears *within* the temporal as the 'synchronic'. However, it should not thereby be thought that the temporality to which such timelessness is opposed is diachronic either, since he argues that diachrony / synchrony distinctions are not distinctions of temporal relations, but distinctions against time. The unconscious, argues Osborne, 'is not synchronic. It is timeless. Synchronic is how it appears in its relations to the temporal'. It is the concept of synchrony which produces the illusion of the possibility of repetition as the temporal reproduction of the same' (emphasis in the original).

The implications here are clear for and clearer understanding of what I have so far called 'subjective time': for insofar as synchronic time might be understood as that which is seen to exist in only one point in time, and diachronic that which is concerned with an historical development, the sensations by which a moment, for the subject, might seem to 'last an age', or be uncannily 'repeated' are accounted for within a conception which accounts for the manner in which our conscious senses of time(s) are interrelate with the unconscious. Osborne's use of the phrase 'temporality' denotes a sense of time(s) analogous to 'positionality' in relation to position and space.

Indeed, for Rose, in her essay 'Sexuality in the Field of Vision', with which I commenced this chapter, this repetition is *staged* within art practice, as per Freud, but is also, now repeated in the encounter between art and psychoanalysis itself.

In so doing, Rose's use of 'trace' elucidates the link between the residual element of unconscious drives, compulsion and symbolisation, allowing for instability in each:

repetition as insistence, that is, as the
constant pressure of something hidden but
not forgotten – something that can only come
into focus now by blurring the field of
representation where our normal forms of
self recognition takes place. (2005:228)

In marked distinction from the obsessive demand for the containment of excess demanded by Eliot, Rose, in the quotation with which I began this chapter, returns to the Freudian schema to emphasise that which is problematic about seeing, and sees excess as key to this: 'Each time the stress falls on a problem of seeing' (2005:227).

What are the implications of these juxtapositions within subjective space? How are they formed in the emergent consciousness, and how does that impinge upon time and space in the work of Sommer? According to Rose, Klein therefore establishes subjective space as a 'space of simile'. For the child, it is in the fantasy of 'as if' that the child first 'opens up the path of indirect representation' and begins to behave accordingly (1993: 149). As Osborne (1995) would have it, timelessness and temporality similarly emerge in the child through a constitutive questioning as 'the mutually dependent poles of a dialectic of temporalisation' (1995: 110). Nevertheless, Osborne draws a clear distinction between the temporality of the death drive and the temporality of history. Defining the death drive as the by product of those very processes of temporalisation and socialisation for which it provides a quasi naturalistic ground for the individual, Osborne suggests that the temporality of

the death drive – its repetition – is ‘the appearance within the ontological structure of the individual of the cosmological time of nature’ (1995:111-12). Historical time emerges as the other to the standpoint of ‘timeless exteriority’, just as timelessness emerges as the other to history. This ‘space of simile’ is a borderland I alluded to earlier, which Sommer’s photomontages and collages play with, a place of tensions, resonances and instability, as well as fantastical possibility.

Pertinent to this, I recall that when my own son Isaac was a little short of 27 months old, his mother and I showed him a photograph of her as a small girl in primary school. His response was such that we transcribed it immediately: ‘That’s Mummy when she was a little girl, can you see her?’ we asked. ‘Yes. I dance with her’, replied Isaac, in a matter of fact tone. ‘You were dancing with Mummy?’ we asked. ‘Yes when Mummy was a little girl. I dance with her at the ball’, came the reply. ‘Where was this?’ we asked. ‘In the morning where the stars open. I dance with her.’ said Isaac.

This instance seemed as a desirous rejection of historical time; the child not inserting himself in the ordering of the past as History, so much as cheekily bringing desirable fragments of that past into his own subjective experience of the present, in the manner of Sommer’s collages. Therein, perhaps, lies the possibility of fantasy (in its psychoanalytical sense, as desire) within which, provoked by a photograph, a small boy, effectively learning about Symbolic time (his mother in history) saw no reason to not being able to obviate that ordering of historical time in fulfillment of subjective desire, and so directed not only by desire but by re-presented phantasy: to feel *as if* the abridgement he desired subjectively could bring irrational pressure to bear in the form of affect; and, of course, it did, and we wept.

