A party to all secrets

Jacqueline Gentile

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A PARTY TO ALL SECRETS

by

Jacqueline M. Gentile

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
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Date 12 Sept 1986 Signature ___________________________
To the memory of
my older brother,

DICK GENTILE

(December 29, 1952 – September 4, 1981)

to express my deepest gratitude
for the profound contributions and enrichment
his short life brought to mine
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NOTE: The thesis was tentatively titled, "A TRANSPSYCHIC REALITY." The proposal was submitted September, 1980.

PURPOSE: It is my intention to photograph objects and landscapes and the positive or negative forces I perceive to exist within them. The purpose is not to obscure the subject matter so as to imbue it with artificial spirituality, nor is it to merely record the subject, but rather to present readily identifiable subject matter in its proper context as it embodies a blend of physical and intuitive properties.

BACKGROUND: I have often seen a tendency in people to separate matter into (a) its concreteness and call that real, and (b) the feelings it evokes in them and call that imagined. To divide the senses into physical and intuitive categories and only emphasize the physical, is, in my opinion a mistake. I can see no valid division between them. Language is at least in part to blame as we lack terms equivalent to mana or imunu\(^1\) which, in their own cultures, define the intuitive characteristics of objects and places to be very real. Lawrence LeShan, in his classifications of reality, calls the blending of physical and intuitive a "transpsychic mode of being.\(^2\) This mode acknowledges physical boundaries but also includes an omnipresent essence in all things which is avail-


able to the intuitive senses. It also recognizes that this can manifest itself in a positive or negative manner.

I have sensed a strong awareness of this more-encompassing view in photographs by Clarence John Laughlin and Wynn Bullock. Their work furthers my belief that there is no predictable balance between empirical and intuitive reality, though both are always present.

PROCEDURE: A majority of the photographs will be taken outdoors in unurbanized areas of Western New York and New Jersey. The work will be comprised of twenty to thirty large format, black and white prints. All 8 X 10 in. negatives will be contact printed; all 4 X 5 in. negatives will be enlarged to 8 X 10 in. prints. The work will be completed for exhibition by December, 1980.
INTRODUCTION

I believe in God; and I have great respect for factual knowledge and scientific inquiry. However important these things are to me, they have never been quite enough. All my life, I have sensed the existence of the "soul of things." As a graduate student studying photography, I finally had an opportunity to explore this topic, both visually and personally.

This paper describes that experience. The main body of this text is comprised of four sections. The first section delineates my world view, my personal ethos. The second examines the images and their content in terms of this world view. The third section discusses the technical aspects. The fourth is concerned with the exhibition and the thesis sharing. All but the first section, "Personal Considerations," are self-explanatory.

In prefacing the personal section of the paper, it should be noted that it was originally titled, "Journal Entries." I kept a journal throughout the MFA Program. One part of it was devoted to compiling a handy technical reference, and one part served as a personal diary. The diary entries had very little to say the first year other than that I did not enjoy Rochester's climate or that my weekly exposure tests were not revealing why my non-test negatives were so overexposed. The
second year, after the thesis proposal had been submitted, the journal took on a life of its own.

All of the second year journal entries were long, convoluted, wildly extravagant essays on "the interrelatedness of all things." The entries addressed such diverse issues as chaos versus order, why preconceived notions override "seeing is believing," and even why every living cell in every living organism must contain a complete experiential history of life on Earth. I tried to excerpt them and present them in journal-entry form, but they were just too unmanageable. I must have been in some kind of frenzied, manic state when they were written. Under the circumstances, I opted to extract the significant points and present them somewhat more coherently in the following section of this paper.
I. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In my need to understand the universe, the science and the religion with which I was raised failed to provide a complete picture. Science did not allow for a soul; and my religious training isolated my soul and all human souls from nature. Both seem to emphasize that man is separate from nature rather than a part of it. Like most self-fulfilling prophecies, the longer we believe this, the truer it becomes. Modern man does not perceive nature as sacred.

Primitive man saw in his surroundings something more than his dependence upon or his lack of control over the environment. He saw its soul. Lévy-Bruhl explains this view as follows:

To the mind of the primitive there is existent and permeating, on earth, in the air and in the water, in all the diverse forms assumed by persons or objects, one and the same essential reality, both one and multiple, both material and spiritual. It is continually passing from one to another, and by means of it may be explained the existence and activities of all forms of being, their permanence and their metamorphoses, their life and death. This mystic reality which permeates everywhere and which is felt rather than represented, cannot be put into a conceptual form like the "substance" of metaphysics. Codrington first made it known under the name mana, . . .

... Holmes, explaining what the natives of the Purari Delta understood by imunu, emphasizes the point that this principle is present everywhere at once like an impersonal force, and yet it is individual in certain persons. "It was associated with everything, nothing arrived apart from it. It was the soul of things. . . . It had personality, but was only such as resembled the specific characteristics of its habitat. . . . It could be kind or malign, it could cause pain and suffer pain, . . . It was intangible, but like air, wind, it could manifest its presence. It permeated everything that made up life . . . "
... Sir Everard im Thurn, speaking of the natives of British Guiana, remarks: "To the Indian all objects, animate and inanimate, seem exactly of the same nature except that they differ in the accident of bodily form. ... It is very difficult for us to realize the Indian conceptions of this identity, in everything but bodily form, of men and other animals; and it is still more difficult to realize that the Indian conception is wider even than this in that it knows no difference, except again in bodily form, between animate and inanimate objects."

