

Clarification of the Sublime By means of Expression

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Lisa McDonald

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Thesis Statement

For my thesis project, I intend to explore our connection to the Sublime ideal and how in our expression of it, we come to clarify and define that which we do not understand. I want to further the conversation of the mighty “it” and show how this relates to the making and interpretation of art.

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Introduction

What is it to create? What is it to exist? What is this innate, human need to describe the unknown desire that is, *the forbidden life*.¹

Throughout this document, there will be references made to “the Source” and “the Sublime²”. These words are being used to describe the act of creation and the experience of inspiration, and how this culminates in the result of a clarified expression that can be perceived in both a personal and universal regard.

This document intends to explore the artist’s connection to the sublime ideal and how in the expression of it, they come to clarify and define that which they did not understand. It will go on to query the modern disconnect to inspiration currently being felt by artists and the like. While also delving into the idea of the non-artist finding artistic clarification by means of projection.

It is being made in the hopes of furthering the conversation of the mighty *it*, “*it*” being another descriptor for the *source* and *sublime inspiration*, and show how this relates to the making and interpretation of art.

Inspired by the *Expression theory of art (a theory that defines art as the expression of feelings or emotion)*³, it will endeavour to explain projection and interpretation to those who cannot make the sublime connection and show how artists, in a sense, have almost become prisoners for those who depend on them to show them the way.

Going from that, it will also discuss the supposed dangers of direct connection and ponder its impact upon mental upheaval. And thus begins the discussion of *the Clarification of the Sublime By means of Expression*

¹ Adam Philips, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xii

² Adam Philips, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xi

³ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999) - page: 299

Chapter One:
The Sublime Connection

What is the Sublime? According to Freud, reading had been the modern equivalent of what, beginning in the eighteenth century, had been called *experiencing the sublime*. That to write and to read was to be close to the source of something, close to the source of the most important something.⁴ In regards to this discussion, the aforementioned *reading and writing* will be considered as stand-in terms for the umbrella idea of artistic expression. This word, *sublime*, is being used here to describe the act of creation and the experience of inspiration, and even more-so seems to be alluding to the imagined source of these things.

He goes on to speak of the desires of existence. Life is composed of its desire for more life, and its desire for less life, and, above all, its desire for the forbidden life.⁵ This statement can be broken down into three parts, all of which will be described within this discussion but as of now will first address this *forbidden life*. The forbidden life is found in the imagined, the wanted, the desired, the relief of finally knowing the unknown. We as humans have a thirst for knowledge and suffer with the epic narcissism to apply this to ourselves and continually wonder the why of what we are.

When it comes to artistry and the application of this sublime inspiration, we fall into the realms of expressionism. And more accurately still, expression as clarification. Expression as clarification is the theory whereby an artist starts out with vague, undefined feelings, and expression is a process of coming to clarify, articulate, and understand them⁶. It is a means of articulating the moment during the artistic process, in which the pieces fall into place and grasped within two hands is the thought “I get it”.

⁴ Adam Philips, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xi

⁵ Adam Philips, *The Penguin Freud Reader* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xiii

⁶ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999) - page: 299

This *vague and undefined* feeling, could perhaps be argued to be the unnameable connection to the source, and thus artistry becomes a clarification of sorts to the sublime's existence, regardless of the product it created, ie: The artist creates out of a need to express inspiration and thus a piece is added to the world to be appreciated by all, but it is this need that should be focused on as being an expression in itself, a proof of the divine.

Divine. The use of this word is no accidental thing. This sublime connection has also been used to describe the existence of the soul, and in a pre-science world, religious belief was used as a means of explanation as to why we as human beings have one. Christ's incarnation, and the idea of the *body-and-soul* passion of man-God, gave momentum to a certain psychic dynamic and comfort that has been nurturing the inner life of Christian humanity for two thousand years⁷. But as we fall away from this spiritual understanding, we are still left with the wondering of the why of what we are. Freud states, on the basis of this oceanic feeling (the sublime connection) alone, one was entitled to call oneself religious, even if one rejected every belief and every illusion.⁸

Taking reference from Art of the Modern age, which discusses Heidegger's assertion that is the romantic ideal of the poet-thinker⁹, it is interesting to see how he discusses poetry as an ex-plication that is pre-ontological (that is naïve and spontaneous) of Being, and for that very reason a pre-ontological "self-explication" of *Dasein* (and thus of man).¹⁰ *Dasein* (in Hegelianism) being human existence¹¹. In other words, that poetry is likened to being the raw state of existential expression, a precursor to ontological understanding. An impulse so to speak. A desire to describe that which

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1993)

⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002)- p.4

⁹ Jean-Marie Schaffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) - p.237

¹⁰ Jean-Marie Schaffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) - p.237

¹¹ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Dasein," accessed March 25, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Dasein>.

isn't there, to find meaning and make sense of the wants of the surrounding world, bringing us back to Freud's speculation on the fundamental desires for existence, the human want for the unknown, *forbidden life*.

