

## “Attention and the Sublime” (with special guest Johannes Wankhammer) 7 February 2025

### OMNI-OBJECT WARMUP!

14:28:52 From Peter Schmidt to Everyone:

My Omni-Object: the 24-oz jar of honey on the table. It seems to me that if the entire universe got mixed up in the form of a thing, it might be the gooey-gooey consistency of honey. And sweet, too? I was admiring the color of honey, and in general thinking about the strange way that it moves...

14:29:13 From Molly Zapp to Everyone:

Orchid. I think folks would attend to/ notice more objects in view more often if digital stimulation were not so available.

14:29:25 From Maura Sullivan (she/her) to Everyone:

My Omni Object is a print given to me by my sister-in-law with the outline of a woman, two beautiful birds, and tropical flowers. One of the birds has the word Persevere. She gave it to me as encouragement during a difficult time.

14:29:34 From Phillip Bimstein to Everyone:

My omni-object was my orange and white care, Fuzzy, who seemed unaware of the attention I was giving him, and simply but infinitely breathed and fuzzed and paid attention to his own south specific and omni-objects which fascinated him

14:29:50 From Phillip Bimstein to Everyone:

my orange and white “cat”! ;-)

14:29:59 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

my reflections were in part refractions from this essay on All Known Objects -  
<https://pubs.aip.org/aapt/ajp/article/91/10/819/2911822/All-objects-and-some-questions>

14:30:15 From Ben G to Everyone:

I think my omni object was in the hole in the table behind my computer screen, which is perfectly round and completely hidden.

14:30:21 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

I looked at the headpiece of this chair I am sitting in, and felt that the Omni-Object MIGHT be in its \*mouth\* -- so I focused on this little gargoyle being. My model in the thinking was those “infinite zoom”

images that I have started to see on TikTok and elsewhere, where one keeps going in and in and in and finding new things....

14:30:29 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

but my OO took the form of a wooden bird, stout and poised, but at rest. majestically dense.

14:30:29 From Connor Griffin to Everyone:

the apparatus holding the salt and pepper shaker- light and dark in perfect balance

14:30:34 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

The omni-object is an orphaned taxi roof-top sign from Bulgaria, a weathered brown-yellow thing, with TAKCI written in all-caps. It designates a live latency of transit, transition, and the movement between any two spaces. A sort of metonym for any path taken within and through the universe.

14:30:35 From Carter Minnick to Everyone:

Staring at my laptop screen seemed fitting enough. Allowed my attention (and eyes) to expand to a view of its situation on my lap, in the room. Circular looping between my attention as what was enabling the contemplation of the "omni-object"

14:30:44 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

A candle, that I poured myself in a re-used vessel. Elements of nature in the glass, wax. The potential for many forms: liquid, solid. The potential for ignition! And because it was something I made, the act of creation contained within it.

14:30:55 From Peter Schmidt to Everyone:

Replying to "my reflections were in part refractions from this ...":

Here's (I think) a write-up for the non-STEM mere mortals among us:

<https://www.economist.com/interactive/christmas-specials/2024/12/21/the-chart-of-everything>

Etienne Turpin:👍

14:31:02 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:

My initial thought was that, surely, the omni object has to be a book? But no: it turned out to be a bottle of water "where any angled light can congregate endlessly".

14:31:20 From Jason Snider to Everyone:

Gravitational presence in the center of the room. It seems to be just below the light fixture. Almost feels like a static electric pull in that direction. I can feel the hair on my head and my arms standing on end in that direction. There is an odd feeling of calm washing over me. I'm drawn towards it.

14:31:24 From Jacob Weger to Everyone:

My omni object: a throw pillow. Rich, indigo blue, with deep black pockets of shadow. Thick shaggy fur, texture. The filaments and fibers invoke hidden secrets of the spaces between. What's inside is undetectable, but the outer layer holds and suggests great complexity within.

14:31:27 From Kristen to Everyone:

A keyhole on its side opening onto a flatness that is golden, in the shape of a headless, robed figure who took a big breath and held it, forever. Reflective. Cinched. Cut!

