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Women, Spirit Photography & Psychological Research: Negotiating Gender Conventions and Loss

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Art and Visual Culture

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how women used practices of spirit photography and psychical research to negotiate social change from the late nineteenth century to today. Developed in the US in the early 1860s, shortly after the Spiritualist movement spread to Canada and the UK, spirit photography emerged when scientific reasoning shook the foundations of orthodox religion and offered an alternative perspective on the afterlife. It was first used by Spiritualists to communicate with the spirit world and as evidence of their beliefs. It was quickly absorbed into mainstream culture through the daily press, becoming an issue for public debate.

This research draws on literature in histories of photography and women's social histories. It is based on archival research and uses feminist and affect theories to explore the socio-cultural conditions in which spirit photographs were produced and disseminated. I consider women's positions within the male dominated field of photography during periods of rapid social transformation and instability, as previously accepted ideas about gender, science, and religion were collapsing. Exploring a range of emotions that the photographs elicit, I consider affective engagements between image, creator, and spirit subject. These relations draw viewers into the photographs and the moments they capture, inviting them to engage with the image and their own spirituality. I also consider how spirit photographs were used as objects for consolation during times of loss and grief.

This dissertation examines three Canadian case studies from a feminist, social history perspective to consider how women's practices simultaneously adhered to and challenged ideas about femininity, and how women negotiated private and public spheres. Through close analyses of Hannah Maynard, Lillian Hamilton, and Sylvia Barber, I argue that these women gained agency and autonomy through various practices of spirit photography. My study concludes with a discussion of spirit photographs and videos by contemporary artists Shannon Taggart and Susan MacWilliam. I highlight continuities between historical and contemporary practices to suggest that the position of artist-as-researcher granted them agency like their historical predecessors.

Key words: spirit photography, psychical photography, Canadian photography, Spiritualism, women's social histories, loss, grievance, the archive, affect theory, feminist theory, gender subversion, contemporary art, artist-as-researcher, video, installation

Summary

This project is about women's practices of spirit photography, psychical research, and social change from the late-nineteenth to today. Spirit photography developed in the US in the early 1860s, shortly after the Spiritualist movement spread to Canada and the UK. At this time, new scientific knowledge was beginning to challenge orthodox religion. Spirit photography offered new perspectives on the afterlife. It was first used by Spiritualists to communicate with the spirit world and to provide evidence of their beliefs. It quickly attracted the public's attention through the daily press, making it an issue for public debate.

My research uses literature in histories of photography and women's social histories. It is based on archival research and uses studies of feminist and affect theory to explore the social and cultural conditions in which spirit photographs were produced and circulated. I consider women's positions within the masculine field of photography, as they were significantly outnumbered by men. My study focuses on periods of rapid social transformation and instability, as new ideas about gender, science, and religion were emerging. I suggest that the photographs produce a range of emotions within viewers that then create a relation between image, creator, and spirit subject. These relationships draw viewers into the photographs and the moments they capture, inviting them to engage with the photographs and their own spirituality. I also consider how spirit photographs were used as objects for consolation during times of loss and grief.

This dissertation analyzes three Canadian case studies through a feminist, social history lens. I explore how women's practices followed, and at the same time, challenged traditional ideas about femininity, while considering how women balanced private and public life. Through close analyses of Hannah Maynard, Lillian Hamilton, and Sylvia Barber, I argue that these women gained agency and autonomy through various practices of spirit photography. My study concludes with a discussion of spirit photographs and videos by contemporary artists Shannon Taggart and Susan MacWilliam. I highlight similarities between historical and contemporary practices to suggest that the position of artist-as-researcher granted them agency, in the way that earlier photographers gained agency through their practices.

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It feels like a happy coincidence, or what Carl Jung would call a synchronicity, that I happened to study spirituality for my dissertation. At the beginning of this project, I never would have imagined going through the emotions that I have while writing each chapter. Finishing my degree amid a global pandemic and grieving for a number of family members that have since passed, have given me the opportunity to write through my experiences and emotions. So, it feels apt (or synchronicitous) to be writing about loss, trauma, bereavement, and life after death. These inexplicable complexities of life have helped me breathe life into this work. This dissertation has been nearer and dearer to my heart than I ever could have imagined; it has helped me cope with my own grief, uncertainties about the future, and to accept that anything that exists in the present can change in a moment's notice. This project has offered me the solace and hope that spirit photographs have provided their viewers with since the nineteenth century.

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Introduction

My dissertation explores how practices of spirit photography has helped women, acting as photographers, mediums, and researchers, negotiate social change across North America from the late-nineteenth century and into today. Spirit photography emerged in the early 1860s, shortly after the Spiritualist movement began in the US, before spreading to the UK and Canada a decade later.¹ At a time when scientific reasoning began to shake the foundations of orthodox religion, Spiritualism offered adherents an alternative perspective on the afterlife, using photographs as evidence of their beliefs. Spirit images quickly became a popular commodity after Boston engraver William Mumler took up photography and discovered an “extra” in one of his photographs. This initiated the field of spirit photography, which was founded on the notion that bereaved individuals could visually reunite with deceased loved ones. Mumler’s findings were soon published in *The*



Figure 1: Cover page, *Harper's Weekly*, May 8th, 1869

¹ William Mumler is most frequently cited as the inventor, or “discoverer,” of spirit photography. His are the earliest to be preserved and documented, though Sir Arthur Conan Doyle cites 1851 as the date of the first attempts at spirit photography in his *History of Spiritualism*. Clément Chéroux, “Ghost Dialectics: Spirit Photography in Entertainment and Belief,” in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 46.

Spiritual Magazine and other mainstream publications such as the New York daily press and *Harper's Weekly* (fig. 1). His trial for fraud in 1869 further propelled spirit photography out of Spiritualism's boundaries and made it an issue for public debate.² As photographs became mass produced with developments such as stereocards and cartes-de-vistes, spirit photography became a lucrative business. Customers could pay to have their portraits taken with spirits of deceased relatives and friends in any number of studios in major cities; New York, Boston, London, and Paris became major hubs for spirit photography.

Throughout the nineteenth century, spirit photographers experimented with darkroom processes, Spiritualist mediums, and séances to develop several types of visual manifestations. Spirits, mediums, and fluids are common categories for organizing spirit photographs, which can be further divided by their intended function. To conjure spirits of the dead and to entertain were the two primary incentives impelling Victorian practitioners. Though these categorical divisions are not definitive, nor mutually exclusive, communicative applications are those that fostered beliefs in capturing spirits of the deceased, while recreational applications are generally considered those that purposefully exploited double exposure to create a "spiritual appearance" for commercial enterprise.³ Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, David Brewster, who was an important figure in the development of the stereoscope, described how this device enabled the photographer to bring us into the realm of the supernatural by creating figures with a "spiritual appearance," who were then exhibited as "'thin air' amid the solid realities of the stereoscopic picture."⁴ Such effects conjured aspects of life, death, and mourning. Spirit photographs functioned, then, as commodified objects that were used for consolation and are thus evocative of a contradictory set of affects—grief, loss, and sorrow and happiness, reassurance, and joy. By exploring the tension between these affects, I question how spirit photographs operated in the nineteenth and twentieth

2 For details about Mumler's practice and his trial see Louis Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

3 David Brewster, "Application of the Stereoscope to Purposes of the Amusement," in *Its History, Theory and Construction with Its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education* (London: John Murray, 1856), 205. Recreational photographs were taken by independent practitioners in professional portrait studios and also for use in stereoscopes.

4 Brewster, "Application of the Stereoscope to Purposes of the Amusement," 205.

centuries, and how practices of spirit photography helped women negotiate their shifting social environment. This allows me to investigate broader technological and sociological circumstances surrounding women's involvement in spirit photography and their position within the public sphere. I therefore question developments in photography, scientific rationalism, religious beliefs, and gender politics at this time.

Spirit communication and some forms of mediumship date back to antiquity. Although historians generally cite modern Spiritualism as beginning in 1848 with two young sisters in Rochester, NY. Kate and Margaret Fox claimed to be communicating with the spirit of a deceased peddler, Charles B. Rosna, through raps in their family home.⁵ In Canada, Spiritualist groups had formed as early as the 1850s in such cities as Toronto, London, Ottawa, St. Catharines, and Montreal.⁶ Spirit communication via physical mediumship, was conveyed through knockings and rappings, like those of the Foxs', as well as table-tilting and Ouija boards. Such activities were used as channels to commune with the dead and as entertaining parlour games. Upon Mumler's discovery of a spiritual apparition in his photograph, the camera became the primary tool for evincing spiritual existence beyond physical life. As spirit photographs proliferated in popular culture and were sold en masse, it was primarily male practitioners who profited from this business endeavour.

Spirit photographers relied on the feminine body, however, to act as a medium between the physical and spiritual worlds in order to produce successful spirit photographs. Mediumship was primarily embodied by women, who were perceived as ideal conduits because of their presumed passivity and obedience. They worked alongside photographers to facilitate the spiritual reappearance of deceased individuals. Yet male photographers led the field of spirit photography. For example, scholar Felicity Hamer suggests that it was in fact Mumler's wife, who was also his secretary and a medium, who "invented" spirit photography in the US.⁷ While in Europe, spirit photographer

5 For more on the Fox family "rappings" and the story of how modern Spiritualism arose and spread throughout the US, see Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Margaret Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005).

6 Walter J. Meyer zu Erpen and Joy Lowe, "The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study," *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990): 80.

7 Hamer makes a case for this in her Master's thesis: "The Role of Women in Victorian-era Spirit Photography: A New Narrative in Art History," Concordia University, 2015. Her study has also been published in the articles: "Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances

Frederick Hudson relied on Georgiana Houghton's mediumship for the success of his London studio a decade later. The only renowned female spirit photographer of the Victorian era, Ada Emma Deane, used her psychic mediumship and photography skills to produce thousands of images throughout the 1920s and 30s. Women have therefore been especially linked to Spiritualism as its modern initiators and as the primary means of communication for producing spirit images. This is, in part, because Spiritualism was a revolutionary religion that placed men and women as equals through its denial of basic binary oppositions—namely male/female, physical/spiritual. Spiritualists were committed to progressive social change, including women's rights and education, antislavery, health reform, and temperance.⁸ Yet because not all Spiritualists were involved in spirit photography, and because the field of photography remained male dominated, women subsequently remained marginalized in practices of spirit photography. Women have nonetheless been steadfast participants within Spiritualism and spirit photography since their emergence. This dissertation accordingly takes these histories as its foundation for exploring the varied contributions that women have made to photography from a feminist, social history perspective. It considers how women used various practices of spirit photography to negotiate social change, and to gain agency and autonomy in the male dominated fields of photography and psychic studies from the late nineteenth century to today.

Sociocultural Climate

The evidentiary status of photography was established alongside numerous social changes in the mid- to late- nineteenth century. And as descendants of the Enlightenment

Green: "The Original Spirit Photographer," *History of Photography* 42, no. 2 (September 2018): 146-167; "Spirit Photography Captured Love, Loss and Longing," *The Conversation* (October 26, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/spirit-photography-captured-love-loss-and-longing-169239>; and "Spirit photography: 19th-century innovation in bereavement rituals was likely invented by a woman," *The Conversation* (September 29, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/spirit-photography-19th-century-innovation-in-bereavement-rituals-was-likely-invented-by-a-woman-164033>.

⁸ Ann Braude writes that, "As investigation of the manifestations swept the nation, Spiritualism became a major—if not *the* major—vehicle for the spread of women's rights ideas in mid-century America." In *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1989), 57.

era, Spiritualists used photographs as evidence to substantiate their beliefs.⁹ In his historical survey on the parallels between photography and the paranormal, Rolf H. Krauss explains how the camera was relied on as a tool of evidence in parapsychology.¹⁰ Culture progressed toward, and was shaped by, a positivist worldview in which empirical evidence was the foundation for knowledge formation.¹¹ This ideology was supported by August Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, published in six volumes between 1830 and 1842, and was disseminated throughout disciplines from sociology to literature.¹² Archivist Walter Meyer zu Erpen has noted that "Spiritualism attempts to investigate and classify the mental and physical phenomena demonstrated through mediumship as evidence of life after death" at the crossroads between religion, philosophy, and science.¹³ Spirit photographers therefore relied on the discursive framework of Spiritualism to reify the mysterious and spectral ambiguities that were inscribed on the photographic plate, particularly as knowledge about darkroom manipulations were circulated publicly by the press. Professionals and amateurs alike developed techniques such as multiple exposures, superimposition, and combination printing, which altered public perception about the medium.¹⁴

This project begins in the mid-nineteenth century, at a time when previously accepted ideas about gender, science, and religion began to collapse under ideological,

9 In conversation with "Media of Mediumship" project leader Professor Christine Ferguson, Taggart states that "Spiritualists were descendants of the Enlightenment, and they seek to create evidence of their beliefs in many ways, including art and photography." *Science Museum*, June 30th, 2020, "Spiritualism, Photography and the Search for Ectoplasm," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWr_4I8Gvw4&ab_channel=TheMediaofMediumship.

10 Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey* (Tuscan, Arizona: Nazraeli Press, 1995).

11 Corey Keller, "Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible," *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 21.

12 Keller, "Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible," 21.

13 Walter Meyer zu Erpen, "Afterlife Beliefs in the Spiritualist Movement," in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 2018), 218.

14 Jennifer Tucker, *Nature Exposed: Photography as Eyewitness in Victorian Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Jennifer L. Mnookin, "The Image of Truth: Photographic Evidence and the Power of Analogy," *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities* 10, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 1-74; and Michael Leja, *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) present the debate about spirit photographers and the manipulation of the photographic image in the nineteenth century.

philosophical, and theosophical issues that were part of a Victorian culture.¹⁵ Technological advancements produced new modes of telecommunication, transportation, medical practices, scientific analyses, and photographic techniques that captivated the public about the new worlds opening up before them. Spirit photographs were developed alongside materialist rationale and were thus aligned with long distance technological media, such as the telegraph. Differences between electric and spectral energy were obscured as spirit photographs contested the disjuncture between body and spirit.¹⁶ And because photography was still relatively new, and the chemical and mechanical processes remained mysterious to the general population, the idea that the camera could capture spirits seemed plausible. Photo scholar Shawn Michelle Smith notes that photography had made visible the invisible, while simultaneously revealing “the limitations of human sight.”¹⁷ Spirit photographs therefore stirred lively debate in fields of science, religion, and visual culture, and in such sub-categories as the occult, paranormal, parapsychology, and psychics.¹⁸ And Spiritualists connected scientific empiricism with the camera’s evidentiary status to bolster their belief in the spirit world.¹⁹ The publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) helped propel scientific reasoning into the public sphere with its argument that human evolution was not “divine intervention.”²⁰ This was a disconcerting fact to religious adherents for contradicting “deeply held philosophical and religious beliefs.”²¹ Newly invented microscopes, telescopes, and X-

15 In his study of Victorian science, Bernard Lightman writes: “For scientific, theological, philosophical, and ideological issues are all a part of a common culture. In *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 11.

16 Richard Noakes, “‘Crank and Visionaries’: Science, Spiritualism, and Transgression in Victorian Britain,” PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1998, 10.

17 Shawn Michelle Smith, “Introduction: First Photographs,” in *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 8.

18 According to Shannon Taggart, however, “Spiritualists reject any association with the occult, with paganism, with witchcraft, or ceremonial magic.” Taggart, “Spiritualism, Photography and the Search for Ectoplasm,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWr_4I8Gvw4&ab_channel=TheMediaofMediumship.

19 Corey Keller provides the example of the draftsman’s manual transcription of the observable world as replaced by the invention of photography in “Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible.”

20 *Ibid.*, 19.

21 *Ibid.*

rays incited a profound reconsideration of humans' place within the universe by revealing the previously invisible elements operating outside of our perception.²²

Spiritualists used Darwin's concepts to provide Spiritualism, and its materializations, with scientific scaffolding for their belief in the spirit world. Jennifer Tucker articulates how Spiritualists translated scientific evolution into the spiritual realm under the supposition that spirits continued to evolve as they transitioned into the afterlife.²³ Jonathan Crary's study of nineteenth-century vision further complicates the boundary between the external world and subjective vision, arguing that photography validated a "new regime of vision" that severed the visual from the viewing subject.²⁴ This concept pervaded philosophical, scientific, and technological discourses, which in turn, prompted a reorganization of knowledge and social practices.²⁵ The question of how women's histories are affected by these changes is central to this study. By considering how scientific understandings of the visual world contributed to artistic developments of perceptual senses, I unravel spirit photography's connection between physical and mental phenomena.

From its invention, photography was positioned as both art and science. This time also saw artistic experimentations with photography, such as photomontage, photo-sculpture, and composite images. Spirit photographers similarly experimented with darkroom processes, states of trance mediumship, and séance conditions to produce several types of visual documentation. Spiritualists were significant within these developments as the first to make an iconography out of photography, which was used

22 The invention of these optical devices also helped provide "proof and absolute conviction" of "genuine" spirit photography. William Hodson Brock describes how the previously skeptical physicist and chemist William Crookes endorsed spirit photography after the invention of the X-ray in 1906; particularly after December 10, 1916, when he brought a photograph of himself with the deceased Lady Crookes to spirit photographer William Hope "convinced that it was a genuine spirit photograph." William Hodson Brock, *William Crookes (1832-1919) and the Commercialization of Science* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008), 474. Crookes is also notable for his studies of mediums Kate Fox, Florence Cook, and Daniel Dunglass Home, and as the president of the Society for Psychical Research in the 1860s.

23 Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, 98.

24 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 3.

25 Ibid.

both to support and to demystify the spiritual entities that the medium immortalized.²⁶ The earliest spirit photographs were taken in portrait studios and utilized the conventions of the genre; three-quarter posed sitters appeared alongside, and often seemed oblivious to, deceased loved ones who manifested as translucent figures once the plates were developed. Other types of spirit photographs depict mediums and fluids.²⁷ Photographs of mediums are the most varied, and they depict such diverse phenomena as levitation, telekinesis, automatic writing, and the production of ectoplasm, which all rely on the medium to occur.²⁸ These images are taken numerous times throughout séance and show attendants seated around a table holding hands. Photographs of fluids emanating from a medium's body were understood as the "vital force, the soul, and also thoughts, feelings, and dreams" that were captured directly onto the photographic plate without a camera.²⁹ Unlike photographs of spirit and fluids—which are part of the research process—those of mediums were often intended as a device for monitoring the séance conditions and the medium's (potentially fraudulent) actions, for they capture the visible, rather than the invisible.³⁰ Photographs of mediums also include those of ectoplasm. It was described by Winnipeg medical doctor and psychic researcher Thomas Glendenning (T.G.) Hamilton as, "a subtle living matter present in the body of a medium, which is capable of assuming various semi-solid or solid states for a brief time."³¹ It emanates from the medium before recoiling back inside the body. Ectoplasm was often photographed in darkened séance

26 For example, Spiritualist Arthur Conan Doyle and illusionist Harry Houdini publicly feuded over spirit photography's authenticity in the 1920s. Doyle was candid about his beliefs, while Houdini based entire shows on exposing the forgery behind spirit photography.

27 Spirits, mediums, and fluids are the categories of spirit photography that Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit identify in "Photography and the Occult," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 16.

28 Levitation is defined as "Lifting and suspension of an object or a person in the air without apparent use of orthodox physical or technological means." Telekinesis is a "Term used in older literature to describe [Psychokinesis] PK," which is "Paranormal influence of the mind of a person upon physical objects." Automatic writing is defined as "Form of automatism where a person writes intelligibly in a recognized language, but without conscious knowledge of what is being written;" wherein automatism is understood as a "Complex activity executed while in a state of dissociation." "Glossary," *Society for Psychical Research*, <https://www.spr.ac.uk/glossary>.

29 Photographs of fluids developed into research about radiation, specifically X-rays and radioactivity, at the turn of the nineteenth century. Sophie Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, "Photography and the Occult," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 16.

30 Sophie Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, "Photography and the Occult," 16.

31 Thomas Glendenning Hamilton, *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1942), 215.

cabinets, which were wooden structures that were enclosed, often by a curtain, and where mediums would sit to help concentrate their psychic faculty.³² These categories are not definitive, nor mutually exclusive, and they are only a few of the aesthetic trends in spirit photography, with a great degree of variance within them. Opposing approaches and purposes also coexist across these categories, including commercial, recreation and entertainment, and experimental.