Referring back to the discussion at hand, Heidegger is describing poetry as a *spontaneous explanation*, but rather this idea could be furthered here by stating that it is but a means of expression that clarifies the human connection to the sublime in which can be found the explanation for existence, or at the very least, creativity. As was already predetermined with the discussion of Freud's sublime connection through language, it can also be the case here that Heidegger's poetic references can be applied to encompass artistic expressionism as a whole. Art being a product of inspiration that comes from the source, the sublime or, perhaps now, the soul. The strength in the reasoning for doing so can be explained in relation to Freud's inquiry as to what language can't do for us¹², and so the artist must endeavour to create through any medium that can harness the inexplicable need to express feeling and clarify thought. Be it writing, painting, dance or filmmaking, this act of creation and the experience of inspiration can be seen as the expressed clarification of the sublime source. Freud's Forbidden life, Heidegger's pre-ontological idea of poetic impulse.

In any case, now that the connection (or the blurring of the lines, as it were) between the sublime source and the existential soul can be made, the loss of this connection is now viable to be queried in regards to the distractions of the modern man.

The Modern Loss of the Soul

Kristeva asks, Do you have a soul? This question, which may be philosophical, theological, or simply misguided in nature, has a particular relevance for our time. In

¹² Adam Philips, The Penguin Freud Reader (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xiii

the wake of psychiatric medicines, aerobics, and media zapping, does the soul still exist?¹³

In the current social climate, humanity find's itself completely inundated with the notion of anxiety, and that anxiety feeds into that corporate, capitalist overview of a somewhat estranged reality, which the fundamentals of human existence seem to have become connected to. There now seems to be an incompatibility between civilisation and individual happiness¹⁴. According to Freud's, *Civilisation and its Discontents*, he states that, in order to enjoy the benefits of living in civilised groups we must all sacrifice, to some degree, the satisfaction of personal interests and passions. And in the immense furtherance of technology, everyday experience points to a vast reduction of private life¹⁵. Thanks to online media, we are all now living and re-living each others stories in such a way that there's almost a loss of a point that ever to live because someone is already doing it for you.

In the sense of artistic expression, the artist is now faced with losing a sense of individualism that almost erases the need to create because the world seems to have already made it, thus rendering your thoughts and ideas superfluous. Day-to-day living comes with it's own difficulties as distraction becomes equally as plentiful as the feeling of futile expression. The seeking of divine inspiration becomes a muddled quest, the object of which almost impossible to see through eyes un-squinted. This idea can be backed up and perhaps quantified by Jung's insertion that the modern loss of sublime connection is evident in this century's astonishing advance of science in the modern era.¹⁶ But as more and more cling to this notion of expression and the rising difficulties of achieving it, mental unrest truly comes heavily into play.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1993) - p.3

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.vii

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1993) - p.7

¹⁶ Thomas Lawson, *Carl Jung, Darwin of the Mind* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2008) PDF ebook - p.12

Today's men and women who are stress ridden and eager to achieve, to spend money have fun and die, dispense with the representation of their experience of what we call a psychic life¹⁷, and in the sense of this discussion, life seems to have gone from being something, to being a reflection of something, and is leading humanity to a point of being completely disconnected from reality altogether and only existing in our own heads as an imaginary thing. It's almost as though we're losing ourselves to a social narrative and it no longer seems to be expressionism or escapism - it's humanism¹⁸ gone insane.

The overriding idea here remains, that it seems as though we are losing touch with reality in a very real way. We are disconnected from it in a much more extreme sense that we ever have been before. To make monetary gain a means of comparison, we've gone from gold, to paper, to digital currency. Everything is becoming less real and life seems to be suffering with a severe loss of substance.

This leads back to the unpacking of Freud's deductions on the human desires of existence. The desire for *more life*, the desire for *less life*, and the desire for *the forbidden life*. It has already been deduced here to think of the *forbidden life* as direct connection to the source of inspiration, but when looking at the notion of *more life*, it could be perhaps be applied to the post modern idea of connection that humanity seems to crave. Where the artist pursues the sublime in order to express some imagined thing, the day-to-day individual is simply seeking to make their life feel more real, they want *more life*.

So there seems to be this free-floating panic of needing something to connect to and perhaps that's why extremist religion seems to have become more pronounced now than it ever has before. Look at the states, look at Islam, look at all of these religions that people are turning to constantly because they're looking to be kept connected to something that they feel is real. Even though that's not what the problem was in the first place. It is fascinating to think of modern day individuals walking around,

¹⁷Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1993) - p.7

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "humanism," (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humanism>). accessed March 24th, 2021,

clinging to the remnants of some ancient belief, in the hopes there has to be something more. It's a kind of existentialism in itself, the loss of the infinite being, the one thing that makes everything make sense, the destination after life, and all that kind of thing.

But in the loss of that belief, all that is left is to deal with is the notion of that disconnect. And it's that need to be anchored to something that seems to be fuelling the fires of social media, and the pursuit of peer validation. This vein of societal narcissism is brought up by Kristeva who states, Held back by his aloofness, modern man is a narcissist - a narcissist who may suffer, but who feels no remorse. He manifests his suffering in his body and he is inflicted with somatic symptoms. His problems serve to justify his refuge in the very problems that his own desire paradoxically solicits. When he is not depressed, he becomes swept away by insignificant and valueless objects that offer a perverse pleasure, but no satisfaction¹⁹.

By forcing this warped co-existence and over-exposure, the loss of individuality is like a wild-fire across the social landscape, and from an artistic standpoint, this lack of originality only serves to further blind and frustrate the artist. Not keeping them from reaching the sublime in a sense, but rather, the expression of such inspiration seems pointless. The craving for escape only growing with each passing frustration.

