ABSTRACT

THE RETURN

By

Linda Andrea Fox

April 2012

"The Return" investigates how culture shapes our understanding of the natural world. The life process of death is the key to this understanding. Culture has interpreted, compartmentalized, or rationalized this process in such a way as to prevent a holistic relationship with the earth and with ourselves.

Creative processes in which we work -- painting, literature, and photography -- are not that dissimilar to the creative life processes in which we are immersed and those that surround us. Death as a creative process is a necessary step toward regeneration and renewal. I approach my photographic subjects with the understanding that these images of what I am seeing are also in the midst of a creative process.

I utilized the method of series or sequence – to hold the moment in the death-life process, a moment that needed to be suspended, so one could look at it with more than one glance, have the time to look into time and change, to study its movement and its confusion and beauty – so that the effect of an image captured in a series on the observer would hold a more lasting, fluid impression.

I photograph common animals encountered in ordinary small town life; animals one might see by the side of the road, a domesticated dog killed by a car, a neighborhood cat, a discarded catfish caught in a nearby river and left behind, a mourning dove that has broken its neck, a deer in season killed by local hunters, a feral fox killed on the highway. These subjects are currently part of a human being's conscious and unconscious awareness of the animal world in a typical small town. They may be a part but not a necessary part of the human world (excluding the emotional relationship between pet owner and pet); that is, they are elements of the world viewed from an unaffected distance.

"The Return" recognizes the possibility to recreate visions of the natural world that are more harmonious and less compartmentalized, more wholesome, less segmented, and avoid the segregation of "diseased" versus "healthy," "polluted" versus "unpolluted," or "dead" versus "living," In some small way, I am aiming to encourage a view of the natural world that sees value and beauty in all of its processes.

THE RETURN

A Report of a Creative Thesis

Presented To

The Faculty of the School of Art and Design

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Photography

By

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THE RETURN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude to Jonathan Bowling, Lawrence Petersen, Michael Ehlbeck, Maria Modlin, Cynthia Bickley-Green, Ron Graziani, Thomas Douglass, Jeff Brown, Angela Wells, and Tom Braswell for their support and creative guidance.

I can't express enough appreciation to my mother, Frances Fox, for her patience and love that carried me through this process. Thank you for helping me making my dream come true.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

My photographs, large-scale color inkjet prints on cotton rag paper, depict animals in the environment in various stages of returning to the earth. The images show movements of resistance, confusion, something blurred, or unknown, and represent an instance of transformation that is anxious, fearful, a recognition of fate, the inevitable movement in life, death, and regenerative processes. My work is about change.

Human beings seem to find it much easier to accept and to participate in life and death processes when viewing them through environmental landscapes and animals, or when considering these processes metaphorically.

I grew up in a military family background where one is forced to accept change every three years, being relocated to another state or country. One understands the necessity of adapting to change and having to meet new friends and acquaintances. Over space and time, the experience of change has helped me minimize the fear of taking risks, especially when something healthy and positive may result.

My father and mother both were in the military, and also worked in health care and preventive medicine. In fact, many in my family have pursued health care careers. I myself worked as a medical photographer for eight years at the hospitals of Duke and East Carolina University, photographing births, stages of disease, and post mortem. This personal background influenced my artistic vision and purpose. I have also come

to understand how culture and environment shape my understanding of personal health and the natural world. It is not a giant step in my understanding, for example, to see the relationship between individual health and well being in the context of the earth environment.

When change is not understood or when phases of change are somehow compartmentalized, kept from view, or unconnected to the whole, the result may produce dysfunction and ill health. This is true for the individual as well as the planet. I appreciate Einstein's observation that "Human beings are a part of the whole we call the Universe, a small region in time and space. They regard themselves, their ideas and their feelings as separate and apart from all the rest. It is something like an optical illusion in their consciousness. This illusion is a sort of prison; it restricts us to our personal aspirations and limits our affective life to a few people very close to us. Our task should be to free ourselves from this prison, opening up our circle of compassion in order to embrace all living creatures and all of nature in its beauty" (qtd. in Ruether 13).

My work attempts to capture that "embrace" -- to recognize life and death processes as part of that embrace, and to acknowledge the beauty in both. In my mind, this is clearly a step to a healthier understanding of our lives and our relationship with the earth.

Chapter 2: OTHER WORLDS

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book *Women Healing the Earth,* suggests that the creative processes in which we work -- painting, literature, and photography -- are not that dissimilar to the creative life processes in which we are immersed and those that surround us. They share the same quality of regeneration and renewal. She writes: "We ourselves continually re-create the life that is in us. Human culture, in its multiple artist and literary expressions, bears witness to our admirable creativity. This creativity also exists, albeit in a different form, in the vegetable and animal worlds"(14). She sees the natural world and the human world not as separate but as creatively dependent on one another. "Living with the context of nature as a whole," she writes, "we have gradually accumulated significant learnings. We have responded, for example, to the challenge of rivers that stretched before us, separating one place from another, we have learned to build bridges. To move on water we built boats, then ships. To cross great distances we built airplanes, and so on. We learned to closely examine our human experience, as well as lives of insects, animals, and plants; and thus we found ways of living and developing our creativity as we responded to the challenges posed by each situation" (14). Yet she observes we routinely ignore this relationship in the way we think. She writes, "We have often been taught, however, that these 'other worlds' have little creativity … we always think of creativity in human terms and judge everything else on that basis" (15).

