Photography 2

Landscape

Contents

Before you start

Your OCA **Student Handbook** should be able to answer most questions about the basics of this course and all other OCA courses so keep this to hand.

Course aims

Photography 2: Landscape aims to help you build both your practical skills and your theoretical understanding of landscape photography. You'll be introduced to the different ways in which photographers and artists have used the land and other spaces and structures within it to explore and communicate complex issues and assert their point of view. The course draws on the practical skills developed at Level 1 but, importantly, seeks to expand your understanding of the uses and nature of landscape photography and the relationship between historical and contemporary understandings of the genre. You'll be encouraged to explore and engage with the spaces around your own environment and use this research to identify your own personal, social or political position within it and to articulate your own viewpoint as an independent practitioner. There's an emphasis on critical, contemporary and experimental approaches to the genre and you'll explore different ways of conceiving landscape practice and new ways to present your work.

Photography 2: Landscape aims to support you to:

- develop visual and conceptual strategies in landscape photography
- contextualise your practice within the historical and cultural framework of landscape photography
- develop your ability to express a personal response to the genre
- develop your critical, analytical, evaluative and reflective skills.

Course outcomes

On successful completion of the course you'll be able to:

- effectively plan and execute a self-directed landscape-based assignment
- demonstrate a wider knowledge of the themes and issues surrounding landscape practice in relation to visual culture and historical and political perspectives
- demonstrate knowledge of current trends and debates within the genre and relate them to your own practice
- effectively and confidently manage research and learning resources
- begin to articulate your personal voice as an informed and independent practitioner
- critically review the work of other photographers in relation to your own work.

Even if you don't intend to submit your work for assessment, it's useful to take ownership of these outcomes to aid your learning and use as a means of self-assessment. You can check your progress against the learning outcomes in your learning log, when you review your progress against each assignment.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with the OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA system is explained in some detail in your **Student handbook.**

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – your experience of photography so far, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope to achieve from it.

Email your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help them to understand how best to support you during the course. Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

Getting feedback

At the end of each part of the course you'll need to submit your work so that your tutor can give you some feedback on your progress. This submission should be a cross-section of the work you've done, including:

- your assignment work, including finished and preliminary work
- a short written evaluation of your experience of the assignment
- relevant pages of your learning log or blog
- an update on your progress with the critical review (Assignment Four).

Show this work to your tutor by gathering it together and either posting or emailing it (you can use a free file-sharing service if there's a lot of material) or you can add it to your blog as you work through each part of the course. For this Level 2 course, you may submit prints, digital images or a combination of the two, unless you're specifically directed otherwise.

Make sure that you label any work that you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Remember to email your tutor to tell them when you're ready to

submit so that they know to look at your blog or expect a parcel. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving your assignment but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

It will be helpful for your tutor to see the work that you produce in between assignments. You may agree, for instance, that you'll send your tutor samples of your work or make your work available on your blog, if you need your tutor to comment on something in particular or if you have a problem that you need help with.

Your learning log

Your learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course. If you're new to OCA courses, read the **Introducing learning logs** study guide for further information. You'll find this on the OCA student website.

Use your learning log to record your progress through the course. Your learning log should contain:

- your thoughts on the work you produce for each exercise
- your ideas and observations as you work through the course
- your reflections on the reading you do and any research you carry out
- your tutor's reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

You're strongly recommended to set up your learning log as an online blog. This blog could document your work for the exercises and assignments and provide links to research material. Setting up a blog is free and can be done through websites such as Blogger, Tumblr or Wordpress. Alternatively you can set up a blog within the OCA student website.

Planning ahead

This Level 2 course represents 600 hours of learning time. The course should take about a year and a half to complete if you spend around 8 hours each week on it.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress. You'll need to allow extra time if you decide to have your work formally assessed.

Photography 2: Landscape is divided into six parts, corresponding to the course assignments; as part of Assignment Six you'll carry out a pre-assessment review – preparing your work for assessment, if that's what you choose to do. Parts One to Five each address a different issue or topic and are separated into projects designed to tackle the topic in bite-sized chunks. As well as information and advice, each project offers exercises that slowly build up and feed into the assignments that you'll send to your tutor.

The first assignment has a diagnostic element and is designed to give your tutor a feel for your work at an early stage in the course.

The critical review

For Assignment Four you'll submit a 2,000-word essay or critical review on a topic of your choice. This may be the first time that you've had to produce a substantial piece of academic writing so start thinking about it as you work through the course. You should be thinking about the topic for your critical review during Part 3 of the course and submit an outline proposal to your tutor at the beginning of Part 4 at the latest Your tutor can then start to give you guidance on how to proceed further. You'll find more information about the critical review in Part Four of this course guide.

Reading

You'll find a recommended reading list at the end of this course guide. There is also a regularly updated version of the reading list on the OCA website.

Referencing your reading

Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article or website straight away. You must fully reference any other work that you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard referencing system. You'll find a guide to this on the OCA student website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event – and ensure that you don't inadvertently plagiarise someone else's work.

Online learning materials and student-led research

The OCA student website contains resource material and links to online archives you may need to use. This course guide will point you to specific learning materials that you need to refer to for particular exercises. Some of these learning materials can be sourced from the reading list while others are publicly available online. Some resources have been specifically prepared for this course – for example, **Core resources: The White Cube.pdf.** You'll find these on the OCA student website http://oca-student.com in your profile listed under 'Core Resources' and on your 'Studies' page (accessible from the homepage) listed under 'Course Resources'. Your learning log should contain evidence of your having accessed and looked into all the online research materials mentioned in the exercises.

Thinking about assessment

Once you've completed and submitted your first assignment, you'll need to decide whether you want to go for formal accreditation at the end of the course, i.e. assessment. Your tutor is there to help you decide. **The Assessment and how to get qualified** study guide, available on the OCA student website, gives more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course:

- all six assignments as submitted to your tutor plus any amended versions (i.e. amended in the light of tutor feedback)
- your tutor reports
- your learning log or blog url.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

If your fifth assignment (self-directed project) isn't submitted as a conventional set of prints (e.g. book, slideshow) we suggest you include a portfolio of the photographs (max A4 / 8" x 12"). This will allow assessors to evaluate the quality of your work independently of how you have elected to present it.

Assessment criteria

These are central to the assessment process for this course, so if you're going to have your work assessed to gain formal credits, please make sure you take note of these criteria and consider how each of the assignments you complete demonstrates evidence of each criterion. On completion of each assignment, and before you send your assignment to your tutor, test yourself against the criteria – in other words, do a self-assessment and see how you think you would do. Write down your findings for each assignment you've completed in your learning log, noting all your perceived strengths and weaknesses, taking into account the criteria every step of the way. This will be helpful for your tutor to see, as well as helping you prepare for assessment.

The assessment criteria for this course are as follows:

- Demonstration of technical and visual skills – materials, techniques, observational skills, visual awareness, design and compositional skills.
- Quality of outcome – content, application of knowledge, presentation of work in a coherent manner, discernment, conceptualisation of thoughts, communication of ideas.
- Demonstration of creativity – imagination, experimentation, invention, development of a personal voice.
- Context – reflection, research, critical thinking (learning logs, critical reviews and essays).

Pre-assessment review

If you decide to have your work formally assessed, you'll need to spend some time at the end of the course preparing your finished work for submission. How you present your work to the assessors is of critical importance and can make the difference between an average mark and an excellent mark. Because of this your tutor is available to guide you on presenting your work.

Preparation for professional practice is a key element of this course so treat the task of putting together your assessment portfolio as an extra assignment with your tutor as 'client'. This will help you develop your skills in preparing your work for presentation to clients, exhibiting bodies, etc. There's more on preparing your work for assessment in Part Six.