The More life as a Simulation

Going back to the idea of *more life* in regards to social media, it can be likened to John Baudrillard's *simulation theory*;

Our lives are based in simulation, but to simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have, to dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one doesn't have. One implies a

¹⁹ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1993) - p.7

presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulation is not pretending: “Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms”²⁰.

Simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false”, the “real” and the “imaginary”²¹. The search for something real only makes us feel less real than ever. And this social craving for some kind of connection to the real world, to something that's sure footed, leaves them vulnerable to losing themselves to online resources, because for a time in exposure to it you feel whole, because yes in sense, it can be validating, but it is unsustainable and fleeting, leaving you feeling more desolate than ever.

But what effect does this societal disconnect have on the Artist's pursuit of sublime clarification? In what way does this untethered feeling manifest itself in the field. The next chapter will base its focus on the expression of this feeling and the idea of finding its clarification through a cinematic lens.

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (United States of America, 1994) PDF Ebook - p.3

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (United States of America, 1994) PDF Ebook - p.3

Chapter 2:
Duel-Clarification of the Sublime
Through Expression and Projection

The main focus of this chapter will be to view the appreciation of sublime expression by means of projection and representation in film.

The artist, (or director), produces their work as a means of clarifying their inspiration through expression, and in turn this work can be appreciated in a way that clarifies others. In other words, that a clarified piece of expressionism, which in the case of this particular chapter would be film, can result in a product of universal understanding and relatability through the act of projected appreciation and thus result in projected clarification. An interesting way to understand and explain this is through the act of Life drawing.

Projected Clarification through Life Drawing

Before completely diving into filmic examples and breakdowns, let first this discussion begin with speaking on the practice of life drawing as a means of explaining clarified projection. When applying this idea to life drawing, this form of expression can be seen as the journey of the *sublime expression* in its most raw of states.

Life drawing being considered a key aspect in the artist's understanding of projected feeling.



Fig. 1. Egon Schiele, Portrait of man with FloppyHat, 1910; Czech Rep.

The idea being, that in capturing the form of another, onto them we discover ourselves.

Taking reference from Deborah L. John's piece, *Drawing as Self-Expression*, she cites:

Hammer (1980) explained that there is abundant information available to clinicians who use projective drawing with their clients. The drawing page serves as a canvas upon which a subject may sketch a glimpse of his inner world, his traits and attitudes, his behavioural characteristics, his personality strengths and weaknesses, including the degree to which he can mobilise his inner resources to handle psychodynamic conflicts, both interpersonal and inter-psyche²².

In this case, the artist stands in the studio and takes in the figure in front of them. This figure being full of their own wants and desires and existence in their own right as a human being. But in capturing this form through whatever chosen media, it is the emotional state of the artist that is given flesh. A visualisation of feeling as it were. Capturing moments of quiet, working as a means of encapsulating fleeting feelings, that just felt so right in the moment. Ghosts of past experience, stress, anxiety, joy; feelings made flesh that may now go on to be further explored and understood in the form of art.

When applying this concept to film, there comes the case of, what this thesis will refer to as, a dual-clarification. Projection as clarification and Expression as clarification.

The director produces a film, much as the painter produces a painting. That film goes on to be a clarification of the director's own expressed inspiration. But to liken the film to the figure that is drawn, the viewer who appreciates and experiences this piece is projecting their own emotional state onto the screen, or the theoretical canvas as it were. And so, this is a form of clarification in itself, *projected clarification*. The next chapter will go on detail to the idea of the supposed cost of

²² Deborah L. John, *Drawing as Self-Expression with Normally Functioning Adults: A 10 week Technique* (Lesley University: The Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences, 2012) - p.15, PDF eBook.

artistic appreciation in regards to those who cannot express the sublime for themselves. For now, let us focus on the idea of duel-clarification through film.

The Duel-Clarification of Expression through Film

In the domain of reflection on the arts, there has been, over the past few years, a remarkable emergence of phenomena. The first is a singular aggravation of the legitimation - one might even say identity - crisis in modern art.²³ That is to say, art of the 20th century is ever increasingly becoming a means of self-exploration and consideration. A projection of the self and being. Rather than paying homage to idols and figures, it shows now to concern itself with philosophical ideals and humanism.

As the title suggests, the main focus of this chapter will be to view the appreciation of sublime expression by means of projection and representation in film.

If we are to go directly from where the discussion was left off in the previous chapter and John Baudrillard's *simulation theory*, that our lives are based in simulation, and combine that with the base idea of the human desire for *more* life, it could be postulated that there's a want for this false reality. That the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary"²⁴, just doesn't really matter to, or even frighten people in a general sense. The search for something real only makes us feel less real than ever, so there's almost a submission to this alternate life, a viable doorway in to the idea of *more* life. However substantial it may be, there's a certain obtuse conviction among some that it's real.

But at the same time, there remains those who, in the rejection of this false reality, find themselves unanchored and lost to the vast planes of a world that is so full, yet so empty.

²³Jean-Marie Schaffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) - p.3

²⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (United States of America, 1994) PDF Ebook - p.3

It is this idea of a disconnected existence that seems to fuel so much contemporary art and so much contemporary film, so here the discussion proffers two cinematic examples, one of acceptance and one of rejection of these “untethered reality” ideals. Doing so, with the intention of detailing the idea of dual-clarification throughout.