Taking her words, I try to honor and capture the creativity that exists in the natural world, and approach my photographic subjects with the understanding that they are also in the midst of a creative process.

I have also been informed by what Leonard Schlain in *Art and Physics* calls the "concept of changing time into a frozen moment of art". Schlain conveys that this is what Monet practiced in 1891 by painting the same scene repeatedly from the same position, but at different times of day or successive days (108). The notion of a series of photographs, or images in sequence, interest me. Minor White, whom I admire very much, also worked with sequences and series; for example, his "Sound of One Hand Clapping" (1957) and **"**Windowsill Daydreaming**"** (1958) series.

Both "series" and "sequence" are not art terms but come from the sciences and serve as indicators or descriptors of time. Schlain writes, "Monet enlarged the moment of the present by capturing the fugitive impression of now" (108-109). For me, there was something about the present moment in life or death that needed to be suspended, so one could look at it with more than a glance, have a moment to look into time and change, to study its movement, and its confusion and beauty. I feel the effect of an image captured in a series holds a more lasting, fluid impression.

Chapter 3: THE INTERPLAY OF VALUE AND BEAUTY

At mid-Twentieth century, Werner Heisenberg observed that, "The common division of the world into subject and object, inner world and outer world, body and soul, is no longer adequate … (qtd. in Davies, 112). Furthermore, Heisenberg said, "Natural science does not simply describe and explain nature; it is part of the interplay between nature and ourselves" (102). The observer and the observed in science, as in art, are connected in the "interplay" between the subjective and objective worlds, joined in a phenomena of perception meaning physicality. This "interplay" is what I want to illustrate in my photographs.

The implications are far reaching. The creation of meaning is also a creative process. In the realm of Art Therapy and Art Education, the possibility therefore exists to recreate visions of the natural world that are more harmonious and less compartmentalized, more wholesome, less segmented, and avoid the segregation of "diseased" versus "healthy," "dead" versus "living," "polluted" versus "unpolluted." In some small way, I want to encourage a view of the natural world that sees value and beauty in all of its processes.

Politically, some small push toward a more balanced understanding of the natural world could alter attitudes about caring for the environment, and perhaps alter the human disregard for the species with which we share this space and time. By

extension, a new more balanced understanding could dramatically change how we treat one another. Specifically, I mean to change current attitudes about death and dying as something to hide away from view as well as social attitudes about the aged, the vulnerable, the unwanted, and the underprivileged that ruthlessly ignore our human connections. After all, there is little difference between the various phases of life in which we find ourselves. Perhaps it is only a matter of a sequence in time.

There are other photographers who have worked with animals in various stages of decomposition or dismemberment, most notably, Frederick Sommer (1905-1999) in his "Eight Young Roosters" (1938) and "Coyotes" (1945). Contemporary photographer Tara Sellios works with animal bones and animal parts to explore themes of life and death. Rosamond Wolff Purcell documents how animal specimens are preserved and collected, and the human attitudes about animals and information inherent in this process. In "Unnatural History" (2010), Diane Fox is concerned with how taxidermy specimens are used to present a false natural history to a museum public and Tommaso Ausili's "The Hidden Death" (Slaughterhouse) series (2009) dramatically captures the pathos of death in domestic animal production.

In relation to these artists' examination of animals and themes of death and representation, my work chronicles common animals encountered in ordinary small town life; animals one might see by the side of the road, a domesticated dog killed by a

car, a neighborhood cat, a discarded catfish caught in a nearby river, a Mourning Dove that has broken its neck, a deer killed in season by local hunters, or a feral fox killed on the highway. These subjects are currently part of our conscious and subconscious awareness of the animal world. They may be a part of (i.e. may co-exist with us), but not a necessary part of the human world consciousness (excluding the emotional relationship between pet owner and pet); that is, they are elements of the world viewed from an unaffected distance.

Although I have tried to capture images of animals in various stages of decomposition, these images also record the environment in which I have either found or placed the animals. Many of my subjects were gifts; they were given to me to photograph after being taken from the locations of their death. Some were taken from dry storage, some were frozen, and some were freshly killed and not preserved in any way. I then placed the subjects in other environments to prompt conceptual comparisons, a garden setting, for instance, in the cat dyptich, "Where does it begin, where does it end?" (plate 8) versus a farmyard, in "When will I be home?" (plate 13); or grass versus more man-made surfaces like broken pavements. The placement brings together various cultural environments in order to provide a broader understanding of the interrelatedness between human beings and other life forms in terms of symbiosis and ecology.

