

# The Sublime as a Tool of Propaganda.

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This essay explores how the Sublime has been used throughout history to promote a certain ideology which encourages conformity to the State's order. From its early origins, followed by its rediscovery, right through to its present day use in the critique of the technological utopia – the definition of the sublime has been applied to the visual arts as a tool of propaganda and persuasion.

In this essay I will investigate the various ways in which artists have captured the sublime in their works. The religious sublime in the ceiling paintings of the Baroque era are discussed in the context of religious propaganda for the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Europe, and the Protestant Monarchy in the United Kingdom. The natural sublime is discussed as a tool for colonial endeavours, and nationalization of America while presenting the sublime as an aesthetic category of its own. The industrial sublime is investigated as a subject which promotes industrialization across the globe, while the technological Sublime embodies the techno-utopian ideology of contemporary society.

The word 'sublime' is the Latin translation of the term *hypsous* derived from Pseudo-Longinus's treatise *Peri Hypsous (On the Sublime)*. Believed to have been written in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, Longinus's treatise was concerned not with the visual arts but rather the way in which written rhetoric can be used to persuade and elevate an audience and thus, evoke a sense of the sublime. The treatise, which was first published in 1554, has made a significant impact on Western culture, the arts playing a vital role in the way in which the term sublime could be manifested. Following translation and publication of the treatise, the term 'sublime' began to be applied not

just to the written rhetoric of the day – as prescribed by Longinus himself – but also to visual works of art.

During the period of the Baroque – the era in which *Peri Hypsous* was published for the first time – the sublime played a crucial role in religious paintings on both mainland Europe and the United Kingdom. Works of visual art where used as an instrument of rhetoric and propaganda, the aim of which was to persuade the audience by appealing to their senses and evoking an emotional state.<sup>1</sup> This was achieved through various means, and certain qualities have come to define the stylistic nature of Baroque. Grandeur, drama, movement, vitality, tension and emotional exuberance are just some of these qualities used in a manner which blurred distinctions between various art forms.<sup>2</sup> Baroque characteristics impacted on music, literature, visual art and architecture across Europe and the way in which practitioners blurred these practices is reflected in Baroque illusionistic ceiling paintings. These works – most often with religious connotations – were painted or frescoed directly onto architectural surfaces.

Michelangelo's *Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel*, fresco, (1508-1512)<sup>3</sup> produced during the transition between the Renaissance and the Baroque period, exemplifies the way in which practitioners began to combine various art forms. Architecture and the visual arts became fused through the process of fresco painting. This technique, which involves the use of pigmenting freshly laid lime plaster, allowed the paintings to become an integral part of the interior's surface rather than a mural placed on the wall. The work is

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1 The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "The Visual Arts." Encyclopædia Britannica Online. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/53809/Baroque-period/284074/The-visual-arts> (accessed September 2, 2014).

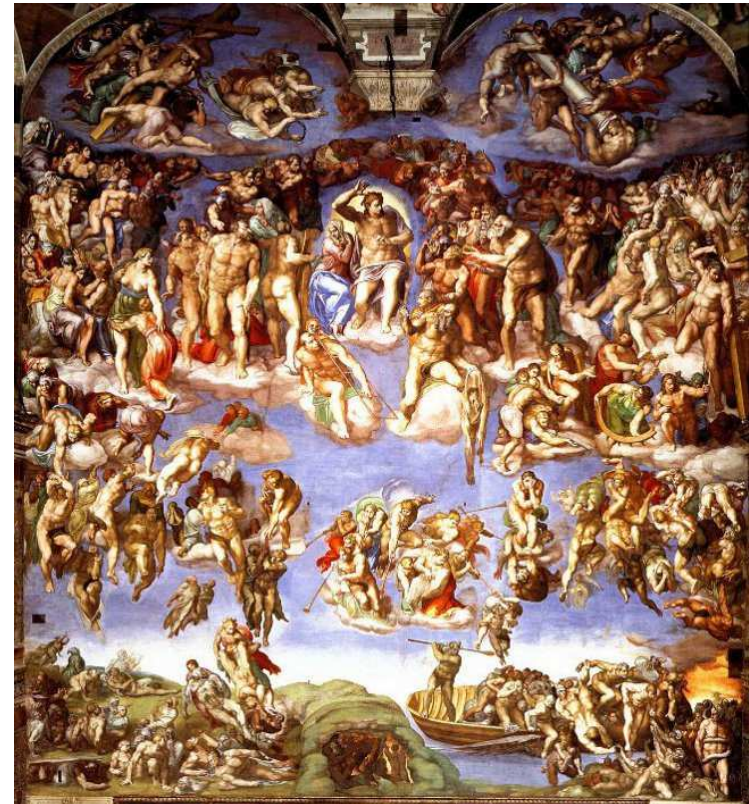
2 Ibid.

