

Corona Equivalents

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London’s skies are normally filled with aircraft and their contrails. The city’s inhabitants live with the noise and pollution, react to them—often without knowing it—physically and mentally, and settle into an environment in which the sky is veiled and scarred. A daytime glance upwards would almost always discover aircraft and their tails, ice-crystal tails seeded with soot; in the night, blinking airborne lights outshone the few visible stars.



In an immediate effect of the Covid-19 lockdown, many people marvelled at the intense blue of the unpolluted sky. Some wondered: how often are we ignorant of what has been stolen from us—and by us?¹ I was far from alone in pointing my camera at the newly pristine and uninterrupted sky, and continued to do so as first ground traffic and then, slowly and incompletely, air traffic returned to muddy and mark the sky. In doing so, Alfred Stieglitz’s sky photographs often came to mind, especially in wondering about the transformed circumstances in which each series was taken: from the skies in which, around a century ago, aircraft were a rarity and contrails unknown, to the temporary abeyance of a pervasive pollution of sight, breath and climate.

¹ In this, some are far more responsible than others: Damien Carrington, ‘1% of people cause half of global aviation emissions – study’, *The Guardian*, 17 November 2020. This article reports on Stefan Gössling/ Andreas Humpe, ‘The global scale, distribution and growth of aviation: Implications for climate change’, *Global Environmental Change*, no. 65, 2020.

Contrails are formed over five miles up when the water vapour, sulphur and soot from jet engines seed the air with particles around which ice crystals form. In drier air, they do not appear or only briefly; in damp air, as their particles disperse, they can persist and spread over many miles. Like natural cirrus clouds, they are made up of falling ice crystals which form feathery clouds, though when they are first formed as the jet-engine vapour is injected into the atmosphere, they are denser and so produce a stark white cloud.² Luke Howard, the inventor of cloud typology, wrote of cirrus that in its earliest appearance it was ‘pencilled’ on the sky. Retrospectively, it serves as a fine description of the contrail.³

Equivalents

In 1923 Alfred Stieglitz, recounted visiting his family home:

My mother was dying. Our estate was going to pieces. The horse of 37 was being kept alive by the 70-year-old coachman. I, full of the feeling of to-day: all about me disintegration—slow but sure: dying chestnut trees—all the chestnuts in this country have been dying for years: the pines doomed too—diseased: I, poor, but at work: the world is a great mess: the human being a queer animal—not as dignified as our giant chestnut tree on the hill.⁴

Stieglitz, imbued with New York, carries with him modern ‘feeling’ which is met with the aging and disintegration of the countryside of his youth. In these mournful circumstances, he began to photograph the sky. Later, he told Nancy Newhall about one of these photographs: ‘that’s death riding high in the sky. All these things have death in them.’⁵

Photography of the sky became for Stieglitz an abiding interest, pursued intensively over the next decade. At first these were made with a 10x8” camera and showed the sky in relation to the land. Later, in a series he called ‘Equivalents’, he would point a smaller camera, more easily wielded, straight up at the sky, excluding other elements. He thought that these images both encouraged viewers to attend to near-abstract form, rather than be distracted by subject matter, and that they were the vehicles of transmission for his emotional and spiritual states, even for his harmonious communion with god.⁶ Stieglitz, troubled but rarely modest, wrote: ‘Several people feel I have photographed God. May be.’⁷

Lacking horizon lines and orientation, sometimes tilted diagonally in camera framing, assembled in frequently changing series, rotated this way and that when put on display, the Equivalents

² Richard Hamblyn, *Clouds: Nature and Culture*, Reaktion Books, London 2017, pp. 181, 186. Jets can produce the opposite effect as they climb or descend through banks of lower cloud, seeding them with particles which produce ice rain to fall from the cloud, leaving a hole.

³ Luke Howard, *On the Modification of Clouds* (1804); quoted in Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds: How an Amateur Meteorologist Forged the Language of the Skies*, Picador, London 2001, p. 126.

⁴ ‘How I Came to Photograph Clouds’, *Amateur Photographer and Photography*, 19 September 1923, in Sarah Greenough/ Juan Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writings*, National Gallery of Art, Washington 1999, p. 207.