Chapter 4: OTHER WAYS OF SEEING

Some of the arrangements were surprising in their abstractness, like the owl placed under Plexiglass in "Are there other ways to see?" (plate 4) or the fossilized bird placed on a stone pavement "Why do you believe in this?" (plate 3). Writing about Frederick Sommer, Keith Davis states, "Sommer appreciated the tangible reality of the world as much as the inventions of human culture. Nature and culture, things and ideas, the found and the made, represented the two sides of the coin of human existence" (9). "Nature and culture, things and ideas" were very much present in this real and abstract quality of these photographic placements. Moreover, the juxtaposition of environments was my attempt to extend the idea that human existence must not merely claim itself but acknowledge this other world to which it belongs. In addition, Davis writes, "His [Sommer's] approach … in his art was one of integration" (10). My photographs were controlled to some extent to reinforce that integrative approach in my work as well.

For these color photographs, I used varying shutter speeds, a high depth of field, and various color value saturation points when printing to gain sharpness and detail for a hyper-realistic effect. As a result, another effect occurred, a kind of space constellation image appeared in several of the photos, especially in "Are there other ways to see?" (plate 4) and "What does the jellyfish know about life and death?" (plate 5). That is,

these images looked like star systems in a galaxy. To create the feeling I wanted, I used multiple exposures to layer the image to achieve a broader tonal range. Also, in printing, the optical illusion produced through a hyper-realistic technique (achieved in the Photoshop post process of color manipulation and enhancement) gives a two dimensional image a three dimensional effect.

Chapter 5: COLOR, CULTURE, AND MEMORY

Shooting color photographs brings an emotional content to the image. For decades, science has established a relationship between color and how it is perceived in the brain, and the subsequent emotions that are produced. Margaret Livingstone's *The Biology of Seeing* (2002) explains this biology for artists. *The Oxford Handbook of Face Perception* by Andrew J. Calder, Gillian Rhodes, Mark Johnson explains why this particular attribute of emotional response to color may have evolved in humans. Schlain in *Art and Physics* points out that Goethe studied "color's effects on the emotions" long before recent scientific research, and he summarizes that "[c]olor is the subjective perception in our brains of an objective feature of light's specific wavelengths"; that there is a "chromatic energy" that can be known (170). Furthermore, Schlain writes that color was and still is "somehow instinctual and primitive" and "precedes words and antedates civilization" – in other words, it is a way of knowing based on the relationship between color and perception that precedes the dominance of logic and the reliance on reason (171). Schlain observes, "Since color is an essential component of art, how the art of an age treats color reveals much about that culture" (172).

There is also a psychological effect of using color. In 1911 Wassily Kandinsky insisted that color "awakens a corresponding physical sensation, which undoubtedly works poignantly upon the soul" (qtd. in Chipp 153). In fact, all of the senses including

memory are awakened by color (Chipp 153-155). For a discussion of the relationship between color and memory, see "Short term memory retention: how time and color play a role" by Kasondra J. Richman in *Saint Martin's University Biology Journal* May 2006, Volume 1 pp. 51-56, or Ellen J. Esrock's "Touching Art: Intimacy, Embodiment, and the Somatosensory System" in *The Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University*, 2003. The "chromatic energy" in my photographs invokes memory and sensation.

In addition, sequencing was also part of my methodology and this, too, is deeply connected to color, emotion, and memory. Taking my inspiration from Minor White's philosophy of sequencing ("A picture story explains and demonstrates. A sequence sustains the feeling-states,") the emotions or "the feeling-states" I had while taking those photographs were sustained; I was after this equivalence.

There are dramatic changes when taking photographs of the same subject in its course of decomposition. Capturing each image with a camera involved the transformation of an object in a three-dimensional field to that of a two-dimensional field, required dozens of photographs, some taken over a course of months, others over the course of a few hours. Each image registered a recognition in me – some were conceptual; some were documentary, a remembrance of a reality that I had photographed previously.

Each image represents a life and death process, or different understandings of life and death as a regenerative process. The fox image "When will I be home?"(plate 22), for instance, is the most documentary of the images; it told a story, a real-life story. Even though the fox was found elsewhere (on Route 13, Pitt County, North Carolina), and placed in a farmyard environment, most people can recognize the story of a dead fox on farm land, the death of the intruder, the animal unwanted by agriculture. The most abstract image is, ironically, the same subject, the fox. The image is titled "How long will it last?"(plate 10). At first view, you can't tell what it is, it is unidentifiable, it can look like a microorganism, or like a tadpole. Conceptually, it represents a beginning and ending, where one life ends and another begins in the birth of microorganisms, new life.