Thus primitive mentality considers and at the same time feels all beings and objects to be homogeneous, that is, he regards them all as participating either in the same essential nature, or in the same ensemble of qualities. ... His primary object is to discover in the objects which attract and retain his attention the presence and degree of intensity and (strange as it may appear to us) the kindly or malevolent disposition of that quality or principle or mana or imunu, or whatever we may like to call it.3

The terms mana and imunu presented in this monstrously long quotation come from ethnographic studies in the Eastern Hemisphere; mana is Melanesian, imunu comes from the Purari Delta in New Guinea. However, they are also used here to describe the native experience in British Guiana, a hemisphere away, and could also be used to describe the world view of indigenous cultures in the Americas, Africa, and Australia. It can be assumed then, that among primitive peoples this perception of the world is standard.

Having arrived independently at the same conclusion as my primitive counterparts, in spite of my education and my religious upbringing, I would venture to say that this response to the world is a human universal. Civilized man has been schooled in every way possible to ignore or deny any leanings he may have in this direction. Our science, technology, and

religions have forced this other perception of the world into hiding. The strongest deterrent to our recognizing the validity of this other view is man's own inflated sense of self-importance. It takes earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and volcanoes to remind man of his insignificance and impotence in the total scheme of things. To me, the insignificance of man is so obvious, it amazes me that people can be unaware of it. Then again, being blind to the obvious is another civilized trait.

The failure to see things is usually due to the lack of importance placed upon them. If civilized man has difficulty recognizing things that are visible, it should come as no surprise that he has even more trouble with that which is invisible. This not to say that modern man does not acknowledge things that are not visible to the naked eye; he does. He knows the air is made up of invisible gases like oxygen, carbon dioxide, and hydrogen. He knows diseases are caused by unseen microbes. He knows all matter is made up of atoms.

It is what man knows about atoms that is so interesting. Atoms are made up of charged particles. These particles are essentially energy. So not only is energy energy, matter is also energy. Recall the remarks of Sir Everard im Thurn concerning the natives of British Guiana: "To the Indian all objects, animate and inanimate, seem exactly of the same nature except that they differ in the accident of bodily form."\(^4\)

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 18.
In other words, so-called "primitive" peoples have always known what atomic scientists have only recently figured out.

Another scientific theory states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed; it can only change form. If matter is energy, and if energy cannot be destroyed, then everything that exists today is made up of material that has been around since the beginning of time. I am not concerned here with whether the beginning of time stemmed from Divine Creation or the Big Bang or even the diplomatic compromise of a Big Bang originating from the Hand of God. What does concern me is that every minute particle in the universe has existed since the beginning. Each particle, regardless of how many times it has been reconstituted, organic or inorganic, carries the total history of the universe. Put another way, every iota of your being, of my being, and of all people and things, has been around since time began. Just as the passage of time leaves its mark on furniture, houses, and the landscape, I believe it does the same thing to subatomic particles. The history, the age, and the effects of time are imparted to all things.

Going beyond the similarities of all matter, animate and inanimate, living things have an additional quality; they are alive. They are dynamic. Their energy is more than just the energy of matter and form. There is the active energy of a life force. They have the ability to convert matter, in the form of nutrients, into raw energy for life and growth and new life. Each individual life is comprised of birth, life,
and death. To keep the repetition of this cycle alive, one of life's most basic drives is to reproduce, make one's contribution to the on-going fabric of life.

Just as I believe subatomic particles carry with them the history of where they have been and what they have been, I believe that every living cell carries within it a complete experiential history of life. We now know that each living cell possesses a blueprint to make an exact duplicate or clone of the whole organism from which it came.

We also know quite a bit about embryonic development. From the time, for example, two human reproductive cells unite, they display a remarkable pattern of development. The development traces life forms from the simplest all the way up to, in this case, a human being. This includes gill slits, a tail, and a two-chambered heart during the "fish" phase. The heart has three chambers during the "amphibian" phase; then progresses to the mammalian four chambers. The embryo passes through all the stages of its evolutionary development from the appearance of life on Earth to its present state. The catch phrase for this process: "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."

Although one would expect a living organism to carry with it the traits of its ancestors, it stretches the imagination to think that each and every living creature actually passes through every stage of its evolution while it is still a very new embryo. It stretches the imagination farther still when one considers that the whole process takes place in a "primeval
The salinity of the amniotic fluid which surrounds the embryo duplicates that of the prehistoric seas where life began. If each cell possesses a blueprint to exactly reproduce the whole organism from which it came, then every living cell must also carry the life history "memory" dating all the way back to the first living cell in that primordial sea.

My beliefs go farther still by including the existence of a collective awareness, past, present, and future, of everything that has or will ever happen. I believe all things are tapped into this force, and all actions everywhere, no matter how minute or insignificant, effect everything else in existence. Concepts such as a collective consciousness or a universal mind have received much scholarly attention and speculation, but have yet to be satisfactorily proved by current scientific, empirical methods. I suppose I should qualify my use of the word, "empirical," which has two contradictory meanings. The definition I am using means that which can be demonstrated by the strictest scientific methods. In philosophy, empiricism means only believing that which can be demonstrated to the senses. One assumes the senses are the five physical senses: sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.

I think by acknowledging the existence of a mere five senses severely underestimates man's capacity to perceive his universe. To my reckoning, there are at least three intuitive senses. These are emotional intuition, intellectual
intuition, and spiritual intuition.

Emotional intuition includes "gut" feelings, strong emotions that come out of nowhere. They are feelings that logic, reason, or common sense cannot disuade.

Intellectual intuition is automatically knowing something before having the chance to think it through. An example of this might involve seeing a sheet full of numbers for the first time and knowing immediately, just from a glance, that the page contains an error. A better example, or at least one which is more commonplace, would be opening a dictionary or telephone directory to the exact page one needed. If this happens a few times in a lifetime, it is probably due to luck or chance. If it happens with a frequency great enough to defy the laws of probability, it is intellectual intuition.