My research takes an interdisciplinary approach to explore the varied and complex ways in which women participated in photography and balanced social and domestic spheres. While other nineteenth- and twentieth-century genres, such as social documentary and pictorialism, have received thorough attention in histories of photography, spirit photography is an under-studied area. More specifically, there is minimal literature on women participating within spirit photography in Canada. In the first three chapters, I focus on Canadian photographers who were active between 1862 and 1958. My final chapter is a discussion of two contemporary photo-based artists who explore spirit photography. My project offers new insight into the significance of women's practices in spirit photography, while illuminating their innovations in artistic techniques and entrepreneurship. I show the sociological complexities around which women were practising spirit photography, extending beyond their involvement as mediums, to demonstrate how it afforded photographers possibilities for autonomy, employment, and financial income.³³ This is particularly relevant since their position within Spiritualism, and society more generally, was enfolded in gender expectations, sexual politics, and power relations between men and women.³⁴ As Ann Braude argues, Spiritualism was significant as a major channel for voicing women's rights. Spiritualists were also the first group of American women to exercise religious leadership or speak in public.³⁵ Spiritualism supported women's autonomy as much as it dispelled differences between basic binary oppositions—women and men, life and afterlife, present and past,

32 *Society for Psychical Research*, "Glossary," <https://www.spr.ac.uk/glossary>.

33 Spiritualism's association with mediumship and femininity has been written about extensively. For example, texts by Ann Braude, Alex Owen, and Claudie Massicotte.

34 Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Verago Press, 1989).

35 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1989).

magic and science.³⁶ As such, my case studies reveal how the women's Spiritualist activities and beliefs facilitated their practices and overall participation in the field of spirit photography. My photographic analyses therefore explore how women used a range of techniques in photography, including composition and editing, to produce evidential documents that supported their beliefs, and to produce subjective forms of expression that fostered their creativity. All of my examples show how spirit images and albums have helped shape public perception about visual culture and women's place within it. This dissertation explores how spirit photography was used without making claims as to its validity.

Through integrated articles, this dissertation investigates how notions of femininity infiltrated, and effectively determined, the degree to which women participated within spirit photography, the séance, and psychic experiments. It explores the visual expression of Spiritualist beliefs, scientific evidence, familial bonds, women's experiences in séance, societal assumptions about gender and the status of men and women—both historical and contemporary and within private and public realms. My study is vested in how the photographs functioned at the time they were produced to understand their significance within private and public spheres.

Literature Review

Most histories of photography have disregarded spirit photography, in part, because of its intangible and seemingly irrational basis. Beaumont Newhall and Naomi Rosenblum, for example, exclude it from their canonical texts;³⁷ while Walter Benjamin, Richard Bolton, Victor Burgin, and Allan Sekula for example, mention it as a curiosity, rather than a subject of critical inquiry.³⁸ The genre's indeterminate nature, and thus problematic

36 Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 19.

37 Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964) and Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 1st edition (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984).

38 Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, et al, 274-298 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 2008 [1931]); Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works 1973-1983*. Vol. 16. (Halifax, N.S: Press of the Nova Scotia

status, has generated competing narratives within spirit photography discourses dating from its discovery to the present. Such conflicting accounts underscore what John Tagg and Richard Bolton describe as the variability of photographic meaning. This is determined by specific purposes, contexts, and ultimately by history, outside of which the “the existential essence of photography is empty,” writes Tagg.³⁹ He explains that without these frames of meaning, the photograph is empty. R. Laurence Moore has suggested that spirit photography’s marginality is related to its position outside of mainstream culture,⁴⁰ whereas Fred Gettings remarks that the images themselves were “scarcely taken seriously in modern times.”⁴¹

Spirit photography’s status has, however, more recently been elevated with exhibitions such as *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* in Paris and New York (2005).⁴² This exhibition coincided with a wide range of others in the first decade of the twenty-first century that explored notions of the paranormal and haunting, as well as Spiritualism and spirit photography more specifically. These include, *Seeing is Believing: Photographing the Unseen Past and Present* in London, UK (2007-2008); *Blur of the Otherworldly: Contemporary Art, Technology, and the Paranormal* in Baltimore, MD (2006); and *The Message: Art and Occultism* in Bochum, Germany (2007). Most relevant to this study is the exhibition, *Investigation of the Human Psyche: Spiritualist & Parapsychology Collections at the University of Manitoba Archives*, curated by archivists Shelley Sweeney and Walter Meyer zu Erpen, which presented photographs, objects, and texts from the university’s archive of over fifty collections that relate to psychical research and Spiritualism, including images from the Hamilton Family Fonds that are discussed in this dissertation (2018).

Spirit photography’s marginal status is related to its connection with Spiritualism. It is often cited in Spiritualist literature as verification of a spiritual presence, particularly

College of Art and Design, 1984); Richard Bolton, *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989); Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

39 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), 3

40 R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 8.

41 Fred Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York: Harmony Books, 1978), 5.

42 The exhibition was organized by Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, and it was first installed at la Maison Européenne de la Photographie then the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2005.

in the 1870s when a second generation of interest coincided with photographic developments.⁴³ Evidence of apparitions was no longer measured by auditory communication, such as rappings, musical instrumentation, etc., but rather, by observable, material reproductions that were made possible by the camera.⁴⁴ Spirit photography's underrepresentation is perhaps also due to earlier scholars' view of it as "vernacular or documentary," rather than as "high art."⁴⁵ Tucker further proposes that Victorian scientific institutions marked spirit photography as "Other."⁴⁶ This is to say that spirit photography was positioned alongside the feminine, and was therefore subordinate to dominant masculinity, and other genres of photography.⁴⁷ In his study of William Mumler, Louis Kaplan suggests that spirit photography became a topic of interest in the twenty-first century, when the art world "reframed spirit photographs from visual artifacts embedded within the history of Spiritualism to objects of value within the history of Western art."⁴⁸ Akin to late twentieth-century revaluations of women photographers in dominant discourses of photography, as Kaplan observes, spirit photography has similarly undergone a sort of "reclassification," further evident in the rise of contemporary literature about it.

The reclassification of spirit photography is related to second-wave feminism and the introduction of feminist theory into histories of art and photography. Scholars then began to reassess the significance of female artists' work, identified by Gerda Lerner as the "compensatory" phase of women's history.⁴⁹ More specifically, Lerner writes about the ways in which scholars posed "feminist questions about photographic representations."⁵⁰ Numerous volumes were dedicated to re-evaluating the historical significance of women's roles in the production and distribution of photographs, and

43 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 101.

44 Smith, "Introduction: First Photographs," 10.

45 Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer*, 2. Here Kaplan cites Douglass Crimp, "The Museum's Old/the Library's New Subject," in Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, 213-223 (New York: SAGE Publications, 1999); and Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 65-83.

46 Tucker, *Nature Exposed*, 124.

47 Tucker also notes, "many male scientific professionals distanced themselves from women spiritualists and spirit photographers." Ibid.

48 Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*, 2.

49 Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1979.

50 Ibid.

working toward redressing their marginalization in traditional studies of photography. For instance, important texts by Jane Gover, Naomi Rosenblum, Peter E. Palmquist, Judith Fryer Davidov, Lindsay Smith, and Patrizia di Bello represent this reevaluation of women photographers.⁵¹ Spirit photographers, however, continued to be underrepresented. Because the literature often focuses on a few male photographers, women have become sidelined, obscured, mis- or unidentified, or they simply remained anonymous, despite their significant contributions to the field. Feminist scholars such as Felicity Tsering Chödrön Hamer, Alex Owen, Meredith Reddy, Kristy Sharpe, and Jennifer Tucker have revised this history by examining women's roles in practices of spirit photography.⁵² Their work endeavours to reconcile traditional, patriarchal accounts through historical revisions. They question the gendered power dynamics embedded within Victorian practices of photography. Women's involvement in spirit photography has, however, yet to be fully explored. My research therefore extends from the continually growing foundation of scholarship to help develop a more comprehensive picture of women's place within this history and contemporary art. I offer new insight into the practices of Hannah Maynard, Lillian Hamilton, and Sylvia Barber in Canada. In the last chapter, I discuss artists Shannon Taggart and Susan MacWilliam, who have similarly not been studied within the context of women's histories and spirit photography.

Nineteenth-Twentieth Century Accounts

Literature on spirit photography dates back to the beginning of the practice, with practitioners documenting their processes and experiments in monographs and

51 Jane Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*; Peter E. Palmquist, *A Bibliography of Writings by and about Women in Photography 1850-1990*, second edition (Arcata, California: Published by the author, 1994); Judith Fryer Davidov, *Women's Camera Work: Self/body/other in American Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photograph* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Patrizia di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (London: Routledge, 2007).

52 Tucker, *Nature Exposed*; Owen, *The Darkened Room*; Meredith Reddy, "Artful Mediums: Women, Séance Photography, and Materialization Phenomena, 1880-1930," PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2015; Felicity Hamer, "Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances Green: The Original Spirit Photographer," *History of Photography* 42, no. 2 (September 2018): 146-167; and Kristy Sharpe, "A Stupendous Fraud: The Rise and Fall of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer," Master's thesis, Simmons College, 2006.

Spiritualist journals such as *Banner of Light*, *Herald of Light*, *Psychic Review*, *Gallery of Spirit Art*, and *International Psychic Gazette*. From the 1870s to the 1930s, books include: *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*, Sir Crookes; *Chronicles of The Photographs of Spiritual Beings and Phenomena Invisible to the Material Eye*, Georgiana Houghton; *The Case For Spirit Photography*, Conan Doyle; *Ectoplasm as Associated with Survival*, Felicia Scatcherd; *Experiments in Psychics*, F. W. Warrick. Typically written by its main proponents, spirit photographers and Spiritualists in North American and the UK often employed persuasive language to argue for the authenticity of their visual materializations. Empirical accounts were the prevailing method for practitioners to detail the mechanics of their procedures, including the names of persons involved (mediums, customers), dates, and the locations of their experiments. For instance, Frederick Altona Binney (Fritz), James Coates, Conan Doyle, and Georgiana Houghton argue for the legitimacy of spirit photography by providing the observable, factual evidence of their experiments to circumvent potential misunderstandings by the public.⁵³ Detractors of spirit images similarly documented their disbelief, published in books and articles from its earliest years, into the twenty first century. These include works by James Black, Annette Hill, Harry Price, and Walter Franklin Prince, for example. These authors endeavoured to expose fraudulent practices in spirit photography by writing about topics ranging from trick photography and stage magic to a lack of “good” evidence.⁵⁴

Many scholars have recognized that since the mid-nineteenth century, fluctuations in scholarly and public interest in spirit, psychic, and supernatural photography has

53 James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare but Allied Phenomena* (New York: Arno, 1972, [1911]); Frederick Altona Binney, *Where are the Dead? Or, Spiritualism Explained: An Account Of The Astounding Phenomena Of Spiritualism, Affording Positive Proof By Undeniable Facts That Those We Mourn As Dead Are Still Alive, And Can Communicate With Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1873); Georgiana Houghton, *Chronicles of the Photographs of Spiritual Beings...Invisible to the Material Eye* (London: E.W. Allen, 1882); and Conan Doyle, *The Case For Spirit Photography* (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1922).

54 James Black, “The spirit-photograph fraud: The evidence of trickery, and a demonstration of the tricks employed,” *Scientific American* 126-127 (October 1922): 224-225, 286; Walter Franklin Prince, “My doubts about spirit photographs,” *Scientific American* 133 (December 1925): 370-371; Harry Price, *Fifty Years of Psychological Research* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003); Annette Hill, *Paranormal Media: Audiences, Spirits and Magic in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010).

“waxed and waned peaking in about 25 or 30-year cycles,”⁵⁵ supporting an influx of publications first in the 1860s and 70s, then in the first decades of the twentieth century, and so on. Interest is often associated with periods of intense technological development, in which the “dangers of new technology” and scientific discoveries fostered new means of visual expression, but also social anxiety and moral panic.⁵⁶ These fluctuations also reflect a shift in the way scholars approach research. Whereas nineteenth-century scientists and psychic investigators capitalized on the apparent indexicality of photography to identify fraudulent practices, simultaneously positioning the photographs in binary oppositions of “real” and “fake,” contemporary scholars have looked beyond authenticity to instead ask questions about ontology, subjectivity, and temporality. This includes looking into the circumstances of their production, how they have developed over time, what they meant to nineteenth-century believers and how they have been (re)interpreted, and how images have been used to support and mobilize particular belief systems.

Researchers of the mid- to late-twentieth century typically maintained binary perspectives as well, writing with strong convictions in the persuasive language of their predecessors. Advocates for authenticity and the evidentiary value of the images include, for example, Major Tom Patterson, who concludes his text with his conviction to foster photographic mediumship and actively support any group of genuine psychic investigators.⁵⁷ Following from this, Cyril Permutt and Fred Gettings were concerned with the origin and purpose of spirit images and how they manifested onto photographic plates and film.⁵⁸ Gettings only included discussions and reproductions of images that he believed to be “genuine spirit-pictures” to write a more accurate history of spirit

55 Cyril Permutt, *Beyond the Spectrum: A Survey of Supernormal Photography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 8. Rolf H. Krauss, Alex Owen, R. Laurence Moore, and Molly McGarry also note the cycles of public and scholarly interest in spirit photography, but also Spiritualism and the occult more broadly.

56 Emily D. Edwards, “Possessed and Dispossessed by Mass Media,” in *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 16.

57 Patterson even provides his address to welcome any correspondence, in any language, for which he can offer his aid. Major Tom Patterson, *100 Years of Spirit Photography* (London: Regency Press, 1965), 64.

58 Permutt, *Beyond the Spectrum*; Fred Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York: Harmony Books, 1978).

photography.⁵⁹ Rolf H. Krauss's study, however, represents a shift in how scholars began to approach spirit photography literature. He maintains a "neutral perspective" with the goal to "present the facts as objectively and dispassionately as possible, including all evidence for and against the authenticity of a phenomenon or series of phenomena."⁶⁰ This change in perspective is significant, for most scholars and researchers following Krauss allow readers to make their own judgements, avoiding finite claims as to the (in)validity of the images.

Most recent studies intersect with multiple discourses to question the uses of spirit photographs, the belief systems surrounding practices and their reception, and the ways in which these factors contributed to how the photographs were made to be "real." John Harvey, for instance, explores how spirit images gained validation within the fields of science, religion, and art through photographic techniques, presentation, and spiritualist events such as the séance.⁶¹ Similarly, Clément Chéroux's catalogue and Martyn Jolly's text employ transnational scopes to discuss histories of spirit photographers and different types of photographs situated within discourses of religion, science, and mediumship; while María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren use spirit photography as a lens through which they conceptualize the "ghost" as it has manifested throughout popular culture.⁶² Following from Benjamin and Crary, Shawn Michelle Smith explores the limits of vision to discuss the dynamics of seeing and not seeing that our visual fields, and the camera's lens, simultaneously present and complicate. Louis Kaplan, Barbara Wesiberg, Stanley Krippner and Daniel Rubin, and Julie Eisenbud deal with more specific topics or events within spirit photography, such as William Mumler, the Fox Family Rappings, and Kirilian and thought photography.⁶³ While much of this literature draws from a variety of

59 Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs*, 44.

60 Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow*, 11-12.

61 John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).

62 Clément, *The Perfect Medium*; María del Pilar Blanco, and Esther Peeren, *Popular Ghosts: The Haunted Spaces of Everyday Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

63 Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*; Martyn Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography* (London: British Library, 2006); Kaplan, *The Strange Case of William Mumler*; Barbara Wesiberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005); Stanley Krippner and Daniel Rubin, *The Kirlian Aura: Photographing the Galaxies of Life*, 1st. ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974); Julie Eisenbud, *The World of Ted Serios: "Thoughtographic" Studies of an Extraordinary Mind*. (New York: W. Morrow, 1967).

archives and images, most of these studies concentrate on the genre's male figures. Jolly and Owen do, however, acknowledge this with the aim to balance the disproportionate amount of literature that focuses on the acclaimed men within spirit photography and Spiritualism. And though the above-mentioned texts are central to the study of spirit photography, their inadequate representation of women has consequently resulted in erasures from this history. My project will therefore follow from Jolly and Owen's work and extend the "affirmation of the feminist historical agenda" that their, and other feminist texts, have propagated.⁶⁴

Spiritualism

Discussions of spirit photography are often aligned with Spiritualism. Even when situated in disparate contexts (popular culture, media, film, science), scholars of spirit photography address its bearing within the religious and cultural movement. Simon Natale articulates that, regardless of purpose, spectral photographs were "explicitly linked to Spiritualism" in scientific and religious contexts.⁶⁵ Many scholars at the turn of the twentieth century observed this interrelationship to ask new questions about historical perceptions of spirit photography, while expanding the religious and superstitious beliefs attached to it.

Because nineteenth-century Spiritualism was not institutionally structured like orthodox religion, it was not studied by contemporary academics. Its adherents, which included Canadian Spiritualists, articulated and disseminated their principles, practices, and testimonies through conventions, meetings, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, and oral communication. Transcriptions of these gatherings, along with such publications, provided a wealth of primary research for subsequent scholarship on Spiritualism and spirit photography. Numerous volumes have been published as introductions to, or comprehensive accounts of, Spiritualism and the wider movements it is associated with, primarily beginning in the early twentieth century. Spirit photographs are included in

64. Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 1.

65 Simon Natale, "A Short History of Superimposition: From Spirit Photography to Early Cinema," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (May 2012): 130. Hamer also clarifies this by detailing how leading Spiritualist lecturer Dr. H. F. Gardner requested Mumler's permission to publish his first spirit photograph in New York's daily Spiritualist press. "Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances Green: The Original Spirit Photographer," 148.

these discussions as visual “manifestations” or “materializations.” Spiritualist texts also coincide with the fluctuating interest in spirit photography, making them a crucial part of my research.

Spiritualism is also significant to women’s history in particular. As a predominantly female movement, it became a tool for women to gain political and religious traction through leadership. Spiritualists were strong supporters of women’s rights, helping shape public opinion regarding their political concerns and concepts of femininity outside the domestic realm.⁶⁶ Braude writes that “Spiritualist meetings were large and frequent and provided an important platform for radicals, who were invited to speak freely whether they were Spiritualists or not.”⁶⁷ Women involved in the Spiritualist movement acquired agency as activists, writers, mediums, and photographers. Curator and writer Pam Grossman further explains that spirit photography “planted a lot of the seeds for the suffragette movement.”⁶⁸ Spiritualism’s principle tenets include the denial of basic binary oppositions (male/female, physical/psychical); a commitment to progressive social change, including antislavery, women’s rights, temperance, health reform, and women’s education; and a belief in the spirit world. In my research, I explore how these beliefs connect with intersectional feminism and practices of spirit photography.

Ann Braude, Claudie Massicotte, Molly McGarry, Alex Owen, Meredith Reddy, Evellen Richards, Beth A. Robertson, and Jennifer Tucker highlight the ways in which women’s involvement in Spiritualism was implicated in conventions of gender and conceptions of femininity.⁶⁹ Like Spiritualists, these authors deny binary oppositions to maintain a neutral perspective regarding spirit photography’s authenticity. McGarry writes:

66 Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 73.

67 Ibid.

68 In an interview with Kristen J. Sollée in *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (Berkeley, CA: ThreeL Media/Stone Bridge Press, 2017), 65.

69 Braude, *Radical Spirits*; Owen, *The Darkened Room*; Tucker, *Nature Exposed*; McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*; Evellen Richards, “Darwinian Science and Women Intellectuals,” in *Victorian Science in Context* (1997); Reddy, “Artful Mediums: Women, Séance Photography, and Materialization Phenomena, 1880–1930;” Beth A. Robertson, *Science of the Séance: Transnational Networks and Gendered Bodies in the Study of Psychic Phenomena, 1918-40* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).

Many Spiritualists denied basic categorical binaries: the distinctions between men and women, science and magic, life and afterlife, the past and the present. They repudiated the power of experts and the necessity of mediating hierarchies at a time in which these forces were taking on a renewed cultural importance.⁷⁰

Rather than juxtaposing Spiritualist beliefs with mainstream American culture, she shows how each contain “the defining characteristics of the other,” since both followed from scientific discoveries and new revelations.⁷¹ McGarry and Robertson focus on the important roles that women played in religious circles and reform movements. They discuss the possibilities that mediumship offered women—autonomy, employment, financial income—to reveal the complex history of Spiritualism and psychical research. Similarly considering gender dynamics and the role of women in Spiritualism, Massicotte explores trance as a channel through which mediums navigated social change and questioned traditional ideas about the role of gender in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century séance. Braude similarly discusses activism, employing contemporary feminism to argue that Spiritualism facilitated the mobility and dissemination of women’s rights ideas. Also, Owen argues that women’s involvement in Spiritualism was enmeshed in expectations of gender, sexual politics, and the subversion of power relations between men and women. His text marks a turning point in the literature since this aspect of Spiritualism had been predominantly overlooked until 1989.

