

“Truth IS: Menger’s Glowing Saucers”

by Joe Bucciero

This transmission took the form of pictures. Mental words would have taken too long, and, as the chinese say, “One picture is worth a thousand words.” — Howard Menger¹

I.

The spaceships depicted in *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* by photographer and contactee Howard Menger both float amidst their blank, black backdrops.² Each ship looks like some original photograph’s negative; *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* in particular looks as though this negative may have then been silkscreened. Indeed, with its harsh contrast and lack of surrounding context, the photo recalls the diagrammatic, silkscreened craft on Robert Rauschenberg’s *Almanac* (fabricated three years after Menger’s photographs) more than it does George Adamski’s canonical photos of Venusian ships from the early 1950s.³

Menger’s photos, printed in his 1959 book *From Outer Space to You*, sought to convince viewers of flying saucers’ existence. But because of the photographs’ abyssal backgrounds, as well as the subjects’ obfuscating blur and glow, they are not traditionally convincing. When Menger shows them to four skeptics, for instance, they do not believe that the craft exist. So Menger takes the men to the field location in High Bridge, New Jersey where the ships often land. Although Menger views “a pulsating glow ahead” and

¹ Howard Menger, *From Outer Space to You* (Clarksburg, W. Va.: Saucerian Books, 1959), 171.

² See figures 1 and 2.

³ See figure 3.

contends that two of the four men do as well, the group does not see an actual ship that night.⁴ As a result, the men leave still in doubt.

Menger's demonstration, however fruitless, betrays his preferred method of persuasion: experience. He knows that his photographs might not reverse the opinions of skeptics, for the images do not accurately represent the craft. In short, they look fake—removed from the real world upon which photographs depend. The space people Menger encounters foreground this perceived fraudulence: “The radiation of our ships will make [the pictures] fuzzy,” they tell him, “and that will do no harm. As I said, we don't expect to convince everyone immediately, nor do we want to.”⁵ The photos' blur and glow make the details of the craft difficult to discern; however, might these qualities imbue Menger's photographs with a different type of evidentiary power? Rather than affirm Menger's story with clear images of otherworldly spaceships, his photographs depict the experience of viewing the ships land. The glow emanating from the referent of *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* is the “pulsating glow ahead” or the “radiation” of the ships itself.

Throughout *From Outer Space to You*, Menger emphasizes the glowing, luminescent, or hazy qualities of the craft as they land and hover in the field near his New Jersey home. Describing one of his first close-up sightings, Menger writes, “It hovered, and I recognized the familiar bell shape. The pulsating colors stopped, it gave off an eery (sic), bluish light, and then portholes appeared.”⁶ The craft in *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet*

⁴ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 107.

⁵ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 75. Menger reiterates this point several times, illustrating his admitted “disappointment” at the “grotesque” appearance of his photos. He recounts another interaction with space people, who say, “I hope these pictures will help you in the future, even though they may be slightly distorted, due to the electro-magnetic flux around the craft... It is not the fault of the film nor the developing process... it's just that the film doesn't see things exactly the same way your eyes pick them up.” (Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 80.)

⁶ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 74.

Above Ground embodies Menger's description. It is blurry but more defined than the brighter, blurrier, in-flight *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft*. Whatever pulsating colors that consumed the craft have indeed "stopped"; what is left is an unsettling, hazy light, untethered to natural light sources amidst its all-black background. The portholes, still fuzzy, appear as though they are in the process of opening. Menger presents what he sees: not a pristine ship but a mess of light and movement.⁷

Nevertheless, Menger's photos still lack the sense of certainty Roland Barthes ascribes to photography in *Camera Lucida*—the "that-has-been," he calls it. Barthes writes that the photographic referent is "the necessarily real thing in front of the lens."⁸ Although Menger maintains that his referent is necessarily real as well, he recognizes that his ships' unconventional texture might not provide the certainty of, for example, the road in a 1921 photo by André Kertész. "[The road's] texture gives me certainty of being in Central Europe," Barthes notes; "I perceive the referent (here, the photograph really transcends itself: is this not the sole proof of its art? To annihilate itself as *medium*, to be no longer a sign but the thing itself?)"⁹ Menger's bizarre, glowing craft preclude this transformation into the thing itself. They do not look like "the thing," whereas Kertész's road is so clearly a particular road. Instead of "the thing," then, Menger's craft substitute "the experience itself" for the traditional photographic sign.