3 Christine Zappella, "Michelangelo's Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel." Sistine Chapel Ceiling. <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/sistine-chapel-ceiling.html> (accessed September 30, 2014).



Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel Ceiling* (center only), Fresco. Vatican, Rome

well-known not just to scholars, but to many people throughout the world, and has left a tremendous legacy for Western art culture. The entire interior of the Sistine chapel is decorated with stories from Genesis and other significant tales of the Old Testament. Michelangelo was not the only practitioner who helped compile these works within the space, however the project became his legacy following the completion of the fresco upon the ceiling above, then by the commission of the *Last Judgment* fresco (1534-1541) on the wall behind the altar.<sup>4</sup>



Michaelangelo, *Last Judgment*, Fresco, 14 x 15m. Vatican, Rome

4 "Michelangelo's Last Judgment (Sistine Chapel)." Last Judgment, Sistine Chapel. <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/last-judgment-sistine-chapel.html> (accessed October 2, 2014).



In the years following the completion of the *Last Judgement*, Pope Paul III established the Council of Trent, sparking the Catholic Counter-Reformation in response to the uprising of the Protestant Reformation<sup>5</sup>. Lydia Hamlett states that Baroque art has “frequently been described as the visual counterpart to the Catholic Counter-Reformation”.<sup>6</sup> During its existence between 1545 – 1563, the aim of the Council of Trent was to support the Counter-Reformation and continue to maintain a Catholic grip over the continent. The decrees applied to art at the final session of the Council of Trent in 1563, responded to the understanding that art and architecture could be used as tools of propaganda to promote Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> The ruling from the meetings of the Council concluded that changes in art and architecture which support the Bible needed to be applied in order to achieve a potent emotional religious response in the viewer. Nudity and pagan symbolism are just a few subjects which were frowned upon by the rulings, and thus, the transition between the dominance of Renaissance art began to be replaced with the new Baroque style which encapsulated the rulings of the church.

In order to respond to these rules and regulations, Catholic Counter-Reformation artists began to further apply the notion of the sublime within the context of religious ideology. In order to achieve the goal of restoring Catholic dominance within Europe, artists applied the visual characteristics of the sublime to create an emotional response in the audience with persuasive effect. Sensuous and spiritual works which had undergone naturalist treatment allowed artists to create works which were accessible to the average churchgoer.<sup>8</sup> One such artist was Jesuit painter and architect, Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709) who has become known as one of the Baroque era's greatest illusionist mural painters.<sup>9</sup> Pozzo's paintings and frescoes

display many of the stylistic characteristics which have become known as the High-Baroque. Pozzo mastered the technique of *di sotto in su* (viewed from below), creating the perspective illusion of depth and dimension; a technique which drew the audience into the heavens portrayed. Pozzo applied this precision of perspective in the ceiling fresco of the Jesuit Sant' Ignatius church in Rome (1691-4).