While there is a great deal of scholarship on Spiritualism in the UK and US, there are few studies that focus on Canada. One of the earliest and most significant texts for outlining a transformative period in Canada’s social, literary, and religious history has only recently come to light. *Mary Melville: The Psychic* was written by Flora MacDonald, who was a first-wave feminist, psychical researcher, and suffrage leader, in 1900. This blend of fiction and non-fiction is based on her older sister Mary Merrill’s psychic abilities in small-town Ontario.⁷² Walter J. Meyer Zu Erpen and Joy Lowe observe this gap in Canadian history, writing in 1990 that “academic study of the history

70 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 19.

71 Ibid., 6.

72 Flora MacDonald, *Mary Melville: The Psychic* (Toronto: The Austin Publishing Co. Limited), 1900. The book blends fiction with nonfiction in a female, biographic narrative.

of Spiritualism in Canada is virtually non-existent.”⁷³ They nonetheless recognize Ramsay Cook’s book and article as exceptions.⁷⁴ Claudie Massicotte, Stan McMullin, and Beth A. Robertson, have, however, made significant contributions to this field.⁷⁵ Their texts also outline current areas of research and highlight the gaps where further work is required. Additionally, while scholars have noted Hannah Maynard’s prominence as one of the West coast’s first professional female photographers, the literature does not provide a comprehensive investigation of her investment in Spiritualism, particularly in relation to its impact on her practice.⁷⁶

Brett E. Carroll, Robert Cox, R. Laurence Moore, Christopher M. Moreman, and Frank Podmore address American Spiritualism to assess its reactionary undertones.⁷⁷ They primarily engage with its political impulses to examine why photography appealed to Spiritualists. Logie Barrow, Richard Noakes, and Janet Oppenheim connect Spiritualism more broadly to social activism in the UK.⁷⁸ They demonstrate how late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century society constructed a “democratic epistemology” that related to Spiritualist beliefs and practices; while Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn intersect Spiritualism and the occult with science and politics across the US and UK to provide a comprehensive study of how Spiritualist beliefs affected what it meant to be

73 Meyer zu Erpen and Joy Lowe, “The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study,” 72.

74 Meyer zu Erpen and Joy Lowe, “The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study,” 72. Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) and Ramsay Cook, “Spiritualism, Science of the Earthly Paradise,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (March 1984): 4-27.

75 Stan McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004); Robertson, *Science of the Séance*; and Claudie Massicotte, *Trance Speakers: Femininity and Authorship in Spiritualist Seances, 1850-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017).

76 These include Claire Weissman Wilks, *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1980); Carol Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Valerie Green, “Hannah Maynard: Rebel With a Camera,” *Focus on Women* (March 1992): 28-31; Monique L. Johnson, “Montage and Multiples in Hannah Maynard’s Self-Portraits,” *History of Photography* 41, no. 2 (2017): 159-170; David Mattison, “The Multiple Self of Hannah Maynard,” *Vanguard* 9 (October 1980): 14-19.

77 Moore, *In Search of White Crows*; Brett E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1997); Robert Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Christopher M. Moreman, *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2013); Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, 2 vols. (London and New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902).

78 Noakes, “‘Cranks and Visionaries’: Science, Spiritualism, and Transgression in Victorian Britain,” Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

Victorian.⁷⁹ They pose questions about authorship, subjectivity, humanity, and society. My research is informed by these discussions and uses them as a historical backdrop to ask questions about women's spirit photography within Canadian culture.

Mediums & Media

The role of the medium is the primary means by which sitters of séance commune with discarnate intelligences and produce spirit and psychic images. Literature on mediumship is therefore interwoven with that of spirit photography and Spiritualism, and likewise, cannot be untangled from discourses surrounding Victorian culture, science, gender, and media. This area of study is pertinent to my research, since most “great” spirit photographers also claimed to be spirit mediums.⁸⁰ The earliest manifestations were created with just sitter and photographer present, though mediums took on prominent roles beginning in the 1870s when séances and full-bodied manifestations became celebrated and new techniques and strategies were developed to conjure spirits. Theorists and historians, such as Paul Coates, claimed that the presence of the medium was crucial to capture visual manifestations, making their role—whether enacted by the photographer or an additional medium—a necessary condition in the production of spirit photography.⁸¹ More significantly, Tom Gunning reminds us that Spiritualism's first mediums were women, emphasizing the prominence of women's involvement in both the movement and photography. His work connects Freud's concept of the uncanny to technological developments in media and cinema to argue that photography created a parallel world of “phantasmatic” doubles alongside the physical realm, which was verified by positivism.⁸²

Many scholars have unravelled the concept of the medium to connect the function of spirit mediumship to Victorian communication technologies. For instance, Jill

79 Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (London: Routledge, 2016).

80 Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny,” in *Cinematic Ghost: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Eras*, edited by Murray Leeder, 17-38 (New York: Bloomsburg Academic, 2015), 26-27.

81 Though not interchangeable by definition, Coates identifies all spirit photographers as mediums in *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Spirit Photography, Spirit Portraiture, and Other Rare but Allied Phenomena* (New York: Arno, 1972, [1911]).

82 Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations,” 15.

Galvan's study focuses on Britain and the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to explore the female medium as a communicative channel to other realms.⁸³ There are also ample studies on spirit photography's connection to early film and cinema, media, popular culture, and entertainment, which typically discuss the images as objects of wonderment alongside other forms of popular Victorian visual entertainment: the Phantasmagoria, kinoscope, stereoscope, magic lantern projection, and "Pepper's Ghost." For instance, Murray Leeder organized the first collection of essays dedicated to ghosts in cinema.⁸⁴ Additionally, Lynda Nead and Jeffery Sconce conceptualize the camera and the photograph through the idea of haunting in visual culture.⁸⁵ Marina Warner takes up Sconce's idea of "haunted media" to explore the ways in which media technologies have communicated the fears and desires of the imagination through optical devices and other faculty-expanding media.⁸⁶

Important texts by Karen Beckman, Carol L. Fry, Tom Gunning, Murray Leeder, Simon Natale, and Patrice Petro further complicate and expand the field of spirit photography.⁸⁷ Gunning, Fry, and Petro take up spirit photography as a challenge to issues of indexicality and subjective perception; though Fry and Petro extend these ideas to account for changes in perception, sexual difference, and notions of the self to bring forth what had been previously invisible in the image. Beckman builds on discussions of subjectivity, combining feminist theory with media studies to elucidate how, like film, spirit photography turned to "the female body as a crucial site for exploration and exposition."⁸⁸ These texts demonstrate how, parallel to feminist critiques of gender

83 Jill Galvan, *The Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, The Occult, and Communication Technologies* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2010).

84 Murray Leeder (ed.), *Cinematic Ghost: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Eras* (New York: Bloomsburg Academic, 2015).

85 Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

86 Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

87 Simon Natale, *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016); Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations;" Carol L. Fry, *Cinema of the Occult: New Age, Satanism, Wicca, and Spiritualism in Film* (New Jersey: Associated University Presse, 2008); Patrice Petro, *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995); Karen Beckman, *Vanishing Women: Magic, Film, and Feminism* (London: Duke University Press, 2003).

88 Beckman, *Vanishing Women*, 76.

binaries, scholars of spirit photography questioned the centrality of the female body in history. This period of scholarship is marked by the influence of psychoanalysis, such as in Laura Mulvey's seminal work in film studies, and by Foucauldian discourse analysis. These scholars continue to play a significant role in the production of literature on media technologies and the modern supernatural, and they reflect the interest that academics continue to have on how media have been used to represent various paths of the occult, including beliefs in New Age practices, karma, spirit guides, Wicca, Satanism, and Spiritualism.

Science

While spirit photography's overlap with Spiritualism has been made evident, its connection to science should also be acknowledged. Many scholars have taken the intersection of Spiritualism and Victorian empiricism as a framework for interrogating how spirit images contributed to public perceptions about photography, the visible world, and how ideas about them were interwoven. Nineteenth-century Spiritualists drew on scientific discoveries for grounding their beliefs as evidenced in the images, simultaneously raising questions about established orthodoxies, representation, and subjectivity. Scholarship investigating these connections in the context of science emerges in the later peaks of Spiritualist interest. Writing in the mid-1990s, Bernard Lightman studies how Victorian knowledge was legitimized, nature was ordered, and science was practiced. Photography is used to examine how the precision of instruments, language, and empirical evidence impacted the human senses and helped configure ideas about science. More importantly for my purposes, Lightman analyzes the relation between science and gender: "Historians have examined how scientific thought provided a naturalistic basis to sexual divisions of Victorian society and how scientific theory itself was shaped by notions of gender."⁸⁹ Collapsing the boundaries between science and gender, Lightman elucidates how the two seemingly divergent disciplines simultaneously inflect each other.

⁸⁹ Lightman, *Victorian Science in Context*, 8.

Evelleen Richards similarly explores the gendered nature of scientific fields and the ways in which Darwinian supporters conceived of women as less intelligent, powerful, and authoritative. She acknowledges the significance of Spiritualism for facilitating how “concepts of femininity and moral superiority could be used to legitimate a range of public and quasi-public activity not usually associated with the traditional female role.”⁹⁰ While disciplines of science were male dominated and had not accepted the evolution of mind in tandem with body, Spiritualism held women at its center as the first place they could hold religious leadership. Though Spiritualism was grounded in science, Richards, along with Sherrie Lynne Lyon and Tucker, explain how women’s involvement provided them opportunities for subverting conventional feminine subservience, and for wielding power. More specifically, Lyon explores the degree to which spirit photography was accepted across scientific disciplines, and notes that because of the Victorian interest in positivist worldviews, Spiritualists, psychical researchers, and theologians were drawn to the prestige of science.⁹¹ Contradictions in how spirit photographs were received were, in part, due to the camera’s ability to capture that which was previously invisible:

Photography played a sometimes contradictory role, working to bring these invisible forces under scientific control at the same time that it helped unleash the wonders and terrors of an unfathomable universe on the public imagination.⁹²

Permutt’s remark about the social anxiety surrounding the discovery of these now visible entities is further underscored here, in addition to Getting’s pronouncement about spirit photography’s poor reception by mainstream culture.

This literature review has shown how the study of spirit photography has been shaped thus far. It has highlighted where gaps in scholarship persist, thus illustrating the need for further research on women’s involvement within it.

90 Richards, “Darwinian Science and Women Intellectuals,” 131.

91 Sherrie Lynne Lyons, *Species, Serpents, Spirits, and Skulls: Science at the Margins in the Victorian Age* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009)

92 Keller, “Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible,” 34-35.

Theoretical Framework

My research is informed by photography and contemporary art, affect, and feminist studies; though I predominantly draw on texts that explore the affective dimension of objects, and those written from a feminist perspective. I mobilize these theories to explore the tension between spirit photography's contradictory evocations as women photographers traversed shifting ideological, philosophical, and theological beliefs. More specifically, concepts by the contributors to *Feeling Photography*, as well as Jill Bennett, J.J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch have enlightened my understanding of the affective dimension of photography. Additionally, feminist affect theories by Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick are integral to my understanding of the intersection of these disciplines. These scholars provide the theoretical grounding to address questions regarding the relationality between bodies and objects, the production of emotional and social value in spirit photographs, gendered divisions of labour and the ideological constraints women pushed against for access into the public sphere, and thus the power relations entrenched within culture. Furthermore, the process of viewing the photographs, and the relations that are forged between photographs and viewers, are central to my analyses. This consideration of the viewing relationship is used for exploring the function and evocations of spirit photography, and the ways in which women mobilized not only its iconography, but the belief systems embedded within it. My theoretical framework begins by tracing key approaches to how affect and feminist theories have operated in their respective fields, as well as where they have overlapped and intersected, and then I move on to explain how these frameworks have helped me formulate my research questions.

Affect Theory

A rise in affect theory began in the mid-1990s, and it signalled a paradigm shift wherein scholarly focus shifted from representation, identity, and trauma to autonomic responses by the body. Following from Proust, philosopher Gilles Deleuze identifies affect as a felt impression that precedes thought; it reaches us "through our senses" and motivates us

toward critical inquiry.⁹³ His work has influenced scholars in such disparate fields as art, literature, culture, gender, sociology, and technology, inciting what Patricia Clough has identified as the “affective turn.”⁹⁴ Clough highlights a key focus in this field, which is to show the body’s capacity to relate to, and engage with, others to show the possibilities for political action by harnessing the body’s affective powers across all disciplines. Affect studies have reconceptualized the body to incorporate psychoanalytical and philosophical perspectives, with an insistence on our relationality to other bodies and objects and the ways in which this begins to rupture the divide between conscious/unconscious, subject/object, theory/practice.

While the precise meaning of affect is continually debated, it has generally been described as an activation of corporeal sensations or involuntary reactions, which can then be further categorized as feelings or emotions. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu articulate these distinctions: “‘feelings’ are aspects of affect to which we have direct, subjective access; in contrast, emotions signify the underlying, physiological phenomena, worked out in the body...and often expressed facially.”⁹⁵ Affects can be triggered by, and attached to, “things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other affects,” and are characterized by, for example, accelerated heart rate, flushed cheeks, and changes in facial muscles.⁹⁶ Psychology versus physiology is a common basis for distinguishing between feelings and emotions.

Though scholars do not always make it explicit, their work typically focuses on affect’s psychological or physiological dimension. For example, critic and art theorist Jill Bennet draws on Deleuze to theorize feelings of empathy in contemporary trauma-related art through “sense memories.”⁹⁷ Unlike cognitive, “common memory,” which is the representation of a particular moment, sense memories are perceptive and contest representation.⁹⁸ They are *revivable* and therefore evocative of new emotions when

93 Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: George Braziller, 1972): 161.

94 Though scholars had been working the concept of affect before Clough’s book—Sianne Ngai and Sarah Ahmed for example—Clough coined the term in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

95 Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, “Introduction,” in *Feeling Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 6

96 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

97 Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 25.

98 *Ibid.*, 23.

recalled in the mind.⁹⁹ Bennett presents the “process of memory as a ‘sign,’” wherein the viewer is “enacting a process of ‘seeing feeling.’”¹⁰⁰ Feelings become “imagined and regenerated” through interaction with the work.¹⁰¹ In my dissertation, the interplay between image and viewer is analyzed through the concept of sense memories in spirit photography to reveal the affective dimensions of photographs, once activated through viewer engagement. At the core of Bennett’s discussion is the question of what art tells us about trauma and the lived experiences and memories of it. She is vested in the affective operations of art, how it is “produced within and through a work,” and the ways in which a conceptual engagement with art’s “unique capacities” contribute to a politics of testimony in ways that logical representation cannot.¹⁰² Bennett accomplishes this through an affective exploration of art, situated in relation to trauma and conflict, rather than by scrutinizing trauma as a subject matter. I similarly look beyond the photographs’ meanings, as expressed through representational frameworks, to instead consider how they register the lived experiences of those involved in the production of spirit photographs. I adapt Bennett’s theoretical inquiry to investigate what the photographs convey about societal assumptions about gender, labour, and public and domestic spheres. More specifically, I use her work to understand affect as being generated through viewers’ prolonged encounter with the work, which operates on the “emotional memory” of viewers by triggering an affective response within them, thereby resonating within bodily memory.¹⁰³ Additionally, I illustrate how spirit photographs contributed to changing perceptions about photography in the Victorian era by situating them, as affective cultural objects, alongside the social function of photography.

Work by Sara Ahmed is important for questioning ideological binaries as they relate to gender conventions. She articulates how emotion itself is perceived as “beneath”

99 Bennett, *Empathic Vision*, 27.

100 Ibid., 41.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 7, 3. Bennett refers to Leo Bersani’s *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990) to present the politics of testimony with which she works. The philosophical realism of redemptive art is problematized through the medium of art and its unique ability to transmit affect through a visual language that does not necessarily adhere to structures of representation.

103 Jill Bennett, “Art, Affect, and the ‘Bad Death’: Strategies for Communicating the Sense Memory of Loss,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002): 334-335.

thought and reason, as “reactive” rather than active, which frames my discussion of how women’s photography has historically been perceived as subordinate to their male contemporaries in mainstream culture.¹⁰⁴ She reminds us that feminist perspectives have elucidated how “the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body. Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature...and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement.”¹⁰⁵ As women’s photography was apprehended as subversive because of its emotional connection to the feminine, female spirit photographers and mediums channelled these negative perceptions as an advantage to mobilize their agency through professional entrepreneurship, artistic innovation, and independence. Spirit photography is distinguished from other genres, in part, for the significant involvement of women, as well as its preference for women’s mediumship. Ahmed’s theory is therefore used to highlight women’s varied practices within spirit photography and psychic studies.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed connects the cultural conditions of various emotions to gender and identity to engage with political issues, including feminism, racism, and globalization.¹⁰⁶ Drawing on feminist and queer perspectives, she scrutinizes how objects are deemed “happy” or “unhappy” by social norms, and how the idea of happiness becomes attached to them. Emotions are “sticky,” intrinsically linked to bodily sensations, and are shaped by our contact with material or conceptual objects.¹⁰⁷ Ahmed argues that emotions are therefore performative; they produce value through repetition as they circulate between and stick to bodies, thereby generating effects by

104 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3.

105 Ibid. Compared to men, who were associated with purity, unity, neatness, technical skill. Discourses of photography have long linked emotion with the feminine, wherein women’s photography was apprehended as radical, messy, emotional, and therefore subversive and disruptive by their male contemporaries. These negative associations relegated women’s photography to the margins of mainstream culture, despite that they were gaining visibility within political, social, and literary spheres. Few women received such success as Imogen Cunningham, Laura Gilpin, Consuelo Kanaga, Gertrude Käsebier, and Dorothy Lange, who harnessed the negative perception of their work and used it as a strength for feminist action. Davidov, *Women’s Camera Work*, 27.

106 “Performative” is an extensive concept within academic scholarship, and its uses and definitions range from the relation between discourse and repetition, to various kinds of speech acts. Judith Butler is exemplary for her work on the performative and has influenced much of the scholarship in this theoretical framework.

107 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11. Ahmed demarcates her theory of affect from Silvan Tomkins, who argues that emotions are separate from objects.

forming and orienting actions.¹⁰⁸ While she is writing in the context of current, capitalist nation formation, I adapt her correlation between affect and objects to my conceptualization of how spirit photographs functioned as cultural objects with the capacity to evoke a spectrum of emotions. This concept is further extended to question how the photographs were used to evoke particular affects within viewers and the significance of their dissemination. For example, I examine the level of social mobility that spirit photography availed to women and the ways in which they balanced domestic and public domains. The ways in which emotions were mobilized within séance is also explored through Ahmed's reading of Martin Heidegger's concept of "attunement." This is used to describe how the shared feelings of séance participants contributed to successful results, for attunement is related to moods and manifests through our relationality to one another. Ahmed further draws on Max Scheler's "fellow feelings" to describe shared feelings that can be evoked through one's attunement to another individual.¹⁰⁹ These concepts are used to examine how séance proceedings elicited emotions within séance participants, and within viewers. Similarly, Ahmed's notion of "happy objects" furthers my discussion of how spirit photographs signified feelings of joy and consolation at the time they were produced and today.

I also interpret the images in this project as evocative objects that retain their capacity to conjure emotions within viewers. This term, "evocative objects," is taken from social psychologist Sherry Turkle, whose book on affect has been instrumental to my thinking through the materiality of photography as a methodology that involves archival research, and as an affective strategy for considering the emotional capacity of photographs.¹¹⁰ I consider the photographs' function, in part, by conceiving the women's practices as challenging the categorical oppositions of masculine/feminine, physical/spiritual, past/present, life/afterlife, thinking/feeling. My conception of these binaries is informed by affect theories, in studies of both photography and gender, which are woven throughout my analyzes.¹¹¹ Ideas about of death, mourning, and memory tie

108 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 13.

109 Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 13.

110 Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007).