⁷ In his wife Marla Baxter's 1958 book *My Saturnian Lover*, she identifies similar visual and experiential traits in Saturnian ships. When she asks her Saturnian lover Alyn (possibly a stand-in for Menger), he tells her, "It is bell-shaped, but somewhat flatter than a Venusian-type craft." There is "a timeless field around the craft," he adds. (Baxter, 67) Although he describes Saturnian craft, Alyn's observation of the craft's flatness foreshadows the flat appearance of Menger's photographed ships.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), PAGE NUMBER.

⁹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 45. See figure 4.

Menger's certainty differs from but does not contradict Barthes's. His photographs affirm the that-has-been of the photographer's experience rather than the subject's existence. Moreover, "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent," Barthes writes. "From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here... the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star."¹⁰ Menger, who uses derivations of the word "emanate" often in his book, would likely abide by Barthes's characterization. *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* does not depict its referent; rather, the referent emanates from the surface of the photograph, hovering and glowing. In turn, the photograph touches its viewer from afar—from the heavens—mimicking a celestial experience. It is not realistic, but can it not convince nevertheless? What is the value of Menger's glow?

II.

In the decades after photography's invention, judges and juries had difficulty determining the new medium's evidentiary power. In "The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy," law professor Jennifer L. Mnookin outlines the shifting attitudes towards photographs in the courtroom. Photographs might be considered "the best kind of evidence imaginable: mechanical, automatic, and not subject to those biases and foibles that may cloud human judgment."¹¹ But judging photographs is not so easy. The photographer can easily manipulate the final product, and even an unmanipulated photo might be staged, presenting *a* reality but not *the* reality.

¹⁰ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 81.

¹¹ Jennifer L. Mnookin, "The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 10, no. 1 (1998), 19.

Mnookin discusses the case of Louis Mumler, a nineteenth-century spirit photographer, whose trial complicated conceptions of photographic evidence. Mumler's photos, like Menger's, look fake. They portray hazy likenesses of unknown referents—in Mumler's case, spirits. Despite reasonable doubt regarding his photographs, however, Mumler won many supporters. And “for Mumler's supporters,” writes Mnookin, “the photographs provided compelling and objective proof of the existence of ghosts—they were ‘real pictures of real spirits,’ a literal rendition of shadows into substance.”¹² Much like Menger, Mumler visualizes a hidden phenomenon. Perhaps Mumler's spirits or Menger's craft look fake in their two-dimensionality—but spirits might not, and craft *do* not, follow earthly laws of physics. When photographed, these otherworldly things may very well appear two-dimensional, fuzzy, glowing. Vashti, the spirit girl in Mumler's portrait of Fanny Conant, looks strange—fantastical even—with lines emanating from her head. But who is to say how the spirit of Vashti looks?¹³

Menger's referents are not as unprecedented, however. He almost explicitly references the work of pioneering UFO photographer George Adamski in *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground*. Menger might have even re-photographed Adamski's models. Even so, Adamski's photos, such as *Venusian Flying Saucer*, lack the experiential power of Menger's.¹⁴ Although the craft is blurry and the background empty, Adamski's *Venusian Flying Saucer* portrays clearer detail and more natural, earthly plays of light and shadow. It therefore holds up to less scrutiny than Menger's, if only because its materials and method of fabrication (assuming the ship is fake) are more apparent. Adamski's photos make Menger's possible, perhaps in more

¹² Mnookin, “The Image of Truth,” 30.

¹³ See figure 5.