The photograph "If I could speak what could be said?"(plate 1) was taken in my garden in spring of 2012 before any seeds began to sprout/germinate. It was an un-hatched baby bird given to me two years ago and kept in dry storage, wrapped in a napkin and placed in a box where I keep bones and other collections from nature. I placed it in the garden, arranged the image because it appeared to me as a totem pole shape, something sacred, something that had an iconic meaning beyond the physical. The title "If I could speak what could be said?" triggers other questions. Where does civilization stop and raw nature begin? Where does one cultural understanding of life give way to another?

Life has been on this planet for billions of years and we remember things through association. A seed, an egg, a birth can be seen both scientifically and metaphorically; they can signify the hope and possibility for new life, healthier ways of seeing, and various opportunities for healthier offspring to actively inhabit this planet earth.

In my opinion, unfortunately or fortunately, our memories appear to have become totally dependent on records of culture and cultural attitudes about the natural world. On one hand, our cultural record shows a poor record of the human relationship with the earth. Many people do not know where their food comes from, or how the simple life cycle of a bird or insect unfolds. People in general do not know if their lifestyle damages or helps the environment, and whether or not that consideration should be a part of human responsibility. On the other hand, the cultural record and our memory can be changed. Artistic expressions are one way of provoking a change. As poetic statements, my photographs, individually or in sequence, embody the whole cycle of life, death, and the process of regeneration. I am asking human beings to honestly and responsibly acknowledge their relationship to the earth and admit the need to understand that "rebirth" and "hope" is intimately and inextricably intertwined with the divine mother earth and the universe we live within.

Chapter 6: NARRATIVE OF TIME AND SPACE

In terms of anthropology, mythology, and spirituality, my exhibition, "The Return", works on several levels. The images are tied together by the narrative quality; each photograph tells a story, but the image also exists as an aesthetic vision and an emotion. The image, "If I could speak what could be said?" (plate 3) held an immediate symbolic meaning for me, a beginning and ending, a seed pod that did not germinate, a baby bird shaped like an egg floating in space. The emotional content was heightened through the formal manipulation of saturation, contrast, lighting, and exposure. I purposely arranged the foreground and background to separate the bird and give the bird totem greater depth. The wood chips in the foreground and at the bottom of the image were large, arranged almost like a foundation pedestal, the small objects chosen for the background were very small to create an icon that floated in space, a space that could be earth or galaxy. This is a reoccurring method used in my working process. There is a dimension of time and space in the image – it is a timeless icon for life on earth, embodying life, death, and regeneration that is also symbolic of the universe.

The titles for the images in the form of questions invited the viewer to put the image in an imagined context or sequence of events as in the dog triptych, "What do you think happens next?" (plate 11). The images trigger a cultural story that people tell of a dog killed on the road, but when does that story end? Everyone plays this story out

in their imagination and memory differently, and some may have a personal resonance. It is a story that can hit too close to home.

In 2010, John DuPree, a janitor at East Carolina University, recalled this incident for me after seeing these dog images (See Appendix C):

To the Requester (Sorry, cannot remember your name)

I recall a story my mother told when I was a youngster about a man with a callous disregard for the life of those with whom he considered lesser beings. As he was driving his pick up [sic] truck down the road, he came upon a dog walking along the roadside. The man intentionally swerved off the road and struck the dog, killing it instantly. His incredulous passenger exclaimed, "How could you be so mean as to go out of your way to kill that poor dog?" The man casually replied "he's just a dog." By and by, this same man was walking along the same road, when he was struck to his death by another man driving a tractor trailer. When <u>this</u> man was asked why, he simply said "it's just a nigger." Moral – Humanity rests in our attitudes and respect for human rights of all living beings who causes [sic] no threat to our right to life.

Compliments of

John Dupree

Another kind of story is suggested, a biological/anthropological story that concerns an organism breaking down into other forms of life, melting into the earth.

The dog on the road appears to be lying on a bed of grass, in between the man-made road surface and a bed of earth. If you look at the head, jaws opened in a cry, the emotional content of the image is filled with the fear of death, a pain of death, a consequence of death, and the hyper-realistic lighting and color along with the large scale of the image compel the viewer to look. The story is suspended in emotion, and the question, "What do you think happens next?" also applies to the viewer's emotion attached to the image. This emotion will change over time, as emotions give way to memory or understanding.

I am searching for another way of seeing. I want the images to invite the viewer to look at things in a way, to see how life breaks down and begins something new, uncontrollable. This is an image of life that many of us refuse to see; unless it is framed as cultural, like a scientific understanding versus an artistic understanding, or framed in an emotional understanding like fear or pity.