Andrea Pozzo, *Sant' Ignatius Church*, Fresco. Rome

The original plan for the church was to have a dome structure in the intersection between the main nave and the transept. Due to the method of construction however, this did not eventuate and a flat ceiling was added between the two hemi-cylindrical rooms. As a temporary solution Pozzo decorated the space with the illusion of a dome upon what is in reality, a flat surface. The final outcome was so impressive it became a permanent fixture

- 5 Trueman, Chris. "The Council of Trent." The Council of Trent. <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/council-of-trent.htm> (accessed October 2, 2014).
- 6 Hamlett, Lydia . "The Art of the Sublime." Tate. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-longinus-and-the-baroque-sublime-in-britain-r1108498> (accessed September 4, 2014).
- 7 "Catholic Counter-Reformation Art (1560-1700)." Catholic Counter-Reformation Art. <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/catholic.htm> (accessed October 2, 2014).
- 8 The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. "The visual arts." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/53809/Baroque-period/284074/The-visual-arts> (accessed September 2, 2014).
- 9 "Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709)." Andrea Pozzo: Baroque Mural Painter: Quadratura,

Trompe l'oeil Murals, Rome. <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/old-masters/andrea-pozzo.htm> (accessed October 2, 2014).

in the building.<sup>10</sup> As the viewer enters the church they are drawn into the decorative paintings all around. Upon the ceiling of the main nave, Pozzo has created a quadratura;<sup>11</sup> the illusion of the building expanding into the sky with the roof opening up, depicting Saint Ignatius ascending into heaven, surrounded with an abundance of allegorical figures including Christ, angels and God himself. The figures and the clouds above have been created with such precision that they appear to be moving across the ceiling. While the viewer is aware that what they see is a painting, the perspective precision in the quadratura is so realistic, it is hard to determine where the architectural columns end and paint begins. Pozzo's mastery over perspective, form and composition achieved his desired intention – to surprise and overwhelm the viewer through the visual narrative of the Jesuit order.<sup>12</sup> The magnificence of the work invokes a religious sublime experience in the audience in a manner which glorifies the Catholic faith.

While the origins of the Baroque style were in response to promoting the Catholic-Counter Reformation, its impact was not limited to this. In Britain, the Baroque style was employed by artists whose pursuit was not to promote the Catholic cause, but rather, as a tool of propaganda which glorified the Protestant succession and the British monarchy. Sir James Thornhill's (c. 1675-1734) *Painted Hall at Greenwich* is an example of such work. Described as “a British take on Pozzo's ceiling”,<sup>13</sup> Thornhill – who held the post of Sergeant-Painter to King George II and was the first British artist to be granted knight-hood<sup>14</sup> – began the project at Greenwich



Sir James Thornhill, *Painted Hall at Greenwich*. Oils on Plaster. London

in the same year that Pozzo's treatise *Rules and Examples of Perspective Proper for Painters and Architects* (1707) was translated and published in English. Completed in 1727, the *Painted Hall at Greenwich* displays the same level of detail, movement and perspectival devices as the painted ceilings of Sant' Ignatius. Rather than promoting the Catholic faith as Pozzo's ceiling does, Thornhill's work's intention was to glorify the Protestant British monarchy.

Gigantic figures perch uneasily on clouds, including George I, surrounded by Peace, Apollo, Time, Truth, Victory, America, Africa, Piety and Hercules, all jostling for space with cupids, roses, coats of arms, naval weapons and billowing drapery, looked down upon by Queen Anne<sup>15</sup>.

10 Roberto Piperno, "Baroque Ceilings." Baroque Ceilings.

<http://www.romeartlover.it/Ceiling.html> (accessed October 2, 2014).

11 Shelly Esaak, "quadratura." About.

[http://arthistory.about.com/cs/glossaries/g/q\\_quadratura.htm](http://arthistory.about.com/cs/glossaries/g/q_quadratura.htm) (accessed October 2, 2014).

12 Lydia Hamlett, "The Art of the Sublime" Tate. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-longinus-and-the-baroque-sublime-in-britain-r1108498> (accessed September 4, 2014).

13 Ibid

14 Brian Thom McQuade, *Seven painters who changed the course of art history: Masaccio, Mantegna, Leonardo da Vinci, Bruegal the Elder, Caravaggio, William Hogarth, Goya*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012.