OCA website and forums

Throughout the course you'll be expected to show increasing autonomy and to interact with the wider community of learners at the OCA. There are lots of other OCA students currently studying photography; use the OCA website forums as a place to meet them. The forums are a great place to ask questions of other students, share some of your research and join the debates that are taking place. Start by logging on to the forums and introducing yourself. Find out who else is on the course and say hello.

Introduction

Landscape – Perspectives on place
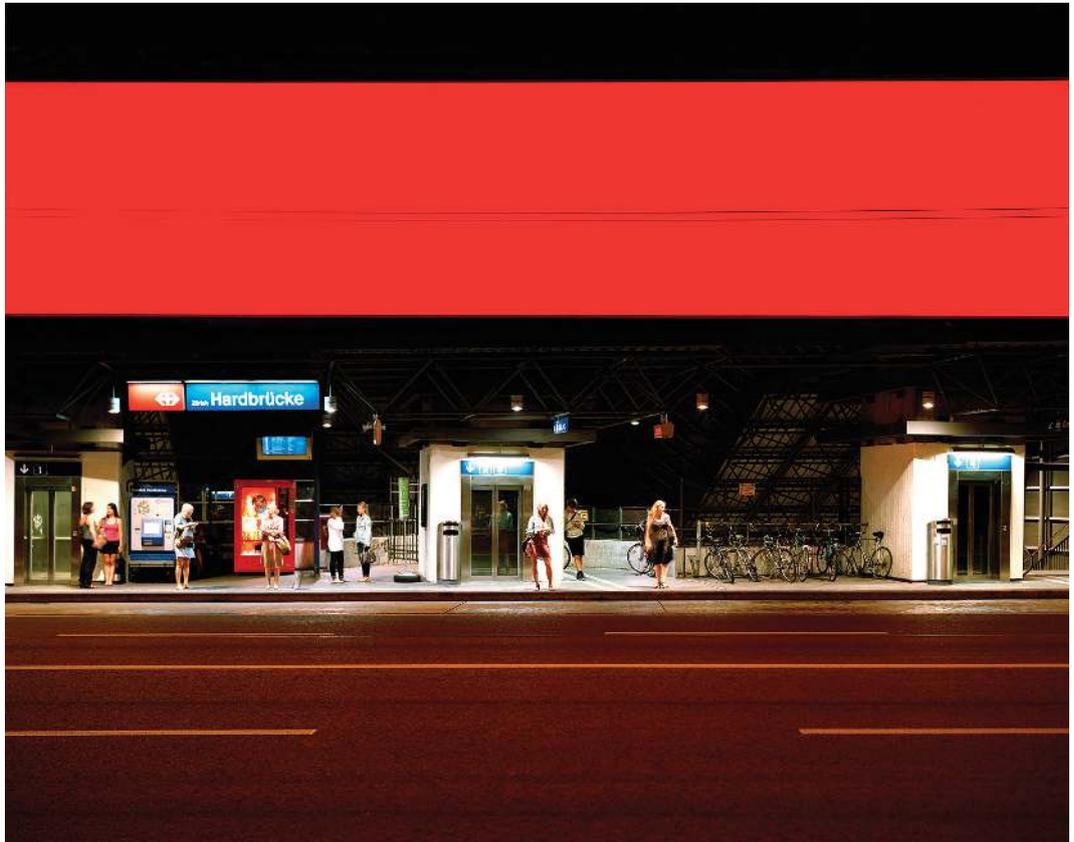
Jesse Alexander *Hardbrücke,* Zurich 2012

"Do not put off doing a coveted picture until another year, for next year the scene will look very different. You will never be able twice to get exactly the same thing."

(Peter Henry Emerson, 1889, 'Hints on Art' in *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art*)

A wider view of landscape

The 'land' – or perhaps, 'our environment', or 'the terrain we inhabit', or simply 'the space that surrounds us' – has featured within all documented aspects of human culture: adorning the walls of the caves that our ancestors inhabited; as settings for theological texts and mythological narratives; as a backdrop to historical friezes; as the theme of folksongs and symphonies. The landscape – including water – is an ever-present motif, reminding us of the intrinsic relationship between mankind and his surroundings. Whether celebrated for its beauty and the bounties it provides or respected for its power and the challenges it presents, the different ways we've represented the landscape – and continue to represent it – tell us, above all, about the depth, range and contrasting values we place upon it.

As you'll see when you work through Part One of this course, photographic landscape traditions, like other genres, are grounded in landscape painting, and these conventions – including particular attention to the 'play' of light on the land and strict compositional standards – have continued to dominate landscape photography, within all applications of the medium. For the vast majority of people working with photography, whether as a tourist or within professional practice, the camera provides an opportunity to record, if not an accurate representation of the scene before them, then an amplified or enhanced interpretation of it. This reflects an urge – perhaps even an instinct – to tame the land and, in an abstract sense, to take ownership of it.

Photography 2: Landscape remains true to the technical rigour of traditional landscape practice, and its heritage is a starting point for our investigation, but at its heart is a belief that landscape is essentially about exploring the relationships between the maker, their subjects, and where they are, both geographically and spiritually or psychologically. This definition of the genre might appear to be at best liberal, and at worst perhaps even taking the term for granted. Hopefully, however, this course will provide an opportunity for you to develop your own views on what may or may not constitute a work of landscape photography – or whether such classification is helpful or even relevant within contemporary practice.

The course will touch on many of the key developments in photographic landscape practice, but it's not a chronological narrative; rather, it looks at certain predominant themes within and surrounding the genre. You'll look at some of the most eminent practitioners within the

field, some of whom will perhaps already be familiar to you. But you'll also look at lesser known emerging artists, and there will be examples of projects completed within photography BA programmes. What these different practitioners have in common is an approach that fits within the narrative of this course, and with particular topics covered in this course guide. Although you'll look at the work of photographers and artists from across the globe who have made exciting contributions to photography, this course – like many other narratives around the medium – takes a predominantly Anglo-American perspective. Sadly, there isn't the opportunity within the confines of a single course to cover more territory, but hopefully you'll be inspired enough to explore further afield, within your own research.

This course guide offers a brief introduction to a vast area of our visual culture and provides a rough guide to help you navigate a route through some of this territory. Remember that this course, as well as the underlying principles behind it, effectively represents one individual subjective position in relation to contemporary landscape practice, albeit an informed one. You'll be referred to specific books, photographic projects, and other works throughout the course. The extent to which you choose to engage with these materials will depend on how interesting or relevant you find a particular aspect in relation to your own practice or broader interests. Don't limit your appreciation of the subject to the course guide alone; investigate the views of other writers, photographers and artists working in other media to inform your subject knowledge and depth of understanding.

Photography 2: **The course at a glance**

Part One: **Beauty and the sublime**

Part One explores traditional, pictorial approaches to landscape photography and also looks at the genre beyond the medium of photography – specifically, the complex and ongoing relationship between photography and painting. You'll also look at the urban landscape, which is a subject that has a particular relationship to the medium of photography. You'll examine two particularly important principles within landscape: beauty and the sublime. At the end of Part One you'll have the opportunity to demonstrate an awareness of some of the traditions of the genre within a practical assignment. This assignment is semi-diagnostic, meaning it is an opportunity for you to introduce yourself and your ideas to your tutor, and for your tutor to gauge your level of technical ability. During your work on Part One, you'll also begin working on Assignment Six: Transitions. For this assignment you'll engage with a very specific location and revisit it over the duration of the course, recording the changes that the space undergoes.