In "Another way of seeing" (plate 4), I placed a common barn owl in the ground under Plexiglass in the fall of 2011 for a very practical reason: to protect it from predators. This yielded a surprising accident. Being aware of the sun's position in the season, I photographed the owl before 10 a.m. in the morning and between 3 and 5 p.m. in the evening. I watched how the sun's rays (passing through the atmosphere) reflected the image of the sky from the Plexiglass, producing a natural layering of light

and image. Condensation also appeared underneath the Plexiglass, creating what looked like a galaxy on the inside surface of the Plexiglass. I partially covered the Plexiglass with soil in a circular frame constructing a world-window like image that I enhanced by photographing with a greater depth of field, high contrast, and amplified saturation. The use of warm colors brought the foreground and owl image closer, while the dark blue color receded into space. The optical illusion invites the viewer to see life on earth and life beyond at the same time; the way we see belongs in both places, in real time. And the owl, of course, the subject itself, corresponds to the cultural meaning of knowledge and wisdom, and in this image – it represents the knowledge and wisdom of this kind of seeing.

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Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

My work encourages other ways of seeing, other ways to see the earth and our whole biosphere in relation to ourselves. Through my images I hope to influence how people treat the world we live in and the life we share with this world. I want my art to represent an interconnectedness in which everything counts, not just the concerns of people. Each one of us is a walking universe. I believe by changing the way we see, we can exist in the world in a more balanced style.

My graduate thesis study helped me understand how regenerative processes break things down, and how these processes are continually misunderstood or ignored. I was pleasantly surprised to find my images revealed to me a beauty and meaning of which I was not previously aware. I have also gained a better understanding of how combining color with movement can enhance an idea or feeling.

I hope my work encourages people to look at death without turning away, and to understand this process as something natural, potently meaningful, and beautiful. Death is a necessary step toward new healthy life.

The "Return" is the beginning of a larger body of work. From here, I will investigate how human systems control the understanding of the natural world: food production, health care, disease research, energy production, architecture, even textiles.

These systems are large production systems that are founded on ideologies that continue to compartmentalize the natural and human world.

Plate 1

Fox, Linda. *" If I could speak, could be said? "*
2012. Digital print on cotton rag, 11x17

Plate 2

Fox, Linda. "*Playing Dead? "*
2011`. Digital print on cotton rag, 18x30

Plate 3

Fox, Linda. "*Why do you believe in this? "*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x25

Plate 4

Fox, Linda. "*Are there other ways to see? "*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x23

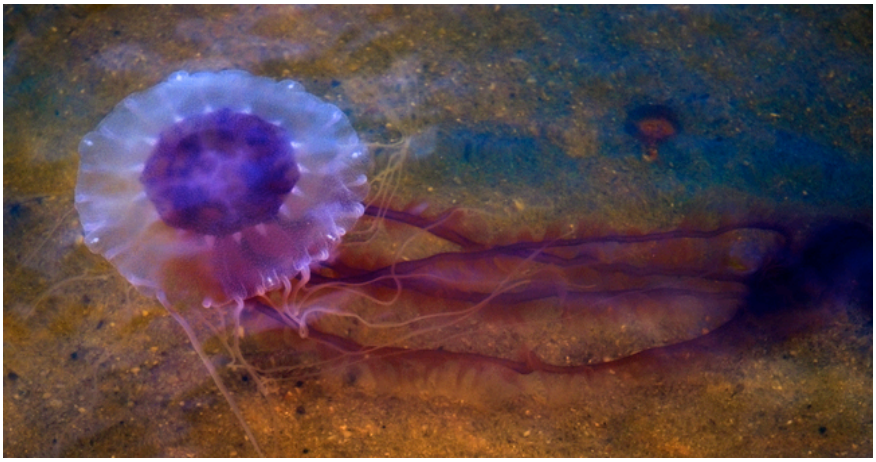


Plate 5

Fox, Linda. "*What does a jellyfish about life and death? "*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 20x40

Plate 6

Fox, Linda. "*What does it mean to return? "*
2010. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x23

Plate 7

Fox, Linda. "*Sign or symbol? "*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 16x40

Plate 8

Fox, Linda. "*Where do it begin, where does it end? "*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x24 (right), 17x 26 (left)

Plate 9

Fox, Linda. "*All flights are grounded?"*
2011. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x25

Plate 10

Fox, Linda. "*How long will it last?"*
2012. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x25

Plate 11

Fox, Linda. *"What do you think happens next?"*
2010. Digital print on cotton rag, each 20 x 29

Plate 12

Fox, Linda. "*Is earth the body of God?"*
2012. Digital print on cotton rag, 20x40

Plate 13

Fox, Linda. "*When will I be home?"*
2012. Digital print on cotton rag, 17x25

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Technical Notes

All photographs were taken with a Nikon D300s digital camera. The images were edited in Adobe Photoshop CS5 on a 2011 27 in. Apple IMAC. The 20 prints were made on an Epson Stylus Pro 9800 wide-format printer using “Breathing Color: Vibrance Rag” 325GSM fine art paper with high gloss Baryta finish, 100% cotton.