⁵ Nancy Newhall, *From Adams to Stieglitz: Pioneers of Modern Photography*, Aperture, New York 1999, p. 108.

⁶ On abstraction, see Richard Whelan, ed., *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, Aperture, New York 2000, p. 238.

⁷ Letter to Hart Crane, 3 April 1925, in Greenough/ Hamilton, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 208.

were meant to uphold expression and pure form over subject matter, to turn photography's indiscriminate descriptive powers to delineate the indescribable. Seen in series, they were also an attempt to grasp, fix and demonstrate the action of Bergsonian flux, and in doing so to create an abstract music of emotion and expression. The aim was high abstraction, the photographic painting of inner states, in which lofty idealism was set against the materialism, commercialism and instrumentalism of the age.⁸



Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent*, 1924

Seen more prosaically, the photographs are a distinct and selective view of the endlessly variable sky: the result from image to image of a particular searching for overall patterning, backlit cloud and the veiling of the sun to yield great tonal variation—the dialectic of light and dark in which the open sky is rendered near black. As Stieglitz put it, pointing Newhall to one print: ‘And that’s reaching up beyond the sun, the living point, into darkness, which is also light.’⁹ Often the cloud patterns evoke other natural textures—fluids, sometimes sand blown by the wind or an animal hide. Sometimes, in the evanescent forms of spectral cirrus, they appear to be ghosts partially and fleetingly coalescing into view.

⁸ Sarah Greenough, ‘Alfred Stieglitz and “Idea Photography”’, in *ibid.*, pp. 21-5.

⁹ Newhall, *From Adams to Stieglitz*, p. 108.

What is the current experience of that attention cast upwards, of sustained focus on the aerial spectacle? It is, of course, different for different people, but for me it was an oscillation between awe and anxiety, vertigo, and a sense of ‘unmooring’ (as Rosalind Krauss puts it in an essay on the *Equivalents*) but also of banal interludes—neck ache, scanning the reactions and movements of nearby people, the glances at histograms, dials and screens, and the narrow, instrumental searching for graspable order in the overhead flux, the hard-headed urge to cut out an image.¹⁰

These photographs are equivalents, too, but they point outwards, not inwards: to a crisis of capitalism and, in our often unsettled, unseasonal and violent weather, to a planet inflamed and, at least in our imaginations, vengeful; and also to the actual and then once again potential beauty of a less polluted world.

Cut

It is harder to frame the sky than any other subject except the open sea. The decision of where to place the viewing rectangle is fundamental to photography, and out of it is borne whatever visual coherence can be wrung from an uncontrolled subject. It is much easier in places of human habitation and cultivated land because the frame has an affinity with the social and physical geometry of the subject. Frames lie, as if naturally, across buildings and the earth—fences, hedges, walls, boundary-marking tree-lines, gates, railings, and the many small architectural signs that mark off one property from another, for example in a row of terraced houses or shops. If photography and the bourgeoisie grew up together, the physical, social and psychological form of property relations—an enclosure of land and emotions—were woven into both.¹¹ So the first deep problem of photographing the sky is that it has no boundaries: pull the lens wider and wider, the only end is the horizon, and formal coherence escapes the limits of the frame. Each cut is felt more than usually as a falsifying imposition on a continuous and boundless scene.

In her highly focused and contrarian reading of the ‘*Equivalents*’, Krauss argues that Stieglitz highlights the photographic ‘cut’, the decision to include and exclude with the frame. It is this emphasis that makes the works ‘great’, because it is imposed on the subject most resistant to it, given both the verticality of the clouds, and the disorientation which comes with looking straight up: ‘[...] these are works that are most radically and nakedly dependent on cutting, on the effect of punching the image, we might say, out of the continuous fabric of the sky at large.’¹² There is a sense here that Krauss is doing some forcing of her own, as she turns these contemplative and even melancholic images towards a masculine, avant-garde imposition—if not violence—on the subject.