111 Here Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu's *Feeling Photography* initiated my research into affective photography theory, providing the impetus for, and informing, the foundation of this study.

my case studies together, along with the feelings of hope, reassurance, and consolation that underpin Spiritualists principles.

Feminist Theory

Two key concepts of feminist theory are performativity and intersectionality. Judith Butler's influential theory of performativity holds that gender and sex are socially constructed and are therefore performative acts that are further complicated by class, race, and sexuality.¹¹² Butler draws on Foucault's formulation of power to analyze the effects of institutions, practices, and discourses that designate identity categories as points of origin and cause. By examining the political stakes that define such categories, she exposes the body as imprinted by history, and thus fabricated through discursive means. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is also important for considering femininity as a historically variable social construction. In the early 1990s, Crenshaw helped revise feminism and feminist theory by naming the racist sexism and sexist racism that women of colour encounter. Intersectionality became the central theory around which third- and fourth-wave feminism was fostered.¹¹³

In art history, feminist theory was taken up by scholars such as Griselda Pollock. Her work is significant for drawing on visual, cultural, and feminist theories to make gender central to our terms of historical analysis.¹¹⁴ She deconstructed masculinist discourses of art history that she writes actively produce definitions of sexual difference and contribute to present configurations of sexual politics and power relations. Pollock therefore proposes a paradigm shift in art history and argues for examining the underlying assumptions of the discipline, rather than merely adding women to the canon. Following from this, I investigate how women negotiated public and private domains in relation to socially constructed gender conventions. Pollock's argument thus informs my exploration of women's position in Spiritualism and spirit photography in light of ideological constraints and their marginal position within the field and patriarchal society.

112 As noted in the above section, Butler's theory of performativity has also been used as a conceptual tool for linking affect with identity, demonstrated in texts by Ahmed and Sedgwick, for example.

113 Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* 42, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

114 Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

Poet, essayist, and radical feminist Adrienne Rich's argument for the need to undo the power of men over women has also influenced my analyses of women's agency within the male dominated field of photography. She contends that this power structure has become a model for all forms of exploitation and illegitimate control.¹¹⁵ Rich's critique of the extent to which male sexual parameters assure men's physical, economic, emotional leverage over women therefore underpins my assessment of women's resistance to barriers of gender. And more specifically, her inquiry informs my investigation of women's authority and agency in practices of spirit photography.

The resistance of feminist action in relation to sexual divisions of labour is another important category for thinking about late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century women's photography. Political theorist and feminist Marxist Silvia Federici unpacks the capitalist rationalization of social reproduction in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century witch hunts and the transition to capitalist society.¹¹⁶ Similar to Rich, Federici's contention that hierarchies of gender confined women to reproductive work, while simultaneously reinforcing their dependence on men, help set the foundation for thinking about the professional careers of women photographers. Though Federici's study focuses on an earlier time frame, her argument about the ways in which capitalist work has created unequal gender relations remains relevant for assessing the devaluation of women in the late-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Feminist writer, curator, and lecturer Kirsten J. Sollée has recently built on Federici's work to explore the sex-positive history of the witch.¹¹⁷ Focusing on sexual liberation, she traces the discourses surrounding the notion of the witch throughout art, literature, music, film, politics, and religion. Sollée's exploration of the ways in which women found agency through art, ritual, and aesthetics to create their own constructs against ideological barriers of gender relates to my dissertation's exploration of spirit photographers who used their practices to subvert these constructions, to "lead others out of the darkness," and most importantly, to enact change for future generations.¹¹⁸

115 Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1986).

116 Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

117 Sollée, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*.

118 Artist Rebecca Goyette in Sollée, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*, 73.

Arguments put forth by scholars of photography and contemporary art, affect, and feminist theories have informed the questions that this dissertation pursues. Questions surrounding the relationality between bodies, objects, and our attachments to them have been explored by Sara Ahmed, for example, and I have accordingly drawn on them for addressing these concerns in women's spirit photography. The ways in which memories transcend representation and cognitive recognition has been conceptualized by Jill Bennett, who proposes that the regeneration of perceptive memories takes place in an affective capacity through our active engagement with a work of art. Her concept of perceptive memories, which present themselves on an individual level, inform how this dissertation conceives of spirit images, while an analysis of how the images operate on a broader scale to generate senses of belonging within communities is adapted to women's practices and the bonds formed within women's circles.¹¹⁹ Feminist scholars have helped me question women's place within the public and private spheres, but also within histories of spirit photography and Canadian histories. My analysis of power and women's marginalization within patriarchal structures has been informed by Pollock, Riche, Federici and Sollée, whose concepts provide a foundation for analyzing gendered divisions of labour and the challenges women have faced throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Chapter Overviews & Methodology

My study is based on archival research and draws on the methods of art history. I have used visual analyses, critical theory, and secondary sources in combination with primary research to substantiate my findings and to contextualize and interpret women's spirit photographs and albums.

My research is anchored by four case studies that allow me to explore spirit photography in the late nineteenth century, the early and mid-twentieth century, and today. I consider discourses of art and visual culture, science, and religion, as they are the

119 I draw on texts by Jill Bennet that include: "Art, Affect, and the 'Bad Death,'" "Stigmata and Sense Memory: St. Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (February 2001): 1-16; *Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

primary disciplines in which the genre has been situated.¹²⁰ Since there is minimal scholarship on the photographers in my study, I have used primary sources such as national periodicals, journals, and the daily press have also be studied. Examples include, *The Colonist* (Victoria), *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* (Missouri), *Banner of Light* (Boston), and *Psychic News* (Britain). I have used them to map the circulation of spirit photographs, as well as to examine how and what types of information was published about them, including accusations of forgery and surrounding controversies. Primary sources support my inquiry into national and international circulation within mass culture and Spiritualist groups.

Chapter one focuses on Hannah Maynard, who established the first portrait studio on Vancouver Island, BC, after emigrating from England in 1862. I explore her experimental portraits through the lens of spirit photography to show how she used her practice as a proxy for her Spiritualist beliefs. I consider cultural perceptions of mid-nineteenth-century women by mobilizing Mary Poovey's and Kate Flint's studies on gender, labour, and public and private realms. In this way, I highlight Maynard as a pioneer in Canadian photography for her independence and unconventionality as the city's only professional female photographer, particularly at a time when women were relegated to the domestic realm and the field of photography was dominated by men. I show how her experimental portraits are not only self-reflexive for exploring notions of selfhood and identity, but push the boundaries in photography, technically and aesthetically. Adapting theories from Jill Bennett and Sara Ahmed, I explore concepts of memory and loss to unravel the photograph's affective evocations and show how the relationship between viewers and images elicits an emotional engagement with the photographs. I argue that Maynard participated in the Spiritualist movement peripherally, using experimental photographic techniques to express her grief during bereavement. For this, I draw on digital reproductions of Hannah Maynard's experimental photographs in the Royal BC Museum and Archive's online collection. The museum has photographs that verify her involvement with Spiritualist groups in Victoria, which are used to

120 These broad categories are also how John Harvey organizations his discussion of spirit photography in *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion Books), 2007

substantiate my investigation of Maynard's association with Spiritualism, as it is expressed in her photographic practice.

In chapter two, I discuss annotated photograph albums that Lillian Hamilton made of the psychic investigations that she conducted with her husband, Thomas Glendenning (T.G.) Hamilton, in their Winnipeg home from 1918 to 1935. After his death, she continued to lead séances and record her findings until 1944. Within the framework of family and personal photography, I draw on theories by Patrizia di Bello, Marianne Hirsch, Patricia Holland, and Jo Spence to argue that Lillian gained agency by (re)scripting the narrative of their reports through her album compilations. I suggest that Lillian's spiritual and intellectual approach challenged binaries within social constructions of gender, which infiltrated the psychical field. My analysis effectively shows how women were able to uphold autonomy within patriarchal systems at this time. Adapting Sara Ahmed's affect theory, I further suggest that Lillian used her practice as a way to reconcile her grief after the loss of her husband, and to ultimately show how her albums simultaneously adhere to and subvert feminine ideals. The Hamilton Family Fonds at the University of Manitoba Archives provides the foundation for my discussion. The Elizabeth Defoe Library, where the Archives and Special Collections are held, presented the exhibition, *Investigation of the Human Psyche: Spiritualist & Parapsychology Collections* (2018), which has also informed my understanding of psychic research in Canada in the early twentieth century.¹²¹ The Hamilton Family Fonds is comprised of over 700 unique images and 1,300 accompanying documents by Toronto-born Dr. Thomas Glendenning and Lillian Hamilton that were taken in Winnipeg, Manitoba, between 1918 and 1945. It is one of the largest collections of psychical research worldwide and it features documentation such as stereo photographs, slides, negatives, and glass slide negatives on such topics as ectoplasm, séances, trance states, telekinesis, and psychic writing. My archival research findings thus inform chapter two of

121 Curated by archivists Shelley Sweeney and Walter Meyer zu Erpen. The exhibition aimed to draw in more scholarly research on nineteenth- to twentieth-century Canadian Spiritualism, and to make the public aware of the collection. I visited the exhibition in December 2018 and conducted archival research in the Hamilton Family Fonds.

my dissertation, as well as information provided by archivists Shelley Sweeney and Walter Meyer zu Erpen and art historian Serena Keshavjee.¹²²

Chapter three extends from my discussion in chapter two to highlight Sylvia Barber's home circle in Winnipeg, which was comprised of a small group of women. After Lillian concluded her experiments, Barber led séances from 1947 to 1958. This chapter foregrounds her role as a photographer and psychic investigator in her own right. I adapt feminist theory by Elizabeth Grosz to show how Barber's séances operated as a space of freedom to practice Spiritualist beliefs, granting her agency and autonomy outside of the male dominated field. I return to Hirsch's notions of family photography to underline the significance of the women's bonds and the work they did within this group, which I suggest provided hope and consolation after the death of Barber's second husband. I also apply Hirsch's concepts to show how the images contribute to collective memory as she defines it, and to demonstrate how Barber's photographs operate within, and expand our understanding of, family photography. Additionally, I connect the operative elements of psychic investigations with the emotional to consider the personal relations among sitters, and to propose that while Barber's photographs represent loss, as markers of physical death, they also represent hope and consolation, as Spiritualist images. The Hamilton Family Fonds holds copies of Barber's photographs, as well as newspaper articles and automatic drawings and writings.¹²³ I analyze these documents, along with three books that Barber's group published: *Life's Purpose* (1951), *Life Continuous! Albert Tells His Story* (1956), and *Appeal to Reason: Messages From the Spirit World* (1958). This chapter draws on primary research that was conducted by archivist Walter Meyer zu Erpen and discussed in the only biography about Barber.¹²⁴

122 As experts on the collection, their research and writings about it, as well as conversations and correspondence with them, have been instrumental to chapters two and three of this dissertation. Keshavjee also has a forthcoming exhibition, *The Undead Archive*, at the School of Art Gallery at University of Manitoba (2023), and a forthcoming book, *100 Years of Photographing Ghosts* (University of Manitoba Press, 2023), which are related to the Hamilton collection. See this dissertation's bibliography for a full list of sources by these scholars.

123 These images have been digitalized and are available through U of M's Archives and Special Collections online database, which can be found here:

https://digitalcollections.lib.umanitoba.ca/islandora/search/sylvia%20barber?type=edismax&cp=uofm%3Ahamilton_family. Walter Meyer zu Erpen holds the original documents.

124 Walter Meyer zu Erpen, "Sylvia Barber Biographical Sketch."

Articles from *Psychic News* and the *National Spiritualist Association* are also used for piecing together details of her life and practice.

Chapter four takes work by American photographer Shannon Taggart and Irish artist Susan MacWilliam as its case studies for exploring contemporary iterations of spirit photographs. Here I examine the role of the historical spirit photographer versus the contemporary artist to consider how artists explore Spiritualist and psychic evidence without arguing for or against the image's authenticity. Instead, these artists take a subjective approach that is unlike nineteenth- and twentieth-century practitioners. Through Mark Godfrey's framework of artist as researcher, I illustrate how Taggart and MacWilliam immerse themselves within Spiritualist and psychic histories and communities, which help them create subjective accounts of their experiences. I underscore the continuity between historical and contemporary examples of spirit communication to suggest that the position of research artist grants them freedom and agency to practice spirit photography without the gender and societal restraints that their forerunners experienced. The thinking/feeling binary that I address throughout my dissertation is challenged here through Olivia Laing's concept of time to reveal the artwork's affective dimension. She proposes a new kind of time frame that opens up space where deep emotional experiences propel critical thought. Further, this chapter also considers how Spiritualist practices remain relevant today, as rapid technological advancements have become a source, and in some ways a replacement, for physical human connection. First, I analyze Taggart's monograph, *Séance* (2019), which is composed of eighteen years of research about contemporary Spiritualism. For this project, she employed a sympathetic approach that involved travelling throughout the US and Europe to immerse herself in Spiritualist communities and practices. I explore a selection of her photographs, as well as the stories she wrote about them to support my inquiry into how her photographs operate for contemporary viewers. Second, I investigate MacWilliam's 2009 video, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, which she produced after conducting research in the Hamilton Family Fonds in 2008.¹²⁵ She similarly adopted a sympathetic approach to create her video, collaborating with members of the psychic

¹²⁵ MacWilliam conducted research in the Hamilton Family Fonds during her 2008 residency at the University of Manitoba Rare Books and Special Collections.

community and conducting interviews with them, fragments of which are featured in the video. Together, these artists are used to underline the relevance of Spiritualism in contemporary culture, while highlighting its continuity with historical examples.

These case studies support my inquiry into the ways in which spirit photography was used to reconfigure ideas about femininity, gendered divisions of labour, and women's place within photography and the public sphere. Accordingly, this research begins with such questions as: How did women use practices of spirit photography to negotiate their changing social environment? How did the images operate to support or alter religious and scientific beliefs? How did the emotional connection between the photograph and the viewer impact the mobilization of these belief sets? And, in which ways did the women's practices adhere to, or subvert, established gender roles?

This dissertation contributes to women's histories, as well as to histories of spirit and Canadian photography. It also contributes to fields of photography and feminist studies more generally. The photographers in my case studies are thus far understudied within academic and public spheres. My historical case studies are also significant for intersecting the fields of Canadian photography, photographic affect theory, and feminist studies, highlighting the women's individual practices and the contributions they make to histories of photography. More specifically, chapter three is the first study to date on Sylvia Barber's photographic practice.¹²⁶ My work on recent spirit and psychic photographs and videos similarly contributes to the fields of photography and contemporary art, as well as feminist and affect studies here too. Much of what has been written about Taggart and MacWilliam reviews their artworks and exhibitions, rather than taking a critical, theoretical lens to analyze the affective layers of their work, as this study does.

126 The known exceptions to this are the articles: "The Spirit World Organises a Test: Dead Researcher and Famous Guide Co-operate," *Psychic News* (September 3, 1955): 5, which explains T.G. Hamilton's lectures on cross-correspondence with medium Beatrice Russell in Jamaica and the Barber circle; and "Famous researcher stages novel test from Beyond," *Psychic News* (March 31, 1979): 5, which is the death notice for Barber. Neither article details biographical information about Barber's life, and her inclusion in them is peripheral to the Hamiltons.

Chapter 1 - Experimental Portraiture in the Pacific Northwest: Hannah Maynard, Photographic Artiste

Introduction

Hannah Maynard's multiple exposures are physically and metaphorically multilayered. Their visual elements are suggestive of domesticity and femininity, while at the same time, they are interwoven with narratives of death and spirituality. She opened Mrs. R. Maynard's Photographic Gallery in Victoria, BC, in 1862, the year that the city of Victoria was founded.¹²⁷ She ran a successful portrait studio that began with more conventional work, such as portraiture and landscape. Then, in the early 1880s, she began to investigate the technical limits of photography by experimenting in such processes as multiple exposures, photomontage, and photosculpture.¹²⁸ Hannah explored the process of image-making by using the camera to look inward and play with notions of the self, while conjuring traces of the spectral.¹²⁹ She incorporated images of the past into her



Figure 1: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-02850 - Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo

¹²⁷ It is commonly understood that Maynard's studio opening was in 1862, though David Mattison notes that direct evidence is yet to be located. *Camera Workers: The British Columbia Photographers Directory, 1858-1900* (Victoria: Camera Workers Press, 1985).

¹²⁸ In the Royal BC Museum and Archives, series MS-3380 contains 20 collodion and gelatin dry glass plate negatives in 5x8, 6.5x8.5, 8x10 and 10x12 inch sized plates of experimental works by Hannah, most of which are photographs of photographic works. Her autobiographical works consist of five tableau vivants (8x10 inch plates) and two self-portraits of Hannah (5x8 inch plates) as gelatin dry or collodion glass plate negatives. There are also two other gelatin dry glass plate negatives (8x10 inch plates) that are part of a number of montages created in the 1880s and 1890s in this series.

¹²⁹ Hannah Maynard is referred to as Hannah in this chapter to distinguish her and her photographic work from her husband, Richard, who is also discussed.

present and played with the aesthetic of spirit photography in a way that allowed her to maintain her professional identity, while expressing her experience of loss.

Hannah was born in Bude, England, in 1834, and she described herself as a “Photographic Artiste,” though she was also an entrepreneur and business manager. In 1852, she married boot-maker Richard Maynard in England and they transplanted their lives to Canada. Most historians conclude that she studied photography or apprenticed at R and H O’Hara of Bowmanville, Photographers, Booksellers, Insurance Agents, Etc., while Richard was in BC during the first gold rush in 1858.¹³⁰ During this time, she established their first business venture, which was a boot, shoe, and leather shop. Upon his return, Hannah taught Richard photography. The Maynards then moved to Vancouver Island on May 6th, 1862, where they expanded their business to include her photography studio. The photographs that Hannah produced throughout her fifty-year career capture the changing landscape of Victoria as it transitioned from a small fort town into a prosperous urban centre.

Hannah’s visual style was, as her critics observed, decades ahead of its time.¹³¹ She was praised for her attention to detail, initially working within pictorial traditions of women’s photography, which focused on the domestic realm. For instance, she took her composite photographs in her portrait studio that appears as a bourgeoisie parlour. “Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo” features five Hannahs in this setting, who appear as unique, yet similar, versions of herself (fig. 1). They all wear the same darkly coloured gown, which is embellished with a delicate floral pattern down the front. Each Hannah performs a different domestic task, or holds a traditionally feminine prop, such as a fan and a bouquet of flowers. She constructed a feminized picture of herself through multiple exposures that she purposefully manipulated and printed from glass plate negatives. For example, Hannah used pencil to smooth the appearance of wrinkles on her face, to slim her waist, and to remove double chins.¹³² She did this by

130 Jennifer Salahub, “Hannah Maynard: Crafting Professional Identity” and ed. K.A. Finlay, *A Woman’s Place: Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, B.C., 1850s-1920s* (Victoria, B.C.: Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery, 2004), 140.

131 Cathy Converse, *Mainstays: Women Who Shaped BC* (Victoria, B.C.: Horsdal & Schubart, 1998), 68.

132 The term “feminized” is used by Naomi Schor in her discussion of women’s photography to argue that details are not “essentially feminine,” but insistently “*feminized*.” Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), xxxi.

adding (sometimes visible) white lines on her hands, and around her nose and mouth, to effectively enhance the overall appearance of the print. Such techniques demonstrate her aptitude for, and versatility with, the medium.¹³³



Figure 2: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05070 - Hannah Maynard and others cycling in Beacon Hill Park, Victoria

The breadth of Hannah’s subject matter can be observed in a number of her photographs, both of herself and others. She captured the documentary value of her subjects’ lives in hand-crafted scenes that she constructed of pastoral, park, and beach-like settings. She did this in favour of draping her scenes with the genres’ artificial romanticism, and effectively drawing attention away from the sitter.¹³⁴ Much of her portraiture and interior imagery follows pictorial conventions of the time, particularly as being photographed was a common social activity in the nineteenth century. Yet her photographic techniques distinguished her from her contemporaries through unique stylization. Hannah earned international recognition for her photographs in *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* after gaining local traction for her specialized studio portraits. Her work was also valued for capturing such cultural trends as the nineteenth-century bike boom (fig. 2). The journal first published her images in 1886 and continued to for

133 Jennifer Salahub and K.A. Finlay note Hannah’s technique for touching up her appearance in her photographs. Salahub, “Hannah Maynard” and Finlay, “A Woman’s Place.”