15 Maev Kennedy, "Greenwich's Painted Hall shipshape after restoration." the guardian. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/may/02/greenwich-painted-hall-restoration-naval-college> (accessed September 2, 2014).

Again we see how the sublime can be manipulated as a device of persuasion and propaganda.

The Baroque period saw changes not just in the field of the arts but across society as a whole. Developments in science saw a broadening of intellectual horizons and the expansion of global travel and colonizing empires. As the Baroque period gave way to the Age of Enlightenment during the mid-eighteenth century, artists' engagement with the notion of the sublime began to shift with the changing philosophical understandings of the time. It was at this time in history when a strong sensibility towards nature began to be synonymous with the sublime experience.<sup>16</sup> In his text *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747)<sup>17</sup>, Neoclassist theorist Nicolas Boileau-Desperaux states that "the sublime in writing is no more than a description of the sublime in nature".<sup>18</sup> Ten years later, philosopher and political theorist Edmund Burke's (c.1729 – 1797)<sup>19</sup> *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Feelings on the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757)<sup>20</sup> was published, leaving a tremendous impact on the discourse of the sublime in the context of philosophical aesthetics. Burke was the first in the field to declare that 'the beautiful' and 'the sublime' are two distinct and separate categories of aesthetics. While the sublime is inspired by terror and awe,

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- 16 Luke White, "The Sublime - A Brief History" Luke White. [http://www.lukewhite.me.uk/sub\\_history.htm#postmodern](http://www.lukewhite.me.uk/sub_history.htm#postmodern) (accessed August 29, 2014).
- 17 John Baillie, "An Essay on the Sublime, 1747" Earthworks. <http://www.earthworks.org/sublime/Baillie/index.html> (accessed August 27, 2014).
- 18 Lydia Hamlett, "The Art of the Sublime" Tate. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/lydia-hamlett-longinus-and-the-baroque-sublime-in-britain-r1108498> (accessed September 4, 2014).
- 19 BBC. "History: Edmund Burke (1729 - 1797)." BBC News. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/burke\\_edmund.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/burke_edmund.shtml) (accessed October 1, 2014).
- 20 Edmund Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the sublime and beautiful*. London: Routledge Classics, 2008.

the beautiful is defined as a form of pleasure and serenity.<sup>21</sup> Burke claims that while the two sensations may overlap, it is wholly possible to experience them individually. In separating the terms, Burke established a canon which fits the context of the sublime into the natural, visual world. Mountains, use of light and darkness, obscurity, the absolute power of God and the ruins of civilizations, are examples of the sublime in their ability to evoke physiological and psychological responses in the viewer with the persuasion of terror – thus, evoking the sublime state.

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.... Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force<sup>22</sup>

Burke's text has had a profound impact on the field of philosophical aesthetics and provided new frameworks in which artists could respond to the sublime experience relevant to the social and political situation in Western society during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>23</sup>

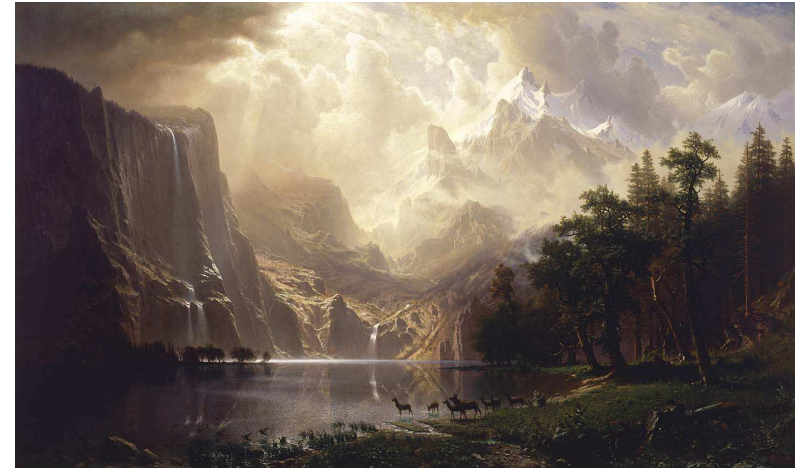
While the artists of the Catholic-Counter Reformation used the sublime as a tool of propaganda for the church, the Romantics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century appropriated its notions in works which promoted colonial endeavours and empire building. The Romantic period originated in Europe in response to

