Artist Statement

Sue Jowsey

Orient the open end toward yourself –
begin by folding the world in quarters.

Ideas, moving in unattuned rhythms, summon narratives that invoke a collapsing world. I am a conjurer; I practice an ancient art–unthreading mysteries from the spindle of time.

These telluric bodies caught in the retina of the imagination appear to me as allegoric visions. Aenigma, exposed in the undulations of light, passing below a glass plate. More sleight of hand than photography. An afterimage. Depictive kin, to the cameraless alchemical renderings of August Strindberg's *Celestographs*, the soul recordings of Hippolyte Baraduc's *fluidic photography* and the haunting in-sights Louis Darget produced by affixing photographic plates to the forehead.[1] These explorers disassociated the recording of images from the medium of the camera, attempting instead to capture matter directly. In his discussion of Strindberg's work, David Campany asserts such strange impressions confront existing expectations of photographic representation, prompting us to ask, "What is the relation between appearance and meaning? Does photography offer impartial knowledge or a surface for imaginary projection?"[2] To these questions, I add, "If photography captures the soul, what else can it possess?"

I see the nebulae of the metakosmia, where worlds are yet to take form, illuminated by the purling motions of shadows.

If we adhere faithfully to the understanding of photography as *light–drawing*, then every likeness rendered through luminosity is a photograph.[3] Yet, photography is a technique for fixing an enduring impression, used to create a record. Despite this, *unfixable* images have emerged in the history of photography, such as the transient text-based images created by Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687 – 1744), which

[1] Strindberg's remaining Celestographs are viewable on the National Library of Sweden Flickr. https://www.flickr.com/photos/25300312@N08/albums/72157629314727875 Hippolyte Baraduc's fluidic photography can be found in his book, *The human soul: its movements, its lights, and the iconography of the fluidic invisible.* https://archive.org/details/humansoulitsmove00bara Made available by the Boston Public Library. Examples of Louis Darget's thought photography can be viewed at https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/34879/louis-darget-french-1847-1923/

[2] David Campany, 'Art, Science and Speculation: August Strindberg's photographics', first published in the TATE Modern catalogue *August Strindberg: Painter, Photographer, Writer* (2006). Accessed August 12, 2021) https://davidcampany.com/art-science-and-speculation-august-strindbergs-photographics/

[3] The word *photography* originates form the Greek root words *light* and *drawing*.

vanished as miraculously as they appeared.[4] It is, however, Earth's maw, opening beneath our feet, rendered by the catoptrics of light on water that transfixes me. A vision recounted by Lucretius in *De rerum natura*,

> … a pool of water not deeper than a single finger-breadth, which lies between the stones on the paved street, affords us a view beneath the earth to a depth as vast as the high gaping mouth of heaven stretches above the earth; so that you seem to descry the clouds and the heaven and bodies wise hidden beneath the earth-yet in a magic sky.[5]

As unerring as a photograph, this simulacrum serves as a reminder of the flawed nature of perception.[6] Upended, the cosmos offers a doppelgänger of Earth's depths. Urging us to look up, Lucretius describes an *ouroboros* vision of the heavens, an ancient conception of boundless time unconstrained by theories of linearity–a self-devouring Universe.[7]

> Now once again gaze on this sky, which above and all around holds the whole earth in its embrace: if it begets all things out of itself, as some tell, and receives them again when they perish, it is made altogether of a body that has birth and death.[8]

In death and rebirth, *prima materia* (first matter) recomposes. Conjoining Lucretian atomism with Walter Benjamin's theories of photography and memory, Eric Downing suggests, "truth cannot be conveyed in the composition, but only in the *décomposé* of the subject."[9] With a scanner and a darkened room, I gather bodies. These *skins of things* confirm Lucretius' simulacra, wherein "likenesses of things and their shapes are given off by things from the outermost body of things"[10] Shed, these likenesses wander till confronted by photography's penetrating gaze, they crystalize. Downing asserts,

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[4] Peter Geimer discusses Schulze experiments in his book, *Inadvertent Images*. Peter Geimer, *Inadvertent Images: A History of Photographic Apparitions*. (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[5] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, translated by Bailey, Cyril. (Oxford University Press, 1946): Book IV, ii. 406–434, 157.

[6] Porter points out, "The problem is not just that what appears solid is rare (mixed with void); it is that the object of our perception is uncertain." James I. Porter, "Lucretius and the Poetics of Void." *Le Jardin romain: Epicurisme et poèsie à Rome. Mélanges offerts à Mayotte Bollaci, a cura di A. Monet, Lille* (2003): 204.

[7] The *ouroboros* is symbolically depicted as a tail eating snake.

[8] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, translated by Cyril Bailey (Oxford University Press, 1946): Book IV, ii. 298–325, 196.

[9] Eric Downing, "Lucretius at the Camera: Ancient Atomism and Early Photographic Theory in Walter Benjamin's Berliner Chronik," *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 81, no.1 (2006): 28.

[10] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, translated by Cyril Bailey (Oxford University Press, 1946): Book IV, ii. 26–58, 144.

the image "that the camera captures, or the eye perceives, or the memory records, is itself not other than the original physical object or the emanated image: it *is* that image, that shed object, transported through the "atmosphere"—not a representation in any traditional sense…"[11] These images are, therefore, a strange collection of preserved skins, the hyperphysical remains of bone, stone and lichen. Soma, on whom "the signatures of hidden forces" are drawn.[12]

I sense the flux of sound released from the burning bones of forests, a lament running the horizon of time.

The scanner's glass plate acts like the occluded eye of a specular object, a dark mirror. Arnaud Maillet speaks of Paracelsus' assertions that "[b]lack mirrors became astrological mirrors because the stars, imprinting their influence into a piece of coal or a fingernail, bring forth signs of the future and the past."[13] Shadows, refracted in the mirror's darkened surface, trace the swirling mists of the intermundia, the space between. Similarly, the inky darkness of the photographic ground, present in these images, is an interstice. A black mirror, from whose surface I divine a rising chimaera. Analogous to Merleau-Ponty's *intercorporeal being*.[14] A being forged by twining the material with the immaterial, a luminescent echo; the sound of fire as it breathes in. It is the kin of Homer's Gorgon, rising from the underworld, at the behest of Gaea (Gaia), with huge, owl-like eyes turning all before it to stone. This monster, given by Prometheus so that we would be civilized, now exposes our shame, having ignited the world, all before us turns to smoke and ash. I see a deadening aether, where the sounds of humanity's savagery toward humanity are extinguished, replaced by a silence that attests to a more insidious form of human violence, the destructive legacy of overpopulation and overconsumption.

These allegoric visions undifferentiated from the shadows cast,
are imprints of the World Soul.

[11] Downing, "Lucretius at the Camera," 23–24.

[12] Hippolyte Ferdinand Baraduc, *The Human Soul, Its Movements, Its Lights, and the Iconography of the Fluidic Invisible* (GA Mann, 1913): 32.

[13] Arnaud Maillet, *The Claude glass: use and meaning of the black mirror in western art* (Zone Books, 2004): 60.

[14] "What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible, is— if not yet the incorporeal— at least an intercorporeal being." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press 1964, 1968):142-43.

List of Images:

1. *In the absence of ether*, Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
2. *Murmur stones*, Susan Jowsey, 2021. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
3. *Mythos*. Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
4. *Signs*. Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
5. *The children of Aether & Day*. Susan Jowsey, 2021. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
6. *The dead of night*. Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
7. *The mutualist*. Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
8. *Vardoger,* Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.
9. *Wünschen,* Susan Jowsey, 2020. Cameraless Photograph. Collection Artists own.

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