Part Two: Landscape as journey

Building upon these themes, Part Two explores landscape practice as a means of defining territory. You'll look at nineteenth-century topographic photographers and how journeys – in one form or another – have been used as a means to make practical photographic work. You'll see how landscape photography has crossed over into sculpture- and performance-based art, with an examination of 'land artists' and also an introduction to psychogeography. Your second assignment is a practical project based on a short journey.

Part Three: Landscape as political text

Part Three considers subject matter far beyond the confines of the camera's viewfinder, and explores the relationship between landscape, politics, history and memory. Central to Part Three is the idea of negotiating the different factors that turn a 'space', i.e. something that may have been unspecified, mundane or otherwise ordinary, into a 'place' – something more subjective, such as a 'landmark', destination or something with spiritual or psychological significance. You'll look at how practitioners have used landscape as a means to make very uncompromising political statements. At the end of Part Three you'll produce a project around a specific location that has personal or historical significance.

Part Four: Landscape and identities

Part Four explores ideas of landscape and identity – from how an entire country perceives itself to how an individual relates their self to their immediate surroundings. Part Four will offer you the opportunity to consider in detail how you'll approach the fifth assignment, which will be an entirely self-directed project. The main assignment for this part of the course will be an essay on an aspect of landscape photography, which should also relate to your own practice in some way.

Part Five: Resolution

During the fifth part of the course you'll predominantly be working on your self-directed project, but alongside this you'll look at the different contexts in which we encounter and consume landscape imagery, with a focus on contemporary fine art, conceptual and documentary practice. You'll examine different modes of presentation, including the photobook, audio-visual slideshows, as well as different types of gallery spaces. Part Five will also begin to address how you'll contextualise and present your work appropriately to an audience.

Part Six: **Preparing for assessment**

This short section provides some guidance for reviewing your work ahead of formal assessment, should you decide to have your work on this course assessed. Once you've begun preparing your work for assessment, you'll have a pre-assessment tutorial (see 'Before you start'). For Assignment Six you'll submit your completed work for the 'Transitions' project that you've worked on throughout the course.

From Level 1 (HE4) to Level 2 (HE5)

If you've already completed a Level 2 course, you will by now appreciate some of the differences from studying at Level 1 – notably, that there is a greater expectation placed on students to begin studying more independently, taking greater ownership of both their practical and academic research and, in particular, developing assignment briefs that are more closely aligned with their personal interests. If this is your first Level 2 course you should find that it's structured in a way that facilitates this transition. You'll certainly find that there is much less practical tuition and more contextual discussion than at Level 1.

By this point in your studies you should have developed an effective range of photographic skills, and be able to command the camera and associated software to a reasonable degree of competence, enabling you to produce and present imagery of an appropriate standard. Of course your level and range of skills will continue to evolve; indeed, this is an integral aspect of your personal development as a practitioner. However, unlike Level 1, Level 2 courses place greater emphasis on developing your contextual knowledge of photography, as well as key historical and contemporary themes within visual culture. So, although some of the exercises are practical activities, a high proportion are critical exercises that ask you to read a specific piece of text or watch a short interview online, then record your responses in your learning log. By now you should be familiar with learning logs and have settled on a format that functions effectively for you, but remind yourself of our expectations by revisiting the guidelines on www. oca-student.com. When you submit your assignments to your tutor, they must be able to view the relevant pages of your learning log.

The reduced focus on practical activities within the exercises means you should invest more time than you might have on Level 1 assignments, particularly in order to develop ideas, for example returning and re-shooting if your results are not as effective as you would like them to be, or to allow your contextual research to take you in a slightly different direction with your practice. Look briefly through each part of the course before you begin work to get a rough idea of what it will involve and the content that you'll explore. Most importantly, study the assignment brief at the beginning of each part of the course, and work on this (i.e. generate ideas, conduct

research, do test shoots and technical experiments) throughout. That way, you can develop your practical assignment whilst learning about the themes associated with that part of the course and its assignment brief. This process is built into Part One, but you're expected to manage this for yourself from then on.

Work closely with your tutor. Don't just use them to provide feedback on completed assignments; keep them informed of your progress and run your ideas for approaching each assignment brief by them before developing it substantially or submitting it. Since the assignment briefs at Level 2 are deliberately less prescriptive than they were at Level 1, your tutor will expect a degree of negotiation. But please remember that your tutor is there to help you develop your ideas, not provide you with them. Where possible provide your tutor with as much detail as you can, such as any test shots.

A kit list?

Traditionally, OCA landscape photography courses have come with a list of minimum equipment requirements. However, due to the rapidly evolving nature of digital photography – the medium of choice (or necessity) for most students and professional photographers – particular pieces of equipment such as black and white, polarising, or even neutral-density filters are perhaps not as relevant to students as they once were.

Landscape work has been – and continues to be – carried out predominantly on larger film formats (i.e. 6cm x 6cm 'medium format', or 5″ x 4″ 'large format' film). These are probably the most common formats used by the practitioners that you'll encounter throughout this course. However, as you'll see, there has been plenty of experimental and conceptually challenging work made on different, smaller cameras, or even without any cameras at all.

Hopefully this course will help you to appreciate the reasons why photographers choose to work with a particular type of camera or film format. Often it is a question of quality: the unrivalled resolution provided by a 10″ x 8″ negative lends itself to making larger gallery prints that are free from visible film grain. On the other hand, the discretion of a compact camera – even a camera-phone – can allow photographers to capture more spontaneous scenarios, and sometimes communicate an intimacy between the photographer and their work.

By now, we hope you won't feel it necessary to supply a description of your exposure settings and focal lengths, etc., with each photograph you submit for your assignments, unless of course your tutor requests it. You should instead focus on describing what you're hoping to communicate and how your images do this. However, when you consider strategies for your practice or evaluate the work of others, it is important to reflect on how different types of camera can influence the

way a photographer works, such as the speed with which they can operate or how conspicuous the camera makes them, as well as influencing the work they produce.

Most students will be working with a digital SLR, but please take advantage of any opportunity you might have to borrow – or even just have a demonstration of – larger format film cameras, in order to get a better sense of the differences in working with this equipment. However, it is important to reiterate that students who have access to more sophisticated equipment are not necessarily at an advantage over students who do not: it is your creativity that will help you more than anything. Having said that, mastering the technology is a fundamental skill, particularly within the genre of landscape photography, so make sure that you're thoroughly familiar with whatever equipment you use.

So, enrolling on this course won't provide you with an excuse to rush out and buy a new camera! However, if you don't already have one, make sure that you have access to a sturdy tripod that you are comfortable to work with, a shutter release cable or remote shutter release control, and a stopwatch.

And finally...

Although many students are drawn to landscape practice because it can provide opportunities to get away from the computer and engage with the outdoors, it is crucial for you to appreciate that this course is not strictly concerned with photographing exotic locations, spectacular scenery or dramatic weather conditions. Whether you live in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, in an inner-city tower block or live out of a string of hotel rooms, this course will encourage you to incorporate your current location and situation within your practice, wherever it is. We hope you'll enjoy taking a closer, more critical look at your surroundings, and that you will begin to articulate your individual perspective on place.

Part one

Beauty and the sublime

Helen Sear *Beyond the View 5* 2010, courtesy of the artist

Project **Thinking about landscape**

Perhaps more than any other genre of visual art, landscape is beset with traditions, conventions and preconceptions. Within specifically western cultures, we – meaning populations at large – have very particular ideas about what may or may not be considered a piece of landscape art. These ideas include what might constitute 'suitable' subject matter, technical aspects (canvas ratio and orientation, compositional depth, etc.), and where we might expect to encounter images of the landscape. Consider why you enrolled on this particular course. Was it because you wanted to learn how to make 'better' landscape photographs and had a clear idea of the kind of imagery you aspired to create? Perhaps you thought this course would provide opportunities to get out and about away from the computer, enjoying some fresh air? Or maybe the genre (as you presently appreciate it) doesn't particularly inspire you but you wanted to challenge yourself? These are just a few reasons why past students have enrolled on the Level 2 landscape course.