the social anxieties caused by rapid industrializations and the removal of

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- 21 Stated on book abstract.  
Ibid.
- 22 Ibid (57)
- 23 Daniel Gold, "The Religiohistorical Sublime." In *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2003. 91.



God from human affairs<sup>24</sup>. As European colonization expanded across the globe, artists were exposed to new scenes and landscapes to respond to. Landscape paintings captured these encounters, while promoting the European colonial pursuits. The natural sublime became a tool of propaganda in the works of the Hudson River School Painters of New York, which affirmed the national myth of the 'frontier' and the human struggle against the forces of nature.<sup>25</sup> Grandeur and power over nature were displayed through the use of Burke's canons of the sublime in an attempt to "Europeanize" other lands, yet ironically, promote the detachment of the American pioneers from the European ancestry, thus promoting American Nationalism. Igor Volsky states that the "American landscape... separated the New World from the Old and imparted individualism, innocence, and pride"<sup>26</sup> to the American audience. Through the focus of the 'new' landscapes, artists were able to provide their audience with a sublime encounter which not only provided a partial escape from the realities of European industrialization<sup>27</sup>, but also invoked a sense of European dominance and superiority over non-European territories.<sup>28</sup> As such, landscape paintings of the Natural Sublime were a potent propaganda tool in colonial pursuits of the era.



Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California*. Oil on canvas. Washington

Following colonial success in most areas of the world, industrialization expanded across the globe at an exorbitant rate during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> The metropolitan landscapes juxtaposed against the forces of nature became inspiration for artists attempting to capture the essence of the sublime in their works. Skyscrapers, bridges, and urban transport systems within the cityscape became dominant subjects of landscape paintings. These structures provided a sense of awe in the audience, and glorified the industrial prowess of the colonizers, and the expansion of Europeanization on the globe.

One artist working with this theme in New York City was John Sloan. In discussing Sloan and his contemporaries, Kristen M Jensen states "These artists took the elements of the Sublime, combined them with Modernism's interest in structure and form, and applied them to the manmade industrial one – thereby creating a new visual vocabulary for the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The Industrial Sublime."<sup>30</sup>

24 Steven DaLuz, "Why Not the Sublime? A Relevant Option for Representational Artists.." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAWCHhIXs-k> (accessed August 28, 2014).

25 Luke White, "The Sublime - A Brief History." Luke White. [http://www.lukewhite.me.uk/sub\\_history.htm#postmodern](http://www.lukewhite.me.uk/sub_history.htm#postmodern) (accessed August 29, 2014).

26 Igor Volsky, "Bierstadt and Nationalism." The Hudson River Valley Institute. [http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/library/pdfs/bierstadt1\\_igor\\_volsky.pdf](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/library/pdfs/bierstadt1_igor_volsky.pdf) (accessed September 14, 2014).

27 Steven DaLuz, "Why Not the Sublime? A Relevant Option for Representational Artists.." YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAWCHhIXs-k> (accessed August 28, 2014).

28 Alexander. Kiossev, "Atlas of Transformation." The Self-Colonizing Metaphor. <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html> (accessed October 2, 2014).

29 "Industrial Revolution." Princeton University. [https://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Industrial\\_Revolution.html](https://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Industrial_Revolution.html) (accessed October 2, 2014).

30 Kristen M Jensen, *Industrial Sublime: Modernism and the Transformation of New York Rivers, 1900-1940 (The Visitor in the Landscape)*. (New York: Fordham University Press), 2013.



