Artful Mediums:

Women, Séance Photography, and Materialization Phenomena, 1880–1930

by

Meredith Kaitlin Reddy

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Art
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Meredith Kaitlin Reddy, 2015
Abstract

This dissertation examines the photographic documentation of the spiritualist movement that took place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an attempt to scrutinize and expose the claims of mediums, a number of leading scientists brought cameras into the séance in order to capture supernatural phenomena on film. The ensuing chapters explore the images that resulted from some of these experiments, with an emphasis on the documentation of several prominent female mediums, including Eva C., Eusapia Palladino, and Linda Gazzera. The investigations of Drs. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, Camille Flammarion, Gustave Geley, and Charles Richet inform the bulk of these pages. Scientific séance photography ultimately documented a wide range of “materialization phenomena” within the darkened conditions of the séance, consisting of ectoplasmic materials, ghostly faces, and spectral body parts, which appeared to emanate from the medium’s body and then dissolve into nothingness. My project hinges on the premise that these mysterious apparitions were symbolic creations, much like...
artworks, which carried implicit cultural and aesthetic meaning. I have sought through the ensuing analysis to examine the frameworks of meaning that surrounded the art of the séance, and to situate the medium as an artist within her own right.
Acknowledgments

I wish to thank, first and foremost, my wonderful advisors, Louis Kaplan and Alison Syme, whose expert guidance and endless encouragement throughout this project has been invaluable. My work with them over the past few years has been a true pleasure and without them this project would not have been possible. I owe considerable thanks as well to Elizabeth Legge, for providing much support and wisdom along the way. Jennifer Tucker and Jordan Bear also provided valuable feedback on the final draft of this project, for which I am exceedingly grateful. I wish also acknowledge the kind assistance that I received from Eberhard Bauer at the IGPP and the staff at the libraries of the Society for Psychical Research. My travel and research for this project was facilitated by grants received from the Department of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto in Mississauga and I was able to carry out this project as a result of generous funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For all of this support I am immensely grateful.

I wish lastly to thank my loving husband, Ian, whose encouragement, insight, and willingness to bring hot cups of tea was a constant source of comfort and inspiration.
Table of Contents

List of Figures.................................................................................................................. VI
Introduction...................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter One: Fixing the Shadow.................................................................................... 25
Chapter Two: Materializing and De-Materializing Mediums........................................... 68
Chapter Three: Phantom Traces..................................................................................... 120
Chapter Four: The Art of Mediumship.......................................................................... 170
Conclusion....................................................................................................................... 215
Bibliography................................................................................................................... 220
Appendix......................................................................................................................... 243
Copyright....................................................................................................................... 299
List of Figures

1. William Blake, *The Soul Hovering Above the Body*, c.1805

2. William Crookes, Spirit “Katie King,” c.1874

3. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Recorded examples of ectoplasm being emitting from the mouth (the medium Eva C. on left and Stanislaw P. on right)*, c.1912-13

4. Henry Peach Robinson, *Fading Away*, 1858

5. Julia Margaret Cameron, “*Beatrice Cenci*,” 1866

6. Claude Monet, *Death of Camille*, 1878

7. William Henry Fox Talbot, *Moth Wing* (negative and positive), 1839-41.


10. William Crookes, *Moon*, 1858

11. Alexander Gardner, *Confederate Dead at the Antietam*, 1862


14. William Mumler, *Spirit portrait of Bronson Murray in a trance with the spirit of Ella Bonner*, c.1872


17. John Beattie, *Spiritualist Séance*, 1872

18. William Hope, *Spirit Photographs*, early 1900s

Invisible, 1903


21. Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of the fluidic nimbus of a medium’s thumb*, 1893

22. Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of Prayer*, undated (c. 1890s)

23. Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of Nadine*, 1907


28. The Holy Shroud (full frontal view)

29. *The Holy Face of Jaen*, 14th century

30. Secondo Pia, *Photographic negative of the Shroud*, 1898

31. Odilon Redon, *It was a veil, an imprint*, late 1800s


33. *Annie Fairlamb with the male spirit, “George,”* August 9, 1894

34. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of Stanislawa in the cabinet, wearing standard medium garments*, 1913


38. Jean-Martin Charcot, *Photograph of a female hysteric* (late 1880s)

40. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph*, June 7th, 1911

41. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of Eva*, April 8th, 1912

42. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing record of events (Dr. Schrenck Notzing receiving the touch of a materializing hand)*, November 18th, 1910


44. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Examples of ectoplasm on body of Eva*, 1913

45. Dr. Hirst, *Pseudocyesis cases*, published in *Human Monstrosities*, 1891

46. Camille Flammarion, *Photograph of table levitation/table tipping during a séance with Eusapia Palladino*, Paris, 1898

47. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight Photograph of Eva*, November 22, 1911


49. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photographs of Eva capturing “ectoplasmic veils,” August, 1911*

50. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph*, November 1, 1911

51. Death mask of L’inconnue de la Seine, c.1880

52. Gustave Geley, *Photograph of a completely materialized face*, February, 1918

53. Gustave Geley, *Photograph of materialized woman’s head in process of formation*, February 26, 1918

54. Enrico I moda and Charles Richet, *Photograph of Linda Gazzera in séance with materialization*, June 28, 1909


56. Gustave Moreau, *Apparition*, c.1874-76

57. Odilon Redon, *Orpheus*, c.1903

59. *The Souls of Purgatory*, 18th century

60. Francesco Granacci, *Madonna of the Girdle with Saints Benedict, Thomas, Francis, and Julian*, 1505

61. William Mumler, *Portrait of Fanny Conant with spirit hands showering her with flowers*, c.1870-75


63. Julian Ochorowicz, *Radiographic photographs of fluidic hands produced by Stanisława’s “double,”* 1911

64. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawings after séance (with materialized hands in cabinet)*, October 22, 1910

65. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hands in the cabinet)*, October 25, 1910

66. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand on medium’s shoulder)*, October 28, 1910

67. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand in cabinet)*, January 6, 1911

68. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand and arm)*, November 11, 1910

69. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of hand materialization*, November 11, 1910

70. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of hand materialization*, February 15, 1913


72. Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet, *Hand materialization with Linda Gazzera*, 1909

73. Albert von Schrenck Notzing and Mme. Bisson, *Materialized finger during a séance*, April 1, 1913

74. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Sample of ectoplasm in porcelain dish*, November 11th, 1910
75. Paraffin spirit molds, c.1900
76. Hand impressions by Eusapia Palladino, c.1907-08
77. Facial spirit imprint produced by Eusapia Palladino
78. Frantisek Kupka, *The Dream*, c.1909
82. Albert von Keller, *Spiritualist Telekinesis of a Bracelet*, 1887
83. John Singer Sargent, *Apollo and the Muses*, c. 1916-21
84. Baldassare Peruzzi, *Muses Dancing with Apollo*, c. 1514-23
86. Pablo Picasso, *Ma Main*, 1905-06
87. Wassily Kandinsky, *Empreintes des Mains de Kandinsky*, 1926
89. Henri Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, c.1781
90. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of materialization of M. Bisson*, June 21, 1912
91. Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of the spirit “Estelle,”* December 30, 1911
92. Abel Favre, *Femina Cover*, 1911
93. Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet, *Ectoplasms conjured by Linda Gazzera*, 1909
95. Ada Emma Deane, *Spirit photographs in colour*, c.1920
96. René Lelong, *Femina Cover*, 1911
97. Belle Epoque hat fashions: Hat fashions by Suzanne Weiss from *Comoedia Illustrée*, November 1910; fashion illustration from *Femina* issue, early 1900's

98. Summer hat and veil fashions, *Galeries Lafayette*, c. 1910


100. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912


102. Raoul Hausmann, *Dada Cino*, 1920

103. Raoul Hausmann, *Dada Self Portrait*, 1920


105. Portrait of President Poincaré as published in *Le Miroir*

106. Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of Eva C. in séance with materialization*, November 30th 1912

107. Portrait photograph of Monna Delza as it appeared in *La Femina*, 1912

108. Political cartoon featuring speech bubbles, c.1807

109. Maurice de Vlaminck, *Dancer of the Rat Mort*, 1905-06

110. Front page of *Le Matin*, March 1st, 1913

111. Ada Emma Deane, *Spirit photograph in colour*, c. 1920
INTRODUCTION

I am here.  I did not die.

In a brief handwritten message scrawled in chalk upon slate, the spirit of Frank Burr wrote, “Will, I am here.  I did not die.  You never will die.  Frank Burr.”¹ The message materialized during a 1908 séance held in Rochester, New York – the birthplace of spiritualism – and was received by the spirit’s living brother, William, who in turn recorded it within a collection of spirit writings. Frank Burr’s spectral words, in their very brevity and simplicity, carry a sense of weight. The message was minimal and yet encapsulated the key tenets of spiritualist belief, namely that spirits existed, that life continued on after death, and that the unseen spirits of loved ones were physically close by and could reunite with the living through the intercession of mediums. The pithy words capture the emotional resonance of spirit communications and the longing for reunion with the dead that lay at the heart of such exchanges. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, spirits, such as that of Frank Burr, made their presence known through the mediums who facilitated communications with the other side. While

¹ William Burr, Photographic Copies of Written Messages from the Spirit World (Rochester: Avondale Press, 1918), 8. This message was received during a séance attended by the author in Rochester, New York in 1908. Burr accepted the veracity of the message, as he reported having felt the vibrations of the writing chalk on the slate. Slate writing was a standard feature of the séance and was generally accomplished by tying two slates together with a piece of chalk in the centre. As the slates were passed around the séance circle, the chalk would roll, mimicking the sound of writing. When the slates were ultimately opened up a ghostly message would be revealed. I had the opportunity to witness a reenactment of this particular séance ritual while attending a conference of the Nineteenth Century Studies Association in 2012. For more on the methods used to produce this effect, see Edward Lunt, Mysteries of the Séance: Tricks and Traps of Bogus Mediums (Boston: Lunt Bros. Publishing, 1905), 12, 22.
at times outlandish to the contemporary eye, the actions of mediums and the conjured objects of the séance, which are the focus of this dissertation, affirmed beyond all else a statement of presence and being – they said, “I am here.”

As my title suggests, the matter of “mediums” lies at the crux of this study. That is to say, I am concerned with mediums themselves (the spiritualist seers and conjurers who presided over the séance) and the media that surrounded those mediums (both the ghostly materials that were formed during the séance and the photographs that were used to document mediumship). Mediumship was a key component of modern spiritualism – a religious movement that centred on a belief in the existence of spirits (the invisible souls of humans whose mortal bodies had perished), and the possibility of reunion and communication with those spirits through the intermediary powers of human intercessors, or mediums. William Burr articulated the spiritualist position succinctly when he wrote, “that there is a world of spirit all around us in which immortal beings dwell, no one of ordinary intelligence will today deny. Science has proved it, the Bible affirms it, and countless evidence and experiences in the lives of millions have proved it.”

Neither the concept of ghosts nor that of communion between the mortal and immortal realms was new to the spiritualist movement. Legends of ghosts and supernatural phenomena have ancient origins and span virtually all cultures. The figure of the ghost within the West was rooted in the Latin concept of spiritus, which encompassed both the human soul and breath – the intangible and animating components of the human subject. In a Christian liturgical sense, spiritus signified both the animating

---

breath of life – the soul’s essence, infused in humankind by God – and the Holy Spirit.\(^3\)

After death, the human spirit or soul was imagined as an autonomous entity that left the body like an escaping vapour at the moment of its last exhalation. William Blake’s rendering of *The Soul Hovering Above the Body* (c.1805) (fig. 1) – a subject that the artist reworked several times – captures the moment of separation, when the soul has peeled away from its physical shell. Blake’s image portrays the spirit as it was widely imagined in the nineteenth century – a disembodied entity, floating close by, yet divided from the earthly realm.

Spirits (or souls) were widely represented within religious art, from the late mediaeval period onward, particularly as a way of depicting the disembodied human soul in limbo or in the moment of the final judgment.\(^4\) This particular cultural understanding of ghosts was contingent on the Catholic concept of purgatory, where the soul rested in limbo awaiting judgment.\(^5\) More broadly speaking, a contemplation of death and the journey of the spirit into the afterlife has occupied a pivotal and primordial part of the human imagination. The ghosts of the nineteenth-century spiritualist movement, however, were shaped by a distinctly modern religious trend that encompassed both Christian and scientific elements.

---


\(^4\) Ariès, *Images of Man*, 139-143.

\(^5\) Davies, *The Haunted*, 104-107. The concept of ghosts predated the Catholic concept of purgatory, which developed within church doctrine during the late mediaeval period. Curiously, as Davies notes, even after the Protestant Reformation had challenged the concept of purgatory, the subject of the existence of ghosts was not very widely debated. One of the earliest publications to address the subject of ghosts was Lewes Lavater’s *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Nyght* (1572). Lavater, a reformed Swiss pastor, compiled a lengthy catalogue of ancient, mediaeval, and contemporary ghost sightings and supernatural phenomena. He concluded that while some of the reported phenomena were hoaxes, others were likely genuine ghosts, angels, or demons. His work was followed by Thomas Bromhall’s *A Treatise of Specters* (London, 1658), which offered a similar encyclopedia of hauntings from a Catholic perspective.
The spiritualist movement’s unlikely origins can be traced to the humble house where two young sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, resided in the area of Hydesville, near Rochester, New York, in 1848. At the time, the Fox family had relocated to a new home, an old farmhouse, which came with a reputation for being haunted. It was not long after the family’s arrival that the young sisters claimed to hear strange knockings and rappings within the home and to see mysterious movements of the household furniture. These phenomena were thought to be the result of an unruly ghost in the house. Remarkably, the girls declared that they had discovered a way to communicate with the disruptive spirit and reported it to be that of Charles Rosma, a man who had purportedly been murdered in the house many years earlier. The girls would ask questions of the spirit, and his answers typically came in a series of raps and knocks, which were interpreted as “yes” or “no.” Before long the Fox sisters were performing “spirit rappings” for the neighbours. The spiritualist movement was effectively born, and the first public meeting of spiritualists took place in Rochester on November 14, 1849.6

It was, of course, rather more complicated than that. Scholars of spiritualism often point to a particular \textit{zeitgeist} that whetted an appetite for the occult, as well as a convergence of social forces during the mid nineteenth century, including the American Civil War and the advent of photography, which situated spiritualism as a major cultural

---

6 It is worth noting that spirits continued to communicate through knocks and raps throughout the spiritualist era, and such percussion became in many respects the standard vernacular of ghosts. Cases of paranormal knockings were investigated by the Society for Psychical Research on a continuing basis. One of the earliest accounts of the Rochester knockings was that of Dellon Marcus Dewey, \textit{History of the Strange Sounds or Rappings Heard in Rochester, New York} (New York: Jewett, Thomas, & Co.,1850). For more recent discussions of the events, see also Bill Jay, \textit{Cyanide and Spirits: An Inside-Out View of Early Photography}, (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1991), 7-11; and Alex Owen, \textit{The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), see esp. chapter 3, “Star Mediumship: Light and Shadows,” 41-74.
force. The historian Rolf Krauss, one of the first scholars to produce a survey of spirit
photography, suggests that spiritualism arose out of a mass compulsion that propelled the
movement forward, sweeping up young women and scientists alike. In other words, the
performances of the Fox sisters came at an especially opportune time, when the Western
world was positively disposed to heeding, rather than ignoring, the haunting knocks.

In this discussion, I have chosen to focus on the photographic documentation of
séances conducted by a selection of especially prominent female mediums who were
active during the spiritualist heyday, between approximately 1880 and 1930. This
timeframe marks a period within spiritualism that saw a shift towards “materialization
phenomena” within the modern séance – wherein ghosts were made more physically and
materially present. Although there were a number of precursors who had documented
supernatural phenomena and ghost sightings, the work of Dr. William Crookes in the
1870s marked the beginning of a highly physical trend in mediumship. During Crookes’s
experiments, the medium Florence Cook, with whom he worked, famously conjured the
fully embodied spirit of “Katie King,” who would part the curtains and walk boldly about
the room (fig. 2). This form of materialization paved the way towards a more corporeal

7 Molly McGarry’s recent study of American spiritualism offers an excellent discussion of the culture of
mourning that surrounded the Civil War. See McGarry, Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the
8 Rolf H. Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena,
trans. Chris Pichler (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1995), 11-12; see also Jeffrey Sconce, Haunted Media:
Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 6-13; and
University Press, 1997). Brown’s text thoughtfully addresses the cultural and psychological underpinnings
of the American spiritualist movement.
9 The term “Materialisations-Phaenomene” is used by Dr. Schrenck Notzing to describe the ectoplasm-
centred phenomena of the séance.
10 Owen, The Darkened Room, 41-74. Owen provides an insightful discussion of this trend in female
mediumship, which saw its peak in England during the 1870s. The subject of Crookes’s investigation of
Florence is addressed again in chapter two of this dissertation.
and performative type of materialization – one which was embraced by a number of mediums during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

With the shift towards materialization-based mediumship that occurred in the 1880s and 1890s, ghosts ultimately spent less time walking about the séance, and instead transmitted “material messages” through the medium’s body in the form of a substance known as “ectoplasm,” a mysterious ghostly matter that both appeared and disappeared with great rapidity. A fragile and elusive material, ectoplasm at different times resembled cobwebs, tissue paper, cheesecloth, or amorphous fluids. The biological and scientific origins of the term originally referred to an outer membrane of a cell. The term was thus well suited to describe the membrane-like supernatural substances that emerged from the medium’s body like an outer layer of the spirit. Ectoplasm shared centre stage with the mediums themselves during lively séances that showcased the mediums writhing and screaming before captive audiences, while ghostly substances issued forth from bodily orifices (see fig. 3). Much of the initial excitement over materialization phenomena quieted down by the 1930s, in favour of other forms of mediumistic communication, such as table turning, paraffin imprints, and forms of automatic writing – and this fact accounts for my decision to conclude at this historical juncture.

The French medium Marthe Béraud (alias Eva Carrière or “Eva C.”) occupies the bulk of these pages, while the cases of other prominent mediums, such as Eusapia Palladino and Linda Gazzera, are also examined in detail. All of these mediums were

---

11 The term ectoplasm was first used by Dr. Charles Richet to describe the supernatural substances that were observed within the séance. Its discovery, however, was also claimed by Mme. Juliet Bisson, who worked closely over many years with the medium Eva. See Gustave Geley, Clairvoyance and Materialisation: A Record of Experiments (1924) (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 178-79. A surviving sample of ectoplasm, produced by the medium Helen Duncan, can in fact be viewed in the Cambridge University library archives of the Society for Psychical Research. It appears as a mass of white cloth fabric, bearing faint stains of what is presumably blood or bodily fluids.

famous for their conjuring spectacles, which were captured on photographic film by a number of scientists bent on documenting the matter of mediumship. In this respect, my dissertation has relied heavily on the publications of these investigating scientists, and particularly the individual writings and photographs of Drs. Albert von Schrenck Notzing and Camille Flammarion, as well as, to a lesser extent, those of Drs. Charles Richet and Gustave Geley.\(^\text{13}\) In addition to these primary source materials, I have relied on the publications of the Society for Psychical Research, as well as materials from the Schrenck-Notzing collection found in the libraries and archives of the Institut für

\(^\text{13}\) There were a number of key researchers who investigated spiritualist claims (often in affiliation with the Society for Psychical Research). I have opted to focus on those who worked most closely with “materialization phenomena” mediums and who largely viewed these phenomena as genuine. My reasons for taking this approach rest on the range of phenomena (and accompanying documentation) that resulted from such studies. The key texts of this study, which are referenced throughout, include Camille Flammarion, *Mysterious Psychic Forces: An Account of the Author’s Investigations in Psychical Research* (Boston: Maynard, 1907) [originally published as *Les forces naturelles inconnues* (Paris, 1907)]; Baron Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics*, trans. E. E. Fournier d’Albe (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1923) [originally published as *Materialisations-Phaenomene: Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der mediumistischen Teleplastie.* Munich: Reinhardt, 1914]; Charles Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychical Research: Being a Treatise on Metapsychics*, trans. Stanley De Brath (London: W. Collins, 1923) [originally published as *Traité de Métapsychique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1922)]; and Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, 1975 [originally published as *L'Ectoplasmie et la clairvoyance: observations et experiences personelles* (Paris: Alcan, 1924)]. The English translations of these texts have been used here, although the originals in French and German were extensively consulted.

Many of these researchers collaborated at various times and investigated the same cases. Marthe Béraud, Linda Gazzera, and Eusapia Palladino were among the most widely investigated mediums of this period. I have chosen to refer to the mediums by their first names because this was generally the manner by which they were identified by the scientists. The mediums were more widely known by their first names within spiritualist publications as well.

There were a number of other important researchers whose work should also be noted here, including Hereward Carrington (who worked with the mediums Eusapia and Margery, and published *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism: Fraudulent and Genuine* in 1907), and Cesare Lombroso (*After Death – What?*, 1909), who also worked closely with Eusapia. The work of Julien Ochorowicz in the 1890s [Mental Suggestion, trans. J. Fitzgerald (New York: Humboldt, 1891)], laid the groundwork for Schrenck Notzing’s research, in particular, as did that of Frederic Myers (another founder of the SPR who also worked with Eusapia in the 1880s and 1890s), Alexander Aksakov (*Animismus und Spiritismus*, 1894), and Enrico Imoda (*Fotografie di Fantasmi*, 1912). A useful survey of many of the key paranormal researchers can be found in Paul Tabou, *Pioneers of the Unseen* (New York: Taplinger Publishing, 1972).

The Schrenck Notzing archives are housed at the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene in Freiburg im Breisgau (IGPP), founded by Hans Bender following the acquisition of Schrenck Notzing’s archives (consisting primarily of original photo plates and notes relating to his experiments with mediums, as many of his letters were burned during WWII). The archives of Dr. Flammarion are largely located at the Société Astronomique de France and the Institut Métaphysique Internationale en Paris, the latter also housing a large bulk of the Geley and Richet research archives.
Although the majority of the key figures in this study were based primarily in countries such as France and Germany, my project does not delve at length into the national trajectories or national differences that existed within occult and spiritualist movements. This is in part because my analysis treats a relatively small selection of case studies, rather than a comprehensive history of European mediumship. Moreover, all of the mediums who figure prominently within these pages worked internationally and were studied across Europe. Similarly, the scientists that I address here collaborated broadly with the London Society for Psychical Research and other paranormal investigative bodies. For my purposes I am more concerned with identifying the common threads that exist within the cases in question than in tracing a geographical or chronological survey of mediumship.

The majority of the historical scholarship on spiritualism has focused on the movements that took place in England and the United States. In recent years, however, more attention has been paid to the spiritualist movements that took hold in other European nations. Writing on the French spiritisme movement, author John Warne Monroe, for example, offers an insightful discussion of the cultural and intellectual history in France that framed the rise of the occult. As he notes, French spiritism (although less fervent than the American and British movements) grew out a widespread rejection of Catholicism in the nineteenth century and the associated surge of rationalist
and empiricist thought. For many, spiritism represented an attractive alternative to traditional religion, which nonetheless retained a material and ritualized relationship with the spiritual. The author points out that there was a surge in religious interest in “material” traditions in France, such as relics and pilgrimage, during the nineteenth century, which overlapped with the rising enthusiasm for spiritualism. The work of researchers such as Dr. Geley and Flammarion were thus part of a broader rationalist search for tangible evidence of the divine within the West, wherein scientific method came to replace supernatural and religious tradition. These cultural shifts represent the backdrop of my examination of mediumship, which seeks to shed light on the material and experiential dimensions of the séance.

Spiritualism has been a subject of growing scholarly interest since the 1970s, when it first came to the attention of revisionist historians, some of whom were interested in unearthing neglected areas of women’s histories. The formative studies of spiritualism that were carried out by Laurence Moore established mediumship as a subject of historical importance. Subsequent work by historians such as Alex Owen and Ann

---

15 Sophie Lachapelle has similarly examined the history of French spiritism during the era of scientific investigation into mediumship. Her work provides a detailed picture of the various interest groups that were witness to the events of the séance, ranging from occultists to physicians. Like Warne Monroe, at the heart of her project is the complicated relationship between the scientific and the supernatural, as the French spiritism movement also reflected a close association with alternative healing practices and Mesmerism. See Sophie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural from Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metaphysics in France, 1853-1931* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For more on the tensions between religion and secularism that surrounded spiritism in France, see also Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2006); and Matthew Brady Bower, “Fantasms of Science: Psychical Research in the French Third Republic, 1880-1935,” (PhD diss, Rutgers University, 2005). The recent work of Corinna Treitel on the occult revival in Germany also examines the ‘modern shift’ toward rationalism that took place in the nineteenth century, devoting much attention to the experiments of Dr. Schrenck Notzing, and Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
16 Moore addressed, among other things, the political implications of mediumship and the social freedoms that were afforded to women through the séance. See Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows* (New
Braude has since built upon these foundations, offering insightful feminist readings of the spiritualist movement, its often radical political implications, and its ties with the early women’s movement.\(^{17}\)

Following Krauss’s initial survey of spiritualist photography in 1995, there have also been a number of excellent historical analyses that have paid particular attention to the visual dimensions of spiritualism.\(^{18}\) In 2004 spiritualist imagery also came to be displayed within the museum setting in an exhibition that was organized by La Maison Européan de la Photographie in Paris entitled *Le troisième oeil: La photographie et l’occulte*, which traveled in 2005 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult*.\(^{19}\) Only a few years later, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibited *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840–1900*, featuring a collection of nineteenth-century scientific photographs.

---

Footnotes:


\(^{18}\) In the last decade, for example, scholars such as Andreas Fischer, John Harvey, Tom Gunning, Martyn Jolly, and Louis Kaplan, have offered especially compelling analyses of spiritualist photography, drawing from academic traditions in cultural studies and the history of photography.

of “invisible” subjects, including images of X-rays, electricity, microbes, and spirits.\textsuperscript{20} These exhibitions sought to position the spirit photograph within a historical context. My own work is situated within this trajectory, and has drawn particular inspiration from the imagery that appeared within the 2005 \textit{Perfect Medium} exhibition. This project therefore owes a significant debt to the emerging field of “spiritualist studies.” The images of spiritualism are, in my view, particularly fascinating. My principal interest, in pursuing this line of research, lies in peeling back some of the iconographic layers that composed the visual images of the séance.

In the last decade, a number of important studies have additionally been published on aspects of the social and cultural significance of mediumship, materialization phenomena, and ectoplasm, which bear mentioning here, as my project intersects with these areas. For instance, both Amy Lehman and Simone Natale have offered insightful examinations of the theatricality of mediumship and the relationship between audience and séance. Their projects have respectively sought to position the performances of mediums within a broader framework of Victorian theatre and spectacle. Lehman’s 2009 study on Victorian mediumship is rooted in the trance performances of the British mediums that rose to fame in the late nineteenth century, although she also dedicates her final chapter to the later development of ectoplasm. She devotes particular attention to the political implications of trance performance, and draws convincing parallels with the contemporaneous “medical spectacles” that took place within the context of Mesmerism and therapeutic hypnosis.\textsuperscript{21} Natale, for his part, examines the spectacular and

\textsuperscript{21} Lehman briefly mentions the case of Eusapia Palladino in her study, but the majority of her project is concerned with earlier examples of Victorian mediumship. See Amy Lehman, \textit{Victorian Women and the
performative dimensions of automatic trance mediumship in a 2011 essay, noting that the séance offered, among other things, a highly entertaining and absorbing visual experience for the audience, which was aligned with the spectacles of early cinema and stage performance. Both of these studies have ultimately sought to position the work of mediums within a broader cultural framework of intellectual influences, and to situate the séance as a complex and nuanced act that ultimately provided a “stage” for women.

Materialization phenomena and ectoplasm have also been the subjects of recent scholarly analyses that have shed new light on their social and cultural roles. Authors such as Andreas Fisher, Tom Gunning, Karl Schoonover, Timon Kuff, and Anne Delgado, in particular, have contributed in meaningful ways to the developing historical examination of ectoplasm as a subject of historical merit in its own right. For the mediums that are discussed here, ectoplasm represented an important visual and tangible part of the séance. The cases that are examined within these pages accordingly seek to identify and flesh out the key symbols, patterns, and iconographies of the séance that

---


supported spiritualist messages, with an aim of shedding new light on the medium’s enigmatic messages.

The field of spiritualist studies has been increasingly concerned with examining aspects of the cultural meaning of the séance; it is my intention to develop upon this groundwork in offering an interpretation of the visual language that appeared within cases of materialization phenomena. My dissertation argues that the material constructions of the séance that are considered here were in fact carefully formed, aesthetic creations, akin to artworks, which helped to shape experience and meaning within the séance. Ectoplasm was an especially elastic and suggestive substance, illustrating a *created and creative* matter, which emerged from the medium’s mind and body. It was often evocative of the artistic process itself, particularly in cases where cloth fragments billowed out of the medium’s head like unfinished “works in progress.”

The medium’s performances within the séance were similarly entwined with frequent references to a creative, (re)animating process. My analysis therefore examines both “generative performances” and material fragments in the séance, the latter of which I seek to connect with both religious and aesthetic frameworks.

The scholarly discussion surrounding spiritualism, as outlined here, has been interdisciplinary in nature, owing to the interwoven narratives of feminism and gender, faith, science, and photography that converged within the séance. My academic interest in spiritualism has developed out of a methodological grounding in art history and the growing art historical interest in the imagery of spiritualism and the occult. As such, my project hinges on the “visual framework” and documentation of the séance. Yet my project also intersects with the diverse spiritualist literature that has come out of fields
such as the history of photography, women’s studies, cultural history, religious studies, and the history of science and medicine. In examining the cases of several prominent female mediums, as well as the gender politics of the séance, I wish to contribute, in particular, to the ongoing feminist discussion on mediumship by shedding light on the artistic agency of the female medium and her skilled manipulation of both materials and viewers.

Photography, as a “medium of ghosts” in and of itself, was fully entangled within spiritualism, although the two spheres did not explicitly cross paths until the 1860s, when the first photographs of ghosts appeared. For much of the spiritualist movement, the camera and its photographic progeny served not only as a means of documentation, but as a conjuring medium and symbol. Photography is thus of special importance to a project such as this. The séance photographs that form the basis of this inquiry have proven to be highly enigmatic images, rivaling the shadowy nature of the spirits themselves. I have endeavoured, however, to shed light on these visual documents, to consider their iconographic and cultural implications, and to position them within a broader framework of cultural influences. While I ultimately make a case for aligning the medium with the artist (and aligning ectoplasm with art), I have not speculated on the mediums’ aesthetic intentions. Instead I hope to analyze the visual construction and implied audience of the mediums’ bodily productions.

A scholarly hurdle arises from the distinct lack of testimony from the mediums themselves, many of whom remained silent on the question of their involvement with spiritualism. There were, however, some exceptions. Like Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, the Cottingley fairy hoax girls, the Fox sisters eventually broke their silence
and revealed how their hoaxes had been conducted. Other mediums were investigated and found guilty of fraudulent practices in due course. In his 1905 exposé of mediumistic tricks, for instance, Edward Lunt wrote that “carpet slides, trap doors, sliding panels, and drapery hangings are used to advantage, and remarkable manifestations are given by the aid of these appliances and confederates.” Detractors of mediumship often noted the striking parallels between stage performances of magic and the proceedings of the séance. Magicians, including Harry Houdini, were among the most vociferous critics of mediums, and supplied many of the explanations for how the illusions of the séance were conducted. Magicians also criticized the scientific approach to the study of séances and suggested that scientific observers were ill-equipped to assess sleight-of-hand techniques.

Séance theatre has elicited comparisons with not only magic acts, but also earlier forms of popular entertainment, such as phantasmagoria shows and magic lantern spectacles. These entertainments relied on projection technologies to create illusionistic visual effects – often featuring ghouls, ghosts, and other images of horror – for audiences.

24 See Reuben Briggs Davenport, The Death Blow to Spiritualism: Being the True Story of the Fox Sisters, as Revealed by Authority of Margaret Fox and Catherine Fox Jencken (New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1888).

25 Lunt, Mysteries of the Séance, 10. It is not my purpose here to dwell in any great length on the techniques of the medium. It should, however, be noted that there were many authors, like Lunt, who published exposés of both the medium’s tricks and the scientist’s credulity. A small sampling of the skeptical texts on spiritualism includes Elliot O’Donnell, The Menace of Spiritualism (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1926); and Donovan Rawcliffe, Illusions and Delusions of the Supernatural and the Occult (New York: Dover Publications, 1959). A more recent historical study that emphasizes the subject of séance tricks and mediumistic fraud is Ruth Brandon, The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983).

26 See Harry Houdini, Houdini Exposes the Tricks used by the Boston Medium Margery (New York, Adams Press, 1924); H. Houdini, A Magician Among the Spirits (1924) (New York: Arno Press, 1972); and the recent catalogue exhibition by Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Houdini: Art and Magic (New York: Jewish Museum in collaboration with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America: Yale University Press, 2010). For more on the matter of trickery in the séance see also Martyn Jolly, Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography (New York: Mark Bally Publisher, 2006), 71-73; and Joseph Dunninger, Inside the Mediums’ Cabinet (New York: Kemp and Company, 1970). Dunninger’s text examines the close relationship between practices of magic performances and mediumship, and offers a useful summary of sleight-of-hand methods used by mediums to perform their tricks.
Magic lantern shows commonly featured landscape views and explorers’ exploits within a combination of dissolving images, shadow play, and smoke. As the historian Marina Warner suggests in *Phantasmagoria*, these effects mirrored the creations of the mind – of insubstantial memories, fantasies, dreams, and nightmares.\(^{27}\) Mediums and magicians alike were known to employ magic lanterns in attempts to create more convincing supernatural effects. The appetite for theatrical horror was a core part of eighteenth-century Gothic-Romantic traditions that eventually filtered into the nineteenth-century consciousness. The séance summoned supernatural illusions out of the darkness and elicited similar audience reactions of mingled delight and fear. While the séance continued to feed an entrenched cultural appetite for enchantment, it also departed from magic shows and lantern productions in its acknowledged association with faith.\(^{28}\) Moreover, the intimate setting of the séance rendered it an entirely different sort of performance and made for a markedly different relationship between the audience and the conjured image.

Might we then liken the medium to the lanternist or magician? Was her performance a conscious attempt to delude and entertain, or the product of a more

---

\(^{27}\) Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 147-156. The traditions and techniques found in phantasmagoria and magic lantern shows trace back to the camera obscura. The magic lantern was an invention of the Renaissance, although its heyday was in the eighteenth century. It used an early form of projector with a concave mirror to cast light and images on a screen. Phantasmagoria shows were developed in the eighteenth century by the French inventor Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, amid the popular interest in Gothic horror after the Terror. Phantasmagoria shows were, in effect, early moving picture shows, which used an improved version of the magic lantern – one that could create moving and shifting illusions. For more on the magic lantern and phantasmagoria show see also Davies, *The Haunted*, esp. ch. 5, “All in the Mind,” 133-162; John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 20-22; Theodore Barber, “Phantasmagorical Wonders: The Magic Lantern Ghost Show in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Film History* 3, no. 2 (1989):73-86; and Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead*, 71. Jolly points out that there has been a long established association between magic and spiritualism, with mediums and magicians alike pillaging the same reservoirs of phantasmagoria and mesmerism in order to create their effects.

\(^{28}\) Despite its Christian origins, many séance-goers naturally visited séances for purely entertainment purposes.
complicated impetus? While the séance was unquestionably a space of theatre and orchestrated spectacle, the medium’s role was nevertheless ambiguous. In the same instant, she occupied the position of the “vanishing lady” who disappeared into the darkness and the magician who pulled the curtain. She both submitted to scrutiny and slipped away behind the curtains, revealing and concealing herself in the process.\(^{29}\) Simply put, the medium evaded easy categorization.

Even with the ultimate decline of the spiritualist movement, many mediums steadfastly maintained that their abilities had been genuine and declined to shed light on the nature of their work. All this is to say that an accurate picture of mediumship from the perspective of its practitioners is exceedingly difficult to form. One is left, for the most part, to pick through the writings of the skeptical and scientific audiences, a task that raises various issues surrounding the subjectivity of the observer. The matter of the medium’s declaration of guilt (or lack thereof), however, is ultimately separate from the driving interests of this project. Instead, my intention is to examine the ways in which meaning was imparted to an audience, in this sense, to “read” the séance as a visual artifact comprised of layered implicit and explicit messages. My working assumption in pursuing such a line of inquiry is that the phenomena of the séance were not of genuine supernatural origin but were instead constructions, and it is the nature and meaning of those constructions that interests me. Yet in framing the phenomena of the séance in this

\(^{29}\) Other scholars have noted the fascinating parallel between the “vanishing woman” of magic stage acts and the “disappearing act” of the medium in the séance. See, for instance, Karen Redrobe Beckman, *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film and Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 61-91; and Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestation: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,” ed. Patrice Petro in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Both Gunning and Beckman draw upon the work of Lucy Fischer in “The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies,” *Film Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Autumn, 1979): 30-40, which examines the trope of the vanishing woman on stage and in film. Recent studies of the ties between spiritualism and theatre, as noted previously, can also be found in Lehman, *Victorian Women* (2009), and Natale, “The Medium on the Stage,” (2011).
way, I do not wish to disparage the believers who sought comfort in spiritualism or to dismiss the very real emotions and experiences that gave rise to phantasms. Indeed, my analysis of the arts of the medium as aesthetically complex and powerful forms of visual communication helps explain how they offered comfort and emotionally compelling experiences for spiritualist believers.

In spite of the tremendous popularity of the movement throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, suspicion and rancour from within scientific and religious circles caused considerable damage. By the mid-twentieth century, spiritualism had been largely dismissed as a fraudulent hoax. In many respects, a dismissive view of spiritualism has persisted through the years, and as a result, spirit photographs have, until quite recently, been largely ignored within historical discussions of photography.

Twentieth-century avant-garde artists such as the Surrealists did, however, show an interest in spiritualist photography and mediumistic practices, and as such, spiritualist imagery has consistently been part of art historical examinations of Surrealist influences. It is only in more recent years that spiritualism has become an increasingly popular subject of public and scholarly interest.

It is difficult to determine precisely why spiritualist photography and its haunting subjects would find an audience now, although I tentatively offer up the following

---

30 The debates surrounding spiritualism largely played out within a number of scientific and spiritualist journals, as well as the publications associated with the Society for Psychical Research. The spiritualist publications included *Light, Borderland, The Two Worlds, and Shadowland.*


32 See, for instance, Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L’amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985). A number of Dada and Surrealist artists, including Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and André Breton, were keenly interested in spiritualist practices and incorporated references to spiritualism and séances within their work.
theories. First, it might be observed that popular interest in the paranormal has, in fact, never faded entirely away, even as the popularity of the spiritualist movement waned. In fact, a cursory glance at current twenty-first-century media outlets and productions, for example, reveals a striking resurrection of spiritualist interests in the form of countless websites devoted to paranormal subjects and contemporary television shows that feature mediums, ghost-hunters, and various other trappings of the supernatural – all pointing to an enduring cultural fascination with the occult.

And finally, ongoing postmodern deliberations upon “haunting” as a theoretical concept have likely also played a part, more generally, in summoning up phantoms within the contemporary mind. Jacques Derrida’s 1993 text *Specters of Marx*, for instance, invoked the concept of the “hauntological,” a play on the term ontological, which addresses the haunting resurfacing of the past within the present. Derrida’s theory touches upon the universality of haunting and positions it as a keystone of the human experience. Ghosts of various forms, indeed, haunt the pages of Victorian and postmodern literature alike, and lurk in nearly every corner of history precisely because they touch upon a chord within the human mind. Whether clad in traditional transparent shroud or serving as literary metaphor, the ever-present specter of loss, in all of its visceral and shadowy forms, haunts our shared experiences.

---

33 Both the IGPP and SPR organizations are still actively engaged with ongoing investigations of paranormal and psychical phenomena. A summary of the IGPP’s research was provided to me in the form of their 2010-11 Tätigkeitsbericht, which included historical research that was being conducted alongside active work in areas of psychophysics, clinical parapsychology, unconventional neurological states (such as ESP), and psychophysiology.

34 See Sconce, *Haunted Media* for an excellent analysis of the ghosts that haunt popular forms of media and technology. Television shows devoted to subjects of ghosts and the paranormal are abundant, and span both fictional and reality-based programming. Interestingly, among the slew of popular supernatural reality shows are several featuring skeptical paranormal investigators and researchers –modern incarnations of scientists such as Flammariion and Schrenck Notzing. (These include programs such as *Ghost Hunters, Destination Truth, Ghost Adventures, Ghost Hunters International*, among others).

Despite the ubiquity of ghosts, which I have laid out here, the spirits and mediums of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century spiritualist movement were also part of a distinct shift within broader cultural conceptions of the supernatural. In order to lay a foundational groundwork for later discussions on this point, I offer here a brief note on the position of the ghost in the nineteenth century.

Much has been written to date on the subject of a “rational shift” towards empiricism that occurred during the Enlightenment, an era of tremendous scientific discovery during which secular principles of objectivity and rationality were touted as a new standard by which reason and truth were measured. Previous models for understanding the physical world, which had been rooted instead in pre-Enlightenment systems of religious faith and superstitious belief, were largely overturned and discredited. Amid such sweeping changes, the very concept of the supernatural was subtly and gradually reframed. Yet ghosts and other manifestations of the supernatural did not entirely vanish – far from it.36

During this period of “disenchantment,” cases of demonic or spiritual possession – or instances of behaviour that would have previously been viewed as such – were diagnosed as symptoms of modern hysteria.37 Such cases revealed points of tension

---

36 One of the most significant works on this subject remains the 1917 sociological work of Max Weber, which sought to examine the systemic rise of secularism and rationalism within modernity. See Max Weber et al., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (London: Routledge, 1991). The nineteenth-century historian William Edward Hartpole Lecky also addressed the secular shift in his important 1865 study, The History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe (London, 1910).

37 Terry Castle, The Female Thermometer; Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26-61. Castle offers an insightful analysis of both “disenchantment” and the return of haunted forces within the meta-narrative of the Enlightenment. For more on this subject see also Roy Porter, “Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic, and Liberal Thought,” in Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, ed. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra et al. (London: Athlone, 1999), 226-233; Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt, eds., Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Dan Burton and David Grandy, eds., Magic Mystery, and Science: The Occult in
between pre- and post-Enlightenment ideologies, as the supernatural was not cleanly “erased” from the modern mind, but was filtered through the scientific lens of rationalism and relabeled. Avenues of pseudoscience that emerged in the post-Enlightenment era often retained vestiges of the supernatural. Such fields were accordingly viewed with a suspicious eye by conventional science.\textsuperscript{38} The Victorian age, in particular, was marked by occult revivals, evident in the flourishing of ghost literature, the widespread influence of mystical and occult themes in art, and a popular interest in esoteric subjects that spanned virtually all rungs of society. It would perhaps be accurate, then, to say that the supernatural \textit{developed} in the modern age, marching forward alongside technological and scientific advancements. Simply put, ghosts haunted the world of reason.

The spiritualist movement, for its part, stands as an intriguing example of a religious movement that stood at the precipice of this divide, balancing tenuously between science/empiricism and the supernatural/esoteric. As a system of belief, it was rooted in Christian principles of the survival of the soul after death, and was tinged with elements of magic and mysticism. Yet it simultaneously embraced empirical values of close observation and scrutiny – particularly in cases where mediums submitted to scientific study. Interestingly, all of the scientists examined here were well established within fields of conventional science, and many suffered considerable damage to their careers as a result of their quests to investigate spiritualism.

The medium, rather fittingly, then, stood as an intermediary not only between the living and the dead, but also between the pre-Enlightenment and modern worlds.

\textsuperscript{38} Porter, “Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment,” 233-236. Areas of pseudoscience that shared common ground with avenues of the supernatural included animal magnetism, alchemy, astrology, phrenology, and physiognomy.
Moreover, the medium (who was more often than not female) represented a modern manifestation of the cult of “magical girls and women,” such as fortune tellers, oracles, mystical seers, spiritual healers, and witches, who, throughout history, have been cast as keepers of supernatural mysteries and conduits of secret knowledge. Mediumship, in many respects, emerged as a modern embodiment of these longstanding female traditions. The often fraught interactions between scientists and mediums seemed to touch upon a post-Enlightenment impulse to gain knowledge of (and mastery over) the uncontrolled female body and its mysterious powers – in a sense, to overthrow the pre-Enlightenment magical body and subject it to the rational, masculine principles of science. As we will see, this aspect of mediumship was especially evident in the scientists’ wrestling with ectoplasmic secretions.

The ensuing chapters, then, seek to weave a picture of the medium’s work within the séance, and to consider the visual and material dimensions of her spirit creations. This study hinges on the premise that the visual dimensions of séances and spirits can be analyzed as part of the visual cultural of the period. I have therefore approached the séance photographs in question as one would a visual artifact. The first chapter considers the broader interconnected relationships that existed among camera, ghost, and medium within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is chiefly concerned with laying out the haunted history of the photographic medium. The second chapter examines the setting of the scientific séance, as well as the complexities underlying the interactions between the performing female medium and her viewing male audience. Here, I am primarily concerned with examining the visual conditions of the séance that

framed the subversive and symbolic performances therein. In the third chapter, I offer an analysis of ectoplasm that ultimately situates “ghostly matter” within religious traditions tied to resurrection and remembrance. Finally, my fourth chapter addresses the role of art and artistry within the séance. My discussion here seeks to address the creative and aesthetic dimensions of the séance, including its relationship with mass media and collage. At the heart of my project is an interest in revealing the visual layers of séances – the images, constructions, and performances – that provided tangible meaning for audiences within the darkness.

Lurking throughout all of these discussions is the matter of belief itself, and its relationship to the visual image. The images that form the basis of this analysis are shaped in compelling ways by the faiths and desires of the actors involved both before and behind the camera’s lens. In his 1907 preface to *Mysterious Psychic Forces*, Dr. Flammarion astutely observed that “nothing is rarer upon our planet than an independent and absolutely untrammeled mind, nor is anything rarer than a true scientific spirit of inquiry, freed from all personal interest.” Flammarion’s point is fully borne out within the photographs of mediums and materializing phenomena. In them we can see systems of belief intermingling with the scientific, just as death intermingles with life, and the invisible intermingles with the visible. The scientific-séance image marks an area of slippage into the murky waters of art and emotion, where what are captured are not only flickering apparitions, but the haunted desires and projections of the human psyche. Perhaps most importantly, these photographs shed new light on the role of images in navigating human understandings of death and the beyond. The performances of medium and ghost within the séance thus bring to life a primordial *danse macabre* and invite both

---

the historical and contemporary viewer to confront human mortality – and immortality – within the same instant.
In the 1891 novel *Down There (Là Bas)* by the French spiritualist and decadent writer Joris-Karl Huysmans, the character Gévingey declares,

Space is peopled by microbes. Is it more surprising that space should also be crammed with spirits and larvae? Water and vinegar are alive with animalcules. The microscope shows them to us. Now why should not the air, inaccessible to the sight and the instruments of man, swarm, like the other elements, with beings more or less corporeal, with embryos more or less mature?¹

Huysmans’s description of “invisible beings” that haunted the visible world indexed the nineteenth-century impulse to discover an interior layer of reality, beyond the boundaries of human vision. Air teemed with ethereal beings – with ghosts, with microbes, and with larvae. From this point of view, ghosts occupied the same plane of existence as larvae or dust particles. They were everywhere, but were imperceptible to the human eye.

Flammarion, reflecting upon discoveries of spiritualism, commented that “We have here a situation analogous to that in which Christopher Columbus found himself on the evening of the day when he perceived the first hints of land in the New World. We are pushing our prow through an absolutely unknown sea.”² Flammarion’s statement thus positioned spiritualism within an entrenched spirit of exploration and discovery, and also

---
hinted at the continuity between earlier colonialist documentation projects and the camera’s conquest of the invisible.