Part One explores some of the traditional conventions within landscape art, and in particular some of the technical aspects. Although this course encourages you to develop a more critical approach to landscape practice however you choose to work, you should adopt a rigorous approach to developing your practical and research skills, and demand of yourself the highest technical standards you can manage. This level of commitment is reflected in the practice of the photographers you'll encounter throughout the course.

Exercise 1.1: **Preconceptions**

For this first exercise we ask you to completely abandon technique, pick up a pencil and draw a very rough sketch of a 'landscape' picture. The purpose of this exercise is to examine and express your preconceptions about the genre. This exercise shouldn't be laboured; don't think too much about it but consider the following questions to help get you started:

- What shape is the picture?
- What sort of terrain is depicted?
- What's in it? Are there people?
- How are the subjects arranged?
- How might you describe the 'mood' of the picture?

Annotate your sketch as necessary. If you're reluctant to draw a sketch or diagram, make a list or brainstorm your ideas.

Put your sketch in your learning log and reflect on why you've drawn what you have. Consider what might have influenced your current understanding of the genre (i.e. where you've seen the kind of imagery you've sketched – perhaps in galleries, magazines, or formal education), and any other factors such as your personal circumstances or background. Also, write a few lines on why you chose to study this course and what you hope to learn from it.

Although this might seem like a frivolous activity, it should get you thinking about traditions and conventions within landscape practice, and encourage you to consider why (and indeed whether) they exist. It will also serve as an interesting reference point when you come to the end of the course.

Early photography and painting

"Perhaps even more than the portrait, landscape photography remains encoded within the language of academic painting and the traditions of landscape art which developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

(Clarke, 1997, p.55)

In some respects, you are at a similar point to the early pioneers of photography. As they experimented with the technical aspects of the medium in the mid nineteenth century, they explored the possibilities of applying these to a variety of subject matter. At this point in your studies, you too should be developing your understanding of different processes and techniques, and also challenging yourself to work with different subjects as often as possible. To expand your knowledge, as when studying any subject, you need to look at what has been done before.

This is also an opportune moment to consider the genesis of the photographic process, and how closely early photography related to painting. It was largely due to William Henry Fox Talbot's (1800–77) frustration at being unable to draw or paint with any degree of accuracy that the positive-negative analogue process underpinning modern photography was conceived. At Lake Como in Italy whilst on his Grand Tour of Europe in 1833, Fox Talbot decided he would find a way to fix the image within the *camera lucida*, which was an aid to drawing employed by painters including Vermeer and a popular gadget for the upper-class Victorian traveller. It would be overly simplistic to describe Fox Talbot as a frustrated, aspiring painter – he was a gregarious naturalist who made contributions to a range of disciplines. However, it is clear that many of his photographic experiments took as inspiration subjects and views that were typical of painting and other related media.

On the other side of the Channel the earlier experiments of Niépce (1765–1833) and Daguerre (1787–1851), announced just before Talbot's calotype process, were greeted with mixed feelings by the art establishment. Ironically these were closer to the singular artefact that Talbot originally intended to make than his process, which allowed for the mass production of photographic images. Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) famously responded to Dageurre's process with "From today painting is dead". However, Delaroche did not mean this quite as literally as it might seem, and believed that photography would in fact be an invaluable asset to the painter, for example by doing away with the necessity for many preliminary sketches:

> *"In short, the admirable discovery of Monsieur Daguerre is an enormous service rendered to the artists."*
>
> (Paul Delaroche quoted in Moholy, 1939, p.39)

'Service' seems an important choice of word here; implying, perhaps, that the usefulness of photography was limited to simply aiding the painter, rather than a creative medium for artists in its own right. Some well-known painters who fulfilled Delaroche's prophecy and made use of photography in one way or another include Claude Monet, Edgar Dégas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Gauguin and Georges Seurat – as well as many contemporary practitioners, such as Francis Bacon, David Hockney, Chuck Close and Gerhard Richter.

The contribution of Eugène Atget (1857–1927) seems to prove Delaroche's point. Atget amassed an archive encompassing many thousands of glass plate negatives, consisting of views of the street life and architecture of Paris. Atget is an elusive figure within the canon of great photographers. He supported himself by selling prints to painters, architects and stage designers as reference images, and later in his life to museums and collections. These were sold as records, however, rather than artefacts. Uncelebrated during his lifetime, his work came to the attention of the surrealists in particular. John Szarkowski (1925–2007) played a major part in championing Atget's photography by acquiring, exhibiting and publishing a major part of Atget's archive whilst director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Others, notably Rosalind Krauss in her essay 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View' (1982), have been critical about the retrospective placing of Atget's work (and that of other nineteenth-century photographers) within the context of the contemporary art gallery; one reason for this is that Atget didn't demonstrate artistic judgement by discerning the strongest works from his vast collection. For a thorough rebuff of Krauss's argument, though, see Tod Papageorge's lecture published in *Core Curriculum: Writings on Photography* (2011) New York: Aperture.

Similar debates continue today around the validity of photojournalism and reportage work and the 'appropriation' of photographs from archives and other, often personal, family collections, within the art gallery context. But in the late nineteenth century, the mechanical aspect of photography was the main setback in terms of its acceptance as a fine art medium. Ironically, a more 'photographic' way of seeing was actually already in place within painting, thanks to the use of the *camera lucida* and *camera obscura*, which allowed Cartesian perspective and photographic realism to become the dominant visual aesthetic of western visual culture. Photography – or rather the apparatus of photography and its particular way of visualising the world – had been in place, steering the fine arts, long before Fox Talbot, Niépce and Daguerre.

Although today we generally think of photographic images in terms of art and design, early photography was only accessible to those with quite specialist knowledge of optics and chemistry (with the associated economic implications) and so was considered part of the realm of science and its related institutions. As you'll see, photography came to fruition within the industrial and colonial age and cannot be separated from the social contexts of the period, including scientific exploration, the advent of mass media, migration and industrialisation. Certainly photography fulfilled many useful functions of the time: primarily to illustrate things, but also to communicate information (journalism), produce mementos of loved ones, both living and dead, serve judicial institutions (e.g. criminal mug shots), and as a method of scientific inquiry (e.g. eugenics), to name but a few applications. Even nowadays, some major art institutions have been slow to acknowledge photography as a valid practice, either within the fine arts or in its own sphere, because of its mechanical and scientific origins as well as its functional omnipresence within society.

Exercise 1.2: **Photography in the museum or in the gallery?**

Read Rosalind Krauss's essay 'Photography's Discursive Spaces: Landscape/View'. Summarise Krauss's key points in your learning log (in note form) and add any comments or reflections.

The essay was first published in 1982 in *Art Journal* Vol. 42, No. 4, pp. 311–19 but you'll find it at: http://dm.postmediumcritique.org/Krauss_PhotographysDiscursiveSpaces.pdf

Copy the url into your web browser.

Project **Pictorialism**

""Pictorialism" is only an exaggeration of what the Photograph thinks of itself."

<div align="right">(Barthes, 1982, p.31)</div>

Some early photographers believed that whilst it had its practical applications, photography also had potential as an expressive medium, and that is was possible to conceive of photographs not just as *images* that rendered an objective, optical analogy of an object or a scene, but as subjective impressions – as *pictures*. Some painters, such as Oscar Rejlander (1857–75), saw the potential offered by photography and adopted it as their principal mode of expression. This debate came to a head in the 1890s when the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring, founded by Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901), split from the organisation that would become the Royal Photographic Society, arguing that the organisation was too preoccupied with the scientific rather than the artistic side of photography. Ironically pictorialism, which was the style and approach of the Linked Ring, was soon adopted by the RPS and remains a strong element of the institution's identity today.