John Sloan, *Cornelia Street*. Oil on canvas, 50.8 x 40.64 cm. Private Collection

In the work *Cornelia Street* (1920), Sloan has captured the cityscape of New York with the Flatiron Building as the most dominant subject. Rather than provide the audience with a perspective of common human experience – on the ground, looking up – Sloan's *Cornelia Street* is capturing the sight of the city from above. The audience is provided no clue as to where the

artist is positioned however, as there is no suggestion of a building from which he stands. Instead, the viewer is provided the sense of flight, above the city from the perspective of a bird or a building. Human figures in the form of silhouettes walk the streets below. Sloan has paid little attention to these forms yet managed to portray a sense of movement, suggesting a hive of activity is taking place in the city street. Few vehicles can be seen parked in the street, but like the human figures in the work, the application of paint has been kept to a minimum. In the lower left corner, a train appears to travel across the canvas on a bridge above the street below. Silhouette figures can be seen in the glowing windows of the moving train, but again, little attention has been applied to these forms. While the presence of human life plays a significant part in the piece, they are not the main subject. The architecture all around is what captures the audience's attention. The cityscape is growing along the horizon. With fully constructed forms in the forefront, and buildings in the process of construction in the distance – suggested by the cranes silhouettes upon the horizon – these monumental forms are glorified over the people they are made for. The cityscape rests upon a backdrop of dusk, suggested by the large population of human activity on the streets and in the train. A school of birds flutter down to the chimney stacks of the Flatiron Building. It is their presence in the painting which invites the audience to marvel at the wonders of nature within the cityscape. Here, Sloan has positioned the industrial sublime closely to the natural sublime, allowing the latter to become over-shadowed by the expanding prowess of industry.

Sloan again portrays the Flatiron Building in his painting *Dust Storm, Fifth Avenue* (1906). In this work, the architecture is not the main subject of the work, but rather, its existence is suggested to bring safety to the humans who are fleeing the dangers of a sudden dust storm. A large group of people are shown to be running for cover from what appears to be an unexpected change in weather conditions. Dressed in their fine attire and driving in automobiles away from the scene, these people are examples of the growing

middle-class within America<sup>31</sup>. Shaken from their leisurely activity by the intrusion of natural forces, Sloan has captured the terror in their expression and movement in their fleeing forms. Sloan has successfully captured the terror of the natural sublime, while suggesting harmony can be found in the industrial sublime. This message is a potent one which allows the work to act as a mode of propaganda, this time through the message that industry will protect us from the dangers of nature.



John Sloan, *Dust Storm, Fifth Avenue*. Oil on canvas

31 "Industrial America" Library of Congress.  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/> (accessed October 2, 2014).

As the industrial sublime took its position as a recognized theme in landscape paintings, the Technological Sublime was developing alongside.<sup>32</sup> The term, first coined by Perry Miller<sup>33</sup> and expanded upon by David Nye,<sup>34</sup> places the aesthetics of the sublime into the context of contemporary society. David Nye's *American Technological Sublime* (1994) is "a study of the politics of perception in industrial society".<sup>35</sup> According to Nye one of the most potent expressions of the technological sublime took place with the atom bomb and its impact on the human psyche.<sup>36</sup> Following the American attack on Japan with the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the devastation caused dramatically changed the way human beings viewed its scientific achievements. For the first time, a weapon was developed which could not only cause dramatic atrocities perpetrated on specific regions and peoples, but could completely eradicate all life from large areas, and impact on the environment for future generations with unforeseen results. For the first time, our species' activity managed to achieve a destruction previously only capable of by the forces of nature, yet now completely within the grasp of human control. With the early 20<sup>th</sup> century political upheavals of war, famine and revolution, a deep sense of fear became a focal point during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during the Cold War, with atomic warfare being threatened on citizenry. While the atom bomb and its potential impact played a major role in lives of Americans and the people within the Soviet Union, with memory of war still fresh in the psyche of the public across the world, the outbreak of atomic war was of major concern globally. However, the use of the technological sublime to control mass populations was not restricted to the possibility of war and warfare. As the Industrial Revolution birthed the technological

32 Perry Miller, *The Life if the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Boston: Mariner Books), 1970.

33 Ibid.

34 David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: social meanings of a new technology, 1880-1940*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1990.

