



The Romantic and Contemporary Sublime

The idea of a contemporary or postmodern sublime is frequently invoked in discussions of recent art. How does the contemporary sublime differ from its Romantic manifestation? This is an outline of the evolving conceptions of the sublime since the 18th Century with reference to its key thinkers.

**By Richard Rosebery
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Unknown Limits

The essay will compare the Contemporary Sublime to that of its Romantic predecessor and highlight re-emergence of the Sublime as the dominant aesthetic concept in Contemporary Art. It will demonstrate that Sublime aesthetics has always been a prime motivator for artistic expression, with the Contemporary Sublime purely the latest incarnation in a long continuum. I will illustrate through key examples of art that Sublime theory, be it Contemporary or Romantic, is a means of describing emotions and thoughts when faced with limitlessness, the uncontrollable and the unknown.

To understand the Contemporary Sublime an examination of the Romantic Sublime is prerequisite. It was the 'rediscovery' and translation of the writings of First or Third Century AD Pseudo-Longinus in describing the Sublime experience of exultation that influenced the reintroduction of the Sublime as an aesthetic concept in the writings of Edmund Burke (1729 -1797).¹ Up until this time, the Sublime was an unnamed aspect of Beauty, with Beauty an emanation of God. Unlike Longinus' spiritual explanation of the sublime, Bourke's was a rational response.

In his 1757 *A Philosophical Enquiry into The Origin of our Ideas into the Sublime and the Beautiful* Burke described the Sublime as "a state of the soul where all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror". He was a product of the Age of Enlightenment, where scientific exploration and classification of the natural world

¹ Pseudo-Longinus is attributed with writing the first treatise on the Sublime, *Pankalia*, in which he stated: "Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things". Note Pseudo-Longinus' real identity is unknown. The 1674 French translation of his work by poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711) was the principal influence of a renewal of the Sublime within aesthetics.

was integral to an increasingly educated secular society. Nature was the new God and Bourke set about classifying those experiences in Nature he deemed Sublime. He cited thoughts of Infinity as prime, and believed that this existential Sublime of ‘delightful horror’ was an experience that revives our sense of being alive.²

The eminent German philosopher Emanuel Kant (1724-1804) theorised that sublime experience was a response to the limitlessness or formlessness in Nature.³ He believed that the Sublime was beyond human senses, in the realm of the Supersensible, where human imagination strains to its limits and fails.⁴ He postulated a ‘dynamical sublime’ when experiencing the awesome power of Nature, such as a hurricane or volcano, and a ‘mathematical sublime’ when contemplating vast magnitudes, such as infinity and the universe. For Kant the experience of the Sublime is moral, dependent upon the inner strength of a person.⁵ Fear and pain of incomprehensible limitlessness and power is balanced by the joy at recognising our untouchable inner, infinite universe.⁶ Kant’s Sublime hinges on rational containment of perceptual and imaginative excess that leads to a transcendence of the self’.⁷

² Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into The Origin of our ideas into the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, 1990, Oxford, United Kingdom, pages 59 -73.

³ Kant wrote three major philosophical works – *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), the latter including *Aesthetic Judgments* and the four reflective aesthetics of the *agreeable*, the *beautiful*, the *sublime* and the *good*.

⁴ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995, page 11.

⁵ Kant suggests that we must already have been exposed to what is morally good in society in order to be able to see the deeper moral significance in the beauty of nature – Christian Helmet Wenzel, *An Introduction to Kant’s Aesthetics: Core concepts and Problems*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2005, page 115.

⁶ *Ibid*, page 111.

⁷ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995 page 11.

Sublime aesthetic debate shifts from the human external to the internal, from object to the psychological and pure subjectivity. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) proposed that reality was purely a reflection of the human mind, and art man's attempt to progressively make sense of his world. For him identity and meaning were generated purely by an operation of limits, and thus sublime theory was implausible.⁸ Hegel believed that art was incapable of adequately representing the Absolute and no longer spoke to the soul.⁹ In competition Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775 - 1854) championed high art for tapping an Absolute realm of collective consciousness; art presents Sublime aesthetics via intense emotions of apprehension, horror, terror and awe.¹⁰

These German Idealist philosophers inspired a whole generation of artists at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. On large canvasses evoking wild natural grandeur, limitlessness, or by intense painterly means, they sought to “express ultimate truths about the individual's relation to the world”.¹¹ Romanticist artists such as J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851), Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840), Francisco Goya (1746-1828), Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) and William Blake (1757-1827) depicted the awesome power of nature and the incomprehensibility of life; it was an art all about sensation.