The third extra sense is intuition of the soul, spiritual intuition. This is the sense that sometimes lets one know the future or that makes one aware of events that have taken place far away. It is this sense that allows one to lose all sense of self and experience one's connectedness to all the universe. Through this magnificent sense, one knows, with a capital "K." It gives one the feeling that there really is meaning to the word, "Truth." Intuition of the soul is the gift that occasionally, however briefly, allows one to be a party to all secrets.

A strange thing happens as the result of the feeling of Knowing. The experience itself is of short duration, and
whatever it is one Knows is lost immediately after the feeling passes. But one is changed by it. The need for order, that is the order man imposes on things, is lost. Things no longer have to be ordered, oversimplified, or reduced to make sense. Chaos becomes the "order" of chaos. Randomness becomes the "order" of randomness. Questioning merely becomes a scientific excercise to improve the material aspects of life. One may not know the answers, in words, to questions about the mysteries of life, and more specifically death; but one is suddenly content to know there are answers.

Lawrence LeShan delineates three modes of perceiving one's universe. At one extreme is a transcendental state of pure consciousness. At the other extreme is the purely objective scientific approach. Somewhere in the middle is what he calls the Transpsychic Mode. He uses it to describe a process—a way of perceiving. What this mode of perception essentially allows one perceive is mana or imunu. He uses the term to describe the world view of primitive peoples. But since the other two modes he offers include only Zen Masters and strict atheists respectively, the vast majority of the human race falls into the category designated to describe primitives. This suits me fine. Most people in the world believe in something divine or supernatural regardless of the particular interpretation, doctrine, or dogma.

The term "transpsychic" however, is never broken down.

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or fully explained by the man who coined it. Does "trans" mean "across," "above," or "beyond?" Does "psychic" refer to the mind in ordinary terms or does it refer exclusively to a mystical experience? LeShan does not see fit to inform the reader.

I see reality as comprised of two distinct facets, one physical, one spiritual, existing simultaneously in the same space. I see the mind as the seat for the emotions, the intellect, and the soul. I believe one's emotions functions only in matters rooted in the physical realm. I believe the soul functions only in the spiritual realm. The intellect, however, is fully functional in both and is the bridge between the two. Perhaps "transpsychic" means just that, "mind bridge."

Then there is the matter of religion and faith versus truth in the form of scientific and factual knowledge. In a truly religious society, God is the only explanation necessary to understand all cause and effect relationships. On the other hand, in a fact-oriented pursuit of knowledge, the existence of God can neither be confirmed or denied, and is therefore simply ignored. This dichotomy has always existed. The temptation offered in the Garden of Eden was not wealth, power, or sex, as one might expect; it was knowledge. The two trains of thought have always run their separate courses like two parallel lines that never intersect.

One can think of two parallel lines in one's mind as two totally separate things with no connection, or one can
think of them as the boundaries of the strip of space between them, like the edges of a piece of ribbon. If one accepts the latter view, one can speculate on what is contained between the two. For me, the answer was mana or imunu. It allows me to believe in God and in factual knowledge without any conflict because the middle ground serves as a bridge.

The greatest thing about having an awareness of "the soul of things" is its accessibility for gratifying one's immediate spiritual needs. The instant gratification of needs, spiritual or otherwise, has never been a high priority of Western religions. In fact, the repression of all human appetites has been one of the primary goals of most religions. One's physical appetites are to be denied because they are sinful and immoral. One's intellectual appetites are in direct conflict with the idea that "God" is the answer to all questions. The current Creationist controversy is a modern example of this; the Dark Ages serve as a reminder of what can happen.

In Christendom, my religious affiliation, even one's spiritual appetites are not fed. The needs of one's soul will be fulfilled in death, and then only if one has managed to suppress his physical and intellectual appetites during life. My spiritual needs could not wait until my death, and so the transpsychic mode of perceiving took over to fill the void.

"Transpsychic" is an ugly word, but it was, and still is, the only term I could find in English that described being able to simultaneously perceive both the material and intuitive aspects of one's surroundings. Since this was the only term
I could find to describe what I was photographing, I used it in the title of my thesis proposal. Detesting the sound of it, I later discarded it in favor of "A Party to All Secrets," a phrase that appeared in one of my journal entries.

The idea of being a party to all secrets smacks of such arrogance. Earlier in the paper, I stated that this feeling results from losing one's sense of self—put another way, becoming egoless. It seems a contradiction in terms that by becoming egoless one would find oneself in a position of such unabashed arrogance. In the normal self-contained state of awareness, this would be the case. This is not the normal self-contained state of awareness; it is a different state of awareness that comes about when one can set one's sense of self aside; and the rules and value judgments that apply in one are not applicable in the other.

The issue of how to explain this in terms of typical Western Culture is problematic. The language does not describe it. Western religious traditions do not include it as part of their teachings. Anthropology documents it, but only in terms of backward cultures with strange, backward ideas. I thought of turning to writers of the Romantic Period. However, it should have become apparent by now that science is one of the most significant influences in my life, so I opted for a slightly more "scientific" approach. I turned to The Doors of Perception, by Aldous Huxley.

Here is a book by an intelligent, articulate, well-educated writer; a man whose grandfather was the world-
renowned scientist and agnostic, Sir Thomas Huxley; a man raised in the West. The book describes his experiences while under the influence of mescaline. It was done as an experiment with an investigator present and with all conversation being recorded; and it took place in the early 1950's before the proliferation of hallucinogens. The book describes the experiences of someone whose cultural background has not prepared him for such heightened consciousness.