Huysmans’s association of spirits with larvae and other invisible microbes was not without historical precedent. In the mid nineteenth century, Louis Pasteur’s discovery of harmful microbial pathogens had transformed air and water into potentially deadly spaces filled with invisible agents of disease and death. Echoes of Pasteur’s germ theories reverberate within Huysmans’s description of air that swarms with all manner of invisible beings, including the spirits of the dead. Technologies such as the X-ray, which appeared at the tail end of the nineteenth century, had similarly contributed to new methods of conceptualizing the human body and “seeing the invisible,” while at the same time transforming living flesh into morbid images of skeletons and bones. Through new visual technologies, life in the nineteenth century was increasingly haunted by the invisible hand of death.³

The spiritualist séance-photography with which this project is concerned took shape in the 1880s alongside the larger projects of “invisible photography” that included

---


It should additionally be noted that the work of Charles Darwin was similarly preoccupied with understanding the composition of “invisible worlds” and his theories were instrumental in shaping empirical, observation-centred methodologies within these fields of study. See Sara Barnes and Andrew Patrizio, “Darwin on the Threshold of the Visible: Contemporary Art and Evolution,” in *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and Visual Culture*, ed. Barbara Larson and Fae Brauer (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press and University Press of New England, 2009), 288-290.
microphotography, radiology, and other positivist ventures to document intangible phenomena, such as electricity, magnetic currents (also referred to as animal magnetism), human thoughts, emotions, dreams, and psychic auras, as well as other fleeting subjects such as physical movement. One of the earliest reviews of such invisible phenomena was conducted by Ottomar Volkmer in his 1894 Die photographische Aufnahme von Unsichtbarem, which chronicled scientific photography of invisible subjects.\(^4\) Research into paranormal phenomena was explicitly aligned with this broader field of unseen phenomena and the exploration of new frontiers of vision. In the last decade, the matter of scientific photography of the invisible has been raised repeatedly within a number of major exhibitions and catalogues.\(^5\)

Since its inception, photography has been haunted by images of the invisible, immaterial, and absent. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ghosts, as well as the mediums who conjured them, were among the more elusive objects to tantalize the camera’s lens. The spirits that materialized on film, at their core, reflected a deep-seated desire to secure a tangible trace of the invisible – a desire that was shared by the scientific investigators, mediums, and séance-goers alike, and that was fundamental to the photographic medium itself. This first chapter endeavors to lay the groundwork for

---


deciphering séance imagery by introducing key concepts of photographic haunting that will inform my later discussions.

In James Coates’s 1911 publication of *Photographing the Invisible*, the author recorded one of the first histories of spirit photography, underlining the special role of photography as a technology that could be applied equally “to the visible, the material invisible, and the immaterial invisible or the psychic.”⁶ Coates, a believer who took a sympathetic view of spiritualist claims, also suggested that the photograph served the spiritualist medium in roughly the same manner that it did the physician or scientist:

> To say that the invisible cannot be photographed, even on the material plane, would be to confess ignorance of facts which are commonplace – as, for instance, to mention the application of X-Ray photography to the exploration of the muscles, bones and the internal organs.⁷

This scientific view of spiritualist photography, as yet another branch of photography of the invisible, was relatively commonplace during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Like the phantoms it documented, however, spiritualist photography existed somewhat ambiguously between the visible and the invisible, and presence and absence, as it sought to preserve a visual record of ghosts. In an 1895 article published in the spiritualist magazine *Borderland*, the journalist W. T. Stead recounted, by means of a spirit guide named Julia, the nature of invisible spirit phenomena and the process of making these visible:

> There is around us all the material, if I may so call it, of the universal mind…To ordinary mortals it is invisible. All its records are written, as it were, with invisible ink. But there are some whose eyes are open, and others can see and read and hear. The pictures in the

---


⁷ Ibid., viii.
astral light, as you can call it if you will, are capable of being materialized so as to be visible on this plane."\(^8\)

Stead’s uncertainties and hesitations in this passage suggest the difficulties of describing the invisible materials of the universe, and speak to the indistinctness that cloaked the immaterial forces outside the bounds of natural human vision.

Stead’s likening of invisible realities to records written “with invisible ink,” however, provides an apt analogy for the medium of *photography* itself, as the photograph exposed the “invisible writings” of light on film. The camera’s dualistic associations with visibility and invisibility made it a particularly fitting technology for mediums to use in conjuring material evidence of specters within the séance. This chapter, then, examines the principles of invisibility, absence, ephemerality within the “haunted medium” of photography, as a foundation upon which an analysis of séance imagery may be built.

The camera was positioned at the very centre of the spiritualist movement, where it served as a technology that both championed and challenged the spiritualist cause. On the one hand, spiritualist photographers employed the camera as a means of capturing (and conjuring) ghosts – or “spirit extras” – on film. The more dramatic mediums (with whom this study is largely concerned) even performed the photographic process by creating photo-like ectoplasms within the darkroom of the séance. On the other hand, the camera was used pervasively as an exposing witness within scientific investigations that sought to establish cases against fraudulent mediums.\(^9\) In this sense, the camera


\(^9\) The Societies for Psychical Research headed many investigations of spiritualism, and there were also innumerable exposés that ran in European and American newspapers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
represented a tool of both illumination and concealment. This ambiguity surrounding the spiritualist camera bears fleshing out.

The camera’s invention was framed by positivism – a system of thought derived from Enlightenment principles, which privileged knowledge of the world through direct, empirical, and observable evidence over inherited ideas and religious explanation.\(^\text{10}\) Scientific projects and technological innovations that unlocked new visual frontiers and extended the reach of the human eye were motivated by these principles. Even within the framework of positivism, however, the division between visibility and invisibility was not always clear, as vision itself often proved unreliable.\(^\text{11}\) Early experimentation with photography illustrated this point, as naturalist and pictorialist photographers in the 1880s and ‘90s sought to capture ephemeral subjects, such as fleeting moments in nature, which inherently resisted capture.

Pictorialist photographers such as Clarence White, for instance, aimed the camera’s lens at landscapes of shifting clouds and misty fields, as well as other fleeting atmospheric effects which neither eye nor camera could fully retain. Thus, although photography possessed the potential to capture the ephemeral, it could not entirely overcome the chasm between the physical world and the human eye. For this reason, even as it offered a newfound level of optical realism, photography simultaneously

\(^{10}\) For a useful discussion of positivism and its effects within the arts, see Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

became a medium of the ineffable and was swiftly seized upon by artistic photographers.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the most famous (and infamous) examples of art photography was Henry Peach Robinson’s photographic print \textit{Fading Away} (1858), which depicted a young girl on the cusp of death (fig. 4). Robinson had carefully arranged the scene to suggest a moment of peaceful passage; the young woman rests peacefully, her languid body lit by the soft glow of a setting sun at the window. His photograph employs symbolic and emotive elements such as hazy, soft lighting and encroaching shadows to convey the subject’s indeterminate position. Robinson’s photograph, which met with considerable controversy due to its falsified imaging of the serious subject of death, in many ways foreshadowed spiritualist photographs of ghosts, which similarly manipulated the visual reality of death and staged scenes in which phantoms returned to life.\textsuperscript{13}

Unearthly and liminal psychological states were also extensively captured by the artist photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, whose intimate and misty portraits of children and young women with downcast eyes and dreamy expressions, tousled hair, and drooping postures, recall the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites.\textsuperscript{14} Cameron’s expressive imagery, typified by photographs such as \textit{Beatrice Cenci} (1886) (fig. 5), sought to


\textsuperscript{13} Robinson’s photograph was viewed as being especially offensive because of its false representation of death, a subject that was deemed inappropriate for art photography. See Marien, \textit{Photography}, 79-97.

\textsuperscript{14} Carol Armstrong, “Cupid’s Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography,” \textit{October} 76 (Spring 1996): 114-141. Armstrong’s essay looks at the allegorical and often eroticized aspects of Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographic portraits, and particularly her employment of “mother and child” imagery as a site of projected desire.
capture mood and emotion on film, as if the photographic medium could transfix a vestige of the soul’s interiority.

Traditions of artistic naturalism have historically reflected the disparity between what the eye could behold and what art could accurately capture. Long before the appearance of the camera, the genres of landscape and portrait painting sought fidelity to nature and yet were hindered by other commitments, especially to artistic style. The foundational disjunction between human perception and the artistic image has been long entrenched in the history of art, and has given rise to a variety of artistic traditions aiming to overcome the gap between eye and canvas. This artistic impetus, however, is perhaps indicative of a more deep-rooted impulse to grasp hold of something eternally ungraspable within human experience – to hold onto time itself as it slips through one’s fingers, to cement the “essential real,” as it were, of a cherished moment.\textsuperscript{15} This is nowhere more evident than in representations of death.

A haunting 1878 painting by the Impressionist artist Claude Monet at the time of his wife’s death (fig. 6), for example, encapsulates the distance between what the eye perceives and the ungraspable reality of the depicted figure’s demise. The painting portrays the dying Camille resting beneath a veil, bounded by a pulsating atmosphere of frenzied brushstrokes, suggestive of electrical currents or an emanating psychic aura. Her body seems to dissolve into the surroundings, as if Monet were trying to encapsulate in paint the ephemeral moment of slippage from presence to absence. Monet’s portrait touches upon the desire to document and preserve life’s most fleeting and transient

\textsuperscript{15} An excellent discussion of the impulse to capture a sense of temporal specificity in Renaissance self-portraiture, for example, can be found in Joseph Leo Koerner, \textit{The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3-6.
experiences – and particularly those associated with the intangible aspects of death and loss.\(^{16}\)

In his treatise on spiritualist phenomena, Dr. Flammarion suggested: “Matter is not, in reality, what it appears to be to our vulgar senses – to our sense of touch, to our vision – but that it is identical with energy, and is only a manifestation of the movement of invisible and imponderable elements.”\(^{17}\) The camera – with its seeming ability to capture momentary glimpses of elusive worlds – represented the enticing prospect of peering into the impenetrable, shadowy, and spectral terrain of the real, beyond the limits of human vision.

Nicéphore Niépce, William Henry Fox Talbot, and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre were the pioneering inventors of the photograph, which emerged in varying forms between 1825 and 1839. Their respective inventions arose out of a common desire to preserve the imprint of nature.\(^ {18} \) In *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Geoffrey Batchen examines the births of photography in the nineteenth century and suggests that the very concept of the photograph grew from a fundamental longing to stave off loss and “fix the transitory.”\(^ {19} \) The imprint of nature that Niépce, Daguerre, and Talbot envisioned represented a new artform – photography – that could, in capturing nature, effectively arrest the hand of its Creator.\(^ {20} \) Photography was,

---

\(^{16}\) See Nochlin, *Realism*, 252-53. As Nochlin notes, artistic movements of the 1840s-1880s, such as Realism and Impressionism, were shaped by positivist notions of seeking representational truth through direct observation of the visual, material world. Impressionism became especially concerned with capturing the “fleeting instant” on canvas.


\(^{18}\) For a thorough discussion of the respective inventions of Niépce, Talbot, and Daguerre, see Larry J. Schaaf, “Invention and Discovery: First Images,” in *Beauty of Another Order*, 26-75.


\(^{20}\) References to the concept of “God as Artist” are widespread within Western thought, largely tracing back to Leon Battista Alberti’s writings on the subject of “Nature the Painter.” See Alberti, *On Painting*, trans.
according to its inventors, a near-magical medium of the intangible and invisible, which could provide glimpses of cosmic handiwork on a microcosmic scale.

In Talbot’s *The Pencil of Nature* of 1844-46, the first book-based publication of collected photographic illustrations, the author summarized the thought process that led him to conceive of the photograph, stemming from his earlier attempts to sketch pictures with the Camera Lucida. This experience led him, as he put it, “to reflect on the inimitable beauty of the pictures of nature’s painting which the glass lens of the Camera throws upon the paper in its focus – fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away. It was during these thoughts that the idea occurred to me…how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper!”

Talbot poetically described photography as “the art of fixing a shadow,” and even ascribed to it an element of supernatural power. It was, as he put it, “a little bit of magic realized: of natural magic.” Traditions in naturalistic painting since the Renaissance have similarly sought to mirror the work of God-the-Artist. Yet photography offered up images that seemed to miraculously transfix time, render the vastness of the universe infinitesimal, and make the invisible visible. By extension, spirit photography represented a unique variety of this “divine medium,” by picturing the continuation of life beyond death.

---

24 This was especially true of traditions of landscape painting. The work of the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, for instance, represented both vast landscapes and minute studies of the natural world, reflecting the artist’s interest in capturing a sense of the divine through nature. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990).
Talbot had been the inventor of an early “photogenic drawing” method that entailed placing objects on light-sensitive paper, which were then exposed to the sun for prolonged periods of time. From this he developed the “calotype,” which required less exposure time and was developed with a chemical treatment.25 Talbot’s early photographic experiments resembled a veritable artform of shadows, which evoked comparisons with Leon Battista Alberti’s description of painting from his 1435 treatise on the subject. Alberti suggested that the earliest painters “drew around the shadows made by the sun,” effectively tracing the handiwork of the Creator.26

Talbot’s Pencil of Nature included an assortment of photographs that sought to record, as much as possible, the “shadows” of nature, such as elusive atmospheric effects or microscopic glimpses of organic patterns. His work reflected an interest in fields of botany, geology, and zoology, and he experimented with various techniques, using microscopes, cameras, and sensitized photographic paper to explore the intangible and elusive corners of the natural world.27 Talbot’s early calotype prints of c. 1839-41, for instance, record the impressions of a moth’s wings in minute detail (fig. 7).28 Under such magnification the moth’s wings appear like mysterious formations, suggesting strange mountaintops or plants with extraordinary features. His microphotographic experiments, such as A Slice of Horse Chestnut (fig. 8), revealed the minute details of an infinitesimal reality, resembling an ornate creation of intricate lacework or beading.29

25 The first calotypes emerged in 1835, but were ultimately eclipsed by Daguerre’s invention of the daguerreotype. The term calotype, which was coined by Talbot, was derived from the Greek terms for “beautiful” and “impression.” See Schaaf, “Invention and Discovery,” 42-44.
27 Ann Thomas, “The Search for Pattern,” in Beauty of Another Order, 78.
28 Ibid.
29 Talbot was the first to produce microphotographs. While the microscope itself predated the visual revolutions of the nineteenth century, it was adopted as a tool of both science and popular entertainment in its nineteenth-century partnership with the camera.
the chestnut is transformed through his lens into a vast landscape of spirals and specks, as if the eye were beholding an entire planet or even a cosmos rather than a tiny seed.

Talbot’s imagery and other examples like it became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century, representing a mapping of new and uncharted visual territories with the camera. In appearance, the microscopic landscape found a visual parallel in forms of astronomical photography of the period, such as Paul and Prosper Henry’s 1885 print of the Lyra Nebula star (fig. 9), suggesting a divine interconnectedness between the vast and the minute.  

In 1858 the spiritualist Dr. William Crookes produced a photographic print of the moon (fig. 10), and he continued to experiment with the documentation of celestial bodies throughout the nineteenth century, alongside his involvement with spiritualism. 

Photography of the late nineteenth century thus delved simultaneously inward and outward, in search of the originating and unifying patterns of the universe and the divine – in cells, dust, and stars – that the naked eye alone could not behold. The idea of unifying patterns in nature had been prevalent throughout the German Romantic and Naturphilosophie traditions. The German Romantic scientist and philosopher Johann Wilhelm Ritter wrote, “Where then is the difference between the parts of an animal, of a plant, of a metal, and of a stone—Are they not all members of the cosmic-animal, of Nature?” These sentiments found new visual expression in the nineteenth century.

---

30 The Henrys’ print of the Lyra Nebula used the photographic and spectrographic techniques developed at observatories, involving the recording of light radiating from individual stars as a means of classifying the star’s age and composition. Positivist photographers aimed telescopic lenses at the moon and beyond, toward more distant stars and planets, in the quest to capture the unseen dimensions of the universe. For more see Ann Thomas, “Capturing Light: Photographing the Universe,” in Beauty of Another Order, 212.

31 Thomas, “Capturing Light,” 201. Dr. Crookes was a well respected scientist and astronomer, who undertook various studies of optics, light effects, photography, and spectroscopy. His association with spiritualism ultimately tarnished his scientific reputation.

Spiritualist photography thus grew out of an existing body of imagery and writing, and shared in its underlying aim of exposing the mysterious truths of existence.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the spiritualist movement had taken root across Europe and North America, with over thirty-five thousand practicing mediums and twelve million followers. Its tremendous popularity in the United States, in particular, has been largely tied to the Civil War of 1861-1865, as spiritualism offered solace to bereaved families wishing to reconnect with the dead.³³ In the United States, vast numbers of Civil War dead returned during séances; British cases typically featured soldiers of the Crimean War, and so forth.³⁴ Ann Braude, in her 1989 study of the political implications of spiritualism, examines the timing and popularity of the movement in the West. She notes that in the tragic aftermath of war, spiritualism spoke directly to a desire to overcome personal loss and find tangible evidence of the soul’s immortality after death.³⁵ It was under this shadow of war that the camera became particularly instrumental in capturing images of death. The development of postmortem photography and documentary war photography during this period, for instance, reflected the desire to simultaneously memorialize and retain an index of the lost subject. Bleak images of corpse-strewn battlefields, such as those taken by Alexander Gardner during

---


³⁴ The association between war losses and spiritualism has been well established. See, for example, the proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research in 1903, wherein the varieties of war dead were discussed – “Private Meeting for Members and Associates,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* XI (April 1903): 56-57.

³⁵ Although these concepts also lay at the heart of Christian belief, spiritualism presented an alternative to Christian theology that eliminated notions of original sin and divine punishment. For more see Braude, *Radical Spirits*; and John Buescher, *The Other Side of Salvation: Spiritualism and the Nineteenth-Century Religious Experience* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2004).
the Civil War (fig. 11), illustrated photography’s haunting capacity to record death through a positivist lens.\textsuperscript{36}

Postmortem photography was also used as a form of private memorial portraiture in the Victorian era, as grieving families commissioned pictures of the dead. Rather than document the stark reality of death, these photographs typically portrayed the dead as if they were either slumbering peacefully or were adrift in some liminal land between death and sleep. A photographic portrait of 1910 titled \textit{Sleeping Beauty with “Floating Roses”} (fig. 12), for instance, depicts the recumbent body of a young woman at her funeral. The satin casket on which she lies is strewn with flowers, and she rests serenely as if her eyes could open at any moment. The \textit{Sleeping Beauty} evoked fairytales of enchanted princesses who eventually awaken from seeming death. Corpses were occasionally posed as if they were alive or were displayed with painted eyelids to resemble living, animated subjects.\textsuperscript{37} Such images, which may seem macabre today, represented symbolic attempts at resurrection, indicative of the profound longing to restore the dead through the photographic medium.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{36}] See William F. Thompson, \textit{The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American Civil War} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); and for a broader discussion of photography and war see also Jay Winter, \textit{Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). A thoughtful discussion of the representation of realism within images of trauma can be found in Susan Sontag, \textit{Regarding the Pain of Others} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). Sontag provides an interesting discussion of issues of memory, the immediacy of death, and the construction of photographic truth within the photography of war and violence. She argues that in events of war, photography has historically been drawn upon to convey a sense of what words cannot – to capture the inexpressible “real” of war – although, as she ultimately points out, the very idea of a fixed truth within photography is illusory.
\item [\textsuperscript{37}] Ariès, \textit{Images of Man and Death}, 124. Ariès traces historical shifts in the funerary display of the dead body, which, during the Renaissance, came to favour an appearance of life or eternal sleep. Vanessa Schwartz has also examined the spectacular media of French fin-de-siècle culture and the popular interest that emerged for ‘deathly spectacles,’ including tableaux vivants, waxworks, and postmortem photographs. She notes that these morbid appetites were stimulated in large part by the development of mass culture technologies. See Vanessa Schwartz, \textit{Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris} (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1998).
\item [\textsuperscript{38}] Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, \textit{Death, Memory and Material Culture} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144-145; cf. Jay Ruby, \textit{Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America
\end{itemize}
Representations of the dead within diverse photographic traditions thus reflected an entrenched cultural impulse to sublimate the more gruesome realities of death. This impulse is especially evident in the more aesthetically pleasing depictions of death. Images of the beautiful corpse and the visiting spirit alike suggest a symbolic mastery over mortality. Photographs of ghosts, then, represented a record of absence that was closely aligned with trends in postmortem photography, as ghosts of the dead were restored on film. While it had been common to imagine the dead as alive within postmortem memorial traditions, spiritualism brought them back to life in earnest. In one famous example from 1921, the female spirit photographer Ada Emma Deane took a photograph of the crowds gathered on Armistice Day to commemorate the end of the First World War (fig. 13). In the resulting image, which was later used by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle during a public lecture at Carnegie Hall, a procession of ghostly soldiers can be discerned floating above the gathered crowds, as elusive embodiments of the

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); S. B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* (Altadena: Twelvetrees Press, 1990); Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, see esp. ch. 3, “On the Threshold: Sleeping Beauties,” 47-57; Sander L. Gilman, *Sexuality: An Illustrated History* (New York: Wiley, 1989); and Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 99. Warner provides an especially insightful discussion of the tradition of “death states” within Victorian waxworks and other media. She compares these figures to examples of waxworks and the Sleeping Beauties of Mme. Tussaud’s wax museum (which were also modeled after dead bodies but seemed to possess a sense of internal breath). The Victorian aestheticization of the corpse was not a new phenomenon and grew out of many earlier traditions in both medicine and the arts. Eighteenth-century anatomical waxes, for instance, were used for medical study and marked a dramatic shift away from the embalmed body of the cadaver towards a more aesthetically pleasing as well as durable reality. For more on the interwoven matters of death, identity, and memory in relation to human likenesses, see Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1997). Schwartz provides a fascinating discussion of the complex history of shade portraits, for instance, which were meant to document and retrieve the likenesses of dead loved ones in order to memorialize and restore loss.

It should be noted that spiritualism was not the first initiative of the post-Enlightenment era to attempt some form of reanimation of the dead. The theatrical and spectacular experiments of the Dr. Aldini around 1803, for instance, pursued this aim by attempting (in some cases successfully) to use electricity to reanimate dead bodies before an audience of onlookers. For more see Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 31; and Mark Essig, *Edison and the Electric Chair: A Story of Light and Death* (New York: Walker & Company, 2003). Essig provides a fascinating examination of the long history that electricity has played within the blurry zone between life and death, as a tool of both electrocution and reanimation.
remembered war dead.\footnote{Andreas Fischer, “The Most Disreputable Camera in the World: Spirit Photography in the United Kingdom in the Early Twentieth Century,” in \textit{The Perfect Medium}, 2005, 77-88; and Jolly, \textit{Faces of the Living Dead}, 125-128. Dean, who worked closely with her daughter Viola, was an unusual case of a female spirit photographer (the field was almost entirely male). She was also a middle-aged woman, whereas the majority of female mediums were relatively young. Her working methods raised speculation about fraud, as she would reportedly spend several days alone with the photographic negatives (in a private darkroom) before results were revealed.} This sort of imagery affirmed the relationship between photography and the remembrance of death.

In many ways, the camera was partnered with the human mind and soul, as an anthropomorphized technology that seemed capable of not only mirroring the function of human eyesight, but of transfixing the ineffable images of the mind’s eye and preserving its memories.\footnote{Krauss, \textit{Beyond Light and Shadow}, 17-19.} Perhaps reflecting this parallelism, a popular interest in experimental “retinal photographs” emerged in the late 1850s. These were experimental theories championed by a number of physicians, who believed that the retina possessed the ability to retain its last impression at the final moment of death.\footnote{Ibid.; cf. Jay, \textit{Cyanide and Spirits}, esp. chap. 3, “In the Eyes of the Dead,” which examines the special interest that developed around the retinal photographs that were obtained from murder victims.} Although such theories were ultimately disproven, they struck a chord with contemporaneous projects of postmortem photography of the period, as well as vague superstitious anxieties surrounding the camera’s mystical capacity to strip away a layer of the soul in order to create a photographic likeness. Honoré de Balzac had famously described these mortal anxieties surrounding the photographic process in his ruminations on the daguerreotype: “Every living substance consists of countless ‘spectra,’ which are imbricated in layers like tiny scales or leaves and envelopes it on all sides…when a daguerreotype is made, one layer of the substance being photographed is removed and captured on the plate. Thus it follows that whenever a substance is photographed it loses one of its spectral layers or a
part of its elemental being.” For Balzac, photographic film and the human psyche were closely interwoven, as each photograph stripped away a thin membrane of the subject in order to create the photographic duplicate.

The spectrality of the photograph has also been explored by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) – an introspective and illuminating study of the photograph’s engagement with death, memory, and longing. Written shortly before his own death, the text was framed around the author’s emotional search through photographs of his dead mother. In the text, Barthes ruminates through boxes of photographs that index this primal loss. Yet photography offers a moment of ghostly return in the form of a photograph that truly captures and conjures his mother’s presence. For Barthes, photography is a fundamentally ghostly medium of absence, one that occasionally wounds us with an effect he calls the punctum – a jarring and unexpected confrontation with one’s own deathliness, occurring as we are struck by a profound realization of that which has been. The photographic image represented, according to him, a site of perpetual loss and haunting – an eternal reminder of what is always out of reach and is no longer present.

As Barthes makes clear in his narrative, photography is a fundamentally slippery and unsettling medium, forever capturing a juxtaposition of subject and object, present and past, and life and death. He speculates, for instance, on the innate deathliness of photography while recounting his emotional response to photograph of Lewis Payne.

---

Taken in 1865, the black and white image described by Barthes is that of a young man in a jail cell awaiting a death sentence for an attempted assassination. Barthes offers the profound observation that the man in the photograph is both _going to die_ and _already dead_ within the same instant:

> I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future…Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.⁴⁶

And later, as Barthes reflects upon his own photographic images, he pronounces, “what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me…is Death: Death is the _eidos_ of that Photograph.”⁴⁷

> At the heart of Barthes’s treatise, then, lies the photograph’s indexicality, or, its causal and physical relationship with an original subject.⁴⁸ The photograph, as he notes, retains a trace of something that _was once_ present, yet _is no longer_. It is this eternally lost original presence that haunts the photographic image. According to Barthes, the psychological process involved in both viewing photographs and in being photographed is thus a fundamentally deathly one, wherein one internalizes a profound sense of loss or becomes a spectral object.⁴⁹ The metaphorically haunted dimensions of photography, so eloquently described by Barthes, were beautifully literalized within spiritualism, wherein the spirits of the dead materialized both on film and in the séance. These returning

---

⁴⁶ Ibid., 96.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.
⁴⁸ The semiotic concept of the index, which Barthes draws upon in _Camera Lucida_, stems largely from the foundational theories of structuralist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, articulated in his essay “What is a Sign?”(1894), wherein Peirce presented an analysis of the linguistic sign. The “indexical sign” exists when the signifier is directly connected, either physically or causally, to the signified, as in the photograph. Rosalind Krauss provides a useful discussion of the indexicality of photography in “Notes on the Index: Part I” in _The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths_ (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 196-209. Krauss also observes that the concept of the trace (or index) existed in the nineteenth century at the very “crossroads of science and spiritualism.” Krauss, “Tracing Nadar,” 35.
⁴⁹ Barthes, _Camera Lucida_, 14.
manifestations served as visual reminders of the photograph’s innate ghostliness. In the same instant, however, spirit photographs also offered a compelling reversal of photographic loss, as the dead were therein symbolically resurrected.

Barthes’s treatise on the haunted nature of photography has played a significant role in informing recent discourses on ghostly technologies within the fields of visual studies and cultural history. Jeffrey Sconce’s *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, for instance, offers a broad analysis of modern haunting, examining the pervasive sense of disembodied consciousness and animated presence in technologies of communication and electronic media.  

Scholars Louis Kaplan and Tom Gunning have underlined the innate “ghostliness” of the photograph and its appropriateness as a medium for capturing phantoms. Jacques Derrida, too, mediated upon the nineteenth-century emergence of haunted technologies, observing that in spite of its seeming rationality, modern technology nonetheless became the “very site (…) of a fantastical *phantomaticity*.” The entwined nature of the camera and the occult – a point which all of these authors have respectively grappled with – stemmed from the fact that modern technologies of vision, of which the camera was arguably the most historically

---


significant, had largely replaced earlier models of superstitious and supernatural belief.
The very tools that facilitated rational vision were also the haunted conduits of ghosts in
the machine.

It was not only the camera that was in dialogue with the spirits. Other
technologies of communication, such as the telegraph (invented in 1844), were
interwoven within spiritualist ideology and practice. This was a logical extension of the
way in which mediumship was often understood – namely that mediums were the
“transmitters” of invisible currents and forces, not unlike telegraphic systems of
communication that relayed messages through the air. Authors such as Jeffrey Sconce
and Martyn Jolly have astutely noted the timely resonance of the telegraph’s coded
tapping system within the spirit’s communicative rappings.53 These ideas were clearly
expressed by the spiritualist William Burr in his description of the medium:

It is a well established theory that ours is a vibratory universe…Wireless telegraphy
demonstrated this principle of nature, while the vibrating strings of the violin and the
piano bring to us audible proof that every sound of harmony or inharmony proceeds from
natural laws of vibration. If you place your ear against the telephone wire without an
instrument capable of receiving and converting to audible sounds the conditions and
vibration which pass along the wire, you will hear nothing of a conversation which may
be taking place…What the receiver of the telephone or of the wireless telegraph
instrument is to the vibrations which they are capable of receiving, so is the medium, who
is capable of transmitting, from the realm of spirit to the realm of the physical, forces and
vibrations that which we in the physical body can understand through our physical
senses.54

Ghosts, according to Burr, existed on an unseen energy frequency – one that mediums
were able to receive and transmit. Flammarion, in observing the medium in the séance,
similarly commented that “all (her) movements correspond, just as in a Morse code

53 See Sconce, Haunted Media, 6-7; Jolly, Faces of the Living Dead, 8-9; see also Warner,
Phantasmagoria, 221-236; and John Peters Durham, Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of
54 Burr, Written Copies, 5.
telegraphic system.”

Such theories also touched upon the pervasive understanding of invisible realities comprised of flowing currents – of spirits, electrical and magnetic waves, microscopic particles – that circulated through the universe like currents of blood through the body.

In 1861 William Howard Mumler was heralded as the first photographer of spirits after he stumbled upon a so-called “spirit extra” in a photograph. In Mumler’s spirit photograph, an apparition of a transparent figure materialized within a self-portrait. Mumler worked for years as a spirit photographer, capturing portraits of living subjects and their ghostly attendants (fig. 14). These images provided seemingly objective evidence for the existence of spirits, and other mediums soon followed in Mumler’s wake, using the camera as a conjuring instrument. Spirit photographs – typically featuring a transparent ghostly body hovering alongside a solid living one – swiftly became a favourite memento of séances. The camera itself functioned as a mechanical “spirit medium,” capable of transmitting messages and images from the other side.

Camera and photograph were, in this sense, intermediary technologies, navigating between visible and invisible realities. Correspondingly, the living, breathing medium of the séance oftentimes served as “camera.”

Early spirit photographs represented visual documents of the spectral, and were accordingly comprised of signs and symbols associated with the invisible. This “iconography of the invisible,” which informed both spirit photography and séance

55 Flammarion, Mysterious Psychic Forces, 72.
57 Gunning, “Phantom Images,” 1995; and Sconce, Haunted Media, 2002. In their respective articles both authors have addressed the camera’s “mediumistic” role.
phenomena, centred primarily on the use of both transparent and misty visual effects, as well as materializing white circular forms (such as orbs of white light or blurry, disembodied “spirit heads”). A spirit photograph of J. R. Mercer (fig. 15), taken by the American medium/photographer Ed Wyllie in 1895, is typical of this iconography. The image depicts Mercer alongside the faces of his dead mother and first wife. Within the photograph, Mercer’s body looms large – a dark and solid presence – while the disembodied and semi-transparent faces of his loved ones hover like insects or glowing orbs, illuminated in radiant white. A bouquet of ethereal flowers accompanies the spirit extras, suggesting funerary or memento mori symbolism. Spectral blossoms such as these materialized regularly in the séance as well; many séance-goers describe the wafting scent of petals in the darkness. Lastly, a hand-written spirit message inscribed within the picture reads: Am so glad thee have gotten the light at last and that thou art so happy. Elisabeth B. Mercer. The spirit portrait of Mercer, like the majority of spirit photographs of the nineteenth century, was a highly composed image, containing a web of iconographic allusions to concepts of remembrance, absence, and invisibility.

58 These are sometimes referred to as “blurs” within the photographic image. Their mysterious appearance often led to their being interpreted as manifestations of a supernatural or divine presence on film. For more, see Tucker, Nature Exposed, 63-69.
59 See Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body, 98-99; and Aries, Images of Man and Death, 176-184. The visual traditions of memento mori and vanitas took shape in Christian art of the seventeenth century as a means of symbolically addressing moralizing subjects of mortality and the passage of time. The term memento mori translates as a “remembrance of death.” Flowers, generally depicted on the cusp of fading, were a common iconographic feature of vanitas imagery. Other standard symbolic motifs included flickering candles, ripened fruit, clocks, mirrors, and skulls.
60 See Lunt, Mysteries of the Séance, 25.
61 Upon seeing this photo Mercer was said to have recognized the faces of his wife and mother. He insisted that the photo could not have been faked because his mother had been buried for many years and had not been captured in daguerreotype or painting while she was alive. Whether this affirms the credibility of the spirit photo or underlines the extent to which one’s vision can be shaped by one’s desire is difficult to say. See Fred Gettings, Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography (New York: Harmony Books, 1978), 75.
The ubiquitous presence of vaporous mist within spiritualist photography recalled the traditional representation of immaterial substances and spaces within artistic tradition. As a visual trope, it was especially evocative of the work of Caspar David Friedrich and the Romantic traditions of the Sublime (fig. 16), wherein hazy atmospheric effects were commonly used to signal the realm of divinity and spiritual vision.\textsuperscript{62} Warner offers an insightful exposition of the historical representation of the immaterial itself within visual culture. She astutely notes that the very concept of immateriality, and its representation as a misty, vaporous substance, was tied to the Western religious understanding of the soul as a transparent, misty entity.\textsuperscript{63}

The convergence of these airy ideas was logical, as human breath is the essential marker of life and spirit within the animated body. Misty and vaporous spaces were therefore imbued with a corresponding sense of mystical or religious significance. In her discussion, Warner examines, for example, the ritual of the Holy Mass that takes place within the Catholic Church, wherein a symbolic dissolution of the boundary between body and spirit is facilitated through the haziness of the ritual space, replete with incense smoke and flickering candlelight. These atmospheric effects signaled an intermediary, dissolving space between the everyday and the divine.\textsuperscript{64} The ghostly vapours of spirit photographs functioned in a very similar manner. After all, misty materializing spirits – both on film and in the séance – occupied the intermediary spaces between life and death, and heaven and earth.

\textsuperscript{63} See Warner, \textit{Phantasmagoria}, see esp. chapter four, “The Breath of Life,” 61-70. As noted in my introductory chapter, vaporous substances evoked the concept of \textit{spiritus} – a point that Warner develops.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 79.
In an essay titled “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision,” Gunning offers similar reflections on the function of transparency as a visual sign. Much like Warner, he suggests that the transparent symbolized intermediary terrain. Ghosts were the natural inhabitants of intermediary realms, as they were located at the very cusp of substance and nothingness, and existed at the outermost limits of human vision. Interestingly, Gunning also extends this quality to film itself, due to, as he puts it, “its status as a filter of light, a caster of shadows, a weaver of phantoms.”

Like transparent mists, white circular discs – often manifesting as halo-effects or alternately as hovering orbs of light – functioned similarly as heralding symbols of the supernatural within spiritualist photography. In appearance, this particular visual trope recalled the microbial forms and celestial bodies of scientific photography, although skeptics of spiritualism contended that circular spots of light on the film could easily be caused by the camera’s flash. Ambiguous “ghostly spots” were ultimately found within a wide range of spirit photography throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John Beattie’s early photograph of a séance of 1872 (fig. 17), for instance, recorded a distinct sphere of light above the séance table. And a number of photographs taken in the early part of the twentieth century by the English spirit

---

65 Gunning, “To Scan a Ghost,” 98.
66 Contemporary ghost photography continues to feature mysterious orbs of light and the internet is rife with examples of such phenomena. For more see Cyril Permutt, Beyond the Spectrum: A Survey of Supernatural Photography (London: Regency Press, 1965), 80-87.
photographer William Hope illustrated similar materializations of prominent spiritual orbs suspended above the photographed subjects (fig. 18).

The resemblance between photographed spirits and the flash-effect of the camera, while convenient for those wishing to produce photographic hoaxes, also had the outcome of reaffirming the camera’s innately haunted mechanisms. Other theories interestingly posited that the glowing effects often observed in spirit phenomena, either in ectoplasm or other spirit manifestations on film, were the result of phosphorescent processes akin to those found in nature. Dr. Geley, for instance, likened luminous spirit forms to glowing insects or microbes. In cases of luminescence observed on the medium’s body (or on materials emerging from her body), researchers speculated that these phenomena may have been either the symptoms of some form of physiological or pathological condition – or the result of an applied phosphorescent substance.

The visual correspondence between fields of positivist photography and spirit photography ultimately bolstered the credibility of the latter, and underscored the revelatory capacity of the camera. For these reasons, such effects were frequently sought and produced by spirit photographers. Nineteenth-century art, like its scientific counterparts, was equally interested in visualizing the invisible, underlying forces of existence. The white orb appeared widely within avenues of occult and Theosophical

---

69 Geley, Clairvoyance and Materialisation, 180-181.
70 These theories were discussed on numerous occasions during the proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, as well as spiritualist journals, over the course of many years. See, for example, the discussions headed by Dr. Crookes, published in “Private Meeting for Member and Associates,” Journal of the Society for Psychical Research XII (December 1905): 160-172. During these proceedings, the researcher Sir Oliver Lodge made the comment that the medium’s luminosity was akin to that of sulphide of calcium, which could be easily applied to skin or garments. In a letter published in the spiritualist journal Light, a researcher named Hewes wrote to describe his recent discovery that the glowing spirit lights he had observed in a number of sittings were the product of “two watch glasses, back to back, with phosphorescent paint daubed on the inside.” See Light XXXVI (February 1906): 80.
imagery in the nineteenth century, for instance, as a form meant to signify the sacred geometry of the cosmos and the eternal, unifying principle of existence (see fig. 19). Georges Poulet reflected upon the spiritual significance of the circle in his 1966 *Metamorphoses of the Circle*, noting that “the eternal centre and the Birth of Life…are everywhere. Trace a circle no larger than a dot, the whole birth of Eternal Nature is therein contained.”

Spirit orbs were likely aligned with such cosmic forms, as they represented the “unseen realities” of the universe. The spirit photograph itself thus served as a highly symbolic space wherein an iconography of the invisible was subtly inscribed across its surface.

An iconography of the invisible was, in fact, interwoven within broader avenues of psychic or mental photography that developed subsequent to the first spirit photographs. Psychic photography experiments, sometimes called “fluidograms” or “thoughtographs,” had been pioneered by Major Darget in the 1880s, roughly twenty years after the first spirit photographs of Mumler.

The techniques used to obtain photographs of thoughts were often surprisingly rudimentary, as the photographic plate was typically placed next to the forehead of the subject in order to procure a mental snapshot. One thoughtograph of 1896, taken by Darget, purports to show an impression of human anger (fig. 20). The resulting image depicts a frenzied mass of undulating lines, loosely recalling tossing waves or flickering flames. According to Darget, the photograph was produced by placing the photographic plate against the forehead of an

---


angry subject for ten minutes. Such images gave credence to the concept of the camera as a transmitting technology of unseen realities and interior states.

The photographic experiments of Doctor Hippolyte Baraduc with psychic fluids and the human aura near the turn of the twentieth century bore a particularly close physical resemblance to trends in scientific and spiritualist photography. Drawing upon Dr. Mesmer’s theories of animal magnetism, which had centred on the existence of invisible, flowing currents throughout animate matter, Baraduc set out on a quest to capture the human soul on film. In his preface to *L’Âme humaine, ses mouvements, ses lumières et l’iconographie de l’invisible fluidique* (1896), Baraduc asserts that “To wish to limit the work of creation to the domain perceptible to our visual faculty, would certainly be only to aspire to know but one very narrow stretch of the vast world of creative power, which we are permitted to explore, even though we could approach the stars by an object-glass, or magnify the infinitely small by lenses.”

His work included experiments with thought and aura photography, as well as the attempts at documenting spiritual subjects. His projects closely mirrored those of spiritualist investigation.

An 1893 photograph taken by Baraduc of the “fluidic nimbus” of a medium’s thumb depicts a thumbprint encircled by a glowing ring of light, reminiscent of luminescent spirit orbs (fig. 21). The fingerprint itself appears as a formation of

---

73 Fischer, “La Lune,” 139-151
74 Doctor Baraduc had previously been a student of Doctor Charcot and was trained in practices of electrotherapy.
75 The theory of animal magnetism (or Mesmerism), first established by Dr. Franz Mesmer in the eighteenth century, maintained that there were invisible forces akin to magnetic fluids coursing through every living thing. Mesmer believed that these fluids could be manipulated for curative purposes. For more see Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and George Winter, *Animal Magnetism: History of its Origin, Progress, and Present State* (Bristol: George Routh, 1801).
concentric pulsating oval forms, suggesting an outward radiation of energy from a central core. This effect is amplified by thin filaments of white light that project outward from the fingerprint like a radiant halo of light. Baraduc took an enthusiastic interest in capturing visual imprints of the “intermediary fluids” that comprised the human soul and spirit. These fluids existed alongside ghosts (and ectoplasm), in the ambiguous middle ground between life and death, spirit and matter. Baraduc’s image also offers a particularly intriguing example of psychic photography because it illustrates the close physical affinity that was believed to exist between photography and spirit medium, as here the medium’s touch transmits an invisible aura of energy to the photographic plate. The visual correspondence between ghosts and other intangible elements reflected the shared dwelling place of invisible phenomena, within the intermediate regions of the universe.

Indeed Baraduc, like many of the scientists of this era, saw his work as an attempt to build an “intermediary ladder between our visible world and the invisible world.” In his attempts to capture the visual manifestation of prayer, Baraduc’s photographs again closely resembled the iconography of spirits. In several examples, the scientist even photographed shimmering white lights that materialized on film during the recitation of prayers, suggesting a visible incarnation of the Holy Spirit (fig. 22). Such examples suggested that divine and otherworldly light could leave its physical mark on light-sensitive film, thus rendering the camera a technology of sacrosanct vision. His experiments sought to secure a trace of the soul itself and the intangible division of life.

---

78 Ibid., 36. It is worth noting that reception of Baraduc’s work was largely negative. Several critiques of L’Âme humaine were published by researchers such as M. de Fontenay (1912) and Josef Peter (1913).
79 Ibid., 177-186.
and death. Baraduc’s aura photograph of his wife Nadine, taken in 1907 at the moment of her death (fig. 23), recalls the painting by Monet of his dying wife Camille in its similar venture to secure the ungraspable moment of death. The resulting photograph appears to show Nadine’s bedridden body beneath three luminous, hovering white orbs – apparently manifestations of her escaping soul at the moment of the last breath.80

Baraduc was not alone in these photographic ventures. Other scientists working within the field of nineteenth-century “fluid photography,” such as Jules-Bernard Luys and Emile David, produced similar images of psychic fluids. A case in point is their 1897 image of Digital Effluvia (fig. 24), which, much like the work of Baraduc, participated in a visual language of immateriality, recalling the imagery of microcosmic and macrocosmic elements.81 The photograph, taken by Luys, appears to capture the psychic impression of his colleague’s touch. The resulting image depicts glowing orb-like fingerprints against a dark void, each orb hovering like a celestial body or shooting star against the night sky. As if meant to bolster this impression, the fingerprint-orbs also possess a sense of quivering movement, conveyed through the shimmering aura-mists that appear to trail in their wake.

By the late nineteenth century, numerous studies of psychical and mediumistic practices were being carried out by medical and scientific communities, often spearheaded and overseen by the Society for Psychical Research. As in other areas of positivist inquiry, the camera was used by investigating bodies as an ostensibly empirical tool to document spiritualist claims and expose the suspected trickery of mediums. The

81 Jules-Bernard Luys was a neurologist at La Salpetriere, whose work with his colleague Emile David centred largely on the study of hypnosis. See Chéroux, “Photographs of Fluids,” 114-125; and Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 21-28.
scientific investigators at the centre of this study relied on photography in this manner and were chiefly concerned with capturing visual evidence of the séance. Their photographs were thus of a different ilk than those of the Mumler variety, as any illusions or conjuring tricks took place in front of the camera’s lens, rather than behind it. Yet, despite the methodical aims of the scientists in question, séance photography often struggled with maintaining a sense of objectivity, slipping instead between scientific object and artistic construction – a point that I will address more directly in the final chapter of this study.

Within his experiments, doctor Schrenck Notzing made particularly extensive use of microphotographic technologies, as part of a highly rigorous scientific examination of mediumship and séance phenomena (see fig. 25). He even went so far as to remove infinitesimal particles of matter, strands of hair, and drops of liquid from mediums’ bodies for analysis with the intent of identifying their cellular composition. In one experiment from 1912, for example, Schrenck Notzing managed to obtain a sample of liquid that had appeared during the séance. Upon microscopic analysis, this liquid was found to be composed of some form of living matter. Schrenck Notzing’s methods suggested that it was possible to apply scientific methods to spirit phenomena to uncover the molecular composition of spirit materials through observation and visual analysis. Although seemingly concerned with exposing the medium’s trickery, Schrenck Notzing’s experiments also pointed to a desire to in some way possess and preserve a physical trace of the fleeting materializations that appeared within the séance. At their core, then, the

---

83 Ibid., 246. Schrenck Notzing succeeded in collecting samples of materialized products during a number of séances, which are recorded in his findings. The original notes for one of these analyses of ectoplasmic “séance matter” (dated June 26, 1916 from the Biological Institute of Munich University) is in the collection of Schrenck-Notzing papers [not indexed] at the IGPP.
photographic investigations of Schrenck Notzing and other scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were aligned with the originating desire of photography, as described by Geoffrey Batchen, to fix a material imprint of the ephemeral.  

Even with the use of photography at their disposal, scientists consistently struggled to witness and record the phenomena of the séance. Like stars in the night sky, spiritual apparitions were thought to appear only when atmospheric conditions were suitably dark. Observers of séances often complained of the poor lighting conditions that made it difficult to properly grasp what was happening in their surroundings (and skeptics justifiably viewed the darkness of the séance as evidence of the deception that was occurring therein). In conducting séances, spiritualist mediums were intent upon producing visible and material ghosts for the sitters in attendance, while simultaneously denying aspects of sensory experience. In order to facilitate communication with spirits, séance-goers were traditionally kept “in the dark” and were asked by the presiding medium to comply with certain physical restrictions, such as maintaining a state of silence and refraining from touching any spirit apparitions. In such circumstances of sensory deprivation, photography represented a tool for seeing what the eye could not, and illuminating the murky proceedings afoot. The researchers of mediums consequently relied heavily on its ability to capture what was happening in the shadows.

Dr. Flammarion viewed the limitations on visibility within the séance in scientific terms, noting that many natural forces of the universe, such as night-blooming flowers, required an absence of light in order to materialize. Flammarion suggests that like ghosts, “the germs of plants, animals, (and) man, in forming new being, work their

84 See Batchen, *Burning with Desire*, 90.
miracles only in the dark.”

According to him, ghosts could no more appear without darkness than “a photographic negative without a darkroom.” A similar sentiment was articulated by Dr. Schrenck Notzing, who reflected, “Do not certain chemical combinations require to be formed in darkness in the laboratory?” Flammarion’s allusion to the photographic darkroom within the context of spiritualism, however, was particularly apt. Séance and darkroom alike represented spaces of the imaginary, out of the shadows of which images emerged.