The acceptance of the More Life

A quick example of a supposed societal acceptance of this online, virtual existence would be found in the 1999 film, by directors Lana and Lily Wachowski²⁵, *The Matrix*.



Fig. 2. The Matrix, Warner Bros. 2009; USA

The Matrix, which directly tackles the simulation theory in the most obvious of senses, follows the path of Neo, a man set to discover and bring down the walls of his simulated universe. But when it comes to the discussion at hand, in regards to this idea of societal acceptance, the focus can be placed on one scene alone.

²⁵ "The Matrix (1999) - IMDB". <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133093/>. Accessed March 16th 2021

The film proves commonplace enough that the general scene setup is unimportant, rather lets focus on what is said. The character, Cypher, sits in a restaurant simulated by the Matrix, eating food that has been likewise created. Upon doing so he states:



Fig. 3. The Matrix, Warner Bros. 2009; USA

“I know this steak doesn’t exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realise? Ignorance is bliss.”²⁶

This is idea of *I don't care if it's not real*, is hugely and wholly representative now more than ever, in the idea that it seems most people have made that choice, to eat that steak in that non-reality world and that steak has become consummative media, that steak has become all of the media that is consumed constantly, media that is consumed in order to make the vast majority feel better, to make living feel more complete, to believe that there is a connection out there that the collective are all a part of, be it Youtube, Instagram, or some other soon to be invented thing. Reality is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe. What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends on what we look for. What we look for depends on what we think. What we think depends on what we perceive.

²⁶ The Matrix, Lana and Lilly Wachowski (United States of America, Warner Bros. 1999)

What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality.²⁷

This explanation of the scene, serves as a projected clarification of a possible expression or view of what is determined to be the acceptance of a portion of society to the notion of the simulated, *more* life.

But when interviewed, director Lilly Wachowski had this to say of her own interpretation of the films meaning:

“I’m glad that people are now viewing the Matrix movies with a trans narrative. I’m glad that it has gotten out that, that was the original intention but the corporate world wasn’t ready for it. The matrix stuff, for us, was all about the desire for transformation but it was all coming from a closeted point of view and so we had the character of Switch, who was a character who would be a man in the real world and then a woman in the matrix. And this is where our head spaces were. I don’t know how present my “trans-ness” was in the the back of my brain as we were writing it, but it all came from the same sort of fire that exists in trans people of the US.”²⁸

For Lilly, the film served as the *expressed clarification* of her burgeoning transition to a woman. But in regards to this discussion, the film serves as a *projected clarification* of the societal acceptance of *more* life.

Lilly goes on to as good as accept this theory in her own words:

“When you make movies, it’s this public art form. I think with any kind of art that you put out into the universe there’s a letting go process because it’s entering into a public dialogue. I like the fact that there’s like an evolution process that we as human

²⁷ "What Is Simulation Theory And Why Does It Matter?" - Built In. <https://builtin.com/hardware/simulation-theory>. - Accessed March 23rd 2021

²⁸ Why the Matrix is a trans story, According to Lilly Wachowski, YouTube.com (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adXm2sDzGkQ>) - Last accessed March 16th 2021

beings engage in art in a non linear way that, we can always talk about something in new ways and in a new light.”

And so concludes how this discussion has examined the societal **acceptance** of the *more* life while subsequently exploring the idea of dual-clarification by means of projection and expression. All of which is truly fascinating indeed.

Now let us move on to discuss and probe the idea of the societal **rejection** of the *more* life

The Rejection of the More Life

As stated previously, people are living and re-living each others stories now in such a way that there's almost less of a point that ever to live because someone is already doing it for you. The idea of “*Here's my story for the day, here's my connection to the world, here is my validation for existing. Here's my connection to you and I'm looking for my connections constantly in the world that I live in. And those connections are making me feel a little bit better in myself*”. People now have so many eyes watching them, that life in itself has become theatre. But where the previous subchapter served to accept the non-reality, there is a rejection to that idea.

While again, the Matrix could of course be used to describe the societal rejection of the *more* life, in the efforts of discussing dual clarification, the explanation will now be proffered using Sophia Coppola's 2003 film, *Lost in Translation*²⁹.

²⁹ Sophia Coppola, *Lost in Translation* (United States: American Zoetrope and Elemental Films, 2003)



Fig. 4. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

As explored in the first chapter, society seems to be going through a strange disconnect. It has been disconnected by the media and the like throughout life, so much so that many things of substance in the surrounding world can barely be recognised.

To bring it back to the musings of Kristeva, modern man is losing his soul but he does not know it, for the psychic apparatus is what registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject. Unfortunately that darkroom needs repair.³⁰

And in regards to the conversation at hand, it seems to be that it is the rejection of the *more* life that leads to the strange feeling of a disconnect. It's the idea of an alien loss and search for an anchor, that seems to exemplify itself in contemporary film. The discussion in this case focussing particularly on Lost in Translation and the fascinating bridge it forms between reality and fiction, between life and film.

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, (France: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1993) - p. 8

Lost in Translation can be postulated as an example of the *projected clarification* of the societal *rejection* for the *more* life.

Some of the following ideas have been expressed by myself (the author) before in a previous discussion. I would like to cite and adapt them as I feel them best utilised here

Lost in Translation is centred around two essential characters - Bob and Charlotte. Here we are met with two people, (who, to the supposed viewer, will work as the objects for the projected feeling of modern loss), on opposite ends of the matrimonial spectrum, “thrown” into life and condemned to assume responsibility for their existence.