Huxley starts by explaining normal sensory perceptions as being filtered from a vastly larger collection of ever-present stimuli, keeping only that which is practical and useful for survival. "To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness that will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet." 6 He goes on to state that in "egolessness there is an 'obscure knowledge' [on the order of] 'perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe.'" 7

I know the feeling; but I know it without the aid of powerful drugs. All I have to do is free up my mind—to quote one of my journal entries: "I don't think when I photograph. Mind goes blank. Images made using a lot of thought,

7Ibid., p. 26.
conscious thought, turn out displeasing. I like reflexive photography. Difficult with an 8 X 10." Huxley, of course, has an explanation:

What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful. A little of the knowledge belonging to Mind at Large oozes past the reducing valve of the brain and ego, into his consciousness. It is a knowledge of the intrinsic significance of every existent.

This is a perfect description of what is happening. The state I achieve when I am photographing does not begin to approach anything as transcendental as pure consciousness, or Mind at Large as Huxley calls it. It slightly transcends the ordinary. It does include egolessness and the feeling of connectedness with the universe and the sense of knowing something extremely important without knowing exactly what it is one knows—in Huxley's words, an "obscure knowledge." There are, however, no illusions, no distortions, nor even a noticeable heightening of any of the physical senses. There is only the added awareness of the soul of things, their mana or imunu. I am sure a large portion of the general population experiences this sensation at some time in their lives. I think it sad that there is no word in common usage in English to describe it.

I believe it is there. I believe it is real. I am convinced it is not a product of my imagination. This brings me

\[8\text{Ibid., p. 33.}\]
to the issue of "seeing is believing" versus "believing is seeing." Sight is the dominant sense, the main source of information, in humans. The phrase "seeing is believing" has been around a long time. How true is it? Sleight of hand can easily fool the eye. It is not uncommon for, say, six eyewitnesses to give six different accounts of the same event. Fooling the eye with photographs is even easier. What is actually at work here? The answer is simple, the mind. People do not believe what they see, they see what they believe. They interpret all in-coming visual information in terms of their own individual understanding of the world. Their beliefs and biases dictate the nature of the perception. The long preceding discourse revealed the biases by which I interpret all in-coming information.

At this point, I would like to say a word about photographic Truth. It was frequently discussed in class but was never really defined. If a photographer wants a photograph to lie, it will lie. The tricks and devices are too numerous to describe here. Sometimes even unintentional "lies" creep in, as in the case of amateur photography manuals warning the outdoor portrait photographer not to position his subject in front of a distant tree or telephone pole, otherwise it will appear to be growing out of the subject's head. If however, a photographer wishes and makes every effort to photograph that which is true, it will be his or her truth. The truth is the photographer's, not the photograph's. People do not always believe what they see, but they always see what they believe.
II. THE IMAGES

I have always had great difficulty discussing the content of my photographs. The subjects of the images have never solely been the physical objects pictured, but rather their souls as I perceive them. Considering the frame of mind I encourage in myself while taking pictures, I think it would be fair to say that, in some small way, the essence of that "obscure knowledge" is also present. Since it is knowledge without words, the difficulties in explaining it should be apparent. In fact, it was its wordlessness, combined with my awareness of it, that made me turn to photography as a means of communicating it in the first place.

To say the experience of knowing the "obscure knowledge" cannot be put into words is inaccurate. However, it is impossible to do so without total contradiction. Everything in that knowledge, when put into words, contradicts itself. Words define by isolation, by imposing boundaries and limits, and by acknowledging differences. If boundaries and differences are completely irrelevant in the other mode of perception, how can one describe things in a terminology based on boundaries and differences?

Language does, however, contain similar contradictions of its own. These contradictions serve as a minuscule indication of the far greater, much broader contradictions
contained in the "obscure knowledge." For example, day and night are opposites. The whole concept of opposites stresses differences. The Western mind thinks in terms of opposites, differences, and boundaries rather than in terms of complements, similarities, or continuaums (continua). The language does not completely fail to recognize the complementary nature of things; it simply contradicts itself. We know that day and night exist as a feature of the Earth rotating on its axis. But if one were to ask someone, "Do you think day and night are the same thing?" the answer would probably be, "No." If one were to continue the interview with, "How long is a day?" the answer would probably be, "Twenty-four hours." Well, then, how long is a night?

The language knows opposites are complements. People who have thought about it know that we would be unaware of the existence of such things as night, heat, and ignorance if day, cold, and knowledge did not also exist. Language allows for that. It calls day and night opposites while also calling them day. It calls man and woman opposites while also calling them man. It calls hot and cold opposites, but calls them both temperature. It allows opposites (complements) to be two sides of the same coin. But the system, the basis of our language, and therefore our thought, is based on concentrating on the differences and divisions in everything.

There are no relevant boundaries and differences in a truly transcendental state. The state of pure consciousness, a state of ultimate clarity and lucidity, is described as
complete nothingness, but with it comes a total understanding of the complex nature of everything in its raw, undeciphered form. One always Knows both sides of the coin.

Since I am not a Zen Master, the degree to which this state effects me is minimal. As Huxley says about the artist, a little of this experience gets passed the brain's filter. It is apparent in the photographs in varying degrees. The first awareness beyond normal consciousness is of the presence of mana or imunu, which is "everywhere at once like an impersonal force, . . . 'It was the soul of things. . . . It had personality, but it was only such as resembled the specific characteristics of its habitat. . . . It could be kind or malign, it could cause pain and suffer pain.'" 9 As a photographer trying to photograph this hidden aspect of reality, I became like my primitive counterpart, whose "primary object is to discover in the objects which attract and retain his attention the presence and degree of intensity and . . . the kindly or malevolent disposition of that quality or principle or mana or imunu." 10

I think I succeeded in capturing it on film. As I stated earlier, photographic truth is the photographer's truth. I made every effort to be totally honest. In my careful scrutiny of the images, I looked for indications of unwitting

10 Ibid., p. 19.
or inadvertent lies or any heavy-handedness on my part. I could not find any evidence of such. I used no tricks or devices to achieve the strange, disturbing effects I achieved. I cannot stress enough that this is not my average, ordinary way of seeing the world. I had to allow myself to make the shift into another mode of perception in order to photograph the soul of things. To make the task unusually challenging, (or unnecessarily difficult,) I used an 8 X 10 in. view camera.