Contrails aid the camera. They mark the sky with temporary framings, criss-crossing each other, adding geometry to cloud forms, and sometimes carving the sky into a chessboard. Their affinity

¹⁰ Rosalind Krauss, ‘Stieglitz/ “Equivalents”’, *October*, no. 11, Winter 1979, pp. 129-40.

¹¹ A point made by Benjamin, among others. See ‘Little History of Photography’, in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings. Volume 2. 1927-1934*, Michael W. Jennings/ Howard Eiland/ Gary Smith, eds., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, vol. II, p. 517.

¹² Rosalind Krauss, ‘Stieglitz/ “Equivalents”’, pp. 134-5.

with property markers is not an arbitrary one, as portions of airspace are bought and sold, a prized commodity in the crowded skies over cities. In an accelerated leasing of aerial space and the tainting of its air, contrails are the commercial border-markers of the sky.



Blue

While Stieglitz sometimes made colour photographs, he chose black and white for the Equivalents, heightening the contrast to render blue near-black. The myriad hues of cloud and light are reduced to the single monochrome scale—sometimes, as we have seen, to ominous effect.

Blue was lost. Blue—the colour by turns of mysticism and enlightenment, of revolution, romanticism and reaction; and most recently in its blanket popularity (at least in the West) of blandness, as it is reliably held up as people’s favourite colour, if only because of the more divisive associations of red, green, yellow, purple or pink.¹³

In a determined avant-garde move, Derek Jarman set out to revivify the colour, letting its effect unfold, in a single uninterrupted, vivid and unchanging tone, held on the cinema screen for nearly an hour-and-a-half. Voices were placed over the colour:

In the pandemonium of image

I present you with the universal Blue

Blue an open door to the soul

An infinite possibility

Becoming tangible¹⁴

In meditations on the blue that Jarman could not but see as his sight failed in his final illness, it became a colour of memory, mourning, melancholy and of death hard by. ‘For Blue there are no boundaries or solutions’, Jarman says.¹⁵ Any attempt to make images will necessarily travesty its limitlessness: ‘The image is a prison of the soul, your heredity, your education, your vices and aspirations, your qualities, your psychological world.’¹⁶ Colour (any colour, like the sky) is ‘devoid of parts’, wrote Plotinus, and there is an affinity here with Stieglitz’s monochrome focus on the sky, both because of the presence of decay and death, and in the striving for the limitless.¹⁷

The crisis of the pandemic served to reawaken the skies, and especially blue. These Corona-Equivalent photographs were shown in an exhibition called ‘I’ve Never Seen the Sky Like this Before...’¹⁸ The revelation of a blue—unseen for a generation and more, unveiled from the pollution generated on the ground and in the air—depthless, vast and luminous, qualities no photograph (dragging education, psychology, vices and all the rest with it) can capture. This blue pointed to values beyond materialism and commerce, held for a time like a breath, to allow some

¹³ Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001, pp. 124, 136-40, 141-51, 158-60, 169-70, 180-1.

¹⁴ Derek Jarman, *Blue*, 1993.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*; quoted in John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, Thames and Hudson, London 1993, p. 14.

¹⁸ This exhibition, which opened in September 2020 at Southwest Contemporary, Adelaide, was curated by Bronia Iwańczak.

people—especially those not immediately plunged into need—to question the purpose of their lives, their connections with others and their relations with nature.

Levels

Stieglitz did not find his subject, as it stood, to act as an adequate ‘equivalent’ for his internal states. It needed a great deal of modulation and manipulation, and on occasion the same negative could be treated very differently from print to print.¹⁹ Even so, while there are a very few high-key prints, most of the *Equivalents* excel in darkness, with dramatic tonal contrasts that drive the darker clouds and blue sky into blacks. The sun is present in many of them, as a spectral disk or as it struggles to make its light felt out of the darkness of cloud and print alike. There is a general movement, too, as the series unfolds across the years, from cumulus to cirrus, and the last works made in 1934 show cirrus’ ghostly veils, which occasionally take on near-liquid form, printed in white and light grey against a black sky.