Fig. 5. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

Both are at a point in their respective lives where they feel lost. They each find themselves without an emotional anchor, drowning in the sea of doubt that surrounds them amidst a trip to a foreign land. The hotel they stay in, and Tokyo by extension, being the embodiment of the purgatory they are stuck in. For them, life has become a way-station, so to speak, between the reality of the everyday and the uncertainty of

what comes next. It is a world created out of their shared loneliness that is maintained by their uncertainty of what's to come.

It is interesting to compare this to the philosophical assertion that it is the implications of the common central claim that we human beings exist without justification (hence absurdity) in a world into which we are “thrust”.³¹ It is even more interesting again, to see how already the film is a mirror for the previous assertions that the rejection of *more* life leads to an untethering of sorts.

Every aspect of the trip is made to keep the protagonists off balance and disoriented. The world seems so full yet they themselves are so empty of reason. They are surrounded by constant reminders that the world they are in is not their own. The language and customs are completely different. The streets have no names and everything about the city is alien to them. Simple everyday activities like eating, showering and sleeping become tedious. This reverting back to the current societal feeling of being disconnected by certain media, so much so that many things of substance in the surrounding world can barely be recognised.

When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try and change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic³².

This idea rings true for our characters as their lives become governed by the complexity of their nothingness, their connections to their normal lives becoming increasingly difficult and no longer seem to be a source of comfort. Much as the *more* life rejecting viewer is currently facing.

³¹ Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999) - p. 298

³²P. Mairet, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions* (Publication Unknown) - p.63 PDF eBook

From their first interaction, neither of them try to hide who they are. They are honest and open. Right now it's just two people recognising something familiar in the other. For the first time since they've arrived in Japan, they feel seen and understood. Bob isn't just the ageing American actor and Charlotte isn't just a wife. They are people in need, amidst their emotional turmoil.

The film moves to a place where it takes those two generations and brings them together over things that they find that they can connect with, and it is in the ups and the downs of these connections that become essential to them. That even though the rest of the world around them seems to be somewhat disconnected, it's the connections with each other that they hang on to and hunger for. And it's not even a sexual thing, it's the idea that *there is somebody here with me*, the idea that *somebody gets me*.

And so, Bob and Charlotte begin to count on each other. Their shared company finally making the insomnia more bearable, this image serving as a pleasant nod to Sartre's notion of being seen: ...First of all, I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: I see myself because somebody sees me³³. And perhaps this notion in itself is the clarification of the untethered viewer's projection, the need to be seen, to be tethered.



Fig. 6. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

³³ Hazel E. Barnes, Being and Nothingness (Publication Unknown) - p. 257 PDF eBook

Their relationship helps them find enjoyment in their situation and surroundings. Coppola subverts our expectations as to how the relationship could progress. She stated that she wanted the relationship to feel innocent. That their interactions aren't based on a sexual need but an emotional one. They become each other's much needed point of reference in the unclear and surreal state they find themselves in. They both see something in the other they haven't seen in themselves for a very long time.

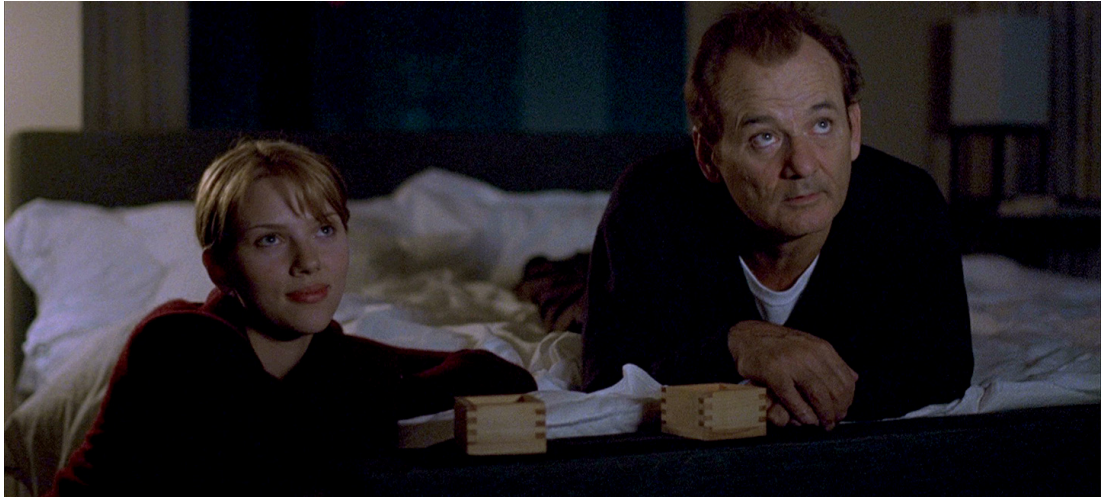


Fig. 7. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

More than what is seen and heard in the dialogue, the way the movie is shot infuses the film with an almost dreamlike quality. The cinematography gives the film a very ethereal look.



Fig. 8. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

The shallow depth of field adds an other-worldly element to what we see. The array of red lights blinking in the background evokes the red of a traffic light signalling a momentary stop.



Fig. 9. Lost in Translation, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

The short time they spent together in this foreign world helps bring into focus what it is that they each want out of life.