⁸ Jerome Carroll, Author, *The Limits of the Sublime, the Sublime of Limits: Hermeneutics as a Critique of the Postmodern Sublime*, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Spring) 2008, page 176.

⁹ Simon Morely, Editor, *The Sublime, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited, London, 2010, page 16.

¹⁰ Jerome Carroll, Author, *The Limits of the Sublime, the Sublime of Limits: Hermeneutics as a Critique of the Postmodern Sublime*, Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 66, No. 2 (Spring) 2008, page 176.

¹¹ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995 page p.7.

Commissioned to paint ‘Northern Nature in the whole of her Terrifying Beauty’, Casper David Friedrich produced his *The Polar Sea* 1823-4, depicting an entombed ship crushed on the frozen Arctic.¹² The painting has been hailed by critic Russell Potter (1960-) as a key instance of the ‘Arctic Sublime’.¹³ Its mastery of perspective leads the viewer through a blasted wilderness to the central focus of jagged ice sheets reaching skyward. Only visible on closer examination, nearly hidden to the side, the broken ship is like an afterthought in the universal scheme, emphasising absolute submission to the sheer power of Nature. The scene is lifeless, and thoughts of ultimate sacrifice all pervading. Friedrich’s cool palate, soft light and the indeterminate horizon line create a scene of infinite frozen desolation at the very ends of the world. His intended viewer response is shock and horror. Throughout the 19th Century stories and theatre of polar expeditions fired public imaginations.¹⁴ Friedrich tapped this spectacle, his message of sublimity a powerful one for its time. Polar explorers were heroes, their demise on the ice a public tragedy.

German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) believed that life was a futile struggle to survive, and that aesthetic contemplation was the one respite. His student, poet and philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), in referencing classical

¹² Johann Gottlob von Quandt (1787 –1859), a German artist, art scholar and collector, commissioned Friedrich’s *The Polar Sea*, 1823-4. See *Image Reference*, Plate 1, page 13.

¹³ Russell Porter is a writer and Professor of English and Media Studies at Brown University, M.A, USA. He specialises in Arctic exploration literature and art. See *Arctic Encounters Blogspot* - <http://eng261.blogspot.com.au>

¹⁴ “In 1818 Barrymore’s melodrama *The North Pole* opened at the Royal Coburg Theatre, with a fully rigged ship affecting her passage through floating islands of ice’. Charles Dibdin cavorted fashionably amongst the ice during the Christmas pantomime at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane over the festive season of 1820. The nautical melodrama *Captain Ross; or, the Hero of the Arctic Regions* opened in 1833 at London’s Royal Pavilion Theatre, and before long its motley crew of characters journeyed to stages in the provinces just as they were crafted into toy theatre miniature-heroes for parlours and nurseries across the country.” – *Polarworld*, *The Arctic Book Review*, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818-1875* by Russell A. Potter, University of Washington Press, 2007 – www.polarworld.co.uk.

Greek mythology as a metaphor, argues that society had progressively favoured the civilised Apollonian energies of light, harmony and order over the chaotic Dionysian energies of the primordial and unknown.¹⁵ In other words, much to its detriment, Western society had chosen Beauty over the Sublime. Nietzsche believed that this obsession of society for order and rationalism had literally killed the concept of God, and thus Sublime experience.

Industrialisation and technology play a significant role in redefining what is Sublime, as does the changing definition of art.¹⁶ From the 1860s Modernism starts a process of dethroning the glorification of Renaissance Beauty in art. First Impressionists, with their pronounced brushwork, and then other successive art movements were bent on deconstruction of the Renaissance ideal.¹⁷ Europe's garish Fauvists, slapdash collaging Cubists and anarchist Dadaists progressively shift the debate about *What is art?* In the 1940s and 1950s this leads to America's intuitive spontaneity of Abstract Expressionists, and in the 1960s Pop artists' kitsch and ultimately Minimalist's triumph of material over form. Sublime aesthetics is severely marginalised in such artistic debate.

However, irrespective of a century of deconstruction within art theory and practice, artists were still inspired by sublimity. Contrary to art critique and theorist Clement Greenberg's (1909-1994) attempts to promote Abstract Expressionism as a movement solely of pure formalism, his shining 1950s artist examples of Jackson Pollock (1912-

¹⁵ Simon Morely, Editor, *The Sublime, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited, London, 2010, pages 17 and 67.