14:31:49 From Anthony Acciavatti to Everyone:

Currently in a hotel room in St Louis wrapped in sheet rock, i.e. gypsum, which is my omni-object. Stained in places, dressed with a tv and hotel art works, the gypsum is an all too common backdrop mined from the earth's crust. Thinking about how ubiquitous this material is...and its increasing scarcity...

14:31:51 From Kyle Berlin to Everyone:

Marcel says: the chessboard as omni-object, a cosmic web of light and shadow, where each square hums with forgotten tales. It is both stage and temple, a space where time folds, and every move

ripples across dimensions. The pieces are not just pawns or knights but strange travelers, tracing unseen constellations in a dance of fate. The board pulses with the energy of thought, each game a fleeting meditation, an eternal echo of minds colliding and dissolving into the ether.

14:32:36 From Helen Miller to Everyone:

Wine/water glass through which I can see circles of black wires.... Reflections pile up where the base of the cup and stem meet. Dripping water in the next room fills the empty space, through association and quiet.

14:35:41 From Peter Schmidt to Everyone:

Timely subject! At the Met: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/06/arts/design/caspar-david-friedrich-metropolitan-museum.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>

14:37:46 From Ana Cristina (Tininha) to Everyone:

My omni-object is a little box that sits on the sunniest corner of the room. I've always been curious about this box, which I believe is in this corner of the room, glued to the wall, since the beginning of this house, over 100 years ago. I look at this apparently very simple box and get interested by its shapes and small decorative details. I wonder how much this box has witnessed and how kindly it has kept itself with the house throughout the many lives who have inhabited the house.

14:41:30 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

I totally buy that argument.

14:41:47 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

Oh yeah, baby!

14:41:58 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

Grooving on that line....

14:42:06 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

Don't take it from me!!

14:43:04 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

AMEN!

14:43:41 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:

(Nah nah nah — he just can't say it... but it's actually the GOD WITHIN....)

14:46:50 From Audrey Deng (she/her) to Everyone:

the alternative explanation reminds me of this Louise Bourgeois quote: "The spiral is an attempt at controlling the chaos. It has two directions. Where do you place yourself, at the periphery or at the vortex? Beginning at the outside is the fear of losing control; the winding in is a tightening, a retreating, a compacting to the point of disappearance. Beginning at the center is affirmation, the move outward is a representation of giving, and giving up control; of trust, positive energy, of life itself." (like beginning w the omni object and moving out)

Peter Schmidt, Julian Chehrian, Donica Bettanin (she/her), Vitória Oliveira, Ana Cristina (Tininha):❤️

14:58:59 From Kim Loeb to Everyone:

David: kittens and anxiety. The life of a new-born kitten that only knows reality for the last few months but has much more to it.

Connor: a teacher. Presence of wisdom he respects.

Jac: an encounter with something large and an encounter with your smallness. But also something large inside and outside of you.

David: Its about triggering the sense of immensity and not the immensity itself.

Jac: Internal fractals

Kim: the immensity isn't only in the big things, it can be in the small things too. Looking at the details of a leaf or heavy rain.

14:59:21 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:

(I just drank the omni object.)

Ben G, Vitória Oliveira: ❤️

Kim Loeb, Ana Cristina (Tininha), David Landes: 😂

Donica Bettanin (she/her): 🙏

Peter Schmidt: 🍷

14:59:38 From Helen Miller to Everyone:

Replying to "(I just drank the omni object.)":

How do you feel?

14:59:55 From Christopher Mole to Everyone:

Replying to "(I just drank the omni object.)":

subline

14:59:56 From Jac Mullen to Everyone:

you are now the omni object

15:00:05 From Peter Schmidt to Everyone:

Replying to "you are now the omni object":

Kant's point, right?