At this point I would suggest it worth imagining how this model relates to the duality of subjective time and historical time, with the latter being that which is fully symbolised, superegotic, and inexorable in its laws. Adapting the Kleinian model to time produces an account in which historical time exerts a terror upon subjective time but at the same time, such a tyranny is rooted in

that which it 'inherits' from subjective space.

Reading Sommer through Sappho and Klein

In tracing the ethical implications of Sommer's practice, through my Kleinian inflected conception of the Sapphic Sublime, I accept that I may seem to have taken this discussion some way from the formal focus on the work of Frederick Sommer that has been at the heart of this and the preceding chapters. However, my contention is that Sommer's work and its implications remain close at hand. Furthermore, I would contend that drawing such implications in this manner is ultimately no less than what both Sommer's work – and my thesis on it – demands.

Sommer's project is not that of an introspect abstraction. Like Sappho's lyrics or Klein's clinical notes, the fragmentary nature of Sommer's images of the world sit alongside the lived experience of it, as if to be read in conjunction with that process. The formal and technical concerns of his work are not those of the abstract painters that were his contemporaries, nor, as I have commented before, did he seek to formalize the pictorial content of his photography in the manner, say, of Minor White. Rather, Sommer's work, whether it be collage, photography, montage repeatedly presents us with radical rethinking of realism, drawing as it does in many cases upon the realist medium *par excellence* of the twentieth century - photography – but not limiting itself to prescriptive accounts of that. His challenging landscapes, nudes and portraits time and again return us to the specifics of genre whilst radically challenging what and how we see their subject matter. In analogous form, his drawings reference musical notation or figuration.

In suggesting that Sommer's oeuvre is a radical realist one, in this way, I am continuing to align it with Sappho's fragments. Sappho's dappled, multi positional lyrics reflect the lived world, its physical objects, its moments of emotional and psychological rupture, the anxieties and tensions produced by lived experience of space and time. Like Sommer's work, they are now fragments which reflectively deal with fragmentation, never seeking to resolve

or transcend that, but submitting, immersively, to what that entails. Sappho calls upon her goddess to come to her in the world, not take her out of it, all the while recognizing the shifting, uncertain, multifarious positions that demands of them both, even in moments of joy. As such, what truth claims are to be assigned to it are grounded in the particulars of experiencing the material world, its appearance and its interpretation, at odds, no doubt, with any supposed normative way of seeing things.

Conclusion

Reflections on this thesis and my own practice

Fragment 31 of Sappho's lyric seems to address a woman, being courted by a man. The fragment records Sappho's feelings as she looks upon the scene in front of her. As such, although often associated with the literary or the aural, the sense in which Sappho's description takes visual stimulation as its instigation seems clear. Anne Carson's translation reads thus:

*[...]for when I look at you, a moment, then no speaking
is left in me*

*no: tongue breaks, and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears*

*and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead – or almost
I seem to me.*

As Yopie Prins has noted (1999:40-51) whilst other translations have moved the tense into the past, and in so doing, imply a subsequent revival on the speaker's part from that moment when she is 'dead - or almost', there is nothing to suggest such a sense of subsequent restoration or revival. Moreover, as Prins and Carson both note, the emphasis in this translation plays upon an unsure sense of self – after the tongue breaks, there seems to be an increasing self objectification, as 'tongue breaks' and 'fire racing under skin' connotes a separation from any centred sense of self, as if a disembodied voice is listing a set of symptoms experienced by another body in the most depersonalized manner. Reading such a

fragment leaves one with a sense of how wonderment as to what happened next: a first person narrative ending in a life threatening situation, might leave wondering ‘does the speaker recover?’. A first person narrative stating ‘I am dead’ is something else entirely. Moreover, dialectically, such depersonalization highlights the desire to personify Sappho, as a woman from the past who can speak to us now. My project raises a particular question in this regard, since I am asking Sappho to speak to the work of a male 20th Century artist, and, by inference, speak to me also.