¹⁴ See figure 6.

ways than one. Menger's image is recognizable as a Venusian ship because of Adamski's example; however, Adamski's looks like a hubcap, whereas Menger's looks like something not of this earth.¹⁵

Venusian Reconnaissance Craft and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* present a unique evidentiary category. They represent flying saucers; however, the photographs look fraudulent; however, they look fraudulent precisely because they are flying saucers—and according to Menger, flying saucers emanate an electromagnetic flux that makes them largely unphotographable. How might we receive them? Would their theoretical claim to demonstrating the experience of extraterrestrial contact hold up in court?

Mnookin describes an early twentieth-century consideration of photography in the courtroom:

Photographs offered a convenient way of capturing—and framing—the outside world and bringing it directly before the jury's eye. "The photograph brings the spot to the jury," explained one judge... Indeed, these forms of evidence turned jurors themselves into *virtual witnesses*, able to see the evidence for themselves, directly with their own eyes... they had a power and a potency beyond the word.¹⁶

With his radiating images of Venusian craft, Menger brings the spot to his viewers. He knows that he cannot adequately describe the way the ships light up the sky, so he crafts images that imitate the "pulsating glow." We become virtual witnesses, standing in front of a Venusian ship as its portholes open, as its shifting colors settle into a single, eerie blue

¹⁵ To a skeptic-turned-believer of Mumler's, "The photograph resulted not from mechanical replication, but from supernatural intervention. Even thus dislodged from a completely mechanical foundation, the photograph has remained authoritative for Silver; we might, therefore, call his attitude 'supernatural realism.'" (Mnookin, 34) Although Menger does not disavow the mechanical process of photography, the supernatural intervention, so to speak, of the flux around the craft determines the ultimate photographic product. Might we refer to Menger's work as "supernatural realism" as well?

¹⁶ Mnookin, "The Image of Truth," 65-66.

light. We see not a mediated representation of the evidence, but the evidence itself “directly with [our] own eyes.”

For Mnookin, this gives rise to a notion of demonstrative evidence: evidence that appeals to the senses, unaided by testimony. Demonstrative evidence “sounds like precisely the epistemic category that emerged from the judicial response to the photograph,” she writes.¹⁷ Because of its complicated relationship to unmitigated reality, photography ultimately proved unsuccessful in its attempts to provide conclusive testimonial fodder. Its immediate visual impact, however, retained value in the trial setting. In a 1919 hearing, a Florida judge asserted, “In the use of demonstrative evidence, one relies upon the evidence of his own senses. It is therefore evidence of the highest rank. It is the ultimate test of truth.”¹⁸ Writing on Spiritualist demonstrations, meanwhile, psychological historian Peter Lamont notes, “Time and again, witnesses appealed to sensory evidence, regularly pointing out that ‘it was impossible to disbelieve the evidence of my own senses.’”¹⁹ Words, which are indirect, and science, which is abstruse and elitist, lose their power in the face of emphatic sensory evidence.

Mumler’s glowing, tactile photos align with such evidence, as do Menger’s. With their flowing, mysterious, self-affirming subjects and surfaces, they animate the viewer. Discourse, testimony, and other intellectual acrobatics seek merely to describe what the senses can prove true immediately. Lamont quotes a frustrated Spiritualist believer, who disagrees that he and his comrades are “not qualified to judge of plain matters of fact made patent to our senses, because, forsooth, we are deficient in scientific training! You

¹⁷ Mnookin, “The Image of Truth,” 67.

¹⁸ Mnookin, “The Image of Truth,” 69.

¹⁹ Peter Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 145.

insult our practical common sense,” he says to his science-minded interlocutors, “and earn our contempt for your scientific nonsense.”²⁰

A member of the working class, Menger likewise disavows highbrow attempts at discerning truth. “Truth never was, never will be a theory,” he writes in *From Outer Space to You*, “nor contemplative arrangement of philosophy of men, nor intellectual insight in the minds of men. Truth IS.”²¹ Menger’s photographs present a truth visible to all—a multi-sensory truth, derived from experience. Although the camera is ineffective in the presence of electromagnetic flux, it nonetheless communicates the experience of seeing craft more immediately and sensually than writing. During another encounter, “Soon an opening appeared on a flange around the bottom of the craft. It is difficult to describe the opening, because it wasn’t there one moment and the next moment it was. The best I can describe it is to compare it to the opening of an iris in a camera lens.”²² When forced to characterize his experience in words, Menger goes as far as to equate it with the photographic process. For him, text clarifies when the photos are too obscure; however, the photos provide necessary evidence when words fail, which they often do for Menger. (As the Chinese say, after all: “one picture is worth a thousand words.”)