Before leaving, Bob whispers something in Charlotte's ear. We don't get to hear what they say but, according to Coppola herself: "That thing Bill whispers to Scarlett was never intended to be anything. I was going to figure out later what to say and add it in and then we never did. It was between them. Just acknowledging that week meant something to both of them and it affects them going back to their lives. People always ask me what's said. I always like Bill's answer: that it's between lovers – so I'll leave it at that."¹⁸



Fig. 10. *Lost in Translation*, Elemental Film, 2003; USA

As they separate, the light finally turns green signalling the moment has ended and they can finally move on to their next step in life.

Sofia Coppola wrote *Lost in Translation* around the time that her marriage to Spike Jonze ended.

“I was in this stage where I wasn’t sure if I’d made the right choices or what I was doing in the post-college beginning of my adult life,”³⁴.

She has stated that there are elements of Spike Jones and lived experiences in the film. It's about people trying to connect but failing to do so and serves as a mature perspective on a failed experience based on her own life.

In the act of expression, Coppola was able to make sense of her place in the universe and find solace in it through clarification. And then in turn, it could be supposed that

³⁴“‘Lost In Translation,’ 15 Years Later: Sofia Coppola on Ending the Film on Her Terms and the Year It Took to Cast Bill Murray.” IndieWire (<https://www.indiewire.com/2018/08/lost-in-translation-15th-anniversary-sofia-coppola-interview-ending-whisper-meaning-1201998010/>.) - Last accessed January 15, 2019

the same sense of clarification was felt by the viewer by means of projection. Resulting in an example whereby the both artists expression and the views projection may align.

That in the rejection of the *more* life, there is a universal want to be anchored to something that is as real as ourselves, something that is not disconnected and free floating. That there is a need for that sense of order and structure to maintain a certain reality that is there foremost to fully reach out and touch and connect to, and not in Matrix-like, simulated reality but in a reality in the sense of *“ok yeah, well I always knew there was something weirdly wrong with the way the world was, but now I can see through the matrix, and with the anchoring of another I can actually connect to the real world underneath it”*.

So to a certain degree, it's a disconnect that everybody who rejects has but can't quite put their finger on quite what it is.

And so concludes how this discussion has examined the societal **rejection** of the *more* life while subsequently exploring the idea of dual-clarification by means of projection and expression. All of which is truly fascinating indeed.

Chapter 3

The Despondence of Connection

This Chapter will begin with a personal anecdote:

When I (the author), was seventeen years old, I was presented with the opportunity of visiting the city of Rome as part of a school-based excursion. As an aspiring artist, this idea, educationally speaking, was of course something by which I was incredibly exhilarated, and as a seventeen year old, I was just as excited by the prospect of not being in school. Each day moved with an excruciating pace, until eventually the time of departure came to show itself to us and suddenly it went from the dark, where life moved on four wheels down a dimly lit road, to a weightless expanse, to a final thunk into a gold-hewn morning.

It was as you can imagine, it being a school trip of thirty five girls. Things went without much room for thought, in the trudging of rubber cast feet. Eyes casting upwards here and there to remark at some oddly hewn figure that leered from the passing stone walls. It was during one of these exploratory trudgings that I somehow missed a step, and suddenly the familiar babble was replaced with the cacophony of a foreign tongue.

Lost and alone, I proceeded to wander in the direction of presumed correctness, slipping through archways down a cobbled confusion, until it came to be that I was standing in a chapel, the name of which now added to that ever growing list of forgotten things. What I felt then remains as something akin to a memory, an unnamable feeling that follows me still, even as it first came over me, walking the pews of that terracotta church. I remember turning into a darkened alcove, eyes barely adjusting to the darkness, as an elderly woman reached forward and in the flick of a switch, I was cast in a warm illumination.

And there they were. There has never been an experience in my life so poignant as then, as my mouth fell open in the aghast realisation of what I was seeing. Hanging on the three walls around me were the contrasted, light and dark miracles that was the work of Caravaggio.

I stood for a length of time that I'll never quite know, staring up at those remarkable feats of artistic expression. Tears falling unknowingly, as I was overcome with a wave of some alien understanding, that this was proof of something more.



Fig. 11. Rom.us, Caravaggio's Paintings in Rome, 2021; Italy

When reading Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents*, he includes letters from a man he refers to as *friend*. They had been exchanging correspondence in regards to the idea of religious belief, Freud himself treating religion as an illusion³⁵. His friend, for lack of a better word (as in the original text, this person remains nameless), was someone of whose opinion, Freud held with an esteemed regard. This friend wholly agreed with Freud's views on organised religion but went on to say that they regretted that he had failed to appreciate the real source of religiosity. That this particular feeling was something of which he himself was never free.³⁶

He goes on to expand upon this thought, this nameless friend spoke of a feeling that he was moved to call a sense of 'eternity', a feeling of something limitless, unbounded - as if it were 'oceanic'.³⁷ To link this back to the above anecdote, it's fascinating to see the shared experience of this 'oceanic feeling' passing unbounded

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.3

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.3

³⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.3

between generations of strangers, something that can be felt by an esteemed friend of Sigmund Freud, to a lost schoolgirl who barely understood that which she was seeing.