Therein lies the central issue with the mediation of Sappho; she either persists as scattered tragic remnants of self annihilation, or as a victim, re-constituted by a faithless mediator, affording her voice a unity that it has, itself, forgone. Prins’s observation about the effect and implications of Longinus’s mediation of Sappho’s work are pertinent here. Other writers have commented upon Longinus’s role in this respect, but Prins’s chapter, ‘Sappho’s broken tongue’ sets out, in highly charged and accusatory tone, the implications in specific detail, arguing that Longinus perpetuates the fragmentation of Sappho through his own re-editing:

If Sappho is bound to be victimized by this argument, however, the reason is not that she exists as a female body prior to the Longinian reading of Fragment 31, but that the Sapphic body is gendered in the very process of being read: it bears the mark of gender, posthumously, by bearing its own death. The reception of Sappho therefore produces an increasingly morbid repetition of the Sapphic riddle. Rather than bearing infants that come to life when they are delivered to the reader, Sappho gives birth to a tradition of lyric reading that kills the very thing it would bring to life.

I draw attention to Prins’s text here on two further accounts: (i) the sense that Sappho’s voice is gendered by submission rather than biology holds out the possibility that a biologically male artist can make work of a Sapphic character (ii) whereas traditionally, as I discussed in Chapter 2, mediators such as Longinus are accorded the role of artificially ‘unifying’ the fragments, here Prins suggests that there is no such guarantee. What Prins refers to as the ‘Sapphic

riddle' here is from a 4th Century comedy by Antiphanes, in which a speaker poses a refers to the voiceless children of Sappho, meaning her words read silently, as text, rather than sung.

However, I would argue that if part of the aim of this thesis has been to explore the extent to which one can speak of a Sapphic aspect to the work of a male artist such as Sommer, then it is possible not least through the creative recognition of the gaps and ruptures through which our understanding of Sappho is constituted. The fragmentation of Sappho then becomes not a diminishing, tortured reduction, but rather, a radical imbricated incompleteness in which absences denote engulfing, immersive excesses rather than buried victimhood.

Therein lay the significance of examining this question in the context of Prins's debate with Winkler, as I did also in Chapter 2: the manner in which Winkler is able to locate Sappho historically whilst attributing trans-historical significance to her work, and Winkler's identification of the characteristics of the Sapphic landscape become important here, not least because it allows the landscape to be the site of a sublime not centred on violent subjugation of the subject by a unified other, as much as much as the dizzying dispersal of multi-positionality of which I spoke in Chapters 1 and 3.

The experience of the Sapphic Sublime is, therefore, those foundational experiences recalled in later life, in profound and shattering moments, in such a way that, in what follows, there can be no simple return to the law as it was previously conceived. Thereafter, one is changed and, in Sappho's original phrasing, one's 'tongue broken', one no longer speaks in the same language as before: nor can one position oneself similarly, but, rather, one recognises the infinite multiplicity of positionings possible, and knows only to go on – to immerse oneself in that. How this might be reflected in art practice could only be varied and multifarious, but I would suggest, outside of Sommer's oeuvre, one might consider one of the masterpieces of the late twentieth century, Gerhard Richter's *18. Oktober 1977* as a moment in that artist's career in a similar vein, precisely because its song turns inwards at the point where it takes on the epic political tragedy of the German Autumn in oils, but, drawing its source imagery from the deflationary, the unlikely and the unresolved, avoids the single definitive image through awkward repetition and non-progressive sequence, denoting those compulsive and repetitive drives resistant to the dialectic of desire, of which I wrote in Chapter 4, and devoid of affirmatory resolution.