The parallels between the séance – and particularly the darkened, curtained-off cabinet of the medium – and the photographic darkroom, as well as the analogous relationship between the medium and the camera, are especially compelling. In many respects, medium and camera functioned as parallel intermediary and reproductive technologies, giving birth to pictures through mysterious internal mechanisms. Mediums also contended that ectoplasm was highly sensitive to the effects of light and touch, much like sensitive photographic film. Throughout the investigations of the séance, low lighting techniques were often used that underscored the ephemeral and “photographic” aspects of ghostly fluids.

Schrenck Notzing’s experiments between 1909 and 1914, for instance, employed electric red lights, similar to those used in photographic darkrooms, as they were believed to be conducive to the development of spirit materials. Madame Bisson, who was present during many of Schrenck Notzing’s investigations, often used a flashlight –

---

86 Ibid.
mimicking the flash of the camera’s bulb – to briefly illuminate (and expose) the medium’s cabinet in order take the photograph. The medium’s sensitivity to light was widely accepted within the field of paranormal research. Schrenck Notzing suggested that white light acted destructively on the medium’s interior mechanisms, impeding the production of telekinetic phenomena, while red light was much gentler on her system. It was, as he put it, “therefore, necessary to consider the reflection, refraction and absorption of the light used in the séance room.”

Other scientists supported this point of view. Dr. Geley, for example, echoed Flammarion as he speculated that the injurious effects of light upon the materializations of the séance were similar in kind to the damaging effect that light can have on various microorganisms. Ectoplasm, according to Geley, was a highly delicate organic lifeform similar in composition to plant chlorophyll, protozoa, embryonic cells, or germs, which were also highly sensitive to light conditions. Geley’s theories thus positioned ectoplasm as a primordial material, closely aligned with various other essential and invisible ingredients for the existence of life.

The materialization of fleeting, light-sensitive ghostly materials within these “darkroom” conditions and through the body of the medium closely echoed the development process of photographic film. Recent studies of spirit photography have addressed this intriguing liaison between the medium’s body and the camera, particularly

---

90 Ibid., 25.
91 Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialization*, 13-14, 180-181. Geley’s experiments with Eva took place during 1916-18 and also involved Mme. Bisson’s collaboration. His work came after the groundwork laid by Schrenck Notzing, as well as other investigations of the SPR, and largely focused on matters of clairvoyance. During his investigations, he subjected Eva (and other mediums) to parallel methods of undress and scrutiny (and utilized identical dark lighting conditions) as were used by Schrenck Notzing, and his results were much the same. Geley, much like Schrenck Notzing, was ultimately convinced of the medium’s genuine powers.
in light of their shared ability to “develop” images. Gunning astutely observes, for instance, that while the medium’s body acted as a fleshy camera apparatus, by the same token, the camera acted as medium of spirits, conjuring phantoms on film through the developing process.\textsuperscript{92} The medium’s “development process,” however, was an explicitly physical one, closely tied to the female body and resembling at times a dramatic birth scene or hysterical fit, as I explore in chapter two.\textsuperscript{93} In this sense, corporeal mediumship offered a marked contrast to the more masculine and “rational” mechanism of the camera.

Throughout the experiments of scientists such as Flammarion, Schrenck Notzing, and Richet, frequent attempts were made to document ectoplasmic phenomena as it materialized within the séance. Yet ectoplasm was a perpetually slippery product that evaded both the light and the human gaze. While on rare occasion samples of ectoplasm were obtained for analysis, it was more typically documented through film. Schrenck Notzing’s photographic methods progressed over time to include even the use of cinematographic photography. In 1913, he began producing series of still shots taken in close sequence, as well as short films (see fig. 26). These more advanced documentary techniques were used primarily during his examinations of the Polish medium Stanislawa Tomczyk (also known as “Stanislawa P.”)\textsuperscript{94} The scientist’s faith in the camera’s lens as a relatively infallible tool of observation and representation thus remained unswerving throughout his pursuit of truth.

\textsuperscript{92} Gunning, “Phantom Images;” see also Schoonover, “Ectoplasms, Evanescence and Photography,” 31-41. Both Gunning and Schoonover address different aspects of the convergence of photography and mediumship; Gunning explicitly positions mediumship alongside film and photography, aligning the medium’s conjuring of spirits with the camera’s ability to channel images. Schoonover, on the other hand, takes a similar approach, albeit with a greater emphasis on the mechanical/corporeal role of medium’s body.

\textsuperscript{93} Schoonover, “Ectoplasms,” 39-40.

\textsuperscript{94} Schrenck Notzing shot his short films of Stanislawa in the summer of 1913. See Phenomena, 251-260; Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 168-69.
Mediums, for their part, claimed to experience a negative physical reaction to both human and technological forms of intrusion during the ectoplasmic conjuring process. It was not uncommon for mediums to writhe or cry out in pain when an attending scientist attempted to either touch or merely photograph her. Moreover, the medium at times registered physical shock in response to the flash of the camera. In one 1910 séance with the medium Eva C., for instance, Schrenck Notzing recorded that “the flash of the magnesium light gave a violent shock to Eva’s nervous system, and, at the same time, brought about the total disappearance of the materialisation phenomena.”

Here, then, Eva responded as if her body – in its state of heightened spiritual receptivity – was susceptible in a physical way to the photographic flash. Her reaction, and the corresponding dissolution of the ectoplasm, led the scientist to the conclusion that her nervous system had responded negatively to the mechanism of the camera, suggesting an interconnected relationship between the medium’s body, the ectoplasm, and the camera. The technological sensitivity of the medium, of course, also made it harder for the scientific gaze and the photographic lens to effectively pin down the medium (and her ectoplasm).

Doctor Schrenck Notzing was particularly prolific in documenting cases of ectoplasmic materializations from his investigative sittings with mediums during the early part of the twentieth century. Beginning in 1911, ectoplasms began to take shape within Eva’s séances bearing the extraordinary impressions of human facial features. This was evident, for example, in an especially evocative photograph from a May 8th, 1912 sitting with Eva, wherein a conjured ectoplasmic veil bore the distinct imprint of a

---

female face upon its surface (fig. 27). The face looked strikingly like a photograph. In his account, Schrenck Notzing theorizes that the apparition in question was not an actual photograph, but was rather an “ideoplastic” impression.

The term ideoplasima had been coined in the nineteenth century to describe precisely this type of materialization phenomena. The theory posited that ideoplasma was situated more or less within a grey area between the supernatural and the psychic, revealing the projected thoughts and ideas of mediums rather than conjured phantasms. Simply put, ideoplasma was said to be the material expression of the unconscious – of buried thoughts, memories, mental projections, and other surfacing psychic energies, which were believed to materialize externally much like other intangible psychical fluids.

In many ways, the concept of ideoplasty was a relatively logical extension of the corresponding pseudoscientific photographic developments of the period – particularly thought and aura photography. Indeed in both its concept and visual form, ideoplasty closely mirrored the contemporaneous photo-based experiments that were being conducted by researchers such as Baraduc. And in many cases the differences between

---

96 The ghostly face here appears framed by fabrics, which were described by Schrenck Notzing as “veil draperies,” Phenomena, 171.
97 Schrenck Notzing provides a useful review of ideoplastic theory and the various scientists who subscribed to it in Phenomena, 29-32. See also Krauss, who underlines the prevalence of this perception of ideoplasty within parapsychology in Beyond Light and Shadow, 80; as well as Henri F. Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 311-14; Treitel, A Science for the Soul, 21. The initial theories of ectoplasma that posited a subliminal origin emerged during the investigations of Myers with the medium Eusapia Palladino in 1885, although Dr. Ochorowicz was another early proponent of this theory. See Frederic W.H. Myers, Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death (1903) (New York: University Books, 1961); Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers & Frank Podmore, Phantasms of the Living: Cases of Telepathy Printed in the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research During Thirty-Five Years, ed. Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick (New York: University Books, 1962). The concept of ideoplasma also paralleled Freud’s notion that, as he put it, “spirits and demons are only projections of man’s own emotional impulses. He turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and meets his own internal mental processes again outside himself.” Sigmund Freud, “Animism, Magic, and the Omnipotence of Thoughts,” in Totem and Taboo, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950), 92.
materializing spirits and blossoming psychic thoughts were negligible. Over the course of his research, Schrenck Notzing consistently took the view that the materializations of the séance could be explained in this fashion.98

In an essay on Schrenck Notzing’s research, the historian Andreas Fischer writes that the theory of ideoplasty assumed an “animistic” origin for the medium’s creations, deriving from the deepest layers of the unconscious.99 Although Schrenck Notzing did not view the conjured substances as autonomous spirits as such, ideoplasm nonetheless existed within the supernatural sphere, as immaterial energies were, according to him, miraculously transformed into material substance.100 In many cases the materializing ideoplastic faces were notwithstanding believed to be those of the dead, as ideoplasty called buried faces and memories of the past to the surface. During the early part of the twentieth century, ideoplastic impressions became a relatively common occurrence within the séances of those mediums who specialized in materialization theatre. The images or impressions that appeared within these séances were typically fleeting, like all ectoplasmic phenomena, appearing only in brief glimpses before vanishing.

The images born from ideoplasm also represented especially compelling visual analogies for the photographic process itself, as they resembled flat picture planes bearing lifelike portraits of spirit faces. Their visible flatness and kinship with photographic pictures – which could have easily been read as a sign of fraud – was instead viewed by believers as evidence of a parallelism with thought or aura

98 Schrenck Notzing did allow that this type of phenomenon could have been the result of fraud, although he always sought to control the environment of his experiments, so that, in his view, trickery was unlikely. See Phenomena, 185.
99 Fischer, “In the Darkroom of a Medium Researcher,” 183-84.
100 It should also be noted that Schrenck Notzing’s understanding of ideoplasm/ectoplasm was at times inconsistent. Within the Phenomena of Materialisation he occasionally attributed to the phenomenon a sense of independent agency (akin to a visiting spirit with its own desires and wants) and at other times implied a psychical origin.
photography.\textsuperscript{101} Ectoplasmic (or ideoplasmic) “photos” can accordingly be read as layered documents of converging visual references. In addition to enacting allusions to the photographic process, the resulting images signified the premise of Christian reversal that lay at the heart of spiritualist belief: namely, that the immaterial spirit could be made material, and the absent could be made present. Much like spirit photography, ectoplasm represented a material and visual trace – or imprint – of spirit presence. And, like photography, it was a fundamentally transformative medium that symbolically replaced death and absence with material substance, and in so doing, offered hope of reconnection with lost loved ones.

Perhaps most significantly, ideoplasmic impressions recalled the professed true images (or original photographs) from early Christendom – namely, the medieval relics of the Shroud of Turin and the Veil of Veronica.\textsuperscript{102} The Shroud (fig. 28) was believed to have been the original linen cloth that encased Christ’s body after his death, and the Veil (also known as the vernicle or sudarium) was the cloth kerchief that had belonged to a pious woman who, according to the legend, encountered Christ and mopped his brow as he carried the cross on his way to Calvary.\textsuperscript{103} The latter has been lost, but was described as a linen cloth bearing rust-coloured stains, which suggested a bearded face (see fig. 29).\textsuperscript{104} Both fabrics, through their direct physical contact with Christ’s body, miraculously received the divine imprint of his likeness.

\textsuperscript{101} Krauss, Beyond Light, 80.
\textsuperscript{102} See Ewa Kuryluk, Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism and Structure of a “True” Image (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991); and Hans Belting, Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 221-222. Both the shroud and the sudarium/veil have been subject to debates surrounding their dating and authenticity. Both are believed to date to approximately the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. In the case of the Veronica cloth, there was initially no mention of an imprinted face, but this later became part of its physical description.
\textsuperscript{103} Alexandra Walsham, Relics and Remains (New York: Oxford, 2010), 10.
\textsuperscript{104} Belting, Likeness, 221.
These relics, then, preserved a material record of Christ’s presence at the time of his death and transcendence on the cross. They also marked instances of acheiropoieta, or, images created without human agency, by the hand of God. Although the history of these relics remains contentious, believers have long held that the relics were the direct transfers of Christ’s body onto the fabric, akin to a “divine photograph” of the Saviour. The historian of religion Alexandra Walsham describes the holy veil in precisely this manner, referring to it as a “photographic facsimile” of Christ’s visage.105 Hans Belting’s fascinating analysis of the conceptual development of portraiture in Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art also reflects upon the photographic nature of the cloth imprints. Belting remarks that the Veronica cloth, for instance, was “more authentic than a work of art, in that it did not rely on artistic imitation. It was as authentic as a photograph.”106 The power of the relic, like that of a photograph, ultimately lay in its indexical relationship with an original presence, as it retained a trace of what was once Christ’s original being. Interestingly, the Shroud was photographed for the first time in 1898 by photographer Secondo Pia, whereupon a previously unseen “negative image” of Christ with more visible features was revealed upon the reverse photographic plate (fig. 30). Pia’s photographic discovery was widely publicized at the time and cemented belief in the revelatory potential of photography.107

The “true face” or vera icon of Christ has figured throughout art history. It was especially popular within medieval artistic traditions that emerged alongside the cult of relics. Painted images of divinities were historically bestowed with religious power

105 Walsham, Relics, 90.
106 Belting, Likeness, 221.
107 Ian Wilson, The Blood and the Shroud (New York: Free Press, 1998); and Harvey, Photography and Spirit, 28-31. Following the discovery of Pia’s photograph, interestingly, there was a resurgence of religious visions that were experienced in the Catholic Church.
through a mimetic relationship with the *vera icon*, just as relics possessed greater spiritual potency through contact with the original body of the saint.\(^{108}\) Early modern images of the Holy Mother similarly indexed the so-called original portrait of the Virgin, which was believed to have been painted by Saint Luke.\(^{109}\) The *vera icon* of Christ was even more spiritually significant, however, as it was not a man-made copy, but an imprint created through the hand of God. The divine, authentic portrait wielded a lasting influence within religious art history and, more broadly, shaped conceptions of portraiture throughout the Western world. Even into the nineteenth century the relic continued to inform religious and mystical imagery.\(^{110}\) An intriguing late nineteenth-century print by Redon, for instance, entitled *It was a veil, an imprint* (fig. 31), created at approximately the same time as Pia’s photograph, clearly references the traditional iconography of the relic while simultaneously invoking the disembodied Christly head as a symbol for the separation of body and spirit, and the eternal life of the soul beyond the physical plane.\(^{111}\)

The image of the face of Christ, a relic preserved on fragile pieces of fabric, unquestionably informed the spiritualist imaging of supernatural presence through ghostly impressions on cloth. The striking visual resemblance between relic and ectoplasm within this framework suggests a conscious allusion to Christian symbolism within spiritualism. Like the relics of Christ, ectoplasmic images signaled a miraculous

\(^{108}\) For more on the religious power of relics, see David Sox, *Relics and Shrines* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 18-40. The relationship between relics and ectoplasm will also be examined at greater length in chapter three of this study.

\(^{109}\) Belting offers a useful discussion of the proliferation of the cult of “true portraits” and notes that by the fourteenth century there were groups of Veronica painters and merchants who were authorized to sell and produce replicas of the holy portrait. See *Likeness and Presence*, 214-223.


imprint of spiritual presence, a symbolic reversal of absence, and a resurrection of the dead. Ectoplasm represented a modern *acheiropoieta* of the mechanical era, enacting aspects of both the miraculous *vera icon* relics of the past and the near-magical technology of the camera.

In his study of spirit photographs, the historian John Harvey underlines the parallel between the photographic medium and the miraculous relic. Both were, as he rightly observes, images “not made by human hands.”112 Within the context of the Christian faith, the relic offered a material proof of spiritual truth – an affirmation of belief. Photographic documentation of visiting phantoms clearly served the same purpose for the spiritualist faith, as Harvey observes, and it stands to reason that ectoplasm, in its strange filmy manifestations, offered up yet another form of material evidence for the metaphysical reality (albeit a fleeting and evasive one). Its symbolic relationship with the relic (and “divine photograph”) ultimately provided substance for spiritualist faith and a seal of authenticity. The echo of the *vera icon* within ectoplasm, in other words, forged an associative link with the original “true image” – one that helped to establish the legitimacy of the spiritualist movement.

The divine photograph of Christ thus provides a contextual framework for viewing ectoplasm. In the case of the religious narrative, Christ offered up his likeness, as if recording a photographic self portrait, as a visual affirmation of incarnate presence. In an interesting sense, the Christly relic cements the spiritual role of the image as a vehicle for divine truth (hence its great appeal for centuries of visual artists).113 Throughout the peak of the spiritualist movement ghosts seemed to call out for

112 Harvey, *Photography and Spirit*, 26. Harvey’s analysis looks, in particular, at the visual characteristics and cultural implications of spirit photographs.

representation, according to their medium-counterparts. For, despite their often camera-shy qualities, ghosts simultaneously courted the camera and sought to reveal themselves to audiences.

In one fascinating example from March 29, 1909, the medium Stanislawa P. conjured the small, mischievous spirit of “Little Stasia” while in séance with Doctor Julian Ochorowicz, a Polish philosopher and psychologist who had pursued spiritualist investigations while working at the University of Lemberg between 1908 and 1912. Little Stasia had appeared with some regularity for Stanislawa, but on this occasion the ghost outright demanded to be photographed without human agency, providing instructions for the scientist to set up the camera and then leave the room.\footnote{Krauss records this incident in \textit{Beyond Light and Shadow}, 76-77; see also Josef Peter, “Die Kleine Stasia,” in \textit{Psychische Studien: vorzüglich der untersuchung der wenig gekannten Phänomene des Seelenlebens Gewidmet} XXXVII, ed. Alexander Aksakow and Dr. Freidrich Maier (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung von Oswald Mutze, 1910), 1-14.} The ghost’s strange request suggests, at its core, an impulse to establish its agency and presence through a “divine photograph” of sorts, taken without human hands. Ochorowicz granted the specter’s wish and the resulting image (fig. 32) revealed a two-dimensional female spirit face and bust protruding out of a white cloth-like mass. The face does not look into the camera’s lens, but gazes off into the darkened room.\footnote{Krauss, \textit{Beyond Light and Shadow}, 76-77.} Yet it is the request itself that is perhaps most revealing. It marks a moment of pivotal self-revelation and self-representation on the part of the phantom, brought about through the camera. It is the photograph that brings the ghost back to life.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The ghost’s strange request suggests, at its core, an impulse to establish its agency and presence through a “divine photograph” of sorts, taken without human hands. Ochorowicz granted the specter’s wish and the resulting image (fig. 32) revealed a two-dimensional female spirit face and bust protruding out of a white cloth-like mass. The face does not look into the camera’s lens, but gazes off into the darkened room. Yet it is the request itself that is perhaps most revealing. It marks a moment of pivotal self-revelation and self-representation on the part of the phantom, brought about through the camera. It is the photograph that brings the ghost back to life.

\footnote{Krauss records this incident in \textit{Beyond Light and Shadow}, 76-77; see also Josef Peter, “Die Kleine Stasia,” in \textit{Psychische Studien: vorzüglich der untersuchung der wenig gekannten Phänomene des Seelenlebens Gewidmet} XXXVII, ed. Alexander Aksakow and Dr. Freidrich Maier (Leipzig: Verlagsbuchhandlung von Oswald Mutze, 1910), 1-14.}

\footnote{Krauss, \textit{Beyond Light and Shadow}, 76-77. It should be noted that upon publication, there were a number of critics who voiced serious skepticism towards this image and the events surrounding it. A thin outline of white encircles the spirit’s body, suggesting a paper cut-out and strongly pointing towards trickery. See, for instance, the debates published in \textit{Annales des Sciences Psychiques} XVII-XVIII (Société universelle d’études psychiques: Alcan: Paris, 1909).}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The apparition of spirits within the séance was a phenomenon steeped in a rich and complicated visual language. Conjured spirits were nearly always more than what they initially appeared. More often than not, they were indexes of social, cultural, and religious meanings. The history that I have attempted to trace in this chapter – namely that of the “haunted medium” of photography – lay at the very heart of spiritualist practices. Photography was both a technological tool and symbolic concept, revelatory “medium of ghosts,” and relic of the dead. In a study of spiritualist imagery and iconography, then, the photograph marks a logical starting point for further discourse. The ensuing chapters look more closely at the formal and visual dimensions of the séance – at the shadowy materializations and imprints – as well as the conjuring women behind the curtains. Photography, as both medium and metaphor, persistently informs these discussions, returning time and again, like a specter, to haunt the pages of this text.
CHAPTER TWO
Materializing and De-Materializing Mediums:
Séance Theatre and the Scientific Lens

From the time of the first spirit rappings of the young Fox sisters, the presence of spirits has been largely heralded by a female cast of performers, through the tradition of mediumship. There were, as a matter of course, a number of male mediums practicing during the heyday of spiritualism, and the “medium photographers” who followed in the tradition of photographic spirit portraiture established by William Mumler were by and large male.¹ The vast majority of mediums, however, were female; and this gendered division at the core of the movement had much to do with the foundational principles and traditions of spiritualist belief. While the practices of mediums varied considerably during the late nineteenth century, a consistent sense of drama and theatricality pervaded accounts of séances that were recorded by believers and non-believers alike.² This sense

¹ For the purposes of this study, I refer to the medium primarily as female, but there were a number of prominent male mediums, such as Daniel Douglas Home, Willy Schneider, and Henry Slade, who practised during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The investigators of spiritualism were predominantly male, although a number of women also worked as medium photographers in their own right or assisted in the development process in the darkroom. (William Mumler’s wife, for example, was closely involved with his practice, and the aforementioned medium-photographer Ada Emma Deane achieved considerable success in the early twentieth century). As noted previously, the matter of gender within spiritualism is examined by Owen, The Darkened Room; and Braude, Radical Spirits. For an insightful examination of the séances of the male medium Daniel Douglas Home, which delves into the material phenomena of Victorian séance, see Peter Lamont, “Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence,” The Historical Journal (2004): 897-920.
² In her examination of nineteenth-century English mediumship, Owen convincingly theorizes that with the eventual waning of séances and the concurrent rise of theatre productions, as well as early film industries, some young women who would have perhaps once been drawn to a career of mediumship instead found their way into acting careers; see The Darkened Room, 73. For more on areas of crossover between theatre
of drama was especially apparent in the era of materialization-based séances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Séance theatre typically unfolded within darkened, hushed, and near-reverent spaces, before an audience gathered around a table in a salon or sitting room setting. Here, the medium performed as ceremonial host, directing the attendees to dim the lights, hold hands, and speak to, witness, and touch the conjured spirits. Within this setting, the medium lifted the curtains and controlled the spectacle (although skeptic observers frequently attempted to wrench this control and expose her methods). Séances thus represented the stage upon which mediums performed, and it is with an interest in exploring the cultural implications of this unusual body of female medium theatre that I consider closely the particular cases of Eusapia Palladino and Eva C. – two of the most famous materialization mediums of the spiritualist movement.

Medium performances are difficult to interpret through any kind of conventional theoretical framework normally applied to the fields of art or performance. Unlike actors within traditional theatre, for instance, mediums practiced within private domestic settings under atypical viewing conditions, and the documentation that exists of séance phenomena within the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is sporadic and at times unreliable. The photographic documentation of mediumship, upon which this analysis largely relies, was principally the result of scientific studies that sought to scrutinize mediums. In seeking to analyze and contextualize the visual language of

---

3 As there is generally a lack of primary documentation from mediums themselves, this project focuses on the accounts of specific scientists who were involved with lengthy studies of spiritualism and mediumship. As I outlined in the introductory chapter of this study, while there were very few cases of confessions recorded by mediums, there were nonetheless a small number of cases, such as that of the Fox sisters, in which the mediums broke their silence many years later.
medium performance, then, this study devotes considerable attention to the surviving records of séances that arose from these investigations. These visual documents resist easy categorization and rest within the uncertain terrain between scientific documents and artistic constructions.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were millions of followers of spiritualism across Europe and the United States. Popular interest in mediumship and séances had developed throughout the 1860s alongside the rising interest in spirit photography, with the more tactile and experiential nature of the séance offering its audiences a possibility of direct contact with the dead. The popularity of spiritualism at large led to the founding of various investigative bodies dedicated to the pursuit of skeptical inquiry into claims of spiritual and supernatural phenomena. The Society for Psychical Research in London was one of the first of these institutions, founded in 1882 as a Cambridge-based collective of scientists, researchers, and intellectuals devoted to positivist principles of empirical observation. Its aims, as laid out by the Society’s early literature, were to “examine without prejudice or prepossession and in a scientific spirit those faculties of man, real or supposed, which appear to be inexplicable in terms of any generally recognized hypothesis.”

Headed by a series of renowned scientists, including

---

4 It is difficult to assess precise numbers of spiritualist adherents, particularly as many spiritualists would have practised their religion privately. Interest in spiritualism spanned all social classes and avenues of society, and the numbers of followers also varied from country to country. It is thought that at the end of the nineteenth century there were at least 13 million followers and over 35,000 mediums in North America alone. There were also millions of spiritualist followers in both the United Kingdom and France. The numbers of spiritualist followers in Germany were somewhat lower, although hotbeds of spiritualism existed in Berlin and Munich. For more on the numbers associated with spiritualism, see Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 104-05; Treitel, A Science for the Soul, which offers a discussion of the spiritualist population in Germany; and Sargent Epes, Planchette, or, The Despair of Science: Being a Full Account of Modern Spiritualism, its Phenomena and the Various Theories Regarding it, with a Survey of French Spiritism (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1869); and Lachapelle, Investigating the Supernatural, for more on the French spiritism population.

William Crookes, Charles Richet, Camille Flammarion, and Gustave Geley, the Society undertook decades of investigation into cases of supernatural and psychic phenomena, often turning a scientific eye to spiritual questions of ghosts and the survival of the soul after death.

It was under the presidency of the physicist William Crookes in 1896 that the Society became particularly focused on the question of mediumship – often examining specific mediums at considerable length. The findings that resulted from these examinations at times led to charges of fraud being leveled against the mediums under investigation, but the studies were not always conclusive, and in many cases researchers were left baffled. In several cases, the abilities of the mediums were found to be credible. Doctor Crookes’ early work with spiritualism in the 1870s, for instance, led to his professed belief in the validity of young Florence Cook’s mediumistic powers, which profoundly shook his scientific reputation. Many other researchers who followed after laboratories dedicated to the objective study of unexplained psychical phenomena. Its journal was founded in 1884, and other branches of the society were subsequently developed in the United States, France, and Germany. For more on the history of the SPR, see Alan Gauld, The Founders of Psychical Research (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968). Richard Noakes has also offered a number of illuminating studies of the history of the SPR. See, for example, Noakes, “The Historiography of Psychical Research: Lessons from Histories of the Sciences,” Journal of the Society for Psychical Research 72, no. 2, (2008): 65-85.

Ibid., 44-45. There were many examples of well-known mediums who were investigated by the SPR, including D. D. Home, Florence Cook, Eusapia Palladino, and Eva C., among many others.

Florence Cook was one of the first mediums to be associated with physical materializations of ghosts. She was an attractive young woman, and Dr. Crookes’ photographs led to speculation that the scientist was romantically involved with the medium. After Crookes’ death his family destroyed most of his photographs of mediumship, presumably because his career had suffered terribly from his involvement with spiritualism. See Trevor Hall, The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes (London: Duckworth, 1962); Haynes, Society for Psychical Research, 115-116; Andreas Fischer, “The Reciprocal Adaptation of Optics and Phenomena,” in The Perfect Medium, 171-188; Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 117-120. It should also be noted that Schrenck Notzing provided a substantial summary of Crookes’ research and cited him as a key influence in his introductory chapter of Phenomena of Materialisation.
Crookes likewise reported credible cases of mediumship and suffered similarly tarnished reputations.  

The positivist aims of the Society (and of scientific observation in general), however, were intrinsically challenged by the subjects of their study. By its very nature (and regardless of whether we view spiritualists through a lens of modern skepticism), the project of spiritualism was innately concerned with principles of invisible and ethereal presence – principles that were fundamentally at odds with scientific concepts of quantifiable data and empirical evidence. Thus, regardless of whether or not certain mediums were found credible, a tension pervaded the studies of spiritualism that were initiated by the Society for Psychical Research from the 1870s onward. These tensions (between the scientific and the supernatural, between observing scientist and observed medium, between visibility and invisibility, and between male viewer and female subject in many cases) were in turn manifest in the photographs and recorded observations of the séance proceedings that shape this inquiry. In fleshing out these issues, it is to the nature of the séance itself that I initially turn.

By all accounts, the séance was a ritual of supernatural communication that necessarily took place within a state of darkness. If any light was permitted, it was generally limited to a candle, a dimmed lantern, or in some cases where scientific research was being attempted, a special form of “dark lighting” was permitted. And, while researchers such as Flammarion accepted, to a degree, the scientific premise that darkness was a state in which certain phenomena arose – like a photograph materializing within the darkroom, as described in chapter one – the condition of darkness also

---

8 These included the scientists who are examined within this study, such as Drs. Flammarion and Schrenck Notzing. There were an astounding number of well respected scientists, doctors, and researchers who participated in the study of spiritualism.
presented a serious problem for any form of empirical observation and served as the
d backdrop upon which the disparity between scientist and medium played out.

Flammarion devoted considerable time to describing this tension in his 1909 *Mysterious
Psychic Forces*, which recounts his experiments with various influential mediums and
devotes a large portion of the text to the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino.9

Eusapia traveled frequently to Paris at the invitation of the Society for Psychical
Research, and between 1897 and 1906 she met with Flammarion to conduct a series of
experiments, many involving table levitations and objects that appeared to move on their
own.10 Their first encounter took place on July 27th, 1897 at the home of the Blech
family, who were, according to Flammarion, “associated with modern researches in

---

9 Dr. Flammarion’s scientific background, as previously noted, lay primarily in the field of astronomy. His
research interests, however, were often nontraditional and delved into fringe subjects such as the nature of
the human soul, the heavens, and the composition of invisible currents of the universe. His work also
revealed a syncretic religious element, as he sought to establish a scientific basis for Christian principles.
His work with Eusapia, which he chronicles in *Mysterious Psychic Forces*, was a source of widespread
debate and speculation among spiritualist and skeptical circles following its publication. It should also be
noted that Flammarion published a number of other texts devoted to fringe science subjects, such as *The
Unknown: On Incredulity and Credulity* (London, 1900) and *Haunted Houses* (London: Adelphi Terrace,
1924). For excellent discussions of his work and career, see Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith*; and
Sharp, *Secular Spirituality*.

10 Eusapia was subjected to a number of investigations between 1894 and 1909 through the British and
American Societies for Psychical Research, as well as the Institut Général Psychologique. See, for
example, F. W. H. Myers’ summary of these investigations in “The Society for Psychical Research and
Eusapia Palladino,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* IX (March 1899): 35. Drs. Lombroso,
Brofferio, Carrington, Richet, and Schiaparelli were among those to participate in ongoing studies of her
mediumship during the 1890s. Schrenck Notzing also attended the tests that were organized by Richet in
1894. For more on her case, see Jules Courtier, “Rapport sur les Séances d’Eusapia Paladino a l’Institut
Hereward Carrington, “Personal Experiments with Eusapia Palladino,” *Journal of the American Society for
Psychical Research* 3, no. 10 (1909): 565-592; Carrington, “Eusapia Palladino and the Newer Researches
into the Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* II,
no. 9 (Sept. 1908): 471; J. Fraser Nicol, “Eusapia Palladino in Retrospect,” *Journal of the American Society
Phenomena,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 6, no. 7 (1910): 349-364; Denis
Canguilhem, “Flammarion and Eusapia Palladino,” in *The Perfect Medium*, 235-248. Dr. Carrington (who
was at the time the director of the ASPR) also published a substantial reflection on her case, detailing her
history with the ASPR in *The American Séances with Eusapia Palladino* (New York: Garrett, 1954). He
was among many researchers who ultimately found Eusapia’s case to be convincing. It should be noted
that not all researchers were convinced of Eusapia’s powers. When she was examined by Professor Ledge
and F. W. H. Myers at Cambridge University in 1895, for example, Eusapia was found guilty of fraud.
These findings are outlined in “General Meeting,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* VII
(October 1895): 131-135.
theosophy, occultism, and psychological studies.”

Throughout his records from this encounter with Eusapia, Flammarion notes the opposition between the medium and her observers, which largely centred on issues of visibility and concealment within the séance. He describes, for instance, her insistence on using a darkened “cabinet” – a curtained-off space, concealed from view – with the claim that it facilitated the production of spirit phenomena.

Such concealment was naturally anathema to methods of scientific observation, and Flammarion voiced his point of view as follows:

Why this dark cabinet? The medium declares it necessary to the production of the phenomena ‘that relate to the condensation of fluids’. I should prefer that there should be nothing of the kind. But the conditions must be accepted, though we must have an exact understanding about them. Behind the curtain the stillness of the aerial waves is at its maximum, the light at its minimum. It is curious, strange, infinitely regrettable that light prohibits certain effects. Undoubtedly, it would not be either philosophic or scientific to oppose this condition (…) The man who would deny the existence of electricity because he has been unable to obtain a spark in a damp atmosphere would be in error. He who would not believe in the existence of stars because we only see them at night would not be very wise.

Flammarion’s account illustrates a reluctant acceptance of the condition of darkness within the séance, largely influenced by his philosophical consideration of invisible forces such as electricity, which, like spirit phenomena, appear only under specific atmospheric conditions. Flammarion’s patience, however, was tested on occasion, as Eusapia repeatedly requested less light, much to Flammarion’s dismay. Her requests were made through the form of ‘rapped’ conversation with the spirits wherein the speaking ghost demands less light. As Flammarion notes, “this is always annoying: I have already said what I think of this. The candles are blown out, the lamp turned down, but the light is strong enough for us to see very distinctly everything that takes place in

---

12 Ibid., 68.
In such instances, Flammarion and Eusapia were engaged in what would appear to be a sort of struggle over the lamp switch, as he lowered the light begrudgingly and only by small degrees. Shortly thereafter, according to Flammarion, the spirit presence requested still less light, so that the proceedings ultimately took place in near-complete darkness. It was within this state of obscurity that many of the more sensational events of Eusapia’s séance transpired.

Plunged into near total darkness, Flammarion records that the medium then fell into a full trance, speaking in the third person as the spirit of a man named John King. The ensuing events were largely noted through Flammarion’s sense of touch and hearing, as his vision was severely limited by the lack of light. He reported, for instance, that the curtains billowed out to touch his face, and he was touched upon the shoulder “as if by a closed fist.” A music box and bell were violently shaken, the music box played from behind the curtain, and objects were thrown to the floor. Afterward, the medium requested for a third time less light and in a state of otherwise complete darkness a red photographic lantern was employed in order to maintain some degree of scientific control. Flammarion recounts:

The curtain moves forward again toward me, and a rather strong hand seizes my arm. I immediately reach forward to seize the hand, but I grasp only the empty air. I then press the two legs of the medium between mine and I take her left hand in my right. On the other side, her right hand is firmly held in the left hand of M. de Fontenay.

The spirit presence in this scenario is akin to an invisible assailant. As the curtain lurches forward, the scientist is caught in a strong grip. Yet when he attempts to grab hold of the

---

13 Ibid., 70.
14 Ibid., 71.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 71-72.
hand, he grasps “only the empty air.” Authority and control, in these circumstances, ultimately rested with the medium (and the spirit).

While she was apparently constrained by the limbs of the scientist, the music box continued to play melodies from behind the curtain, and the observers continued to receive spirit touches, often of a violent or sensual nature. Flammarion’s account continues: “I feel several touches in the back and on the side. M. de Fontenay receives a hard slap on the back that everybody hears. A hand passes through my hair. The chair of M. de Fontenay is violently pulled.” And moments later, Flammarion describes being “struck several times in the side, touched on the head, and my ear was smartly pinched. I declare that after several repetitions I had enough of this ear pinching; but during the whole séance, in spite of my protestations, somebody kept hitting me.”

Flammarion, like many séance-goers, was left to blindly experience physical sensations and to grope for a sense of his surroundings within a setting where he was disadvantaged. He and his colleagues were repeatedly seized, slapped, pinched, and touched by unseen forces. Another participant, Jules Claretie, wrote of similar assaults during a séance with Eusapia, headed by Flammarion, on November 25, 1898.

I felt at first a little light blow on my right side. Then, through the curtain, two fingers seized me and pinched my cheek. The pressure of the two fingers was evident. A blow more violent than the first hit me on the right shoulder, as if it came from a hard, square body. My chair was twice moved and turned, first backward, then forward.

Eusapia’s spirits were emphatically physical and even vicious in these moments, striking blows against the observers, touching them under the table, and pinching their ears and

---

17 Ibid., 72.
18 Ibid., 73.
19 Ibid., 98.
These attacks, carried out by the female mediums via spirit agents, offered a striking counterpart (or perhaps defense) to the often sexually aggressive touching and undressing that occurred at the hands of the male investigator.21

Occasionally, such episodes hinted at an absurd, subversive, and dark “slapstick” humour, particularly in the abuse that was heaped upon the unfortunate scientists, who dutifully records every pinch and jab. These physical spirit attacks underlined the fraught nature of the interactions between observed medium and observing scientist. It is tempting to read such combative and comedic scenes in relation to a feminine resistance of male authority, particularly in cases where the medium actively fought back, resisting the scientists’ attempts at observing and restraining her. The medium’s dissident behaviour was, in many ways, directed at both the attending male experts and, more broadly, the cold eye of scientific reason. Humour in the séance, then, was of approximately the same ilk as that of the court jester or trickster – a point that will be revisited within this chapter – who traditionally mocked and challenged reigning authorities.22

Strikingly similar events to those experienced by Flammarion during his séance with Eusapia were recorded by other investigators during the early twentieth century. During a 1909 investigation of the medium Linda Gazzera – a young woman of twenty-two, described as “pleasant, well-educated, lively, and gay” – the physiologist Charles Richet recorded his observations of a séance: “The musical box started, and in complete

---

20 These attacks were experienced by several participants, in addition to Flammarion and Claretie, who were present during the 1898 examinations of Eusapia.
21 A number of scholars have commented upon the sexual and sometimes violent undertones of the séance, particularly in the case of sensationalist mediums such as Katie King. See, for example, Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, chap. 6, “Science and the Séance: Transgressions of Gender and Genre.”
22 The matter of subversive play and the medium’s relationship with the trickster-figure is addressed in forthcoming discussion.
darkness, a pipe placed behind Linda was pushed into my mouth […] Some heavy objects dealt strong blows on the back of my hand; some large object struck heavy blows on the table.”

Richet’s experiences thus occur in a state of sensory deprivation, described as “complete darkness,” wherein he appears to sense objects being moved. He feels the pipe being pushed into his mouth, is struck on the back of the hand by unidentified objects, and hears the blows of objects upon the table. It is clear, in narratives such as this, that the sensory conditions of the séance at once enhanced the genuineness of the haunting experience and rendered the spirit phenomena difficult to fully grasp.

Another case recounted by Richet possessed many similar elements. On this occasion Linda was observed by Richet in the company of Dr. Imoda. The scientists held the medium firmly as the séance ensued in complete darkness. Richet’s notes on the séance, which were later transcribed in *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, vividly recounted his experience with a hurtful spirit:

> I hold Linda’s two hands, her head and knees. A hand seemingly from behind me strikes me heavily. I think I can distinguish its fingers, and this is repeated a second time. I hold the left hand firmly, Imoda holding the right which I frequently verified by touch.

---

23 Richet, *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, 525-527. Richet was a highly regarded physician and a pioneer of vaccine medicine as well as neuropathology, whose work on mediumship had stemmed from an interest in the subject of somnambulism. *Thirty Years* represents his review of mediumship to date, and his findings are reported in carefully objective terms. In the end, Richet was convinced of the genuineness of materialization phenomena, although he (like Schrenck Notzing) concluded that there was a psychical/subliminal origin. He worked extensively with Eva C., Eusapia, and Linda Gazzera over the course of several years, and collaborated with many of his colleagues, including writing the preface for Dr. Imoda’s study of mediumship. For more on Richet’s work, see Tabou, *Pioneers of the Unseen*, 98-132; and S. Wolf, *Brain, Mind, and Medicine: Charles Richet and the Origins of Physiological Psychology* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993).

24 Richet, *Thirty Years Psychical Research*, 432. Richet does not provide a clear date for this particular sitting and the case was not published prior to its inclusion in *Thirty Years*. It presumably would have taken place around 1909 when Richet and Imoda were in collaboration.
Shortly thereafter, objects moved about the room. A thimble found its way onto Richet’s finger, a cloth was placed on his nose, and, as he put it, “I felt fingers touching my nose and face.” In the episodes described by both Richet and Flammarion, then, the physical dimensions of the materialization ranged from violent wallops in the dark to milder forms of groping and touching, as well as movements of objects that directly implicated a phantom agency in the room, such as the thimble that was placed on Richet’s finger, the pipe that was pushed into his mouth, or Flammarion’s eerie sensation of a hand passing through the hair.

Physical spirits such as these traced back to a group of talented mediums of the 1870s and 1880s who became renowned for their theatrical séance materializations. Ghosts would emerge from the cabinet and walk about the room while the mediums apparently remained bound and passive within the enclosed cabinet. Annie Fairlamb, for instance, was a young medium who frequently conjured a male spirit entity named George – a gruff, bearded fellow who was overtly sexual, violent, and even inappropriate with some of the female sitters (fig. 33). At times, when a request was made to touch George’s body during a séance, the spirit would respond with a slap to the asker’s face. In a later séance of 1897 with Flammarion, Eusapia conjured a similarly bearded male phantom. As Flammarion reached out to touch the apparition, he reportedly “felt upon the back of my hand the brushing of a very soft beard.”

Flammarion’s encounter with spectral hair in the darkness carried implicit sexual undertones. The gendered reversals

25 Ibid.
27 Flammarion, Mysterious Psychic Forces, 21.
within a scenario such as this are compelling, as the medium presumably played a
masculine (and rather sexually aggressive) role, brushing up against the emasculated
scientist as he sat in the dark.

The medium Kate Wood was known to conjure the debased spirits of alcoholics
while in a trance, who often caused her to behave in an abusive way toward her
audience. And Florence Cook, who was widely known as the subject of Dr. Crooke’s
early studies of spiritualism, became a sensation for her ability to conjure the spirit of
Katie King – a beautiful young ghost who thrilled her viewers with titillating displays as
she stepped out from behind the curtain in gauzy dress (see fig. 2). During her séances,
Florence was typically bound, tied to a chair, and concealed from view. After falling into
a trance, the ghost of “Katie” would appear. Katie, for her part, frequently toyed with the
sitters, at times playing jokes upon them. On one occasion, for instance, she was said to
have tied up one of the male sitters and playfully covered him with a tablecloth.

Another interesting example of séance-play is illustrated in the case of the “Little
Stasia,” the diminutive spirit introduced at the end of chapter one. As noted there, the
medium Stanisława had been known to produce the impish phantom while under the
examining eye of Dr. Ochorowicz. Little Stasia enjoyed mischievous behaviour and
reportedly delighted in throwing objects or hiding the possessions of those in attendance,
as well as other childish pranks. The childishness and unruliness exhibited by Little
Stasia highlighted the subversive potential of mediumship, particularly when her defiant
behaviours were aimed directly at the authoritative observers. A similarly childish spirit

States*, 75-96. Tromp’s discussion of gender roles and erotic performance in the séance looks closely at the
case of Florence Cook and other late nineteenth-century British mediums.
30 Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow*, 76-77.
was conjured by the American medium Leonora Piper in the form of a thirteen-year-old native American girl named Feda. Feda would purportedly speak in a juvenile mix of babyish prattle and broken English. Her manifestation as an aboriginal child drew upon ingrained perceptions of Indian spirit guides, but her identity as a “savage other” and free-willed child also meant liberation from most cultural norms and social structures.³¹ Spirit controls such as these therefore permitted less rigid constraints on both speech and behaviour.

Many of these examples highlight the prevalence of both youth and femininity within spiritualism. There were, as noted, select cases of male mediums, as well as older female mediums – Eusapia Palladino, for instance, was middle-aged. The movement, however, by and large featured a cast of young, fresh-faced girls, many who were only in their teenage years, and women. There was, it seemed, a close affinity between ghosts and girls, recalling in many ways the perceived association between women and witchcraft in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³² It so happened that an attractive appearance of youth served the medium well and bolstered her credibility. Indeed, numerous accounts of séances drew particular attention to the physical beauty and social class of the medium. Owen, for instance, observes this pattern in her review of various prominent Victorian mediums, and suggests that there was a tendency to privilege

---


³² The predominance of young girls within spiritualism was discussed during the 103rd General Meeting of the Society for Psychical Research with Dr. Crookes acting as chair. See “General Meeting,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* IX (March 1900): 204-207. During the proceedings researcher Mr. Podmore noted the link between the young girls who populated spiritualism and those of earlier eras of witchcraft.
appealing “girlish” and “childish” appearances, as these qualities were perceived as signs of innocence and honesty.\textsuperscript{33}

Even more importantly, mediumship often illustrated a fascinating form of cross-gendered behaviour (that is, if we are to assume that the spirit materializations were either the mediums themselves or their associates stepping out in costume from behind the curtain of the cabinet). Undercurrents of feminist sentiment unquestionably existed in some forms of spiritualism, and the burgeoning women’s rights movement of the nineteenth century was frequently reflected in the political empowerment attained by many young women who became practicing mediums. The spirits, as a number of historical scholars have noted, facilitated forms of dissident behaviour and gendered struggle for the mediums, manifest in both violent and playful terms. In their respective studies of British and American mediumship, Owen and Braude have explored, for instance, how spiritualism enabled women to work as healers in areas of alternative medicine and to hold public positions as spiritual leaders within their communities, as many female mediums actively lectured and published writings on subjects of religion and morality (albeit often while entranced and speaking through the voice of a male spirit guide).\textsuperscript{34} Leonora Piper, for example, wrote and spoke publicly while under the control

\textsuperscript{33} Owen, \textit{The Darkened Room}, 41-74; cf. Braude, \textit{Radical Spirits}, 94-98. Schrenck Notzing’s descriptions of Eva concur with this basic sentiment of innocence and honesty, and the scientist frequently discusses her respectability, good upbringing, and position within the Bisson family, as well as her attractive physical qualities. See Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 27-39. (I return to this notion of “honest beauty” in chapter four).

of a French male doctor. The political freedom that surrounded mediumship was thus framed in acceptable feminine terms that adhered to traditional Victorian notions of womanhood and female behaviour.

As passive and sensitive conduits of ghosts, then, female mediums were able to remain more or less within the bounds of acceptable social norms, as their actions were viewed as being beyond their control. This did not hold true, naturally, in cases where the examining scientist suspected the medium of trickery. If the medium was believed to be fundamentally honest (this was, unsurprisingly, more often the case with young and attractive mediums of good social standing), then it was the spirits that were active in guiding her hands and causing objects to move around (or slap the unfortunate séance-goers, as the case may be), and it was the spirits that caused the entranced mediums to engage in theatrical exhibitions. Within the spiritualist séance, then, there was a perpetual tension between submissive and active female behaviour as these two opposing qualities were perpetually conflated within medium practices.

The accounts of Dr. Albert von Schrenck Notzing detailing his lengthy investigations of the medium Eva C. between 1909 and 1913 exemplify entrenched conflicts within the séance. Schrenck Notzing was an aristocratic figure with notable business ties and a socially prominent wife. His wealth and status enabled him to fund major research projects in areas of parapsychology and paranormal science, as well as establish his reputation among the upper echelons of German society. The scientist had

35 Mrs. Piper’s case was observed by the Harvard Professor William Faines and the London SPR. Her case is described in “Mediums of the Past,” Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research II, no. 9 (September 1908): 859.

