

## Four Peculiar Connections: *LOGOS* Become *EROS* in Blakely's Forms

To me, coming through my sense, imprinting and prompting the functions of my mind and the memories of my life experience, the most impressive art fosters, sponsors connections to many concerns that are never merely personal, but of import to the human collective. To risk commentary on such import from the perspective of self is to risk offending many contemporaries struck with too much reason, too much fear of losing power inherent in the safety-zone of privatism. Most likely, they will find any interpretations of collective import, simply put, *absurd*. I believe that the Swiss depth psychologist Carl G. Jung was painfully right when he stated that "art is innate in the artist, like an instinct that seizes and makes a tool out of the human being. The thing that in the final analysis wills something in him is not he, the personal man, but the aim of art" and that "the essence of the work of art does not consist in the fact that it is charged with personal peculiarities— in fact, the more this is the case the less the question of art enters in— but that it rises far above the personal and speaks out of the heart and mind and for the heart and mind of humanity." (*Psychology and Literature*, "Collected Works, Vol. 15). Jung also stated that the artist "is the mouthpiece of the secrets of the psyche of his time...the spirit of the age speaks through him and what it says is so, for it works" (*Wirklichkeit Der Seele*, 1934); further, that the social importance of art lies in the fact that "it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, since it brings to birth those forms in which the age is most lacking." (*Contributions to Analytical Psychology*, 1928).

I hear the disturbing voice of Madame Rosepettle, she of Arthur Kopit's 1960's drama, *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad*, last-line-saying: What is the meaning of this?" I beg your attention, for I am interested in sharing a few recognitions concerning George Curtis Blakely's pictorial forms. I have known and taken to thought Blakely's art for many years. I have long permitted the forms of his art to provoke my senses, to see as splendid reminders that art necessarily need not be privately self-allusive. Rather, I believe that Blakely's art, like all impressive art, is *born of us*, not just his individual endeavor. And that is why I value his evolution as an artist and why I value his art.

Sensing the development of Blakely's art, each work and series reminds me of Robert Heineken's influential assertion, made in an unpublished typescript of 1966, that much contemporary photography is "conceived not as *pictures of* something, but as *objects about* something." I have given much consideration to Blakely's "objects about...." I have let them become abettors of feeling, following the intuitions they have generated in my mind. And I have, through intensive attention to Blakely's evolving and involving work, arrived at many peculiar connections, but four of which I wish to share with you in the context of this brief commentary. The first three connections are offered sequentially, without interruption, followed by a clarification of terms and a condensed commentary concerning a few aspects of Blakely's art forms. Final comments on the three connections presented, intended to reveal their *conjunctio* to Blakely's work, shall be linked to a fourth connection, a type of coda that, hopefully, does not close your

experience of his inventions, but opens a passageway to a few unanticipated imports for collective consideration. Bear with me please, even if as a test of tolerance!

I. A REMEMBRANCE: Ten years of age I was. World War II offered many fearful and inhumane revelations, but none more memorable at the time to me than the woman with the five sailors on a sweltering Saturday afternoon in Neptune Beach, Florida. Theirs was a terrible struggle in front of the moviehouse poster featuring Tarzan, Jane, Cheetah, a menacing python and choking jungle vines, all titles and figures defined in acrid greens and yellows and outlined in blistering red. I alone, waiting for Mama to come out of the Piggly Wiggly grocery store, sitting in the back of the old fender-bent Packard, watched the woman and the men. I was horrified. She was very drunk. She was enormous. She was unable to stand. The five sailors wanted their one woman and struggled to lift her from the pitted sidewalk with its brain-like cracks. Every time they tried to make her stand, her sweat-slicked nylon dress would slip upward, revealing rhinocerotish thighs badged with vicious bruises and covered with dark brown fur. Oh, how her booze-limbered head tried to look heavenward! How the little giggles occasionally arriving from her sputtering lips and the fluttering of her tiny eyelids tried to compensate for her great bulk! Oh, how her ever-returning bond with hard earth signaled the most meaningful evidence of the pull of gravity I had ever witnessed! Two policemen and seven members of the streetcleaning crew came. The sailors moved on, their white bell-bottoms limp, their faces wandering in their heads, spittle still at the corners of their mouths. Like landfill she was thrown into the back of a sanitation truck. Her cries of pain filled the salty air, becoming but a thread of wounded sound as the truck moved down the street. I remember Mama asking me why I was crying."