In my own studio work, hoping to re-visit an earlier set of material and conceptual parameters, I found myself stumbling across a paradigm shift that I am still unable to rationalize fully, but which visualizes a sustained tension through its elisions and gaps, as well as demanding an unexpected shift – or perhaps more correctly – a paring down of medium. Having worked for the last decade and a half with a combination of constructed photography and collage, with occasional forays into annotated painting, I found myself confronted by what I had hitherto regarded as a fragmented element of my own work in a manner which was at the same time unresolved and overflowing with a sense of lack, but persuasively immersive. Like Sommer, my practice has engaged with various combinations of photography, montage and drawing, with, arguably the added component of painting (although some of Sommer’s ‘drawings’ have a painterly character in both medium and gesture). Specifically, I would characterize the presence of painting in my practice in one of three rather marginalized ways: as illustration, as backdrop, or as ‘artist’s impression’. Whereas illustration and backdrop are supplementary, this last category connotes a sense of lack by virtue of its status as an impressionistic promissory note: the hotel not yet built, the aeroplane that never flew. Whilst I did not seek to reflect – and certainly not illustrate – the Sapphic Sublime in my own studio practice, my own work has therefore drawn upon my reflections and research into elements of sustained tension, the complexity of temporality and spatiality and the manner in which lack or absence can be read as excess.

To take Sommer as the example is to take an artist whose tongue was broken many times. The breaks are marked by the abrupt shifts from one form and style of practice to another, in which hiatus and rupture are the only constants. In retrospect, after his death, Sommer’s work may or may not appear as a whole. In any case, such a wholeness were it perceivable, is transient, for it exists only in so far as the viewer might feign for a while a single point of vantage, wherein the stilling of Sommer’s practice by death allows, momentarily, for such, before the times and spaces of new viewers in turn engulf that of both, and other responses appear within grasp.

Appendix A:

Notes on examples of Sappho's lyrics relevant to this thesis

Tropes of Framentation: Lyric 31 'Phainetai Moi'

There are two ways in which Sappho's lyrics can be associated with fragmentation. The first and most obvious might be the manner in which, formally, they now reach us – in a fragmented form. As Anne Carson, in the preface to her 2003 translation records, Sappho's lyrics, originally sung to music that is now lost, were noted down either during or soon after her death, and recorded on papyrus. Originally this body of work, which extended to nine scrolls, were archived by scholars in the Library at Alexandria. The intervening millennia saw most of this work lost. Therefore, as Carson (2003:xi) notes,

Sappho's fragments are of two kinds: those preserved on papyrus and those derived from citation in ancient authors.

The second sense in which Sappho's work can be associated with fragmentation, shattering, and the immersive is through the authored themes and subject matter. Sappho's famous fragment 31 Phainetai Moi (φαίνεται μοι), which is commented upon by Longinus six centuries later, deals with a paroxysmal experience, wherein the speaker in the poem is overwhelmed and shattered by her tortured emotions at watching a young women she seems to love being courted or married to a handsome young man. Carson renders the relevant verses thus:

[...] for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead – or almost
I seem to me

But all is to be dared, because even a person of poverty

Poochigian (2009) translates the same lines as follows:

The least glimpse, and my lost voice stutters
Refuses to come back

Because my tongue is shattered. Gauzy
Flame runs radiating under
My skin; all that I see is hazy,
My ears all thunder.

Sweat comes quickly, and a shiver
Vibrates my frame. I am more sallow
Than grass and suffer such a fever
As death should follow

But I must suffer further, worthless
As I am...

An earlier translation by Barnard (1958) turns ‘look’ / ‘glimpse’ to chance meeting:

If I meet you suddenly, I can't

Speak – my tongue is broken
A thin flame runs under
My skin; seeing nothing,

Hearing only my own ears
Drumming, I drip with sweat
Trembling shakes my body

And I turn paler than
Dry grass. At such times
death isn't far from me

Pertinent here to the present thesis is the inability to speak, the loss of sight (and the overwhelming aural 'drumming') the bodily shaking and the feeling that one is 'dead – or almost'. In Poochigian, the fragment ends without a satisfactory resolution to this emotional and somatic crisis, only the sense that more suffering and self abasement must be the speaker's fate. In Carson, however, the notion of worthlessness becomes more clearly that of material wealth, whilst the phrase 'I seem to me' suggests that a splitting of the speakers psyche allows one portion to remain an observer of the crisis. Barnard's omission of the final line regarding 'worthlessness' or 'poverty' is unexplained.