134 Converse, *Mainstays*, 68.

the remainder of her professional life.¹³⁵ Yet despite her success, even loyal commentators were initially ambivalent about her photographic experimentation in multiple exposures and photomontages. She produced these after enduring multiple deaths in her family and becoming involved with Victoria's Spiritualist society. Her composite images of living and deceased family members allude to the ephemerality of life, while reaffirming and making tangible their permanence after death. In this chapter, I discuss how Maynard's images are imbued with self-reflexivity and reflect Spiritualism's key tenets.

Scholarship on spirituality and Maynard's photographs is limited; and much like spirit photography, it is often only recognized or footnoted, rather than critically assessed.¹³⁶ In a discussion of her experimental photography, Mary Allen briefly mentions that Hannah was a member of a Spiritualist group, and that this linked her experimental photographs to a symbolic "conquering of death."¹³⁷ Archivist David Mattison similarly notes her connection to the Spiritualist movement, yet focuses on Maynard's frame of mind as the rationale for her multiple exposures of departed loved ones.¹³⁸ Curator and historian Petra Rigby Watson connects Maynard's multiple exposures to nineteenth-century aesthetics of photography,¹³⁹ whereas Jennifer Salahub connects them to handcrafts and feminine discourse.¹⁴⁰ Salahub further argues that Maynard's recognition of Victorian gender barriers allowed her to vacillate between domestic and professional spaces. Maynard's multiple exposures have also been discussed as

135 Carol Williams indicates that a female editor and photographer for *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer*, who was a strong advocate for women in her profession, may have influenced the abundance and regularity of baby and child photography that were published here. Carol Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 129.

136 Molly McGarry contends that "the history of American Spiritualism is much more than a cultural footnote, even as if may be considered the ghost story of the long nineteenth century" in *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, Ltd., 2008), 1.

137 Mary Allen, "Situating Hannah Maynard: A Comparison with Hannah Höch," *History of Photography* 33, no. 3 (2009): 246.

138 David Mattison, "The Multiple Self of Hannah Maynard," *Vanguard* 9, no. 8 (October 1980): 14-19.

139 Petra Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard: 19th Century Portraits* (Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art and Design, 1992).

140 Jennifer Salahub, "Hannah Maynard: Crafting Professional Identity," in eds. Kristina Huneault, and Janice Anderson, *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*, 135-67 (Montreal, Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

precursors to the modern art movements, Dada and Surrealism, because of their experimental nature.¹⁴¹ Historians and scholars of Maynard have, however, predominantly focused on her settler identity, her place within Canada's photographic history, and her professionalism as a woman photographer in the nineteenth century.¹⁴²

I examine Hannah's experimental practice from a feminist social history perspective to unravel how her photographs functioned. I mobilize affect, feminist, and cultural theories primarily through art critic and theorist Jill Bennett by adapting her Deleuzian poetics of sense memory to connect narratives of memory and remembering to Spiritualist beliefs.¹⁴³ I draw on her analysis of Medieval devotional imagery, which was believed to always contain an emotional component, for understanding the spiritual evocations in Hannah's experimental practice.¹⁴⁴ I understand the affective response in Hannah's photographs through what Bennett calls the "identificatory relationship"¹⁴⁵ between artist and viewers, and between representational figures and viewing subjects. This response is triggered by the connection between embodied sensation and emotional memory, which further supports my conception of how Hannah's images were perceived by Victorian spectators. Additionally, Bennett's discussions about the performance of grief, and the memory of loss that trauma induces, in contemporary art facilitates my reading of the ways in which the photographs mediated the affective response in nineteenth-century spectators by implicating them in the viewing process through felt impressions of emotional memory. I also draw on cultural historian Mary Poovey's and art historian Kate Flint's inquiries to

141 Allen, "Situating Hannah Maynard: A Comparison with Hannah Höch."

142 Carol Williams discusses Hannah's settler identity in *Framing the West*; David Mattison, K.A. Finlay, Petra Rigby Watson, and Claire Weissman Wilks have discussed Hannah within Canadian photography; Jennifer Salahub and Cathy Converse highlight Hannah's professionalism.

143 Jill Bennett's theoretical writings in "Art, Affect, and the 'Bad Death': Strategies for Communicating the Sense Memory of Loss," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28 (2002): 333-351; "Stigmata and Sense Memory: St Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (March 2001): 1-16; and *Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005).

144 Bennett discusses Aristotle's notion that images stored in memory are "physiological 'affectations,'" because they are mediated through sense perception. Thus, sensory perception entails a spiritual change. Bennett, "Stigmata," 6.

145 Jill Bennett, "Stigmata," 1.

investigate what the photographs convey about societal assumptions about gender, labour, and public and domestic spheres.

This chapter explores the “subversive possibilities” in Hannah’s photomontages and multiple exposure.¹⁴⁶ I analyze a series of her composite photographs that feature her with her grandson, Maynard, portraits deceased women in her family, as well as self-portraits to suggest that her penchant for experimenting with Spiritualism’s iconography was a way to express her Spiritualist beliefs. I argue that her association with Victoria’s Spiritualist group is expressed photographically; that the images functioned to support Hannah’s religious beliefs after facing numerous family deaths. This chapter examines how she navigated Victorian gender expectations, and the male dominated field of photography. Following this, I contend that she did not overtly express her connection to, or identification with, Spiritualist beliefs to preserve her professional reputation from the controversy surrounding Spiritualism and its photographic manifestations. Instead, I show how she engaged in a more implicit, or peripheral, connection to the movement. This is particularly relevant since the photographs I explore were taken while Hannah was reconciling with her grief, as she was “haunted by the deaths in the family.”¹⁴⁷

Studies on Hannah Maynard

Hannah is often recognized in histories of Canadian or women’s photography, although, like many other successful women artists, she is generally omitted from canonical histories of photography. She has gained more attention in histories of British Columbia. Her work came under scrutiny by art historians in the late 1970s and 1980s, though with mixed reviews.¹⁴⁸ For example, historians have described Hannah as “an artist pushing the bounds of her medium”¹⁴⁹ and “one of Canada’s remarkable early professional

146 This term is taken from Naomi Schor, originally conceptualized in *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995) and reread in *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007) for categorically critiquing the distinctions between “good” and “bad” objects as designated by the academy in literary criticism.

147 *Royal BC Museum*, <https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/exhibits/bc-archives-time-machine/galler10/frames/maynard.htm>.

148 Jennifer Salahub, “Hannah Maynard: Crafting Professional Identity,” in *Rethinking Professionalism* (), 136.

149 K.A. Finlay, *A Woman’s Place: Art and the Role of Women in the Cultural Formation of Victoria, BC 1850s-1920s* (Victoria: Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery, 2004), 51.

women photographers,”¹⁵⁰ yet they have also used more ambivalent language, describing her as peculiar or strange.¹⁵¹ Laura Jones highlights female photographers in Canadian history and deems Hannah “the magician” among Mattie Gunterman, Geraldine Moodie, Gladys Reeves, and Elsie Holloway.¹⁵²

Hannah has earned credit for her technical precision, much like her reputation for peculiarity and defying gender norms. Although photography was increasingly popular among women in the mid-nineteenth century, their work was often considered a form of recreation.¹⁵³ Cathy Converse notes that Hannah’s critics disregarded her experimental photograph from 1890 to 1895. Historian Valerie Green recounts how her contemporaries considered her “ambitious, career-driven spirit” odd because it was atypical of women of her class.¹⁵⁴ This was further reinforced by her preference for dark gowns in shades of black and grey, rather than the Victorian fashion of brightly coloured frocks and hats.¹⁵⁵ She was accused of eccentricity for disregarding social conventions at a time when few women had careers. Hannah’s inclusion in such texts as Green’s *Upstarts and Outcasts: Victoria’s Not-so-proper Past* further underscores this perception about her, and also undervalues her professionalism. She may be less recognized than other nineteenth-century photographers because she did not appear to conform to feminine stereotypes. American photographers Gertrude Käsebier and Frances Benjamin Johnson, as well as British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, have garnered greater attention in histories of photography, despite Hannah’s technical skill. The 1879 edition of *St. Louis and Canadian photographer*, for example, wrote “Mrs. Maynard is one of the most industrious and preserving ladies we have in our business. She stops at no impediment, in our Art, but is a regular go-ahead, even beating our Yankee girls two to one in photography.” Further, Laura Jones more recently observes that Hannah’s experiments

150 Susanna McLeod, “Maynard’s Photographic Life,” *The Kingston Whig Standard* (Kingston, On.), April 12, 2016, <https://www.thewhig.com/2016/04/12/maynards-photographic-life/wcm/901d2b12-2e71-c94e-e9d9-8981e58b7bbb>.

151 Such as in McLeod, “Maynard’s Photographic Life,” and David Mattison, “The Maynards: A Victorian Photographic Couple,” *Photographic Canadiana: Photographic Historical Society of Canada* 11, no. 5 (March-April 1986): 4.

152 Laura Jones, “Five Remarkable Women in Canadian Photography,” *PhotoED MAGAZINE* 49 (Spring/Summer 2017).

153 Converse, *Mainstays*, 69.

154 Valerie Green, *Upstarts and Outcasts Victoria’s Not-so-Proper Past*, (B.C: TouchWood Editions, 2000), 179.

155 Ibid.

with the medium were “not only creatively ahead of her time, but technically superior to the work of her contemporaries.”¹⁵⁶

Hannah’s life and career are most often described as “eccentric,” evinced by such publications as *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* by Claire Wiessman Wilks and “Eccentric Genius Behind the Black Box: Hannah Hatherly Maynard, 1834-1918” by Merna Forster. Petra Rigby Watson acknowledges that such designation, however, “serves as a dismal summation of the historical recognition of Hannah Maynard’s contributions” to not only nineteenth-century West Coast Canadian photography, but to dominant histories of photography.¹⁵⁷ To define Hannah’s photography as a result of her “eccentric” personality is to dismiss the social, economic, and institutional forces within which she was practising. The technical and aesthetic choices she made are subsequently reduced to mere results of strange behaviours and views she is presumed to have had.¹⁵⁸ Subsequent texts, such as Peter Wollheim’s, “Hannah Maynard: Participant and Portent,” have ventured to recast how she is presented in scholarship.¹⁵⁹ He proposes sociohistorical and intersection frameworks for interpreting her work, as her surroundings are reflected in her work.

Such interpretations are likely the result of the mystery behind the artist’s intentions, particularly since there are not any known commissions for her experimental photographs.¹⁶⁰ These images were created for her own purposes, allied neither with commercial photography nor fine art.¹⁶¹ Mattison writes that,

her purpose in producing these strange photographs, many of which bear hidden meanings due to her spiritualist beliefs, will probably never be known. On one level they were photographic amusements, on another they were reflections of her artistic imagination and psychology.¹⁶²

156 Jones, “Five Remarkable Women in Canadian Photo History.”

157 Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard*, 7.

158 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “eccentric” as “(of a person or their behaviour) unconventional and slightly strange.”

159 Peter Wollheim, “Hannah Maynard: Participant and Portent,” *Canadian Forum* (March 1981): 35-36.

160 Finlay, *A Woman’s Place*, 65.

161 Converse, *Mainstays*, 69.

162 Mattison, “The Maynards,” 4.

He notes the variety of contexts within which scholars have attempted to situate her experimental work, including modernist, fine art, commercial and documentary photography, or simply experimental, recreational “amusements.”¹⁶³ Mattison recognizes the problems that arise from such approaches and the subsequent underestimation by most photo historians as a result of the uncertainty regarding Hannah’s intentions and the difficulty in categorizing her photographs.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, Mattison, along with art historians Mary Allen, K.A. Finlay, and Claire Weissman Wilks, have linked Hannah’s experimental photographs to Dada and Surrealism. They describe her multiple exposures and photomontages as precursors to these avant-garde movements. Yet Mattison poses, “even if she did not fully and consciously *intend* a fine art context for her photo collage, is the work formally altered?” To presume this connection is a “coincidental novelty” is to “limit the potential of art.”¹⁶⁵ Experimental photography’s technical and formal qualities are much too complex and wide in scope to be solely relegated to categories of fine art, commercial, or recreational photography.

Shifting notions of subjectivity, temporality, and representation have also been discussed through Hannah’s multiple exposures and photomontages. Allen gives particular attention to the ways in which Hannah used irony and juxtaposition to play with notions of subjectivity; while the contributors to *A Woman’s Place* acknowledge her light-hearted, whimsical approach to reflect on notions of the self, as she skillfully balanced her personal, domestic life with that of her public, professional life. Allen and Salahub further read Hannah’s experimental images as an exploration of her own place within conventions of femininity and domesticity, and as a social critique of the Victorian values in which she found herself.¹⁶⁶ Salahub argues that Hannah was aware of the challenges she faced as a female professional in a masculine environment and accordingly developed strategies to pursue the professional activities of an artist and a

163 “Amusements” is taken from the title of the technical photography guidebook, Walter E. Woodbury, *Photographic Amusements: Including Tricks and Unusual Or Novel Effects Obtainable with the Camera* (Boston, Mass.: American Photographic Publishing Co., 1896). Eadweard Muybridge similarly employs the term in a reprint from the journal *La Nature* (1887) entitled “Amusing Photographs” in *Scientific American Supplement* (October 8, 1887).

164 Mattison, “The Multiple Self of Hannah Maynard,” *Vanguard* 9, no. 8 (October 1980): 16.

165 Ibid.

166 Allen, “Situating Hannah Maynard;” and Salahub, “Hannah Maynard.”

commercial studio practitioner. Salahub shows the photographer's connection to the handcrafts and domestic discourse that was presented in contemporary advice literature to suggest that her familiarity with it allowed her to move between private and public realms. Carol Williams similarly discusses Hannah's practice within feminist discourse. She argues that Hannah's "commitment to maternalist values" contributed to establishing Euro-American settler life.¹⁶⁷ Williams explains how family photographs act as documentation of settler women's singular political contribution to the larger imperial agenda of colonization. She asserts the ideological imperative of Victorian photographers to visually assert racial and class superiority as nation-building tools in the Pacific Northwest. She thus contextualizes Hannah's professional work within regional photography and in terms of settler colonialism.

Hannah has indeed gained recognition in Canadian and women's histories, though it is important to acknowledge that these histories are marginal in comparison to accounts of American and British photographers. Canadian women remain further marginalized by men in national studies, necessitating further research.

Mrs. R. Maynard, Photographic Artiste: Early Career and Cultural Climate¹⁶⁸

Conventions of domesticity in Victoria correlated with those in Britain. Green notes that Victoria was built upon long-held European values, customs, and traditions.¹⁶⁹ Yet the transitory nature of the new frontier provided more room for challenging, or subverting, the cultural perception of mid-nineteenth-century women.¹⁷⁰ Mary Poovey explains that "the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Williams, *Framing the West*, 129.

¹⁶⁸ Mrs. R. Maynard, *Photographic Artiste* is the title that Maynard used to identify herself, which she embossed onto the backs of her *carte-de-visite* and cabinet cards.

¹⁶⁹ Valerie Green, *Above Stairs: Social Life in Upper-Class Victoria 1843–1918* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1995), 5-6.

¹⁷⁰ Converse, *Mainstays*, 67.

¹⁷¹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

Salahub also suggests that the mid-nineteenth century appears to have been a moment of opportunity for Canadian women.¹⁷²

Such opportunities included women's inclusion in the arts, where they were undeterred by cultural limitations. More specifically, photography was a popular activity for Canadian women.¹⁷³ Photography at this time was unimpeded by the conventions that restricted traditional art, unlike other artistic mediums. Naomi Rosenblum discusses how women photographers did not have to compete with a canon of male photographers, as its terms had not yet been defined.¹⁷⁴ Photography was thus more inclusive in terms of who could be a photographer, which facilitated a more heterogeneous field of practitioners with regard to age, race, gender, class.¹⁷⁵ Victoria in particular had a burgeoning art community, in which a disproportionate number of women were practicing in.¹⁷⁶ Hannah shows that women photographers were indeed among the medium's earliest experts, who helped to establish the field of photography in the Pacific Northwest.

Hannah was the first and only professional woman photographer in the Pacific Northwest.¹⁷⁷ At this time, women in business were regarded as unconventional, and she received objections and negative reception by the local press simply because she was a woman in a male-dominated field.¹⁷⁸ After retiring in 1912, she admitted in an interview for *The Victoria Colonist* that at the beginning of her career she credited Richard with her prints to avoid rejections, boycotting, and disapproval from her community.¹⁷⁹ This prevarication distressed her, as she did not want to hide herself, nor her work, behind her husband. Hannah waited until her Fort Victoria residents, and ultimately her future customers, "got used to a woman photographer" before crediting herself as a

172 Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 140.

173 This can be observed in advertisements for photographic equipment and articles in the women's section of newspapers. Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 163.

174 Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 39.

175 Ibid.

176 Finlay, *A Woman's Place*, 1. Salahub also discusses how Victoria "boasted a burgeoning art community," and notes the importance placed on the applied arts in such educational institutions as St. Ann's Covent School and the Mechanical Institute. Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 152.

177 In 1862, Hannah was one of five photographers on the island.

178 Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 144-145; and Mattison, "The Multiple Self of Hannah Maynard," 14.

179 Converse, *Mainstays*, 67.

photographer in her own right.¹⁸⁰ She ultimately gained a reputation in Canada and the US and was celebrated for her photographs of children and families.¹⁸¹

The Maynard business was founded on collaboration. The couple, and later their children, practiced gendered divisions of labour.¹⁸² Yet unlike many husband/wife collaborations that had men working as photographers and women as darkroom technicians or assistants working discreetly without credit,¹⁸³ Hannah was the business and household manager. She specialized in studio portraits, handled darkroom responsibilities, and career promotion, while Richard maintained the shoe and leather shop, accepted government contracts, and fulfilled most fieldwork.¹⁸⁴ Little is known about the precise details of the studio's operations, as few records survive, though it is clear that their business arrangement allowed her to balance domestic, family, and professional responsibilities.¹⁸⁵ Her first two studio spaces were attached to the Maynard house, on Johnson and Fort street, and they built their third and final location on Pandora Avenue to accommodate their growing business, with the photography studio upstairs and the boot shop downstairs.

For all the benefits of collaboration, it has made accurately attributing some of the photographs difficult. Authorship over their 1870s stereoscopic views remains uncertain, particularly those from the couple's photographic excursions of the Pacific coast. The couple frequently documented their travels together, including the Canadian Pacific

180 Converse, *Mainstays*, 67

181 Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 136.

182 Daughter Emma Macdonald declared her occupation as a photographer at age 21 in the 1881 census, and helped in the darkroom before her death in 1888; the Maynard's oldest son, Albert, assisted Richard on his Barkerville tour in 1868, worked in the boot and shoe shop, and managed their photographic supply store and the international distribution of the couple's photographs after they retired. Williams, *Framing the West*, 41, David Mattison, *Camera Workers: The British Columbia Photographers Directory, 1858-1900*, 1st ed. (Victoria, B.C.: Camera Workers Press, 1985), M-2.

183 For example, the English inventor of the Talbotype (or calotype), William Henry Fox Talbot's wife, Contance, has been credited as the first female to take a photograph and wrote about her experiments with the medium as early as May 1839, yet receives little credit in history. László and Lucia Moholy-Nagy collaborated in the darkroom at the Bauhaus, though most of their work from the 1920s is credited to László. Olive Cotton worked as assistant and administrator for her husband Max Dubain's photography studio in Australia in the 1930s, and set aside her interest in, and penchant for, art photography to fulfil the domestic responsibilities of the household. Bernd and Hilla Becher, who collaborated between 1969 and 2007, are a notable exception to women's erasure from history.