The Linked Ring's philosophy was that a photographic print could be considered as a work of art, despite the necessity for some kind of camera apparatus and related chemistry. The central element to the pictorial approach was not necessarily to do with the taking or making of the exposure, but lay in the printing process. Pictorialists explored alternative ways to subvert the mainstream industrial processes, which rendered continuous tones and optical clarity from glass negatives. Instead of applying the photosensitive coatings to the surfaces of their prints as evenly and uniformly as possible, pictorialists were keen to leave visible brushstrokes and marks on the print surface, revealing to the viewer the unique hand and artistry of the maker. Alternative processes included the bromoil, cyanotype and gum bichromate processes, which all rendered images with less clarity and imposed a more atmospheric aesthetic. Imitating the more impressionistic look of other two-dimensional media such as drawing, pastels and painting was also intentional.

The making of the actual negative was also explored, most notably by Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson, who created some of the first photomontages by assembling multiple negatives to create a scene with the appearance of having been captured within a single exposure. This subversion of the then undisputed belief that photography stood for accurate, truthful representation of real events and subjects was certainly one of the more radical explorations of the medium at the time.

The themes and subjects explored, however, were conventional enough and did little to challenge the art establishment. Robinson's *Fading Away* (1858) was a typical sentimental narrative, and Rejlander's *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) was an allegorical scenario on a grand

scale. The tableau was a fairly exceptional phenomenon in terms of the history of photography, and has been re-examined in more recent years by practitioners such as Jeff Wall. Graham Clarke (1997, p.44) summarises these two seminal works of the period:

> *"Like Talbot's images, they depend upon a known visual language and convention, as found in the work of contemporary painters like Millais and Holman Hunt. They are, as much as Talbot's work, examples of the photograph as a painting."*

However, the artifice of the 'photographs' of Rejlander and Robinson was met with scornful disdain by contemporaries such as Peter Henry Emerson (1856–1936), who strongly believed in a purer photographic way of seeing, more akin to human vision. Emerson is something of an exception, as he accumulated a large body of work on traditional rural practices around the Norfolk Broads that collectively serves as an invaluable document of the time. [In recent years, Justin Partyka has made a similarly large body of work around East Anglia, which has been related to Emerson's work. See: http://justinpartyka.com] The norm within pictorialism was, and remains, the production of singular, one-off pieces, designed to convey the maker's mood at the moment it was made and to satisfy the eyes of the viewer. The singular-image tradition (as

Peter Henry Emerson, *The Amwell Magna Fishery on the River Lea* 1888

opposed to working with series or sequences of images) is still upheld by 'photography salon' type organisations, camera clubs, competitions and other societies.

Exercise 1.3: **Establishing conventions**

Using internet search engines and any other resources, find at least 12 examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landscape paintings. List all of the commonalities you can find across your examples. Consider the same sorts of things as you did for the sketching exercise at the start of Part One. Where possible, try to find out *why* the examples you found were painted (e.g. public or private commission). Your research should provide you with some examples of the visual language and conventions that were known to the early photographers.

Now try to find some examples of landscape photographs *from any era* that conform to these conventions.

Collate your research and note down your reflections in your learning log.

Modernist approaches

"Do not call yourself an 'artist-photographer' and make 'artist-painters' and 'artist-sculptors' laugh; call yourself a photographer and wait for artists to call you brother."

(P H Emerson [1889] in Trachtenberg (ed.), 1980)

As you've seen, Emerson sought to distance photography from painting and began to explore and exploit the unique possibilities of the new medium. Whilst his photographs of rural life in East Anglia are in line with an idyllic, pastoral view of Victorian rural life, his approach and – more importantly – his view of what artistic photography could and should be, represented a change in direction for photography as art. He scorned the photographic tableau, which employed the modes of production of studio-based painters, and championed instead technical excellence whilst working from life, in the field. He departed from making softer, stylised photographs and began to make pictures that were sharply focused throughout the image. This implied a 'democracy' of the frame, where all of the subjects are on an equal footing in terms of their relation to other elements in the picture, and in their importance to the formation and interpretation of the scene.

It wasn't until considerably later that this kind of simpler, yet more technically robust approach was properly defined. This is attributed to Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) who became editor of *American Amateur Photographer* in 1893 and set up the highly influential magazine *Camera Work* in 1902. Stieglitz's contemporaries, who included Clarence White (1871–1925) and Edward Steichen (1879 – 1973), were known as the 'Photo-Secessionists', implying an ambition for photography to 'secede' from previously accepted ideas about photography, that is, serving purely practical purposes. Like their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere, the impressionistic approach was their visual style of choice. Through discourse within *Camera Work* and the associated 291 gallery, Stieglitz and his peers began to challenge the style and philosophy of pictorialism. The fact that it wasn't only photography that was exhibited at the 291, and that modern artists like Picasso, Rodin and Matisse were also represented, marked a significant strategy to align photography with the contemporary art world, rather than to imitate traditional styles, as was practised elsewhere.

"The advocates of pure or straight photography feel that by manipulating a print you lose the purity of tone which belongs especially to the photographic medium in trying to get effects that can be more satisfactorily obtained by the painter's brush."

(New York Times, 1912, quoted in Clarke, 1997, p.168)

1912 can certainly be identified as a defining moment within the history of pictorialism. In that year Stieglitz exhibited a collection of works, including one of the most celebrated photographs of all time, *The Steerage*. The image depicts, with clear photographic realism, a group of refused would-be immigrants boarding the SS Kaiser Wilhelm II to return to Europe. For Stieglitz, the image encapsulated an abstract collection of forms and tones alongside a sense of the emotional response he felt towards the scene he had witnessed. This retained the pictorialists' desire to render an emotional response within a photograph, but Stieglitz believed he had achieved this by embracing photography's unique ability to reproduce optical clarity captured within a split-second. The term 'straight photography' was used to define this approach, and it marked a radical shift towards celebrating photography – within creative circles – for what it really was. The show was positively received but photography still had a long way to go before being accepted more widely.

Exercise 1.4: **What is a photographer?**

Marius De Zayas (1880–1961) was an essayist, intellectual and curator of modern art and was closely allied to the 291 gallery. His essay 'Photography and Photography and Artistic-Photography', first published in *Camera Work* no. 41 (1913), makes a distinction between the 'artist photographer' and 'photographers'. Read the essay closely, summarising De Zayas' key points. In your learning log, write down your responses to his point of view, and consider whether these questions are still relevant today. As a practitioner yourself, where do you stand on this issue?

See: http://www.camramirez.com/pdf/DI_Week6_PhotoAndArt.pdf (copy link into your browser) or http://www.journal1913.org/pdfs/1913_issue2.pdf

Smaller apertures and visualisation

Two of the best-known figures within landscape photography, Edward Weston (1886–1958) and Ansel Adams (1902–84), are indebted to the influence of Stieglitz and the Photo-Secessionists. Weston was an aspiring artist who survived by taking portraits professionally and churning out un-challenging picturesque pictorial works. Following a meeting with Stieglitz, Weston changed direction; he took to the precisely composed, sharp and very photographic aesthetic as a valid form of artistic expression, and brought it back home to California. Ansel Adams had a similarly chance encounter with Paul Strand (1890–1976). It wasn't until 1932, however, that the f/64 group was formalised in San Francisco. The name referred to the minimum aperture of the lens (although this varies between lens designs), which yields the greatest depth of field and best optical quality throughout the image. The idea was to distinguish themselves from the softer, impressionistic imagery of traditional pictorialists.