Tropes of Multipositionality: Fragment 2

Prins (1999:96) offers this translation of Sappho's ode to the goddess Aphrodite, also known as Cypris:

Here to me from Crete, to this temple
A holy place where your lovely grove
Of apple trees is, and altars smoking
With incense

And here cold water murmurs through the branches
Of apples, and with roses all the place
Is shadowed, and from rustling leaves
Deep sleep descends

And here the meadow where horses graze blooms

With spring flowers, and breezes

Breathe sweetly

This is where... O Cypris, taking...

In golden cups luxuriously

Mingled with celebration the nectar

Pour

Carson (2003:7) renders it:

]

here to me from Krete to this holy temple

where is your graceful grove

of apple trees and altars smoking

with frankincense.

And in it cold water makes a clear sound through

apple branches and with roses the whole place

is shadowed and down from radiant-shaking leaves

sleep comes dropping

And in it a horse meadow has come into bloom

With spring flowers and breezes

Like honey blowing

[]

In this place you Kyrpris taking up

In gold cups delicately

Nectar mingled with festivities:

Pour.

Barnard (1958) renders it:

You know the place: then

Leave Crete and come to us
Waiting where the grove is
Pleasantest, by precincts

Sacred to you; incense
Smokes on the altar, cold
Streams murmur through the

Apple branches, a young
Rose thicket shades the ground
And quivering leaves pour

Down deep sleep; in meadows
Where horses have grown sleek
Among spring flowers, dill

Scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!
Fill our gold cups with love
Stirred into clear nectar

Poochigian (2009) reiterates the emphasis placed by Prins (*ibid.*) on the repetition of the word 'Here':

Leave Crete and sweep to this blest temple
Where apple-orchard's elegance
Is yours, and smouldering altars, ample
Frankincense.

Here under boughs a bracing spring
Percolates, roses without number
Umber the earth and, rustling,

The leaves drip slumber

Here budding flowers possess a sunny
Pasture where steeds could graze their fill,
And the breeze feels as gentle as honey...

Kypris, here in the present blend
Your nectar with pure festal glee.
Fill gilded bowls and pass them round
Lavishly.

Whether explicit or implicit, all the translations show a lyric ceaselessly shifting from the enticing description of one place to another across the landscape of Lesbos, as the lyric juxtaposes successive images of equally alluring locales.

Temporality: Fragment 147

Carson (2003) offers this translation:

Someone will remember us
I say
Even in another time

Poochiglian (2009) renders it:

I declare
That later on,
Even in an age unlike our own,
Someone will remember who we are.

Barnstone (2009) suggests:

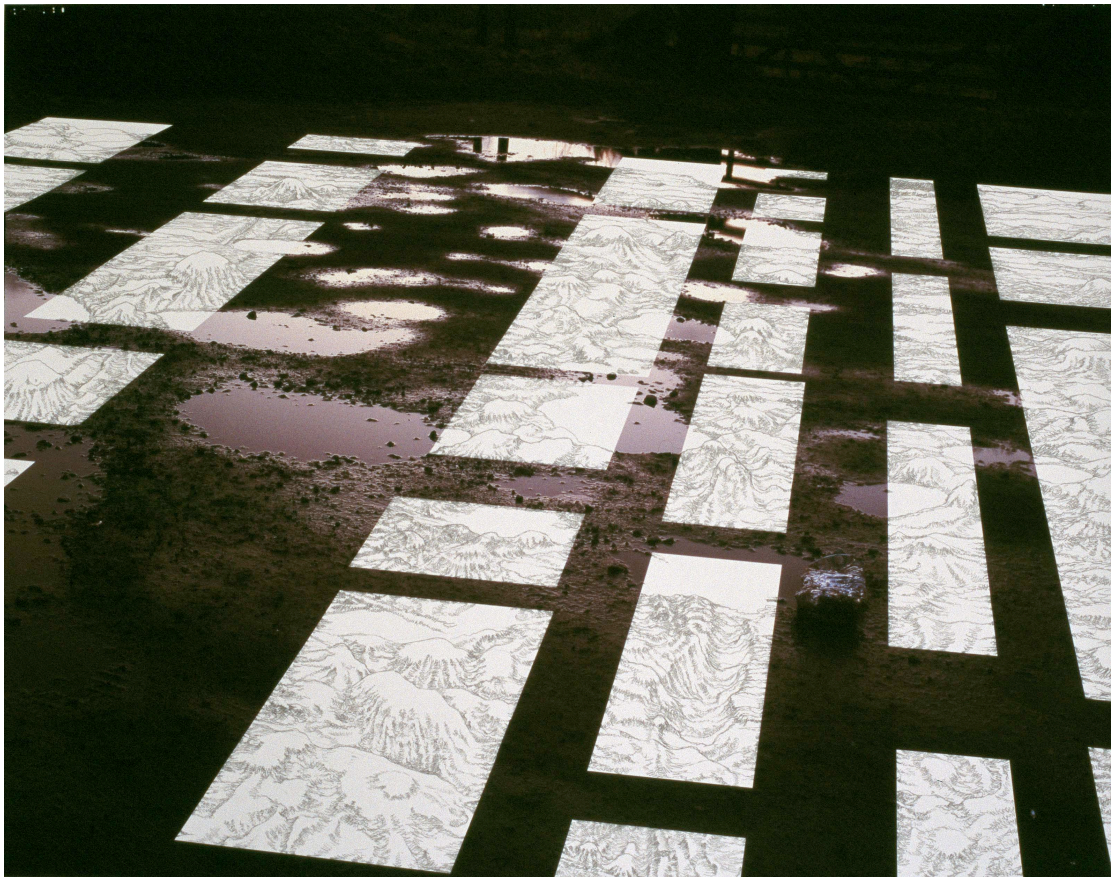
Someone, I tell you, in another time,
Will remember us.