¹⁶ J.M.W. Turner's painting *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844 already presents industrialisation as a process that competes with Nature for Sublime inspiration. See *Image Reference*, Plate 2, page 13.

¹⁷ Simon Morely, Editor, *The Sublime, Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited, London, 2010, page 26.

1956) and Barnett Newman (1905-1970) continued to champion the Sublime within their work.¹⁸ For colour field painter Barnett Newman the title of one of his best-known works, *Vir Heroicus sublimis*, says it all.¹⁹ In 1948 Newman wrote a famous article *The Sublime is Now*; though still concerned with nostalgic Romanticist ideas, in it he states: “ourselves become the ‘cathedral’ through our feelings”²⁰. *Vir Heroicus sublimis* translated means ‘Man, Heroic and Sublime’. For Barnett it is no longer simply the subject, but “the how of painting that carries the seal and modality of the sublime”²¹.

Oil on canvas over five metres long, *Vir Heroicus sublimis* was the largest Newman had ever painted. Here he was not representing a sublime event, he was creating one.²² This massive red expanse is unevenly divided by Newman’s signature vertical ‘zips’, each creating an ambiguity in the visual field. The beautiful painting offers the spectator a sensory overload of colour and size inviting them to interact imaginatively with this virtual space that evokes suggestions of the Infinite.²³

Partly a reaction to Modernism’s commodification of ‘beautiful art’, where the narrative had all but been deleted, during the 1970s and 1980s the art world became obsessed with the idea of the anti-aesthetic, specifically of negating the idea of Beauty within art. Beauty had become a frivolous concept to be avoided, whilst the Sublime

¹⁸ Clement Greenberg promoted *Abstract Expressionism* as a subjective emotional expression with particular emphasis on the spontaneous creative act, and hence the title *Action Painting* was often used.

¹⁹ See *Image Reference*, Plate 3, page 13.

²⁰ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995, page 19.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995 page p.71.

²³ Ibid, page 72.

had always been a more serious and enduring topic.²⁴ With the advent of the Post Modern and conceptual art's pluralism, the Sublime re-emerged resplendent in a cloak of technology. Unlike the Romantic version of the Sublime where the uncontrollability and power reside in Nature, with this new anti-aesthetic sublime the techno-capitalist culture redefines it as a negative force of disorientation, absence and pain.²⁵

In this society, argues French philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2011), life's surface is dematerialised, "the boundaries between consciousness, its products, and reality, have been totally erased ... we are now in the realm of the hyper-real".²⁶ Baudrillard believed that the media spectacle of television and cyberspace dominate a progressively homogenous 'post-human' society with simulated experiences, and that these have become our key signifiers.²⁷ He offers an apocalyptic vision where human knowledge is necessary but human beings are not.²⁸ Along with other leading French Post-Structural theorists Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), Michael Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Baudrillard stressed

²⁴ Rex Butler, Editor, *Art After Deconstruction/ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe*, Editions 3, Brisbane, 2011, page 14 -16.

²⁵ Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999, pages 23- 24.

²⁶ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995 page 10.

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard's philosophical treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981 examines the use of symbols and how in a complex society we can only perceive a simulation of reality. Driven by media spectacle and consumerism, symbols now simply represent other symbols. The Wachowski brothers' film *Matrix*, 1999 plays on the concept that humans are unable to perceive reality; what we experience is in fact a simulated reality. *Disneyland* is often cited as a hyper-reality show.

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard saw a 'post-human' society where humans are potentially irrelevant within a technology based capitalist system, except for the moment as consumers – Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999, page 125.

\ the complexities of semiotics that result in an inability to fully understand such a complex and dehumanising world.

Jean-François Lyotard, both philosopher and literary theorist, defines the Contemporary Sublime as an experience of limits.²⁹ For him “the Sublime is the experience of a discontinuity in experience ... of the here and now”.³⁰ Within our science and technology driven society, it is our fear of silence outside of time and space that cannot adequately be represented, since it is beyond our comprehension.³¹ Lyotard highlights the limits of our conceptual powers and reveals the multiplicity and instability of a postmodern world where there is no longer any grand narrative. For him art only offers relief to such fear of the unknown, an ambivalent enjoyment of intensified cognition and emotion.³²

From the 1970’s onwards, Conceptual Art’s pluralist methods tempered Lyotard’s scepticism by offering new possibilities for presenting ‘the unrepresentable’ of Sublime experience.³³ At the height of his literary success in 1985 Lyotard staged his history-making blockbuster *Les Immatériaux* (Immaterials) exhibition at the Centre

²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard published *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979, first introducing the term ‘Postmodern’ as a period that he said was the end of the ‘grand narrative’ in history. He believed that communications, mass media and computer science ensure a plurality of smaller often competing narratives that exist in a relativist state. Lyotard argues that there is no objective truth since such truth is beyond human understanding.