Menger’s glow turns his viewers into virtual witnesses, creating for them in real viewing time the scene of a landing craft. As unbelievable as they may seem, Menger’s photos might actually help his testimony in the context of a trial, serving as Mnookin’s demonstrative evidence. Why this experience so vital to Menger, though? By activating his senses, these photographs recall for Menger his sensory and *sensual* experiences, and

²⁰ Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs*, 146.

²¹ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 172.

²² Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 51.

ultimately his distant, sorely-missed past. Their truth depends upon the truth of Menger's own memories—illusive and elusive as they are, even to him.

III.

A successful picture transcends written language or testimony and, even more so, provides a multi-sensory experience. The space people, who are infinitely more advanced than humans, develop a type of habitable photography. “It was more than a picture,” Menger writes. “It was self-illuminated and was like looking more through a window at a real three-dimensional scene than at a flat object.”²³ The space people's activities and technological practices continue to signal to Menger the link between photographs and experience. When he eventually teleports, for instance, he writes, “First a bluish-green haze enveloped me and the more I thought of the shop the clearer an image of it became. The field and trees became indistinct and hazy.”²⁴ The act of teleportation resembles that of watching a ship land, both of which are visualized in *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground*. Each photo might become clearer the more one thinks of it, despite its indistinct and hazy shell.

Spending time with *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* allows us not just to believe Menger's story of seeing its portholes open to feel the sensation ourselves.

Might Menger have constructed the photographs to establish this phenomenon?

²³ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 86.

²⁴ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 97. Marla Baxter's Alyn describes a similar experience in *My Saturnian Lover*: “I was surrounded by a greenish haze, and I felt pleasantly relaxed, but I was not unconscious or asleep. I had awareness of what I was doing. In a few seconds I was actually in the image I had visualized. I was right there, Marla. I remember walking around the front of the house and looking in the big picture window.” (Baxter, *My Saturnian Lover*, 41.)

“Believing is not knowing,” he writes. “To know a thing one must experience it.” He then elaborates:

Have you ever experienced some illuminating truth which flashed across your mind and gave an answer to a particular problem which had been worrying you? ... The memory of this brief illumination remained with you in your mind, but you can never find words with which to explain it to others. This is what I mean by *knowing*.²⁵

Venusian Reconnaissance Craft and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* push us to “know” not through belief but through real, tactile experience. They are fuzzy because of the flux around the ships, but the fuzziness—a visual vibration—also lends them a strange and inviting texture.

The sensory invitation is key. Indeed, for Menger and Marla Baxter, the photographs and the space people are tied up with not just the senses but physical contact and sex specifically. “I found it impossible to describe the feelings I had when I first encountered one of the space craft,” Menger writes, because of an “overwhelming stimulus.”²⁶ Perhaps sex, even more than photographs, parallels the stimulating experience of seeing a spaceship. Glowing, with its vibratory valences, thereby represents Menger’s sexual desires as well. Discussing one of his first encounters, Menger writes that a space person “put a gentle pressure on [his] hand, and [he] suddenly felt warmth glowingly permeate [his] entire body.”²⁷ The extraterrestrials present a glow with their ships; however, a glow also permeates their skin, into the bodies of chosen earthlings.

My Saturnian Lover, as its title suggests, is more explicit in its relation of extraterrestrial phenomena and intimate bodily contact. When Baxter makes love to the

²⁵ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 122-123.

²⁶ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 82.

²⁷ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 33.

Saturnian, Alyn, she feels “the undulating tremors of his body.” Like the craft in *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground*, Alyn’s alien body pulsates. He explains why: “I just raise the vibration surrounding each atom of the body,” he says, allowing him to manipulate his corporeal form.²⁸ The vibrating atoms recall the blurry texture of *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground*. The form of the photograph’s subject is in flux, as Menger tells us. How might we come to know something that constantly shifts? Menger and Baxter suggest the very internal stimulation they receive from both intercourse and general extraterrestrial contact.