The relationship that Adams and Weston had to the print was very different to earlier approaches. For the pictorialists, mastering control of the print was fundamental to their concept of artistic expression – understanding the different process, techniques and chemistry, and often leaving a trace of the photographer's brushstrokes within the emulsion on the surface of hand-coated paper. Using 10″ x 8″ large format cameras (sometimes called 'plate cameras', which take a single image at a time as opposed to being loaded with a roll of film on which multiple frames can be shot), Adams' and Weston's negatives were 'contact printed' onto a sheet of high-quality commercially available photographic paper. Contact printing is a relatively straightforward process and, although it was always the main method for printing from larger negatives (and remains so, particularly with 'alternative' processes such as the cyanotype), it is different to the method of 'enlarging' images taken on smaller formats by projecting the image onto paper, which actually allows for greater manipulation of the final print.

This meant that for the f/64 photographers, mastering the exposure in camera was essential to their creative process. This was where the real artistry lay: in the photographic technique and the pre-visualisation of the image in the first instance. The contact print is a precise analogy of the negative as made by the photographer. This approach is the antithesis to how many view photography nowadays (professionals, amateurs and the public alike) – that getting the shot right in the first place doesn't really matter, as practically anything is easily rectified in the digital darkroom. Although as a community f/64 was not long-lived (it dispersed in 1935 due to the migration of its members away from San Francisco and the general pressure of the economic depression), the legacy of this group and its members was and continues to be widely felt.

Ansel Adams is best known for his landscapes of Yosemite National Park. (Adams is often mistakenly credited for contributing to the area being defined as a national park, which was actually declared in 1890. However, he was actively committed to the conservation of the park. See Wells, 2011, pp.136–140). His exceptional technical skill, applied to these spectacular locations, continues to impress itself upon newcomers to photography as well as on more seasoned, critical viewers.

Photographs of Yosemite certainly dominate Adams' oeuvre, and to an extent overshadow the work of the other members of f/64. Like Adams, his f/64 contemporaries – most notably Edward Weston and Imogen Cunningham (1883–1976) – were drawn to the realism of natural forms, rather than the grittier realism of urban life that appealed to their Photo-Secessionist peers on the other side of the country. Weston and Cunningham were, arguably, more experimental in their use of photography, however. In the majority of Adams' landscapes, the formal elements (e.g. use of perspective and composition) are not much more of an extension of painterly traditions. Weston and Cunningham expanded the *photographic* way of seeing further by cropping into views to make more abstract photographs. Weston's often-reproduced *Dunes, Oceano* (1936) is a typical example of this. However, as Graham Clarke (1997, p.63) points out, the image explores much more than simply the texture and form of the landscape:

Ansel Adams *North Palisade, Sierra Nevada* 1936

"… the photographer takes an extreme American terrain (a desert) and makes of it something other than its physical appearance. The camera transposes it as part of a larger mythology of spiritual and mysterious presence. Its two primary elements, sand and light, are both subject to continuous change, but the photograph fixes a moment from that continuum and celebrates it as part of a unity of time and space, without (on the surface) reference to the social or political… Weston has made the most barren of substances, sand, into something remarkable in its effect as a visual spectacle. The play of light and pattern, of texture and contrast, express an almost metaphysical presence."

Key to the method of the f/64, which has remained with many of today's photographers, is the idea of 'visualisation' of a photograph. Adams (1983, p.177) describes this as:

"The process of "seeing" the final print while viewing the subject. With practice the photographer can anticipate the various influences of each stage of the photographic procedure, and incorporate these intuitively in visualizing the finished image."

This approach differs significantly from the idea of a photographer's roaming eye fixed to a camera viewfinder, waiting for pictures to jump into it from the activity of the scene before him. As your own photographic skills have developed, you've almost certainly become more accurate at anticipating how the thing you photograph will look when you review the image on a digital camera, or when you have your film processed. Understanding how lenses of different focal lengths function is one important factor in discerning between the human binocular perception of a scene, and the photographic, monocular way of seeing. Also, knowledge of exposure – how you can manage the different tones in a scene, from darkest to brightest – is essential here, and this was a particular area of technical research that Ansel Adams focused on.

Exercise 1.5: **Visualising Assignment Six: Transitions**

For this exercise you'll begin working on Assignment Six: Transitions. Read ahead and familiarise yourself with the brief for this assignment now.

To get started with this assignment you'll need to choose a location or specific view that you'll revisit throughout the duration of this course. Choose somewhere that is easily accessible and practical within the confines of the assignment brief. We recommend that you pick a location that's somewhere near to where you live or work.

If you decide to revisit a very particular view, then this activity will test your skills of *pre-visualisation.* You'll need to try to imagine how the view might look throughout the year under different weather and lighting conditions, and whether there are any other factors that will affect your camera's view. You may of course try a few different angles or vantage points but in any case pay very close attention to how you compose the frame, as you'll need to 'commit' to this for the duration of the course.

You're strongly recommended to consider shooting a back-up location (at least in the early stages of this project) so that you have a 'plan B' in case anything hinders the development of your project.

Document your work within your learning log. As the project develops you may wish to ask your tutor for feedback; do this when you submit your other assignments for feedback.

Project **The beautiful and the sublime**

"Beauty and art were once thought of as belonging together, with beauty as among art's principal aims and art as beauty's highest calling."

<div align="right">(Beech, 2009, p. 12)</div>

In his introduction to *Beauty,* an anthology of essays on the subject, Dave Beech asserts that art and beauty have a special relationship. This is perhaps most acutely felt within the genre of landscape, and the representation of nature more broadly. Think back to the beginning of Part One, when you were asked to consider why you elected to study this particular course. Surely we all share a desire to capture, or render photographically, a sense of what impresses upon our senses most strongly and most positively.

Beauty is very much an aspect of aesthetics or more simply our 'senses'; sensuous music and sounds, luxurious textiles and textures, pleasant flavours and smells are all things of beauty. There are essentially two perspectives on beauty. The first sees beauty as something universal within human nature. Mathematical and geometric evaluations of pieces of music, human features and pictorial composition have been used to support this point of view. The other perspective argues that a sense of beauty is in fact subjective and unique, as summarised by the cliché that 'beauty lies in the eye of the beholder'. Beauty is almost always a matter of cultural identity as well; what is considered to be beautiful to one group of people might be vulgar and repulsive to another.

Beauty is often confused or conflated with the notion of taste. We think of taste as something that is culturally specific; for instance, a certain action within one group of people might be seen as inappropriate within another. Or we often hear (in relation to art) comments along the lines of "I can appreciate the beauty of it, but it isn't to my taste." Interestingly however, in *A Philosophical Enquiry*, Edmund Burke (1729-97) describes taste as something that is in fact universal, "...the same in all human creatures" (Burke, 1990, p. 11), relating this specifically to flavours. He describes how we use these descriptions to apply to other, unrelated things, for example, "...sour temper, bitter expressions...a bitter fate..." in contrast to "a sweet disposition, a sweet person, a sweet condition" (ibid p.14).

The relevance of beauty as something that relates to aesthetic harmony within the arts has been hotly contested throughout the twentieth century and continues to be a topic of discourse today. Modernist debates and Marxist critiques of beauty have made it a political matter – a bourgeois preoccupation and even a tool of repression. Dadaists like Otto Dix (1891–1969) satirised images of conventional, romantic notions of beauty and fascist ideals of perfection in his politically challenging paintings made around the dawn of the Second World War. The conceptual artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) confronted the relevance of the relationship between beauty and art by controversially placing a signed (with a pseudonym) porcelain urinal

within a gallery context (*Fountain*, 1917). Duchamp intended viewers to consider the ideas behind the art, rather than just the object itself or the formal qualities of its representation. By appropriating an object completely and holding up an object of pure function, he divorced it from the troubling matter of aesthetics.