15:00:33 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Jacob -

About a month ago was in Columbia, on a trek through the rainforest, and we got rained on.. expectation was that rainy season had been over. But it rained non-stop for two days in the middle of the forest. Everything got completely soaked. One night the river we camped next to flooded and almost washed everything away. Being there and experiencing the terrifying power of nature was awe-inspiring and literally terrifying. Connected him to the experience of the sublime.

Peter -

Is a mountains person! Mountains, the original sublime thing. When he was 18 took a gap year and was in Bolivia for nine months. Had a day where they climbed to top of nearest ridge. Came up over the ridge and was face to face with mountain known as a deity figure known as Illimani

15:00:33 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Julian -

Spoke, similar to Jacob, as having been in a rain storm on a bicycle tour, enveloped, cold and depleted, full self-abnegation and shivering.. the worst part of the trip and the part that I most romanticize..

Peter (on the second part of the prompt) -

The representational challenge is about representing something that surpasses limits.. a lot of the artistic work that I'm interested in is preoccupied with the limitations of its form... painting of a landscape that give you sense that there is more than can be captured in the painting... then there are artworks that directly examine this. Which tend to be academic exercises. The painting just give you the feeling. Or then there is the self-aware post modern examination of limitations of language...

15:00:48 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Liberation from habit, beauracracy, capitalism lets us recognize the sublime  
the subject isn't self or the universe, the whole idea of separation is obliterated

Omni object: just stopping and looking at my cup I had an experience of boundaries/fog lifting,  
seeing a circle

Doesn't often experience the sublime, being grounded in the everyday

The illusion of the self is sort of not emphasized in Western literature  
some psychological understanding of what the experience of the sublime is  
\*in music/orchestration, a powerful shared, pre-language experience; the music can be dark, or  
bright, but it is inexplicable  
\*seeing death, also something the mind can't really comprehend that is powerful, beautiful in its  
own way

Distinction/division between language and the sublime

The attention angle :in order to define ANYTHING, one must put attention on it. In the process of  
describing something, is one also limiting it?

15:01:00 From Joanna Fiduccia to Everyone:

Johannes: The sublime of the mountains, the ocean come to mind... The classics are somewhat  
boring; I feel I should search my mind for something more interesting

Tyler: Paddleboarding in Santa Barbara, as big waves were coming in, I got smashed and sucked  
under. Awestruck and immersed.

Joanna: Laboring. In sublime landscapes I am aware of my future remembering of them,  
nostalgia, and thus I am already at some distance from them. In childbirth, entirely immersed, overrun by  
pain. The immersion in the sensation and remoteness of it now are symmetrical.

Vitória: A particularly disastrous voyage to a blissful location, but I also saw the past coming for  
me. But in the Biblioteca vasconcelos I felt layers of time. In harmony with all parts of myself

15:01:01 From Joanna Fiduccia to Everyone:

Johannes: The first time I really interacted with new ChatGPT – surreal, terrifying, but also deeply  
fascinating. Not a sense of oneness or liberating infinity. Absolutley shattering experience.

Bailey: Similar experience with ChatGPT. Also: In an unfamiliar part of Texas, as the world was  
waking up. Realizing it had nothing to do with me, unable to grasp the vastness of it. Something about  
morning...

15:01:49 From Anthony Acciavatti to Everyone:

Breakout Room transcript

There are the typically transcendent experiences like big trips in nature with family and friends,  
but more naturally, I've fallen into the ritual where I smoke cannabis in the morning and the stillness it  
produces and a looping effect of stillness... it produces a kind of double infinity loop. And led to a feeling  
of grounding the sublime.

Extreme resistance to the prompt which comes from something that is so big and then chop it into  
something that is an experience, which dishonors the sublime as opposed to the sublime as the goo I live  
in. Attending feels like a way of integrating these experiences...

15:01:56 From Kristen to Everyone:

Mitra has been writing a book, has been in dialogue with the spirit of the book or the sentience  
that wants the book to exist. She was walking down the bike path, questioning space, wondering what the

book needs next, feeling connection between herself and that presence, felt alert, looked for clues in her environment, felt relaxed, was in dialogue w benevolent presence.