184 Williams, *Framing the West*, 64.

185 Mattison, "The Maynards," 4.

Railway (1884, 1888), Barkerville (1868), England (1870), Vancouver Island (1873, 1874, 1879, 1880), San Francisco (1875), Alaska (1879, 1882, 1887, 1892), Queen Charlotte Islands (1884, 1888).¹⁸⁶ Yet uncharacteristic for not only women, but women photographers in particular at this time, Hannah also travelled independently. For example, she voyaged to the Queen Charlotte Islands in August of 1884 on the Princes Louis to capture the vast landscape surrounding BC.¹⁸⁷ The cumbersome equipment at this time typically confined women photographers to indoor studios, though she was impervious to the task of travelling with the necessary equipment for the collodion process. In an interview for *Old Ways to Waddington* in January of 1964, she pronounced, “[e]ven today it is rather remarkable to hear of a woman going into the great beyond of the interior country, but then I thought nothing of it.”¹⁸⁸ There are, however, potentially miscredited prints because they collaborated on numerous photographic journeys, and because many photographs attributable to Richard bear the “Mrs. R. Maynard” imprint.¹⁸⁹ Historians have thus had difficulty distinguishing between their work, and have only recently begun to examine the authorship of these early photographs.¹⁹⁰ This confusion is further complicated by Hannah’s frequent changing of the embossed design on the backs of her photographs, with some bearing multiple imprints per location.¹⁹¹

Hannah’s portraits of children gained her renown under her own name. She took advantage of “the common perception that women were naturally inclined toward children and therefore better suited than a man to take their photographs.”¹⁹² Photographs

186 The Maynards also kept notebooks to document their travels, though few records of their business details have survived. Mattison, “The Maynards,” 2.

187 Ibid.

188 Williams, *Framing the West*, 64.

189 Finlay, *A Woman’s Place*, 53. Margaret B. Blackman similarly acknowledges the potential for misattribution of the Maynard’s forty-two studio photographs of Indigenous peoples in “Studio Indians: Cartes de visite of Native People in British Columbia, 1862-1872,” *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86): 71.

190 At this time, it was also common for photographers to buy or preserve glass plates from other photographers that would then be reprinted under the name of the latter. For example, the Maynards were responsible for preserving Frederick Dally’s glass negatives of British Columbia taken between 1866 and 1870, which have been (re)printed bearing Maynard’s stamp. Charles Gentile is another such photographer who may have been published under their name.

191 Mattison, “The Maynards,” 2.

192 Williams, *Framing the West*, 129.

of children therefore became a lucrative business. Williams notes that the popularity of Hannah's "demonstrates an awareness of the continuing social and political significance of child rearing not only among a female constituency of settlers but also as an international trend."¹⁹³ She was thus able to cultivate a consumer market of upper-class settler mothers and their "maternal aspirations" as a strategic business strategy.¹⁹⁴ Her aptitude for portraiture also attracted the attention of the Victoria Police Department, which hired her as their first official photographer from 1897 to 1902. Those arrested were brought to Hannah's studio, where she crafted dual-view mugshots in accordance with the department's request for full-face and profile shots. She used mirrors to capture dual views in a single image. This was achieved by using a specially constructed mirror positioned over the accused's left shoulder, resulting in a frontal face portrait with their profile reflected in the mirror.¹⁹⁵ Her business expanded to serve Victoria's eclectic population of permanent residents and temporary visitors—Anglo-European, Indigenous, Black, Chinese individuals, families, and communities. She made portraits of the city's elite, such as members of the colonial government, and she was one of the most prolific producers of First Nations and Indigenous subjects in the early 1860s and 70s.¹⁹⁶ Hannah's extensive portfolio supports her proclamation upon retirement: "I think I can say with every confidence that we photographed everyone in the town at one time or another."¹⁹⁷ She used her later work in composites, photosculpture, and montage to advertise her gallery in such trade publications as *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer*, and she cultivated customer relations by sending out her *Gems of British Columbia* as New Year's greeting cards to customers from 1881 to approximately 1885.¹⁹⁸

193 Williams, *Framing the West*, 129.

194 *Ibid.*, 130.

195 Claire Weissman Wilks, *The Magic Box: The Eccentric Genius of Hannah Maynard* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1980), 113.

196 Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology commissioned Hannah to photograph groups of Indigenous peoples on the northwest coast of BC. These photographs are significant for contextualizing and understanding Hannah's work, and they are significant to histories of photography. There remains much research required on this topic, however, it is beyond the scope of this chapter.

197 Victoria's *Daily Colonist*, September 29, 1912.

198 *Gems of British Columbia* are collages of all of the children that Hannah had photographed during the previous year.

Fort Victoria was initially constructed by the Hudson Bay Company for fur trade, and by the 1850s, it had grown economically and socially.¹⁹⁹ When the Maynards arrived in Victoria, the population had already expanded after gold was discovered along the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. The December 1854 census indicates that the population was barely 300, by the spring of 1858 it had grown to 3,000, and by the end of the year had tripled.²⁰⁰ From early 1862 to 1871, bride-ships from England arrived in Victoria in “apparent synchronicity” with a “surplus” of women in England.²⁰¹ Businesses initially thrived in service of local settlers, miners, and transient residents, yet post 1865, the economy declined along with gold discoveries. Rates of unemployment and crime inflated as the city entered into a depression.²⁰² Photography subsequently became an important tool for documenting Victoria as prosperous and flourishing in an effort to highlight it as “pleasing” to prospective immigrants.²⁰³ It was used to celebrate urban growth, and to show the city as stable and civilized.²⁰⁴ Photography also appealed to the government, which contracted documentary photographers to capture the city in such a way. Many photographers strengthened their professional credibility through these types of commissions, including Hannah and Richard.²⁰⁵ While photographic surveys had political, commercial, and scientific aims, Williams emphasizes that photographers “who exhibited the greatest versatility and a commitment to entrepreneurial innovation were the most likely to thrive in this climate.”²⁰⁶ Hannah was aware of the opportunities for prosperity and credibility at this time, and she used them to expand her career, reputation, and status before experimenting with photography’s technical and aesthetic elements.

Hannah continued working in portraiture throughout her career. Approximately midway through her career, she began to incorporate spiritual elements into the familiar

199 Green, *Above Stairs*, 6.

200 *Ibid.*, 8.

201 Finlay, *A Woman’s Place*, 11. Jim Mussell more specifically reports that in 1851 there were half a million women than men in Britain in “English Women’s Journal (1858-1864), *Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition*, <https://ncse.ac.uk/headnotes/ewj.html#d56e2207>.

202 Converse, *Mainstays*, 69.

203 Williams, *Framing the West*, 61.

204 David Mattison, *Eyes of a City: Early Vancouver Photographers, 1868-1900* (Vancouver, B.C: Vancouver City Archives, 1986), 9.

205 Williams, *Framing the West*, 63.

206 *Ibid.*, 58.

themes of Victorian domesticity. These experimental photographs push the technical and aesthetic limits of photography to express, what I understand to be, her Spiritualist beliefs.

Spiritualism in Canada

By the time Victoria became a flourishing town, the Spiritualist movement had been well underway in the US. It emerged in Rochester, New York, in 1848, it spread to Canada nearly a decade later through the Belleville, On., area. According to the International Spiritualist Federation, Spiritualism's orthodox tenets provided Victorian's with "personal survival of bodily death" and "communion between this world and the Spirit World."²⁰⁷ Molly McGarry writes that its "respectability" in Canada is evinced by Victoria's mayor James Fell's title as president of the local Spiritualist society.²⁰⁸ Reputable, Canadian proponents also included William Lyon Mackenzie King, who visited the London Spiritualist Alliance in England several times in the early twentieth century and is purported to have received recurrent communications from his mother and grandfather.²⁰⁹ He also became well-read on spiritual and psychic research, particularly *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) by Canada's leading psychiatrist Dr. Maurice Bucke.²¹⁰ Following from the ideas presented by the Society of Psychic Research, Dr. Bucke proclaimed that the phenomena of Spiritualism was a proven fact.²¹¹ Many other important Canadian figures demonstrated involvement in the movement. For example, writer Susanna Moodie and her husband John were initially interested in séances to contact deceased family members after news spread about the Rochester rappings. They were visited by Kate Fox in the summer of 1855, in which their daughter Agnes acted as

207 Major Tom Patterson, *100 Years of Spirit Photography* (London: Regency Press, 1965), 53.

208 Salahub, "Hannah Maynard," 160.

209 Walter J. Meyer zu Erpen, Joy Lowe, "The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study," *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990): 78.

210 William Lyon Mackenzie King was also interested in fortunetellers, was superstitious, noted coincidences in the everyday, practiced table rapping with his friend Joan Patteson, and believed dreams or "visions" to be an effective way of communicating with the deceased. For more on King's evolution of faith, his explorations in Spiritualism and psychical research, and the ways in which such readings informed his political and religious activities, also see Margaret Elizabeth Bedore, "The Reading of Mackenzie King," Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, January 2008.

211 Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 65-66.

medium on several occasions.²¹² Susanna herself became a medium in the spring of 1858, along with writer Catherine Parr Trail when she visited the Moodies in Belleville. Such Spiritualist activities had gained public attention by the mid-1850s, and Hannah was among those intrigued.

Spiritualism Manifested in Photographic Experiments

The Victorian crisis of faith was not simply mass secularization, but it has been described as the commercialization and feminization of religion.²¹³ This meant that open-minded discussions about Spiritualism were occurring in religious and secular circles.²¹⁴ McGarry describes how the peak of modern Spiritualism “was a time when the numinous, traditionally imparted by established religion, did not so much disappear as rematerialize, newly domesticated, in daily life.”²¹⁵ Spiritualist activity first began in the private realm, typically taking place in the home, where women were central as mediums, investigators, and speakers during séances. Hannah’s involvement in Spiritualism was not expressed through such roles. She instead used her camera and the domestically constructed space of her studio to create a material expression of the movement’s tenants, which took form in photomontaged portraits of herself and deceased family members. Salahub explains that although the new faith provided much to the bereaved mother, and that she played an active role in the local Spiritualist group, the need to safeguard her reputation deterred her from the “controversial” genre of spirit photography.²¹⁶ Mattison also affirms that there is no evidence to suggest that Hannah attempted to trick herself, nor anyone else, in her photographic endeavours.²¹⁷ She instead experimented with notions of death and apparitions in accordance with Spiritualists’ concern to find material proof of immortality. But as Mattison also points out, “Her purpose in producing these strange photographs, many of which bear hidden meanings due to her Spiritualist beliefs,

212 The Fox sisters and what came to be known as the Rochester rappings are discussed in this dissertation’s introduction. Also see Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Margaret Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2005).

213 Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 11.

214 Cook, *The Regenerators*, 65.

215 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 10-11.

216 Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 161.

217 David Mattison, personal archive notes, 14.

will probably never be known.”²¹⁸ Hannah adapted its iconography by disintegrating the boundaries between earthly and spiritual worlds and her private and public life by incorporating visual references to, and portraits of, past loved ones.²¹⁹ McGarry further maintains that “[m]any Spiritualists denied basic categorial binaries: the distinctions between men and women, science and magic, life and afterlife, the past and the present.”²²⁰ Hannah’s experimental photographs can thus be read within the framework of spirit photography, introduced “within a period of intense development of darkroom manipulations, as a means of visual expression in art and commercial photography.”²²¹ I follow Alex Owen’s argument that women’s involvement in Spiritualism was wrapped up in expectations of gender, sexual politics, and the subversion of power relations between men and women. Thus, the focus of my analysis is not the materialization or dematerialization of spirit beings as Victorian critics were concerned, but the ways in which Hannah symbolically constructed the spirit world.²²²

Many scholars observe how Spiritualism grew out of the Victorian period, a period defined by consolation and mourning, and evidenced in literature, theology, advice manuals, and the material culture of *memento mori*.²²³ Salahub explains how women in particular were encouraged to participate in Spiritualism, because it provided a channel for grieving, especially in a time of high child mortality.²²⁴ Hannah experienced several deaths in her family, including her youngest daughter Laura Lillian (1867-1883) who died of typhoid fever at age 16, Emma (1859-1888) who drowned accidentally in Seattle at age 29, and her daughter-in-law Adelaide M. Maynard, the wife of the Hannah’s second son Albert, who also drowned in August of 1892. After his mother Adelaide’s death, Hannah and Richard’s grandson Maynard lived with them and was a frequent

218 Mattison, “The Maynards,” 4.

219 Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 161.

220 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 19.

221 Simone Natale, “6. The marvels of Superimposition: Spirit Photography and Spiritualism’s Visual Culture,” in *Supernatural Entertainments: Victorian Spiritualism and the Rise of Modern Media Culture* (2016), 149.

222 Adapted from Owen’s response to the question: “Were the spirits real?” with, “The issue, then, is not necessarily so much the reality of the spirits as the way in which reality itself is symbolically constructed,” in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (Camden Town, London: Virago, 1989), x.

223 Such as McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 9; and Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 160.

224 Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 160.

subject in her experimental photographs. Lilly, Emma, and Adelaide are also discreetly integrated into and immortalized in Hannah’s portraits. The children appear embroidered onto pillows, imprinted on plates, and framed and displayed in juxtaposition with herself and Maynard.²²⁵ Converse writes that Hannah’s work took a new “spiritual” direction after Lillian died, as “white ghostly or spirit figures started showing up in her montages.”²²⁶ It was at this time that she joined the increasingly popular Spiritualist movement,²²⁷ a fact that she affirmed in an interview with her son Albert in 1931.²²⁸ Wilks reports that a member of the Maynard family recalls going with her to a séance as a child,²²⁹ though Hannah herself did not document this occurrence.



Figure 3: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item D-04033 - Victoria spiritualists’ picnic at Cordova Bay, near Victoria; Hannah Maynard seen in near profile, seated far left.

225 See figures 5, 6, and 7 for examples. These images, and the significance of the deceased women in them, are discussed in detail below.

226 Converse, *Mainstays*, 70-71. She also notes that around this time, Hannah also began to attend séances, yet documentation of it has yet to emerge.

227 Victoria photographer Oregon Columbus Hastings was also a member of the local Spiritualist movement.

228 Maynard in conversation with Isabel Bescoby, Victoria, BC, 16 June 1931, Maynard Files, box 2/3, file 11, BCA, cited in Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 166.

229 Wilks, *The Magic Box*, 11.

Hannah's involvement is nonetheless evidenced in photographs of her attending a Spiritualist picnic at Cordova Bay in 1890.²³⁰ In most of these images, members are posing for the camera in traditional portrait style amidst the verdure. Figure 3 appears to be taken more candidly than the others, showing figures seated in a circular formation atop a sweeping blanket. Most of them face the camera, while Hannah, however, is seated on the left and turned to the right, showing mostly her back. In figure 4, she sits at the opposite side of the group and is faced directly to the left. In all of the Spiritualist picnic photographs, Hannah defies direct engagement with the lens, and thus her viewer, offering instead, only her side profile. She sits at the edge of the group, neither fully immersed in its mass, nor severed from its assemblage. Rigby Watson acknowledges how Hannah positions herself as well:

Hannah's conceptual approach to "photographic seeing" includes the positioning of herself in the photograph. In group portraits, both family and social occasions, she always positioned her face and body in profile, thus refusing the gaze of the spectator and positioning herself apart from the group; in her self-portraits she faces the camera with authority, in control, almost mocking.²³¹

She appears to have consistently participated in photography on her own terms. She maintained a sense of control over how she was represented photographically—whether in her studio or in social settings—by strategically positioning herself peripheral to the group, and never looking into the camera.

230 According to the BC Museum and Archives. Salahub cites "several" were taken in 1886; Mattison records that there are four photographs of a Spiritualist meeting at Cordova Bay in the British Columbia Archives and Records Service, and that the Victoria City Archives also holds some. The Royal BC Museum and Archives has five dated with 1890: reference codes D-04031, D-04032, D-04033, D-04034, and F-05059. D-04033 and D-04034 appear to have a different background from the other three—no wagon, Maynard seated at left (and right in other three), which means that they were likely taken on different dates.

231 Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard*, 3. This is further evinced in a photograph of Hannah and Richard hosting a family dinner in 1895, item F-05028 in the Royal BC Museum and Archives: <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/richard-and-hannah-maynard-hosting-dinner>. In this photograph, Hannah sits with her back to the camera, while Richard and the other six guests turn their attention to the dish that one of them holds on the left side of the table. As the creator of this photograph, I speculate that Hannah positioned the camera to include the table and her guests within the frame, and to have sat in which a way to as to not picture herself frontally, like the Cordova Bay images.



Figure 4: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item D-04031 - Victoria spiritualists' picnic at Cordova Bay, near Victoria; Hannah Maynard seen in profile, seated far right.

Hannah's position in the Spiritualist Picnic photographs can be further understood in accordance with Victorian concepts of the gaze. The practice of looking was a complicated and controversial topic to Victorians, particularly as the unreliability of the eye was proven by physiologists and evinced in photography. Tension between empirical and imaginary seeing laid bare questions regarding perception, subjectivity, and point of view.²³² In this "new regime of vision," as Crary deems it,²³³ vision itself was an object of study in the form of binocular vision and retinal afterimages, for example, and manifested in new ocular technologies such as eyeglasses, telescopes, microscopes, stereo viewers, kaleidoscopes.²³⁴ The camera became a stand in for the eye both physically and metaphorically:²³⁵ "Photographic practice after 1880 began to outstrip the very concepts that made it seem rational, legible, and empirically verifiable even the

232 Kate Flint explores the topic of seeing in Victorian culture as an interdisciplinary study that considers attitudes toward new technologies, spectatorship, subjectivity, and the unreliability of the eye. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

233 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 3.

234 Corey Keller, "Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible," *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 29.

235 Keller, "Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible," 29.

decade before, as it pushed past the horizons of visibility that previously defined it.”²³⁶ Scientists and writers who were interested in aesthetics expounded the properties of vision to inform medical perspectives and the importance of observing the natural world.²³⁷ This included gendered interpretations of eye expressions that circulated in such popular scientific writings as *The Language of the Eye* around mid-century. In it, John Turnley indicates that the eye of the man is firm, whereas women’s is flexible; men survey and observe, while women glance.²³⁸ According to nineteenth-century understandings of the eye, then, I suggest that Hannah’s photographs can be understood in light of these theories, which can be read through the strategic positioning of her body and the direction of her eyes.

Her play in categorical gender expressions is demonstrated in the Cordova Bay photographs. In them, she exhibits what Turnley deems expressions of “sensibility,” “modesty,” and “dignity” by avoiding direct contact; whereas in her later, experimental self-portraits she often addresses the camera with a sense of authority and control—or a male gaze according to Turnley’s theory of “General Character, Female Beauty, and Manly Genius.”²³⁹ Her photographs operate within this viewing structure, while challenging viewer expectations and unsettling any sense of stable or linear narratives. It appears that the circumstances in which her photographs were taken—group portraits versus self- or familial portraits in her studio—affect the contours of her expressions. Hannah’s studio provided a space to explore her Spiritualist beliefs in a fluid way, unfettered from the controversial opinions surrounding the new faith and its photographic manifestations. Her indirect engagement in figures 3 and 4 is therefore representative of her more indirect approach to Spiritualism, however, the Cordova Bay photos nonetheless mark her inclusion in the movement.

236 Douglass R. Nickel, “Photography and Invisibility,” in Dorothy M. Kosinski, *The Artist and the Camera: Degas to Picasso* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Museum of Art, 1999), 36.

237 Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, 25.

238 John Turnley, *The Language of the Eye: The Importance and Dignity of the Eye as Indicative of General Character, Female Beauty, and Manly Genius* (London: Partridge and Co., Paternoster Row, 1856), 48.

239 Turnley, *The Language of the Eye*, 53.

Hannah's use of the camera to indirectly play with spirit photography's iconography suggests a covert interest in the mutability of life. Scholars such as Allen, Garrett-Petts and Lawrence, Mattison, and Wilks have accordingly noted Hannah's preoccupation with death, as illustrated in the duplicated figures and their often spectral-like appearance in her composites.²⁴⁰ Such is the case in "Hannah Maynard and her grandson, Maynard McDonald, in a tableau vivant composite photo" (fig. 5 & 6). Here, Hannah and Maynard engage with each other, and their doubles, against a backdrop of nineteenth-century domesticity—plush, decorative furniture and portraits of passed loved ones compose the set, which is woven with affective triggers.²⁴¹

To further analyze Hannah's photographs, I adapt Jill Bennett's theorizations on sensory images and the ways in which visual culture engages with perception. While Bennett's work is concerned with contemporary art, devotional and funeral imagery, her theories offer valuable insight as to how Hannah's photographs can be understood as not merely representing sensation or feeling, but as regenerating and sustaining sensation. I understand affect as something that is generated through viewers' encounter with the work, operating on the "sense" or "emotional memory" of the viewing subject, rather than something that is produced by the artist and expressed through the work.²⁴² This type of memory is contrary to "common" or narrative memory, which involves the representation of previous feelings. Mnemonic representations operate by triggering viewers' individual affective response; "what 'suits you' in effect means what relates to your experience, what resonates within your bodily memory."²⁴³ Accordingly, affect relies on a prolonged encounter with the work, more than just a cursory glance.²⁴⁴ The mode of affect thus always involves the spectators' encounter with the work as it intersects with their own sense memory. The affective dimension in Hannah's

240 Allen, "Situating Hannah Maynard," 239.

241 It is a double or triple exposure photograph featuring one of Hannah's photosculptures—a statuette portrait—printed from a 20 x 25cm glass plate negative.