Likewise, contemporary camera renditions of skies, as meters tend to judge them, and even with changes to exposure compensation while photographing, rarely seem adequate to the experience of seeing them. The usual methods of post-photography adjustment are geared to earthbound subjects. The use of Auto Tone or Auto Contrast, or even slight tweaks to shadow or highlight detail yield melodramatic and evidently false results, as if a deranged mannerist had been let loose on the subject. Like this:



¹⁹ See Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz: The Key Set: The Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs, Volume Two 1923-1937*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Harry N. Abrams, New York 2002, pp. 886-7.

So, as with Stieglitz, though with digital tools that have made the task much easier, the sliders of the levels setting must be nudged to produce detail and drama, without straying into absurdity. This is a fakery which sets out to compensate for the loss of the effect of what was seen, now framed and tamed, in false expressive effects. Here the levels sliders are the markers of taste and distinction, and of the borderlands of, on one side, banality and, on the other, kitsch.

After all, the sky, symbol of transcendent limitlessness, has regularly become in photography and painting, the domain of kitsch. I once knew a couple who made their living painting lurid skies onto the ceilings of the super-rich. Endless sunsets have long populated the pages of amateur photography magazines; in the analogue age, polarising filters were often used to darken skies and throw the clouds into stark relief; now endless manipulated dawns and dusks decorate social media posts.

Borders and Vapours

For Stieglitz, as we have seen, the Equivalents could be pitched against dull description and materialism to produce a fixed intimation of incessant and limitless flux. Yet in reading the literature about this photographic patriarch, one cannot avoid the pervasive vapours of nationalism—in his own writing and those of others. Even in discussing the images of the sky, those hectoring, needy assertions are insistently heard: his ‘mastery’ of making an ‘American art’ permits the ‘rarefied and transcendent Equivalents’ to be made.²⁰ Stieglitz represents the height of American ‘native’ culture in his dedication to the camera, for ‘is not American the land of the MACHINE?’ And we are told to see in the work, including the Equivalents, ‘American experience’ and ‘an Americanisation beyond all arbitrary conceit’.²¹ An American ‘seer’, then, regarding American skies.

With her usual incisiveness, Krauss raises the issue of the fake and the sham that clouds avant-garde art: if traditions are abandoned and with them the time-honoured means of judgement, how can we know that we are not being conned by the new?²² This was just the initial reaction of Nancy Newhall to the Equivalents: she took the associations, musical and otherwise, ‘with more than one grain of salt; frankly, I thought they were mostly humbug, and Stieglitz at his romantic worst.’ But left alone with the prints, she found herself moved to tears by them, and took to heart the invocation ‘Never to be literal or prescriptive.’²³

In Aristophanes’ comedy, *The Clouds*, the same dilemma is faced, here with philosophical thinking that strayed beyond religion and tradition. Clouds veil, confuse, mislead, and in feeding the sophists’ false and paradoxical logic, produce nonsense. Socrates is made to say of the chorus of women who represent the clouds on stage:

²⁰ Ralph Flint, ‘Post-Impressionism’, in Waldo Frank/ Lewis Mumford/ Dorothy Norman/ Paul Rosenfeld/ Harold Rugg, eds., *America and Alfred Stieglitz: A Collective Portrait*, Aperture, New York 1979, p. 69. This collection was first published in 1934.

²¹ Edna Bryner, ‘An American Experience’, in *ibid.*, p. 126.

²² Krauss, ‘Stieglitz/ “Equivalents”’, pp. 129-31.

²³ Newhall, *From Adams to Stieglitz*, p. 107.

[...] they're heavenly clouds—great
Goddesses of the empty-headed.
They fill us with skill in Logic
And the brain-waves and *savoir-faire*,
And the art of duping fools,
Garbling the truth, talking
Beside the point, spell-binding
Meaningless oratory and brow-beating.²⁴

Among the charlatans fed by the clouds are false prophets, quack doctors, fake weather-forecasters, layabouts and poets ('metre-weavers and chorus-coilers'): the makers of a sham art.²⁵ In *The Clouds*, the sophists are mocked, the gullible are punished and conservative commonsense is eventually restored.