36 Schrenck Notzing was able, for instance, to build his own research lab for the investigation of mediums and the supernatural. For more on the life and social status of Schrenck Notzing, see Eberhard Bauer, “Spiritismus und Okkultismus,” in Okklutismus und Avantgarde: von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915, ed. Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (Ostfildern: Edition Tertium), 1995, 60-80; Treitel, A Science for the Soul, 65;
been fascinated by the abilities of the twenty-three-year-old Marthe Béraud/Eva C., the young Frenchwoman with an impressive mediumistic resume who had begun to captivate European audiences during the late nineteenth century.\[^{37}\]

His lengthy photographic documentation of her case, which was published in 1914 as *Materialisations-Phaenomene* (later translated in English in 1920 as *Phenomena of Materialisation*), however, resulted in a considerable blow to his career.\[^{38}\] This was in large part due to both the shockingly sensationalistic and blatantly dubious nature of the photographs of mediums emitting ectoplasm, upon which his study relied.\[^{39}\]

The photographs of Eva were especially disturbing and evoked both fascination and disgust from Schrenck.
Notzinger’s readership. Harry Houdini, a vocal critic and debunker of mediumship, memorably wrote that “Up to the present day nothing has crossed my path to make me think that the Great Almighty will allow emanations from a human body of such horrible, revolting, viscous substances as Baron von Schrenck-Notzing’s claims.”  

Schrenck Notzing’s accounts, which are particularly well detailed, offer considerable insight into the complex dynamic between the investigating scientist and the medium. His work fell in line with that of earlier occult researchers, such as Drs. Crookes and Ochorowicz, although his commitment to photographic documentation surpassed that of his forerunners. Eva, for her part, had been examined by Dr. Richet prior to Schrenck Notzing’s investigations, where she also produced materialization phenomena. Eva’s materialization “oeuvre,” so to speak, consisted of amorphous veils and fragments of paper or cloth, as well as more physical and substantial objects that resembled fingers or hands. All of these forms of materialization will be examined in due course.

The methods used by Schrenck Notzing entailed first recording meticulous data related to Eva’s physical state, psychological profile, and medical history. He typically began their séance sessions with lengthy – and invasive – searches of her body. These methods included strip-searching Eva, examining her body, and re-dressing her before witnesses in selected restrictive garments, which would then be sewn onto her body, in order to prevent concealment or trickery. A photograph taken by Schrenck Notzing in

---

40 Houdini, *Magician Among the Spirits*, 179. As was noted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, Houdini was a prominent debunker of spiritualism and viewed mediumship as a form of trickery, akin to stage illusionism; cf. Beckman, *Vanishing Women*, 79; and Brandon, *The Passion for the Occult*, 165-174.

41 These proceedings are outlined in numerous places in Schrenck Notzing’s text, such as his accounts of the sittings that took place in May and June 1909. See *Phenomena*, 40-42. Other scientific researchers followed the same procedure and typically described the medium’s appearance and physiognomy in explicit detail.
1913 with Stanisława, whom the scientist later also investigated and subjected to similar search methods, illustrated these confinement garments (fig. 34). In the image, Stanisława stands in a stitched-up garment with her back to the camera, partially concealed by the heavy folds of the cabinet curtain.

These measures were deemed necessary as the medium might conceal objects and materials somewhere on her body. By 1911, the searches conducted on Eva had become intensely thorough, and even included full gynecological examinations. In order to alleviate concerns of fraud, Eva even performed some of her séances fully nude. Following these thorough searches, the medium was stitched into her restrictive black garments. The psychical researcher James Hyslop, who observed and participated in a number of séances with Eva and Dr. Schrenck Notzing, affirmed that during the sittings “there was adequate control of the [medium’s] nose, the ears, hair and throat by physicians, and even of the vaginal and rectal cavities.”\textsuperscript{42} The medium’s entire body – inside and out – was subject to a relentless scrutiny.

Schrenck Notzing’s experiments with Eva largely took place at the home of the Bisson family, with the hostess Madame Bisson in attendance. She was a respectable woman of good social standing with an interest in spiritualism, who had taken in the twenty-three-year-old medium, and served as her protector and benefactor. Eva was technically of a lower social standing (and of “unfavourable heredity,” as Schrenck Notzing put it), as were many young women in the mediumship trade, but her ties with the prominent Bisson family secured for her a position of trust.\textsuperscript{43} It was in large part due

\textsuperscript{43} Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 27-35; see also Owen, \textit{The Darkened Room}, 1-6. Owen offers an excellent discussion of the issues of class and social hierarchy within the world of spiritualism. She notes
to Mme. Bisson’s backing that Eva C. was viewed favourably by Dr. Schrenck Notzing, who, although repeatedly affirming his position of skepticism toward spirit phenomena, remained convinced that both patron and medium were credible and honest figures, unlikely to participate in fraud and deceit because of their good status and breeding.  

During his many séance experiments with Eva at the Bisson household, the medium would enter the enclosed cabinet area and would then submit to hypnotization by Madame Bisson. Once in a somnambulistic trance, she would typically produce a variety of materializations, while opening and closing the curtain in brief movements, enabling the spectators to catch glimpses of the conjured materials therein. There were a number of different theories surrounding the nature of ectoplasm, which tended to favour supernatural, psychological, or fraudulent explanations for the phenomenon. Schrenck Notzing, as noted in chapter one, ultimately came to the conclusion that the medium’s productions were indeed genuine, albeit linked with psychical rather than strictly supernatural origins.

that mediums who were explicitly charging fees were generally viewed with greater suspicion than those who appeared to be acting purely out of a spiritual calling. As she rightly observes, however, even those mediums who appeared to be free of the muddying effects of capital gain often gained in subtler ways through their mediumship.

44 Mme. Juliette Bisson’s role within these séances was a complex and interesting one, as her participation became increasingly involved over time. There is fairly strong evidence to suggest that Mme. Bisson and Eva may have conspired together within the séances. Mme. Bisson was, in fact, accused of being complicit with the medium following the publication of Phenomena of Materialisation. Bisson frequently served as assistant to the medium, entering the cabinet both to hypnotize Eva and to release her from the trance, or to communicate with her in some way. And on occasions when Eva refused to be touched by the attending scientists, she usually permitted Mme. Bisson to touch her. As the séance experiments progressed, Mme. Bisson was also subjected to more frequent searches and close observation, likely out of a lingering suspicion that she was involved in some form of deception behind the closed curtains. However, Schrenck Notzing appeared to have ultimately maintained his faith in her honesty. Juliette Bisson, interestingly, wrote her own account of the proceedings with Dr. Schrenck Notzing, which closely mirrors Schrenck Notzing’s Phenomena in both format and scientific tone: Juliette Alexandre Bisson, Les Phénomènes dits de Matérialisations: Étude Expérimentale (Paris: Librairie Félix Algan, 1921). The contents of Mme. Bisson’s text shed little light, however, on any possible collusion between the author and the medium. For more, see Fischer, “In the Darkroom,” 184.
In whatever form they took, the materializing phenomena of the séance always occurred in darkness, within the curtained space of the cabinet, where visibility was controlled by the medium. Eva’s use of the cabinet space marked a particular source of frustration for Schrenck Notzing during their sittings. Much like the previously recounted episode with Dr. Flammarion and the medium Eusapia Palladino, Eva’s requirements for a dark cabinet, as well as dim lighting, were countered by Schrenck Notzing’s use of various sensitive lighting techniques, such as red lighting (which, as noted in the previous chapter, closely paralleled the red lights used within photographic darkrooms). The scientist, for his part, accepted that the young medium required the separate cabinet space and darkened conditions in order to produce spirit materializations, and used photography as a means of recording what was happening within the séance.

On numerous occasions, noted in his *Phenomena of Materialisation*, Schrenck Notzing’s attempts at documentation were, however, thwarted by the speed at which the phenomena occurred. Eva conjured ectoplasmic matter and spirit manifestations with relative ease, but these were nearly always fleeting phenomena that appeared in brief glimpses and dematerialized in mere seconds (often before the attending doctor had time to light a flash and secure an image). The sense of visual uncertainty within these

---

45 Schrenck Notzing’s red lighting was produced in a variety of ways, including candle-power lamps covered in red cloth or lamps contained within ruby glass globes, “as used in the development of photographic plates.” See *Phenomena*, 60.

46 Instances of failed attempts at recording fleeting manifestations are quite common throughout his text, although in these cases, Schrenck Notzing provides a surprisingly detailed account of what he observed in those moments. The accuracy of these observations should likely be taken with a healthy grain of salt, particularly given the poor lighting conditions and the rapidity of the events. The intimate relationship that developed between scientist and medium, as well as the intimacy between Mme. Bisson and Eva, furthermore raises a great many questions about the degree of objectivity involved in the methods used by Dr. Schrenck Notzing. Scholars such as Rolf Krauss have speculated that the close relationship between medium and investigator, in cases such as this, may have produced in the young medium a tremendous sense of pressure to perform and produce results. See Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow*, 75.
spaces is well described by Schrenck Notzing in his account of a sitting that occurred on November 25, 1920:

There appeared a formless mass of a light grey colour, about a foot in vertical height, which disappeared and reappeared without a change in the position of the curtains or (Eva’s) hands. The shape appeared at first vague and indefinite, with a fluctuating motion, then it became visibly brighter and more solid, until it changed into a white luminous material, like a heap of the finest chiffon veiling, apparently stretched out beyond the curtain by a hand and again withdrawn. Some of those present thought they saw a small female hand which held the stuff. In spite of the most accurate observation I could not perceive anything of this. The mass dissolved before our eyes, losing first its solid shape. Finally we only saw a light strip, which ascended from the quiescent hand and gave the impression as if a column of luminous smoke were ascending from it. The total duration of this remarkable process may have been thirty to sixty seconds.47

Schrenck Notzing’s description of Eva’s performance emphasizes the visual uncertainty within the séance. He struggles to identify the indistinct and insubstantial materials, which seem to shift in their appearance between chiffon and smoke, appearing and disappearing within a matter of moments. Eva’s materializations were generally of this nature and Schrenck Notzing’s accounts continually describe instances of amorphous, shifting, immaterial substances that defied scientific observation.

Disappearing and dematerializing ectoplasm became a staple feature of Eva’s séances, and indeed of nearly all mediumship. Dr. Geley, a colleague of Schrenck Notzing and fellow séance researcher, defined the medium as “one whose constituent elements – mental, dynamic and material – are capable of being momentarily decentralized.”48 The medium was, according to Geley, similar in her physical makeup to both phantom and phantasmal substance – impermanent, fluid, and elusive. Scientists continually strained to glimpse, photograph, and touch the medium’s fleeting emissions – often lamenting the limitations of both the eye and the camera to capture the phenomena.

At a sitting on May 25, 1910, for instance, Schrenck Notzing observed another “whitish

---

grey mass” floating from Eva’s mouth. The ectoplasmic substance “resembled a large
muslin veil of the finest texture. A draught would set it in motion.”⁴⁹ Schrenck Notzing
then requested to touch the fragile fabric, and Eva promptly denied this request. She
swiftly retired behind the curtain, with her hands clenching its hems, and, according to
Schrenck Notzing, the veil then promptly vanished “in the darkness of the cabinet, as if
dissolving into vapour.”⁵⁰

This fleetingness proved a near insurmountable dilemma for the observing
scientist. On occasion, the ectoplasmic phenomena lasted only for a second, according to
the observing doctor. At a sitting held on November 3, 1920, for instance, Schrenck
Notzing recorded having witnessed a “young and fully developed female swathed in grey
veils down to the waist,” as Eva suddenly opened the cabinet curtains “for about a
second.”⁵¹ In such a brief interval of time and within the darkened conditions of the
séance, all the scientist could have accurately perceived was a flickering impression of
the female apparition behind the curtain. And, as Schrenck Notzing admits, “the time of
observation was too short to tell whether the face under the veil resembled Eva or not.”⁵²

Visual surveillance was, according to the scientist, integral to the process of observing
and capturing the fleeting phenomena of the séance, yet his methods were often
ineffective.

During his experiments in 1909 and 1910, Schrenck Notzing primarily relied
upon stereoscopic cameras situated outside the medium’s cabinet to record observed

---

⁴⁹ Ibid., 53.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 53-54.
⁵¹ Ibid., 71.
⁵² Ibid. It would seem highly possible that the apparition was, indeed, Eva herself dressed in veils.
Schrenck Notzing, however, concluded that Eva had not had sufficient time to clothe herself in veils and
rise up from her chair.
phenomena. This endeavor repeatedly proved difficult because of the brief time frame in which he could light a magnesium flash and take a photograph, as Eva quickly opened and closed the curtains. Frustrated by this arrangement, Schrenck Notzing even took to leaping inside the cabinet occasionally in order to surprise the medium unawares.53 Both eye and camera thus struggled to see clearly within the séance, as Eva evaded observation behind the curtains and ectoplasm vanished time and again before it could be properly seen and recorded. In this sense, Eva’s actions highlighted the farthest boundaries of both human eyesight and visual technologies, as well as the impossibility of truly objective documentation, as her performances were located precisely at the liminal point where visibility dissolved into invisibility.

Schrenck Notzing was, however, successful in securing an image of Eva mid-séance during one of the instances where she briefly drew aside the curtains, although the resulting image lacked the effect he had hoped for. His photograph from October 25, 1910 (fig. 35) revealed the medium’s body positioned behind dark curtains, with lowered gaze. A small pile of white ectoplasm is visible on her lap, resembling a crumpled bit of cloth. By Schrenck Notzing’s account, there had been, only moments earlier, a more impressive materialization within the cabinet, which had dissolved into nothingness by the time he was able to take the photograph.54 It would seem that Schrenck Notzing’s camera was thwarted by the conditions of the séance. While the scientist’s photographic methods initially operated in this manner (with his camera situated outside the cabinet), by 1911 he had arranged for a camera to be installed inside the cabinet, thus improving

53 Schrenck Notzing records such attempts throughout his 1910 experiments (see, for instance, his records from October and November of that year in Phenomena, 65-66).
54 Ibid., 66.
the quality and range of photographic images resulting from the séances.\textsuperscript{55} Naturally the circumstances surrounding these images also suggested rather strongly the possibility of fraud.

A great deal of unease thus existed within séances surrounding the issue of visibility, as medium and scientist were engaged in a complex dance, taking place on either side of the cabinet curtain. The medium maintained that conditions of darkness and concealment were crucial to the séance process, and the scientist, for his part, employed various tactics to shed light on the séance and overcome its sensory limitations. At times this tension was also apparent in the attempts made by Schrenck Notzing to not only witness and document, but to \textit{touch} the issuing ectoplasm. In the aforementioned sitting that of March 25, 1920, for instance, Schrenck Notzing had found his request to touch the materializing ectoplasm swiftly denied. In a few rare instances, however, Schrenck Notzing was successful in grabbing hold of a sample of ectoplasm before it disappeared (fig. 36). These moments of physical contact are described as ones of excruciating pain for Eva, as if the seizure of ectoplasm was a violation of her body.

In 1910 Schrenck Notzing described several such occasions (two involving sittings from June 1 and September 2, respectively, which I note here) where he was permitted to briefly touch a sample of ectoplasm, seemingly with Eva’s permission. In the first instance, Schrenck Notzing observed ectoplasm issuing from Eva’s mouth. The medium then guided the hand of the scientist toward the material. Schrenck Notzing described his sensations as follows:

\begin{quote}
My finger touched a solid substance of dark or nearly black colour. The sensation of touch may be compared with the impression obtained by touching the dark skin of a mushroom. During the touch which (Eva) herself made with my finger, she gave a strong
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 81.
and painful shudder and trembled violently, and it seemed as if she made every effort to overcome her physical aversion to this touch. The mass then disappeared. 

Schrenck Notzing’s touch, in this case, seems again to do little more than affirm the ineffable and elusive qualities of the ectoplasm. And the moment of contact between human skin and spirit matter is marked by Eva’s dramatic physical reaction. At one of his next opportunities to touch ectoplasmic matter, Schrenck Notzing describes a similar behaviour on behalf of the medium. On this occasion, Eva had produced an ectoplasmic veil, which was draped over her body. Again, Schrenck Notzing’s hands were guided to touch the material. As he grasped hold of it, however, Eva reacted dramatically and, according to him, cried out, “That hurts me, but I wish it all the same” – an exclamation that seemed rife with sexual current or sadomasochistic performance. Schrenck Notzing complied, describing the ectoplasmic veil under his touch as a “cool, moist, living thread.” He observed, once again, that “Eva suffered severely” throughout this examination.

During a sitting recorded on November 15, 1910, with both Dr. Schrenck Notzing and Dr. Richet in attendance, the physical dimensions of the séance became especially volatile. In a sequence of events that closely mirrored the spirit attacks suffered by Drs. Flammarion and Richet, Eva produced ectoplasmic materials that lashed out from behind the curtain at the gathered audience. Schrenck Notzing describes being struck by something thin, moist, and leathery, and the doctors in attendance repeatedly tried to grab hold of the ectoplasm. The camera was able to capture an image from this particular sitting (fig. 37), showing Eva behind the curtains, with a rope-like strand of ectoplasm

---

56 Ibid., 55.
57 Ibid., 58.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
hanging before her face. Schrenck Notzing stated that during this episode he repeatedly
“felt light blows on the palm of my hand, as if with whipcord, and I saw something
resembling a ribbon crossing my hand.”\textsuperscript{60} The scientist attempted to resist this attack by
quickly seizing hold of the ectoplasm, which felt to him like “a fine rubber cord, which,
however, felt moist, and escaped from my fingers with a strong jerk and a serpentine
motion, while the frightened medium gave a cry of pain.”\textsuperscript{61} This was not the only
occasion where the spiritual/psychical materials conjured by Eva became violent.
Schrenck Notzing’s accounts mention several other sittings in which he received blows to
the face and body, which appeared to be administered by supernatural forces.\textsuperscript{62}

The séance reverberated with screams of pain from both sides of the curtain, as
the cries of the medium echoed those of the attacked audience. These audible emissions
were an important component in any manifestation of the supernatural. With the
limitations on visibility that were in place, touch and sound were all the more integral to
the séance experience.\textsuperscript{63} The following example was provided by the spiritualist
researcher E. J. Dingwall, who had attended a séance experiment in Munich headed by
Dr. Schrenck Notzing. The young male medium Willy Schneider was under observation.
Dingwall described the events that ensued with particular attention to the audible
phenomena. Before the séance took place a table had been placed within a gauze
enclosure. As the séance progressed, “a rustling was heard near the table,” as Dingwall
put it, “as if the gauze walls were being brushed over with a feather duster.” He

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 77.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 77-78. The scientists became rather suspicious of the medium during this particular sitting, and
Schrenck Notzing describes watching her as closely as possible throughout these events. Within the
darkness, his observations were uncertain, but he suggests in his records that Eva may have risen from her
chair at one point, and that the ectoplasm appeared to attach to her head in some way. However, the
scientist’s examinations of Eva’s body following the séance as usual produced no result.
\textsuperscript{62} See Phenomena, 62.
\textsuperscript{63} My third chapter delves more deeply into the subject of séance materiality.
continued, “Then some raps were heard on the table and it began to creak and move slightly, finally rising once or twice on what were presumably the two back legs, and then coming down with a loud thud on the carpet.”\(^{64}\) Finally, Schrenck Notzing placed in sequence a clockwork musical box and a bell on the table, which proceeded to intermittently play music and ring seemingly of their own accords.\(^{65}\)

Similar sequences of events were described by many séance attendees – I have already noted analogous cases involving music boxes that were described, for instance, by Richet and Flammarion. In Richet’s review of other cases of mediumship, he also noted a number of corporeal spirits, such as the narrated account of Dr. Feijao who had witnessed the mediumistic abilities of the Countess Castlevitch on January 10, 1913.\(^{66}\)

According to Richet’s narrator, Mme. Lacombe, the séance with the countess was highly physical in nature; “sitters felt hands touching them,” as tables and chairs levitated.\(^{67}\)

According to Dr. Feijao’s written report,

Blows were struck, the loudest being on the glass of the bookcase. Articles of furniture sometimes moved. Heavy chairs moved about the room; efforts were made on the locked doors of the bookcase, which were opened; large and heavy books were flung on the floor…an office-bell and a handbell, the half-open piano, and a guitar in its case all sounded loudly…the table rose.\(^{68}\)

Unseen spirits touched, pinched, and hit the participants, alongside a cacophony of screams, rustling curtains, banging tables and chairs, ringing of bells, objects falling to the floor, and intermittent music drifting from unmanned instruments and music boxes.

---

\(^{64}\) E. J. Dingwall, “Physical Phenomena Recently Observed with the Medium Willy Sch. at Munich,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* XVI (November 1922): 691-92.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.

\(^{66}\) This particular episode was partially related to Richet by Mme. Lacombe, who knew Dr. Feijao, although Richet also confirmed the details with the doctor himself.

\(^{67}\) Richet, *Thirty Years*, 531.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
In this way, the audible backdrop of the séance loudly bolstered a sense of the spirit’s immediate presence.

The medium’s cries also underscored the adverse relationship between examining doctor and examined medium, as well as the physical connection between medium and ectoplasm. Ectoplasm seemed to react defensively, alongside the medium, toward intrusive touching within the séance. Mediumistic suffering suggested, then, a possible tactic to curtail the probing examinations of the scientist, while still permitting a degree of limited contact with the ectoplasm. The medium’s agony (or at least its simulation) also revealed ectoplasm to be a corporeal fluid, along the lines of mucous, and an intrinsic part of her body. It was not only Eva who performed in this manner. Numerous mediums of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resisted scientific touch through physical displays of pain, which accompanied the conjuring process.

What is to be made, then, of these performative elements within the séance, as well as the images that survive from the scientific attempts at documentation? How might the visual dimensions of these séance performances be interpreted? On a fundamental level, such scenes – and particularly those wherein the medium enacted signs of physical trauma and pain – have elicited comparisons between the female medium and the nineteenth-century medical phenomenon of hysteria.⁶⁹ The ensuing discussion examines this dynamic, and considers the broader implications of the séance performances that have been examined thus far.

⁶⁹ These comparisons were made during the spiritualist heyday, often by doctors who sought to identify the underlying causes of mediumship, as well as by modern scholars of cultural history, who have observed a similar physical framework at play in hysterical patients and mediums. See, for example, Owen, The Darkened Room, 18-40; and Braude, Radical Spirits, 157-160.
Hysteria was a feminine condition, more or less confined to the nineteenth century, which was characterized by a wide range of complex nervous behaviours. The condition was generally attributed to a disorderly female sexuality, and as such, the diagnosis often carried with it implicit moral undercurrents. Cases of hysteria were widely studied and documented during the nineteenth century by physicians such as Sigmund Freud and Jean-Martin Charcot, as part of the positivist initiatives to investigate and observe a variety of human conditions – and especially those conditions associated with forms of abnormality and otherness. The concurrent scientific interest in photographing the medium existed, in this sense, as part of a wider trajectory of empirical documentation, responsible for attempts to classify various groups of social others with the camera, including racial specimens, the mentally ill, criminals, and so-called sexual degenerates.

The most notable criticism of the empirical positivist system was put forth in the 1960s by the French theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault, who offered a compelling analysis of the genesis of power and the shaping of otherness through social structures and their collective gazes. Throughout his analyses of various establishments of the Enlightenment, such as the medical clinic and the prison, Foucault argued that positions

---

70 The medical perception of hysteria during the nineteenth century drew, to some extent, from the ancient concept of the “wandering womb” that appears in the classical writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Hippocrates. Hippocrates’ ancient medical writings on the ailments of women had first introduced the notion of the “wandering” movements of the displaced womb, while Plato, in turn, had suggested in the Timaeus that the womb was a “living entity,” possessing its own voracious desires and impulses. Similarly, in Aristotle’s History of Animals, he speculated that the distempers of the womb were due to its capricious fluctuations. During the nineteenth century, hysteria became somewhat of a “catch all” term to describe a wide range of nervous afflictions and disorders of the female psyche. There have been many contemporary studies devoted to the fascinating history that surrounded the Victorian treatment of hysteria and the gendered implications of the condition. See, for example, Juliet Mitchell. Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and Rachel P. Maines, The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria,” the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

of social and political power were formed in relation to an objectified, pathologized, and ultimately controlled subject.\textsuperscript{72} The female body was, perhaps not surprisingly, a site of particularly relentless surveillance and scrutiny, and the camera’s lens significantly expanded the reaches of the clinical gaze.

The respective classification projects of Drs. Charcot and Diamond during the late nineteenth century became well known for their prolific photographic studies of female patients at the Salpêtrière Hospital (see fig. 38), which aimed to catalogue the so-called hysterical type and document the typology of female mania.\textsuperscript{73} Under the auspices of science and empiricism, photography was thus used to map a visual picture of mental illness, expressed through an iconography of the body. Following his time at the Salpêtrière, Charcot even promoted his work as a new form of image-centred psychology with his publication of the \textit{New Iconography of the Salpêtrière}.\textsuperscript{74} The photographs depicting women in the throes of hysterical fits and convulsions would find a parallel in many of the later photographs of young women suspended before the camera’s lens in moments of mediumistic paroxysm. A 1918 photograph of Eva, taken by Geley, for instance, reveals a hunched and rigid medium, with disheveled hair and a furtive glance (fig. 39). This sort of “madwoman” facade was a reoccurring theme within the séance.


\textsuperscript{74} Jean Martin Charcot, \textit{Nouvelle iconographie de la Salpêtrière} vol. I (Paris: Lecrosnier & Babé, 1888); see also Kemp, “A Perfect and Faithful Record,” 139.
The documentation of mediums was thus framed by scientific ventures of positivist photography and their associated iconography of madness.

Within the field of medicine, doctors had even ventured to diagnose the modern medium through an analysis of her pathological symptoms (leading to diagnoses such as hysteria and other forms of nervous manias, including the aptly named mediomania.\textsuperscript{75} It was Dr. R. Frederic Marvin, a professor of medicine in New York, who had first levied this particular diagnosis, claiming that the condition was the result of improperly aligned female sexual organs. Marvin even went so far as to attribute a broad spectrum of female rebelliousness (including the embrace of spiritualism) to the condition. According to the doctor,

\begin{quote}
The angle at which the womb is suspended in the pelvis frequently settles the whole question of sanity or insanity. Tilt the organ a little forward – introvert it, and immediately the patient forsakes her home, embraces some strong ultraism – Mormonism, Mesmerism, Fourierism, Socialism, oftener Spiritualism. She becomes possessed by the idea that she has some startling mission in the world. She forsakes her home, her children, her duty, to mount the rostrum and proclaim the peculiar virtues of free-love, elective affinity, or the reincarnation of souls.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Marvin therefore saw spiritualism and its accompanying non-upright female behaviours as a side-effect of female madness. Another interesting example of the pathological take on mediumship is provided by Dr. Hammond, who addressed the subject in \textit{The Physics and Physiology of Spiritualism} of 1871. Here he similarly attributed the behaviour of medium to symptoms of “hysteria, catalepsy and ecstasy.”\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{75} Owen, \textit{The Darkened Room}, 148-150; and Braude, \textit{Radical Spirits}, 157-158.
\textsuperscript{76} Dr. R. Frederic Marvin, \textit{The Philosophy of Spiritualism and the Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania} (New York: Asa K. Butts & Co., 1874), 7; see also Braude, \textit{Radical Spirits}, 160.
\textsuperscript{77} Dr. William Alexander Hammond, \textit{The Physics and Physiology of Spiritualism} (New York: Appleton & Co., 1871), 34. As Hammond notes, many of his theories regarding the pathology of mediums had been previously published in an article for the \textit{North American Review} of 1870. See also Owen, \textit{The Darkened Room}, 146; and Braude, \textit{Radical Spirits}, 158.
Dr. Flammarion, a professed believer in the authenticity of mediumship and psychical powers, also drew a parallel between the medium and the hysteric. He, like many paranormal scientific researchers, believed that while some cases of mediumship—namely those that had undergone thorough scientific scrutiny—were legitimate, others were cases of female pathology or trickery. As he saw it, the case of mediums,

Is nearly that of the hysterical folk under observation at the Salpêtrière or elsewhere. I have seen some of them outwit with their profound craft not only Dr. Charcot, but especially Dr. Luys, and all the physicians who were making a study of their case. But simply because hysterics deceive and simulate, it would be a gross error to conclude that hysteria does not exist. Because mediums frequently descend to the most brazen-faced imposture, it would not be less absurd to conclude that mediumship has no existence.\(^\text{78}\)

Flammarion thus connects hysteria and mediumship through their shared propensity for female deceit, but he asserts the need to nonetheless acknowledge the legitimate existence of both conditions. The intersection of hysteria and mediumship was also taken up on occasion by the researchers of the Society for Psychical Research.\(^\text{79}\)

As noted elsewhere, the scientific photographs that were taken of mediums by scientists such as Drs. Schrenck Notzing and Flammarion pointed to the underlying friction that existed between women of spiritualism and men of science. At first glance, then, the female medium existed within an identical paradigm of surveillance and subjugation. And yet, the photographed body of the medium differed from those of other documented medical specimens by possessing a greater degree of agency.\(^\text{80}\) Eva, like many other mediums of the period, actively engaged with the viewer and the scientific


\(^{79}\) The SPR documented many cases of so-called hysterical mediumship in 1900—see “Automatic Phenomena in a Case of Hystera,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* IX (December 1900): 333-339. Much of the SPR’s report, on this occasion, centred on the findings of Dr. Cervello, who had examined cases of hysterical patients claiming spiritualist powers.

\(^{80}\) Mediums were not incarcerated so although their performances were subject to some scientific parameters when observed, they had more freedom. And while hysterics displayed “artistry” of a sort, my dissertation ultimately positions the medium as a cutting-edge performance artist of the day.
lens through her theatrical antics and spectacular ectoplasm-spewing shows, which in the end concealed secrets and evaded comprehension.

The parallels between mediumship and hysteria are both complicated and compelling, and the case of Eva represents a particularly fitting point of comparison. Eva’s séances were marked by displays of decidedly unruly and provocative behaviour, akin to fits of hysteria, which were oftentimes implicitly erotic. Although at times professing a sense of modesty (particularly on occasions when under close scrutiny), Eva also exhibited a range of more transgressive behaviours, including screaming, moaning, writhing, and appearing to ultimately labour and deliver forth ectoplasmic substances before the gathered onlookers – often while in varying degrees of undress. Schrenck Notzing duly recorded these groaning and gasping contortions, as did his colleagues.\(^{81}\)

The scenes in which female mediums were forced to undress (often before male onlookers) are particularly disquieting and present a very real challenge to a feminist reading of mediumship. Albeit with their permission, mediums were strip-searched and probed, degraded, touched, bound, gagged, exposed, and photographed. They often expressed severe anxiety over these conditions. As Schrenck Notzing acknowledged, “fear and modesty may control young female mediums to such an extent that they resist investigation of the bare body, and indeed will refuse any experiment rather than allow such misinterpreted interference with their feminine feelings.”\(^{82}\)

\(^{81}\) The provocative elements of mediumship were, as far as I have been able to tell, exhibited for both scientific and ordinary audiences. Mediums such as Florence Cook and Eva C., for example, were widely known for their enticing or titillating performances. This was likely part of their broad appeal.

\(^{82}\) Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 24. Schrenck Notzing notes that Linda Gazzera was one of the mediums who was most adamant in her refusal to submit to bodily searches. Refusal to submit was, in many ways, tantamount to an admission of trickery, so mediums were under intense pressure to comply. Gazzera’s case was also discussed in detail by Schrenck Notzing in “Die Phänomene des Mediums Linda Gazerra,” *Psychische Studien*, 39 (1912): 133–73.
the séance. In many respects, materialization phenomena contained both realities. Expressions of female sexuality have historically struggled with negotiating the hot male gaze, and the medium’s nudity undoubtedly elicits this old dichotomy, pitting a woman’s sexual empowerment against her objectification before the male onlooker. The medium was in many respects a personification of Manet’s confrontational nude, who stared back at her audience, returning the male gaze. The medium, similarly, challenged the male scientific witness to face the tenuous nature of observation and the utter impossibility of detached observation.

In her examination of the medical climate of the nineteenth century and its largely hostile reaction to spiritualism, Owen has suggested that at a time when doctors were increasingly gaining the power to incarcerate the insane, many physicians and medical journals put forth claims that spiritualism was in fact a contributing factor to and cause of insanity. The trance-state of the medium within the séance was widely perceived as evidence of her hysteria, and as Owen writes,

Physicians drew the worst conclusions from the fact that mediums sometimes exhibited violent, uncoordinated body movements and were not slow to point out that many ‘spirits’ delighted in the swaggering talk and profanities associated with

---

83 The matter of the medium’s agency in the séance has been widely discussed within the literature of spiritualist studies and the subject continues to invite discourse. For a useful survey of this debate see Ehler Voss, “A Sprout of Doubt: The Debate on the Medium’s Agency in Mediumism, Media Studies, and Anthropology,” in Religion, Tradition and the Popular in Asia and Europe, Judith Schlehe and Evamaria Müller, eds. (Freiburg: Transcript-Verlag, 2014), 205-224. Voss has also recently published on the experiments of Schrenck Notzing with Eva C. in “Die Erziehung der Medien. Reinigungsarbeiten am Spiritismus bei Albert von Schrenck-Notzing,” Reinigungsarbeit. Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaft I, ed. Nacim Ghanbari and Marcus Hahn (2013): 81-94.

84 I thank Alison Syme for suggesting this comparison with Manet.

85 See, for instance, Dr. Lyttleton Stuart Forbes Winslow, Spiritualistic Madness (London: Baillière, Tindall & Co., 1877); cf. Owen, The Darkened Room, 140-141; Barbara Wolf-Braun, “The Higher Order of the Natural Laws and the Wrong World of Hysterical Mediums,” in Historical Aspects of Unconventional Medicine: Approaches, Concepts, Case Studies, ed. R. Jutte et al. (Sheffield: European Association for the History of Medicine and Health Publications, 2001), 227-245. Among the journals to identify spiritualism and mediumship as “symptoms” of madness during the late nineteenth century were the Medical Critic and Psychological Journal and the British Medical Journal.
hysterical outbursts. They also considered that hysterical personalities were perfectly capable of conjuring up visions of spirits at will.\(^{86}\)

The medical association between the medium and the hysterical woman, in many cases, explicitly linked the medium with depraved behaviour. The following excerpt from Dr. Henry Maudsley’s *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1868) clearly illustrates a general conflation of hysteria, mediumship, and sexual depravity:

> A single lady, aet. 38, fancied herself under mesmeric influence, in a state of clairvoyance, and had a variety of anomalous sensations. Rubbed her skin till it was sore in places, bit her nails to the quick, scratched her face, etc. Quasi-hysterical maniacal exacerbations. Irregularity of menstruations, and suspected self-abuse.\(^{87}\)

Dr. Maudsley was one of many nineteenth-century doctors who viewed the medium in clinical terms. He, like many other physicians of the period, put forward medical diagnoses of mediums that were tinged with moral judgment and suspicions of sexual depravity. Similar diagnoses were, not surprisingly, also attributed to female mystics and religious ecstasies, whose physical “symptoms” similarly pointed to madness.\(^{88}\) Female mediums, in this sense, existed within a broader trajectory of entranced women.

Schrenck Notzing’s accounts frequently suggested a conflation of hysteria and mediumship, with detailed observations that evoked contemporaneous medical discussions of female illness. He frequently noted, for instance, intimate physiological details regarding Eva’s “internal condition” (so to speak), which emphasized a connection between her spiritual emissions and her physical/psychological state. He

---

\(^{86}\) Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 143.


\(^{88}\) These sorts of diagnoses are discussed at greater length in Maudsley’s *The Pathology of Mind: A Study of its Distempers, Deformities and Disorders*, (1895) (London: John Friedman, 1979). Sigmund Freud had also theorized that there was a link between excessive religious behaviours and forms of sexual dysfunction. See Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905), *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 7 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981). I return to the subject of ecstatic states and mediumship in chapter four.
commented at numerous points on irregularities in her menstrual cycle, as well as headaches, bladder troubles, and shifts in temperament. Both he and Mme. Bisson seemed in agreement that such factors had a direct bearing on the materializations of the séance. Mme. Bisson commented in a letter from December 11, 1911 that Eva seemed restless, “every day she tells me that she is bored, and wants to marry.” Eva thus possessed many of the classical symptoms of nervous disorders such as hysteria.

The language used by Schrenck Notzing in describing his observations of Eva also pointed explicitly to the hysterical symptoms of mediumship. In a 1911 sitting, for example, the scientist recounts the following sequence of events:

On the 5th of August Eva was out of sorts before the sitting, and strongly resisted all attempts to awaken her from the somnambulic state. In order to produce a slight shock in her nervous system, the author took a needle and made a prick in her neck. The medium reacted to this harmless intervention with a violent fit of rage, followed by an hysterical crisis, with nausea and convulsive weeping.

Eva’s actions were thus decidedly hysterical on occasion, by early twentieth-century standards. And, as already noted, her outbursts served the additional purpose of deterring scientific probing and close scrutiny. Schrenck Notzing did not, however, seem to draw the same skeptical conclusions as other doctors (such as Dr. Maudsley, who presumed that his patient’s claims of mesmeric and clairvoyant powers were symptomatic of an hysterical mind). Schrenck Notzing instead took the more credulous position that Eva’s hysterical symptoms may have augmented her psychic and mediumistic abilities.

This point of view was, in fact, more in keeping with prevalent cultural conceptions of passive, sickly, and sensitive femininity in the mid nineteenth and early

90 Ibid., 136.
91 Ibid., 105 (my emphasis).
twentieth centuries. Within spiritualism it was precisely these qualities – which were typically aligned with an inclination towards hysteria – that gave strength to the medium. Mediums were viewed as being especially sensitive and nervous (as infirmity often paved the way for an ability to receive spirits – a premise that was reflected in Schrenck Notzing’s observations of Eva). The quality of passivity, which defined the very condition of womankind in so many ways, was viewed as an empowering characteristic of mediumship, as a passive nature made the medium more porous and, hence, susceptible to entrancement and the flow of spirits through her body.\(^{92}\) Gendered divisions, reflecting the medical dialogue surrounding hysteria, were categorically at play within séances, and perhaps even more pointedly so in cases involving scientific study. The physical divisions of space, for instance, between the concealed female medium within the screened cabinet and the observing male scientist without, consistently underscored these boundaries.

The medium’s performances within the séance, although indecent according to most norms, were not strictly unfeminine. They instead emerged out of existing traditions and familiar feminine roles. This was arguably most evident in cases where mediums appeared to labour and give birth – a decidedly feminine occupation – to ectoplasm. Throughout spiritualist investigations there was a persistent, albeit often implicit, association between female fertility and mediumship, as if the medium’s (re)generative powers and spiritual fertility were a necessary component in the production of ghosts.\(^{93}\) Schrenck Notzing’s detailed cataloguing of Eva’s menstrual

\(^{92}\) See Owen, *The Darkened Room*, and Braude, *Radical Spirits* for more on the medium’s passivity.

\(^{93}\) The association between mediumship/spirit photography and childbirth is noted by Schoonover, “Ectoplasms,” and Gunning, “Phantom Images.” Krauss also describes Eva’s bellowing as “mediumistic labor pains,” in *Beyond Light and Shadow*, 164.
cycles is a testament to this. Moreover, many of the researchers stressed a parallel between mediums’ exertions and childbirth – a point that supported the physically interwoven nature of ectoplasm and medium. As Geley wrote after witnessing one such performance with Eva, “She sighs, groans intermittently, like a woman in travail.”94 What was ultimately “delivered” as a result of their labouring fits within the darkened space of the séance, however, was not a living infant, but the grotesque and fleeting material traces of the dead. In this sense, the medium’s unruly actions behind the curtains represented a point of distinct symbolic importance within the context of spiritualism and its project of generating ghosts and materialization-phenomena.

At a photograph taken at a sitting with Eva on June 7, 1911 (fig. 40), the medium was captured in the midst of delivering ectoplasm while in a conventional childbirth position, with her hands and feet in the grips of the male observers (namely Dr. Schrenck Notzing and M. Fontenay) who for all intents and purposes occupied the position of medical attendants during a birthing scene.95 At times the medium’s labour produced a fleeting, amorphous substance, and at others it produced more substantial forms. During an earlier sitting on November 3, 1910 Schrenck Notzing recorded the materialization of a small forearm “about the size of a child’s arm,” glimpsed for approximately thirty seconds before it dissolved “into an amorphous mass of indefinite appearance.”96 Immediately thereafter the scientist recorded the following:

In the course of the sitting I suddenly saw something resembling a bunched-up grey veil fall from her right shoulder into her lap. My wish to take this ball into my hands was not acceded to by the lady of the house. Mme. Bisson thought that any sudden intervention taking the medium by surprise would injure her health…The material lying in her lap

94 Geley, Clairvoyance and Materialisation, 184.
95 Schrenck Notzing, Phenomena, 96-98.
96 Ibid., 69-70.
resembled a grey placenta-like pap, traversed by fairly thick round strips and cords. It was fairly immobile and remained visible at least two minutes.\textsuperscript{97}

The appearance of an indefinite, amorphous, “placenta-like” materialization, alongside the conjured child’s arm moments earlier, clearly evoked, for the scientist, a scene of childbirth, as Eva performed a spectacle of labour, groaning and clutching the curtains. Many of these examples oscillated between suggestions of painful childbirth and sexual ecstasy; screams of pain might just as easily evoke screams of pleasure.

The mediumistic childbirth scene, however, was fundamentally different than a traditional moment of birth, as the delivered body appeared in broken and fleeting fragments that swiftly dematerialized. This suggested, at least symbolically, a reversal of the traditional moment of new life. Or perhaps more accurately, placental ectoplasms were evocative of indeterminate life and nebulous animation. A photograph of Eva from April 8, 1912 (fig. 41) exemplifies precisely this point. In the image, Eva appears with a globule upon her head (resembling an amoeba or jellyfish creature) and tendrils of stringy matter cascading down her face. An indistinct spectral face appears in the globule as well, as if transfixed in a moment of incomplete creation. Such “birth matter” was ultimately suggestive of the originating forms of nature (and spirit) – and yet the birth scenes of the séance were always incomplete and lacking.

The photographs of mediums giving birth within the séance may have also reflected the increasingly voyeuristic and spectacular nature of childbirth itself within the nineteenth century. Once an event historically relegated to the curtained-off realm of

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 70-71. It is also worth noting that in many instances, such as this one, Mme. Bisson played a unique role within the séance in lending her support and protection to the young medium. Here, she opposes the scientist’s desire to seize the conjured ectoplasm. Elsewhere, it is she who is granted sole entrance to the cabinet to assist the medium or check on her wellbeing, while the male scientists are typically excluded. It is certainly possible that this informal role of “medium’s assistant” may have entailed more than the typical responsibilities of a guardian, although it is impossible to say exactly what went on behind the curtains.
midwives and female attendants, the event of childbirth had, by the nineteenth century, become increasingly positioned within the male realm of physicians, examining tables, invasive medical tools, and technologies such as photography. As such, the once private and secretive nature of the female body shifted, amid advances in medical science and technological advances, to become a site of public viewing and scientific surveillance. In this sense, the medium within her curtained-off cabinet had symbolically reclaimed the concealed and confined space of childbirth, to which men were traditionally denied entry.  

Eva staged a number of such séances during which small bodily fragments materialized, which were highly suggestive of infants or children. Curtains opened briefly, and the gathered audience glimpsed materialized arms and hands. Several of these instances were subsequently rendered in drawings because of the scientist’s inability to successfully photograph them. These fleeting forms at times resembled fluid or insubstantial substances and other times appeared almost skeletal in composition. At a sitting on November 18, 1910 Schrenck Notzing (once again unable to capture the phenomenon on film) was touched by one of these spectral child-hands (fig. 42). The materialization in question was likened to an amputated limb that “resembled a child’s arm ending in a stump.” Its fingers touched Schrenck Notzing’s own hand, leaving the trace of nail indentations upon his skin. As the scientist notes, “this performance was

---


99 This occurred during a number of Eva’s sittings with Schrenck Notzing. For instance, the scientist recorded several sightings of ectoplasmic body fragments throughout November, 1910.

100 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 79.
always accompanied by the groaning of the medium.”\textsuperscript{101} These scenes were emphatically theatrical in nature, as Eva typically opened and closed the curtains rapidly while delivering the ectoplasm, at once concealing and revealing the materialized fragments before a captivated audience.\textsuperscript{102}

Interestingly, in a later case from the 1920s, a medium named Mina Crandon (known as “Margery”) was similarly photographed giving birth to an “ectoplasmic hand” (fig. 43), recalling Eva’s materializations. A photograph of Margery revealed her exposed, delivering body, surrounded by an audience as she too laboured to give birth to an uncanny bodily fragment. The ghostly hand produced by Margery could apparently be “touched and examined: it was said to feel like skin, it contained bones, its temperature was around forty degrees, and its weight was estimated at around three ounces.”\textsuperscript{103} This ghostly hand, like those produced by Eva, was in many ways suggestive of an infant’s hand clinging to the body of the mother. The bodily fragments in these cases, however, were appropriately akin to the severed hands of dead children.\textsuperscript{104}

At times, the ectoplasmic secretions of mediums additionally mirrored maternal fluids. In a number of photographs of Eva from 1913 (fig. 44), for example, she appears as a maternal lactating body, emitting a stringy, cobwebby ectoplasm from her breast.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} This occurred, for example, during a sitting which took place on March 13, 1911 (Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 87).
\textsuperscript{103} Pierre Apraxine, “The ‘Margery’ Case,” in \textit{The Perfect Medium}, 217; and Delgado, “Bawdy Technologies and the Birth of Ectoplasm.” Margery’s case remained largely unexplained for years, although it was eventually found that the supposed ‘infant hand’ was formed from the liver of an animal. Margery’s case was widely discussed within scientific and spiritualist circles and even Houdini weighed in on the matter of Margery’s mediumship (see Houdini, \textit{Houdini Exposes}). For a summation of the SPR investigations into Margery’s case, see James Malcolm Bird, \textit{“Margery” the Medium} (Boston: Maynard & Co., 1925); and “The Margery Mediumship,” in \textit{Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research} XX-XXII (1926-1933). Margery’s case was reviewed at length in the journal of the ASPR over the course of several years.
\textsuperscript{104} Interestingly the phenomena of “ghostly hands” in the séance was sometimes invoked within religious discussion of reincarnation. See, for example, Dr. J. Clericus, “Zum Phänomene der eingebrannten Hand,” \textit{Psychische Studien} XLI (1914): 138-142.
The substances emerged from her body, only to be reabsorbed moments later.105 The medium’s milk in this case, however, pointed to an inversion of the life-sustaining nourishment that good mothers would provide for their babies, as the ghostly plasma was here linked instead with death and absence. The fragmented and fleeting characteristics of ectoplasm, in this sense, presented a counterpart to the ideal model of the mother.

By 1911 Eva had begun to perform in a state of full nudity before her small audience; initially this was done only in the presence of Mme. Bisson and subsequently in the presence of Schrenck Notzing (and his camera). Her nude and nearly pornographic photographs were largely responsible for the tremendous scandal that followed in the wake of Schrenck Notzing’s publication of his text.106 Bisson’s private séances with Eva reportedly yielded impressive ectoplasmic phenomena (including some materials that Bisson touched), as the medium was less inhibited.107 In a letter to Schrenck Notzing from September 11, 1911, Bisson described a remarkable (and possibly dubious) account of one such sitting, wherein she was the only witness. Here, according to Bisson, the medium produced ectoplasm in a manner unquestionably resembling conventional childbirth. She wrote that “a large spherical mass, about 8 inches in diameter, emerged from the vagina… I distinctly recognized in the mass a still unfinished face, whose eyes looked at me. As I bent forward in order to see better, this head-like structure rose before

---

106 Pornographic photography emerged shortly after the invention of the camera. For more on early pornographic imagery, see Linda Williams, “Corporealized Observers: Visual Pornographies and the ‘Carnal Density of Vision’,” in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3-41. See also Tromp, *Altered States*, 75-96 for a thoughtful discussion of the erotic dimensions of mediumship; and Kuff, *Okkulte Ästhetik*, 353-381, wherein the author also addresses the sexual undercurrents of the séance and aligns the medium’s nude photographs with examples of nude pornography.
107 Private sittings between Mme. Bisson and Eva took place numerous times and are described in her *Phénomènes dits de Matérialisation*, as well as her letters to Schrenck Notzing, which are reproduced in *Phenomena*. Bisson’s private séances relied less on the camera as witness.
my eyes, and suddenly vanished into the dark of the cabinet away from the medium, disappearing from my view.”