Appendix B:

Images of work by John Timberlake relevant to this thesis



Another Country XI (2001) C Print photograph



Colony 10 (2006) Pencil drawing on inkjet photograph



Colony 14 (2007) Pencil drawing and inkjet photograph on paper



Artist's Impression: Microtopia (2011) Acrylic paint on inkjet photograph

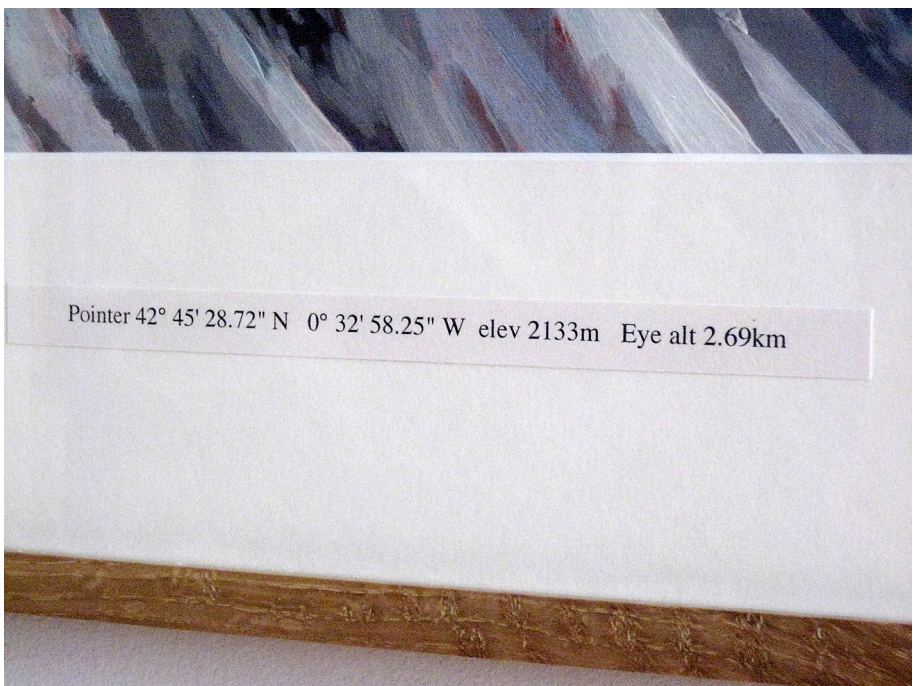


Triptych: 3 Views of the Thames (2010) Acrylic paint on inkjet photographs





Google Grid 2007-2009 (Oil on paper sketches made from different locations found on Google Earth, framed with coordinate captions).



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