The oceanic feeling in these letters is what this thesis has been referring to as the Sublime. A feeling from which it could be speculated that artists find their inspiration to create, the need to express and clarify a plethora of vague feelings and emotions. Perhaps this oceanic feeling is the sublime connection, and perhaps again that's entirely an artistic understanding, but as Freud said, on the basis of this oceanic feeling alone, one was entitled to call oneself religious, even if one rejected every belief and every illusion,³⁸ the religion here perhaps being art itself. It's interesting to note that, this friend of Freud's was a poet. A person who so purely accepted this vast feeling as fact, not as an article of faith, not in the understanding that in one's acceptance of it, one would receive an assurance of personal immortality, but perhaps wondering if that source of religious energy that was seized upon by the various churches and religious systems,³⁹ now finds itself entrenched in the soul of the artist.

It's interesting again to see Freud's acceptance of the oceanic idea, especially considering his lack of this higher connection. Throughout his writing, he refers to himself as a psychoanalyst and that is all, - *I can discover no trace of this oceanic feeling in myself*⁴⁰. It's something that will be broached and understood in the upcoming wonderings of this chapter, this idea of some being in connection to the sublime source, while others exist without, but the combined collective all agreeing and believing in its existence, one side serving to enlighten the other.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.4

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.4

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.4

Looking at Plath's Rook with a Freudian understanding

It is a heavy thing in itself to wonder if perhaps art is made as a means of sharing this sublime experience with those who are unable to tap into the source. And for those who can, ie; the artist, finding that connection is a drug of sorts, a high forever chased. But, in the pushing for the creative to delve deeper and deeper and become more connected, it almost becomes a perverse disconnect. In the effort of reaching for it, it just backs further away, just out of reach.

This, it could be supposed, is where the idea of an artistic block comes into play, that the mind has given up in its effort to find clarification and so the artist must step back to see if that connection can be repaired. Sometimes it will, but there also is an overwhelming fear that there will come a day where this dries up forever. The idea is that artistic expression can, for just a moment, connect you to that sublime understanding, the unsustainable bliss of what it is to understand and clarify some inner turmoil within oneself. But to say again, it is unsustainable. That perhaps this connection is simply too big to be fully held within the human grasp, and so the artist must let go, and it becomes a spiritual death almost. Perhaps that is why the artist seems to search for death. And here is where Freud's third idea of fundamental human desires comes into play.

Covered is the idea of *more* life, as it finds itself in the base human desire for validation, and understood is the *forbidden* life as it refers to the sublime source, but now is the result of these two, the desire for *less* life. Better the death of the artist's earthly vessel, than to lose the precious knowing of the unknown. Eyes blinded in the brilliance of this *radiant miracle*⁴¹.

To bring this back to a literary standpoint, in the furtherance of understanding the artist's need of the connection, a prominent example to breakdown and observe with

⁴¹ Patrick Murray, Kevin McDermott, Mary Slattery, Karol Sadlier: New Discovery Poetry Anthology (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 2014) - p.370

the sublime ideal would be a quick look at Sylvia Plath's, *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*,



Fig. 12. Harsha Padayana, Untitled, 2020; Inda

Here, Plath speaks to herself after a time spent without knowing when she would repair the window that would bid her see the sublime. She describes the act of living in this lack of creation as a sense of *fatigue*, as one treks through a *dull, ruinous landscape*⁴², a landscape that would only be broken by the *angel* that is inspiration. Seeking the hope that soon, something will present itself and serve to *set the sight on fire*.

It's something to which all artists can relate, this *fear of total neutrality*, the idea that general living, outside of the sublime, is merely a husk of the passions that come from the inspirational source. And when this idea is overwhelmingly coupled with the idea of humanity's thirst for knowledge and the narcissistic need to apply this to themselves and the why of what they are, the quest for finding the sublime ensues.

⁴² Patrick Murray, Kevin McDermott, Mary Slattery, Karol Sadlier: New Discovery Poetry Anthology (Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland, 2014) - p.370

But if it is to be understood that only some can tap into this source, then it is the artist alone who must clarify this universal feeling.

But in being the being of searching for this answer, on the day the artist comes to know it best for themselves, the eyes of the many begin to follow, depend and scrutinise as the work and efforts gain traction. The societal pressure can prove to much and in that the artist may crumble. All through life, man works to succeed, but succeeding in what one loves is another kind of murder in itself. A cruel look on life perhaps. That the artist, who is the pursuer of exploration and advance becomes the pursuit of the very thing that will hold them back. A thirst for knowledge coming at the expense of life. The artist may continually hurt and become consumed with an anxiety, and depressive based existence. And in the wondering of why there has to be this heavy reaction, it can be said that the artist simply hurts when they cannot find the sublime, when they are not struck with with rook and it's feathers, but forever to suffer in the knowledge that if it is found and more to the point, if it is understood, they become a beacon of sorts for the others who take it from them.

As stated previously, the artist works to clarify themselves and in turn this work can be appreciated in a way that clarifies others, which ends up putting an unearthly weight of responsibility on the artist, as well as a resulting in a loss of creative privacy. The artist blunders forward into the dark, casting a light for those who follow, muscles growing weary of the voyage. It seems at times for that pressure to swell and the artist is up to their neck and drowning. In the pursuit of finding the sublime, it can be the case where the artist may call themselves Icarus⁴³, as they have flown too close and burn. A warning for the rest to stop.