The choice of subject matter came first. Next came the decision to use a view camera, which helped dictate my subsequent choices. The whole procedure consisted of using a large format camera, black and white materials, photographing places or objects, working mostly outdoors, always presenting readily identifiable subjects, while at the same time photographing their souls. Economic considerations encouraged the use of black and white materials. The technical problems I encountered will be discussed later. The influence the large format, black and white procedure had on the image content will be discussed now.

The 8 X 10 in. photographic procedure is so slow that, according to my calculations, making one exposure takes roughly the same amount of time and effort as shooting thirty-six exposures with a 35mm. camera. A 35mm. camera allows the user to spontaneously capture events of extremely short duration. This is not the case with a view camera used in the field. If it was my intention to photograph the soul of
things with a view camera, its presence could not be fleeting or transitory. It would have to linger at least long enough for me to photograph it. If I became aware of its presence and then lost my awareness while setting up the camera and (mis)calculating the exposure, the "soul" would not appear in the photograph. The only explanation I can offer for this phenomenon, is that the truth of the photograph can only be the truth of the photographer at the time the exposure is made. Conversely, being able to succeed using a large format camera was extremely rewarding. It meant that my handling of a view camera was becoming reflexive, that I was gaining real control over altering my consciousness, and served to reinforce my belief that mana or imunu really do exist.

The use of black and white followed out of economic necessity, but this was not the only reason. With black and white, the photographer is involved in every step of the process. I wanted to be responsible for every step from start to finish. Another reason was the indescibable specialness of 8 X 10 in. black and white negatives. They are seductive and addictive. I was hooked the first time I saw one and held it up to the light. The final and most important consideration was the black and white aesthetic.

In the absence of color, no matter how much life is depicted, there is a certain feeling of deadness--an exquisite deadness, but a deadness none the less. There is also a feeling of the absence of time. A logical conclusion for this might be that black and white is associated with the past.
I sense the separateness from time, however, even in the most contemporary black and white photographs. If I had to offer my own reason why black and white photography seems to exist outside of time, it would be because I always dream in black and white. In my dreams, there may sometimes be a sense of urgency, but there is never a sense of time. The beauty of black and white is that, in the absence of color, all that remains is the interplay between shadow and light.

It has been said that my printing is too dark. This may or may not be true. The prints are not too dark for me. All of the shadow detail is present. There are very few true whites in my subjects, so there are very few true whites in my prints. The true whites, however, are faithfully reproduced when they do occur. Even the snow scenes were photographed either before dawn or on days that were so heavily overcast that everything appeared to be grey. Another influencing factor was the paucity of bright, sunny days in Rochester. The most significant reason was the time of day that most of the pictures were taken. Almost all of them were taken just before or during sunset, when shadows are longest and deepest. If the images are too dark, (I still contend that they are not,) then it is my opinion that nothing was lost as a result of this error in judgment, but perhaps something was gained.

The images were described as being moody, brooding, eerie, creepy, ominous, threatening, foreboding, as well as busy and cluttered. One image of some plants and some stonework at Mt. Hope Cemetary (slide 21), was specifically
described as "Gothic Horror." Another image of some plants in the Conservatory (slide 23), in which the feelings of animism and malevolence are particularly strong, was dubbed "Warner Brothers Take LSD" by one of my classmates. The best overall summary came from my younger brother, Tom, who has no background in art or photography, but was kind enough to allow me to take notes as he commented on my work. He said there was a strong sense of isolation and a strong sense of being "out of place in time." He said he thought the images were haunting, foreboding, and morbid. He said he was not drawn into the photographs, but was instead drawn into his own thoughts, and that the nature and tone of those thoughts were evoked by the moods of the photographs. He said they made him think of death and the inevitability of death. Although such morbidity had not been my intention, I was grateful for his honesty, lack of vagueness, and his acknowledgement of the photographs as a point of departure rather than as an end in themselves.

What I perceive in the images is that the subjects have lives and thoughts of their own and that they are aware of their surroundings and of their place in the overall scheme of things. In some of the images (slides 6, 14, 22, 23, 26), there is a strong feeling of a malevolent presence. The odd thing about it is the malevolence does not seem to be directed at anyone or anything. It seems to be the existence of malevolence for its own sake. In almost all of the remaining pictures, there is a sense of threat or suspense that
something is about to happen. Another quality in this group of images is that the subjects seem to be bearing witness to the passage of time and are the resigned recipients of all the thoughts and feelings, good or bad, that go on in the universe.

One image (slide 20), the photograph of Bill Gratwick's garden, goes beyond all this. It has the feeling of a much higher, much purer state of consciousness—the great void and its complement, a total understanding of everything in the universe. It is the purest and most spiritual of all the images.

While on the subject of the spiritual, let me return to the stipulation in the proposal that all the subject matter must be readily identifiable. I have seen some photographs that are amazingly spiritual. They look like genuine photographs of souls as one would imagine souls look. What is missing from these photographs, and what also makes these photographs so strikingly successful, that the actual, real physical subject is not readily identifiable from the information provided. I was photographing mana or imunu which "had personality, but it was only such as it resembled its habitat."\(^{11}\) To me and to my pictures, it was of critical importance that the average, ordinary nature of my subjects be included along with their spiritual component.

Another important factor was the idea of a continuum and the connectedness of all things. The only way I can think to

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 19.
explain this is by using an analogy, in this case a pie. Pie can be presented to someone as a whole pie; it is a complete and self-contained unit. Pie can also be presented as a slice of pie; although it is a complete piece, it is very obvious that it was connected to and was part of something larger.