242 The terms "sense memory" and "ordinary memory" were coined by Holocaust survivor and poet Charlotte Delbo, as cited by Bennett, "Bad Death," 334-335.

243 Bennett, "Stigmata," 5.

244 *Ibid.*, 11.

photographs functions in multiple ways and is achieved through the myriad of curiosities contained within the image.

In such carefully constructed photographs, Hannah's composition would have encouraged nineteenth-century viewers to engage with the narrative flow and parse through what is real and what is not; to fill in the missing pieces and decipher between past and present moments. This type of image interpretation had already become familiar to audiences via early cinema, which became a common medium for representing spectrality during the second half of the century. As Simone Natale describes, superimposition was used to create the illusion of spirits and ghosts within the contexts of Spiritualism, trick photography, and both stage and lantern magic at a time when spirit photographs were commercialized commodities.²⁴⁵ These images were widely circulated and served to substantiate beliefs and to entertain audiences by suspending their disbelief.

In figures 4 and 5, Hannah and Maynard embody the boundary between the photographs' tangible and intangible traces. Their "doubles," through their multiplicity, show different moments in time as though it has simultaneously been layered and displaced. The photograph therefore contests linear conceptions of time, leading viewers to question the significance of the personal and spiritual elements presented. Garrett-Petts and Lawrence suggest that such querying dislocates viewers by unsettling their expectations, while captivating their attention through the photographs' corporeal and spiritual complexity.²⁴⁶ The sense of curiosity that Hannah's images elicit aligns with Bennett's description of how devotional imagery functioned to foster bodily and spiritual fusion by transmitting affect.²⁴⁷ In questioning Hannah's compositions and venturing to interpret their varied meanings, we are induced into "sustained focus rather than casual interaction," which incites an affective response, according to Bennett.²⁴⁸ Garrett-Petts

245 Simone Natale, "A Short History of Superimposition: From Spirit Photography to Early Cinema," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (May 2012): 124-145. In this article, he examines the link between early film tricks and spirit photography and examines the ways in which the photographs were believed by Victorians to be truthful manifestations of spirits. His argument builds on previous scholarship by Karen Beckman, François Jost, Tom Gunning, Lynda Nead, and Matthew Solomon, in which the indebtedness of spirit photography's iconography to early cinema is discussed.

246 W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence, *Photographic Encounters: The Edges and Edginess of Reading Prose pictures and Visual Fictions* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), 129.

247 Bennett, "Stigmata," 11

248 Ibid.

and Lawrence also follow Wilks's conclusion that Hannah's "representational strategies" leave her experimental photographs open to interpretation, all of which are "unsettling."²⁴⁹



Figure 5: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05031 - Hannah Maynard and her grandson, Maynard McDonald, in a tableau vivant composite photo

In figure 5, Hannah on the left simultaneously calls attention to herself, while denying the spectators' gaze. She stands in profile with arms raised as the two Maynards and the other Hannah look towards her. Her right hand obstructs our view of her face, permitting only her other self and her grandson to look; yet she demands our attention, as we inadvertently follow their eyes turning to look toward her. Our process of perception is slowed as our eyes are led from figure to figure in a triangular motion, before resting on the severed photosculpture of Maynard fixed atop a wooden pedestal.²⁵⁰ She directs our gaze in the classical tradition of triangular composition, at once aligning her work with masterpieces of art history and reaffirming her status as "artiste." Maynard's body in this arrangement also illustrates Spiritualist interest in a "progressive decorporalization of

249 Wilks, *The Magic Box*, 93.

250 In photosculpture, the model appears as a living statue; Hannah referred to this technique as "Living Statuary" or "Statuary from Life." Other scholars, namely Mattison and Allen, describe Maynard as "impaled" on the pedestal. I, however, do not believe that it was Hannah's intention to ascribe such violent language to this spectral representation of him. I would argue that her placement of him on a pedestal is a metaphorical positioning that shows her great regard for him.

the physical world, and de-materialization of the human body.”²⁵¹ Much like Bennett’s funeral image, Maynard’s photosculpture operates as an affective trigger by regenerating emotional sensation—rather than merely representing it—in the spectator through the viewing process.²⁵² The visceral severing of his body activates an affective response that generates sensation, making this what Bennett describes as a “productive,” rather than “representational” image.²⁵³ Maynard’s body elicits a personal response from, and thus a connection with, viewers as they complete the missing information in the picture.²⁵⁴ This engagement draws viewers into the photograph and into Hannah’s space, which forms a relation between her and her audience. By viewing this image through an affective lens, I understand this connection as one that might be otherwise difficult to create, for the deeply personal implications of grief are variant and transformative experiences. Yet in this way, Hannah renders her loss as an expression of personal connection by way of her artful composition, which also intimates an attachment to the spiritual.

Maynard’s fragmentary, spectral body further contributes to the spirituality of the photograph. He and Hannah reach out toward each other in an act that facilitates the “spiritual and bodily fusion” that Bennett articulates in her analysis of how affect is channelled through the consistent attention required of devotional imagery.²⁵⁵ Their performance calls into question the figures’ corporeality, further prompting us to question Hannah and Maynard’s physical presence in the studio. Bennett writes that “it is precisely concentration on the detail...that engenders an affective response, resulting in a tactile convergence and a state of full immersion or absorption for the devotee.”²⁵⁶ In Hannah’s case, it is not necessarily the devotee that she engrosses, but Victorian audiences across nations, through international publications. Maynard’s disembodiment materializes the strangeness that death has beset onto Hannah, while drawing viewers into her experience of it. The palpable suggestion between earthly and spiritual realms is suggested through their almost-touching hands that give the impression of a tactile interaction between each

251 Gerrett-Petts, and Donald Lawrence, *Photographic Encounters*, 36.

252 Jill Bennett, “Stigmata,” 5.

253 Following from Deleuze’s work as adapted by Jill Bennett in “Stigmata,” 12.

254 Bennett, “Stigmata,” 12.

255 *Ibid.*, 11.

256 *Ibid.*

other. This, in turn, registers the sense of touch within viewers.²⁵⁷ This simple gesture connotes closeness and intimacy shared between family members, and incites what Bennett deems a “sensory engagement with the image.”²⁵⁸ It registers “sense impressions” that retain within the visual the capacity to evoke sensation. The photograph can therefore be understood as not merely representing sensation, but as regenerating to produce sensation through the viewing process. A catalogue of experiences is subsequently opened up to viewers, who are prompted to recall their own familial connections that are evocative of a range of associated affects—grief, loss, and sorrow and happiness, reassurance, and joy. And because affect operates on an individual’s own unique sense memory, each viewer and each photographic encounter has the capacity to evoke any number of these affects.

Hannah’s photographic play connects earthly and spiritual elements that reside not just in their bodies, but in the image’s puzzling mixture of real and unreal objects. For instance, the artificial backdrop in figure 5 is convincing upon initial glance, but closer inspection evinces the ornate staircase, exotic foliage, and the bookshelf just behind the Hannahs to be false. The exaggerated highlights accentuating the designs carved into the railing and the slightly askew lines of the pots and books give away their falsity. While such artifice is common, and even expected, in nineteenth-century studio photography, its intricacies nonetheless interrupt our initial impression of the photograph’s truth. In this way, Hannah challenged the evidentiary status of photography at a time when, as John Tagg contends, “the photograph’s status as evidence and record (like its status as Art) had to be produced and negotiated to be established.”²⁵⁹ She does this by strategically combining real and unreal elements, leading us to further question the image’s individual components, and thus unveiling a world of new interpretations and meanings. Why, for example, is there empty picture frame propped up at the edge of the visual field in addition to the ones holding photographs of her daughters? Perhaps it is to invite viewers to not only imagine the space in which this photo may be hung in future photographs. Or perhaps it is to make tangible the void that her lost family members have left behind.

257 Bennett, “Stigmata,” 8.

258 Ibid.

259 John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988), 6.

Though Hannah's intentions cannot be known, all aspects of image-making appear to have been executed meticulously and with purpose. As such, I argue that in these self-conscious creations, she opens viewers up to the space of her bereavement, to feel with her, and to engage with the "affective dynamic internal to the work."²⁶⁰ As with the disembodied Maynard, viewers are called on to use their memory to fill in the missing information and to imagine what might be illustrated in the pictureless frame. In this way, the subjective experience of loss and mourning is materialized and made permanent through the photographic process.

Yet at the same time, Hannah's representation of absence—as in the empty frame—acts as a visual metaphor of her connection to the spirit world and to those who reside in it. In her discussion of how the physical eye has been interpreted alongside imagination and memory in Victorian literary and artistic cultures, Kate Flint argues that absence was a more powerful signifier for portraying loss than presence was.²⁶¹ Hannah represents absence in these works in three ways: the empty picture frame, the portraits of her deceased daughters, and the half body of Maynard's double. By representing absence in multiple ways, Hannah more impactfully stimulates memory, which subsequently forefronts that which cannot be captured through the "easy legibility" of photography; that is, one's interiority.²⁶² The "inward" aspects of the deceased—Hannah's and now ours through memory—are enacted by imagination. She calls attention to the futility of attempting to seize, and mechanically reproduce, one's inner character because to accurately capture the essence of someone has "proved resistant to representation."²⁶³ Patricia Rigby Watson substantiates this notion, writing:

Spiritualism as an essence of form lurks within the totemic use of photography by Hannah Maynard, as she represents the deceased members of her family by the insertion of photographs within the photograph to produce both the pseudo-presence of her daughters and daughter-in-law and the token of their absence.²⁶⁴

260 Bennett, *Empathetic Vision*, 1.

261 Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, 23.

262 Ibid.

263 Ibid., 24.

264 Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard*, 7.

Hannah makes strange the common space of the domestic by “reworking familiar objects in ways that evoke the losses that households have borne and the silences that descend in the spaces inhabited by the bereaved,” to borrow Bennett’s phrasing.²⁶⁵



Figure 6: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item J-04568 - Hannah Maynard and her grandson, Maynard McDonald, in a tableau vivant composite photo

Our prolonged encounter with the photographs also works to draw us into the process of remembering with Hannah and Maynard. Upon engaging with the image, spectators bear witness to her sorrow, which she performs before the camera with the strategic positioning of bodies and props, and manipulation of the photographic process. Her subjects not only want to be “remembered as remembering,”²⁶⁶ as Salahub describes, but through Hannah’s multiplicity they also enact the potential of “being a spectator of one’s own feelings.”²⁶⁷ While the inclusion of the women’s portraits in figure 5 implies the act of remembering, figure 6 explicitly calls attention to it. Here, Hannah uses her arm to direct our gaze to the three framed portraits of women propped up in the background. The same portraits appear in both images of Hannah and her grandson, though they are arranged differently and in full view in figure 6. Here, the Maynard’s daughter, Lillian,

265 Bennett, “Bad Death,” 342.

266 Salahub, “Hannah Maynard,” 160.

267 Bennett, *Empathetic Vision*, 23. For Bennett, this outlines the possibility for artist and audience to participate in viewing feeling.

appears in the photograph hung centrally at the top of the image.²⁶⁸ The portrait of the woman holding an umbrella in the bottom frame is Maynard's mother and Lillian's older sister, Emma. The woman portrayed in the middle portrait is Adelaide. Hannah's double and her grandson are posed to view the portraits, turning their bodies toward them, while Hannah holds a lorgnette for closer inspection. The ways in which she constructed the poses, props, and set in this image refers to the act of remembering by depicting her subjects explicitly enacting it. She calls attention to the loss of the women in the portraits, while simultaneously enlivening them in Hannah's present. This performance further underlines her memories of past family members, while encouraging viewers to similarly recall their past and locate it in their present.

Hannah's multiple exposures invigorate memories that transcend time. By photographing memorialized family members and reintegrating them into her contemporaneity, she moves them from the past into her present, and from the private realm into the public.²⁶⁹ Affect is triggered through these traces of the dead, and through viewers' recognition of their lifelike presence in both images of Hannah and Maynard. Her portraits effectively haunt the spectator by inhabiting these photographs. In viewing them, one realizes these portrayals of the dead, and the loss their presence evokes, as Hannah would have perceived it.²⁷⁰ She permeates her studio, and thus the photographs, with the weight of her grief. In doing this, she brings us into her world of bereavement through her implicit rendering of death. Hannah populates the image with portraits of her deceased children, which can be understood as confronting her own reality, and her own loss. Hannah again represents the strangeness of death by materializing and making permanent her feelings of being haunted by numerous deaths in her family, as noted above. She makes visible the presence of the dead by "haunting" her studio, and thus her viewer, with their pseudo-presence; for, as Bennett writes, "to be in the grip of sense memory is, by definition, to remain haunted by memory that resists cognitive

268 Hannah did not date her experimental photographs, and because her personal records on photography are minimal, it is not possible to precisely date this series. Archivists have, however, concluded that image F-05031 (93199) was taken post 1883, because it was December of that year that Lillian died, and Hannah began incorporating images of her into her photographs.

269 Also true for *Gems of British Columbia*, which were circulated publicly via international trade journals such as *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer*.

270 Bennett, "Bad Death," 347.

memory.”²⁷¹ Hannah draws us into this affective space, imbued with spirituality, and which operates within Spiritualism’s orthodoxy—the personal survival of bodily death and the communion between physical and spiritual worlds.

Through photographic experimentation, Hannah invites viewers to engage with her as she adjusts to her physical and psychological space that has been permeated by death. The multiple exposures discussed thus far have effectively shown the complexity with which her reality has been de-familiarized and made unstable through photographic manipulation. Yet in the self-portrait entitled “Hannah Maynard in her parlour; the corner what-not shelf is a small shrine to her loved ones who had passed on, including her daughters and daughter-in-law” (fig. 7), Hannah makes tangible the inexplicability of death. She draws viewers into the viewing process and, by extension, into this closed-in space with her. Here we are inundated with portraits of her lost family members, who have been immortalized through portraiture and exhibited in wall-hangings, embroidered onto cushions, and imprinted on plates. Upon first glance, such objects would have been familiar to nineteenth-century audiences. But through sustained attention, the eye is drawn in and around Hannah and the numerous miniature portraits, prompting the realization that she has physically surrounded herself with the dead. Perhaps this was to “render death familiar, or ordinary,” as Bennett remarks about funeral imagery, as such personal effects were hung or displayed in typical Victorian fashion.²⁷² Yet unlike most nineteenth-century portraiture, and even her other self-portraits, Hannah does not appear assertive, resolute, or even passive as many women do from this time. She displays a look of despondence that can be interpreted as a reflection of her inner state; that bereavement has left her with sorrow and grief, and she has chosen to record herself in this way.

Hannah’s photographs are therefore not mementos of the dead, nor commemorative works that directly refer to her deceased family members from the past. But rather, they register a shift in the way common objects—and photographs more specifically—are perceived. “Hannah Maynard in her parlour,” and the seemingly familiar objects contained within it, are indeed evocative of familial memories, though

271 Bennett, “Bad Death,” 340.

272 *Ibid.*, 339.

they can also be understood as an “effect of the way things change when loss is experienced.”²⁷³ This change is clearly marked by the expression on Hannah’s face, and the ways in which she tactically composed the photograph.



Figure 7: Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05036 - Hannah Maynard in her parlour; the corner what-not shelf is a small shrine to her loved ones who had passed on, including her daughters and daughter-in-law

“Hannah Maynard in her parlour” is compositionally complex, depicting Hannah, and the shrine next to her, as the vanishing point in the frame. She is seated in a chair in the corner of the constructed room, which, through the use of perspective and slightly askew angles, pulls viewers in, while conjuring feelings of closeness, or claustrophobia—with her in this small space and the proximity of the relics to her. Large frames are hung on the walls in such a way that they appear to be looming down and narrowing in on her, and thus viewers, as she sustains their attention as the focal point of the photograph. As such, I maintain that Hannah crafted this closed-in environment as a reflection of her psychological space. It echoes the “alienating and disorienting experience of loss”

273 Bennett, “Bad Death,” 345.

that Bennett articulates plays on our bodily memory.²⁷⁴ Viewers are then encouraged to focus on each one of the shrine's intricacies that decorate the room in a process that extends viewing and slows perception. Through this process, each object becomes an affective trigger that keys into our perceptual senses.²⁷⁵ Every piece appears to be methodically placed to face the camera and to present viewers with the significance they held as embodiments of the great losses Hannah faced. Bennett describes the experience of mourning, writing that "those left behind learn to inhabit the world made strange and uninhabitable by death."²⁷⁶ And in Hannah's strategic juxtaposition of the living with the dead, she physically and figuratively occupies this now-strange world. By surrounding herself with depictions from the past, she makes her world habitable, transposing her family into her present through a performance that can be read through Spiritualist belief. The common space of the domestic becomes a transformative space that aligns with the ways in which Spiritualist practice "collapsed time and refused to accept the past as over."²⁷⁷ She insists on the strangeness of death as a traumatic and violent experience through an emotive self-portrait that is a fitting reflection of her Spiritualist engagement.²⁷⁸

Hannah's play in self-expression is pushed further in a composite self-portrait in which she creates five iterations of herself (fig. 8). She shows multiple sides of herself through various poses and facial expressions that are performed through multiple exposures. The composite image is reminiscent of Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotography, in which analyses of motion are traced in sequential movements on a single glass plate. Allied neither with commercial production nor art, methods for producing this type of "recreational" or "amusing" photography were circulated and published in *British Journal Photographic Annual*, *Scientific American* and *La Nature*, for example, which detailed procedures for producing double and triple exposures.²⁷⁹ Hannah used these methods to visualize various poses and expressions in a single frame:

274 Bennett, "Bad Death," 346.

275 Ibid.

276 Ibid., 345.

277 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 6.

278 Bennett, "Bad Death," 339.

279 Terms are taken from an article titled "Amusing Photography," *Scientific American Supplement* (October 26).

the first displays her side profile as she looks toward the other representations of herself, the second and third stare directly back at viewers, the fourth is the only one to demurely gaze down and away, and the fifth just misses the camera's lens, looking slightly askance. The Hannahs are seamlessly connected by a chain of white daisies, which each figure holds, demonstrating her technical skill.



Figure 8: Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo

In representing herself five times, she captured the ability to perform her multifaceted individuality using composite photography, rather than the static representation that traditional portraiture offered. By picturing herself in multiple moments, she not only conflates time to appear as a singular moment, but she brings five different pasts into the moment that the glass plates were developed. Like Marey's chronophotography, this image appears as a sequence of photographs that suggests motion, wherein each of her performances connotes a different aspect of herself and her life. For instance, in the second and third figures, she portrays herself as a confident English bourgeoisie who climbed her way up the echelons of society in Victoria by meeting our gaze. In the fourth figure, she appears as a solemn woman who expresses her grief with downward glance. In the fifth figure, she represents a charismatic and charming professional who was ahead of her time. I thus interpret this photograph as Hannah gesturing to the multiple sides of herself through multiple exposure.

The image also reflects an exploration into broad questions of aesthetics, subjectivity, and shifting concepts of temporality. Watson observes that while narratives

of femininity, as coded through shifting trends such as fashion, Hannah's portraits lack the narcissistic qualities that photography of this period reinforced.²⁸⁰ They instead reveal a self-conscious enactment of Victorian vulnerability and sentimentality conveyed through a sense of ease that replaced the rigid poses and facial expressions of early portraiture.²⁸¹ She follows Victorian conventions of femininity with her flower props and her genteel appearance, yet the multiplication of her appearance and the various identities she presents, transverses the familiarity of the genre. In this way, "Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo" counteracts viewers' familiarization with, and relation to, nineteenth-century portraiture through Hannah's ethereal appearance, which is layered with notions self-reflexivity and interiority.²⁸² As such, I argue that she was aware of what each rendering would intimate; that her purposeful role-play is an indicator of how she wished herself to be perceived. This interpretation corresponds with how historians and archivists have noted that Hannah subscribed to international trade journals to stay attuned to photographic trends, and to tailor her techniques to meet the demands of clientele. This also suggests that Hannah tailored her appearance accordingly to "poke some fun at conventions of domesticity and femininity in order to inquire into perceptions of self and her own place in the world," as Allen proposes.²⁸³

Hannah's work moves towards subverting the standards within the male-dominated field of photography, as a female professional working and living in patriarchal structures. While her earlier work in landscapes and with Indigenous subjects contributed to Victoria's goal of promoting industriousness through commercial production, the personal nature of her later work is unlike that of her contemporaries. Garrett-Petts and Lawrence observe this aspect of her work, writing that her "personal vision subverts the public world of commercial production."²⁸⁴ Surrealist, whimsical imagery produced in a personal nature, such as hers, was not widely practised in

280 Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard*, 3.