II. Fragments from a poem, *A VILLAGE NIGHT: (SCEAUX, FRANCE)*. 1980, conceived by my daughter, C. Neil Parker:

That night a girl came in  
Towing several oily men  
From off the streets of Sceaux:  
Her sandals, tightly buckled,  
She wobbled.  
Around her dress straps  
Fat bubbled like custards.  
She was fifteen, I guess, no more.  
As she walked, she drew on  
Every eye  
With that female sound  
Sweet nylon scissored against itself,  
But never lifted her face lowering  
Her heft into a seat,  
Turning from the men who sneered,  
Who rolled their tongues  
In her direction.

III. From C.G. Jung: MYSTERIUM CONJUNCTIONIS: AN INQUIRY INTO THE SEPARATION AND SYNTHESIS OF PSYCHIC OPPOSITES IN ALCHEMY (Bollingen Series XX, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 14, New York: Pantheon Books, 1963): "... For purely psychological reasons I have, in other of my writings, tried to equate the masculine consciousness with the concept of Logos and the feminine with that of Eros. (p. 179) ... The recent promulgation of the dogma of the Assumption emphasizes the taking up not only of the soul but of the body of Mary into the Trinity... Only in 1950, after the teaching authority in the Church had long deferred it, and almost a century after the declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, did the Pope, moved by a growing wave of popular petitions, feel compelled to declare the Assumption as a revealed truth. ( p. 186) ... It is true that the far-reaching implications of a marriage of the fatherly spiritual principle with the principle of matter, or maternal corporeality, are not to be seen from the dogma at first glance. Nevertheless, it does bridge over a gulf that seems unfathomable: the apparently irremediable separation of spirit from nature and the body. (p. 466) .... it will immediately be apparent that we have here an 'upper' quaternio which is supraordinate to man's wholeness...Man and the dark abyss of the world, the *deus absconditus*, have not yet been taken up into it (p. 188)...God is...also hidden in the 'cheap,' 'despised,' common-or-garden substance, even in the 'uncleanness of this world...' (p. 280)."

In considering the usages and meanings of the terms Logos and Eros, please dismiss your dictionary, such as *Webster's Third*. For there, in the case of *Logos*, you will but know a Greek word variously translated as *word, reason, speech, account*; there, you may confuse yourself with ancient Greek philosophical conceptions of reason as constituting the controlling principle in the universe, become entangled with Heraclitus, the Stoics, Philo, even the "actively expressed creative revelatory thought and will of God identified in the prologue of the Gospel of St. John and in various Christian doctrinal works with the second person of the Trinity." And, *Deus avertat!*, do not reductively limit *Eros* to conventional meanings such as ardent sexual desire, the Greek god of love, cherubs, Cupid, "the aggregate of pleasure-directed life instincts whose energy is derived from libido," much less, "aspiring, self-fulfilling love often having a sensuous quality." As C.G. Jung often stated, the terms can be used symbolically in the service of broader archetypal implications active in the concerns of "depth psychology," that is, Jung's rigorously demanding approach to individuation known as Analytical Psychology in which unconscious material, personal and collective, is a primary consideration. Let us simplify! Let us uncapitalized the terms *logos* and *eros* so as to make them pertinent to us, to our minds and world. For those who cannot bear simplisms of any sort, excuse me, but recognize my aim to make plain a few least suspected messages, significations, delivered by George Curtis Blakely's art. A chart will do:

logos  
 Spirit, mind  
 Idea; *cogitatio* (thought)  
 Conscious  
 Interest in objective, analytic

eros  
 nature, body  
 matter; *res* (thing)  
 unconscious  
 interest in subjective, psychic feeling,