Similar events were described in a series of letters written by Bisson several months later. The first of these, a letter dated December 9, 1911, recounts another ectoplasmic birth during a private sitting with Eva. On this occasion Bisson reported witnessing a long, winding thread of ectoplasm (not unlike an umbilical cord) that appeared to emerge from the medium’s genitalia, and according to Bisson, “with a sinuous serpentine motion of its own it crept up the girl’s body.” The snaky ectoplasm then slithered into her mouth and disappeared. This narrative possesses clear similarities with the later case of Margery, where the ectoplasmic parts were birthed and then crawled along the medium’s body, ultimately returning to their maternal origin.

In a subsequent letter from December 11, 1911, Bisson recounted the events from yet another private séance. Once again the insinuation of labour and childbirth was unambiguous. As the sitting began, according to Bisson, the medium endured a physically wrenching fit. Bisson continued,

Thereupon the phenomena commenced again in the bed, the material again emerging from the vagina, as some days before. Eva lay stretched on her back, and I knelt in front of the bed. The mass emerging from the genitals had the shape of a thick and solid strip, passing along the thigh, and appearing to recede into her body. Suddenly she exclaimed, ‘Look, look, it comes again; I feel a head.’ Then a round and fairly solid sphere, of the shape and size of a billiard ball, fell into my hand...The sphere was attached to her body by a ribbon. I thus held in my hand this mysterious living mass, which moved on the palm of my hand.

---

109 Ibid., 134.
110 Ibid., 136.
According to Bisson, as she attempted to enclose her hand around the spectral mass, “the whole thing disappeared…as if it had been vaporized.” The spectral head, described by Bisson, was again connected to an umbilical ribbon, linking it with the medium’s body (and womb). Regardless of the strict veracity of these accounts, it is clear that the images and rituals of labour and childbirth shaped the séance.

The spectral birth scene outlined here might also be usefully compared with Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject – a concept that Kristeva developed to describe the destabilizing outermost boundaries of the self. Much of what Kristeva articulates in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) concerns the impulse to separate what is human from what is deemed threatening, transgressive, and ultimately non-human, in order to maintain a sense of psychological order. The abject exists, according to Kristeva, within the rupture of that order. Within this framework, she identifies fragmented parts of the body – fluids, human waste, dismembered limbs – as sites of abject horror.

Kristeva’s theory of the abject, in this respect, draws considerably from the work of cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas, whose ideas surrounding ritual boundaries were articulated in *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas ascribed to the human body a particularly strong association with threatened social boundaries, and suggested that dangers lay in its margins or boundaries, as these areas marked points of rupture and vulnerability:

> We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolize its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk,

---

111 Ibid.
urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat.\textsuperscript{113}

Closely echoing these ideas, Kristeva speculates that in moments of encounter with abject human bodily elements, the subject was threatened and thrust into contact with its own otherness:

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – \textit{cadere}, cadaver.\textsuperscript{114}

Kristeva ultimately suggests that the corpse, “the most sickening of wastes,” represents the ultimate form of abjection, death itself.\textsuperscript{115} The mediumistic birthing scene thus brought the viewer into immediate contact with precisely this form of abject reality. The séance not only facilitated meaningful communion with the dead and a symbolic reversal of loss, but also brought about jarring encounters with death’s threatening realities – and this was especially so in the case of ectoplasmic body parts and fluids. Not surprisingly, Kristeva identifies the maternal body, and specifically, the mother’s womb, as an originating source for the “desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject.”\textsuperscript{116} The medium’s erotic and monstrous delivery of specters elicited these maternal dualities, as her body alternately conjured desire and disgust, and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{113} Mary Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger} (London and New York: Routledge, 1966), 150.
\textsuperscript{114} Kristeva, \textit{Powers of Horror}, 3.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 54. The subject of the monstrous mother is also taken up by Barbara Creed in her fascinating analysis of the representation of maternal figures of horror films in \textit{The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis} (London: Routledge, 1993).
\end{flushright}
straddled life and death. Her ghostly “offspring” thus embodied the haunting boundary of human existence – the site where life ends and death begins.¹¹⁷

In Barthes’s search for his dead mother within the photograph, he touches upon not only the deathly, specter-making quality of the camera, but also alludes to its maternal elements. It was, after all, a technology that not only “killed” the subject, but also “reproduced” – an agent of birth and death, as it were – giving life to photographic progeny in the womb-like darkroom. Barthes writes that “a sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze,” and later defines the loss experienced in the photographic image as the cutting of that cord.¹¹⁸ His conflation of maternal and morbid language resonates with the scenes of ectoplasmic birth and mediumistic mothers, who generated both life and death.

The birth scenes of the séance thus seemed to draw upon ancient and modern anxieties surrounding the mother’s womb and its associations with primordial loss. The womb became a site of otherness and absence. Accordingly, spectral childbirth scenes within the séance were also suggestive of contemporary discourses surrounding the medical condition known as pseudocyesis or, more colloquially, “ghost pregnancy.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Barthes, Camera Lucida, 81. The link between the photographic and birth processes is also discussed in Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Post-Memory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). In her discussion, Hirsch draws extensively from Barthes’ search for his own mother in the photographic image as she examines the role of maternal photographers documenting their own children. It is perhaps also worth noting that scholars such as Lucy Fischer (“The Lady Vanishes”) have argued that the camera represents a male technology that engages in a form of “womb envy” and a desire to give birth. In chapter one I outlined the photographic aspects of the medium’s performance. See Gunning, “Phantom Images,” and Schooner, “Ectoplasms, Evanescence and Photography,” for discussions of the medium’s engagement with the photographic/birth process through the séance.
¹¹⁹ See Barton Cooke Hirst, Human Monstrosities (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers & Co., 1891), 56; and George M. Gould & Walter L. Pyle, Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine (New York: Julian Press, 1896), 70-74. In his discussion of pseudocyesis, Dr. Hirst documents the range of symptoms experienced by the female subject, ranging from suppression of the menses to enlargement of the breasts and abdomen,
Although a relatively rare phenomenon consisting of pregnancy symptoms that manifest in the absence of a medical pregnancy, the condition was documented in the late nineteenth century alongside a wider fascination with medical oddities and abnormal bodies. The photographic documents compiled by Dr. Barton Cooke Hirst in his 1891 medical collection *Human Monstrosities* (fig. 45), which were in turn reprinted in the 1896 collection of *Abnormalities and Curiosities of Medicine* by Drs. Gould and Pyle, illustrated a similar documentary approach to the work being conducted with female hysterics.

Much like female hysterical patients, pseudocyesis cases were habitually cloaked in moral terms. Gould and Pyle describe instances of pseudocyesis that were not, according to them, genuine, but were instead “instances of malingering for mercenary or other purposes and some are calculated to deceive the most expert obstetricians by their tricks.” Such medical treatises expressed an ingrained unease vis-à-vis the maternal body, which was echoed, in many respects, throughout the scientific documentation of the medium’s body and its ominous (or at times suspicious) secretions. A dialogue can

---


121 Gould & Pyle, *Anomalies and Curiosities*, 80-81. These photographs were surrounded by lengthy discussions of the perverted, depraved, and monstrous appetites of pregnant women, including accounts of women consuming dirt, excrement, the blood of their husbands, and their own milk while pregnant, and experiencing changes in behaviour including “debauchery, lasciviousness, dirty habits and perverted thoughts.”

122 Ibid., 79
thus be traced between the ghostly labour of the medium within the séance and medical traditions of “abnormal mothers” in general, such as those suffering from ghost pregnancies. In reflecting on the grotesque birth scene in the séance, for example, Geley took the scientific view that “along with perfect births, there are miscarriages, monstrosities and aberrant forms.” Pseudocyesis cases experienced symptoms such as lactation and physical labour, which were accompanied by a spectacle of “screams and groans” that produced nothing, much like the séances of Eva and Margery. Deviant mothers, whether labouring in the séance or medical hospital, engaged in symbolic deliveries of loss and absence.

Despite these parallels, there was an important and marked difference between the position of the examined hysteric or pseudocyesis patient and the female medium, as the latter made a habit of successfully evading (or at least attempting to evade) the medical gaze. Oftentimes it appeared that Eva, like many of her contemporary mediums, self-consciously set out to engage with familiar feminine traditions and subvert social standards. And, despite the restrictions that were in place within the séances, (including rigorous body searches, physical restraints, and recording equipment), mediums perpetually resisted and challenged their skeptical audiences and defied authorities. The performances of the séance were thus tremendously complex in their navigation of gender boundaries and social constructs of femininity.

The matter of the medium’s agency within the séance is thus an exceedingly ambiguous point. Mediums simultaneously resisted and submitted to their voyeurs. They exposed and yet concealed their bodies. They assumed a variety of roles, including

---

123 Geley, Clairvoyance and Materialisation, 189.
that of captive woman, madwoman, mystic, and labouring mother, as well as roles that seemed to challenge gender categories. They played tricks on their captors and then slipped out of reach. These performances, with their many nuances and paradoxes, ultimately hinged upon a persistent tension between compliance and opposition, transparency and evasion, suppression and empowerment. It is quite likely that mediums, like the very specters that they conjured, hovered ambiguously between these sets of possibilities.

One might more accurately liken the medium to the ever-present trickster – a symbolic figure of folklore, religion, and myth found across many cultural traditions. While tricksters were typically male deities, as in the cases of Loki, Coyote, and Hermes, they often possessed an uncertain sexual status. Loki, for example, was known to transform into a woman, and Hermes was aligned with the hermaphrodite. In many respects, the magician represented a less ambiguously masculine embodiment of the trickster-figure, although the magician’s conventional conjuring acts might be considered sanitized versions of the medium’s corporeal and feminine “birth-materializations.”

The trickster has also historically occupied a slippery cultural and political position, as a social other who challenged hierarchical knowledge and exposed buried truths through playful mischief and subversive action.

During the course of a particularly baffling séance with Eva, M. de Fontenay reportedly made the astute comment to Geley that “one would think…that some

---

126 For an interesting discussion of gender within magic performance see Beckman, *Vanishing Women*, 17-59.
malevolent imp was laughing at the observers.” M. de Fontenay’s comment was likely surprisingly apt, as imps were mythological demonic creatures who, much like the trickster (and the medium), were known for their playful or malevolent pranks and mischievous senses of humour. The trickster was additionally a shape-shifter who occupied a liminal space, not only with regard to gender identity, but between the categories of animal and human, and hero and villain. The medium’s complex role-playing was, in my view, far more complicated than childish trickery or hysterical delusion, and oftentimes seemed more in line with the trickster’s shape-shifting and destabilizing acts. In the séance the medium was a powerful catalyst, dismantling social conventions and revealing the ghosts and myths of the modern unconscious.

It is exceedingly difficult, however, to interpret the actions of all mediums in any kind of uniform light, as the truth of these events – or the interventions of their orchestrators – remains a thorny terrain. Certainly, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medical interpretation of mediumship as a form of hysteria may have occasionally had a degree of accuracy. Yet a strictly medicalized reading of medium performance overlooks the more playful and performative dimensions of mediumship, which suggested varying degrees of agency, self-awareness, and intentionality on the part of the medium.

This chapter has outlined several interpretive possibilities underlying the spectacle of the séance, largely relating to the concurrent medical theatre of hysteria and childbirth that influenced and shaped the construction of mediumship in the early twentieth century. The next chapter will look beyond these historical underpinnings of

127 Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, 189.
mediumship to examine more closely the iconographic and religious implications of medium performance within the context of spiritualism. The medium ultimately occupied a slippery position within the séance; she was at once concealed and revealed within the darkness, and she was both host of the proceedings and controlled subject of scrutiny. Mediums played with their audiences (and their cameras), and, unlike their hysterical counterparts, shaped their own image before the scientific lens. By assuming a simultaneously displayed and obscured, and active and passive, position within the séance the medium self-consciously (or perhaps subconsciously) engaged with a range of cultural and gendered tensions. In this way, the photographs of hysterical and labouring mediums rendered visible not only the conjured spirits of the dead, but the conflicted and conflicting spirit of the female body.
CHAPTER THREE

Phantom Traces:
Ectoplasm, Memory, and the Materiality of Death

Between 1854 and 1918 Eusapia Palladino was widely known for her table tricks, and in 1898 Camille Flammarion captured a series of photographs, taken at his own home in France, documenting this phenomenon. The images reveal scenes of witnesses gathered within a comfortable domestic setting, sitting around a table with joined hands while the table appeared to rock or sway upon its legs (fig. 46). The earlier summoning knocks of the spiritualist movement upon the table of the Fox home had, in many respects, prefigured the role that was to be played by familiar material objects, such as the humble table, within séances at large. Parlour tables continued to represent places of gathering and sites of contact with the supernatural. This was particularly so within traditions of mediumship that emerged during the mid nineteenth century involving variations on the knocking table, such as table tipping, table turning, and levitation – all

1 The ritual of the séance typically demanded that the séance-goers should either join their hands in a circle around the table or that they should sit with their hands touching the tabletop. Generally at least one person was commissioned with the task of monitoring the medium. The tradition of placing one’s hands upon the table during the séance ostensibly served to lessen the likelihood of trickery when objects would move or the table itself would levitate. The practice of table turning, which emerged slightly later, was a practice that derived from ancient divination methods, whereby spiritual vibrations of the table conveyed messages to the medium. The vibrations tended to indicate certain letters of the alphabet, which would then be written down by the medium. For more, see Canguilhem, “Flammarion and Eusapia Palladino,” 235-248; Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 74-75. A number of authors have also addressed the matter of how table tricks were likely accomplished; see, for example, Lunt, Mysteries of the Séance; and Dunninger, Inside the Mediums’ Cabinet.
of which involved a transformation of the everyday table into an object of enchantment and transcendence.² The practice of congregating at the common table, which became a staple of séance traditions, evoked the familiar, everyday act of gathering to consume a meal around the family table. At the haunted table of the séance, however, a variety of extraordinary and decidedly unfamiliar phenomena took place.³

It was not only tables but a variety of familiar objects that took on unexpected and magical behaviours during the séance. Curtains shifted, music boxes played, and objects moved. A pipe found its way into Dr. Richet’s mouth.⁴ The séance experience commonly included autonomous movements of objects, as well as loud knocks and the appearance of mysterious substances and materialized handprints that announced otherworldly presence. All of these phenomena ultimately represented moments of symbolic disturbance to domestic household order, as fixtures of everyday life were shifted out of place and ordinary spaces opened entryways to the extraordinary. The familiar within the home, in this sense, became a point of slippage into the haunted realm of the unfamiliar and “un-homely.”

The preceding chapter of this dissertation examined aspects of the séance that elicited a tension between visibility and invisibility, as well as materiality and immateriality – a tension that was further complicated by the relationship between

---
² Galia Ofek discusses the transformation of the wooden table in *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 49. Interestingly, in tracing his materialist theory of history, Karl Marx also used table turning as an analogy for commodity fetishism, as the plain wooden table was miraculously transformed into a site of transcendence. See Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Freidrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), 31. Derrida similarly draws upon Marx’s table turning analogy within *Specters of Marx.*
⁴ This example was described in chapter two. Dr. Richet’s report, as the reader may recall, stated that “Even before Linda went into the trance, there were movements of objects. The musical box started, and in complete darkness, a pipe placed behind Linda was pushed into my mouth…Some heavy objects dealt strong blows on the back of my hand; some large object struck heavy blows on the table.” See Richet, *Thirty Years*, 527.
observing male scientist and performing female subject. This chapter seeks to examine more closely the nature and role of materiality itself within the séance, and takes as its starting point the concepts of familiarity and unfamiliarity. My aim here is to develop upon the initial interpretations put forth within chapter two, in order to offer an analysis of the gestures, objects, and traces found within the séance – one which will look in particular to the material traditions and symbols of remembrance and death.5

On a symbolic level, the subversion and reversal of the everyday that took place within the séance reflected a core premise of spiritualist belief, namely, that spirits were located precisely within the physical here and now. Spiritualism presented itself as a modern religion of experiential faith and “spiritual accessibility,” diametrically opposed to the symbolic separation of humankind and God that existed within the Catholic tradition, in which priests served as intermediary interpreters of the divine Word, in place of more direct communion between worshipper and God. By contrast, within the spiritualist movement, although mediums served as intermediaries (or priestesses, as it were) of the spirit world, they facilitated a more direct – and visible – line of communication and exchange between the living and dead. This flow of communication represented, for the thousands of spiritualist adherents, a more tangible and meaningful form of solace for the bereaved than those offered by more traditional forms of Christian

---

5 This approach draws from the field of material culture, which might seem counterintuitive for a project largely centred on the immaterial traces of the séance. Broadly speaking, the study of material culture has offered new understandings into the way in which the material sphere interacts with human experience. Fascinating research has been conducted into the complex relationships between death, memory, and material objects – a subject with considerable bearing for a study of spiritualism. The work of Hallam and Hockey has been especially informative in this regard; see Death, Memory and Material Culture. In the last decade, a wealth of research has also been published in Material Religion: The Journal of Art, Objects and Belief, a scholarly journal devoted to the intersections of belief and material culture.
The first chapter of this study described the sense of invisible haunting that had pervaded many avenues of nineteenth-century science and visual culture, within which spiritualism was situated. The importance of the familiar, everyday world was thus paramount within spiritualism, as the haunted world of spirits was housed within the land of the ordinary. Spiritualism sought to lift the thin veil that separated these coexisting worlds and expose the haunted recesses of the everyday.

The indefinite boundary that existed between the spirit world and that of the everyday recalls Freud’s conception of the *Unheimlich* (meaning roughly, the un-homely or uncanny), which he articulated in his well known 1919 essay. According to Freud, the *Unheimlich* is a psychologically unsettling effect stemming from a perception of estrangement within the familiar. He describes this effect as a slippage of the *Heimlich* (that is, the familiar or the homelike) into the *Unheimlich*. This sense of the uncanny was often brought about, according to Freud, through forms of repetition and the return of something familiar, such as the encounter with the doppelganger or the resurfacing of a repressed memory. In his words, “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”

---

6 During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there were significant tensions between Catholicism and the Occult movement, as the latter was viewed as a perversion of Christian ideals that embraced demonic influences and undermined Christ’s power. For a thorough discussion of these issues within Europe, see Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 192-209. For more on the tensions between Protestant Christianity and spiritualism, see Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 34-39.

7 Freud’s concept of the uncanny offers a particularly useful way of understanding the relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar within spiritualist practice, as fear and a sense of unsettlement were key components of séances. Several historians of spiritualism have taken up Freud’s theory of the uncanny in their analyses of spirit photographs and séance phenomena. See, in particular, Kaplan’s discussion of the uncanny in relation to spirit photography in *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 220-227; and Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations.” It is also worth noting that in Castle’s *The Female Thermometer*, the author draws upon Freud’s theory of the uncanny to describe the post-Enlightenment era of disenchantment, which was, according to Castle, haunted by the uncanny return of repressed enchanted forces.

The ultimate uncanny return, for Freud, is found in the repressed desire to return to the maternal womb – the eternal *Heimlich*. As he puts it,

> It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. The *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. There is a joking saying that ‘Love is home-sickness’; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: ‘this place is familiar to me, I’ve been here before’, we may interpret the place as being his mother’s genitals or her body.9

The maternal body, as the originating point of life, paradoxically conjured up loss (in the form of the always already lost mother). Freud expressed similar ideas in his theory of the “death drive” – an impulse that compels the subject towards the ultimate inanimate state of death.10 Ectoplasmic birth scenes of the séance, wherein specters emerged from (and frequently returned to) the haunted wombs of mediums, perfectly illustrated this connection between motherhood and death.11

The uncanny, then, *arises from* and *exists within* the known and familiar, as the *Heimlich* secretly contains within it the *Unheimlich*.12 It is in moments of disjuncture and repetition that we, according to Freud, experience its presence in our everyday, familiar reality, as if an unseen curtain were lifted. This view of the uncanny resonates with the spectral realities of spiritualism, where ghosts were located within the everyday. The encounter with specters within the séance amounted to an unsettling encounter with one’s

---

9 Ibid., 368.
10 Freud first articulates this concept in his account of the “death instinct,” in which he argues that the mother’s body represents an originating point of inanimate being. According to Freud, the human psyche possessed an unconscious desire to return to that state. See Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987), 316. A useful discussion of the representation of maternal deathliness can also be found in Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 32-33, 63-69.
11 It is worth noting that Kristeva’s later writings on the *abject*, which were referenced in chapter two, recalls many aspects of the Freudian uncanny. Although organized differently, both concepts ultimately centre on an unsettling encounter with death’s otherness.
12 Ibid., 347, 368.
own mortality – and immortality – within the same instant. As Freud put it, “many people experience the (uncanny) feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.”¹³ The return of the dead in the shape of ghosts thus offers one of the most elemental examples of the uncanny, wherein the boundaries between subject and object, and life and death are blurred. Freud’s text has considerable bearing upon this study, as mediumship and spiritualist imagery continually summoned up death as the *Unheimlich*.

The slippage of familiar objects into the terrain of the unfamiliar was central to the séance experience. In its proper place within the home, a table, a pipe, a music box, or a curtain merely represented the backdrop of everyday domestic objects, but within the séance, ordinary items and familiar spaces of the home repeatedly slipped out of place and indicated something uncanny and outside of the ordinary. Recorded accounts of séances frequently stressed the seemingly normal nature of the objects and venue.¹⁴ This emphasis on the mundane normalcy of the fabrics, furniture, and objects within the room underscored the dramatic subversion of the everyday that would come to pass during the séance. In a recounting of one of Flammarion’s sessions with Eusapia, for instance, the scientist described a series of disruptions to everyday objects that mirrors Richet’s aforementioned account. First, a pencil flew across the room. Next, Flammarion picked up a packet of paper, which was immediately snatched away by invisible hands and shaken violently in the air. One observer, M. de Fontenay, claimed to have witnessed a

---

¹³ Ibid., 364.
¹⁴ The prominent role of familiar items within the séance closely mirrors elements of magic performances, wherein perfectly common and everyday objects frequently behave abnormally before their audiences. In many cases, magicians intentionally use the personal items of audience members or ordinary objects in order to make their tricks all the more convincing. See, for instance, Albert Hopkins, *Magic: Scientific Diversions and Stage Illusions including Trick Photography* (New York: B. Blom, 1967).
hand at work, holding the block of paper, although the other witnesses saw only the shaking paper. Flammarion’s account continues,

The little round table, placed outside of the cabinet, at the left of the medium, approaches the table, climbs clear up on it and lies across it. The guitar in the cabinet is heard moving about and giving out sounds. The curtain is puffed out, and the guitar is brought upon the table, resting upon the shoulder of M. de Fontenay. It is then laid upon the table, the large end toward the medium. Then it rises and moves over the heads of the company without touching them. It gives forth several sounds.  

The supernatural presence is announced through the objects in the room, which became mediums themselves. The curtain billows out, the instrument touches the shoulder of M. de Fontenay, and the guitar produces autonomous music. After these disturbances, domestic order is restored: candles are lit and the objects are returned to their proper places. The disorderly state of familiar objects during the séance seemed, in instances such as this, to announce not only the physical presence of invisible spirits within the room, but also the symbolic reversal of everyday order.

In a 2001 study, the sociologists Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey examined at length the role of everyday objects in the formation of memory in relation to death and loss. They suggest that within the context of death and remembrance, material objects are imbued with special significance, as it is precisely within familiar, everyday things that memory is lodged. This was particularly so in the case of objects that in some way embodied presence through being derived from or linked with the human body. It is for this reason that seemingly mundane items, such as clothing, strands of hair, photographs, and certain household items of everyday use, consistently served as cherished talismans of the dead and uncanny “mediums” of ghostly presence.

\[15\] Flammarion, Mysterious Psychic Forces, 73.
\[16\] Ibid., 74.
\[17\] Hallam and Hockey, Death, Memory and Material Culture, esp. ch. 2, “Figuring Memory: Metaphors, Bodies and Material Objects,” 23-46.
Hallam and Hockey also note that within the Victorian era, domestic interiors and feminine rituals framed the physical setting for memories of the dead. The parlour, in particular, played an important part in the intimate and private life of the house’s inhabitants. It was a room enmeshed with memory-laden rituals and material objects. During times of loss, families would customarily gather in the parlour, where women played a pivotal role in mourning rituals.18 It was chiefly women, after all, who presided over the domestic spaces and traditions of everyday life.19 In all of these respects, then, the medium’s practices remained within the bounds of established mourning traditions and cultural frameworks of death. Mediums commonly practised their “feminine talents” within private domestic spaces, either within their own homes or within the homes of patrons (unless they were under examination within a laboratory), and therein used everyday “embodied” materials to elicit the ghosts of lost loved ones. The séance was, in this sense, both a departure from and a continuation of familiar traditions of mourning and remembrance.

The materiality of death was frequently evoked through a variety of fabrics within the séance, such as curtains, as well as the ectoplasmic cloth-like substances that resembled veils, sudariums, or shrouds. These fabrics emphasized a sense of materiality in place of deathly absence, and suggested fundamental links with rituals of death and remembrance. The cloth veil and shroud, which are the subject of ensuing discussion, were commonly evoked as metaphorical devices within the séance, and provided perhaps

---

18 For more on the history of the parlour room, see Thad Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). In his study, Logan notes that the parlour represented the symbolic heart of the home and that its myriad of displayed objects often reflected the status and position of the family.

19 Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, 69, 182-183. Hallam and Hockey note that women in many cultures play a central role in the communal expressions of mourning. Women have also historically been coupled with ingrained cultural associations with death, dating back to late medieval representations of Death and the Maiden. See also Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 60-67.
the most explicit examples of the materiality of loss and remembrance that was found within spiritualist rituals.

The documentation of mediumship that has been examined thus far illustrates how fabrics, such as curtains – and their intrinsic capacity to reveal and conceal – were used as both a ritualistic and theatrical device within the space of the séance, recalling as well the sleight-of-hand drama of magic stage acts. It was largely through the medium’s control of the curtain that revelation occurred and loss was temporarily overcome. The curtain, much like the household table, was, moreover, a familiar fixture of the domestic home, with an important function as a partition between interior and exterior spaces. Within the home, curtains marked a threshold of vision that facilitated privacy and concealed interior spaces from view. Curtained-off, interior spaces were also historically the domain of women, as boundaries between the sexes were deemed necessary, for instance, during times of childbirth or illness. As noted in chapter two, a particularly compelling correspondence existed between the gendered divisions of the home and those of the séance. The gesture of opening curtains, then, automatically carried with it a number of broader implications and signaled a penetration of concealed (and perhaps even forbidden or foreboding) spaces.

Schrenck Notzing’s text, interestingly, touches upon the subject of the cloth materials of the séance and their function:

We may suppose that soft substances, such as the flowing dress of the medium, curtains hanging near, etc., can be of some advantage, and may form conductors and reservoirs of power, from which the effects may take their origin, besides giving points of support for the materialized structures. Both for the materials for the furnishing of the cabinet, as well as for the dress of the medium (for which knitted fabrics are preferable), a black colour is to be recommended. For with a black background even the finest, hardly visible
materialized fabrics can be seen. Besides, this colour increases the darkness in the cabinet, and thus contributes indirectly to the development of the phenomena.  

Schrenck Notzing viewed the fabrics of the séance from a rather different vantage point than mine in this chapter, largely linked with their ability to “conduct” the supernatural and produce positive effects during his experiments. His language underlines the functional role within the séance of fabrics in creating proper darkroom conditions for the “development of the phenomena.”

Fabrics, however, also marked the material divide between vision and obscurity, enveloping the séance in sheaths of shifting, flowing, and concealing materials that both facilitated the phenomena and enabled the medium’s evasive gestures. Ectoplasm, as it cascaded out of the medium, was highly suggestive of cloth, and particularly the cloth of veils and shrouds that enveloped the body, carrying it to the deathly otherworld. Cloth of this sort was a “second skin,” enwrapping body and soul. As religious historian Ewa Kuryluk has observed, the worn, lived-in quality of cloth and its close proximity to our bodies makes it an especially ambiguous material, occasionally standing in for human flesh itself. She writes, “cloth, as it is folded, unfolded, stored away and unrolled, seems suitable for representing memory, both as a texture woven in a laborious process, and as a sequence of images and words impregnating the fabric with mercurial speed.”

Kuryluk’s comments are particularly applicable to the malleable and formless ectoplasmic fabrics of the séance – the nebulous cloths that billowed out of the medium’s body (and mind, according to ideoplasmic theory). In the dark it became the shapeless

---

21 Kuryluk, *Veronica and her Cloth*, 179.
22 Ibid., 180.
“stuff of memory,” morphing briefly into faces and dematerializing into nothingness, evoking the flow of memories.

The material preservation of memory was also reflected by the Victorian obsession with tactile mourning objects, which included talismans such as commemorative hair jewelry, largely consisting of lockets, brooches, and bracelets, which not only preserved a physical trace of the subject, but also signified cherished material possessions that were infused with psychic and spiritual meaning through their intrinsic and indexical connection with the body.23 Such objects have been interpreted as fetishes that provided an enduring material form in the absence of the deceased loved one. The art historian Marcia Pointon, for instance, has drawn upon an anthropological view of fetish objects to account for the ritual use of Victorian hair jewelry in relation to the body. She suggests that the fetishized memory object provided a fixed form – an “irreducible materiality,” as she puts it – to resolve an “unrepeatable event.”24 Calla Ofek, a historian of Victorian jewelry, has argued that hair jewelry possessed a fetishistic quality because it came to stand in for the absent body, often becoming an anthropomorphized site of love and affection.25

A fascinating materialization, which begs comparison with the culture of mourning objects, took place during a séance with Eva on November 22, 1911. On this occasion, Schrenck Notzing, in the company of Mme. Bisson, observed the appearance of an ectoplasmic veiled female head with hair (fig. 47).26 The free-floating head moved

26 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 131. This materialization is addressed again in chapter four.
about. As it did so, Eva asked Mme. Bisson to “cut a lock of hair off the head.” This was successfully accomplished under Schrenck Notzing’s close observation, and the lock of hair, which was approximately 4 inches in length, was given to the scientist. Shortly thereafter, the medium screamed as if in pain and the spectral lock of hair vanished. According to Schrenck Notzing, “it seemed as if the substance dissolved and was reabsorbed by the medium’s organism.” This episode highlighted the complex materiality of mourning that was often embedded in the séance.

The collection of the lock of hair, at the medium’s request, strongly alluded to a conscious engagement with the symbols of remembrance, as locks of hair were especially poignant memory objects. Many similar examples can be found interwoven throughout the scientific reports of mediumship. Dr. Crookes, for instance, had collected a lock of Katie King’s hair. Richet also collected mediums’ hair, and commented in *Thirty Years of Psychical Research* that certain mediums commonly permitted such sentimental snippings of hair or fabric. In a poem titled “Only a Curl” of 1862, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning articulated the profound sense of bereavement and loss of a mother for her dead child:

\[
\begin{align*}
Tis easy for you \\
To be drawn by a single gold hair \\
Of that curl, from earth’s storm and Despair, \\
To the safe place above us.
\end{align*}
\]

The mother’s grief in Browning’s poem centres on the reliquary object – the lock of hair – that indexes the lost child and presents a compelling site of memory and grief.

---

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Richet, *Thirty Years*, 476.
Photography was another widely used medium of mourning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And, much like commemorative mourning objects, photographs preserved and resurrected memory through their uncanny indexing of an absent presence.\textsuperscript{31} The first chapter of this study described examples of postmortem photography that overtly captured images of death and sought to simultaneously preserve an impression of continued life through a careful staging of death as a state of peaceful slumber. This ambiguous imaging of deathly life (or living death) was consistently present within the visual manifestations of ghosts that shaped spiritualist practices and hovered in limbo between this world and the next.\textsuperscript{32}

The practice of spirit photography, outlined in previous discussions, was also closely aligned with the visual and material domains of mourning, as it explicitly sought to secure the tangible presence of dead loved ones, and, in effect to literalize the memorial function of the photograph by simultaneously remembering and restoring the dead. Mumler, interestingly, had worked as a jeweler prior to his career in spirit photography, having trained under a Mrs. Stuart, a maker of mourning jewelry and photographer by trade.\textsuperscript{33} Objects – whether framed photographs, locks of hair preserved in golden lockets, or mere scraps of cloth – were tactile locations of memory and personifications of the dead, which were ritually handled and infused with personal meaning.\textsuperscript{34} The traditions of the séance, however, were of a somewhat different nature,

\textsuperscript{31} This subject was explored in chapter one. For more on the photographic index see Barthes, \textit{Camera Lucida}; and Krauss, “Notes on the Index.”
\textsuperscript{33} Jay, \textit{Cyanide and Spirits}, 11-12.
although they were similarly situated within an ambiguous material framework of loss and an “objectification” of memory.

While the spirit photographs of the late nineteenth century had functioned, in many respects, as memorial portraits, offering a static visual reminder (and resurrection) of the dead, the spectacle of the séance alternatively offered a physical space for exchange and reunion between the living and the deceased – one in which the living and dead were brought into close proximity with one another. In this respect, the séance was aligned with traditional religious spaces of worship, wherein communion between the material and spiritual plane was facilitated within a specific spatial context. The spiritualist séance was, in this sense, more directly engaged with the traditions of Christian transformation and transfiguration, for it marked a material union with death that mirrored the analogy of the resurrection. Rather fittingly, the historian John McManners writes that in the eighteenth century, a spiritual view of death emerged whereby “man is brought into union with Christ in his suffering, death and resurrection, he is transfigured, and receives the imprint of Jesus.”

The photograph, needless to say, offered a fitting medium of resurrection – it is a medium that, according to Barthes, is inherently reanimating. It brings the dead back to life, even, as he notes, in the case of the photographed corpse, which is horrible “because…it certifies, so to speak, that the corpse is alive, as corpse: it is the living image of a dead thing.” This photographic reanimation was, however, perpetually fleeting, elusive, and uncertain. Elsewhere Barthes also describes the futility of his attempts to grasp hold of his mother’s presence through the photographic image: “In

---

36 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 78-79.
order to ‘find’ my mother, fugitively alas, and without ever being able to hold on to this resurrection for long, I must, much later, discover in several photographs the objects she kept on her dressing table, an ivory powder box (I loved the sound of its lid), a cut-crystal flagon, or else a low chair, which is now near my own bed, or again, the raffia panels she arranged above the divan, the large bags she loved…”

Interestingly, amid Barthes’s ruminations on longing for the presence of his dead mother, he is led to recognize this presence in the photographed everyday objects and surfaces of the home.

There is a long history in Western culture of using visible and material markers to counter death’s absence with tangible form, and to signify the immaterial and intermediary realities of death. Gravestones, tombs, relics, and churches, in particular, have historically represented physical sites for situating loss and memory, as well as embodying material spaces for the transcendent. Such physical indexes of loss provide sites of memory, as well as substantiations of once living bodies. The Christian cross has long served as perhaps the most prominent material symbol within Western culture for the union of death and resurrection – an earthly reminder of the mortal flesh and divine spirit that converged in the figure of Christ. These religious and cultural traditions of death underline the complex entanglement of materiality and mortality. Spiritualism, with its interest in revealing material evidence of ghosts, fell within this framework. In fleshing out these issues, I turn first to the Christian tradition of relics and its relationship to spiritualist ritual in the early twentieth century.

37 Ibid., 64.
38 See Ariès, Images of Man and Death, for a comprehensive overview of the visual and material traditions surrounding death in Western culture.
The Cult of Saints, which flourished between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, established the spiritual importance of material traces of the dead – particularly in the form of saints’ relics – within both Christendom and Western culture at large.\textsuperscript{40} According to the historian of religion Alexandra Walsham, relics are the “material manifestations of the act of remembrance. They sublimate, crystallize, and perpetuate memory in the guise of physical remains, linking the past and present in a concrete and palpable way.”\textsuperscript{41} The most prized relics, generally, were those associated with the actual physical remains of the martyred body, such as bones, flesh, and even bodily fluids, as these were viewed as more potent and powerful conveyors of miraculous healing or saving properties.\textsuperscript{42}

Amid the height of religious enthusiasm over corporeal relics, nearly every church devoted to the Holy Mother claimed to possess a relic in the form of her milk.\textsuperscript{43} Such remains – bits of bone, dried fluids, and scraps of flesh – indexed the whole body of the living saint and provided a physical link with a lost point of origin. Other items that were in close proximity to the body, such as robes, veils, and other worn garments, were also highly valued after death.\textsuperscript{44} The Holy Shroud and Veil of Veronica, discussed in chapter one, were particularly compelling and widely venerated testaments to the secondary relic

\textsuperscript{40} Sox, Relics and Shrines, 18-40. Sox notes that the Cult of Saints emerged amid an explosion of churches and cathedrals that were constructed between 1050 and 1350 CE, giving way to the widespread religious veneration of relics through pilgrimage.

\textsuperscript{41} Walsham, Relics and Remains, 13.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.; cf. Sox, Relics and Shrines, 8-9; Hallam and Hockey, Death, Memory and Material Culture, 134-136.


\textsuperscript{44} Saint Paul’s handkerchiefs represent an especially interesting example of “secondary” relics. These scraps of cloth were highly valued for having had contact with the saint’s skin and were believed to possess curative properties for the sick. See Sox, Relics and Shrines, 9. For more on the cult of relics more generally see Barbara Abou-El-Haj, The Medieval Cult of Saints: Formations and Transformations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Esther Cohen, “Roads and Pilgrimage: A Study in Economic Interaction,” Studi Medievali ser. 3, 21, no.1 (1980): 321-341.
category, as these were fabrics that had not only touched Christ, but had been imbued with the miraculous iconic as well indexical signs of that touch.\(^{45}\) Finally, a third category of relics existed in the form of other material objects that had in some way received a physical trace – akin to a photograph – of the saint, such as handprints or signatures, which were similarly invested with special meaning at the time of the saint’s death.\(^{46}\)

Walsham eloquently describes the manner in which relics symbolically and physically linked past worlds with the present, noting that they “carry messages from beyond the grave and provide a mnemonic ligature to a world that has been lost.”\(^{47}\) Her assessment nicely summarizes the function of relics as material bridges between presence and absence, and the everyday and the spiritual. The material traces of ghosts that appeared within the séance functioned in precisely the same way, carrying tangible (and even hand-written) messages from other side. Ectoplasm and other spectral manifestations represented material points of intersection with the supernatural, which, much like relics, challenged the absence of death and provided physical links with the dead. Ghostly materials of the séance also offered up symbols of resurrection and life beyond death, as well as sources of psychological healing (and perhaps even salvation) for those haunted by loss and grief.

Ectoplasm was, in its essence, a formless substance that established the material presence of spirits within the séance. It shape-shifted, materialized, and dematerialized. Oftentimes, however, ectoplasm elicited something of the familiar in the brief moments that it appeared before its audience – and it is here that I believe the primary significance

---


\(^{47}\) Ibid., 13.
of ectoplasm lies. Glimpses of a material that could momentarily take the shape of a body part or resemble a human face were presumably meant to startle and impress the audience, as well as potentially evoke memory or recall a familiar face in the mind’s eye of the observer. This is doubtless why mediums did not allow ectoplasm to be contemplated at any length, and why its manifestation also required darkness. In a sense, these limitations on visibility rendered ectoplasm more revelatory and receptive of projected desires. Facial imprints and body parts appeared only in brief flashes as the medium parted the curtains, creating a heightened psychological and uncanny impact.48

In many ways, the séance embodied the liminal and intangible spaces of the mind, and the gaps between loss and remembrance. The darkness and quiet therein spoke to the laden psychological moment of awaiting the spectral return of a familiar face and forgotten touch – that ultimately materialized like a resurfacing memory. Edgar Allan Poe, in his short story, “Ligeia,” written approximately a decade before the emergence of spiritualism, touched upon the impossibility of ever truly recapturing memory, as the male narrator struggles to recall to mind the essence and spirit of his dead wife, Ligeia. The narrator laments that “in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves upon the very verge of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember.”49

In Madame Bisson’s writings she reported instances of recognition during her séances with Eva that illustrate the emotional role of ectoplasm in negotiating loss. One

48 Lehman has interestingly likened the theatre of the séance to “reception theories” of traditional performance, which maintain that the emotional state of the audience profoundly shapes the quality and effect of the performance. Similarly, mediums frequently refused to perform for overly hostile audiences, as the receptive and engaged mind was consistently deemed necessary for the successful production of spirits. See Lehman, Victorian Women, 89-90.
such occasion occurred in December of 1911 during a sitting with Bisson and Eva, during which Eva conjured several ghosts. One of these Bisson recognized as her deceased nephew Georges Thurner, who then disappeared from view.\textsuperscript{50} This nephew-imprint reappeared in later séances that were held in June 1912, and Schrenck Notzing even secured a photograph of the apparition, which was then sent to the nephew’s mother for identification (fig. 48). The mother’s reaction, according to Bisson, was to exclaim, “Georges, my dear son, it is you! My God, my God, how wonderful, and yet how terrible!” after which “she broke into sobs and tears.”\textsuperscript{51} Her emotional reaction – one of mingled delight and horror – accurately embodies the psychologically unsettled state described by Freud in his treatise on the uncanny. Rather like the gruesome resurrection of the dead son’s mutilated corpse in the famous 1902 tale \textit{The Monkey’s Paw} by the British author W. W. Jacobs – whose return is incidentally heralded by “a perfect fusillade of knocks” that reverberate throughout the house – the return of the longed-for son within the ectoplasmic image is both a macabre and ecstatic moment.\textsuperscript{52} The parent is faced with the unsettling prospect of joyful reunion with the dead child, accompanied by a sense of dread at reencountering the dead body itself. Mme. Bisson’s sister also provided a written statement in the form of a letter that read,

\begin{quote}
My Dear Juliette,
Immediately on seeing the photograph I recognized my deceased son Georges. I am grateful to have a proof that he thinks of me, and am looking forward to seeing him again some day.
Yours, with all my heart,
Eugénie.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 137.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
The image itself resembled a fairly rough sketch of a bearded male face with generic features. Yet within the emotional framework of the séance, the face, indistinct as it was, became a site of projected memory.

The ineffable and mutable nature of ectoplasm also supported its uncanny function. Descriptions of its physical qualities, recorded by observing scientists, ranged from misty and amorphous substances (often likened to cobwebs) to more tangible materials resembling cloth or human skin. It was a substance of flesh and soul, suggesting at once materiality and transcendence. In his various accounts of the veil-like fabrics that materialized during Eva’s sittings, Schrenck Notzing devoted considerable time to discussing their material composition and appearance, which he identified as being at once substantial and insubstantial. The fabrics of the séance, according to Schrenck Notzing, generally signaled a merging of physical and spiritual (or psychical) dimensions, in the vein of materialized spirits.

The sense of materiality that surrounded ectoplasm thus underscored its parallels with a variety of malleable, amorphous, and metaphysical substances, such as breath, vapour, smoke, wax, and clay, which have traditionally shaped conceptions of both the human body and soul. Warner has offered a fascinating examination of examples of “liminal life,” including instances of automata and somnambulism that reflect transient materiality. According to Warner, liminal and plasmatic materials (which either lacked fixed form or possessed the ability to be molded) were ideally suited for embodying the intangible dimensions of human life, such as the soul, spirit, or animating breath. She astutely notes that amorphous substances such as vapour, smoke, clouds, “and their

---

54 See, for example, Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 63, 109.
55 Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 59-70. In my introductory chapter I noted the Christian liturgical origin for the concept of *spiritus*, which denoted the “animating breath” of the soul.
spirituous, sublimed counterparts among airy and even gaseous substances (…) have served to make manifest the invisible, supernatural, imponderable, and ineffable according to the promptings of belief and fantasy.”

Ectoplasm was an expression of precisely this nebulous interiority, of the substances that mediated life and death, and spirit and matter.

In her later reflections on this ghostly substance, Warner goes on to suggest that ectoplasm provided a reversal of the traditional ritual sacrifice, wherein animal flesh was transformed into the smoke of a burnt offering. As she so eloquently puts it, the medium “turns smoke back into live cinders…and she thereby offers proof of the existence of matter beyond the known material conditions, and consequently, of life after death.”

Warner’s analogy perfectly describes the transformational nature of ectoplasm and its evanescent materiality. In its cloth form, the sheer, film-like fabric of ectoplasm seemed to inhabit the very margin of being and nothingness.

In the records of Drs. Schrenck Notzing and Geley ectoplasm was consistently described in either emphatically material or immaterial terms, depending on the structure taken by the substance on a given occasion. While some ectoplasmic apparitions were explicitly insubstantial and fluid in nature, others took the shape of seemingly solid and tangible body parts, textiles, or membranes. The ectoplasms captured on film within this study thus varied considerably, appearing as insubstantial mists and vapors, as well as overtly substantial and three-dimensional fabrics and body parts. The first chapter of

---

56 Ibid., 79.
57 Ibid., 305.
58 Reports of ectoplasm manifesting in these diverse material states can be found throughout the annals of the British and American Societies for Psychical Research between approximately 1880 and 1935.
59 In his research notes, Schrenck Notzing outlines a full spectrum of ectoplasms in his observations with Eva, including substances that resembled vapours, piles of cloth, cords, cobwebs, veils, and more three-dimensional forms, such as bodily limbs and full phantom figures.
this study introduced the ectoplasmic veils that made their appearance within the séances of Eva and several other mediums, bearing the imprinted faces of what were either spirits or resurfacing memories (depending upon one’s reading of the phenomena). As initially noted, these imprints were evocative of both photographs and the *vera icons* of Christ’s “divine imprints.” I return here to the subject of ectoplasmic veils to consider more closely their relationship with the materiality of death – both as spectral fabric and a surface upon which ghostly faces could appear.

In his *Phenomena of Materialisation* Schrenck Notzing maintained that ectoplasm was, as already noted, a form of externalized psychic matter that amounted to a mental projection of the medium.60 He steadfastly maintained that fraud or trickery had been impossible within his experiments, and although at times he appeared, within his writings, to support a belief in the living, independent will of the conjured materializations (he addresses them directly during several experiments), he ultimately suggested that Eva’s ectoplasms were the result of genuine ideoplastic phenomena born from her own psychic processes, thoughts, and remembrances.61

By the tail end of 1911, Schrenck Notzing’s records indicated a shift within Eva’s materializations, as her ectoplasms had begun to take on more defined human features and qualities. The misty, shadowy, and vaporous materials of her early séances gave way to more substantial and evolved apparitions, which included examples of fragmented human limbs and facial reproductions impressed upon veils of cloth. Over the course of his experiments with Eva, Schrenck Notzing came to believe that the evolution of her materialization phenomena was the result of the medium’s developing experience and

61 Ibid.
honied psychical skill within the séance. The scientist also professed the belief, which was shared by others in the field, that the shifting aggregation of ectoplastic matter that he had observed ultimately reflected fluctuations in the medium’s subconscious or physiological state. Within the framework of the séance, ectoplastic veils were highly enigmatic materials enmeshed within both the performative and emotionally resonant aspects of the séance. The veils generally appeared in a fleeting moment as the curtains were briefly parted by the medium, thus producing a momentary visual effect, as well as a physical surface upon which meaning was either projected or reflected back upon the viewer.