In emphasising the arbitrary cut, Krauss read the *Equivalents* against Stieglitz for whom the images were replete with emotional, aesthetic and even spiritual meaning. For Krauss, their symbolism points only to a vacuum, to: 'symbolism in its deepest sense, symbolism as an

²⁴ Aristophanes, *Plays: 1*, trans. Patric Dickinson, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1970, p. 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

understanding of language as a form of radical absence—the absence, that is, of the world and its objects, supplanted by the presence of the sign.²⁶

As at least one contemporary pointed out, Stieglitz was engaged in a pursuit of deep observation which echoed the intense, if not obsessive, reflections on the nature and appearance of the sky and clouds in John Ruskin.²⁷ In lengthy scenes of detailed, emotionally loaded description, Ruskin tracked the aerial spectacle from dawn to dusk, lauding the infinite variety and perfection of the sky, in any chosen fragment as well as the whole, and the way that cumulus clouds, in their resemblance to earth-bound objects make ‘a capricious mocking imagery of passion and life’.²⁸

Here the incense-laden airs of religion are inescapable, for in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin stands at the opposite pole of the theory that views humans and natural processes as inextricably entangled, but also stresses the alien and unknowable essence of ‘things’.²⁹ Rather, while many people neglect to attend to it, for Ruskin, the beauty of the skies is laid on by God for the pleasure of humans, as nature creates:

[...] scene after scene, picture after picture, glory after glory, and working still upon such exquisite and constant principles of the most perfect beauty, that is quite certain that it is all done for us, and intended for our perpetual pleasure.³⁰

Cirrus, the highest clouds that Ruskin would have seen, he describes as:

[...] composed of the purest aqueous vapour, free from all foulness of earthy gases, and of this in the lightest and most ethereal state in which it can be, to be visible. Farther, they receive the light of the sun in a state of far greater intensity than lower objects, the beams being transmitted to them through atmospheric air far less dense, and wholly unaffected by mist, smoke, or any other impurity.³¹

Contrails, as they waft and disperse, become cirrus. The paradox, then, is that the brightest cloud in the sky, the glittering and veiling ice trail as it is ‘pencilled’, can be the dirtiest and most dangerous cloud of all.

The Clouds is a curious read in our circumstances in which those most concerned to throw up the chaff of confusion and distraction are the guardians of the old order. Among Aristophanes’ list of charlatans are weather-forecasters, and here those who draw hard borders, and those who fake the weather come into alignment. Those who insist on ‘America first’ are those who love coal and fracking and declare war on the wilderness, and happily burn up the future. And not just in the US—think variously of Brazil, Russia, Poland and Australia where the guardians of

²⁶ Krauss, ‘Stieglitz/ “Equivalents”’, p. 140. This reading has some similarities with Hubert Damisch’s account of the problem of painting clouds, especially when seen against linear perspective, in which clouds act as a deconstructive corrosion of fixed meanings and systems. Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of /Cloud/: Towards a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002.

²⁷ Ralph Flint, ‘Post-Impressionism’, in Frank et al, *America and Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 89.

²⁸ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. I, George Allen & Unwin, London 1918, pp. 278-81, 244-5, 243. First published in 1843. ‘Mocking’ may be an echo of Shakespeare who in *Antony and Cleopatra* has Antony say that clouds ‘mock our eyes with air’.

²⁹ See, for example, Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, Penguin Books, n.p. 2018.

³⁰ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, p. 216.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

stern morality, antique gender and race divides and the national borders also fake forecasts and corrupt the weather.



The End of the Sublime

The sky and clouds have often been seen as a realm of the ideal, the immaterial, the imagination, and of a magic lacking in the world beneath. Ernst Bloch traces its fancies through fairy tales in which the poor triumph through cunning over rank, riches and power. Such wishes

[...] are aroused by the fairy-tale qualities of nature, especially by clouds. It is there that the distant mountains first appear, a towering and wonderful foreign land above our heads. Children believe that white-capped clouds are ice mountains as though Switzerland were up in the sky.