David E. Nye, *American technological sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1994.

35 Abstract excerpt:

David E Nye, *American technological sublime* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1994.

36 Ibid



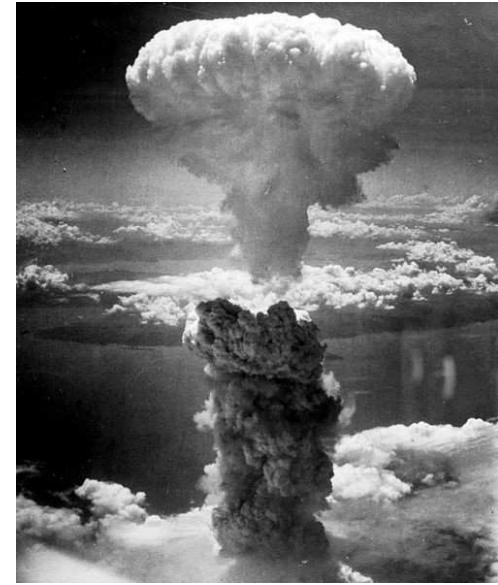
proWess of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and later, the digital advances which have highly influenced the 21<sup>st</sup> century, during the post-war era, the development of a consumer culture<sup>37</sup> was needed to ingrain a technological-utopian ideology in the cultural mindset of the West. This could be achieved through mass consumption by citizenry. In order to maintain a capitalist system without fear of economic depression, the technological sublime was promoted through models of planned obsolescence.<sup>38</sup> While its sublime predecessors – industry, nature and religion – was captured in works of art and fed to the public as tools of propaganda, the technological sublime made its place outside of the art world, and into the homes of the mainstream public through advertising media, television, and later, the internet. These devices both embody the idea of the technological sublime while also feeding its message. The utopian ideology around the wonders of technology was presented to a much broader section of society than art at the time could, i.e. through television and other forms of mainstream media. With the expansion of technology, art began to play a minor role in the cultural language presented to the public. Television media, film and advertising have become the visual food of our culture, and provide useful avenues to construct cultural conditioning.

In contemporary society, capitalism has replaced God; money is our prophet and wealth is the moral code we are encouraged to pursue. As technological advances have continued to consistently out-model themselves through the role of planned obsolescence, the belief that our planet and species can be saved through these devices is embodied in our continuing obedience to consume. Without planned obsolescence and its

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37 Adam Curtis, "The Century of the Self," Top Documentary Films RSS, <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-century-of-the-self/> (accessed March 26, 2014).

38 Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York: D. McKay Co.), 1960. The models of planned obsolescence were presented in great detail for the first time in *The Waste Makers*. Vance Packard. To this day, this text remains to be the most thorough investigation on the subject.



*Nagasaki bomb*, Photo by Charles Levy from one of the B-29 Superfortresses used in the attack<sup>39</sup>.

role in shaping the ideology of consumer culture through the framework of the technological sublime, we would not have access to the devices which have come to dominate our communication and our access to knowledge in Western society. While such devices can be used as powerful tools, the way in which they have come to exist has created a future fragility for our species within our finite ecosystem. We cannot continue these models without dire consequences. As such, exploring the technological sublime within works of art allows makers to create a narrative from our waste. Rather than regurgitate a techno-utopian view of the sublime, the collections within the project *Abundance* have embraced the aesthetic of the ugly in order to critique the technological sublime and its pervasive messages. These relics could provide visual cues of what to avoid by challenging the ideology of a techno-utopia, or, they could provide us with a looking-glass into the way future generations of humans will adorn themselves in their technologically constructed dystopia – where their resources will come from our waste.

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39 *Nagasaki bomb*, Photo by Charles Levy. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nagasakibomb.jpg> (accessed October 2, 2014)

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