Appendix B

Artist's Commentary on the photographs

"Are there other ways to see?" (plate 4)

This image is a window into another world, another galaxy. We go through this vortex, a hole in the earth, and see into another world other than our own. It's not a new world. It's still the same world. Yet it is seeing the world differently. It's almost like standing on one planet looking onto another.

The owl represents knowledge and wisdom, seeing what's in the dark and bringing it to the light. Images are metaphors for stories. They indicate a story, they don't tell the story. The images also suggest a moment in a story, a warning to see what is going on in the world and on this earth. While the image of the owl in a galaxy can represents wisdom or clairvoyance it could also foretell the coming of destruction. We can invent a story as stories have been invented regarding constellations throughout history. People have always looked to the stars for clairvoyance as in astrological predictions. These stories allow us to work things out from a distance, using animals, or star shapes of people to tell stories about history and about ourselves. People have always used stars for guidance on a journey or prediction of future events.

Many of my images are mental landscapes. My thoughts and feelings of the time, how I feel about the earth and the human condition in the sense of how we interact with the earth, our belief systems, and how they affect the earth and the things around us. If the owl represents wisdom and clairvoyance now buried in the earth (not out there in space), then it's not that far away, or mythical, but concretely here where we stand on this earth.

I've been burying my subjects, a return to where we come from idea. I didn't expect the condensation that created the nebula effect. There was not a single plane of focus. The earth is in focus, the dirt of the earth, the owl and the illusion of deep space are on the same plane. You cannot quickly identify an owl. No one would predict that I buried the owl and took this image through Plexiglass. Oddly, we usually look to the stars and the constellations in the sky for our stories but here we are looking into the earth, the opposite direction. It is similar to the way the night sky is reflected in a pool of water, but in this case, the earth world is now a reflected in the cosmos.

Looking into the earth is like looking into the body, the inner self, rather than this outward looking to see our reflection. The word *body* is used to represent everything. It is a universal noun -- body of water, body of knowledge, body of an animal, body of an insect, body of light, here is the body of another world. The word *body* connects everything.

I think of this image as earth astrology with ancient story patterns, fables that resemble human behavior, or astrological tales based on constellation forms. Now look to find your own constellation story, look to where you stand on the earth.

The new direction suggests a new way of telling the tales we lean on so heavily to explain everything. Now it is time for some new stories to tell by looking into ourselves, into the earth, instead of away from the earth. We must tell our stories.

"What does it mean to return?" (plate 6)

This series of five images are observations of a Mourning Dove decomposing, a biological process (carried out by other living things other than the dead dove.) Emotionally, these are moments of resistance, confusion, something blurred, unknown, a transformation that is anxious, fearful, recognizing fate, while knowing there is inevitable movement in both life and death.

The average human being does not watch something decompose – the process is kept from our conscious vision because culturally we have been taught that this visual awareness. This process is usually seen as gross, repulsive, because we fail to recognize these changes in ourselves as well, or to appreciate them and to see the beauty in them. Ultimately, by not looking at it, we are not prepared to see what will happen to all life,

including our own, in the course of a life's natural cycle; instead we react in shock and fear. That is what horror films depend on, our shock and fear of death.

Each of the five images recognizes changes that also represent a moment in time, space, and thought. For the viewer, the moment is interpretive and individual. Looking at one single image, a viewer might jump to what culture has taught us about death; the emotion is negative, the image is something you don't want to look at, something grotesque. By looking at the images in a series, there is a recognition (in a sequence of time and space that occurred over a two week time period) of a biological fate that we all share.

On another level, the images carry imaginative likenesses that correspond to the abstract, to imagined ideas about space and time. For instance, the third image in the series (plate 10) looks like an alien, something from another world, something you don't see living except in the imagination. Only in imagination have we seen depictions of the alien. We begin to see a cultural construction of the alien as we have seen it in film or comic books, something fearful, repulsive, and/or fascinating. It is interesting that the images we have borrowed for our imaginations often correspond to what some of these images capture.

In the last photo of the series (plate 3) the image looks prehistoric, though this is a skeleton of a bird that was born just last year (2011). Imaginatively, the likeness lets our minds travel through space and time to connect the present to the prehistoric past.

The decisions we make about aesthetics, of what is beautiful or ugly -- these decisions often dictate how we behave in the world and how we imagine the world we can't see.

"Sign or symbol?" (plate 7)

The image of the catfish bones resembles a galaxy. In a sense it seems like heaven and earth, swimming through in a split between heaven and earth, through cloud forms and the motion of the water. Just like the sky reflects itself in the water, the water is also reflected in the sky. Bones are the remnants of what once was alive, like memory, and a moment in time. You cannot really save the moment, but you can save the representation of a moment in time in a photograph, in a painting, poem, or story.

The image presents a way of seeing and understanding the world. The world is constantly moving. It does not stop, and things are constantly changing – we are repulsed by the death of things rather than the transition and transformation of things.