My pictures are like the slice of pie. They are complete as photographs, but they are not self-contained. Their borders could theoretically be extended indefinitely. They deliberately lack that quality found in advertising photography that forces the viewer to focus his attention on one thing. Conversely, the purpose of my pictures is to force the viewer to release his concentration and let his mind wander.

Having said that, this is probably the best time to introduce the works of other photographers to support my contentions. The photographers I have in mind are: Atget, Sudek, Clarence John Laughlin, Wynn Bullock, and Ansel Adams. Ansel Adams' work will serve as the antithesis of my thesis. This is not to say I dislike his work. I have great respect for him as an artist and technician. I am merely saying that if one were to generalize about his photos, those observations would be the antithesis of observations about my work. This goes beyond the obvious fact that he is a master technician, and I am not.

I guess the words I am looking for are "contrived" and "self-conscious." I stated earlier, that the photographs I made using a lot of conscious thought could not capture the soul of things. Well, Ansel Adams has cornered the market
in soulless, self-conscious photography. His primary involvement (his "truth") while taking pictures was with the zone system. His second concern was composition and the perfection of nature. I am aware of his Sierra Club commitment and his respect for nature. I would also venture a guess that he believed that part of Genesis in which God made man in His own image and likeness, and told man he was to be the master of all the creatures of the earth. His photographs depict nature as a glorious prop, not a living entity with a soul of its own. He also has the astonishing ability to disconnect a slice of landscape from its surroundings. It is my contention that the average viewer can look at just about any landscape photograph, and, in his own mind, can invent the terrain that extends beyond the borders of the photograph. With almost half of the Ansel Adams pictures I viewed, I found this simple task impossible to perform. I am aware that this is because he has employed the techniques of advertising photography and focussed the viewer's attention expressly on what is presented. What I do not understand is how a man whose work portrays nature in the most unnatural tones imaginable; avoids any subject that does not depict nature as neat, orderly, and perfect; is only concerned with nature as a prop and therefore photographs it as though it were an advertisement (for the Zone System and Yosemite) can be considered one of the gratest nature photographers of all time.

I acknowledge Ansel Adams as an exceptionally gifted technician. I realize he is the major influence on a
generation of photographers. His influence is so strong in terms of what a photograph should look like that I felt like a heretic when I decided that if I could print like anyone, it would be Wynn Bullock. I like dark, contrasty prints. The important point, however, is that technical skill is nice, but it is not everything.

This brings me to Atget, Sudek, and Clarence John Laughlin, none of whom would win prizes for technical excellence. The importance, the richness, and the beauty of their work come from the content and from their direct involvement with their subjects. Two observations made about my work concerned the darkness of the images and their busy, complex, or cluttered nature. I think the same is true for the three photographers just mentioned. Apparently no one told them to limit the number of elements in each picture and to make sure there is one strong, central object that is very light in tonal value against a dark background. I appreciate the fact that there is a lot going on in their pictures, and that the shadow areas are at least as important and interesting as the highlights, if not more so. I feel this is also true about my work.

The next aspect is the photographer's direct involvement with the subject while making the exposure. I stated earlier that one's emotions were confined to the physical component of reality; the soul was confined to the spiritual component; and the intellect was at home in both. Atget's involvement with his subjects is complete. It is emotional, spiritual, and (to a lesser degree) intelligent. His ability to simulta-
neously experience his subjects emotionally and spiritually has never ceased to amaze me. His involvement is so complete, so well-balanced, and so well-integrated.

This is not the case with Sudek, Clarence John Laughlin, or my work. The emotional component is generally absent. It has been cast aside in favor of unearthly pursuits. In Atget's images, the dark areas and the complexities exist, but they are balanced by his emotional involvement with his subjects. In Sudek's, Laughlin's, and my photographs, the darkness and the complexity have taken over. We have crossed the line, and the balance of placing equal importance emotional and spiritual is lost. I knew from the beginning that my images would be devoid of emotional content because I was trying to get beyond that. What I did not realize was the overall effect the absence of emotion would have on the pictures as a group.

Seeing the thesis photographs as a group for the first time had a very surprising effect on me. I had hoped they would be both intelligent and spiritual, since that was what I was exploring and those were the ingredients I felt I was contributing. But what I saw when I looked at them together, and only then, was an intelligence that far exceeded my own intelligence and a spirituality that far exceeded my own spirituality. The collective intelligence and spirituality had fused together to form an essence that was very strange, very still, and hauntingly lucid. The only individual image that possessed this quality, but to a much lesser degree, was the picture of Bill Gratwick's garden (slide 20).
Suddenly, when presented together, they all had it. It was identical in each picture. The intensity may have varied from picture to picture, but the essence was identical; it was indistinguishable from one to the next. I had deliberately chosen a wide variety of subjects in an effort to show that "the soul of things" existed everywhere. What I had never imagined was, when shown as a group, the "soul" would look exactly the same in each picture.

I have seen a few photography exhibitions in which the individual images would look or feel one way, and then something would "click" in my head. The whole show would become unified into one overall experience with an impact that was dramatically different from my response to the individual images. I had not expected my work to have that effect on me.

From comments that were made, I know some people thought it was a cohesive body of work, while others viewed it as a haphazard collection of dark, creepy photographs. I know of one other person whose response to the group as a whole was different from his response to the individual pictures. Again, the person who had the most to say was my brother, Tom, as I took notes. He said when he looked at them individually, they were moody and foreboding, but when he looked at them collectively, the only thing he could think of was death. From my own impressions of a strange, still, haunting lucidity, it is not a significant leap to death.
III. TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All the photographs were made using an 8 X 10 in. view camera with a 14 in. lens that stopped down to f/90. The film was Kodak Tri-X sheet film. A few of the earliest negatives were developed in Kodak D-76. The majority of the negatives were developed using Kodak HC-110, dilution B. All prints were contact printed on Kodak Polycontrast F, using Edwal Super 111, dilution B. The strictest archival standards for fixing, clearing, and washing were employed. All of the prints were archivally matted, full frame, in 14 X 17 inch white museum board and framed for exhibition.