The earliest veils that were conjured by Eva resembled simple swaths of muslin cloth draped over her face (fig. 49). Eva revealed these apparitions in her usual theatrical fashion, by pulling aside the curtains of the cabinet. In his relaying of these materializations, Schrenck Notzing noted (quite rightly) that “a critic would at once have the impression that Eva had put a handkerchief over her head.” The vaguely defensive tone in Schrenck Notzing’s address to the “critic” illustrates the compelling sense of uncertainty that haunts much of the *Phenomena of Materialisation*. Despite a careful scientific methodology and objective approach, Schrenck Notzing consistently struggled with a degree of incredulity in the face of his own findings throughout his investigations, and this underlying anxiety pervades other scientists’ writings in places as well. Eva’s gesture within the photograph also imparts a distinct sense of playfulness with not only

---

62 Schrenck Notzing discusses the range of forms that Eva’s ectoplasms assumed in his introductory chapter, see especially *Phenomena*, 13-14. Similar theories are expressed by Geley (among others). See, for example, Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, 176-177.

63 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 110. The scientist notes that similar events transpired during a number of sittings between 1910 and 1911.
the scientist and viewer, but also with identity and vision itself. Of this materialization, Schrenck Notzing wrote that “the medium was obviously anxious to mask herself with her teleplasmic productions,” as she, in effect, concealed her own face and pointedly evaded the scientist’s gaze. The photograph thus serves as a document of the indeterminate and at times unsettling nature of ectoplasm as an object of study.

Even more importantly, however, the image presented by Eva in the moment of veiled revelation was that of a spectral woman draped in ghostly cloth. This motif was immediately suggestive of both mourning veils, such as those traditionally worn by bereaved women, and the familiar iconography of specters draped in burial shrouds or winding sheets. In this sense, the draped veil of ectoplasm was particularly fitting within the context of the séance and its ritual recalling of the dead. For scientists such as Schrenck Notzing, however, the link between ectoplasm and remembrance was primarily tied with ectoplasm’s subliminal origin, as a material expression of repressed memory. As relic, material memory, and symbolic prop, the ectoplasmic veil thus represented a particularly complicated and elusive material surface within the séance.

The first recorded instance of a veil bearing a facial imprint appears to have occurred in a séance with Eva that was conducted by Schrenck Notzing on November 1, 1911, although Linda Gazzera had produced two-dimensional spirit faces as early as 1909. Initially, Schrenck Notzing could not distinguish the ectoplasmic form that Eva had produced near her right shoulder. It appeared at first as an indistinct mass. As she

---

64 Chapter two addresses the subject of subversive gestures and playfulness within the séance at greater length. For more on this subject, see Owen, The Darkened Room, esp. ch. 3, “Star Mediumship,” 41-74.
65 Schrenck Notzing, Phenomena, 110 (my emphasis).
66 See Davies, The Haunted, 20; Ariès, Images of Man and Death, 96-114. In many deathbed rituals, families would typically gather around the dead body after it was wrapped in a shroud or winding sheet.
reopened the curtains, however, the scientist was able to discern more detail, despite being permitted to view the materialization only in brief glimpses. He wrote:

I thus saw on Eva’s right shoulder a white mass partly covering her head, and showing the indistinct profile of a face. The hair of the head-like structure seemed to be of a lighter colour than the medium’s hair. The medium’s face and the materialization were turned away from each other, and gave the impression of a Janus head… The photograph shows for the first time in three years’ observation a clearly-marked, but imperfectly-modelled, male profile, in which the nose is wanting. The whole gives the impression of an unfinished sketch of a death-mask made with the help of a soft, white, pulpy substance.  

The photographs recorded during that sitting bear witness to the phenomenon that Schrenck Notzing described (fig. 50). Schrenck Notzing’s account of this materialization is especially intriguing for its mention of the similarity between the ectoplasmic impression and a death mask. His comparison bears some further consideration, particularly as he invokes the analogy repeatedly throughout his text.

Death masks were the casts made of the faces of the dead, usually in materials such as plaster or wax, which were intended to preserve the original likeness of the subject and serve as models for future portraits. In many customs they were also meant to be a “new skin” for the dead. Their history within traditions of burial and remembrance is a long one, tracing back to ancient practices in Egypt, and their use over the centuries also included being displayed and mourned as funerary effigies for the dead. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries death masks became more common fixtures of the Western funerary ritual, where they served as indexical portraits of the

---

67 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 121 (my emphasis).
68 Schrenck Notzing uses this analogy repeatedly to describe the appearance of heads and faces within the ectoplasm conjured by Eva.
69 Kuryluk, *Veronica and her Cloth*, 205-208.
deceased that provided a link to this original presence. As imprints of the dead, they were also similar to photographs, indexing the absent body. The young French medium may well have been familiar with such traditions. A particularly famous case in Paris, which became known in the French newspapers as the L’inconnue de la Seine during the 1880s, involved the discovery of an unknown young woman who had drowned in the Seine (fig. 51). A plaster cast of the woman’s face had been made in the hopes of identifying the young woman, but her appearance of serene deathly beauty led to a widespread fascination with the Ophelia-like death mask, as a topic of both fashionable news and artistic interest.

Death masks thus represented a material imprint of a dead subject’s likeness, and a doubling of the original. The case of the unknown woman from the Seine touched upon the pervasive late nineteenth-century fascination with other images and imprints of death (such as the aforementioned trend of postmortem photography) that both recorded a portrait of death and simultaneously denied death’s finality. The young woman’s plaster death mask was especially compelling because of its appearance of peaceful slumber, which closely recalled the so-called Sleeping Beauties, who were described in chapter one, and slumbering infants that would never wake. It was, in many respects, the...

---

70 Ariès, Images of Man and Death, 124-128; Kuryluk, Veronica and her Cloth, 206; and Robert Cecil, The Masks of Death: Changing Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century (Lewes: Book Guild, 1991). In ancient Rome wax death masks, painted in naturalistic colours, had been used to preserve the features of the dead. This tradition extended into the early Christian period.

71 Susan Sontag likens the photograph to the death mask in her discussion of photographic indexicality in On Photography (New York: Doubleday, 1977). For more on the intersection of photography and death masks, see also Hallam and Hockey, Death, Memory and Material Culture, 142; Warner, Phantasmagoria, 24-25; and Louis Kaplan, “Photograph/Death Mask: Jean-Luc Nancy's Recasting of the Photographic Image,” Journal of Visual Culture 9 (2010): 45-62. Kaplan’s essay draws upon the theories of Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot to reflect on the photograph’s relationship with the death mask, and the mask more generally. Kaplan also notes that Blanchot was so taken with the young visage of L’Inconnue de la Seine that he owned a copy of the popular death mask.

72 See Bertrand Tillier, La Belle Noyée: Enquête sur le Masque de l’Inconnue de la Seine (Paris: Arkhé, 2011); and Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body, 206-208. In “Photograph/Death Mask,” 59,
ambiguous liminality of these deathly impressions that lent them poignancy. More than just preserved image and memory, the postmortem imprints of the late nineteenth century captured a dream of peaceful, slumbering death beyond the reality of the corpse – of the loved one forever transfixed like a *memento mori* painting, in a space between the bloom of life and the decay of death. The cultural imaging of death, I would suggest, ultimately shaped ectoplasm – a decidedly impressionable material, enmeshed within a visual legacy of postmortem imprints. Ectoplasm underlined the deathliness that was etched within the world of material things, and yet subverted its finality.

By 1912 the appearance of ectoplasmic veiled faces and other spectral floating heads had become relatively common within séances; such visages are evident within many of the photographs resulting from the early twentieth-century scientific investigations of mediumship. Eva C. produced these manifestations with impressive regularity in her séances with Dr. Schrenck Notzing. The aforementioned apparition that had materialized during a séance on November 22, 1911 (see fig. 47), for instance, was described by the scientist as a child-sized head, “clothed like […] a nun with a white veil.”

His comparison is quite perceptive, particularly as Christian overtones and symbols were common within the séance, which occasionally included spirit visits from priests or saints. In this context, however, it is more likely that the ectoplasmic veil in question was meant as a visual reminder of mourning garb, particularly as its appearance was accompanied by Eva’s insistence on collecting a lock of the spirit’s hair.

The physical appearance of veiled ectoplasms was relatively consistent within séances, appearing time and again like spectral versions of the Christly relics. Schrenck

---

Notzing’s description of the previously noted veil of May 8, 1918 (see fig. 27), offers a clear account of the typical physical composition of these materializations:

At the opening of the curtains a mask-like face was seen attached to the medium’s back hair. It resembled a half-soft pulp, traversed by softer material, and kneaded into shape. Only the forehead and eyes were recognizable, which gave the impression of a female face…The photographs show a remarkable half-finished structure arrested in its development. It is fastened to the hair on the back of Eva’s head on the right, and does not appear to exceed in size the face of a new-born baby or a fairly large doll. If we wished to make a comparison, we might say as follows: - The whole thing looks like a half-finished sketch of a female face-mask from nature, composed of pulp and softened cardboard and fragments of veil-like material, or perhaps made of a special mass resembling plasticine. The forehead, cheeks, nose, and eyes, and the upper face generally, are sufficiently finished to recognize the intention of the modeler to compose a female face…The face is surrounded by fabric in the stereoscopic photograph and shows a distinct low relief, like a sculptural sketch for the mask of a female head. The surface of the formation is covered by numerous folds, holes, and creases, while the lower half appears to consist of broadcloth or paper bands unfolded, placed one upon the other, and organically joined and felted up with a veiling material. A crumpled mask, such as can be bought, would have a more complete appearance, and would hardly be organically connected with cloth fragments and veils, as is the case with the present structure.  

The scientist’s lengthy description pays particular attention to the materiality of the ectoplasm, despite an inability to actually touch and examine its composition. He likens the ectoplasmic substance to pliable materials such as pulp, softened cardboard, veil fabric, and plasticine. The pulpy, soft, and fragmented qualities of the diminutive face, which he describes as being the size of a new-born baby or large doll, were also eerily evocative of both decaying and newly formed flesh, suggesting at once death and rebirth. Schrenck Notzing’s words hint at the uncanny and simulacral quality of the ghostly body, which simulated real, familiar, animate life, and yet was always innately other. Throughout his accounts, and those of his fellow researchers, ectoplasmic matter was also likened to moldable media – softened cardboard, pulp, plasticine – that could simulate life and copy an original.

---

74 Ibid., 158-59.
The apparition’s veiled appearance was, once again, visually aligned with the cloths of funerary traditions, such as the shroud or mourning veil. The suggestion of ragged cloth, within this type of materialization, furthermore, contributed to a general impression of authenticity, of “lived in” cloth and the tattered remnants of a spectral life beyond the grave. In typical fashion, Schrenck Notzing’s stance on the nature of the apparition is vague and riddled with an underlying anxiety surrounding the possibility of fraud. His comparisons between the ectoplasmic face and a “mask” suggested that for him, at least, ectoplasmic faces were only an outer veneer rather than a fully embodied ghostly presence. This was complicated by the fact that he did, on occasion, address himself to the apparitions directly as if they were alive and cognizant.\(^75\) He appears, however, to have ultimately regarded Eva’s ectoplasmic faces as fragmented copies – or imprints – of the dead, generated from the medium’s own buried memories.

Schrenck Notzing’s notes from a séance on October 22, 1910 capture a typical spirit-head materialization:

> In this and the following sittings forms resembling heads were shown mostly near the curtain on the medium’s left…At first they were only fragments of heads, and partial formations, in which certain lines and forms, resembling faces, could be clearly recognized, while the rest appeared to be a dark undeveloped mass. Thus, I saw in this sitting a face looking upwards, in which I could recognize the bridge of the nose, the forehead, the hair and a rough outline of the head. A broad band surrounded the forehead. Owing to the fugitiveness of the impression, eyes and other details could not be recognized.\(^76\)

The scene described by Schrenck Notzing was one of unfolding creation, as disjointed spectral heads – representing ghosts of the dead – were “reborn” in bits and pieces within the space of the cabinet. Their unformed and fragmented appearance, however,

---

\(^75\) This occurred in a number of places within the *Phenomena of Materialisation*, including, for example, in his documentation of the spirit known as “la petite Estelle,” which is discussed in chapter four.

\(^76\) Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 63-64.
reinforced a fleeting and visually uncertain effect. And, “owing to the fugitiveness of the impression,” as the scientist put it, an observer could perceive only small and disjointed parts of a presumably larger whole.

On occasion, ghostly faces exhibited a more whole and finished appearance. During the course of Dr. Geley’s later experiments with Eva C. (the results of which closely mirrored those of Schrenck Notzing), a range of ectoplasmic apparitions were recorded. In one experiment with Eva (conducted in February of 1918 in the presence of Mme. Bisson), Eva produced a particularly lifelike disembodied face following a performance of mediumistic labour (fig. 52):

Above the medium’s head, in the opening between the curtains and coming from the right, the head of a woman was visible at about the normal height of a person standing. Only the head emerged from the curtain. The materialisation was perfect; it was a living face of normal size, of fresh tint, and with expressive eyes. The face was beautiful, and the experimenters gazed at it with expressions of admiration spoken in low tones.\(^{77}\)

Resembling a small doll’s head or magazine cut-out, in Geley’s photograph the face appears nestled near the medium’s chest, looking out at the viewer. It was also, in Geley’s estimation, exceedingly natural in both its complexion and expression.

Two weeks later, Geley gathered again with Eva and Mme. Bisson, as well as several other observers. On this occasion, another ectoplasmic head – with strikingly similar facial features and expression – was produced (fig. 53). Geley described its ephemeral appearance:

A materialized face developed round about the medium, disappearing and reappearing. It had obvious resemblances to that photographed on February 12...The face appeared at the curtain suddenly and without amorphous ectoplasm. It was of natural size, but ephemeral, and immediately vanished, so that I had no time to photograph it. The face was formed from a mist which floated at the sides of the medium, then placed itself on her breast, her head, or her shoulder. Its visibility increased and decreased alternately.\(^{78}\)

---

\(^{77}\) Geley, *Clairvoyance*, 192-93.

\(^{78}\) Ibid. 193-94.
Interestingly, Geley does not spill much ink on the task of explaining the remarkable similarity between the faces produced on these separate occasions, although he hints at a possibility of manipulation in conceding that “the (two) manifestations seemed designed to show various modes in the genesis of the phenomenon.”

Geley, however, generally regarded the séance apparitions as genuine psychic phenomena, in much the same terms as Schrenck Notzing. In his view, then, such materializations were indicative of “a fractional part of a living being,” which was externalized and then reabsorbed by the medium.

Eva’s séances were frequently visited by disembodied faces, which took shape and occasionally appeared to move about the cabinet of their own accord. This phenomenon was a common component of medium theatre and also recalled the various “floating orbs” of invisible photography. Linda Gazzera’s earlier séances had featured comparable materializations that consisted of two-dimensional, disembodied faces, surrounded by billowing fabric (see fig. 54). A number of these were photographed by Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet in 1909. Such iconographic patterns continued well into the twentieth century. Later spirit photography, such as that of Ada Emma Deane from the 1920s (fig. 55), for example, similarly included many illustrations of pallid, circular spirit “heads” (many with traces of what appeared to be ectoplasmic cloth) that appeared suspended above the portraits of living sitters.

---

79 Ibid., 193.
80 Ibid., 176.
81 Schrenck Notzing, Phenomena, 131.
82 Dr. Imoda’s work with Gazzera was published in Fotographie di Fantasmi (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1912); see also Fischer, “The Reciprocal Adaptation,” 208.
83 For more on Deane’s photography, see Jolly, Faces of the Living Dead, 111-130.
Spectral disembodied faces, in all their variations of appearance, were suggestive of not only an “invisible iconography,” but invested with a complex symbolism of death and the afterlife. This chapter has already established the close relationship between the veils of ectoplasm and the miraculous relics of Christ (with their associated connotations of resurrection). The appearance of floating heads within the darkened cabinet space, however, pointed to a close correlation with other artistic symbols of immortality and the human soul – especially those associated with the Symbolist movement.

European Symbolism had taken shape at the end of the nineteenth century largely out of a rejection of pictorial realism. Symbolists embraced the representation of spiritual, mystical, and immaterial concepts and forms, as well as occult subjects. The shared interests and principles between Symbolism and spiritualism led to a common language of the invisible, as well as some evidence of reciprocal currents of influence – a point which is revisited in the next chapter.84 Within the Symbolist camp, the disembodied head functioned as a relatively common symbol for the separate spheres of body and spirit, and the material and immaterial planes.

Artists such as Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau turned with frequency to subjects such as Orpheus and Saint John the Baptist, figures who had famously lost their heads and were subsequently aligned with narratives of resurrection and transcendence (see figs. 56-57).85 As a visual motif, then, the disembodied head represented the

84 There have been a number of excellent exhibition catalogues that explore this relationship, including Maurice Tuchman et al., eds., The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Art; Jean Clair and Pierre Théberge, Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe (Montreal: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, 1995); Bernd Apke et al., Okkultismus und Avantgarde; and Serge Fauchereau and Joëlle Pijaudier-Cabot, eds., L’Europe des esprits, ou, la fascination de l’occulte, 1750-1950 (Strasbourg: Musées de Strasbourg, 2011).
85 Artistic interest in the mythical figure of Orpheus derived largely from his role as the first artist and an emblem of both poetry and music. After death, Orpheus’ head continued to sing, marking him as a figure of spiritual transcendence, which appealed to the mystical interests of the Symbolists. For more on the
division of body and spirit, and the triumph of the higher plane of existence beyond the mortal realm. In many respects, spiritualist disembodied heads functioned similarly, as their appearance within the séance pointed to a literal transcendence of death and a converging of material and spiritual planes. Like the head of Saint John the Baptist (or other beheaded saints for that matter), the materializing ghostly face indexed, in theory, an original body and presence. In this sense, the veiled faces and disembodied heads of the séance suggested relics of past life and fragments of a lost whole that was symbolically restored during the séance.

The ectoplasmic apparitions of the séance, despite consisting of fleeting scraps of matter that disintegrated and vanished, ultimately pointed to the once-living and whole human body. The materialization of human limbs and fleshy matter, much like the appearance of disembodied heads, underscored a fundamental link between spiritualism and corporeality. The second chapter of this study examined, among other things, the role of bodily contact within the séance experience, as ghosts frequently appeared to not only manifest themselves in material ways, but to assert their presence with great physical force (and at times with a sense of mischief). I have also suggested that the materialization of bodily parts within the framework of the séance evoked theatrical scenes of hysteria or childbirth. The spectral parts born from these scenes, however, were additionally closely aligned with the visual traditions of death and remembrance that I consider here.

The appearance of small hands and limbs, as well as ambiguous fleshy body parts, featured consistently within the séances of Eva C. and Eusapia Palladino. In chapter two,
several such examples were noted, insofar as they shed light on the dialogue between mediumship and childbirth. The materialization of bodies and bodily parts, however, was a particularly complex aspect of the séance performance – one which incorporated a spectrum of iconographic concepts and traditions. The case of Florence Cook had first introduced the fully embodied materialization to the spiritualist séance (wherein full figures draped in white garments appeared, and even stepped out from behind the curtains), and mediums such as Eva C. also took up this practice on occasion.\footnote{At a séance during November 1909, for instance, Schrenck Notzing witnessed the apparition of a specter, clad in light grey and white material, which stood within the cabinet, visible through the gap in the cabinet curtains. At the time he stated, “I thought I recognized the medium’s face, and could distinctly see a turban covering the head.” Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 45-46.}

Mediumship in the early years of the twentieth century, however, had shifted toward materialization phenomena and ectoplasm-centred séances. Within the category of what might be termed “corporeal ectoplasms,” there were, in addition to disembodied heads and facial imprints, an especially large number of ghostly hands that made their appearance within the cabinet. The materialization of outstretched hands from the other side gave the impression of the dead physically “reaching out” to the living, as well as emphasizing a sense of reanimated material presence and touch.

During a sitting with Eva on November 25, 1909 (previously noted in chapter two), Schrenck Notzing recorded one of the first sightings of a ghostly hand within the séance.\footnote{Ibid., 48. Schrenck Notzing notes that he did not personally witness the apparition, but that it was observed by others present. It is difficult to make out the hand-shaped form within the resulting photograph.} A hazy photograph taken on the occasion reveals the vague shape of a hand, visible at the upper left (fig. 58). The ensuing materializations progressed from misty vapours to substantial forms, and seemed to reflect a series of transformations from the immaterial and indefinite to the material and solid. Schrenck Notzing writes, for
instance, of dissolving, smoky, and barely tangible apparitions that appeared to radiate
out from the medium’s body, “probably influenced by unconscious volitional
impulses…finally flowing back into the organism.”88 As the séance progressed, he
observed spirit materials that were endeavouring to solidify into human parts. “In this
sitting,” he wrote, “the grey material repeatedly assumed a spherical shape, a more solid
white nucleus formed within it, in size and shape like a human head, while the outer parts
appeared to change themselves into veils and textile fabrics.”89 Ectoplastic
transformations such this underlined the fundamentally creative and “reanimating” nature
of the séance, as grey shapeless matter assumed recognizable form, akin to God’s original
molding of life out of formless clay. The moment of creation that transpired within the
cabinet, however, was one of spiritual resurrection, articulated in material form.

The outreached hands of spirits were reminiscent of the idealized deathbed scene
of eighteenth-century literary conventions, wherein the moment of death was imagined
with gathered loved ones and awaiting angels crowding around the beloved dying
figure.90 Outstretched hands and moments of contact between the living and dead also
commonly figure in artistic representations of purgatory (fig. 59), wherein the dead are
welcomed by the souls in limbo.91 Images of the Madonna of the Girdle, in which the
Virgin is portrayed handing down her cloth girdle from heaven, as material proof of her
divine presence (fig. 60), similarly capture a scene of communion between the spiritual
and terrestrial realm. Interestingly, the girdle relic of the Madonna was frequently

88 Ibid., 49.
89 Ibid.
90 Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body; 77-79. Bronfen cites a number of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-
century literary examples of deathbed scenes that convey a return to order, suggesting a psychological
function in response to the traumatic chaos of death.
91 See Ariès, Images of Man and Death, 152-153.
depicted as a long belt of fabric dangling down from the clouds like a fishing line, not unlike the cords of ectoplasmic cloth that occasionally materialized in the séance cabinet.\(^\text{92}\) The Madonna’s gesture also parallels those of conjured spirits in the séance who offered “material tokens,” such as flowers, from the other side.

The deathbed has thus been envisioned within various cultural traditions as a communal space shared by the living and the dead, as well as a space of transformation, capturing the laden moment in which animate life becomes inanimate. Such representations of the moment of death served a psychological and memorializing purpose – one that was eventually replaced with the advent of postmortem photography – in imagining a serene and peaceful death.\(^\text{93}\) In her insightful study of deathbed imagery, Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that although the physical reality of the decaying corpse was represented within certain contexts, it was generally circumvented in the eighteenth century in favour of a more aesthetically pleasing reality.\(^\text{94}\) The returning spirit of the séance developed upon this premise; in the séance the dead body was no longer a corpse at all, but a sentient force, reaching out to touch the living.

Interest in hands as a site of important spiritual contact was wide-ranging within spiritualist circles. Spirit photography, for instance, is riddled with images of disembodied spirit hands that supposedly became visible when the film was developed. William Mumler’s early spirit photographs included examples such as that of *Fanny Conant with Spirit Arms and Hands Showering Her with Flowers*, c.1870-75 (fig. 61).

\(^92\) I thank Alison Syme for suggesting this comparison. The legend of the Madonna’s girdle was associated with her Assumption into heaven, and she is typically depicted offering her girdle to Saint Thomas. For more see Jean K. Cadogan, “The Chapel of the Holy Belt in Prato: Piety and Politics in Fourteenth-Century Tuscany,” *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 60 (2009): 107–137.

\(^93\) Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body*, 77.

\(^94\) Ibid., 98-99. Bronfen describes, for instance, the tradition of wax cadavers that took shape in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and came to replace the actual body of the cadaver within the framework of medical study.
this example, Mumler’s image reveals the living subject encircled by transparent ghostly arms and hands that appear to reach down from the heavens, scattering spectral petals over her body. The act of scattering of flower petals was a familiar component of funeral rituals and served as a symbol of fond remembrance. The spirit’s gesture, if read in this light, is touchingly reciprocal, and suggests a moment of loving communion between the living and the dead. Examples of floral offerings carried by ghostly hands were widely reported by séance-goers as well. Occasionally fresh flowers from the other side materialized and were offered to the audience of the séance. Dr. Crookes, for example, wrote of being offered a flower by “a little hand, very beautifully formed” during his investigations of Florence. The hands of spirits were thus not only possible points of contact between the living and the dead, but conveyers of spiritual souvenirs.

A 1913 spirit photo of the American Reverend C. H. Cook illustrates a similarly affectionate gesture conveyed by a disembodied hand (fig. 62). In this case the spirit photographer Alex Martin purportedly took the photograph while the Reverend Cook rested drowsily in a chair. The resulting photograph shows a spirit face hovering in the space above the head of Cook. The suspended face was identified as that of Father Ryan, a priest and poet whose work Cook appreciated. A disembodied spirit hand is also visible, separated from Ryan’s head, which reaches out to touch Cook’s forehead, as if

---

95 The ritual of scattering flowers over the corpse traces back to ancient Greek and Roman culture, where flowers covered the bodies of the dead as they were carried to the funeral pyre and were scattered over graves. In the Victorian era, flowers played a prominent role in the symbolism of loss and mourning, as their fleeting beauty served as a reminder of life’s fleetingness. As previously noted, flowers were also aligned with the “fading beauty” messages found within memento mori traditions. For more on flower symbolism see J.E. Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971), 109-110. Mumler’s photograph of Fanny Conant is reproduced in Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 110.

96 This particular episode was recorded in Richet, *Thirty Years*, 492. It was also not uncommon for the flowers of the séance to remain invisible while haunting floral scents infused the darkness.
providing spiritual comfort.\textsuperscript{97} Cook’s photograph thus documents a gentle touch that is strikingly different from the harsh spirit blows that were sometimes dealt within the séance.

Spirit hands of the séance were, after all, far more substantial than their spirit photo counterparts. While photographed subjects sometimes described a faint sensation of being touched or a cold draft of air at the moment of being photographed, their experiences were far less tangible than those of séance-goers.\textsuperscript{98} In person, spirits oftentimes assumed an explicitly physical presence, as spirit hands tapped, grabbed, pinched, in addition to proffering gifts or writing messages. Some hands appeared as if fully alive with bone and flesh, while others resembled cloth or paper.\textsuperscript{99} Whether flesh or vapour, the hands of spirits consistently served as points of direct communication between the material and spiritual realms.

The spiritualist projects of the early twentieth century had also included a surge of photographic experimentation using x-ray technology, carried out by scientists such as Drs. Julian Ochorowicz, Gaston Durville, Roger Pillard, and Adrien Majewski. These scientists undertook a related project to photograph the hands of mediums with the aim of capturing the invisible traces of their so-called spirit guides or astral doubles, based on the ideoplastic theory that spirits were the externalized projections or shadowy “doubles” of the medium. This theory relied on the premise that reality was composed of a universal fluid, which flowed through all things and could assume different forms, rather like

\textsuperscript{97} This case is recorded in Gettings, \textit{Ghosts in Photographs}, 107-109.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. The Reverend Cook, for example, described feeling an icy sensation at the time that the photograph was taken.
\textsuperscript{99} The much later case of the Canadian medium Margery, which was discussed in the preceding chapter, highlighted an especially fleshy case of ectoplasm, formed in the shape of a human hand (fig. 44).
currents of energy or rays of electricity. Using radiographic techniques (which allowed for the visual penetration of solid bodies), occult circles undertook to penetrate this realm of invisible vital fluids. Dr. Ochorowicz, whose spiritualist investigations were noted in earlier portions of this study, was a chief investigator on this front. He sought to capture mediumistic radiographs, or, the visual imprint of mediumistic energy currents, on photographic plates. The resulting images showcase various shadowy hands (fig. 63) – spectral traces of human presence that closely mirror other ephemeral and “disembodied” séance phenomena.

As previously noted, many of Ochorowicz’s experiments had centred on the abilities of the renowned Polish medium, Stanislawa. She reportedly cried out in pain during one séance in 1911 while Ochorowicz was attempting to photograph her hand double, as if a layer of the medium’s body were being stripped away by the photographic doubling process. The scientist wrote that “the double normally retains the form and dimensions of the body, for the body is probably what determines and preserves this form. But if the double is temporarily separated from the body, it becomes physically freer while at the same time being subject to the influence of ideoplasticity.” On another occasion, Stanislawa reported seeing the shadow of a hand peel off from her body during the photographic process, in a near-literal illustration of the photographic uncanny. Her account of a shadowy hand-double eerily peeling away like a glove

100 Chéroux, “Photographs of Fluids,” 114-125; and Schrenck Notzing, Phenomena, 32-33.
101 Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 76.
102 Chéroux, “Photographs of Fluids,” 112. Ochorowicz, like many of his contemporaries, used a photographic process that mirrored the experiments with thought photography, whereby images were imprinted directly onto the plate without the use of a camera. The concept behind such an approach was that the medium’s energy would transfer directly onto the plate, thereby capturing her spirit double.
103 Krauss, Beyond Light and Shadow, 86-87.
104 Ibid., Chéroux, “Photographs of Fluids,” 112.
recalled Balzac’s theory of the thin layers of the soul that were stripped away by the photograph.

In other séances conducted under Schrenck Notzing, a number of decidedly corporeal and yet ephemeral spectral hands were witnessed. On October 22, 1910, for example, the scientist recorded a materialization within the cabinet, which began as a patch of indefinite grey matter and grew to take the form of a human hand. The hand “disappeared and reappeared, remaining visible hardly more than a second.” Schrenck Notzing then put out his own hands, which were touched by the apparition. He described the sensation thusly: “Several times (the hand) passed over my face, from right to left, and I had the sensation of being touched by a strongly developed, and rather large, cool and moist male hand. My forehead after this occurrence was moistened as if by a sponge.” During this session, Schrenck Notzing also observed another human part, of a “bright pink colour,” that emerged from beneath the curtain (fig. 64). This materialization he likened to “four fingers of a left male hand, lying on the floor, with only the upper two joints of the finger showing.”

On October 25, 1910, at a subsequent sitting with Eva, Schrenck Notzing observed yet another hand materialization. On this occasion, however, two spectral hands, resembling “a woman’s or child’s fists,” appeared as if clinging to the arm of the medium (fig. 65). In his records, Schrenck Notzing described the hands as follows:

The knuckles, and even the furrow between the fingers, were clearly recognizable, even at the first impression. The skin appeared a delicate pink in the red light of the room. Several times the medium exposed this plastic product to the light by the motion of her forearm, but never for more than a second, so that further observation of detail was not possible.

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., 65.
After this phenomenon disappeared from view, Schrenck Notzing reported that Mme. Bisson continued to suggest that the medium should again attempt to “form a hand,” until the scientist looked inside the cabinet and observed “three forearms lying in (the medium’s) lap.”  At a subsequent session that took place only days later, Eva conjured a similar materialization, which appeared as a hand resting upon her shoulder (fig. 66), as if a ghost were standing behind the chair.

In other instances, spirit hands hovered overhead within the cabinet, as in the case of a materialization that occurred on January 6, 1911 in which a male hand appeared as Eva moved the curtains to and fro (fig. 67). That so many spirit hands were small and childlike was perhaps as a reflection of the many lost children that drove believers to consult mediums. Schrenck Notzing’s text is filled with examples of small, child-sized hands and arms that appeared to reach out from the darkness of the cabinet. On one such instance, he described his observation of “the hand of a child of one or two years,” whose fingers stretched out in the direction of the audience. Schrenck Notzing’s repeated encounters with ghostly hands of all sorts within these sessions affirmed the significance of material presence and touch within the context of the spiritualist séance. The ghostly hand seemed to reach out momentarily from across an invisible barrier, offering a symbolic gesture of physical reunion and spiritual connection.

109 Ibid.
110 Ibid., 67.
111 Ibid., 86.
112 Spiritualist publications and the reports of the Society for Psychical Research indicate innumerable cases of ghostly children reaching out from the other side. Of course this may have also reflected the relative ease of using doll parts in the role of spirits or of employing small children behind the curtains. I have previously noted that there was an affinity between enchantment and childhood, as children (and women) were perceived as being more attuned to supernatural and spiritual forces. See Braude, Radical Spirits, 94-96.
113 Schrenck Notzing, Phenomena, 87.
In one particularly eventful sitting on November 11, 1910, Schrenck Notzing recorded a materialization behind the medium’s curtain of a small, child-sized arm and hand, which, according to the scientist, appeared to attach itself to the medium’s own elbow (fig. 68).\footnote{Ibid., 74.} Schrenck Notzing’s account ran as follows:

A hand and fingers were formed in a rudimentary and imperfect way at first. But, before our eyes, this semi-liquid substance, endowed with some kind of animal life, changed its appearance, until it assumed the form of a correctly-drawn left hand, somewhat smaller than the medium’s arm, and showing all the imperfections already mentioned as regards modeling, muscular development, detailed structure and nails.\footnote{Ibid., 74-75.}

Eva then proceeded to close and reopen the curtain, revealing that the hand had detached from the medium and had shifted position within the cabinet. It moved, and, according to Schrenck Notzing, beckoned to the gathered witnesses. Schrenck Notzing’s account of the hand’s apparent “animate life” highlighted the impression of reanimated living matter that was the cornerstone of the séance performance. A second hand, resembling that of a white male, was also produced subsequently, of which the scientist wrote,

We cannot say what material the hand is made of. There is no question of a glove, because the outlines corresponding to the muscular modeling are too detailed. Besides, seams would be visible in some place or other. Nor does the material appear to consist of paper, for the sheen of white paper is easily recognizable on a photograph, and the fibres are seen in magnification. The freely-exposed thumb does, indeed, produced a flat impression, especially in the stereoscopic picture. But the photograph shows other and very remarkable things. We see a white and closely-twisted tissue, resembling veiling or lace, the end of which passed round the middle finger of her right hand.\footnote{Ibid., 76.}

This larger hand in fact closely resembles a flat glove that has been draped across the medium’s head, as if the spirit hand were administering a tender touch (fig. 69). The medium Stanislawa produced a strikingly similar phenomenon several years later, conjuring a distinctly glove-like hand during a séance on February 15, 1913 that appears
draped across the medium’s forehead much like a soothing compress (fig. 70).\textsuperscript{117} Schrenck Notzing’s curious dismissal of the likelihood of a glove or constructed object (such as a paper tracing of a human hand) having been employed in the séance does little to nullify these distinct possibilities, especially in view of the consistently limited duration of the apparitions. The scientist even highlighted the consistently flat appearance of mediumistic hand materializations – a characteristic consistent with a glove or paper cut-out.

Linda Gazzera’s trances frequently produced disembodied hands as well. One such apparition materialized within a 1909 séance (fig. 71), during which a luminous hand formed above the entranced and prostrate figure of the medium, suggesting a gesture of blessing from the spirit realm. And another noteworthy apparition took shape during Richet’s previously discussed 1909 sitting with Linda. Immediately after the series of disturbances in the room had signaled a spirit presence (as the music box played and objects moved of their own accord), a small and childlike hand appeared. A photograph (fig. 72) captured the materialization, which, according to Richet, possessed perceptible nails and fingers.\textsuperscript{118} This small, disembodied member was also seemingly attached to the medium by a thin ribbon – rather like a fluidic umbilical chord, linking together mediumistic mother and spectral child. Despite the observation of such curious “connective tissue” in the hand-shaped materializations that were produced at times by Eva and Linda – a point that would presumably indicate trickery on the part of the medium – Schrenck Notzing and Richet both rejected this possibility.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 255-256.
\textsuperscript{118} Richet, \textit{Thirty Years}, 527.
While hands and arms were a particularly common motif within the séance, at times the spirit forms consisted of no more than fingers (fig. 73). During the course of one such sitting held on November 11, 1910, Schrenck Notzing requested a physical sample of the ectoplasmic parts as they materialized. While these requests were generally denied, this time he was able to secure a sample:

While the medium’s hands clutched the curtains and remained distinctly visible, I brought the open box, held in my right hand, close to the curtain, at the level of about a foot above (Eva’s) right hand, while, at the same time, Mme. Bisson held my right wrist. At that moment the other two persons saw three well-developed fingers coming out of the curtain and touching the box. I myself could only see one finger, since I sat too far towards the left. This finger entered the open box on its narrow side and executed several shaking motions.\(^{119}\)

Schrenck Notzing promptly closed the box and examined its contents, which appeared, according to him, to resemble fragments of human skin (fig. 74).\(^{120}\) These scraps, like ectoplasmic cloth, represented a material surface of the body and soul. The body fragments, collected within the box, strongly suggested the corporeal relics of saints – the bones and flesh – and established a link with both the original martyred body and with the spirit’s continued life beyond its physical shell. In the case of the moving finger within the box, however, the body of origin, however, was unknown. Moreover, in this case, dead flesh and spirit were seemingly reanimated.

Dr. Geley, too, repeatedly encountered materialized body fragments throughout his investigations with Eva. “I have very often seen complete representations of a face, a hand, or a finger,” he wrote.\(^{121}\) While the disembodied parts of the séance were tied to reliquary traditions, such materializations also unquestionably marked encounters with

---

\(^{119}\) Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 75.

\(^{120}\) Ibid. In an accompanying footnote, Schrenck Notzing included the following commentary: “Whether we have here to deal with tissue produced during the sitting, or introduced, in spite of the rigid control, or with an ‘apport’ (or paranormal transference) one cannot say with any certainty.”

\(^{121}\) Geley, *Clairvoyance and Materialisation*, 186.
the uncanny – the returning double. Geley rightly observed that “these are simulacra of fingers” rather than original appendages of the dead.\textsuperscript{122} Corporeal ectoplasmic parts brought the observer into close contact with something fundamentally other and destabilizing, akin to the reanimated dead son in the tale of “The Monkey’s Paw.”

Fleshy materialization served as a tangible relic of past life restored – albeit one that could not be fully grasped or retained. As with all séance phenomena, the return of the dead body was fleeting and fragmented. And although Schrenck Notzing’s analysis did not posit a direct link between the Christian and spiritualist traditions surrounding the physical body, both his written accounts and the resulting photographs pointed to the medium’s participation in a visual language of corporeal spirituality. Christian concepts of resurrection thus coexisted in the séance with the uncanny reality of reanimated dead flesh.

The appearance of the ghostly hand continued to play a symbolic role throughout the séances of the early years of the twentieth century, although its manner of materialization shifted. In \textit{Mysterious Psychic Forces}, Flammarion described new modes of imprinting the spirit through materials such as clay, putty, and paraffin wax that were implemented by the mediums of the day.\textsuperscript{123} Within the realm of mediumship, these methods of capturing spirit imprints through paraffin or clay molds came to effectively replace the brand of “ectoplasm theatre” that has been largely examined here.\textsuperscript{124} In creating these spirit impressions, the medium would typically put forth the request that the ghost dip its hands in melted wax. A hand-shaped mold would subsequently fall upon

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 188.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Flammarion, \textit{Mysterious Psychic Forces}, 22. Geley also addressed this subject in his investigations of Eva. See Geley, \textit{Clairvoyance and Materialisation}, 321.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} As noted in earlier chapters, ectoplasm had become less prevalent within séances by the 1920s and 1930s, as new modes of capturing and communicating with spirits emerged.
\end{itemize}
the table, like a discarded ghostly glove (fig. 75). Although involving altogether different media, these three-dimensional imprints in wax or putty represented yet another physical trace of the absent referent, mirroring the haunting photograph. Simply put, ghosts continued to “imprint themselves” upon visible surfaces, making their presence felt through emphatically material means.

Alternatively, the medium placed a block of putty or wax upon the table, and after the lights were extinguished and later relit, the yielding material would reveal the telltale impressions of ghostly hands or fingerprints (or other bodily prints) upon its surface (fig. 76). Flammarion discussed this latter process within the introduction of his text in the following way:

> The “spirits” have sometimes impressed on paraffin or putty or clay the print of their head or of their hands, - a thing that seems in the last degree absurd. But we bought some putty at a glazier’s and fixed up in a wooden box a perfectly soft cake. At the end of the séance there was there was the imprint of a head, of a face, in this putty. In this case…I am absolutely certain there was no trickery.

In this instance, Flammarion had recorded the facial imprint of a ghost that bore a suspicious resemblance to the presiding medium, Eusapia Palladino (fig. 77). In these cases, the handprint or facial imprint itself, received as it was upon a malleable surface, served as a substitute for the fleshy ectoplasmic apparitions of body parts within the cabinet. The spectral imprints on clay or putty, however, continued to affirm a material presence and a moment of physical contact between the spirit world and that of the living. They also indexed an original presence in a manner that explicitly recalled the closely related traditions of photographs, death masks, and relics. Traces of presence were enmeshed in each of these objects in slightly different ways, and yet all of them

---

ultimately bridged a gap between the seen and unseen worlds, and between presence and absence.

The many fragmented limbs and disembodied heads of the séance evoked the Freudian uncanny, a concept, which, as noted earlier in the chapter, was intrinsically tied to the fear associated with an encounter with the familiar, with the double, and ultimately, with our own otherness and deathliness. In his essay, Freud noted that “Dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist…all of these have something peculiarly uncanny about them, especially when…they prove capable of independent activity in addition.”[127] The uncanniness of the séance was of precisely this sort, as disjointed body parts moved about in the darkness, shadowy “doubles” took shape, objects shifted out of place, and the audience encountered death, in the shape of reanimated parts that appeared and disappeared within the otherworldly space of the cabinet. In this respect, the séance was a space of not only spectral encounters, but of interiorized revelation and self-reflection.

Materialization phenomena were mired in a profound sense of duality, oscillating between suggestions of spiritual transcendence and base corporeality. The disembodied heads that floated up out of the darkness illustrated this, as they simultaneously evoked the soul’s ascension and hinted at the macabre reality of the dismembered human body. Ectoplasm that resembled crumpled cloth similarly evoked both the intangible matter of memory and the human body’s more abject elements – decaying flesh or the body’s grisly interior parts. Ectoplasm was, in effect, a fluid body without definitive shape, without order – a material expression of commingled life and death.

I suggested in chapter two that Kristeva’s notion of the abject offers one possible interpretive lens for understanding the function of ectoplasm and mediumistic performance. In her essay, Kristeva also considers the implications of religious rituals surrounding the “relic body” – a point that bears examining here in light of the ectoplasmic relic. She notes that the Christian veneration of sacred relics hinged on a ritual purification of the abject corpse – one that transformed the horrific markers of death and mutilation into transcendent signs of salvation. Through the Christian sublimation of the abject body, the once-horrifying bits of flesh, hair, or blood acquired sacred power. This transformation was mirrored in the power of Christ’s resurrected body to purify and restore mortal transgression through the ritual of transubstantiation and communion. The notion of transformative and transcendent defilement was thus at the crux of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection on the cross, as it meant a redemptive rebirth of mortified skin and an overcoming of abject death. Ectoplasm might be read in analogous terms – as abject, dead flesh transformed and resurrected.

Despite its materiality, ectoplasm was also always out of reach (except in rare cases of physical contact). Elusiveness was central to the meaning of ectoplasm, and in some respects made it a surprisingly truthful “relic.” Self-doubt is palpable throughout the scientific narrative of spiritualism, and this is particularly evident in the many attempts made by Schrenck Notzing and others to analyze ectoplasmic matter. Ectoplasm’s elusiveness touched upon the irresolvable tension of the index.

---

128 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 119. The concept of transformative (and restorative) ritual is also thoughtfully discussed by Elaine Scarry in The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 292. Scarry suggests that the power of religious artifacts hinges on a ritualized remaking of human suffering that renders the site of loss into one of transcendence. Georges Bataille similarly reflected upon the reversal of transgression that occurs in the event of sacrificial death, stating that “here life is mingled with death, but simultaneously death is a sign of life, a way into the infinite.” Georges Bataille, Erotism: Death and Sensuality, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 91.
Photographs, relics, and imprints all provided a physical link with a lost original, and so hinted at the possibility of a return that can never be realized. Ectoplasm, in its inherent slipperiness, articulated this impossibility in its very fabric. In a theoretical sense, Schrenck Notzing’s search for tangible proof and visual certainty – his desire to touch and document the phenomena of the séance – spoke to a far more profound “photographic impulse” to subvert death and grasp truth, rather in the manner of the doubting Saint Thomas whose faith hinged on tactile proof through contact with Christ’s wounds.  

The diverse examples of bodily manifestations that have been examined within this chapter defined the spiritualist experience of the early twentieth century. The dead returned in a variety of forms, the majority of which were emphatically rooted to the material realm. Everyday objects moved, curtains billowed, and scraps of ectoplasm materialized, including, in their most developed stages, fully formed body parts. All of these phenomena represented an overturning of familiar order through spiritualist ritual, as at its core, the séance’s emphasis on materiality provided a tangible means of navigating the intangible spaces of death. Yet these important spiritual and metaphorical implications of ectoplasm were generally lost on their scientific and analytic audiences.

In many ways, séance phenomena reflected the haunted nature of the material world, as it was primarily through everyday objects and the familiar rubble of existence that the self separated itself from the immaterial otherness of death. In death, the self was transformed into matter and embodied by talismans, such as clothing, jewelry, and other

---

129 Barthes draws upon this analogy, as he suggests that the photograph offers a promise of visual certainty, and, as he put it, “a proof no longer merely induced: the proof-according-to-St.-Thomas-seeking-to-touch-the-resurrected-Christ.” Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80. I thank Adi Louria-Hayon for suggesting this idea as an analogy for ectoplasm.
material debris. Reminders of this tension were everywhere within spiritualism, as virtually every type of materialization was countered by a sense of impermanence and immateriality that itself reflected the very nature of memory and loss. Ectoplasm was the visual and material expression of loss – it was a way of visualizing and indexing absence, like a photograph. The bodily fragments and physical effects that appeared and disappeared within the séance, then, were intrinsically connected with the very fabric of memory and mourning. The appearance of fleeting faces and bodies within the darkness offered a visual analogy for the spontaneous resurfacing of memory and the flash of remembrance. The appearance of ghostly hands echoed the role of physical touch within the framing of memory, and offered a visual analogy for the desire that lay at the root of spiritualist belief to physically reconnect with the dead. Viewed through this lens, ectoplasm represented a tangible embodiment of loss and a material expression of memory. Far more than a spectacular effect, it functioned as a symbolic reversal of death through methods that explicitly recalled the Christian and cultural traditions surrounding material impressions of death.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Art of Mediumship

This project has sought to focus on the images of the séance – the documenting photographs and ectoplasmic impressions born of mediumistic performance – and to situate these within a framework of visual traditions. The position taken in this analysis is that the medium was an elusive and unorthodox artist, working wonders in the darkness and conjuring spectacular and fleeting artworks before a rapt audience. Her artworks took shape like half-formed ideas or passing memories rather than solid, finished products, emerging out of the medium and dissolving into nothingness. Like an artist giving shape to aesthetic visions, the medium constructed material (albeit elusive) expressions of her specters. Spirits seemed to call out for visual or plastic rendering. In the aforementioned case of the ghost of Little Stasia, for example, the spirit commissioned its own portrait photograph. The instances in which scientists were able to successfully procure photographs of mediums have enabled outside viewers and modern scholars to peer inside the cabinet and contemplate the apparitions anew. The resulting images are, without a doubt, hauntingly layered and visually complex artifacts. This
chapter sets out to look first at the art and artistry of the medium, and then to consider the modern and avant-garde implications of her work, especially pertaining to collage.\textsuperscript{130}

I do not wish to oversimplify the psychologically complex underpinnings of mediumship, or suggest that the medium was an artist in a strictly traditional sense. Whether her work was motivated by financial gain, status, genuine faith, or a combination of all of these factors, her actions and creations were nonetheless aligned in compelling ways with both fine art and popular visual culture. The creative dimensions of mediumship were, interestingly, not lost on the scientists who investigated spiritualism. Dr. Schrenck Notzing, in particular, voiced a clear aesthetic appreciation of the medium’s craft throughout the \textit{Phenomena of Materialisation}, and, as Eva C.’s case was especially well documented, this chapter looks primarily at her productions. The conclusions drawn from Eva’s work, however, are applicable to a wider field of mediumship in the early twentieth century.