Cognition, discrimination,  
differentiation

Assertive, aggressive

Generating element; initiating,

Arousing energy; stimulating,  
divisive, shattering penetrating  
power; light (sun, ray, illumination)

Masculine: intellectual, tutored  
*doing*; the surveyor, possessor

relatedness, synthesis

receptive, yielding

gestating element, formative

concretizing energy; enclosing,  
containing, coalescing power;  
density (weight, spatial location,  
tactility, stuff)

Feminine: instinctual, natural, *being*;  
the viewed, obtained

George Blakely's art has impressed me as thoroughly analytic in conceptions and manufactures. His approach to the use of photographic media is never obscure, rather, the grammar of his intentions and procedures appears transparently accessible, an accessibility I find to be a worthy virtue communicated by his forms. Blakely seems to insist upon our seeing and knowing that discarded and banal stuff can become reobjectified, redefined, revalued. It is probable that our minds could never believe such reclamations to be possible were they not before us in fact: more like objects, not pictures; more like presences, not illusions. Every series of his evolved work is assertively and aggressively concerned to some degree with re-finding, redefining, re-joining atomistic units of the preexistent. His inventions seem not to serve the purposes of synthesis but the purposes of indexing differences, variabilities, permutations; of discovering the most complete array as possible of forms, structures, colors and images within the types of subjects he chooses to attend and the directly or indirectly generated photographic media he employs. Blakely writes and speaks with analytic detachment concerning the series of his evolved work, never presuming his function as artist to interpret, but to declare, to survey potentials for formal or structural analysis, *to do* and to name the results of his actions by references to clear intentions and the processes of manufacture and selection employed. Consider but a few examples of his descriptive nomenclature and articulation of intentions or concepts:

"...16 x 20 inch color prints from 'third generation snapshot series' (made from Polaroid peel-offs). "\_\_\_\_\_ " a series of 36 rejected SX-70 prints found at Disneyland, blown up to 11 x 11 inches. "\_\_\_\_\_ " classification of found snapshots by subject matter, including dogs, cats, Christmas trees, Santas, cars, backs of heads, 'photomistakes,' and comparison of post cards and snapshots featuring blue-sky variations, consisting of 12 to 27 photos each. "\_\_\_\_\_ " Entitled *The First Inch or So*, this series of 3-1/2 x 15 inch color photographs, completed in 1977, deals with a paradoxical dispersion of the real or actual through linear abstraction by means of delineating the bottom portion of found pictures, traditional homemade images processed by G.A.F. labs. The selection process involved cropping the original pictures by placing a mask over each image. 66 images were chosen from several thousand. "\_\_\_\_\_ " The *.1% from 75,000* series of 75 color prints, completed in 1978, represents a body of work that resulted from the activity of viewing 75,000 discarded snapshots obtained from a processing lab. The title of the

series is descriptive of the editing ratio (1/1000). These pictures, predefined by others, emulate my sensibilities as an image-maker. The activity of selection was analogous to looking through the viewfinder of a camera. “\_\_\_\_\_” The 28 pieces consisting of SX-70 photographs collaged on panels of graph paper, each panel measuring 17-1/2 x 22” are a series entitled *About Photography Itself*, completed in 1978. This body of work ‘lightly’ deals with the specific qualities of reproduction inherent in the media itself, i.e. exposure, two-dimensional surface, depth of field, specific moment in time, light, shadow, color permanency.”