Robert Adams has written extensively and insightfully on beauty and photography, from the perspective of a landscape practitioner. He asks:

"Why is Form beautiful? Because, I think, it helps us meet our worst fear, the suspicion that life may be chaos and that therefore our suffering is without meaning."

<div align="right">(Adams, 1996, p.25)</div>

Herein, perhaps, lies the binary distinction between beauty and the sublime.

"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. In this case, the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it."

<div align="right">(Edmund Burke [1757], 1990, p. 53)</div>

Whether consciously or not, the sublime is something we've all personally encountered, although perhaps without necessarily being able to fully appreciate or articulate what it is. Much like the idea of beauty, the sublime is a slippery term, often taken for granted or misused. It is a concept that lies behind the motivation of much landscape work, in painting and photography as well as other media. Certainly, early pictorialist as well as topographic photographers inherited the preoccupation of the sublime from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting. The concept of the sublime relates to the human psyche (although Edmund Burke used the word 'soul'), which is equally fluid and an ongoing topic of discussion.

Where beauty might dominate the realm of aesthetics (taste, touch, sight), the sublime occupies the imagination. There are no such things as 'sublime objects', but when something triggers a psychoactive response in an individual – for example, a mountain, a waterfall or a great canyon – then you are in the presence of the sublime. As Liz Wells (2011, p.48) succinctly describes it:

"...the sublime is associated with awe, danger and pain, with places where accidents happen, where things run beyond human control, where nature is untameable."

As with the concept of beauty, the sublime has been subject to discourse over the centuries, even millennia. One of the earliest thinkers on the topic was the Greek philosopher Longinus (c.300 AD), whose treatise related to literature rather than to visual works. In addition to Burke, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Georg Hegel (1770–1831) and Johann Schiller (1759–1805) all made substantial contributions to the field. Perhaps the most significant development of our understanding of the sublime in relatively recent years is owed to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who defined the sublime as not just an aspect of aesthetics, but of psychoanalysis. Freud related the sublime to his idea of 'the uncanny', which refers to a feeling of discomfort when seeing something that is simultaneously familiar and alien. Freud's choice of vocabulary with which to describe this principle, 'Das Unheimliche', relates to being 'not home' or contrary to what is familiar – not just in terms of location, but also in terms of identity. The un-settlement, or more accurately, cognitive dissonance that can result from an encounter with the uncanny is what can stir the sense of the sublime (Wells, 2011, p.49).

Jesse Alexander *Box Freestone Quarry* from the series *Threshold Zone* 2008

"In many cultures, a confrontation of the sublime is a requisite rite of passage. Within my project, Threshold Zone (2008) I explored and attempted to rationalise my own response to both man-made and naturally formed underground spaces. I felt curious, and was determined to make some work in these spaces, but I was also acutely phobic of being underground, particularly when working alone. These spaces were generally physically unfamiliar to me, yet my mind was filled with familiar fairytales and contemporary narratives relating to the dangers that lurk below ground in the darkness. I channelled these feelings into a creative strategy, in which I placed my camera in a space referred to as the 'twilight' or 'threshold zone' of a cave; the area that lies somewhere between the 'entrance zone' of a cave that receives some daylight, and the 'dark zone' that receives none. The resulting, highly contrasting images which are presented as back-lit light-boxes, I hope illustrate my encounter with the sublime."

(Jesse Alexander, course author)

The sublime was a particularly common theme throughout eighteenth- and nineteenth-century painting and literature. An example of this is the German painter Caspar David Friedrich's (1774–1840) often-referenced *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818), also known as *Wanderer above the Mist*. The anonymous male figure encounters the majesty and awe of the scene and the terrain before him, but we can never really be sure if he is truly bold and fearless of what lies in front of him, or whether he is terrified. Photographic artist Helen Sear, whose ongoing practice explores relationships between nature and culture, references Friedrich's *Wanderer* in her two series of digital images, *Inside the View* (2004–08) and *Beyond the View* (2009–10). In these works, Sear layers different perspectives of views, and with a time-consuming digital (manual) process, picks out holes to form an intricate, lace-like patina across the 'surface' of the image. The obscurity of the resulting image – a simultaneous combination of a partially visible female subject and multiple views of a place – demands the eye to render some visual order from this beautiful chaos and, in so doing, establishes for the viewer a challenging inquiry into the sublime.

Casper David Friedrich *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* 1818
Courtesy of Kunsthalle Hamburg

The sublime is not simply confined to visual art works. Examples of the sublime within mythology and narrative are rife throughout all cultures.

The terrifying aspect of the sublime is no more clearly expressed than in the Hollywood disaster movie, both the historically based and more fantastic. In *A Night to Remember* (1958) and the more recent (and yet somehow more dated) *Titanic* (1997) the audience is subjected to the peril of the sub-zero conditions of the Atlantic Ocean. Environmental apocalypses have been explored in movies such as *Day after Tomorrow* (2004) and *The Road* (2009). A viral epidemic threatens to wipe out mankind in *Outbreak* (1995), while in *Arachnophobia* (1990) it is spiders. (Burke recognised small animals and insects in relation to the sublime.) Perhaps most terrifying of all, screenwriters have tapped into our fear of the vastness of outer space and the possible dangers it might pose in movies such as *Independence Day* (1996) and *Deep Impact* (1998).

Listen to this episode of Radio 4's *In Our Time* which discusses the sublime:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/iotc/all - playepisode67

Several resources on the sublime are available from the Tate. Look under the 'Art Movements' heading:
http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/

Robert John Welch (1859-1936), official photographer for Harland & Wolff, Olympic and Titanic

Exercise 1.6: **The contemporary abyss**

Read Simon Morley's essay 'Staring into the Contemporary Abyss' published on the Tate website:

http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/staring-contemporary-abyss

This should provide you with a good overview of the sublime as a theme within visual culture. Next, choose any body of work that you feel explores the sublime. It may be a photographic project, a work of literature, cinema, or any other medium. In your learning log, write at least 300 words describing how you believe the work you've selected relates to the sublime. Use Morley's text to support your argument.

Exercise 1.7: **Assignment preparation**

If you haven't already done so, read ahead to the brief for Assignment One.

Email your tutor a short summary of any ideas you have for this assignment. Use their feedback to help you to refine or expand your ideas. Include a description of how you intend to submit your assignment, as well as any other questions you may have.

Record your correspondence in your learning log.

Project **The Zone System**

Human vision is far superior to any camera, at least at the time of writing, in terms of the range of tones it can encompass within a single field of vision. Certainly cameras are getting much better at 'seeing' in the dark, with enhanced clarity at much higher ISO settings; however they can't cope as well as humans can with both dark and light simultaneously. If you're still not convinced, look out of a window from the back of a room, so that you can see whatever is on the other side of the window and some of the room simultaneously. This demonstration works best on a dull day with no lights on in the room. You should be able to see the view from the window clearly, and if you look around the room, you should be able to make out details throughout the room, even in the darkest corners. Now compare how your camera sees what you see. If you take a light reading and make an exposure for the view outside the window, the room will be very dark, if not completely devoid of any detail; if you measure and expose for inside the room, the view on the other side of the window will be completely over-exposed – 'blown-out' highlights with no detail. The scenario described here is one of 'high dynamic range', and many of you will be familiar with the process of combining several digital images of the same scene made at different exposures. When this process is carried out with restraint and sensible artistic judgement, it can be a very useful tool to extend the tonal range of an image, but sadly many less discerning amateurs and professionals alike use the method rather unnecessarily and over-enthusiastically.