The first procedural choice was opting for a large format camera over a 35mm camera. I was fully aware at the time I made this decision that I could have shot the entire thesis in two weeks using a 35mm. The 35mm format did not present enough of a challenge nor the opportunity for a major learning experience. I had come to RIT with one purpose—-to learn, the more the better, and the harder the better. The view camera epitomized this, as did using black and white materials.

The next choice was black and white. Large format color was astronomically expensive, and it did not offer total control. Black and white was ideally suited to the nature of the subject matter. I was also having more trouble with black and white than I had ever had with color. The more technical
information I learned, such as trying to be mindful of reciprocity law failure, the more serious my technical problems became.

I learned to use a view camera, sheet film, and the zone system simultaneously. I would like to take this opportunity to say that I think this approach is a mistake. I think one should first learn to use a view camera and sheet film following the data sheet instructions for exposure and development. Then the zone system should be taught. There is such a thing as learning too much too soon.

My own difficulties, however, stemmed from not knowing how to use a light meter, specifically a Gossen Luna-Pro. Actually, I knew how to use one; I just did not quite grasp how to use one with the zone system adjustment incorporated into the meter reading. This led to a year of anguish, torture, and almost weekly exposure tests. The tests were consistently perfect, thereby giving no indication of what I was doing wrong in the field.

If I were following the exact same steps in my tests and in my picture-taking, why were the test results always perfect while all my other negatives were so grossly overexposed they were opaque black? The answer, in retrospect, is simple. I was not doing the exact same thing in the tests and in the field. In the tests, I read for the highlight detail, then stopped down two stops on the lens, and made the exposure. In the field, I always determined the aperture setting while looking through the ground glass to get the depth and focus I
wanted. Then I would take my meter reading and make the two stop adjustment on the meter dial. Unfortunately, I was turning the dial in the wrong direction. Instead of stopping down two stops, I was opening up two stops. The final result was a slew of unprintable negatives that were overexposed by four stops. If, at the end of my first year, Owen Butler had not watched me turn the dial in the wrong direction and start smiling and shaking his head, I might still be trying to figure out what I was doing wrong. Obviously, if I had realized what the error was, I would have remedied it a lot sooner.

Instead, I became an expert on developers, development times, and printing unprintable negatives. Dense negatives give contrasty results. Some of the whites were so hot, all the burning-in in the world could not produce any highlight detail (e.g. slide 16). I eventually started using HC-110, which softened the contrast appreciably. But even with this, I gradually worked my way down to half the recommended development time. Once my meter problems were resolved, I continued to use HC-110, but for the full recommended development time. Printing the properly exposed negatives was a breeze; almost none of them even required any burning or dodging.

The only other exposure consideration was the use of filters. The two black and white filters I own that fit my huge 14 in. Fujinon lens are Kodak Wratten gelatin filters #25 red and #15 dark yellow. Only three images in the exhibition were made using filters. The first two, made on the same day during the period when I was using my light meter incorrectly, were
shots of Bill Gratwick's garden and of a tree near his swimming pool (slides 20 and 15, respectively). Because I was using a filter, adding three stops for a #25 red filter coupled with subtracting two stops for the zone system adjustment should have given me an exposure that was one stop over the original meter reading. I turned the dial in the wrong direction, one stop under the initial meter reading, thereby ending up with exposures that were two stops under the required exposure. If they had not been (and still are), the two best pictures I had ever taken, I would never have bothered using well over a hundred sheets of paper for each in an effort to produce usable prints. It should be noted here that it was this supreme printing effort that discouraged me from the further use of filters until I resolved my exposure problems. By that time, however, I had devised an aesthetic that did not include using filters. I only used one once, four days before the thesis show, to photograph an orchard (slide 26).

The paper developer, Edwal Super 111, was chosen for its silvery look and for its excellent tonal quality for the long development times that bring out even the most minute detail in a contact print. It allows one to make dark prints without losing detail in even the darkest shadows. It works well with Kodak Polycontast F paper.

A variety of papers was considered: Agfa, Ilford, and Kodak. Agfa Portriga printed well but was too warm for this particular group of images. Agfa Brovira was too harsh. Ilford was not harsh enough. It also has a quality of being
too white. This brought me back to the first paper I had ever used, Kodak Polycontrast F.

Polycontrast had just the right look, harsh but not too harsh. It also had the decided advantage of being the only paper on which I could print my two favorite images. These, if one recalls, were underexposed by two stops. They were not just underexposed; they were underexposed through a red filter. Even with a normal exposure, a red filter adds density to the highlights and subtracts it from the shadows. Parts of these negatives, the highlights that were two stops underexposed, printed perfectly on grade 1 or 2 paper, but the shadow areas turned into solid black silhouettes. The shadow areas printed on the highest grade of paper, but the highlight areas were completely absent. I had tried burning and dodging on a single grade of paper without success. Basically, what I needed was two grades of paper to make each print. So, through the use of dodging and Polycontrast filters, I was able to combine two separate paper grades onto one sheet of Polycontrast paper. If one really scrutinizes the image of Bill Gratwick's garden (slide 20), one can see, on the two pillars at the back of the garden, the horizontal line where the shift in paper grades occurs.
IV. EXHIBITION AND THESIS SHARING

To say that I had planned the exhibition down to the smallest detail would be an understatement. I was well-organized and seemingly well-prepared for all contingencies. I had the mats professionally cut well in advance. I had the frames well in advance. The glass was ordered. I had the sequence of the photographs worked out perfectly. I had set aside two weeks for the final printing followed by a whole week for matting and framing.