³⁰ Paul Crowther, *The Contemporary Sublime, Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock*, Art & Design, Vol. 10, No. 12, January – February 1995 page 69.

³¹ Ibid, page 71.

³² Ibid.

³³ Lyotard believed that Post Modernism was prepared to accept ‘the pain of unrepresentability’, with the Contemporary Sublime becoming a catch-cry for all unrepresentable ideas. ... Lyotard never mentions transcendence in his conception of Contemporary Sublime, since the concept had been extended far beyond what Emanuel Kant had intended. – Dr. Ian Greig, *Contemporary Sublime*, National Art School Lecture, 12 October 2015.

Pompidou in Paris, featuring art that referenced the Sublime.³⁴ The exhibition illustrated the limitlessness once found in Nature was now experienced via technology. *Les Immatériaux* showcased a new materiality produced by advancements in telecommunications, exploring varied dimensions of light and sound using infrared and text. It was an attempt by Lyotard “to convey the profoundly destabilizing experience of contemporary life” and the show had a significant affect upon subsequent contemporary art in the 1980s and 1990s.^{35, 36}

Aligning with Edmund Burke’s ‘awe and terror’ and Kant’s ‘dynamical Sublime’, English woman Cornelia Parker’s (1956-) multi-media installation *Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991 at the Chisenhale Gallery London is an insightful example of Lyotard’s negative ‘Technological Sublime’.³⁷ Parker presents a three-dimensional sculpture that depicts the split-second mid-explosion of an ordinary garden shed. Parker’s carefully selected surviving fragments, many with sentimental value, are suspended from the gallery ceiling and lit by a single 200-watt light bulb to cast eerie exploding-like shadows upon the gallery walls.

Photographs and video also offered viewers the ‘before’ of the very ordinary garden shed along with the actual explosion carried out on Parker’s request by the British army. Parker was responding in Baudrillard-fashion to the media saturation of ‘explosions’ in society, “from the violence of the comic strips, through action films,

³⁴ “Les Immatériaux was a major event in French cultural life: it occupied the entire fifth floor of the museum, took two years to plan, and was the most expensive exhibition staged by the Pompidou up until that time.” – Tara McDowell, *Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard and Bernard Blistène*, Art Agenda. – www.art-agenda.com/reviews/les-immateriaux-a-conversation-with-jean-francois-lyotard-and-bernard-blistene. Also in 1981 Jean Baudrillard staged a similar *Hyper Reality* exhibition in Paris.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ In May 2014 the 3-day *Art, Science & Theory Symposium* convened in Paris to celebrate *Les Immatériaux* achievements thirty years previous.

³⁷ See *Image Reference*, Plate 4 and 5, page 14.

in documentaries about Super Novas and the Big Bang, and least of all on the news in never ending reports of war”.³⁸ Presenting the power of man-made destruction, the viewer is offered fearful thoughts of personal annihilation and the limitlessness beyond.³⁹

Much Contemporary Art attempts to offer the experience of sublimity, and not simply a visual representation of it. Japanese painter, installation and performance artist Yayoi Kusama (1929-) repackages Kant’s romantic ‘mathematical’ sublime in her *Fireflies on the Water*, 2002 at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, New York.⁴⁰ The installation consists of a small darkened-room with mirrored walls, two inches of water on the floor, a raised platform for the viewer to stand on and 150 lights dangling from the ceiling.⁴¹ A hallucinatory sense of total isolation is achieved as one person at a time is allowed in the room with the door closed; the viewer feels suspended in space.⁴² The mirrored reflections of the multiple coloured lights and of the isolated participant extend endlessly, forming a technology-created universe that produces feelings of being everywhere and nowhere simultaneously, disorientating the viewer with an invitation to abandon the self.⁴³ This ‘infinity room’ also references the

³⁸ Interview of Cornelia Parker by Tate Curator Michaela Parkin – www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/cold-dark-matter. In it Parker also states that she selected a garden shed since it is a mini building where you store personal everyday objects that you just cannot quite throw away.

³⁹ “The limitless once found in nature gives way, in technology, to a limitlessness produced out of an idea which is not interested in being an idea of nature, but one that replaces the idea of nature.” – Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999, page xii.