⁴³ "The Icarus Phenomenon", Paulearley.net. (<https://paulearley.net/articles/addiction-recovery/icarusphenomenon#:~:text=Icarus%20was%20a%20minor%20character,Minos%2C%20the%20king%20of%20Crete.>) - last accessed the 25th March 2021

The Passing of hands

Why is there something rather than nothing?⁴⁴ Taking inspiration from this chapter's opening anecdote, let us ask this in regards to Rome. One need hardly understand to know, that the remnants of Ancient Rome appear as scattered fragments in the jumble of the great city that has grown up in recent centuries, since the Renaissance. True, much of the old is still there but it is buried under modern buildings⁴⁵. This again is an excerpt of Civilisation and its Discontents, that aligns with this chapters aim. It goes on to further state - Now let us make the fantastic assumption that Rome is not a place where people live but a psychical entity with a similarly long rich past, in which nothing that ever took shape has passed away, and in which all previous phases of development exist beside the most recent⁴⁶.

It is an impactful sentiment to think of the Sublime source in this way, to think that all inspiration comes from the same place. A place where the old ideas, who in a day-to-day sense, are *buried under modern buildings*, can here be seen alongside all contemporary creativity.

And perhaps the pain of the sublime's fleeting beauty is evident in the art. Perhaps when standing beneath the works of Caravaggio, the overwhelming feeling was one of sadness and hope. Perhaps the whole concept of chiaroscuro⁴⁷ and its description of the light and dark battle, is just that. An immense battle to hold dearly to the religious light, at the artist desperately fights off the ever encroaching darkness that seeks to rid them of sight. But the hope returns in the idea that this is all just the continuance of some old conversation, a conversation who's roots can be found evident in all forms of expression. And in that sense, it can be accepted that it is

⁴⁴ Jean-Marie Schaffer, *Art of the Modern Age: Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000) - p.239

⁴⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002)- p.11

⁴⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.10

⁴⁷ *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "chiaroscuro," accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chiaroscuro>.

better and more fruitful to let go of the expectancy to be the keeper of the key and to simply allow the sublime to appear and clarify itself in artistic expression at the whim of this unearthly, *oceanic* ideal.

Let us view the artist as a parental figure. They work hard to make sense of the world around them, hoping that someday, the chosen child will continue the work laid out before them, like the changing of hands of some inexplicable business. Father to son, laying down the mantle and passing it on to the next. Seeking to further the conversation laid out so many years in advance.

And maybe that's all this confusion is, the helplessness of the child and the longing for its father⁴⁸, perhaps there is no sublime and this whole conversation has merely taught us little of what is already known⁴⁹. Perhaps in the human craving to know itself, the artist invents these realities as a means of comfort. In that case, it could be said that the Sublime is a projection of that base human need for connection, that it is not some ulterior plane but rather a shield against the void of solitude.

And finally, perhaps the artist's only goal should be to make that one thing, that one important thing that will span the ages of time in the hopes that when it is discovered, the eyes that take it in will be faced with a vast, inexplicable feeling and, perhaps, just for that moment, they won't feel quite so alone.

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p.14

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002) - p. viii

Conclusion

The journey in compiling this document has taken many turns. Discovered has been many nameless and uncountable, beautiful things and ideas. Things on some level the Artist can claim to always have known but showing here, through research, how those personal knowings can be clarified through the works of others.

The journey has proven to me (the author) that on a personal level, I can clarify my own feelings in another's expression. Thus almost a return to where I began, as by understanding the theory of expression by means of clarification.

To conclude, it will be asked again. What is it to create? What is it to exist? What is this innate, human need to describe the unknown desire that is, *the forbidden life*.⁵⁰

Throughout this document, there have been references made to "the Source" and "the Sublime"⁵¹. These words were used to describe the act of creation and the experience of inspiration, and how this culminates in the result of a clarified expression that can be perceived in both a personal and universal regard.

This document intended to explore the artist's connection to the sublime ideal and how in the expression of it, they come to clarify and define that which they did not understand. And then went on to query the modern disconnect to inspiration currently being felt by artists and the like. While also delving into the idea of the non-artist finding artistic clarification by means of projection.

It was made in the hopes of furthering the conversation of the mighty *it*, "*it*" being another descriptor for the *source* and *sublime inspiration*, and show how this relates to the making and interpretation of art.

⁵⁰ Adam Philips, The Penguin Freud Reader (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xii

⁵¹ Adam Philips, The Penguin Freud Reader (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2006) - Page: xi

Inspired by the *Expression theory of art (a theory that defines art as the expression of feelings or emotion)*⁵², it endeavoured to explain projection and interpretation to those who cannot make the sublime connection and has shown how artists, in a sense, have almost become prisoners for those who depend on them to show them the way.

It also discussed the supposed dangers of direct connection and pondered its impact upon mental upheaval.

Using the theory of Expression throughout as a means to clarify the Artist's *vague and undefined feelings* and justify the sublime experience.

It was realised then, at the end of all things that the connection may not have to make sense, or even to mean something. That the artist may simply harness the confusion, embrace it and perhaps clarify something both within them and those standing in appreciation. The product no longer being what the Artist has done but rather in the understanding of what it represents. That perhaps the true artistry of it all lies in the process. That it is in the process of making art that may lead to, and further the quest of sublime enlightenment.

And thus ends the discussion of *the Clarification of the Sublime By means of Expression*.

⁵² Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999) - page: 299

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