This image of bones may be perceived as something negative, but I do not see it that way. Through death, something else is given room to live, to breathe. A death is a birth of something else in the form of a child, in the form of plants, of ideas. Old patterns should give way to something else.

We try to keep the old patterns alive, we put different clothes on them, so we can keep them alive. Often the old patterns are flawed, worn out; especially patterns based on profit and exploitation, environmentally destructive patterns, and religious patterns that keep the fear of death and change in full force.

Where did this catfish came from, how long did it take to grow that large? It looks like a prehistoric earthly creature riding the heavens. Prehistoric times may not have been easy, but they are more directly connected to life death cycles in terms of eating, sleeping, fighting, procreating – we have added to the list (i.e. ownership, materialism, relationships, etc.) and that in itself has made our present history more complicated. Our whole economic make-up is so complex now -- work your ass off to buy something to impress or influence somebody else for self-interest, for survival. It does not make any sense to me. Just going to the store is a very problematic matter of production and consumption, requiring all sorts of sophistication and technology.

I am not suggesting a return to the prehistoric, but I am suggesting that we can return to something more simple and fundamental.

The catfish by its nature finds a home, a home more in keeping with its biology, its life habits. Who can describe the modern home as something in keeping with our biology? We've been brainwashed into buying stuff we don't really need and live in a certain way. I suggest we can work with what we have, we can embrace the catfish approach.

"Where does it begin, where does it end?" (plate 8)

This is how life energy changes, it is not static. These cat images side by side have the same form, one in which you see the cat by the side of the road, what people call road kill. Life's energy is never static, it is shifting, fluid, changing like the weather, like any life form, it is always shifting.

How do we see death – it is not the end of something. The cat in the garden: is it decay, or does it become food for other organism? It is not the end of it.

The images have movement, moving to the right, charging through the galaxy, the one in the earth seems more relaxed, gliding, more calm. In the street it looks like it is in a race to get somewhere. There is an implication of time in these images too, the time seems to be slower in the garden.

How do we relate to this dynamic flow of energy and its importance? How something happens naturally has an importance in its own time and on its own terms, not on our anthropocentric terms. In our current society, we try to speed things up, not see, throw away, and we do not stop or pause or breathe or even appreciate the cycles of birth or death. We hurtle headlong without noting time, transformation, or the changes.

Cats relate to the domestic sphere of human life, how we co-exist together. The cat has a wildness to it, but it is also domestic. I am playing with the wild and domestic living together. A cat wants to roam at night to hunt and it also wants the comforts of a human home, shelter, food, warmth, and kindness. One wants to feel wild, free to be, free to become without constraint. The wild is self-directed, the domestic is prescribed by society, by the presence of someone else.

I chose warm tones for this image. The cat in the street has more contrast to communicate a faster pace; there is less contrast in the cat in the garden earth, a blending of colors. In the garden the cat seems to be melting, at peace, at ease, more natural in its placement. The one in the street makes me feel sorry, killed while running, and no one picked it up (but me). It's more tragic.

There is a respect for things or should be, a respect for death. I framed the image to catch it gliding or running through into another world.

"When will I be home?" (plate 13)

This narrative of the fox and the barn tells us there isn't anything that has not been affected by human beings, both positively and negatively. The image gives one narrative, as if the fox was found there, but actually it was road kill I placed in this specific location. The fox could fit other stories that end the same way.

Re-photographing the same object can show change over time, but it cannot explain the cultural history behind it. It can't show what is excluded on either side of the picture. I wanted to re-photograph the fox to show the relationship between time and change. Over time the fox changes shape, changes identity that no longer possesses a cultural identity that has been assigned through language.

This fox has decomposed and now is a pile of bones and skin. It is buried on the farm without marker, just one hundred yards away from the grave of a dog honored with a gravestone. What is the difference between the dog and the fox but a culturally assigned identity and the value contained in that identity? Death and decomposition take away all cultural identity without a further abstraction that denies death as part of the natural order of things.

