

Three or four prints emerge from the bath. Occupied at other tasks I have ignored them, but now I grant them my full attention:

one by one

I take them to the light, my eye roving across the surface of the **thick** Ilford baryta paper, impulsively riding every curve,

every accumulation of silver,
each hollow and empty space as well,
the so-called negative spaces,

which to me have always meant more in their emptiness than those regions filled with shape and mass because they allow the rest of the paper to speak.

I breathe deeply and pull back.

A smudge,
a line leading nowhere.
Was that intended?

I follow it into a crevice, then to a valley, **dark mottled passages that have arisen** from who knows where and belong to who knows what.

Astounding mystery: what is the spirit that has delivered this to me, these tawny unpredicted forms, mad with birth and the foam of their coming?

They dance and taunt,
they celebrate,
forms unseen on earth till this very moment.

Even so I fear for them, because the bath they have soaked in has elusive properties they may not withstand, and their life all too soon may be cut short. But in their brief interval, what tremors they bring.

I have grown accustomed to this: shapes scarcely apprehended, slight things incomplete or aborted, detritus of unfinished business in the chemical trays.

But these fleeting apparitions are what on the evidence I value most in my work. From some obscure darkness they arrive unbidden and, as is unfortunately often the case, to it they will soon return.

I save what I can, **the rest dissolving back into chemistry and water**. In the meantime I imbibe and consume them as if they exuded some essence which entered the pores of my senses.

They are wicked and damaged,
 these stains,
 impoverished like orphans,
 but in them I glimpse a pathway to an
 incommensurate knowledge, a type of knowing
 beyond clarity.

It is true, as it has been said, that stains are tentative marks,

unintentional,

relics of error,
 reminders of intentions failed or foiled:
 confessions,

disavowals.

But from another perspective they are not less than unremitting claims on our consciousness, cracks in the stultifying rationality around us, so that by letting us see further - and that's what they do although it may be hard to decipher at first - they spread a kind of ecstatic poetry into a world of prose. As artists we shouldn't want it any other way.