Positioned as it was amid burgeoning modernity within Europe, the spiritualist movement emerged as an emphatically modern religion. Its associations with new technologies of photography and x-ray, for instance, made it a modern form of spirituality, aligned with avenues of science and empiricism, as well as the progressive ideas of the artistic avant-garde. As the first séances of the spiritualist movement were taking shape within dimmed parlours, modern art and science were engaged with parallel investigations into matters of the unconscious and the transcendent. The artistic interest

\textsuperscript{130} The links between mass media and mediumship have been touched upon in the respective studies of Andreas Fischer and Timon Kuff. Kuff, in particular, has arrived at a similar conclusion to the one I reach here with regard to the collage process that appears to be implicated in Eva’s materializations. See \textit{Okkulte Ästhetik}, 313-340; 426-443. Interestingly Kuff’s study also argues that there was a conscious and consensual engagement between the medium and the experimenter in many cases, and he positions Schrenck Notzing, in particular, as a skilled photographer with aesthetic purposes. See Kuff, 293-305. Although I am in agreement about the collaborative aspects of the séance, I ultimately position the medium as the key artist and agent within the séance.
in giving visual form to the unseen dimensions of human experience mirrored the broader projects of modernism and positivism, as outlined in chapter one, to reveal invisible dimensions of the world. In many respects, art and spiritualism thus walked a shared path, as artists dabbled in the world of spiritualism, and mediums, for their part, demonstrated a familiarity with modern art and visual culture.

In *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, the historian Corinna Treitel addresses the relationship between modernity and spiritualism, and points out that the spiritualist séance represented “a thoroughly modern route to the transcendent.” Spiritualism was one of a number of the modern initiatives that bridged the fields of science, technology, and art. Cameras and other modern communication technologies, as already noted, were front and centre, acting as mediums in their own right; and newfangled techniques of psychic/supernatural transmission, such as automatism – the practice of producing freely flowing words and images while in an entranced state – were used by innovative mediums, artists, and physicians alike. In many ways spiritualists believed in progress nearly as much as they believed in ghosts.

---

134 Automatic techniques, for example, were widely used within these respective fields to access either a spiritual or subliminal realm. During the 1930s André Breton published *Le Message Automatique* (1933), which drew upon his awareness of both mediumship and psychoanalysis, and shaped the development of Surrealist automatic techniques. Breton espoused the use of automatic writing and painting, as a means of accessing the unconscious. Automatic techniques thus became especially influential among the Surrealists in the years after WWII, as a way to produce art that was believed to be more uninhibited, irrational, and ultimately truthful. See Peter Gorsen, “The Entrance of Mediumism into the History of Art: Inexplicability – The Surrealist Key,” in *The Message*, 169-182.
To date there has been a considerable amount of scholarship devoted to the subject of the influence of spiritualist ideas on Western art and literature, especially in the occult revival of the nineteenth century. Mediumship held a particular appeal to artists who were intrigued by states of psychological liminality. Less attention has been paid to the skill of the medium or the artistry of ectoplasm, and yet the works that emerged out of the séance revealed at times both aesthetic creativity and judicious adaptations of artistic styles and motifs. Artists, for their part, have long been positioned as visionary outsiders and seers, and art has similarly been viewed as a revelatory medium, capable of opening windows into other worlds. The concept of the “artist as medium” took hold in a significant way in the artistic and literary circles of the 1880s and ‘90s, amid widespread interest in Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, Spiritualism, and other forms of mysticism and the occult – and it is this formation that guides my interpretation of the case studies that I have selected in this dissertation.

In her examination of the history of the “artist genius,” art historian Patricia Matthews suggests that the male artist was thought to possess an intrinsic ability to see an “interior reality” invisible to most laymen. This invisible, interior reality was revealed to

---

136 The concept of the painted image as a “window” into a new world, and the associated perception of the artist as visionary, was established during the Renaissance, as artists employed techniques of linear perspective and illusionism to create a sense of real space and depth within a two-dimensional plane. It was not until the artistic innovations of the nineteenth century that this classical model of vision was challenged. Crary has suggested that the shifts in nineteenth-century visuality were the result of a new kind of observer. See Techniques of the Observer. For more on the Renaissance visual model, see also Koerner, The Moment of Self Portraiture, 112.
137 The Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 under the leadership of Mme. Helena P. Blavatsky, whose key texts Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1888) represented monumental theses on the occult. Theosophy was largely centred on concepts of religious syncretism, cosmic duality, and spiritual evolution/transformation from matter to spirit. In art, these concepts were often translated into geometric and abstract principles. These interests were reflected primarily in the Pre-Raphaelite, Symbolist, and later, the Orphist movements. These short-lived artistic groups enthusiastically embraced syncretic religious themes, derived largely from Theosophical beliefs. See Tuchman, ed., The Spiritual in Art; and Fauchereau & Pijaudier-Cabot, eds., L’Europe des esprits, 131-176, 227-265.
the artist through extase – a transcendant and revelatory state akin to madness. The correspondence between this artistic ideal and the spiritualist medium was self evident. The visionary artist and the medium, like other prophets and seers, harkened back to the Platonic concept of a philosopher king, who, through a process of philosophical meditation could behold a radiant realm of higher forms beyond the shadows of the material world. The influence of the occult on avant-garde art has inspired several major retrospective art exhibitions and accompanying catalogues in recent decades, including The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 (1986), Okkultismus und Avantgarde: von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900-1915 (1995), Lost Paradise: Symbolist Europe (1995), and L’Europe des esprits, ou, la fascination de l’occulte, 1750-1950 (2011). These catalogues deftly trace the influence of occult concepts and themes within key art movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and lay out the spiritual undercurrents of abstraction.

Many artists personified a bridge between spiritualism and art. The prominent Czech Symbolist, František Kupka, for instance, worked for many years as a practicing medium, while simultaneously carrying out experiments in abstract painting – works which sought to reveal mystical insights through geometric form. Kupka was among a number of artists who were closely involved with spiritualism and the Theosophical

138 Patricia Matthews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999). Matthews’ study examines the particular role of the artist-genius within French Symbolism. She notes that so-called primitives or savages could also access the realm of the Absolute, but they (like women) lacked the intellectual capacity to communicate these ideas through art. It therefore remained a privileged gift of European men.

139 Tuchman, ed., *The Spiritual in Art*; Clair and Théberge, *Lost Paradise*; Bernd Apke et al., eds., *Okkultismus und Avantgarde*; and Fauchereau and Piaudier-Cabot, eds., *L’Europe des esprits*. There are many areas of intersection between these catalogues, with a number of chapters in each text devoted to the prominent influence of spiritualism, mysticism, and mediumship within artistic movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

His early painting *The Dream* of c. 1909 (fig. 78), explicitly points to these interests, as it depicts the dark, earthly bodies of two conjoined sleeping lovers, whose spirits appear to merge together overhead in a vibrant and stylistically abstracted expression of immaterial union. Kupka’s image captures in paint the separation of spirit and matter, and the convergence of separate planes of existence, loosely recalling the transparent ghosts of Mumler’s photographs who hovered above the bodies of the living. Although titled *The Dream*, the painting might easily be read as an image of physical death and spiritual return, or as a moment of entranced revelation.

Long before the Surrealists began experimenting with trance and automatism, a number of “medium artists” employed such techniques for spiritual purposes. The work of the medium-artist and spirit photographer Georgiana Houghton offers another fascinating example of mediumistic art that appeared to channel spirits and modern artistic style. Houghton produced large numbers of automatic drawings and paintings, most often resembling abstract cosmic and floral motifs, which she claimed were directly guided by spirits. In a watercolour and ink spirit drawing of 1867 (fig. 79), Houghton created a surface of non-objective spirals and vortexes that vaguely resemble a

---

141 In addition to Kupka, there were many late nineteenth and early twentieth century artists who were closely affiliated with the Theosophical Society, including, for instance, Theo van Doesburg, Wassily Kandinsky, Edvard Munch, Odilon Redon, Jean Delville, Maurice Denis, Paul Gauguin, James Tissot, Robert Delaunay, Paul Klee, and Paul Séruisier, to name only a few. Many of these artists were directly influenced by spiritualism as well, and used mediumistic techniques much like Kupka. Paul Klee, for example, used automatic trance states. For many artists, abstraction became a stylistic device for expressing invisible realities of the cosmic and spiritual plane. See Fauchereau and Pijaudier-Cabot, eds., *L’Europe des esprits*, 227-265, 278-80.
142 Georgiana Houghton became involved with the spiritualist movement around the year 1859 and exhibited her works on paper (which amounted to over one hundred and fifty pieces) during the 1870s. Houghton also wrote about her experiences with spiritualism in several texts, published during the nineteenth century, including *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance* (1881) and *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye* (1882). It is worth noting that there were other female “automatic medium artists” during this era. Another notable case was that of Mrs. Alaric Watts, which were discussed with interest by the London Society for Psychical Research in 1903. Her drawings were also published within the spiritualist journal *Light*. See “The Automatic Drawings of Mrs. Watts,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* XI (May 1903): 95-97.
disembodied human face. Many of her spiritualist drawings and photographs reflect a Christian theology underpinning her spirit revelations. This is evident in an automatic drawing titled *The Eye of God* of 1861 (fig. 80), for instance, as well as spirit photographs in which heralding angels appeared (fig. 81).\footnote{143}

In her *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings*, Houghton described feeling “St. John’s signal” during a mesmerized state, as the spirit communicated that “in love is the fulfilling of the law to every one who believeth.”\footnote{144} Her encounters with the spirit world were thus closely tied to Christ’s messages of forgiveness of sins and redemptive love. Automatic art and spirit photography, for Houghton, were material means of channeling religious truth and receiving the imprint of divine presence. Her works were exhibited with an associated catalogue at the New British Gallery in London in 1871.\footnote{145} The traditional figure of the artistic muse was replaced within Houghton’s work by unseen spirits, who transmitted religious messages and mystical revelations. Houghton’s unrestrained style of swirling lines foreshadowed the later automatic drawings and paintings of the Surrealist artists André Masson and Max Ernst, which were influenced by the entranced creations of mediums.\footnote{146}


\footnote{144} Houghton, *Chronicles*, 229.


\footnote{146} Surrealist automatism borrowed from psychological techniques such as word association and ink blot techniques, as well as the entranced communications with spirits used by spiritualist mediums, in order to express intuitive realities. Artists often tried to evoke somnambulist or dissociated states. Masson, for example, was known for forcing himself to work under extreme physical conditions including starvation, sleep deprivation, and drug use. Artists also used a variety of other methods to produce irrational and chance artworks, often through techniques like free association drawing or haphazardly dropping materials
The spiritualist artist Albert von Keller, a contemporary and associate of Schrenck Notzing, is an interesting case of mediumistic art directly influenced by the work of mediums. Keller was familiar with spiritualism and Schrenck Notzing’s work in particular. The artist completed several painted reproductions of séance photographs and incorporated automatic techniques into his own painting, often working in a trance.\textsuperscript{147} In a painting titled \textit{Spiritistischer Apport eines Bracelets (Spiritualist Telekinesis of a Bracelet)} of 1887 (fig. 82), for instance, Keller produced a painted version of a c. 1887 photograph of the medium Lina who had been hypnotized by Schrenck Notzing. In both the original photograph and in Keller’s portrait, she appears in a somnambulistic trance, draped in a white cloth garment. Keller’s painting captures the medium with an intensely focused gaze, with one raised hand, and the other hand resting upon the table and gesturing towards the gold bracelet on the glass table. She appears transfixed in the liminal state between wakefulness and sleep, in the psychically laden moment of conjuring the gold bracelet. According to his biographers, Keller was not merely interested in reproducing painted versions of spiritualist photographs, but was engaged in a more personal, mystical search for truth through both artistic and spiritualist mediums.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{147} Albert von Keller’s work is examined in Jo-Ann Birnie and Gian Casper Bott, eds., \textit{Séance: Albert von Keller and the Occult} (Seattle: Frye Art Museum, distributed by University of Washington Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 30-32. Keller was not the only artist to overtly mine spiritualist imagery and draw inspiration directly from séances and spirit photographs. Another notable example was the nineteenth-century French painter James Tissot, who similarly participated in séances and painted mediums and apparitions. Tissot was in fact noted within Richet’s commentary in \textit{Thirty Years of Psychical Research}, as the artist hosted a number of important séances at his home. See Richet, \textit{Thirty Years}, 536. For more on the influence of spiritualism among nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists, see Fauchereau and Pijaudier-Cabot, eds., \textit{L’Europe des Esprits}, 131-176.
Instances of entranced authorship or performance closely mirrored the ambiguous “passive agency” of mediumship (a subject previously addressed in chapter two). Spirit guides, for instance, assisted the pen of Clara Eysell-Killburger, a female poet whose automatic trance poetry was said to have been produced under spiritual influence.\(^{149}\) And the early twentieth-century French “dream dancer” Madeleine Guipet represented another form of unconscious performance, accomplished while in a somnambulistic state.\(^{150}\) Female artists, writers, or speakers whose work was the product of channeled spirit forces were not “active authors” per se, but were instead the mediators by or through which unseen authors worked. In this way, many female mediums circumvented traditional gender restraints by channeling spirit controls and unfeminine behaviours from beyond the veil. There were thus liberating effects that accompanied states of female unconsciousness, and yet, in many cases entranced women were also subject to an intense male scrutiny and voyeuristic gaze.\(^{151}\)

Guiding spirits (or spirit controls) within the séance loosely mirrored the mythical tradition of the Muses, allegorical figures widely represented within the arts, who offered inspiration to the artist. In their Greek mythic origin, the Muses were female goddesses of art, poetry, music, and literature. They were also feminine counterparts to the male artist,

\(^{149}\) Occasionally mediums produced poetry through automatic techniques, as a means of conveying messages from the other side. See Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 111-114.

\(^{150}\) Guipet was said to have been an untrained dancer, who would dance and play music through the control of an outside spirit agency. Treitel writes that “Guipet’s creative unconscious commanded the scene, and in the face of her talent the men of the Psychologische Gesellschaft had to be content to sit, literally at her feet, and watch the performance” Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 117. Schrenck Notzing studied the case of Madeleine Guipet in 1904 and assisted with arranging for her public performances in theatres in Munich, which thousands attended. See Schrenck Notzing, *Die Traumtänzerin Magdaleine G. Eine Psychologische Studie über Hypnose und dramatische Kunst* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1904), 21-22; Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 114-117; and Kuff, *Okkulte Asthetik*, 218-238.

\(^{151}\) The matter of gender and performance in the séance is addressed in chapter two. See also Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 1-17.
believed to inspire the brush or quill. The artist’s call upon the Muse was therefore one of divine intercession and guidance through the artistic process. The “medium-artist” stemmed from this tradition of inspiration, although the spirit guide of the séance was in many ways different from the muse, as she was believed to contact and speak through the medium in order to convey messages to others. The medium was thus (seemingly) thrust into a more passive role in relation to the acting spirit. The inspired artist conversely received the gift of inspiration, like a divine blessing, while retaining a greater degree of agency. In many literary examples, the artistic muse also assumed the form of a dead loved one, as in the case of Danté’s beloved and much lamented Beatrice or Edgar Allen Poe’s dead wife, Virginia. In such cases, the distinction between the ghost and the muse was somewhat more uncertain.

Moreover, ectoplasm/ideoplasm – the “idea cloth” that billowed out of the medium – loosely correlated with traditional depictions of the Muses draped in flowing robes. John Singer Sargent’s painting of Apollo and the Muses (c. 1916-20), for example, depicts the dancing muses in long, draped garments of white, circling around the deity of music and poetry (fig. 83). In Sargent’s work, the dresses create a rippling effect, as if the cloth itself were alive. The loose cloth that billows rhythmically in Sargent’s painting suggests a poetic dance of flesh, cloth, and music. His work is, in many ways, typical of representations of the Muses. The Italian artist Baldassare Peruzzi’s much earlier version of the Muses Dancing with Apollo, c. 1514-23 (fig. 84), for example, captured a similar symmetry and animation through fabric. Long, fluid robes were consistently the telltale garments of the Muses. Such piles of undulating fabrics allude to the “shapeless matter”

---

152 For a useful discussion of the concept of inspiration, see Warner, Phantasmagoria, 61-80.
153 These examples of ghostly muses are discussed in Bronfen, Over Her Dead Body, 360-383.
of raw creative product that will ultimately be given shape at the hands of the artist. In this sense, the Muses were embodiments of fluid artistic processes rather than completed, static works. The ancient Greeks had in fact conceived of the artistic process as a melding of inspiration and creative thought, originating from memory. Memory, in this sense, was the raw “fabric” of creation itself. Ideoplasm poetically embodied these ideas, as “remembered images” seemingly blossomed out of the psychic and spiritual ether to form insubstantial works in flux. Thus, in its formlessness and fluidity, ideoplastic cloth loosely suggested a material expression of metaphorical fabric.

The metaphor of inspiration was also literalized within examples of ectoplasmic hands in the séance. In chapter three I described a number of materializations of disembodied/dismembered spirit hands, and suggested that these fragmented parts represented “reanimated relics,” reaching out to the living from across the veil. It is also possible, however, to understand such ghostly hands alongside those of the artist. Within art historical traditions of self-portraiture, for example, the artist’s hands are often a site of particular emphasis, transfixed in the very act of forming new life out of raw material. The nineteenth-century artist, Théophile Bra, for example, produced a number of paintings and drawings that centred on the artist’s hand as a matrix of spiritual power. His drawing *Le Torrent des Esprits* (fig. 85), illustrates a disembodied hand with circular ripples of energy emerging from each fingertip. In a painting titled *Ma Main*, c. 1905-06 (fig. 86), Pablo Picasso similarly captures the artist’s own hands grasping at indistinct and formless matter, recalling the outstretched hand of God in Genesis that similarly gave

---

154 Kuryluk, Veronica and her Cloth, 181.
155 Ibid.
156 Fauchereau and Piaudier-Cabot, eds., L’Europe des Esprits, 96-98.
form and meaning to shapeless substance.\textsuperscript{157} And in 1926, the artist Wassily Kandinsky addressed a similar theme in 	extit{Empreintes des Mains de Kandinsky} (fig. 87), a work that reflected the artist’s view that one’s hands were capable of producing a vibration in the soul. Here he produced a powerfully minimalist image of his own handprints on a white background, as if intent on capturing those very “soul vibrations.”\textsuperscript{158}

Hands and fabric were not the only conduits for inspiration. Within the séance, the medium’s performative body language also evoked a subtle correlation with the tradition of the “inspired body.” In their respective texts Schrenck Notzing, Flammarion, and Richet repeatedly describe their observations of strange states of languid tension occupied by the entranced mediums. The medium’s body, in these moments, signaled the spirit’s imminent presence and mastery, as her drooping head and closed eyes implied spiritual readiness. As described in chapter two, the medium’s theatrics frequently recalled the abandoned gestures of the hysteric – and for those seeking to pathologize mediumship during this period, these physical theatrics were read as manifestations of psychological disturbance. Her bodily enactment of spiritual presence, however, simultaneously bespoke a close affinity with mythical and mystical allusions. At times oscillating between twisting contortions and passive limpness, the medium’s body represented a transformative and intermediary site of revelation and spiritual incarnation.

In this sense, mediumistic fits closely mirrored the religious ecstasy associated with Christian mystics, such as Saint Teresa of Avila, a figure widely represented within the arts (fig. 88). Teresa’s religious ecstasy was experienced as a physical encounter with

\textsuperscript{157} A watercolour study for Picasso’s rather obscure painting is in the collection of the Prints and Drawings department at the Art Gallery of Ontario, where I had the good fortune to stumble across it while conducting a review of their twentieth-century works on paper.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 24-25.
Christ and a moment of dramatic spiritual embodiment.\textsuperscript{159} The writings of the medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen described similar visions of Christ manifest internally within the female body, recalling Christ’s earthly incarnation in the womb of Mary.\textsuperscript{160} As observed in chapter two, mystics, madwomen, and mediums all exhibited similar “symptoms” or behaviours, as doctors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were quick to point out.\textsuperscript{161} The medium was thus aligned with a visual history of ecstasy, inspiration, and incarnation. While within the spiritualist context, the medium was strictly understood as an intermediary of spirits, she nevertheless embodied a close proximity to the traditions of the manifest divine spirit within female mystics and the inspiration of the Muse.

In \textit{Phantasmagoria}, Warner examines the meaning surrounding representations of the feminine ecstatic body and connects this trope with a long artistic tradition of recumbent, eroticized women of ambiguous psychological states, exemplified by the famous dreaming damsel in Henri Fuseli’s \textit{The Nightmare} of c. 1781 (fig. 89). Warner suggests that the image of the ecstatic and half-conscious woman, which the medium

\textsuperscript{159} The ecstatic vision of Saint Teresa was a common motif in art and often carried implicit erotic undertones. Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s marble rendering of \textit{The Ecstasy of Teresa} (c. 1647-52) is perhaps the most famous example. Teresa described her spiritual visions in \textit{The Interior Castle} (1577). For more on Teresa, see Andrea Janelle Dickens’ thorough discussion in \textit{The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages} (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

\textsuperscript{160} Hildegard of Bingen, \textit{Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias}, trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bisoph (New York: Paulist Press and the Abbey of Regina Laudis, 1990), 109-129. There were a number of medieval female mystics who experienced the divine in an explicitly corporeal way; these cases are examined by Dickens in \textit{The Female Mystic}. For an interesting examination of the “mapping” of spirits on the female body within early modern cases of spiritual/demonic possession, see Nancy Caciola and Moshe Sluhovsky, “Spiritual Physiologies: The Discernment of Spirits in Medieval and Early Modern Europe Preternature,” \textit{Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural} I, no.1 (2012): 1-48. During the late nineteenth century, the automatic medium Hélène Smith spoke in tongues similar to those of religious ecstasies. Her case was observed by Professor Theodore Flournoy, who reported her episodes of speaking in so-called “Martian language.” Hélène was subsequently of interest to the Surrealists as well. See “Mediums of the Past,” 858-861.

\textsuperscript{161} Freud was among the physicians who drew a link between religious fervour and sexual pathologies. See, in particular, Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.”
enacted, was likely drawn from lingering beliefs surrounding the malleability of the female body, which made it impressionable and receptive to mediating states. The medium, in many ways, seemed to embody both spiritual fluidity and ecstatic inspiration, at once channeling and creating within the séance. In this sense, the dichotomy of inspired (male) artist and passive (female) Muse was often reversed through the subversive performances of female mediums. Behind the cabinet curtains, mediums habitually had the upper hand over their audiences, and it was by way of their elusive and inspired contortions that the medium concealed materials and evaded scrutiny.

The material works themselves – the faces and spectral scraps of the séance – suggested careful artistic construction and awareness of composition. Ectoplasm was also intrinsically linked with the artistic tradition of portraiture by virtue of its correspondence with the original portraits on cloth, made by the hand of God-the-artist. Schrenck Notzing’s written accounts contain passages that reflect an explicit mindfulness on the part of the author of the links between mediumship and art, as he peppered his observations with subjective assessments of the aesthetic beauty and composition found in examples of ectoplasm. In this sense, Schrenck Notzing occupied a twofold role as scientific observer and connoisseur (and aesthete) – a point which bears further exploration.

During the course of several of Eva’s séances that took place in June and July 1912, the medium produced ectoplasmic portraits that were identified as both the bearded

---

162 Warner notes that themes of entranced, ecstatic bodies became especially popular in the 1800s through the literature of writers such as Edgar Allen Poe and Lewis Carroll; see *Phantasmagoria*, 52-53. For an insightful discussion of the ecstatic female body and its intersections with mysticism and sexuality, see also Joy Dixon, “‘Dark Ecstasies’: Sex Mysticism, Psychology in Early Twentieth-Century England,” in *Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History*, Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan, eds. (Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2014), 256-271.
face of Mme. Bisson’s nephew, Georges, noted in chapter three, as well as that of her late husband, Alex Bisson (fig. 90). As Schrenck Notzing deliberated upon the question of the identity of the spectral face that was believed to be that of Mme. Bisson’s late husband, he provided a lengthy account of its physical attributes:

Now we might ask: Is this a portrait of the deceased at all? The author can answer this question in the affirmative by what he remembers of Bisson, and after the study of photographs. The picture shows the following: - Eva’s distorted face is turned to the right, while the portrait appears to lie on the left side of her head, or to be attached to it. The sharply contoured head is drawn in broad lines under the thick transparent veil, covering the whole flat surface. It is drawn as if by a heavy awkward hand of a sculptor making a charcoal drawing. The line of the eyebrows here also makes an obtuse angle, instead of being straight, as in the photographs from life. The eye-sockets, especially the left one, are so strongly marked by deep dark shadows that one might describe them as plastic. The expression of the eyes is extremely vivacious, especially in the left eye, which is less covered by veils. The nose appears to be rudimentary, and only a stump is seen. On the other hand, the falling line of the bushy moustache corresponds exactly to the photographs from life, and the building of the forehead, the eye-sockets, and especially the eyes, removes all doubt as regards the resemblance to Bisson. A piece of paper projects from the veil below. The arched forehead appears as if split by a broad vertical fissure in the middle. There are also three parallel creases crossing it downwards at equal intervals. The lower portion of the face vanishes under the veils.\footnote{163 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 170-71.}

The resulting photograph is exceedingly dark and its finer details are difficult to discern. Schrenck Notzing’s account, however, underlines that the observed face of the ghost Bisson resembles a reproduction of far cruder quality than a photograph, as he likens it to the awkward hand of a “sculptor making a charcoal drawing.”\footnote{164 There are, in fact, numerous instances throughout *Phenomena of Materialisation* where Schrenck Notzing makes reference to the “drawing-like” or “sketch-like” appearance of an ectoplasmic imprint. He repeatedly acknowledges the constructed, artistic, and painterly aspects of various apparitions throughout the text, and yet maintains a remarkably consistent belief in their authenticity as genuine psychic phenomena. It would seem, however, that for the scientist (and many of his colleagues) faith in empirical values, photographic truth, and scientific methods – the latter of which included rigorous controls and searches of the medium – rendered the question of fraud wholly unacceptable. In the case of the ghost Bisson, Schrenck Notzing’s pondering over whether it was or wasn’t the “real” face of the spirit points toward a personal struggle in maintaining a consistent position of skepticism or belief in the face of the visual evidence before him. The scientific séance photograph was thus as much a testament of faith in science as the spirits themselves.} Elements of the face appear unfinished, as if only a preliminary “sketch” of the spectral presence was able to
take shape. The incomplete quality, visible in this example, underscored the creative process at work within the séance, as the fragmented ghostly image was fixed in a moment of becoming. The effect produced, of a ghostly facial imprint emerging out of the medium’s own head, was one that symbolically evoked a moment of artistic inspiration, or the physical manifestation of an idea out of the mind of the medium.

Schrenck Notzing also directly compares aspects of the image to a photograph, suggesting that in his estimation the apparition rested somewhere between a drawing and a photograph, between pictorial likeness and a disjointed, collage-like construction. His deliberations on the nature and appearance of the ectoplasmic image are poetic in their way, reflecting a struggle with the process of both reading the imprint and determining its degree of realness. These struggles are evocative of the deliberations of the art connoisseur who, among other things, assesses the visual details of the artwork in order to assess its authenticity. They are also reminiscent of Roland Barthes’s philosophical search for the elusive lost essence of his mother within a box of photographs.165 Schrenck Notzing’s ruminations thus reflect the slippery nature of both human vision and photographic realism. He appears challenged at times by the attempt to reconcile his own memories and experiences of the séance with the resulting images, even resorting on occasions to producing hand-drawn versions of the events in cases where the camera was not quick enough to accurately capture the scene. In such instances Schrenck Notzing effectively acted in the role of artist, recording an impression of the medium’s handiwork.

Speaking of the ghostly manifestation of the late M. Bisson, Schrenck Notzing also suggested that

---

165 See Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, as well as the discussion of Barthes in chapter one.
In this production... an *artistic will* has attempted to materialize its interpretation, and has strongly emphasized the main points, in order to produce the desired resemblance, with the least expenditure of power. The present portrait is no doubt designed from nature, and not after photographs. In spite of its coarse imperfections it produces a much more living impression than the reproductions from life.¹⁶⁶

According to Schrenck Notzing, then, the imprinted image of the dead was born through a form of “psychical art” – a projected interpretation of the ghostly essence, as it were. This view of ectoplasm was in keeping with the scientist’s theory of ideoplasty, a term first introduced by Schrenck Notzing and discussed previously in this study. According to this theory, the oftentimes dubious appearance of ectoplasmic imagery was attributed to the medium’s ability to “absorb” outside influences – found, for instance, in contemporary popular imagery – and subsequently project these images outward as psychical ectoplasm, in turn shaping the appearance of the spiritual manifestations formed in the séance.¹⁶⁷ The medium’s séance creations, then, were akin to a living, evolving artform, born from conjoined psychical and artistic impulses.¹⁶⁸ The crude appearance of ectoplasmic imprints could thus be attributed to the nature of the mental-artistic process, rather than to human manipulation. And, the noted similarities between ideoplasms and images from print media, which will be examined presently, could also be attributed to the permeation of psychic-artistic influence.

In addressing the previously noted apparition of Georges Thurner (fig. 48), the nephew of Mme. Bisson, Schrenck Notzing claimed that “the author of this head is less

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 29-32.
¹⁶⁸ See Fischer, “In the Darkroom of a Medium Researcher,” 183-86; Wolfram, *Stepchildren of Science*, 131-176; and Kuff, *Okkulte Ästhetik*. Since their initial publication Schrenck Notzing’s photographs have been a source of debate and speculation. In recent years, several scholars have begun to address more specifically the artistic undercurrents in his work. In his essay, Fischer emphasizes the artistic view of mediumship that is taken by Schrenck Notzing within his text. Wolfram also thoughtfully explores Schrenck Notzing’s use of photography and the pictorial appearance of mediums. And Kuff’s study examines, among other things, the cultural and artistic parameters of Schrenck Notzing’s work.
concerned with anatomical accuracy and technical completion than with the psychical expression. In spite of the simple realism in the means of presentation (drawing supported by sculptural presentation and decorative veil ornaments), the desired impression is produced, and the essential character is maintained.\textsuperscript{169} Time and again, the scientist thus donned the cap of aesthetician, appraising the visual merit or lack of finish within the ectoplasmic materializations, and attributing “authors” to them. Schrenck Notzing’s perception of ideoplasmic creations was, however, inconsistent. Throughout the \textit{Phenomena of Materialisation}, he periodically discusses “séance works” as if they were constructed aesthetic objects, while at other times views them as the products of a psychical-spiritual – or on rare occasion, entirely supernatural – origin. Within this tangle of deductions, it is his references to artistry and creativity that are especially revealing for a study such as this.

In several places within the text, Schrenck Notzing explicitly describes mediumship as a “creative process,” a description that is, in my view, accurate. In his commentary on a sitting that involved Eva and Mme. Bisson from November 12, 1911, the scientist wrote that “the creative process, which requires the undisturbed passivity of the somnambulist, was interrupted.”\textsuperscript{170} I have already described how the mediumistic ritual was an echo of the photographic development process, whereby ghostly images were formed out of darkness. In my first chapter I noted that ectoplasm was often viewed, through a scientific lens, as a “primordial material,” aligned with other intangible ingredients in the stew of life.\textsuperscript{171} Its appearance of essential materiality equally suggested

\textsuperscript{169} Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 170.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 125.
\textsuperscript{171} This was articulated most clearly by Geley, although similar theories were espoused by others in his field.
an association with the unformed substances of artistic creation – both in terms of the raw
media (such as paint, paper, and clay) used by artists and the evolving, animated mental
processes of inspiration. Ectoplasm was in many ways a living artform and a “medium”
of creation in more than one sense.

The séance was, after all, a birthplace of not only visiting specters, but of images. Many ectoplasmic images were finely wrought and others pointed to judicious
adaptations of aesthetic traditions (including instances of overt “borrowing” wherein the
ectoplasmic imprint was recycled from known visual sources). Schrenck Notzing,
interestingly, openly acknowledged these aspects of ectoplasm, often referencing an
“artistic will” in ectoplasm. I have sought to unpack some of the artistic references that
materialized in the séance.

During one of her séances with Schrenck Notzing on December 30, 1911 Eva
produced an apparition that resembled an attractive female face on a fragment of
ectoplasm, which was identified as a ghost named “la petite Estelle.”172 Madame Bisson
reported multiple encounters with Estelle while holding private séances with Eva, and the
face of Estelle reappeared within a number of subsequent sessions with the medium,
Madame Bisson and Dr. Schrenck Notzing in attendance.173 Such reappearances of
ghosts naturally suggested a returning spirit, but they might also be viewed as a repeated
visual motif within the medium’s oeuvre. Although the photographs from the December
30th séance depict what appears to be a two-dimensional female face with attached cloth,
Schrenck Notzing expressed astonishment at the “lifelike qualities” that it possessed. “I
was so surprised,” he wrote, “by the natural colour and the life-like expression, that my

172 This identification was made by Eva herself.
173 These details appeared in a letter written by Mme. Bisson, dated December 18, 1911. Schrenck
Notzing, Phenomena, 137.
first impression was that it might the...head of the medium swathed in material." Yet the image of Estelle possesses clear markers of being a constructed object with a specific iconographical subtext.

In one of the first photographs taken of Estelle on this occasion (fig. 91), the specter appeared to emerge from Eva’s head, creating a familiar “Janus” double-headed effect. As noted in the preceding chapter, Eva had produced several materializations that created an appearance of conjoined heads. Schrenck Notzing describes an example from an earlier sitting on November 1, 1911, during which the ghost appeared in similar fashion. “The neck of the apparition,” he wrote, “visible along its whole length, is attached like a stalk to Eva’s neck, as if growing from it, and this gives the picture the character of a Janus-double head.” The Janus motif in the séance evoked its classical Roman origin, suggesting a figure straddling two planes of existence – an impression that echoed the spiritual/material pairing of medium and ghost. The two heads point in different directions, as if peering simultaneously toward the spiritual beyond and the earthly realm – echoing the faces of Janus, which looked to both the past and the future. Schrenck Notzing observed the “dreamy expression” of this particular spirit face, whose eyes are half-closed and shadowy, intimating otherworldly dimensions and mystic revelation.

Schrenck Notzing’s commentary on the photograph of Estelle includes the pronouncement, “The observer’s curiosity as to how these two heads are joined is left

---

174 Ibid., 138.
175 Ibid.
176 Janus was a Roman god who is traditionally represented as two faces joined together, facing opposite directions (symbolizing the past and future). The Janus head has historically functioned as a complex iconographic symbol, but it generally signifies duality and union. For more, see Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols*, 161-162.
177 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 139.
unsatisfied. The magnified picture taken by the inner camera corresponds, by virtue of its finer drawing, to the classical profile, and recalls heads on Etruscan and Greek vases – as a work of art it is an excellent production…In beauty of form and purity of drawing, this face stands in the foremost rank.”\textsuperscript{178} His analysis thus draws particular attention to the aesthetic merit of the ectoplasm in question and appears to position the profile of Estelle within an explicitly art historical context, alongside other classical portraits. This sort of commentary is interspersed throughout the otherwise scientific notations within the *Phenomena of Materialisation*. Schrenck Notzing’s evaluations of the medium’s work rely on traditional aesthetic criteria, but occasionally mark points of tension within his text, as empirical language and methodology momentarily slips into more subjective and emotive language.

However one ultimately reads the example of Estelle, it is apparent that the ghostly face reproduced and was received in terms of aesthetic and symbolic codes. And while the example of this “Janus spirit” offers an intriguing and rare glimpse of subtle classical influences within the séance, the conjured materials found in early twentieth-century mediumship more often suggested modern references drawn from popular print culture and avant-garde art. This was perhaps fitting in light of the modern parameters of spiritualism. The ensuing examples delve more deeply into the “modern aesthetics” of the medium’s handiwork.

I begin by revisiting a photograph taken during the séance of November 22, 1911 (fig. 47), which was discussed in chapter three, in which Eva had produced an ectoplasmic apparition a two-dimensional female face, resembling a fashionable model from a modern magazine. The face appeared upon a piece of cloth-like ectoplasm, which

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
emerges out of Eva’s head much like the case of Estelle. The photograph depicts Eva with grimacing face, parting the curtain to reveal the spectral creation. What interests me is that in Schrenck Notzing’s account of the materialized face, he specifically draws attention to its “sketchy” and “unfinished” appearance, as it materialized and dematerialized before his eyes. The face was formed, then, in the manner of a work of art, unfolding in rough, unfinished fragments as if an artist were actively working through the creative process, with preliminary sketches and drawings that might inform a later finished work.

Schrenck Notzing’s commentary ruminates upon the aesthetically pleasing dimensions of the ectoplasm in question:

In an artistic frame of white veils we see two-thirds of a pretty female face, appearing to be about half the size of Eva’s. The forehead, left temple, and ear are covered by the veil, and the right eye and the right temple by hair hanging down […] The left eye, directed towards me and inwards, is as natural and vivacious in expression as it would appear in a good photograph from life, and seems designed accordingly. With the help of marks, reproduced photographs, or hairdressers’ models of heads, a similar result cannot, in the opinion of artists and other experts, be obtained. The excellent drawing of the face, the softness of the finely-modeled form of the small head, lightly inclining to the right, the shadows everywhere strictly corresponding to the direction of the incident light, increase the impression of natural truth. In spite of the smallness of the face, it corresponds more to the type of a young woman’s than a child’s face. The pretty mouth, with the dimples in its corners, the slender and regularly-built nose, the rounded and rather broadly developed chin, the well-nourished curve of the cheek, together with the vivacious expression of the eye, express a certain brightness and contentment which might correspond to an age of twenty to twenty-four years. The manner in which this small face presents itself in its frame of veiling makes an artistic impression, and even suggests a trace of coquetry and vanity.

Such commentary upon the “natural truth” and general beauty of the female face within the apparition again positions Schrenck Notzing as artistic judge (and one who has consulted with artists on the merits of the work in question). The language used to

---

179 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 131. The apparition would reappear and vanish for brief moments, so Schrenck Notzing managed to obtain several photographs and catch several glimpses of the ghostly face in question.

180 Ibid., 131-32.
describe the desirable feminine attributes of the ghostly impression, such as a pretty, dimpled mouth; nicely nourished cheek; and expressive, bright eyes, also recalls contemporaneous ideals of feminine beauty from popular literature and mass culture.

A contemporary illustration by Abel Favre of a young rosy-cheeked girl (fig. 92), which appeared on the cover of the popular French magazine *Femina* in 1911, for example, nicely exemplifies a similarly girlish feminine ideal. With tousled curls, pink lips, and a gauzy white dress concealing and revealing her body, she offers an appealing and wholesome model of beauty, with striking similarity to the pretty face on ectoplasmic cloth. Exclamations of aesthetic appreciation and desire were voiced by nearly all the scientists I have examined. In chapter three, for example, I noted Geley’s exclamation from February of 1918 that “the materialisation was perfect; it was a living face of normal size, of fresh tint, and with expressive eyes. The face was beautiful, and the experimenters gazed at it with expressions of admiration spoken in low tones.” This was not the grim face of death. His description of the materialization’s “fresh tint” and “expressive eyes” suggested an appearance of especially vibrant, youthful beauty. Its loveliness was, it would seem, synonymous with its being alive; indeed as he put it, “it was a living face.” Such moments of unfettered gazing were, of course, much rarer than the scientists would have liked.

Gene Stratton-Porter’s classic 1909 American novel *A Girl of the Limberlost* featured the beautiful, innocent, and long-suffering heroine, Elnora Comstock – a slender, lovely creature who flitted quietly and rather mysteriously through the Limberlost swamp

---

181 For a useful discussion of the rise of French women’s magazines during this period, see Rachel Mesch, *Having it all in the Belle Époque: How French Women's Magazines Invented the Modern Woman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013; Vanessa Schwartz also provides an illuminating analysis of the rise of mass print culture in Paris during the fine-de-siècle period in *Spectacular Realities*, 13-44.

like the very moths she hunted. Elnora’s beauty is described throughout the text in terms of its childlike radiance – a “bright young face…with its pink tints, its heavy dark brows, its bright blue-gray eyes, and its frame of curling reddish-brown hair.” Interestingly, Elnora’s beauty also becomes a site of frustrated voyeurism when Pete, a sinister man who wanders the swamp, watches her through her bedroom window. In a scene that is remarkably similar to the frustrated voyeuristic desire of the observing scientist in the séance, Pete tries in vain and with mounting anger to truly see Elnora through the sheath of white mosquito netting that hinders his view. The scientist’s prose evoked such literary examples of elusive and tantalizing feminine beauty, made all the more desirable for being just out of reach.

Elnora’s beauty in *A Girl of the Limberlost*, like that of many literary heroines, was synonymous with her moral character. Physiognomical publications regularly took up the matter of feminine beauty, similarly relating it to internal values of goodness, purity, honesty, and virtue – albeit through a more “scientific” lens. Caroline Williams LeFavre’s 1912 collection of beauty tips for women, *Beauty of the Highest Type: A Scientific and an Artistic Aim for a Nobler Beauty*, clearly lays out the innate links between desirable physical traits and one’s morality. She advises the female reader to

---

184 Ibid., 54.
185 The pseudoscientific field of physiognomy (and its closely related field of phrenology) had emerged as part of the broader post-Enlightenment project to document invisible, interior worlds, as discussed in chapter one. Theories of physiognomy and phrenology were organized around the classification of “human types” through a study of anatomy, as a means of reading external signs of intrinsic moral character. The findings of these systems bolstered many existing racial and gendered stereotypes, and supported concurrent theories of racial evolution (and degeneration) within the human race. These fields also identified physical markers of criminal and degenerate behaviours, effectively separating “different breeds” of person. See Nelson Sizer, *Heads and Faces, and How to Study Them: A Manual of Phrenology and Physiognomy for the People* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1885); Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Thomas Hardy Leahey, *Psychology’s Occult Doubles: Psychology and the Problem of Pseudoscience* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1983).
cultivate virtuous behaviours and to surround herself with beautiful influences in order to achieve such qualities as a full and pink, dimpled cheek or a nicely curved mouth. According to LeFavre, external influences, both good and bad, could easily impress themselves upon the body’s physical surface, and it was therefore necessary to guard against negative influences.¹⁸⁶

Physiognomical principles such as these were, in many respects, at the root of ideoplastic theory. For, according to both physiognomical and ideoplastic models, the boundary between the mind and body was fluid. In a seminal essay on physiognomy, for example, Dr. Johann Caspar Lavater describes the possibility for an individual to take on the physical qualities of strong external influences, citing the example of a man in love who acquires the visible traces of his beloved; her features become etched upon his physical surface.¹⁸⁷ The longstanding physiognomical association between physical beauty and nobility of character likely informed the pervasive sense of faith in the intrinsic honesty of pretty, young mediums. Just as childhood was framed by qualities of innocence, girlish mediums were often perceived to be closer to a realm of wholesome innocence and spiritual purity – a point that ultimately served such mediums well.¹⁸⁸

Schrenck Notzing’s evaluation of the natural truth and beauty of the ghostly face also


¹⁸⁷ See Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy: For the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind,* trans. Thomas Holcroft (London: C. Whittingham, 1804). Lavater’s work was especially foundational within the field of physiognomy.

¹⁸⁸ At different times Drs. Schrenck Notzing and Richet, as well as earlier scientists such as William Crookes, described the appealing attributes of the mediums they studied. Crookes, in particular, expressed frank admiration for Florence Cook’s beauty. As Braude notes, the mediums Cora Hatch, Flora Temple, and Susie Cluer were all especially well known for their loveliness (and many séances were filled with admiring audience members); see *Radical Spirits,* 95-97; see also McGarry’s discussion of the careers of young, pretty mediums in *Ghosts of Future’s Past.*
hinted at an intrinsic association between feminine beauty and virtue – an association that seemed to buttress the genuineness of the materialization. Indeed the loveliness of the materializations, and in many cases the mediums who conjured them, strengthened the spiritualist foundation.

Schrenck Notzing also highlighted the seemingly coquettish manner in which the ghostly face presented itself, peeking out from behind the veiling. Tastefully arranged sheer cloth gave the loose impression of a burial shroud that had perhaps been adapted to suit a more fashionable purpose. The fabrics that were employed by mediums often seemed to serve a dual function, especially in cases such as this, wherein wisps of gauzy, sheer fabric gathered around the face of the spirit imprint, creating a stylish and alluring effect. Schrenck Notzing’s allusion here to the apparition’s “artistically framed” veiling underlined an inherent relationship between mediumistic and artistic processes, just as his likening of ectoplasmic images to “sketches” or “drawings” similarly reflected this connection. Contemporaries of Schrenck Notzing also commented upon the artistic qualities in early twentieth-century séance materializations. Albert von Keller, for example, wrote a review of the artistic merits of ectoplasm following Schrenck Notzing’s publication of *Phenomena of Materialisation*. In it, he highlighted both the amateurish nature of certain materializations and the finer quality of others.\(^{189}\)

Within her oeuvre, the medium Linda Gazzera had authored several ectoplasmic apparitions that closely resembled Eva’s pretty female ghosts and appeared to possess traditionally beautiful features. The previously noted 1909 photograph of Linda (fig. 54) depicts one such ectoplasmic portrait of a young woman peering out from behind frothy

\(^{189}\) See Birnie & Bott, *Séance*, 30-33; von Keller’s work is also discussed by Fischer, “In the Darkroom,” 184.
The female apparition seems to strike an enticing pose, sheer veils trailing down her back while she glances invitingly over her shoulder at the camera. With veils concealing nearly all of her face, the young woman imparts a calculated air of mystery. In all likelihood, this fashionable concealment also served to obscure the apparition’s resemblance to a magazine illustration and to somewhat minimize its two-dimensional appearance.

Beautiful female spirits consistently played a prominent part in Linda Gazzera’s oeuvre – peaking out from mounds of veiling or hair (fig. 93), as in the aforementioned example, or glancing upwards to the heavens with sweet and serene expressions upon their youthful countenances (fig. 94). Her séances were filled with comparable examples of coy, beautiful spirits, peaking out from behind their veils. Unsurprisingly, the authenticity of Linda Gazzera’s materializations were doubted at the time of their publication, as she was known to have held a profound interest in fashion and art – interests which raised suspicions among skeptics with regard to her role in fabricating the apparition in question.  

Dr. Geley’s investigations also catalogued many examples of noticeably alluring and coquettish spirit faces, such as the case produced by Eva C. in 1918 (fig. 52), which he later published in his 1924 study. Here the female apparition again glances beseechingingly at the viewer, her face framed by transparent veiling. Examples of

---

190 Fischer draws attention to the elegant appearance of this particular apparition in “Reciprocal Adaptation,” 208.
191 Ibid.; Richet, Thirty Years, 526-527. Although he reported other cases of mediumistic fraud and acknowledged the debates that surrounded séance investigations, Dr. Richet remained convinced of Gazzera’s authenticity. One of those who openly voiced doubts over the images’ authenticity (due in large part to their flat, pictorial appearance) was M. de Fontenay (who had additionally been present for several of the sittings with Eva).
192 Geley, Clairvoyance. The image in question is also reproduced in Champion, ed., The Perfect Medium, 211.
attractive materializations were ubiquitous throughout spiritualism. Georgiana Houghton’s flowery descriptions of beautiful spirits, for instance, were often similar in tone to those of the admiring male investigators. The medium-photographer recounted one such spirit that appeared on the photographic negative, “a sweet-looking girlish face…She wears a quaint old-fashioned bonnet, which reminds one of the days when beauty used to be half hidden from the public gaze, and was all the more prized for the modest concealment.”

Ada Emma Deane’s early twentieth-century colour spirit photography also managed to capture striking female apparitions with fashionable veiling that at once flattered and concealed (fig. 95). The ghostly shroud or veil within these examples clearly assumes a stylish presentation, framing the face of the female spirit and suggesting an aesthetic composition. Cocooned in white gauze, Deane’s spirits resembles airy, angelic beings, hovering over the living. With sweet expressions, rosy complexions, as well as occasional glances upward to the heavens, the spirits embodied a morally elevated beauty, reminiscent of the many earlier cases of pretty veiled faces that materialized through ideoplasty.