Baxter’s doctor tells her, moreover, “Knowledge must be a personal experience— from within.”²⁹ The value Menger and Baxter each place on internal sources of truth and knowledge, as well as on sex, speaks to the evidentiary power of Menger’s photos. Tapping into the sexual energy of the space people complements the experience of viewing the photographs, glowingly animating our senses and letting us find knowledge from a personal experience—from within.

Menger’s formative personal experience, meanwhile, was his first encounter. When he was a boy, he saw a beautiful blonde woman in the woods near his home. “She seemed to radiate and glow,” he writes. Her eyes, like *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft*, are “opalescent”—“tranquil luminescence.” “I seemed to be encompassed by the very glow, almost visible, that emanated from her presence,” he continues. “Somehow the entire area surrounding us appeared to take on a greater kind of radiance. I have often tried to describe it as like seeing a Technicolor movie in three dimensions and being a part of the

²⁸ Marla Baxter, *My Saturnian Lover* (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), 51-52.

²⁹ Baxter, *My Saturnian Lover*, 28.

action of the film.”³⁰ Each of the space women Menger meets thereafter, and Baxter as well, fit similar descriptions to the desirable alien Menger first met. In each instance he observes some combination of glowing, luminescent, radiant, and emanating qualities.³¹

Menger’s photographs are manifestations of his sexual desires, which take their purest form in this initial encounter. Might Menger’s desires grow from feelings of nostalgia? In *Camera Lucida* Barthes considers nostalgic, more so melancholic, feelings while looking at photographs, namely one of his mother. In doing so he outlines photography’s ability to transcend temporal boundaries. “In Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here: of reality and of the past,” he writes.³² As Menger views his own photographs, might he superimpose the past—and in particular, this first encounter—directly onto his unbelievable reality?

By returning to the foundation of his incredible—illuminating, animating, stimulating—present, Menger discovers its Platonic form, so to speak. As such he affirms Barthes, who notes, “Under the effect of a new experience, that of intensity, I had induced the truth of the image, the reality of its origin.”³³ The origin of *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* is the moment Menger saw a radiating, glowing, emanating woman sitting on a rock in a New Jersey forest. His photographs communicate the experience of seeing a craft or interacting with a space person—but they more fundamentally communicate his own desire to superimpose his past onto his present-day reality.

³⁰ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 26-27.

³¹ Here, again, when he is lost for words he compares the experience to seeing a movie—filtering his celestial experience through a camera’s lens.

³² Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76.

³³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 77.

Menger certainly misses his boyhood. Barthes might too. He looks at a photo of a Parisian boy, Ernest, and comes to the conclusion that “it is *possible* that Ernest, a schoolboy photographed in 1931 by Kertész, is still alive today... I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is that I am alive *here and now*?”³⁴ Menger might wonder the same: why is he alive here and now (and in this human incarnation—he was a Saturnian in a past life)? By evoking the origins of his here and now, he rediscovers his “Ernest.” Menger yearns to go back, to teleport, to his halcyon days—to the days when he and his brother saw discs in the sky and beautiful women on rocks. And to the days when his brother and mother were still alive.

IV.

In 1954 Menger’s beloved son Robert was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and passed away. In 1955 Menger’s younger brother, with whom he first saw flying saucers, died in a car accident. A few months later Menger’s mother “left this earth” as well, prompting him and his family to move back to High Bridge, New Jersey to care for Menger’s lonely father. Standing outside his boyhood home, Menger writes,

I paused and looked around me. These woods and fields were real—like they had always been. They were more real—that was the tragedy. The enchantment of my boyhood was no longer here. Now I lived in a world of men, a world of hum-drum average men. I found myself liking it; too much.³⁵

Menger resents his “hum-drum,” middle-class 1950s lifestyle. A return to High Bridge might have stirred up the wonderment he felt there as a child, even if he could no longer

³⁴ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 84.

³⁵ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 50.

share those feelings with his brother; however, at first it only reinforces the averageness of his adult life.