⁴⁰ See *Image Reference*, Plate 6, page 14.

⁴¹ Whitney Museum of Modern Art Website – <http://collection.whitney.org/object/19436>

⁴² Whitney Focus: *Yayoi Kusama, Fireflies on the Water*, 2002, YouTube – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahZh_Qpb8ik

⁴³ The installation is based upon Kusama’s life-long artistic obsession with dots, her belief that our entire universe is made of dots, from the tiniest physical particle to most gigantic cosmic structures – Jud Yalkut, *Kusama’s Self-Obliteration*, 1967, 23-minute film, 1967 – YouTube – www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6wnhLqJqVE.

Narcissus myth, highlighting a postmodern societal belief that ‘we are all at the centre of our own universe’.

Painter, art critic and theorist Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (1945-) in his book *Art After Deconstruction*, 2011 takes this centrifugal idea even further. He believes that the decadent and uncontrollable global capitalist system is a negative force converting the entire world in its own image.^{44, 45} In this post-human society individual movement is minimised in its deferral to electronic agility of cyberspace that short-circuits social interaction. The home becomes the centre of a person’s universe, “a more mobile state than the public ever was” and where everything ‘happens at a safe distance’.⁴⁶ The individual is given a false sense of control of the uncontrollable. Gilbert–Rolfe highlights that with Kant’s Sublime this ‘uncontrollability’ is derived from Nature, whilst in the Contemporary Sublime it originates from technology.⁴⁷

The Contemporary Sublime is the Romantic Sublime reshaped by industrialisation, technology and the capitalist contemporary culture. It is an aesthetic philosophy that mirrors the pace and magnitude of a global society. The incomprehensibility and uncontrollability of complex modern society, the limitless boundaries of science and the alienation of the capitalist system have replaced limitlessness Nature.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Jeremy Gilbert–Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999, page 7.

⁴⁵ Gilbert-Rolfe calls this a homogenous state of ‘equalized subjectivity’ and mirrors philosopher Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) earlier beliefs that ‘the technological image of the world would come to conceal the world from itself’. – Ibid, page 24.

⁴⁶ Ibid, page 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid, page 28.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Gilbert–Rolfe, *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, Allworth Press, New York, 1999, page 66. – “A schizo-relationship between the two systems of delimitation (infinite nature and infinite technology) and limitation (nature made all the more finite by technology, technology finite because produced), which overlap but cannot be said to have the same ends.

Sublime theory, be it Contemporary or Romantic, is a means of explaining emotions and thoughts when faced with the unknown – infinite, limitless, uncontrollable, incomprehensible forces of our world. Fuelled by a spectacle of media and technologies ever-present marvels, the Contemporary Sublime surrounds us every day. In art, the question is not what is the Sublime, but more how do we access it.

Image Reference



Plate 1: Casper David Freidrich (1774-1840), *The Polar Sea*, 1823-24, oil on canvas, 96.7 x 126.9 cm. Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany.

The Romantic artists such as Friedrich and Delacroix wished to create sublime experiences in their works, using big themes such as the majesty of nature, limitlessness, freedom and injustice.

Plate 2: J. M. W. Turner, (1865–1915), *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844, oil on canvas, 91 × 121.8 cm, National Gallery, London.

The tiny hare running in the right hand corner of this painting may be reference to the limits of technology; whilst another interpretation is that this fast hare is no match for this new technology; a technology which has the potential to destroy the inherent sublime elements of Nature.



Plate 3: Barnett Newman, (1905–1970), *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950/51, oil on canvas, 540 x 242 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The title means 'Man, Heroic and Sublime', and refers to Barnett Newman's essay *The Sublime is Now* where he asks the question: "If we are living in a time without a legend that can be called sublime, how can we be creating sublime art?"



Plates 4 & 5: Cornela Parker, *Cold Dark Matter An Exploded View*, 1991, Wood, metal, plastic, ceramic, paper, textile and wire, Dimensions Unconfirmed: 400 x 500 x 500 cm, Tate Collection, London, United Kingdom.



Photograph of the Garden shed exploding. © Hugo Glendinning



Plate 6: Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), *Fireflies on the Water*, 2002. Mirror, plexiglass, 150 lights and water, 281.9 × 367 × 367 cms, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. *Fireflies on the Water* is romanticism through technology. Kusama plays on the juxtaposition of limitlessness and confined space. Visitors enter this small room alone and experience a limitless perspective. Kusama is highlighting that the sublime moves from nature to the man-made world/culture.

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