Nabil had an experience of revisiting a giant sequoia, which he had not seen since childhood, stood in a grove, was struck by the grand scale of biological growth and temporal connection to human time and accretion of ecosystems, something about specifics of where it grew that struck a chord.

15:01:57 From Anthony Acciavatti to Everyone:

Sublime is always available and a question of how attuned I am with it or not... Walking down the street or driving and I can have the experience...when on a deep meditation retreat, I had the physical experience of a lack of separation between myself and the environment around me... Kant's definition did not work for me...

I'm struggling with Kant's definition, too... and the moments when I'm hoping to experience the sublime,... that self-consciousness... The crowd is a locus of the sublime...

15:01:59 From Kristen to Everyone:

Audrey relates to that strongly. She went to Bryce National Park, to the canyons, was her first time in a national park in the US, and she understood for the first time why so many people love America and want to immigrate to the US, and why in Chinese it is called, literally, beautiful country. She experienced some version of the sublime there but also...she looked at her cat...

15:02:48 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

J \_ Tadpole Swarm Sublime. Not a particular instance nor profound; last year in France visiting an old house, a lake nearby to swim and cool off in the summer; one moment on the edge of the lake there was suddenly a little school of tadpoles that came by, and it really hit me that these are part of a vast, infinite creation experiencing itself.

A \_ Is there a recurrence of memory? Childhood was a time to sit and watch, but as a grown person, do we lose that moment? Is the connection that flattens time part of the Sublime? We glimpse our childhood. (Childhood is destiny. - Rilke / The Future is Ancestral)

Natural Witness Sublime. Seeing my son see the sea for the first time. Contemplation. Viewing. Inauguration. The first time he was in contemplative mood that I was aware of.

15:02:50 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

P \_ Musical Sublime. – Mahler Symphony number 3 outside of Chicago; Gursky's Symphony Number 3. Tingles. A space.

E \_ Dance Sublime. The first time seeing Min Tanaka dance; the opening movement was him standing up over the course of 45-50 minutes. He was sitting; then, 50 minutes later, he was standing, but he never moved. Not a fold of cloth fell, not a single detectable gesture. The audience, myself included, witnessed the becoming imperceptible of the dancer.

15:11:42 From Etienne Turpin to Everyone:

\_ Gesture. My means of conveying is writing. I have time as a writer, but the gesture is meaningful and doesn't have to be verbal.

\_ Words can take us there. Embodied Way. Movement. Non-verbal. When asked a question by the Buddha, the respondent holds up a flower. The answer is non-verbal.

\_ The experience of witnessing the child witness the sea is it.

\_ That is it.

15:12:03 From Anthony Acciavatti to Everyone:

Breakout Room 2

This question gets at the grasping aspect of the sublime... Silence is where I go with this. But it's hard to scale silence...

Practices can help prep the soil...a condition helpful for that is when encouraging compassion for others... inclining the heart to receptivity and noticing people and the environment...

Every event I've been to at Strother School sets the soil well... having led wilderness retreats and sometimes people take in sublime surroundings and other times their legs hurt and they are uncomfortable... how much can you guide someone to having a sublime experience... seems like an open question...

Diversity of outcome can result from a jolt of meta-awareness...allowing for anything to come up...

Resonating with these words and the sublime as a potential energy source... thinking of the practice of 'voices of the field,' where someone takes on the voice of someone who is not in the circle... being open to the sublime and open to others...

15:12:05 From Kim Loeb to Everyone:

Jac: textural sublime.

David: anxiety: elimination of the pupils. Your mind is receiving images that are not in your reality.

Kittens: nonsense behaviour, failure of being able to do something. Examples: jumping and falling.

Kim: swimming in the great blue ocean in the open sea. Not knowing what is beneath you.

Connor: sharing a poem of a teacher or a video of them.

David: teacher talking and a fluid form of the world entering the senses of the listener.

Connor: snowflakes coming out of the mouth of the teacher, something small and incomplete.

David: divine hole in the ceiling with intense light shooting in right on peoples forehead.