In many examples, ectoplasmic compositions bearing attractively veiled female faces appear to draw upon mass produced print sources, such as newspapers or fashion magazines. This was likely due to the relatively newfound availability of reproduced images in the wake of nineteenth-century innovations in mass production. Advertising imagery of the early twentieth century commonly featured attractive female models adorned with scarves or veils, which may well have influenced the appearance of “fashionable ghosts.” A 1911 cover for Femina featuring an illustration by René Lelong

---

193 Houghton, Chronicles, 173.
(fig. 96), for instance, depicts a glamorous woman with flowing loose fabrics and a coy
glance, reminiscent of Linda Gazzera’s stylish apparition. Large hats also featured
prominently in French fashion of the early 1900’s (see figs. 97-98), and these were often
beset with cascading veils and decorative protrusions, such as feathers or flowers, and
were perched upon voluminous hairstyles. The billowing veils and externally projected
ideoplastic materializations of the séance were thus vaguely in vogue, and fell in line
with the many stylish extensions and amplifications of the female body that appeared in
women’s fashions.¹⁹⁴

On November 27, 1912, Schrenck Notzing had photographed a materialization
within a séance with Eva that revealed an unusual ectoplasmic form “lacking the features
of a face” (fig. 99).¹⁹⁵ After the publication of the *Phenomena of Materialisation*,
spiritualist detractors noted the fragmented text “Miro” upon the ectoplasmic surface and
identified it as a scrap of paper from the French newspaper *Le Miroir* – one which
presumably bore a printed face on the reverse side, which the medium had intended to
display for the camera/observer.¹⁹⁶ Evidently, in the moment of the camera’s flash the
wrong side of the newsprint had inadvertently been made visible. This led to a search of
*Le Miroir* as a source for faces that had appeared within Eva’s séances. A number of

¹⁹⁴ See Mesch, *Having it all in the Belle Époque*; and Bonnie Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The
Bourgeoisies of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press,
1981), 79-90. Smith notes that the turn-of-the-century *femme nouvelle* typically wore full dresses with
hoop skirts, crinolines, and bustles, as well as large hats and Pompadour frames to give their hair an
appearance of tremendous volume. During an era of rising feminist sentiment, women’s fashions thus
appeared to symbolically bolster feminine power by making women appear to have an even greater
physical presence (although, as Smith notes, these styles simultaneously served to constrain women under
mounds of fabric).
matches were located, among them well-known portraits of celebrities, royalty, and political leaders.\footnote{These included the French President and the King of Bulgaria.}

In an addendum to Schrenck Notzing’s text he addresses these cases directly, defending the legitimacy of his scientific approach and photographic evidence. In the aforementioned case of the fragmented newspaper text, Schrenck Notzing remained convinced, despite evidence to the contrary, that the word \textit{Miroir} was in fact part of a spiritual or psychical message, transmitted through the medium. At the initial time of the materialization, he professed bafflement at the mysterious letters that had appeared during the photograph’s development. The following day, Madame Bisson seemed to join him in his puzzlement, but Eva (who, according to Schrenck Notzing, had not yet seen the photographs from their previous session), immediately pronounced the word “Miroir” upon entering a trance. This pronouncement was subsequently followed by a spirit message from “Berthe” that told of the spirit’s desire to make contact with those in attendance:

She (Berthe) wanted to write to you the other day. She wanted to send you her written thought. You are her mirror. She sees herself here. You have a photograph of the thought of Berthe. She has the joy of creating another image for herself.\footnote{Schrenck Notzing, \textit{Phenomena}, 214.}

This rather ingenious explanation seemed to satisfy the scientist, who was presumably anxious for a story that would shore up his shaken beliefs.

What was inadvertently produced, in the case of Eva’s “Miro” ideoplasm, was an image of fragmented text, reminiscent of contemporaneous collage works, such as Picasso’s \textit{Still Life with Chair Caning} of 1912 (fig. 100), which featured a fragmented
**JOU** to evoke the newspaper, *Le Journal*, as a point of semiotic play. The broken text of the séance – *Miro* – was initially attributed to a disjointed message from the spirit world, and later to its newspaper source. Even if Schrenck Notzing accepted Eva’s explanation as fact, the appearance of the text nonetheless suggested a mass produced image and created an intriguingly jarring juxtaposition of past and present, as well as an inadvertent form of linguistic play. It is tempting to read in the *Miro* fragment an analogy for art’s mimetic relationship with the visible world. The broken text is, in this sense, suggestive of a broken mirror and therefore a fractured relationship with representational reality. The spirit text hints at a confrontation with illusionism itself – with the exposed “mirror of art.” Such analogies aside, the spirit message in Eva’s *Miro* materialization indexed both the world of the dead and the media of the present day. It thus arrived, quite by accident, as a compellingly modern fragment. This happenstance intersection of spiritualism and collage leads me to examine the broader relationship between the two domains.

Prior to the innovations of Cubism, photocollage had existed as a popular Victorian pastime enjoyed especially by upper class women. Photocollages, such as those of Georgina Berkeley, reveled in a distinct sense of trickery and playfulness, as they pieced together portraits taken from *cartes de visite*, situating them in new contexts. In one image, for instance, Berkeley creates a fantastical scene in which a boy blows bubbles containing a number of photographic heads (fig. 101). The resulting


image is not unlike spirit photographs of hovering spirit orbs/faces or blossoming psychic thoughts. Early photocollages often featured severed heads and limbs, in a manner of speaking, as faces or body parts were carefully cut and pasted into new pictorial arrangements. Vestiges of these photographic jests are certainly visible in the manipulations of the medium, who similarly “edited” photographic portraits in order to create the visual illusions of the séance.

In 1912 (the same year in which Picasso created his Still Life with Chair Caning), collage was pioneered as an avant-garde artform by the Cubist artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, consisting of assembled constructions using bits of paper and fragments of newspaper text and images. Picasso’s Still Life with Chair Caning, incidentally, marked a point of transition between Analytic Cubist painting and Synthetic Cubist collage, as it was one of the first works to include glued-on materials. The playful juxtaposition of painted abstractions and glued fragments of real objects highlighted Picasso’s interest in capturing (and deconstructing) different levels of artistic illusionism.

Cubist collage incorporated the fragmented detritus of modern society that had come to represent a revolutionary merging of high and low forms of culture, as well as a re-contextualizing of everyday materials and debris as conceptual objects with newfound meaning. The works of Picasso and Braque have thus been widely viewed as sites of tension between the high and the low, as well as indexes of their social milieu. What was often sought through cubist collage was an elusive boundary of visual legibility – the

---

203 Ibid.
point at which the concept of an object was elicited through the fragment.\textsuperscript{204} Within art historical discourse, it is widely held that artists such as Picasso and Braque may have been attempting to deconstruct pictorial and spatial relationships on the canvas, and that their work ultimately illustrated a point of rupture between the subject and object, sign and signified.\textsuperscript{205}

Within the arena of high art, collage thus represented an explicitly modern artform, immersed in contemporary mass media, photography, and print culture. Its counterpart cut-and-paste ghosts of the séance were born out of the same modern context. While there was generally little resemblance between the ectoplasmic fragments that Eva proffered to the camera’s lens and the constructions of the Cubists (or photocollages, for that matter), there was nonetheless a shared reuse of mass media among mediums and artists. This aspect of the séance underscored its proximity to the imagery of the avant-garde, as mediums were enmeshed within the same framework of cultural influences and aesthetic impulses.

The séance, then, was a site of visual disparity and “collaged” juxtaposition. Flattened spirits – effectively abstractions of their former living selves – converged with living mediums and often bore what appeared to be three-dimensional, illusionistic plastic forms upon their surfaces, such as real hair or cloth. In these “mixed media” incarnations, then, séance materializations were conceptually aligned with collage. Additionally, collage art and séance creations expressed a similarly fluid relationship between inside and outside spaces. Their shared use of mass media, such as newspaper or magazine clippings, effectively brought the outside world into domestic spaces. And in

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 123-124 ; Poggi, \textit{In Defiance of Painting}, 47-50.  
\textsuperscript{205} Poggi, \textit{In Defiance of Painting}, 1-29.
the case of mediums, there was a parallel attempt to capture the “beyond” inside the cabinet. Yet despite these convergences of collage and mediumship, I would hesitate to make the argument that Cubist artists were directly influenced by the constructions of the séance (or vice versa). Rather, it is more likely that art and mediumship developed parallel to one another, emerging out of the same *zeitgeist*. The cobbled-together ghostly faces, in this sense, offered a compelling counterpart to the pieced-together fragments of modern collage. Ectoplasmic scraps, which so often resembled (and likely were) bits of paper or wisps of fabric (as Schrenck Notzing repeatedly notes), recalled the bits and pieces that comprised collage-based works, featuring fragments of paper with hints of images and snippets of words that found new meaning as a refashioned whole.

In her discussion of the interconnection between semiotics and avant-garde collage, Rosalind Krauss points out that at its core, the relationship between signifier and signified, as originally outlined by Ferdinand de Saussure, is predicated on absence. Krauss argues that this absence was fundamental to collage, wherein the material fragment signifies an always absent, immaterial concept. In this sense, collage is closely aligned with the photograph and the relic, as these also represent material indexes of a lost original presence. Photograph, relic, ectoplasm, and collage were imprints of loss, albeit imprints that were manifested in different contexts. Krauss goes on to note that “the sign, as a function of absence rather than presence, is a coupling of signifier and immaterial concept in relation to which…there may be no referent at all.” Her argument might have just as easily been applied to the ectoplasmic ghosts of the séance, where material traces indexed immaterial, absent beings – which were in turn illusions.

---

207 Ibid. (my emphasis).
In her analysis of Picasso’s collage works, Christine Poggi refers to the story, known to Picasso, of a Westerner’s encounter with an African tribesman, to whom a photograph was shown. The tribesman could not, according to the story, read the photograph as a legible surface. This implied that the eye’s ability to interpret and recognize forms is based on the beholder’s frame of reference. As Poggi puts it, “resemblance…turns out to lie in the eyes of the beholder rather than in certain configurations of line, color, and form.” She quite rightly suggests that such issues of resemblance were at stake within the Cubist investigations. The earlier analytic Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque had also played with the outermost boundaries of visual legibility. The artists were intrigued by the idea of locating the precise point at which a simple curved line, for example, elicits the figure of the guitar. Their paintings were perpetually centred on the middle-ground between meaning and meaninglessness, legibility and illegibility.

Much like in the art gallery, the eye of the beholder was similarly of crucial importance within the séance, where transient and elusive visual effects – which often offered no more than the merest suggestion of a human face – acquired meaning through the interpretative lens of the viewer. Shadowy, ephemeral, and obscure images resembled the familiar countenances of loved ones when viewed through the right eyes and conditions. Fragmented parts – a momentary glimpse of a finger or lock of hair – similarly conjured up absent whole beings in the mind’s eye. At the very heart of both collage and mediumship, then, was the matter of legibility, as well as the relationship between subject and object, and the eye and the image. Eva was quite right when she

---

209 Ibid., 47-51.
conveyed the face-saving message from the spirit “Berthe” that the viewer was “her mirror.” The viewer was indeed an integral part of the meaning that was created in the séance.

Ectoplasm did not in fact closely resemble modern collage, but rather shared in a similar process of removing images from their original contexts and resituating them in new settings to form new meanings. Artists and artist-mediums in this sense “gave new life” to lifeless fragments. Interestingly, in the post-WWI era, German artists heralded a more overtly political use of collage (and photocollage) – one that was often explicitly tied to postwar trauma. Collage and assemblage techniques eventually became, for the postwar artist, a means of symbolically rebuilding out of the chaotic rubble. The work of German Dadaists drew explicitly from the realm of popular print culture, incorporating clippings from newspapers, magazines, and posters in a variety of ways. Hausmann’s Dada Cino of 1920, for instance, depicts a chaotic collage of disjointed text and image, mirroring the chaotic jumble of postwar German society, while his Dada Self Portrait of the same year suggests a cyborgian entity, fashioned out of cut-and-pasted machine and human parts (see figs.102-103). The jarring effect of Hausmann’s work was illustrative of the politically-charged undercurrents within the German Dada group at large. These later forms of collage that emerged out of Germany harkened back in many ways to the psychological and symbolic constructions of the spiritualist movement (itself

---

210 See Matthew Biro, Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); cf. Leah Dickerman, Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris (Washington: National Gallery of Art in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2005). For more on the relationship between German Dada and postwar trauma see also Biro, Dada Cyborg; and Brigid Doherty, “We are all Neurasthenics!” or, The Trauma of Dada Montage,” Critical Inquiry 24, no. 1 (Autumn, 1997): 82-132. It is additionally worth noting that in his study of Surrealism, Hal Foster has suggested that later examples of Surrealist art were similarly based in postwar trauma. Interestingly, he identifies repeated motifs and concepts within Surrealist works that embodied, in his view, an expression of the Freudian uncanny return through a compulsive repetition of the traumatic moment of loss. See Foster, Compulsive Beauty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).
a product of wartime losses), wherein fragments of the dead were ritually pieced back together.

The spirit faces of the séance did not necessarily appear as perfect copies of the printed originals, but instead showed signs of having been subtly manipulated and distorted through veiling, crumpling, tearing, or pen markings. It is conceivable that in the darkness, and in the brief flash of the opening and closing curtains, an indistinct, papery face might easily pass for a familiar (albeit uncanny) countenance. Critics of spiritualism were, naturally, quick to note the resemblance between ectoplasmic apparitions and their modern print counterparts. Schrenck Notzing’s own descriptions of the observed phenomena admitted that many materializations had an undeniably two-dimensional and paper-like appearance, although he nonetheless maintained a steadfast faith in the genuine nature of mediumistic powers and the autonomous agency of the manifestations. On occasion, however, specific sources for the spectral faces were identified, causing serious damage to the spiritualist cause and to Schrenck Notzing’s reputation.

A number of photographs taken by Schrenck Notzing during the spring of 1913, for instance, record the recurring visage of a male ghost (fig. 104). These faces were later identified as an altered photograph of the French President Raymond Poincaré (fig. 105), which had originally been published in *Le Miroir*. The alterations appear to have consist of crumpling, tearing, and distorting his features through penned additions, such as thicker, slanting eyebrows. In one instance, a small fragment of blank paper conceals Poincaré’s nose, and the hairline is somewhat altered. Such changes imbued the familiar face with enough subtle differences as to render it uncannily unfamiliar.

---

A materialization of November 30, 1912 featured the portrait of a female face within a luminous orb that appeared above Eva’s head (fig. 106). The imprinted face in question was later identified as that of actress Monna Delza (fig. 107), whose photograph had been published in *Femina* earlier in the year. The original image, however, appears to have been significantly altered in its séance unveiling. In the spectral version, Delza’s face is less clearly defined and any natural shadows have been obliterated, as if her features had been washed over with chalk or light paint. The result is a somewhat blurry portrait with flattened features.

To complicate matters even further, there was another pictorial undercurrent within this type of apparition – namely, a mimetic relationship with the cartoon balloons or bubbles commonly found in modern newspapers and comic strips to capture expressions of speech and thought. These emphatically two-dimensional bubbles, typically depicted jutting out from the speaker’s head (fig. 108), serve as a means of imaging invisible verbal utterances and mental processes. As Holger Schott Syme has astutely observed, “To the extent that bubbles are mimetic at all, they suggest breath. They gesture, if anywhere, away from the written characters inside them towards the mouths of the figures, and the living voices emanating, imaginatively, from them.”

The correspondence between the ideoplasmic “thought blossom” and the cartoonish

---

212 Ibid., 290-315; in a lengthy appendix Schrenck Notzing addresses the claims of fraud that were levied against mediums. It is worth noting that *Femina* was a popular women’s magazine in France, and one that was aligned with feminist sentiments and the changing attitudes towards gender roles during the Belle Époque in France. For more see Mesch, *Having it all in the Belle Époque*, 1-30.

213 Cartoon balloons are thought to trace back to early modern speech scrolls, which made their first appearances in medieval paintings as a means of conveying spoken words in a visual way. In their modern Western incarnation, thought and speech balloons have appeared in cartoon form since the political cartoons of the eighteenth century. The early twentieth century also marked a period of considerable growth in the cartoon industry. For more on the modern representation of speech balloons, see Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Collings, 1993); and for an analysis of early modern speech scrolls, see Holger Schott Syme, “The Look of Speech,” *Textual Cultures* 2, no. 2 (Autumn, 2007): 34-60.

thought balloon pointed to their mutual project of giving visual form to the intangible. The face of the “Monna Delza spirit,” like many séance materializations, seemed to grow out of the medium’s head (or mind/psyche), a product of her innermost thoughts, memories, and experiences, according to ideoplastic theory.

Curiously, Schrenck Notzing was impressed in this case by the sense of naturalism and artistic merit of the apparition:

Schrenck Notzing, interestingly, offers an interpretive reading of the portrait, attributing a sense of “sensuality” to her red, parted lips, as well as an “animal and bloodthirsty” look to her eyes. The portrait itself possesses a somewhat garish style, loosely resembling the primitive painted faces of early Expressionist works, such as Maurice de Vlaminck’s *Dancer of the Rat Mort* of c. 1905-06 (fig. 109). Vlaminck’s crudely painted prostitute, with exposed breast, appears before a golden backdrop – an icon of the modern age. Eva’s apparition similarly vacillates between a depiction of the flesh and the spirit, between haloed phantom head and painted, carnal woman.

One of the first scandals surrounding the appropriation of images within the séance took place in 1909, and involved the medium Linda Gazzera and Dr. Richet. The latter took a photograph that revealed a materialized face hovering over the figure of the

---

215 This study has already examined various examples of hovering spirit orbs and floating spirit heads that appeared in the séance, which were simultaneously encoded here. In chapter three, for instance, I drew parallels between ectoplasmic apparitions and the disembodied heads of both myth and Christian faith.  
medium. On March 1, 1913, however, the French newspaper *Le Matin* reported that it bore a suspicious resemblance to the face of an angel painted by Rubens (fig. 110). In the *Phenomena of Materialisation*, Schrenck Notzing took up this case, suggesting that the similarities between the Rubens angel and the conjured face did not necessarily point to conclusive evidence of fraud. He argued instead that the medium’s image likely represented a genuine ideoplastic phenomenon, whereby, according to him,

> The medium takes a great interest in painting, and has certainly seen the collection of pictures in the Louvre, where the original may be found. This Rubens angel head left a vivid remembrance in her subliminal consciousness. In the state of trance the dream memory of this head was translated into a reality. The image gives the impression more of an artistic recollection than that of a true copy.

This account nicely lays out the scientist’s perspective on the impressionistic nature of ideoplasms, whereby images filtered through the medium’s subconscious. They were, according to this point of view, organic photographs of the mind.

Within spirit photography traditions, too, ghosts often evoked direct comparison with cut-outs from magazine or newspaper sources. Ada Emma Deane’s later colour

---

218 The image in question was first reproduced in Imoda’s *Fotografie di Fantasmi*; the comparison with the Rubens painting ran in an exposé titled “Les Mystères de l’Au-Dela,” *Le Matin* (March 1, 1913). Schrenck Notzing provides an account of the details of this case in *Phenomena of Materialisation*, 33; and “Die Phänomene des Mediums Linda Gazerra,” 133–73.

219 Schrenck Notzing, *Phenomena*, 33. This interpretation of ectoplasm was also supported by several other scientists whose work concerned psychical phenomena, whom Dr. Schrenck Notzing cites, including Dr. De Fontenay and Professor Morselli. De Fontenay had studied the case of Linda Gazzera and concluded that her materializations represented examples of “dream impressions,” while Dr. Morelli had worked primarily with the medium Eusapia Palladino and concluded that her materializations were produced through a similar “half-dream” state wherein the medium’s subconscious images were manifest externally.

220 It should also be noted, however, that Schrenck Notzing ultimately viewed ideoplasm as a phenomena that was highly complex and mutable, which could channel either internal or external forces, depending on various factors in the individual’s physical and psychical state, as well as their sensitivities. In a treatise dealing with the ideoplastic conditions in neurasthenic patients, for example, he articulated the somewhat indefinite nature of its origin: “die receptivität des Gehirns für Eindrücke von aussen und suggestionen braucht nicht immer zu correnspondiren mit des Ideoplastie. Die centrale Erregung der Vorstellung und ihre Verkörperung sind zwei aufeinander wirkende, aber nicht von einander abhängige Vorgänge. Ebenso hängt von individuellen Umständen der Grad der ideomotorischen und ideosensorischen Reflexthätigkeit ab und es gibt Personen, die für Suggestionen ins motorische Gebiet mehr empfänglich sind, wie für sensible Acte und umgekehrt.” See Schrenck Notzing, “Die psychische und suggestive Behandlung der Neurasthenie,” in *Handbuch der Neurasthenie*, Franz Carol Müller, ed. (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel), 1893, 529.
spirit photographs, for example, sparked similar allegations of fraud, recalling the
controversy that surrounded Eva’s notorious “celebrity spirits.” In Deane’s photographs,
attractive, veiled women materialized on film. They did not resemble three-dimensional
beings, but were distinctly two-dimensional, like paper cut-outs. One of Deane’s spirit
photographs – namely that of the Indian chief “spirit guide,” who appeared alongside a
female spirit (fig. 111) – was ultimately recognized as a portrait that had been reproduced
in a number of publications, including the cover of My Magazine in October, 1921.
Spiritualist supporters, however, maintained that her case, like that of Eva C., illustrated
genuine mental projections.  
Despite strong visual evidence to support charges of fraud in many cases,
Schrenck Notzing (and many of his contemporaries) steadfastly maintained a belief in the
materializations they had witnessed and documented. Schrenck Notzing’s faith hinged
largely on the theory that mediums could produce images that were, for all intents and
purposes, mental artworks. He also maintained that the similarities between examples
of ectoplasm and magazine or newspaper images were exaggerated by the detractors, and
that the visual comparisons were indicative of only a psychic influence passing from the
medium to the spirit forms. These influences permeated the materializations, according
to him, but were not exact copies. The theory of ideoplasty thus aligned the ectoplasmic
image with the practice of artistic emulation, as the medium’s works bore the physical
imprint of her influences and mirrored traces of her surrounding environment.

Fischer discusses this case in “The Most Disreputable Camera,” 76-77. McGarry also offers a
fascinating analysis of the appearance of Indian spirit guides within spiritualism, which she positions as a
Schrenck Notzing ultimately evades drawing a clear conclusion on the nature of the ectoplasm he
witnessed, claiming that he only wanted to provide objective data of the phenomena. In several places
throughout his text, however, he appears to view the manifestations as either genuine spirits or psychical
phenomena with agency.
Schrenck Notzing’s defense of ideoplasm may have been inspired by similar rhetoric espoused by other spiritualists. In an 1895 article published in the spiritualist journal *Borderland*, the writer W. T. Stead, for instance, responded with force (through his spirit guide, Julia) to the charges that were levied against mediums in the face of materializations that either bore striking likenesses to existing images or appeared to recycle from identifiable sources. As “Julia” put it,

> Whenever any spirits on our side manifest themselves, either by means of photography or by materialization, it is necessary for them to create what I may call a mould, by which they can impress themselves upon the photographic plate, or make themselves visible in a materialization séance…We could of course, make a fresh mould for every sitting, but this would involve a great deal of trouble, and when you have got one good mould, there is no necessity to take the trouble to make new moulds any more than there is for having a separate woodcut for every reproduction of a picture in a book, or taking a new negative for every portrait which you desire to give away to your friends. You get the block and go on printing. We get the mould, and go on reproducing copies when they are wanted.”

This explanation perfectly illustrates the convergence of ideoplasmic materialization and concepts of artistic reproduction. Julia explicitly aligns the ideoplasmic image with indexical art, like the photographic print that is copied from a negative or the woodblock print that is copied from a mould. In the analogy provided here, spirits are formless matter, akin to paint or clay, which took on form through the manipulation of the medium-artist. Julia suggests that the ideoplasmic image is an index of an old mould, rather than a direct copy of an “original.” According to her, then, the spirits of the séance were not reanimated or restored “originals,” but were the “doubly lost” shadows of specters.

---


224 I am reminded here of Plato’s famous analogy of the cave, which he described in *The Republic*, in which cave-bound individuals perceived the shadows dancing upon the cave wall as the “real thing.” These cave shadows were, according to Plato, *twice removed* from the true reality of the Forms.
Throughout this analysis I have primarily focused on a relationship between séance materializations and visual art. Yet I do not necessarily mean to suggest that there was a conscious exchange of ideas at work between the medium and the modern artist. It seems far more likely that the correspondence that exists among these fields reflected concurrent preoccupations with similar ideas. Both artist and medium ultimately constructed a visual illusion for the audience. The performative and experiential aspects of mediumship were, of course, also decidedly important to the shaping of meaning within the art of the séance. My second chapter, in particular, touched upon this and explored some of the performative references that were interwoven within medium theatre. In that chapter I also briefly likened the medium to the Trickster – a composite jester figure who, in his various forms, might also be compared with the performance artist. Certainly, the medium’s craft encompassed a fluid and hybrid form of expression – a mixed-media theatre, as it were. The medium’s performances, moreover, took place “behind the curtains,” in the close, dark, and introspective quarters of the séance, where the phantasmal encounter always implicitly suggested an encounter with oneself, and with one’s own mortality. While the medium’s work was at times subversive and confrontational, at others it was hauntingly revealing, or utterly evanescent.

What seems most clear is that séance was ultimately a site of disjointed and transient meaning, and in this respect collage seems to offer the most straightforward

---

225 The first manifestations of performative gestures in art occurred in the early twentieth century, at a time when séances were already in full swing. A number of avant-garde artists in the Futurist and Dada groups published manifestoes and experimented with politically charged gestures that challenged notions of fine art. See RosaLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 3rd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011).
“medium” of comparison. Faces and limbs formed from bits of newspaper or scraps of cloth materialized and vanished, signifying immaterial and absent referents. Spectral parts made up of everyday matter signified absent bodies, and ghostly pieces conveyed meaning in part through the audience’s mental “completion” of the image. Spectral heads and hands that appeared to peel away from the body of the medium created strange patchwork effects wherein the boundary between the living and the dead was muddied. Ectoplasm was centred on these spatial disparities, which reflected converging spiritual and material worlds. And while modern artistic collages made fresh meanings out of newspaper scraps or detritus, the fleeting oddments of the séance were often more closely reminiscent of the wretched pieced-together body of Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, resurrected from dead parts.

For the majority of the scientific researchers that I have examined ectoplasm was some form of paranormal-psychical projection – an externalization of the medium that gave shape to unseen spiritual forces. An artistic reading of the medium’s creations, such as the one that I have posited, also provides a compelling parallelism with the reigning scientific position. Whether the ectoplasmic materializations of the medium are read as true psychical phenomena or symbolic constructions, they originated from the medium’s “inner being.” Ectoplasm, like art, was a composition formed from the artist’s will and imagination.

A final note: the art of mediumship reflected an important and enduring search for a relationship with origins. Spiritualism was, after all, a system of belief founded on the uncanny premise of the dead restored (albeit to an incomplete state of being). The materializations of the séance hinged on what once was, indexing an original presence
that was always already lost. These ideas resonated within the “indexical media” that associated with spiritualism, which I have explored here. They also resonated within the origins of ectoplasm itself, out of the shadowy mediumistic womb. Through ectoplasm, the spiritualist search for ghosts came to embody a far more pointed search for a primordial, creative, and spiritual genesis.

Behind the curtains, then, mediums were engaged in an art of illusionism that paralleled that of the visual artist, as they created and (re)constructed material fragments. More broadly, this chapter has sought to present a discussion of the artistic and cultural underpinnings of both the medium and the séance, with the aim of positioning the medium’s craft within a “creative context,” as did Schrenck Notzing himself. I have sought throughout this study to provide an interpretation of spiritualist photographs and mediumistic phenomena that considers the implicit visual meanings and cultural underpinnings of the séance and its images. Arising as it did out of the minds (and heads) of mediums, the séance became a multifaceted visualization of resurfacing memory, artistic inspiration, and the ever-present specters of loss. Although absent from gallery walls, ectoplasm was in every sense an innovative and nuanced artform.
CONCLUSION

Cabinets of curiosities and wonders (known as *Kunstkammern* or *Wunderkammern*), were collections of marvels and oddities that became fashionable within sixteenth-century homes. Wealthy collectors acquired vast anthologies of natural specimens and manmade artifacts, which were carefully categorized and displayed as a means of demonstrating the collectors’ knowledge and status. Cabinets of curiosities were precursors to the modern museum and embodied the enduring human desire to master the natural world, to classify its inhabitants, to identify its oddities, and to order its mysteries. I have outlined the photographic expression of this desire, which took hold in the post-Enlightenment world of empirical exploration, and sought to capture and document not only the visible world, but its invisible interiors. It is within this context that the medium revealed a new sort of “cabinet of mystery” – one that also sought to expose the innermost secrets of existence in the darkness of the séance.

My project is not the first to tread this path; a number of scholars before me have similarly turned their attention to the visual dimensions of spiritualism, as well as the sociopolitical and cultural underpinnings of both mediumship and spiritualist

---

1 Meant to be a microcosm of the world, a typical cabinet of curiosity or wonder might include a range of flora and fauna, such as interesting coral, fossils, skeletons, antlers, and unusual floral or geological specimens, as well as antique objects, religious relics, and paintings or engravings, among other things. One of the most famous cabinets of curiosity was owned by the Dutch anatomist and botanist, Fredrik Ruysch (1638-1731), whose collection included dioramas of embalmed body parts and fetal skeletons. Ruysch constructed otherworldly tableau landscapes out of human organs and plants, creating an impression of reanimated dead parts. For an excellent analysis of his collection, see Julie Hanson, “Resurrecting Death: Anatomical Art in the Cabinet of Doctor Fredrik Ruysch,” *Art Bulletin* 78, no.4 (December 1996): 663-679.
photography. My analysis has developed out of the ongoing interdisciplinary discussion on spiritualism, which has been taking place since the 1970s. Although my work is rooted in the visual terrain of the séance, I have also sought to expose the broader context and meaning of the medium’s images. In so doing my project contributes to a number of historical narratives, including the cultural meaning of materialization phenomena, the gendered relationships that transpired between the performing female medium and viewing male scientist, as well as the tensions surrounding secular and spiritual knowledge during this era. Furthermore, my study of these female mediums and their production of materialized fragments and part-objects also makes a contribution to our understanding of the formation of collage in Modernist art in this same period.

My dissertation ultimately offers an interpretation of the elusive and fleeting iconography of the séance, and positions the séance as a fundamentally creative and animated space. Mediums such as Eva C., Eusapia Palladino, and Linda Gazzera employed symbolic motifs and artistic techniques that carried a variety of complex messages to their audiences. I have relied upon their case studies to explore the seemingly deliberate use of “fragmented media” (of cloth, newspaper, and other materials), as well as performative strategies, to create the visual spectacle of the séance. The medium’s artworks, as I have suggested here, amounted to a visualization of both her creative talents and agency. I believe that this interpretation offers a useful way of understanding the delivery of meaning within the séance, as well as a clearer picture of the manifestation of female power within the spiritualist movement.

The veil of secrecy that has long shrouded the séance is only beginning to be lifted and much work remains to be done in order to understand this shadowy chapter of
human history. This project only scratches the surface of the complicated history of spiritualism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The imprints and images of the séance, which have been examined over the course of the preceding chapters, might at first glance represent an odd – or at the very least nontraditional – choice of subject for a dissertation in the field of art history. Yet as I have argued, there was a compelling artistry involved in the manifestation of ghosts – one that encompassed a complex visual language of signs and signifiers. What has continued to haunt me throughout this project, however, is the enigmatic figure of the ghost itself, particularly as it pertained to the shape of belief. In the heyday of spiritualism ghosts seemed to exist at the hazy intersection of art and faith, both of which mediate between humanity and the invisible unknown. Ghosts arose like the flickering and fleeting visions of the mind’s eye. As much as their existence was predicated by spiritualist faith, they actively shaped that belief.

Richard Holloway, an Episcopal theologian, writes that “one way to understand religion is to see it as a product of the creative power of the human mind, a work of art. Like any other work of art, including great poetry, its dubious origins should not be allowed to undermine its enduring value.”² Holloway’s argument applies nicely to the séance, where both art and belief were constructed. Art and faith are, after all, fundamentally aligned through a communal relationship with creation. Alberti touched upon this in his conception of “Nature the Painter.” The artist’s creations were, according to this line of thought, echoes of those of a divine original artist who first shaped the natural world and brought light into the darkness.³ The medium was the

---

intermediary (and catalyst) who stood between the audience and the imagined spaces of the beyond – in every sense an artist.

A closely related undercurrent within this project has also been the construction of scientific faith. The positivist principles of the Enlightenment were rooted in an enduring belief in the infallibility of rationality and the power of the observer to conquer the unknown. I deliberately chose to focus on the work of a number of scientific researchers who were ultimately convinced of the legitimacy of the phenomena in question. Many of the mediums in question – Eva C. and Eusapia, for instance – were ultimately found guilty of some measure of fraud during the course of various investigations conducted through the Society for Psychical Research. Often their tricks were revealed when more stringent restrictions were put in place during the séance. The scientific narratives that have been examined here stray from purely empirical documentation to express more personal sentiments of bafflement or wonder. Their narratives chronicle an ongoing state of internal struggle as the scientific mind grappled with its own faith in the impartiality of human vision, and sought to overcome the irresolvable gap between subject and object. In this way they testify to a far more entrenched longing for tangible meaning – one that was epitomized by their authors’ futile attempts to grasp hold of fleeting ectoplasm in the

---

4 See Tabou, *Pioneers of the Unseen*, 29-34, 111-112. As noted, Eusapia had been widely suspected of trickery, as many researchers had noted that the success of her séances tended to relate directly to the level of controls in place. Detectives even observed her cheating at work while using a fake foot under the table. A headline in the *London Sunday Chronicle* at the time ran, “Eusapia Exposed: Unmasking a Famous Medium – ‘Tecs Under the Table.’” Eva, for her part, was also widely suspected of fraud – particularly following the publication of Schrenck Notzing’s many dubious photographs in *Phenomena of Materialisation*. In 1920 Eva C. and Bisson were examined by the London SPR under more rigid controls; Eva was unable to produce any convincing materializations under such circumstances. The leading theory among skeptics was that Eva had managed to regurgitate materials during the séances or otherwise conceal them in her body, despite the scientist’s careful examinations. Richet reviews these late SPR investigations of Eva in *Thirty Years*. See also Rudolf Lambert, “Dr. Geley’s Report on the Medium Eva C.,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 37 (November 1954).
darkness. This longing persists and phantoms continue to haunt the modern world; they have merely shape-shifted and now develop through new media (and mediums).

---

5 The flickering computer screen has largely replaced the close darkness of the séance. The internet brings individuals into contact with various “unseen” realities, folding time and space in upon themselves and delivering messages into the “ether.” With the advent of social media, for example, there has been a widespread phenomenon surrounding postmortem messages to the dead. Websites such as Facebook (which index the original presence) are transformed into spontaneous memorial sites after an individual’s death, as well as spaces of ongoing postmortem communication. Examples of postmodern literature and criticism have also turned with frequency to concepts of haunting and spectrality in order to articulate a sense of subjective fragmentation, disembodiment, or distortion, arising from modern technology and urban reality. A number of authors have touched upon the ways in which ghosts and the phantasmal continue to materialize within the contemporary age of the postmodern hyperreal – an age haunted by reminders of death and otherness. Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* is the prime example of this. See also Sconce, *Haunted Media*; Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2007); and Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002).
Bibliography


Armstrong, Carol. “Cupid’s Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography.” *October* 76 (Spring 1996): 114-141.


Burns, S. B. *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America.* Altadena:


Clericus, J. “Zum Phänomene der eingebraunnten Hand.” *Psychische Studien* XLI (1914): 138-142


Psychologique en 1905, 1906, 1908.” Bulletin de l’Institut Général
Psychologique (1908): 415-546.

Crary, Jonathan. Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the

Creed, Barbara. The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis. London:

Davenport, Reuben Briggs. The Death Blow to Spiritualism: Being the True Story of
the Fox Sisters, as Revealed by Authority of Margaret Fox and Catherine Fox


Davies, Owen, and Willem de Blécourt, eds. Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and
Magic in Enlightenment Europe. Manchester: Manchester University Press,
2004.

Davis, Colin. Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the

Delgado, Anne. “Bawdy Technologies and the Birth of Ectoplasm.” Genders Online


the New International. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York; London:

Dewey, Dellon Marcus. History of the Strange Sounds or Rappings Heard in

Dichter, Claudia, “The Medium as Artist.” In The Message: Art and

Dichter, Claudia, Andreas Fischer, Michael Krajewski, and Susanne Zander. The


Doherty, Brigid. “‘We are all Neurasthenics!’ or, The Trauma of Dada Montage.” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn, 1997): 82-132.


Fischer, Lucy. “The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies.” *Film Quarterly*


Hallam, Elizabeth, and Jenny Hockey. *Death, Memory and Material Culture*. New


Kemp, Martin. “A Perfect and Faithful Record: Mind and Body in Medical Photography before 1900.” In *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in


*Light: A Journal Devoted to the Highest Interests Both Here and Hereafter* XXXVI (February 1906)


“Mediums of the Past,” *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* II, no. 9 (September 1908): 858-861.


Noakes, Richard. “Natural Causes? Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-


Talbot, Henry Fox. *The Pencil of Nature.* London: Longman, Brown, Green, and
Longmans, 1844.


Haven: Yale University Press in association with the National Gallery of

Thomas, Ann. “Capturing Light: Photographing the Universe.” In Beauty of Another
Haven: Yale University Press in association with the National Gallery of

Thomas, Ann. “The Search for Pattern.” In Beauty of Another Order: Photography in

Thompson, William F. The Image of War: The Pictorial Reporting of the American

Thurschwell, Pamela. Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920.

Thurschwell, Pamela. “Refusing to Give up the Ghost: Some Thoughts on the
Afterlife from Spirit Photos to Phantom Films.” In The Sixth Sense Reader.

Tillier, Bertrand. La Belle Noyée: Enquête sur le Masque de l’Inconnue de la Seine.

Treitel, Corinna. A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German

Tromp, Marlene. Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in

Tuchman, Maurice. “Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art.” In The Spiritual in Art:
Abstract Art 1890-1985, edited by Maurice Tuchman and Judi Freeman, 17-62.
Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art: New York: Abbeville Press,
1986.

Tuchman, Maurice, and Judi Freeman, eds. The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Art 1890-


Appendix

Fig. 1
William Blake, *The Soul Hovering Above the Body*, c.1805

Fig. 2
William Crookes, Spirit “Katie King,” c.1874
Fig. 3
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Recorded examples of ectoplasm being emitting from the mouth (the medium Eva C. on left and Stanisława P. on right),* c.1912-13.

Fig. 4
Henry Peach Robinson, *Fading Away,* 1858
Fig. 5
Julia Margaret Cameron, "Beatrice Cenci," 1866

Fig. 6
Claude Monet, *Death of Camille*, 1878
Fig. 7
William Henry Fox Talbot, *Moth Wing* (negative and positive), 1839-41.

Fig. 8
William Henry Fox Talbot, *A Slice of Horse Chestnut*, 1840
Fig. 9
Paul and Prosper Henry, *Lyra Nebula*, c.1885

Fig. 10
William Crookes, *Moon*, 1858
Fig. 11
Alexander Gardner, *Confederate Dead at the Antietam*, 1862

Fig. 12
Fig. 13
Ada Emma Deane, *Photograph of Armistice Day Ceremony*, November 11, 1922

Fig. 14
William Mumler, *Spirit portrait of Bronson Murray in a trance with the spirit of Ella Bonner*, c.1872.
Fig. 15
Edward Wyllie, *Portrait of J.R. Mercer with spirit extras of his mother and first wife*, 1895

Fig. 16
Caspar David Friedrich, *Abbey Under Oak Trees*, c.1810
Fig. 17
John Beattie, *Spiritualist Séance*, 1872

Fig. 18
William Hope, *Spirit Photographs*, early 1900s
Fig. 19

Fig. 20
Louis Darget, *Fluidic Thoughtograph of Anger*, 1896
Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of the fluidic nimbus of a medium’s thumb*, 1893

Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of Prayer*, undated (c. 1890s)
Fig. 23
Hippolyte Baraduc, *Photograph of Nadine*, 1907

Fig. 24
Jules-Bernard Luys and Emile David, *Digital Effluvia*, 1897
Fig. 25

Fig. 26
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Cinematographic stills of Stanislaw in séance*, June 23, 1913
Fig. 27
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of ectoplasm*, May 8th, 1912; (enlarged view on right)

Fig. 28
The Holy Shroud (full frontal view)
Fig. 29
*The Holy Face of Jaen, 14th century*
This icon is said to be a direct copy of the original relic, which is no longer surviving.

Fig. 30
Secondo Pia, *Photographic negative of the Shroud*, 1898
Fig. 31
Odilon Redon, *It was a veil, an imprint*, late 1800s

Fig. 32
Julian Ochorowicz, *Photograph of “Little Stasia,”* March 29, 1909
Fig. 33
Annie Fairlamb with the male spirit, “George,” August 9, 1894

Fig. 34
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, Photograph of Stanisława in the cabinet, wearing standard medium garments, 1913; (enlarged view on right)
Fig. 35
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of Eva C. behind cabinet curtain with ectoplasm during séance*, October 25th 1910

Fig. 36
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of ectoplasm*, August 21, 1911 (enlarged view on right)
Fig. 37
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of Eva*, November 15, 1910

Fig. 38
Jean-Martin Charcot, *Photograph of a female hyster*ic (late 1880s)
Fig. 39
Gustave Geley, *Eva C. in séance, materializing ectoplasm from fingers*, 1918

Fig. 40
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph*, June 7th 1911
Fig. 41
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of Eva*, April 8th, 1912

Fig. 42
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing record of events (Dr. Schrenck Notzing receiving the touch of a materializing hand)*, November 18th, 1910
Fig. 43

Fig. 44
Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *Examples of ectoplasm on body of Eva*, 1913
Dr. Hirst, *Pseudocyesis cases*, published in *Human Monstrosities*, 1891

Camille Flammarion, *Photograph of table levitation/table tipping during a séance with Eusapia Palladino*, Paris, 1898
Fig. 47
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight Photograph of Eva*, November 22, 1911; (enlarged view on right)

Fig. 48
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of materialization of Georges Thurner*, June 24, 1912
Fig. 49
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photographs of Eva capturing “ectoplasmic veils,”* August, 1911

Fig 50
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph,* November 1, 1911
Fig. 51
Death mask of *L’inconnue de la Seine*, c.1880

Fig. 52
Gustave Geley, *Photograph of a completely materialized face*, February, 1918; enlarged view of face on right
Fig. 53
Gustave Geley, *Photograph of materialized woman’s head in process of formation*, February 26, 1918

Fig. 54
Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet, *Photograph of Linda Gazzera in séance with materialization*, June 28, 1909
Fig. 55
Ada Emma Deane, *Spirit Photographs*, 1920-23

Fig. 56
Gustave Moreau, *Apparition*, c.1874-76
Fig. 57  
Odilon Redon, *Orpheus*, c.1903

Fig. 58  
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of materialized hand*, November 25, 1909
Fig. 59
*The Souls of Purgatory*, 18th century

Fig. 60
Francesco Granacci, *Madonna of the Girdle with Saints Benedict, Thomas, Francis, and Julian*, 1505
Fig. 61
William Mumler, *Portrait of Fanny Conant with spirit hands showering her with flowers*, c.1870-75.

Fig. 62
Alex Martin, *Portrait of the Reverend C. H. Cook with spirit extra of Father Ryan*, 1913
Fig. 63
Julian Ochorowicz, *Radiographic photographs of fluidic hands produced by Stanisława’s “double,”* 1911

Fig. 64
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawings after séance (with materialized hands in cabinet),* October 22, 1910
Fig. 65
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hands in the cabinet)*, October 25, 1910

Fig. 66
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand on medium’s shoulder)*, October 28, 1910
Fig. 67
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand in cabinet)*, January 6, 1911

Fig. 68
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Drawing after séance (with materialized hand and arm)*, November 11, 1910
Fig. 69
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of hand materialization*, November 11, 1910

Fig. 70
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of hand materialization*, February 15, 1913
Fig. 71
Enrico Imoda, *Linda Gazzera in séance*, 1909

Fig. 72
Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet, *Hand materialization with Linda Gazzera*, 1909
Fig. 73
Albert von Schrenck Notzing and Mme. Bisson, *Materialized finger during a séance*, April 1, 1913

Fig. 74
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Sample of ectoplasm in porcelain dish*, November 11th, 1910
Fig. 75
Paraffin spirit molds, c.1900

Fig. 76
Hand impressions by Eusapia Palladino, c.1907-08
Fig. 77
Facial spirit imprint produced by Eusapia Palladino (pictured on left)

Fig. 78
Frantisek Kupka, *The Dream*, c.1909
Fig. 79

Fig. 80
Georgiana Houghton, *The Eye of God*, 1862
Fig. 81
Georgiana Houghton, *Spirit photograph*, undated (late 19th century)

Fig. 82
Albert von Keller, *Spiritualist Telekinesis of a Bracelet*, 1887; (*on right*: photograph of the medium Lina in séance with materialized bracelets, 1887)
Fig. 83
John Singer Sargent, *Apollo and the Muses*, c. 1916-21

Fig. 84
Baldassare Peruzzi, *Muses Dancing with Apollo*, c. 1514-23
Fig. 85
Théophile Bra, *Le Torrent des esprits*, late 19th century

Fig. 86
Pablo Picasso, *Ma Main*, 1905-06
Fig. 87
Wassily Kandinsky, *Empreintes des Mains de Kandinsky*, 1926

Fig. 88
Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, c. 1647–52
Fig. 89
Henri Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, c.1781

Fig. 90
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of materialization of M. Bisson*, June 21, 1912
Fig. 91
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of the spirit “Estelle,”* December 30, 1911; (enlarged view on right).

Fig. 92
Abel Favre, *Femina Cover,* 1911
Fig. 93
Enrico Imoda and Charles Richet, *Ectoplasms conjured by Linda Gazzera*, 1909

Fig. 94
Enrico Imoda, *Linda Gazzera with an ectoplasmic materialization*, April 29, 1909
Fig. 95
Ada Emma Deane, *Spirit photographs in colour*, c.1920

Fig. 96
René Lelong, *Femina Cover*, 1911
Belle Époque hat fashions: (On left) Hat fashions by Suzanne Weiss from *Comoedia Illustré*, November 1910; (on right) fashion illustration from an early 1900's *Femina* issue

Summer hat and veil fashions, *Galeries Lafayette*, c. 1910
Fig. 99
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Flashlight photograph of Eva C. in séance*, November 27, 1912

Fig. 100
Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912
Fig. 101
Georgina Berkeley, *Untitled Photocollage from the Berkeley Album*, 1866-71

Fig. 102
Raoul Hausmann, *Dada Cino*, 1920
Fig. 103
Raoul Hausmann, *Dada Self Portrait*, 1920

Fig. 104
Albert von Schrenck Notzing, *Photographs of Eva C. with ectoplasmic materializations*, March-May 1913
Fig. 105
Portrait of President Poincaré as published in *Le Miroir*

Fig. 106
Schrenck Notzing, *Photograph of Eva C. in séance with materialization*, November 30th 1912; (enlarged detail on right)
Fig. 107
Portrait photograph of Monna Delza as it appeared in *La Femina*, 1912

Fig. 108
Political cartoon featuring speech bubbles, c.1807
Fig. 109
Maurice de Vlaminck, *Dancer of the Rat Mort*, 1905-06

Fig. 110
Front page of *Le Matin*, March 1st, 1913
Fig. 111
Ada Emma Deane, *Spirit photograph in colour*, c. 1920
Copyright Acknowledgement

All images that appear here are within the public domain.