The show was to contain between twenty and thirty prints. I had twenty-two images that I thought were really good. I had arranged and rearranged them around my apartment until they held together beautifully. The I went to the MFA Gallery to visualize how they would look in that space. The Bruce Davidson show was up. It was the only exhibition that I had seen at RIT that took up every square inch of space in the gallery. The sheer quantity of pictures along with their colossal size was overwhelming. I felt intimidated. The idea that I was going to follow his show with a meager twenty-two prints of a measly size made me feel so inadequate. I went home and immediately added two passable shots to my offering.

Then there was a delay with the glass. I was told it would be ready on a Friday, eight days before I was to hang the show. It was not ready until the following Tuesday. I
was not fazed; I still had plenty of time to frame everything. As I was driving home from picking up the glass, I casually stopped to photograph an orchard that had always caught my eye.

Then it happened. I like printing dark, very dark. My bare prints were as dark as I wanted them to be. I matted and framed one. Under glass, the print was too dark even for me. During my final printing, I had completely failed to take into account how much darker prints look under glass. I had just spent two weeks in the darkroom without ever coming out, and it had all been for nothing. I checked through the piles of duplicates for lighter prints. I found a few, but not enough.

I returned to the darkroom Tuesday evening, developed the new orchard negative, and then began reprinting the entire show. From Tuesday to Friday afternoon, I did not eat or sleep. I stopped only to make coffee and have an occasional cigarette or to make my daily trip to RIT to use the print dryer. I went through almost 500 sheets of paper. On Friday, the day before the show, I had a week's worth of framing to do. A fellow MFA student offered to assemble the frames. I cleaned glass and started matting and framing. The process lasted until Saturday morning. In the meantime as my judgment worsened from lack of sleep, I added two more pictures because I was following the gigantic Bruce Davidson show.

When I arrived at the MFA Gallery, I started following my diagram of which prints went where. Things were suddenly going smoothly. I had all the pictures on the floor, properly spaced and in their proper sequence, when Roy Greer walked in.
He did not like the sequence and just started moving them around as they were being hung. I moved them back to their original order. He changed them again. I changed them back. Then he changed them; then I changed them; then he changed them again. This continued for well over an hour. I finally decided to arrange them in their proper sequence later--a wise decision, otherwise I would still be serving out a life sentence for the murder of Roy Greer. I had hoped there would be time before the opening reception. My family had arrived, and they were waiting for me back at my apartment. I still had to organize the food for the party. And worst of all, I had to try and make myself look human after five days without any sleep. We arrived at the gallery with the food in plenty of time for me to rearrange the pictures. However, as soon as people saw food, they started coming into the gallery, so I never had the chance to rearrange them.

The only reason for including this story is because I was so well-organized, yet things fell apart. One oversight, the fact that pictures look darker under glass, ruined my otherwise perfect planning. In showing my work since, things have gone off without a hitch.

The show itself exhilarated me. Seeing it hung, my first one-woman show, made me feel great. I partied long into the night. I am sure that the people who saw me stumbling and falling assumed that I had had too much to drink, never realizing that I was so exhausted that my legs could no longer support me. The exhilaration was so intense it kept me going.
I think that if I had not had to reprint the entire show, including some unprintable negatives, at the last minute, the climactic thrill of seeing them hanging on the gallery walls would not have been anywhere near as great.

I know that after I finally got some sleep, I woke up feeling depressed, numb, and bewildered. Everything seemed anticlimactic. I would go to the gallery and look at the pictures and think, "I really should put them in the right order." I never did. I would look at the extra pictures and get angry at myself for being intimidated by the size of the Bruce Davidson show, knowing that a smaller show of my best work would have been more effective. Other times, I would sit behind the flats reading in order to eavesdrop on comments about the work. No one said anything bad, at least not while I was listening. A few people made some very nice comments, and yet I was nonplussed.

I was still depressed at the thesis sharing. I was also extremely defensive, like a mother who does not wish to hear other people's criticisms of her child. As a rule, I want to hear what other people think about my work, good or bad. For whatever reasons, this was not the case at the sharing.

The major criticism was the randomness of the work. The order in which they were hung clearly exacerbated the situation. It was suggested that if I had only photographed in one spot, the feeling of randomness could have been avoided. I protested in earnest that I did not want to avoid it. The whole point of the work was to show that "the soul of things" existed everywhere. I felt the more random the settings, the more it proved
my point. The sequence in which the images were presented could have been more cohesive, but after everybody saw them in the wrong order at the opening, I thought it might be awkward to change them.

There was also the observation that the show would have been stronger if I had eliminated certain pictures, specifically an image of Chimney Bluffs and one of the Conservatory (slides 25 and 27). I was in full agreement with this. Those were the last two pictures to be added. I wish I had only showed twenty or twenty-three (I keep forgetting to include the orchard shot taken a few days before the show) of the twenty-seven pictures. The colossal show that preceded mine really affected me.

The exhibition was approved by the board.
CONCLUSION

The thesis photographs were a demonstration and a culmination of what I had learned up to that point. They satisfied the proposed criteria I had set out to meet. By recording my thoughts and speculations in a journal and by watching the trends that were developing in my pictures, I gained a tremendous amount of insight into life, the universe, and myself. I had never before realized the extent to which believing influences seeing.

The thesis photographs also stand as a testament to my priorities. I have had a life-long fascination with the spiritual component of reality. I have also always had a love affair with learning and challenge. I probably should never admit this, but during my first year as I was contemplating a thesis topic, I was occasionally tempted to choose something easy, tightly restricted and confined, and in 35mm color. When the time came to make a commitment, I chose the most difficult subject I knew, and I chose the most difficult means of executing it available to me. Looking back, I know anything less would have been a betrayal of everything that is important to me.
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Installation Shots