How precisely Blakely shows mind, thought, concept, intellection, as well as recovery, redefinition, and regeneration to be the primary concerns of his forms. How generous he is to permit his audience to know exactly what he has surveyed, what he has repossessed in order to transform. How indicative of a consciousness that virtually exemplifies the function of *logos*. But, Blakely’s art ultimately attends to our need to reengage stuff with a simpler devotedness than we have recognized. His *logos* orientation enters the domain of *eros* when implications of his “objects about” are recognized. In their attentions to the detritus found in restaurants, at amusement parks, in the rejection-bins of photographic processing plants, George Blakely’s early works reveal the fortunes resultant from an encounter with the discarded. His large-scale color images of torn sugar-packets bearing lithographed traces of monumental landscapes and structures, of human involvements in the grand space of outdoor territories—actions and environments, forced to all-too-typical pictorial debasement—remind us of our persistently puny regard for the functions of *physis* and the vulnerable earth. His enlargements of Polaroid negative-matrices or of rejected Polaroid prints recovered from refuse containers signal the often arresting beauty to be found amid the waste of our failed attempts at commemoration. His modular displays of instant-images abandoned by an anonymous public or by some photographic industry having failed to meet its promise of the perfect print ironically reveal the rarely witnessed pictorial gems that, before Blakely repossessed them, were destined for destruction. Blakely’s assemblages of print and image types or categories, again more often than not born of discarded material reclaimed for re-presentation, virtually teach us to recognize varieties of things and places, climates, times-of-day, topographies, typologies, forms and hues that serve to chart the extensive range of appearances in our world, and to remind us of our oft indifferent senses. His regular and irregular cubes of stacked and wired-strapped snapshots—for example one with 50,000 rejected traces of matter once defined by light—deny pictorial visibility to all save for those images on the upper surface of the cubes, but at least return some degree of the weight and mass of their original subjects to our attention. His “photo-sculptures,” consisting of thin cascading strands of edge-and-end-cuts of assembly line prints, tremble when a hand waves or a body passes by; vaguely evident presences of arrested time and light become reanimated. His displays of dots maintaining old reflected light from faces—10,000 tiny circular fragments punched from the photo-portraits made to grace the plastic ring magnifier or to become a “modcameo” on a keychain; points of fixed rays of light, capable of being scattered by the gentlest breath—become poignant images of corporeal ephemerality. Vertically hinged, encyclopedic, paginations of primary and progressive hues found in the everyday images of peoples, places, and things inform us of how much we really fail to

sight or discover amid the ordinary. His pictorial works on graph paper, typically diptych-oriented displays of SX-70 images flanked by the residue of their original subjects, reveal evidences of the untrustworthy illusion of a subject's photographic permanence and the fact of its disappearance, loss of energy, or decay: a tormented mandala defined by a withered slice of fruit, its original state in the photograph betrayed by an ever-constant but deadly promise of moist freshness; the graph paper wrinkled from melted ice, burnt from the combustion of a matchbook; an actual balloon becomes flaccid next to photographic evidence of its original pneumatically abundant, state; each, ultimately, signals of waning earth, water, fire and air. And what are those more recent, extravagantly beautiful, amalgams of post cards that appear to expand and contract, advance and recede, interlace and spiral, geometricize and biomorphize, but glorious physicalities discovered by Blakely through simple placements and overlappings of dull, uninspiring, utterly conventionalized, "wish you were here" material. In the midst of these multi-hued brilliances, in the presence of their vigor, their intensity as objects, we might dare to think of Blakely as a latter-day alchemist who has discovered the secrets for transforming cheapstuff, base media, into forms of wondrous vitality, energetic forms to which our senses and our spirits must bow.

#### IV From Erich Neumann: "ART AND TIME" in ART AND THE CREATIVE UNCONSCIOUS (Bollingen Series LXI, New York: Pantheon Books, 1959):

"...There is a continuous interchange between the collective unconscious (which is alive in the unconscious of every individual in the group)...and the creative individuals of the group (in whom the new constellations of the collective unconscious achieve form and expression). (p. 90)...When unconscious forces break through in the artist, when the archetypes striving to be born into the light of the world take form in him...he expresses and gives form to the future of his epoch....Renaissance art did not, as it might appear, abandon medieval symbolism in order to reproduce the objective outside world; what actually took place—and it is a phenomenon decisive for this epoch—was the reappearance of the earth archetype....a discovery of the sanctity, the beauty, and the vitality of the material world, a praise of life in this world and of earthly man (pp. 94-95)...The workings of this ascendant earth archetype, which was to become the central component of the new cultural canon, extended down to the French Revolution, to philosophical materialism, and to the Madonna's rather belated dogmatic assumption into heaven. Only today has the process begun to be intelligible, but concurrently the archetype is beginning to undergo a transformation: the projection is being dissolved and the content reintegrated into the psyche. As one of the greatest poets of our time <Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, IX> has written: *Earth, isn't this what you want: an invisible / re-aring in us? Is it not your dream / to be one day invisible? Earth! Invisible! / What is your urgent command, if not transformation? / Earth, you darling, I will!...*(pp. 96-97)."