Of course, then he sees a “huge fireball” moving through the sky that “looked like a huge spinning sun, shining, pulsating and changing colors.”³⁶ He follows it only to find the idealized woman on the rock there to greet him after several decades. That Menger’s sightings began upon his return to High Bridge underlines their relationship to his nostalgic longing. In the years since his boyhood, his desires had shifted from their celestial origins. High Bridge is a magical place for Menger; like photography for Barthes, it collapses temporal boundaries. “My brother and I continued seeing the bright, shining circular objects in the sky, and one day one of them landed in the field where we were playing,” he recounts near the beginning of *From Outer Space to You*. Then, “the disc on the ground began vibrating, then took off at a terrific rate of speed in a blinding flash of light.”³⁷ *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft*, bright and blurry (as though vibrating), is the ship Menger writes about and, moreover, the memory itself.

His experiences with his brother betray the connections Menger forges between his deceased family members and the space people. He associates his brother with those formative extraterrestrial experiences. His mother, meanwhile, understood his esoteric beliefs: “I believe that Mother sensed, however, my gift of sensitive perception,” he writes, “for now and then when I mentioned such things to her I could tell that behind her pretended disbelief was a knowing look of understanding.”³⁸ Finally, his son Robert,

³⁶ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 50.

³⁷ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 25.

³⁸ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 25. Menger resembles Barthes in this regard; each misses his mother. In non-Winter Garden photos of Barthes’s mother, moreover: “For the moment it was a quite physical luminosity,” he writes, “the photographic trace of a color, the blue-green of her pupils. But this light was already a kind of mediation which led me toward an essential identity,

meanwhile, shares characteristics with the space people themselves. His “intelligence and physical growth was above average for his age,” like the space people, who are tall, fit, and brilliant. And “one day he astounded a small audience when, at the age of three, he sang ‘Old Man River’ in its entirety.”³⁹ The space people sing and play music extremely well, as Menger and Baxter often point out. Menger’s trauma triggers his awareness that his life as a boy—or boyhood at large (like Robert’s)—was better, filled with glowing desires. His photographs’ glow activates the senses; it duplicates his present-day craft encounters; more than anything, though, it represents “flash-backs” to his childhood.

Discussing his childhood in *High Bridge*, Menger writes, “I began to have ‘flash-backs,’ or hazy remembrances of scenes, places and happenings which somehow were familiar to me, but were outside my real experiences. They seemed to be of another world. *About this time [my brother and I] began to see the discs in the sky.*”⁴⁰ For Menger, the photograph is the physical manifestation of a flash-back, illuminating hidden memories, the apparatus literally flashing and the product glowing—hazy like the very past it evokes. That he follows his introduction of flash-backs with his first concrete characterization of saucers highlights his mental association between flash-backs and spacecraft. Looking at Menger’s photos of Venusian craft, we have flash-backs, ultimately feeling what Barthes describes as a “shared hallucination.” The hallucination arises when “on the one hand ‘it is not there,’ on the other ‘but it has indeed been,’” Barthes writes: “a mad image, chafed

the genius of the beloved face.” (Barthes, 66) Is luminosity photography’s most animating, sensual quality? Susan Sontag writes in “Against Interpretation” that we must embrace the “erotics” as well as the “luminousness” of a given art object.

³⁹ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 61.

⁴⁰ Menger, *From Outer Space to You*, 28. In *From Outer Space to You*’s question-and-answer section Menger clarifies: “Q: What is a flash-back? A: A mental picture of an experience, or a feeling of remembering a place or lifetime on this planet or another planet.” (Menger, 168)

by reality.”⁴¹ Menger’s referents are not necessarily real, as such. He may lie about his photographic process. Nevertheless, *Venusian Reconnaissance Craft* and *Venusian Ship Hovering Two Feet Above Ground* serve successfully as “flash-backs.” because knowledge comes from personal experience—from within—for Menger and for those of us who similarly experience hazy remembrance, the photos are in a sense real, however hallucinatory—at the very least, we can say, chafed by reality.

⁴¹ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 115.