15:12:28 From Tom Anderson to Everyone:

Gloria had a sublime moment with the statue of David in Florence and noticed that the crowd was focused on selfies with the sculpture.

Stephen felt the sublime with his grandkids looking at a rainbow sparkle.

Maura discovers sublime by reading, in this case "Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents." She explores the sublime in her writing.

I felt it in a terrible run in Central Park as I tried to keep up with the group. I wonder about the difference between the sublime and flow.

Melissa struggled to remember a moment of Sublime even as she enjoyed sunsets and nature. She feels like it is reserved for a handful of experiences in life.

15:12:40 From Kristen to Everyone:

Mitra is a dancer who dances Argentine tango, this was the first thing that came up for her as a way to convey the experience she had with this conversation partner, like following, in an improvised tango dance, a partner she's comfortable with but who also keeps her on her toes.

Nabil does not answer the question but he thinks of boredom, like a male narrator describing their abstract experience, immediately thinks of how challenging this is and how whatever it is turns into something not reproducible in abstract language, but he likes this image of two, of co-creation.

When Audrey was in Bryce, she had the thought that she wished she could take everyone she loved to be in the canyons with her, her parents, her best friend, she wanted with all her heart for the cat she fostered to be in the canyon. She would straight up teleport a dead cat into the canyon.

Kristen suggests moving through the keyhole of another's dark silhouette.

15:12:50 From Joanna Fiduccia to Everyone:

Scale? An old technology for communicating historically inculcated practices for conceiving the relation between vastness/vast structures and the self.

The ineffable center can only get expressed indirectly, as what motivates us to continue to attempt to make works – aligned with the power to create.

Analogous experiences. A mosh pit. A surrendering of sorts would be necessary. Meditation (also a surrendering). Meditating in a mosh pit?

Conveying the journey rather than the representing the object that was perceived as sublime.

A representation of the object seems to fall short.

15:13:05 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

We spoke about "storytelling" as the original medium for conveying and representing experience (replicated in how we each shared our sublime experiences with one another). We then spoke about different mediums and what they can and cannot do to signify and convey.. and the distinct and divergent temporalities and structures of different medias - sound, painting, moving image, and composite forms..

15:13:13 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Michael: the question of how \*I\* convey an experience (of the sublime) brings in the subject/self

Avik: it's part of the experience of the illusion of the self to want to share a story, share one's experience (we wake up every morning in the story of the self)

Why bother sharing at all? You can't just tell people "you are an illusion" (!) Stopping to ask: even if the self is an illusion, can we use our attention wisely and experience a pathway to this greater thing


Helen: doesn't want to bring didacticism to the sublime, not wanting an administrative task of translating experiences but wanting to do it again, FEEL it again. Instead a space of potential.

Sublime and possibility, potential, risk!

Donica: subjectivity of the sublime, do we all experience it in the same places? Not that simple

15:14:29 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:

Hello darkness, my old friend...

Peter Schmidt, Tyler Sookochoff, Vitória Oliveira: 

15:14:59 From Bailey D. to Everyone:

Thank you Johannes!

15:15:02 From Ana Cristina (Tininha) to Everyone:

Thank you so much

15:15:03 From Julian Chehirian to Everyone:

Thank you!

15:15:15 From Anthony Acciavatti to Everyone:

Thank you, Johannes!

15:15:28 From Johannes Wankhammer to Everyone:


Thank you all for your attention!

15:15:40 From Donica Bettanin (she/her) to Everyone:

Thank you Johannes!!

15:16:16 From Ana Cristina (Tininha) to Everyone:

Welcome Donica!

Donica Bettanin (she/her): 



15:16:26 From Helen Miller to Everyone:  
I really appreciated her attention in the breakout.

15:18:57 From D. Graham Burnett to Everyone:  
davidgrahamburnett@gmail.com

15:19:24 From David Landes to Everyone:  
davidblandes@gmail.com

15:19:34 From David Landes to Everyone:  
add me too! (?)