There is a likeness with the open and reflective sea:

[...] the cloud is not only castle or iced mountain to the fairy-tale gaze, but it is also an island in the sea of heaven or a ship, and the blue skies on which it sails reflect the ocean.³²

Think of the beauty of the layers of high cirrus, augmented and altered by jet exhaust, as cumulus clouds pass by against the slower background of feathery fronds, the drifting and descending ice crystals catching the sun. As we have seen, in *Modern Painters*, Ruskin wrote of the cirrus clouds,

³² Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes/ Frank Mecklenburg, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1988, pp. 175-6.

elevated above the smoke and tainted steam of the industrial age as pure and free of all 'earthy gasses'.



No longer, of course. The pollutants hang in the air, seeding clouds, and producing a greater warming effect on the planet than even the CO² emissions of the jet engines.³³ Seen from space, contrails can criss-cross the sky on a continental scale. They make a marked contribution to the effect by which the warmth of the winter sun on our skin evokes both gratitude and anxiety.

In old age Ruskin, unhinged by the trampling of science over religion, industrialisation, his nation's imperial hubris, and the rebirth of war (after a long abeyance) among the European powers looked to the skies for signs of pollution, haunting and the curse of God.³⁴ He saw them in the prevalence of what he called 'plague winds' and 'plague clouds' that blanche the sun, plunge the land into prolonged gloom, and are as fitful and weak as they are malignant, as though the climate itself was sick. Such 'diabolic' clouds shed rain that poison the earth.³⁵ Many extracts from his diary were enough, for Ruskin, to prove his point, and defend him against the charge that he was merely 'soured' or 'doting':

Thunderstorm; pitch dark, with no *blackness*, –but deep, high, filthiness of lurid, yet not sublimely lurid, smoke cloud; dense manufacturing mist; fearful squalls of shivery wind [...]. I never saw such a dirty, weak, foul storm.³⁶

His views were widely ridiculed at the time, and Ruskin may well have been 'doting' but the alteration in the weather may not have been imaginary. In Humphrey Jennings' *Pandaemonium*, numerous texts comment on the novel pollution of the industrial age—for instance, in early balloon flights over London from which could be seen the smog of a million coal- and wood-fired chimneys smothering all but the factory stacks and church steeples, and drifting over the countryside.³⁷

If for Stieglitz death stalked the skies, it was for personal reasons—his dying mother and aging self—though the blighting of the trees may have been caused by pollution. For us, it is no longer so. For Ruskin and Stieglitz, and for innumerable others since the Romantic age, the skies were a realm of the sublime for their scale, changeability, force, obscurity and threat. For Edmund Burke the highest degree of the sublime was to be found before the powers of nature which hold the soul in suspension 'with some degree of horror' and exclude all other thought.³⁸ That feeling is a reminder of the divine order of creation and our place in its hierarchy, and by extension of the 'natural power' and 'dread majesty' that arises from the institutions that maintain our 'kings and

³³ Richard Hamblyn, *Clouds: Nature and Culture*, p. 185. As Hamblyn notes, even before Covid, the events of 9/11 marked an experiment in how weather would be altered by the abrupt removal of contrails: it led to a marked cooling and a greater difference between day and night temperatures.

³⁴ John Ruskin, *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, George Allen, Sunnyside, Kent 1884; in E.T. Cook, ed., *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. XXXIV, George Allen, London 1908, pp. 33, 40.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-7.

³⁷ Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium, 1660-1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, eds. Mary-Lou Jennings and Charles Madge, Andre Deutsch, London 1985, p. 266. For a detailed account of the difficulties of assessing early human effects on the climate, see Mike Davis, 'Taking the Temperature of History: Le Roy Ladurie's Adventures in the Little Ice Age', *New Left Review*, no. 110, March-April 2018, pp. 85-129.

³⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 53; first published in 1757.

commanders'.³⁹ The skies act this way no longer. When danger comes too close, the pleasure of the sublime vanishes. It relies on distancing, delineating and controlling the dangerous subject: the storm seen through the window frame or the picture frame.⁴⁰ But now the danger is palpably present—in heatwaves, uncontrollable floods and fires, increasing numbers of dry thunderstorms, the shrinking ice sheets and glaciers, and the release of methane from the permafrost. We still lift our cameras to cut the skies, but the sublime has evaporated in the face of peril, which stalks even these tame images.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 61-2.

⁴⁰ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 36-7.