Patient reader, and you, Madame Rosepettle, know that "the meaning of this" is near! With the reappearance of the earth archetype during the Renaissance, humankind did not exclusively realize "a discovery of the sanctity, the beauty, and the vitality of the material world, a praise of life in this world." It also became for Western

consciousness—particularly by the 17<sup>th</sup> century through Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* and, especially, for an already conditioned *logos* consciousness—a newly extended invitation to polarize mind and nature, a guarantee for a split world view in which the physical and psychical remain fundamentally distanced, even to the very moment of our now. The reappearance provided easy justification for grotesque and rapacious exploitations of earth and its inhabitants under the vicious guise of names and purposes such as imperialism, manifest destiny, ethnic superiority. Insidious changes in men's attitudes toward women became ever more persistent, flourishing with little change in the collective masculine consciousness to the present day. Consider the increasingly perverse championing of masculine psychic, physical, and economic supremacy—even today but an extension of the *timor Feminae* sponsored by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* published in 1859, with its personification of nature as an indifferent woman relative to the survival of the fittest and its despised articulation of the primacy of the female in matters of evolution. Consider how the daughters of earth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were polarized in terms of *being* or purpose, by masculine consciousness, a consciousness still unabated on the collective level today: harlot/virgin, Blessed Damozel/*la belle dame sans merci*, obedient mother/*femme fatale*, self-sacrificing-healing agent/detriment-garbage-trash ("...but a thread of wounded sound"), Lolita/Sphinx, required vessel of purity/obligated inspirer—and identified as thing, object, property, surveyed body ("...the men who sneered,/Who rolled their tongues in her direction."), territory, gross *prima materia* for masculine sighting, obtainment, carnal occupancy and ultimate, neutralizing possession. And where else is the earth demeaned? Consider the mismanagement, misappropriation, exploitation of natural energies; the every day, every minute, recognition that *logos* consciousness has all the horrible capacities for the insane unleashing of the final light on matter, the final fracturing of both the meaning and fact of *earth*. In addition to his work as photographer, object and image maker, participant in film and video productions, George Blakely has published two small visual books. Both were developed in 1978 and printed by Temple University Tyler School of Art Press. One is entitled *Medical and Dental Photography*, a textless gathering of photographic and diagrammatic pictorial imagery that surveys male and female somatic identities; an operation in progress; various clinical instruments and photographic records of their use; laboratory mice; plaster and ceramic casts; X-Ray evidence; cell specimen samples; modularly arranged photographs concerning the oiliness or scaliness of skin samples from age groups identified as young, middle age, and senile; various pathological conditions and physiological attentions concerning the primary sensory receptors: the eye, the ear, the hand, the nose, the mouth. Such images are distributed throughout the book with no apparent attempt to cultivate a logically evolved visual discourse. And they are often interrupted by blank pages, *tabulae rasae* of utterly pristine whiteness; pages that, because of their coated paper stock, reflect and increase the intensity of the light by which one views the book. Illustrated throughout, there are varieties of cameras, instruments for magnification, camerawork notations and diagrams pertinent to optics and measurement, visual vantage points and proximities. Strangely included are seven photographs of human feet: two, single, in profile; four pairs X-Rayed, some through shoes; one sole of the foot accompanied by a hand-held shoe. One can view the book as deeply serious and disturbing. One recognizes that its visual "text" is about photography, about the energies

