INDIVIDUAL SCHOLARLY PAPER ABSTRACT

Alaska is a world apart, America’s “last frontier”, which offers a challenging and awe-inspiring wilderness experience (Nash 2014). While its nature illustrates the horrid features of the Burkean sublime, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and air traffic show the presence of technology in a state that has been perceived as “pure” and “pristine”, a view customarily associated with the natural sublime. Consequently, contemporary U.S. memoirs which include descriptions of extra-textual Alaskan landscapes constitute suitable case studies for analyzing the rhetorical affordances and limits of (1) using the concept of wilderness as world in the environmental humanities and of (2) the sublime for figuring modes of (non-)human materiality in the Anthropocene, in which the reality of nature can no longer be separated from humanity and its culture. While the Anthropocene and the sublime are linked to senses of excess, overwhelm, and disorientation (Purdy 2015), the memoir, as inevitably human-centered, is a privileged genre to investigate the Anthropocene sublime and related affects. Through a rhetorical and narratological—mainly informed by recent insights from econarratology (James and Morel 2020) which will help interpret emotions and affects produced by the sublime and examine readers’ emotional engagement with narratives of the sublime—analysis of Sam Keith’s One Man’s Wilderness (1973) and Ernestine Hayes’s Blonde Indian (2006), this paper will argue that the natural sublime and the concept of wilderness are still problematic, and will explore the “haptic sublime” (McNee 2016) and “stuplisme” (Ngai 2005) as contributing to shaping a more participative, “ecological sublime” (Hitt 1999).