Digital HDR techniques and related software can be seen as an extension of much earlier attempts to achieve greater tonal range in finished photographs. Early photographic emulsions were considerably more sensitive to blue light than to other colours on the spectrum of visible light. This meant that landscape photographs, particularly those made on clear days, had completely blown-out skies as the negatives were much denser in the skies than the foreground, resulting in absence of detail in the (positive) print. Some photographers – most notably Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904) – made a library of photographs of clouds and skies, which would be layered with a negative where the sky detail was absent in order to make photographs that were closer to human perception.

The Zone System, developed by Ansel Adams and Fred Archer (1889–1963) is essentially a way to visualise how the tones visible in a scene can most effectively be rendered onto the photographic negative. Adams and Archer sought to refine and better manage some of the many variables that affected exposure, such as developer formulae and development times, so that the photographer could more strictly control the contrast and range of tones rendered. They contrived a (slightly confusing!) eleven-point scale of tonal range, '0' being pure black, 'X' being pure white.

The Zone System scale

In reality, both film and digital sensors can render many more 'zones' than just eleven. However, what the Zone System scale reminds us is that a light-meter, whether hand-held or built into a camera, is objective. Whether you point it at a dark or a bright subject, it perceives and provides an exposure value at middle grey (Zone V). Therefore, the photographer must decide where in the scene they wish Zone V to be in order to control exposure properly.

This principle may be something you're already familiar with. However, what the practice of all of the photographers you've encountered so far teaches us is that, unlike other areas of photography such as portraiture, where the sitter's gesture is perhaps more important than the exposure, or a busy street scene where we might excuse the rushed framing of an enthusiastic street photographer, landscape is generally a slower paced, more patient and, in some senses, meditative practice. As such, its viewers and critics are much less forgiving of technical mishaps and expect more from the photographer.

Exercise 1.8: **Zone System in practice**

Demonstrate your awareness of the principles of the Zone System and your ability to take accurate light readings by producing three photographs taken in relatively high dynamic range, i.e. contrasting light conditions. Make sure that your exposure choice renders as much detail as possible in the brightest and darkest areas of the photograph.

Collate your work and any reflections in your learning log.

Project **Photography and the city**

Louis Daguerre *Boulevard du Temple* 1838

Since the very beginnings of the medium, the city has provided opportunities for photography, both for landscape images and also as a rich resource of other potential subject matter. One of Daguerre's first exposures, and the oldest surviving example of its kind, was the view from his studio window. *Boulevard du Temple* (1838) is also the first example of a photograph of a person. Unlike the rest of the people, carts and wagons that must have been visible from the window, the tiny figure towards the lower left of the frame with his foot perched was only rendered on the plate because he remained relatively still whilst having his shoes shined during Daguerre's ten-minute exposure. Like Fox Talbot on the other side of the Channel, Daguerre also turned to still life subjects to experiment and practise with. One of the valuable lessons we can draw from both photographers is their example of engaging with their own surroundings photographically. Although Talbot did photograph beyond his home at Lacock Abbey, Clarke is critical of some of these works. If we needed a good example to highlight the limitations of the common misconception, that in order to take interesting photographs one has to travel, surely this is it:

The city is a type of space that we are more likely to associate with documentary photography – or, more specifically, street photography – than the landscape genre. Photography has often been used to explore and expose the darker, seedier side and moral imbalance within cities. John Thomson's (1837–1921) major project documenting daily urban life, *Street Life in London,* was published in eleven parts between 1876 and 1877. On the other side of the Atlantic, the body of work *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), made by Jacob Riis (1849–1914), was a substantial photographic investigation of the impoverished parts of New York City, and is often cited as an example of a morally inspired social documentary that had a direct and lasting effect upon the political context of the time.

Photographers all over the world continue to explore the seedier – as well as complex – nature of conurbations. A recurring line of investigation is that of the city, not just as one complete inter-connecting unit, but as layers of different cities or cities within cities. Sometimes these elements are briefly exposed to one another, but often they are designed to restrain their inhabitants from uncomfortable contact with each other. This is a recurring theme in fictional narrative, for example the film *In Time* (2011). In this science fiction thriller set in a dystopian future, the protagonist travels through the different levels of strictly controlled and guarded zones to escape from the ghetto and seek revenge upon the most affluent who live in luxury at the cost of the poorest.

Extending some of the themes of his earlier works around history, memory and disputed territories, Paul Seawright travelled to major cities in sub-Saharan Africa, exploring communities on the fringes of conurbations, both geographically and socially, for his series *Invisible Cities* (exhibited 2007). *Invisible Cities* (the title is appropriated from the book by Italo Calvino (1972)), comprises varied photographs, some of which are recognisable as landscape pictures, whilst others might be considered works of environmental portraiture. None of the titles of the photographs refer to specific locations or people, which emphasises the indistinct nature and the anonymity of these places and their inhabitants. Of the series, *Bridge* (2006) perhaps communicates some of these ideas most acutely. The road bridge, presumably an interchange of major roads on the edge of a city, cleanly divides the frame in two. A yellow bus heads along the road towards the city from, we might suppose, the sanctuary of the suburbs, taking children to school or their parents to work. The sky is empty and bleak, which is echoed by the detritus that

sprawls below, shielded by the flyover from the view of the bus's passengers. The composition and social sentiment echoes Stieglitz's *The Steerage*, made 90 years earlier. You'll return to the city as both a motif and a means of making work when you look at psychogeography in Part Two. But for now, it suffices to say that the city is a valid and exciting subject for landscape work.

Paul Seawright *Bridge* 2006 from the series *Invisible Cities,* courtesy of the artist

Exercise 1.9: **Visual research and analysis – social contrasts**

Find photographs depicting at least two different social perspectives of the same place. 'Place' could refer to a province, a village, an event, an entire city or a small area of a city. For example, find a photograph depicting the affluent side of a city, and one that shows the poorer side. You may wish to use this as an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the photographers we've already discussed, or to look at completely new ones. You might find two or more contrasting images by the same photographer, or contrasting images of the same place by two or more different photographers.

Then see if you can find two photographs where social contrasts are present within a single image.

Assignment one
Beauty and the sublime

Produce a series of 6–12 photographs that convey your own interpretation of beauty and/or the sublime within the context of landscape. You may choose to support, question or subvert accepted definitions of these terms.

Your images don't necessarily have to be made in the same place or type of location; however, they should complement one another and attempt to function as a cohesive series.

Introduce your work with a supporting text (around 500 words) that:

•   Describes how you interpreted this brief.

•   Describes how your work relates to aspects of photography and visual culture addressed in Part One.

•   Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of your work, describing what you would have done differently or how you might develop this work further.

•   Identifies what technical choices you made to help communicate your ideas, and also references relevant artists and photographers who have influenced the creative direction of your project.

•   Explains your reasons for selecting particular views, and arriving at certain visual outcomes.

Send your work and your supporting text, as well as extracts from your learning log or link to your blog, to your tutor by the method you've agreed with them. Make sure that all your work is carefully labelled with your name, student number and the assignment number.

This assignment is diagnostic, which means it is an opportunity for you to introduce your practice to your tutor. It should still be submitted along with the rest of your work for assessment: however, it is unlikely to have a significant impact upon your overall grade.

If you've chosen your location for Assignment Six, let your tutor know now. It's important to come to a decision as soon as possible so that you can maximise your photographic opportunities. If you're struggling for an idea, talk to your tutor; they should be able to help.

You don't need to wait for your tutor's response before starting Part Two.

Reflection

Before you send this assignment to your tutor, take a look at the assessment criteria which are listed at the start of this course guide. Reflect on how you think you are doing against the criteria and add notes to your learning log.