of light, about the peculiar arrests of order, action, time, space, mass, photography encompasses. About the medium's capacities for enabling us to see the surface and substructure of matter; about light as nature's *amanuensis*, the pencil of nature that is the final determinant of the photographic recording. It is about the fragment, the detail, the scene; about the cooperation of a photographer with the nature in the production of his work; about the generative extension of the photographic into ink; the binding of records of nature, assisted by nature; about how we have to believe what we see, rather than see what we believe because of the photographic syntax that has given the imagery birth. Was it tutored awareness or astounding prescience that prompted Blakely to include images of feet? Through her images concerning etymological roots and meanings of words in the publication, *The Anatomy of The Image Maps* (Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1982), the contemporary artist, Bonnie Gordon, informs us that words such as retina, skin, and sole of the foot are linked in their identification as image receptors, as well as to artificial image receptors such as film, camera, photograph. Astounding! Feet as the participants in the experience of gravity; feet, the sixth of our sense receptors of earth's most persistent, inarguable drawing of us into its *still being here*. Such are the mysteries of confirmation we have forgotten, ancient signals of the body that mind displaced. Signals that Blakely brings to value once again.

Blakely's second book, entitled *The Deer Sayers*, includes but three photographs reproduced by offset lithography. Attached to the back of the book is a small white envelope containing a little plastic magnifying glass. One uses the glass to carefully inspect the woodland scenes depicted in the photographs. One searches for the deer. There is a text but seven lines in length: *While my friends Greg and Bruce were camping they saw a deer. Greg took three pictures of that deer, with Bruce's camera. I visited them sometime after their trip and they showed their snapshots (of their trip). Bruce talked about all of the pictures including the ones of the deer. I told them I wanted these three pictures and they agreed to give them to me, but they didn't understand why I wanted them.* I never have known exactly how to consider this treasured book. At times I find it uproariously amusing. At other times—using the provided glass, I search the three pictures earnestly, carefully, changing the orientation of the pages, seeking a better light, hoping to find the deer to have been present in the matrix of silver from which the illustrations evolved. I search not for the deer to which “deer-sayers” alude, but for the deer that might be permanently fixed within the photographic form, an eternal deer, a deer that has escaped my temporality; the deer that might be present in the patterns of light and shadow, in configurations of foliage or defined by the trunks and branches of trees; the deer hiding in the grasses, the deer on a distant mountain, the deer defined by the shapes of space between natural motifs, defined by the shapes of background sky. I never find the deer. And without embarrassment, I cry. I cry as I did when I saw the woman with the sailors. I cry when I think of how she tried to escape her substance through little giggles and fluttering eyes. I remember her scream again, cry when I remember her demeanment by the men. I sorrow for the world that is kept away by mind, relegated to spirit, the world that is only *said* or *promised* to be. That is when I look out upon the world and touch it, when I walk upon its surfaces, when I do not know the world, but *feel* its confirmation of me.



Confirmation? Yes, that is what we need to recognize in George Blakely's art; that is what our epoch requires. A reengagement of the dismissed, the discarded, the neglected; a discovery of the "gods" that lie in very usual, very accessible shadows, waiting to be seen, to be touched, embraced, particularly the Sacred still not served: fragile, vulnerable Earth, the substance of our being. And we need to learn the lessons of transformation, reclamation, and search for the real that Blakely's *logos* consciousness teaches so well through his art; to feel his art, its cooperation with light, its objectness, its respect for regenerative identifications, its permutations of things, its reception and yielding to the numinosity found in new arrangements of the cheap, despised and common substances we miss every moment of our lives; to make *logos* serve, become *eros* as richly and impressively as George Blakely has done. For this signally important artist, and for *us* because of his art, I offer last words from a letter written in 1925 by Rainer Maria Rilke, concerning the "aesthetic transformation of earth" (*Letters*, Vol. II., New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1947/1948):

"...we must introduce what is *here* seen and touched into the wider, into the widest orbit. Not into a beyond whose shadow darkens the earth, but into a whole, into *the whole*....So it is important not only to run down and degrade all that is here, but just because of its provisionalness, which it shares with us, these phenomena and things should be understood and transformed by us in a most fervent sense. Transformed? Yes, for it is our task to imprint this provisional, perishable earth so deeply, so patiently and passionately in ourselves that its reality shall rise in us again 'invisibly.'..."

William E. Parker  
Professor of Art and History of Photography  
Department of Art, School of Fine Arts  
The University of Connecticut (Storrs)