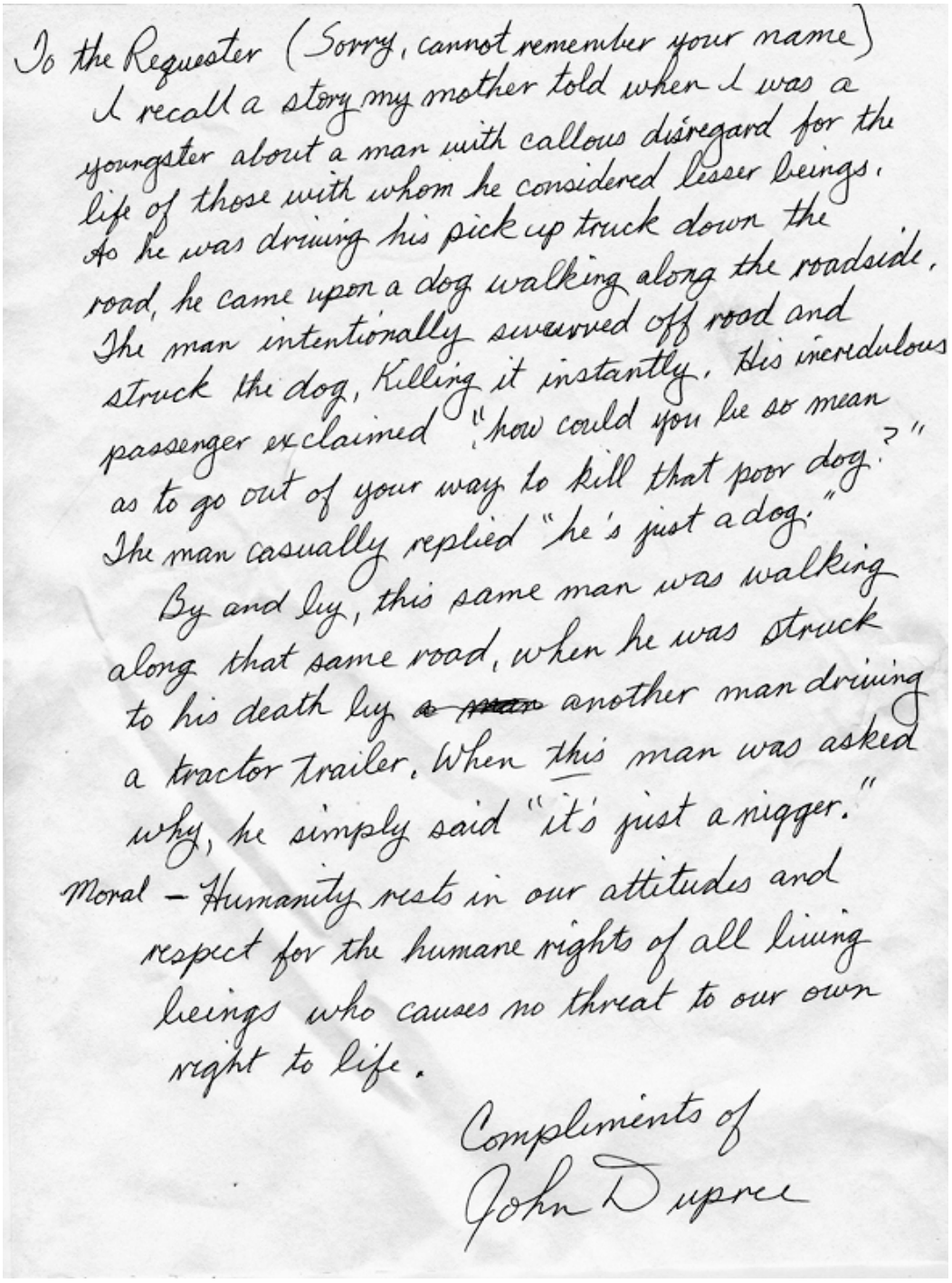
Going back to re-photograph this fox, I expected everything to still be intact, similar to previous times, but I was shocked by the way the head seemed like it exploded. The brain and skull fell apart due to all the moisture and gases produced by

the decaying process. At first I was disappointed. I expected it to decompose in a more aesthetically pleasing way. I wanted to see a pretty fox. I got a horrific fox. I thought I lost it, so I reminded myself of the task: photograph the process as it happens before my eyes and be okay with it and see what happens next. It fell apart on me a little too quickly. It had its own time and its own sense of change outside of my expectations or what I wanted to see. It was a learning moment regarding my cultural conditioning about death.

I had to photograph what was there not what I wanted or expected to see. The environment and the weather and time had its own agenda. The human impact on landscape, the human cultural impact on a landscape is not in control, even if we think it is.

We do not want to look, but when we stop looking, we lose control, or we come to know that we did not have any control to begin with, so we turn our backs or call it something else. It seems our attitudes, our value systems, are in total denial of what actually happens in the natural world.

Appendix C



To the Requester (Sorry, cannot remember your name)

I recall a story my mother told when I was a youngster about a man with callous disregard for the life of those with whom he considered lesser beings. As he was driving his pick up truck down the road, he came upon a dog walking along the roadside. The man intentionally swerved off road and struck the dog, killing it instantly. His incredulous passenger exclaimed "how could you be so mean as to go out of your way to kill that poor dog?" The man casually replied "he's just a dog."

By and by, this same man was walking along that same road, when he was struck to his death by ~~a man~~ another man driving a tractor trailer. When this man was asked why, he simply said "it's just a nigger."

Moral – Humanity rests in our attitudes and respect for the humane rights of all living beings who causes no threat to our own right to life.

Compliments of
John Dupree

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