281 Ibid.

282 This idea is adapted from Jill Bennett's use of the phrase, "process of familiarization," to analyze how Belfast artist Sandra Johnston projects her own experiences of how funeral images impact her, and to call attention the lack of affect in media images of funerals, by inserting affective triggers in her work. "Bad Death," 339.

283 Allen, "Situating Hannah Maynard," 246.

284 Gerrett-Petts, and Donald Lawrence, *Photographic Encounters*, 127.

photography until the late 1920s. Scholars such as Allen Converse, Finlay, and Mattison situate Hannah's experimental work in relation to the Surrealist movement, as intermediary between Victorian sensibilities and modernist worldviews. The complexity of Hannah's image making, including her focus on artistic structure and play in multiple perspectives, is arguably akin to the early photomontage work of Berlin artist Hannah Höch.²⁸⁵ The social, political, and economic impetus behind Dada and Surrealism is, however, clearly distinct from the cultural climate within which Hannah was working. As class boundaries began to disintegrate in the late nineteenth century working women such as Hannah contributed to, and confirmed, their proactive contributions to Canada's cultural, social, economic identity by visually documenting the colonial outpost's rapid growth. She advanced her knowledge of domestic discourse, Victorian sensibility, and modern photographic techniques to craft a professional identity for herself that balanced social expectations. She first gained traction in newly developed Victoria, then pushed the boundaries that demarcated class, gender, and what constituted art to solidify her status in Canadian, women's and photographic histories. Her artistic merit, advanced through emerging photographic techniques, transformed the terms of pictorial representation, as Rigby Watson claims.²⁸⁶ And she was, as Hannah's critics lauded, "one of the most industrious and preserving ladies we have in our business."²⁸⁷

Conclusion

Hannah Maynard worked as a professional photographer for nearly fifty years and, in that time, she experimented with emerging photographic techniques such as multiple exposures, photomontage, and photosculpture. Her work throughout the 1880s and 1890s demonstrates a deep exploration of interiority and her own position within dominant patriarchal structures. She critiqued the gender dynamics that structured everyday life and established the norms of domesticity for women through an interior and spiritual exploration of self that was expressed through emergent photographic techniques that were combined with juxtaposition and irony. She drew on her personal archive of

285 Allen closely examines the link between these two artists in "Situating Hannah Maynard."

286 Rigby Watson, *The Photographs of Hannah Maynard*, 8.

287 *St. Louis & Canadian Photographer* cited in Converse, *Mainstays*, 65.

photography to physically and metaphorically reinvigorate the past and bring it into her present. Hannah's photographs rouse tension between familiar and unfamiliar elements, while inviting viewers into her world of bereavement through the strangeness and unfamiliarity that is not always immediately apparent. Her indirect, or peripheral, involvement in Spiritualism, is, as I have argued, performed before the camera through strategic poses, facial expressions, and photographic manipulation. She presented the psychological complexity and emotional distress of grief in accordance with Spiritualism's tenets. By rendering death unfamiliar, or intangible, Hannah called into question the boundaries between earthly and spiritual realms. Her photographs implicate spectators in the strangeness and violence of death through a prolonged viewing process that engages with our perceptual senses and effectively demonstrates the way loss was perceived by Hannah. As I have shown, the movement's principles allowed her to explore her beliefs in the private space of her studio, and to evoke affect in ways that encouraged Victorian viewers to see the photographs on more personal terms so they too might recall memories and emotional connections to loved ones. Hannah immortalized herself, along with deceased family members, onto the glass plate, which served to at once arrest and displace time, as it was layered within the photographic frame.

Appendix

Figure 1: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-02850 - Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-tableau-vivant-composite-photo-3>.



Figure 2: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05070 - Hannah Maynard and others cycling in Beacon Hill Park, Victoria, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-and-others-cycling-in-beacon-hill-park-victoria>.



Figure 3: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item D-04033 - Victoria spiritualists' picnic at Cordova Bay, near Victoria; Hannah Maynard seen in near profile, seated far left, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/victoria-spiritualists-picnic-at-cordova-bay-near-victoria-hannah-maynard-seen-in-near-profile-seated-far-left>.



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Figure 4: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item D-04031 - Victoria spiritualists' picnic at Cordova Bay, near Victoria; Hannah Maynard seen in profile, seated far right, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/victoria-spiritualists-picnic-at-cordova-bay-near-victoria-hannah-maynard-seen-in-profile-seated-far-right>.



BC Archives Photo # P-04031 - Supplied for Research Only. No Reproduction. Fees May Apply for Other Use

Figure 5: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05031 - Hannah Maynard and her grandson, Maynard McDonald, in a tableau vivant composite photo, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-maynard-mcdonald-tableau-vivant-composite-photo-2>.



Figure 6: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item J-04568 - Hannah Maynard and her grandson, Maynard McDonald, in a tableau vivant composite photo, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-maynard-mcdonald-tableau-vivant-composite-photo-1>.



Figure 7: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05036 - Hannah Maynard in her parlour; the corner what-not shelf is a small shrine to her loved ones who had passed on, including her daughters and daughter-in-law, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-in-her-parlour-corner-what-not-shelf-is-small-shrine-to-her-loved-ones-who-had-passed-on-including-her-daughters-and-daughter-in-law>.



Figure 8: Hannah Maynard, Royal BC Museum and Archives, Item F-05043 - Hannah Maynard in a tableau vivant composite photo, <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/hannah-maynard-tableau-vivant-composite-photo-5>.



Chapter 2 - Seeing & Feeling, Science & Religion: Negotiating Binaries in Lillian Hamilton's Photographic Albums

Introduction

Lillian May Hamilton approached psychical research from a spiritual and scientific perspective. She was the impetus behind her husband, Dr. Thomas Glendenning (T.G.) Hamilton's, investigations in Winnipeg, Manitoba, as his motivational and supportive collaborator. Her investigations were vested in the nature of the afterlife and founded on empirical evidence, yet her accomplishments were not recognized in their own right within the field of psychics. She led séances in the Hamilton family home from 1935 to 1944, while simultaneously organizing documentation about the processes and results of her investigations with T.G. Lillian continued to research historical and emerging phenomena after he died, and the photographic documentation of their experiments comprises the world's largest collection of its kind. Lillian also compiled many of these images into annotated albums that are imbued with emotionality. They feature photographs, typed fragments of transcript, and handwritten captions that illustrate Lillian's spiritual and intellectual process, while evoking an affective response



Figure 1: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Suspended square mass, May 22, 1939

from viewers. Images of the albums draw viewers into the séance experience with their captivating detail (fig. 1). In an image of one such page, three photographs are adhered to the page as evidence of a teleplasm that appeared on May 22nd, 1939. Lillian also wrote brief descriptions around them to identify the subjects and dates that the phenomena occurred. More significantly, her ardour and resolute belief in her investigations are conveyed through her annotations. She created these albums as records of psychical evidence that were intended to be viewed by close friends and family, yet filled with snippets of photographs, typed and handwritten captions, they encapsulate and elicit the feelings of séance.

Lillian's investigative findings are part of the Hamilton Family Fonds at the University of Manitoba.²⁸⁸ This collection is an archival record of the Hamiltons' research into life after death, comprised of original research and séance notes, attendance registers, affidavits, correspondence, photographs, stereo photographs, glass-plate negatives, lantern slides, journal articles, and newspaper clippings. The collection represents Spiritualist and scientific investigations into psychic phenomena. Lillian worked alongside T.G. from 1921 to 1935, yet her contributions to psychic research have been overshadowed by her husband's accolades as a highly regarded member of Winnipeg's medical community and within international psychic networks.²⁸⁹ Lillian's work has thus received little attention in scholarship. Literature on the Hamiltons concentrates on T.G.'s expertise as a medical doctor who began to seriously investigate psychic phenomena after experiencing profound grief over the loss of his son. Much of it also focuses on the authenticity of their psychical documentation and as a part of Winnipeg's cultural heritage. Lillian's albums have yet to be discussed in a scholarly context, and in this chapter, I examine her contributions to the Hamilton collection. I

288 The Hamilton Family Fonds, held in the Archives & Special Collections in the Elizabeth Defoe Library at the University of Manitoba, forms the foundations of this chapter, based on archival research, and with the generous support and aid from the library's staff, archivists, and experts in the field, most significantly, Dr. Shelley Sweeney, Walter Meyer zu Erpen, Dr. Serena Keshavjee, and Nicole Courrier. The collection holds 2,681 photographs and accompanying documentation comprised of research and séance notes, attendance registers, affidavits, correspondence, photographs, stereo photographs, glass-plate negatives, lantern slides, handmade scrapbooks, published articles, and newspaper clippings. It details the family's investigations in psychic phenomena that took place in their Winnipeg home between 1918 and 1945.

289 For example, T.G. joined the New York section of the American Society for Psychic Research (ASPR) in December of 1923.

investigate how her work challenged gender binaries, particularly in relation to scientific and psychic communities' conceptions about the status of men and women. In exploring these questions, this chapter bridges scientific and Spiritualist ideas in an effort to illuminate how the women in the Hamilton circle were granted agency and autonomy within séance.

This chapter examines Lillian's albums from a feminist social history perspective to show how they simultaneously adhere to and challenge ideas about femininity, and family and personal photography. I mobilize theories of affect, gender, and culture primarily through Sarah Ahmed's work on emotion. I use her theory of affect to consider the shared feelings of séance participants, and to explore the ways in which the circulation of affects can be understood as creating a happy association with the photographs. By showing how the photographs operate as "happy objects" within Ahmed's affective economy, this chapter theorizes how emotions were activated in séance. This chapter also explores how the photographs convey the experience of the séance to twentieth-century viewers, and how they retain their capacity to evoke the emotionality of the sittings today. I ultimately suggest that Lillian approached her practice from an intellectual and spiritual perspective, thereby challenging the rational/irrational, thinking/emotional binaries that saturated the field of psychics and persist in mainstream culture.

Moreover, this chapter reads Lillian's albums as simultaneously adhering to and challenging twentieth-century ideas about femininity. To do this, I draw on literature about personal and family photography by Patricia Holland, Marianne Hirsch, Jo Spence, and Patrizia di Bello. Their discussions are framed around ideas about women's culture and domesticity, family and women's histories, and notions of memory to consider the social uses of personal photography. They do not argue that personal photographs should be valued for how they have been use and interpreted in within art, but rather, that they should be apprehend on their own terms.²⁹⁰ Holland builds on John Taylor's discussion of Kodak's impact on memory creations for families and how it (re)shaped society's understanding of "eternal happy memories" in the early twentieth century. She cites John

290 Patricia Holland, "'Sweet it is to Scan...': Personal Photographs and Popular Photography," in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells, fifth ed. (London and New York: Routledge), 140.

Taylor to discuss the revaluation of the private sphere post World War II, wherein domestic consumption became a prevailing ideology for women returning to the home as the fulcrum of family life.²⁹¹ Holland's description of family photography as a "resolute insistence on the creation of *happy* memories" is apt for my theorization of Lillian's photographs as Ahmed's "happy objects."²⁹² By intersecting these theories, and combining them with visual analyses, I show how Lillian's albums vacillate between a subscription to, and subversion of, feminine ideals.

This chapter considers the period between 1935, when Lillian began to lead experiments, and 1944, when she concluded them. It focuses on a series of album images from April and May of 1939 that depict and describe séances in which a materialization of T.G. appeared. My discussion also considers her corresponding séance notes, typed then later edited in handwriting, which substantiate the photographs' visual materializations. I demonstrate how Lillian's effort to provide evidence of her belief in the afterlife subsequently reveals her multifaceted approach to psychical research. I do this to suggest that she used her practice, and her compilation of albums, to reconcile her feelings of grief after the physical loss of her husband. I further suggest that through her album creation, she was granted agency in (re)scripting the Hamilton narrative; that the album pages provided a space in which she was able to communicate her experiences of séance. In this way, I show how women were able to uphold autonomy even as they were subjected to nineteenth-century patriarchal structures. This chapter therefore elucidates the multifaceted contributions that women made across varied aspects of photography.

Studies on the Hamiltons

While research about the Hamiltons is abundant, Lillian is typically mentioned in passing as T.G.'s wife, assistant, and collaborator. He has been deemed "by far Canada's most highly regarded psychic investigator,"²⁹³ and his work is often cited as the best

291 Ibid., 164; here Holland refers to John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 141.

292 Holland, "'Sweet it is to Scan...'" 164.

293 Stan McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 86.

documented and most credible psychical research worldwide.²⁹⁴ Lillian, however, appears more as a cultural footnote than as a psychical investigator, researcher, and album creator.

Most literature about the Hamiltons focuses on photographic evidence of psychic phenomena and on attesting to its authenticity. For instance, archivist and president of the Survival Research Institute of Canada Walter Meyer zu Erpen has written extensively about the Hamilton collection and the significance of its contribution to the field of psychics.²⁹⁵ Serena Keshavjee and James B. Nickels have also conducted extensive work in the fonds. Keshavjee studies nineteenth- and twentieth-century spirituality at the intersection of culture, art history, and science, and her work is vested in providing insight into Winnipeg settlement between the world wars.²⁹⁶ Nickels used archival materials and an interview with the Hamiltons' son Dr. Glen Forrester Hamilton in 2007 to publish Glen's recollections and views of his family history, his beliefs, and his father's research in relation to Manitoba heritage.²⁹⁷ Numerous studies have examined visual manifestations such as table levitation, various forms of ectoplasm, and automatic writing. Beth A. Robertson and Stan McMullin use the Hamiltons as a primary case study to provide the widest accounts of psychical research in Central Canada.²⁹⁸ And unlike

294 Paraphrased from telephone conversations with Walter Meyer zu Erpen in April of 2020. He also writes: "From this era, the Hamilton collection provides the best photographic evidence of table levitations in the world" in "Do Tables Fly?: The Hamilton Family's Experiments with 'Psychic Force,' 1921-1927," *Paranormal Review* (2016): 13.

295 Meyer zu Erpen is also a contributor to the winter 2016 issue of *Paranormal Review*, the magazine of the Society for Psychical Research, which Dr. Leo Ruickbie considers a reassessment of the Hamilton circle. Contributors to the issue also include the Hamiltons' granddaughter Janice Hamilton, Walter David Falk, Shelley Sweeney, and Susan MacWilliam.

296 Related publications include: "Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in fin-de-siècle France," *Occulture*, Special Issue of *Aries*, 13, no. 11 ed. Tessel Bauduin and Nina Kokkinen (2013): 37-69; "The Enactment of the Supernatural in Fin-de-Siècle France Art and Culture," in *Inversions*, ed. Dr. Jennifer Fisher (Toronto: York University); "The Scientization of Spirituality," in *Seductive Surfaces: The Art of Tissot*, Vol. 6, Studies in British Art, ed. Katherine Lochnan (London: Yale University Press, 1999). Keshavjee also has a forthcoming exhibition, *The Undead Archive* (2023), and forthcoming book, *100 Years of Photographing Ghosts* (University of Manitoba Press, 2023), which are related to the Hamilton collection. My work is also informed by virtual meetings with Keshavjee, who has provided me with great insight and helped me to think critically about how Lillian's albums were compiled.

297 James B. Nickels, "Psychic Research in a Winnipeg Family: Reminiscences of Dr. Glen F. Hamilton," *Manitoba History* 55 (June 2007): 51-60. http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/55/psychicresearch.shtml. Prior to this, Glen had remained quiet about his parents' research because his classmates teased him about them having ghosts in their house. Janice Hamilton, "'Bring on Your Ghosts!,'" *Paranormal Review* (2016): 11.

298 Beth A. Robertson, *Science of the Séance: Transnational Networks and Gendered Bodies in the Study of Psychic Phenomena, 1918-1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*.

most literature on psychic research, they do not make distinctions between religious and secular perspectives. Robertson extends her study to include the wider network of researchers in the US and the UK, applying feminist theory to assess the role of women within the séance. Following the work of feminist scholars Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, Robertson argues that female investigators were denied the same recognition as their male colleagues.²⁹⁹ This chapter accordingly builds on Robertson's work to further address women's involvement in psychic investigations.

The Hamiltons' children and grandchildren have also been involved in substantiating their family's investigations. Their granddaughter Janice Hamilton has contributed an article to the Society for Psychical Research's magazine, *Paranormal Review*, in a reassessment of the Hamilton circle.³⁰⁰ Attention to the Hamilton experiments has also been paid by several local periodicals in an effort to highlight local achievements and to pay homage to Winnipeg's "haunted past."³⁰¹ My study is also informed by secondary sources written by the Hamiltons: *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival* by T.G., which was edited and published posthumously by Lillian and their youngest son, James Drummond Hamilton, in 1942;³⁰² and *Is Survival a Fact?*, largely written by Lillian and compiled and published by their daughter Margaret Lillian Hamilton Bach in 1969.³⁰³

This chapter diverges from previous literature by engaging with the emotive capacity of the images. My approach follows from Lisa Blackman's conception of

299 Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, "Introduction," in *Body Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge, 1990).

300 *Paranormal Review* (2016).

301 Linda Horodecki, "Psychic Experiments at Hamilton House - Part One," *Heritage Winnipeg* (February 24, 2017), <http://heritagewinnipeg.blogspot.com/2016/02/psychic-experiments-hamilton-house-at.html>; Linda Horodecki, "Psychic Experiments at Hamilton House - Part Two," *Heritage Winnipeg* (March 2, 2017), <http://heritagewinnipeg.blogspot.com/2016/03/psychic-experiments-hamilton-house-at.html>; Aidan Geary, "Ectoplasm on the Prairies," *CBC News* (October 28, 2018), <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/ectoplasm-on-the-prairies>; and Ben Waldman, "Haunted headquarters: Gags Unlimited moves into new digs with a definite connection to the afterlife," *Winnipeg Free Press* (Winnipeg, Mb.), November 1, 2021, <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/business/haunted-headquarters-575648832.html>.

302 A second edition of the same name was edited by Margaret and published by Regency Press, London, in 1977.

303 Full citation: Margaret Lillian (Hamilton) Bach, *Is Survival a Fact? Studies of Deep-trance Automatic Scripts and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by the Trance Personalities on the Question of Human Survival* (London: Psychic Press, 1969).

contemporary cultural theory, in which a concern for the processes, practices, sensations and affects presides over subject matter. She writes that “the solidity of the subject has dissolved into a concern with those processes, practices, sensations and affects that move through bodies in ways that are difficult to see, understand and investigate.”³⁰⁴ Therefore, the relation between the photographs and viewers, and by extension, between séance participants and viewers, is central to this chapter. And while this study is not comprehensive, it begins to explore a previously unstudied area of Canadian and women’s histories both nationally and regionally, with the aim to illuminate Lillian’s work and to better understand the contributions of women to psychic photography in Canada.

Psychic Investigations in the Hamilton Home

Thomas Glendenning Hamilton (1873-1935) became internationally renowned for his psychic investigations, with the support of his wife, Lillian May Hamilton, née Forrester (1880-1956). They experimented with trance states, telekinesis, and teleplasmic manifestations, and they produced extensive textual and visual documentation about these phenomena. According to their daughter, Margaret Lillian (Hamilton) Bach (1909-1986), T.G. was an excellent amateur photographer. He developed, enlarged, and printed all of their photographs until his death in 1935. Afterward, Lillian continued to conduct and record experiments with the support of family and colleagues. Several members of the Hamiltons’ group remained active in Lillian’s investigations, though by the close of her investigations in 1944, the group had largely dispersed. The circle was comprised of approximately twelve close friends and relatives who regularly sat for the experiments. These included psychic mediums Mary Ann Marshall, née Speirs (1880-1963),³⁰⁵ Elizabeth Poole, née Wilson (ca.1868/70-1935), and Jeannie Wither (1894-1970).³⁰⁶

304 Lisa Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies. Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (London: Sage, 2012), viiii.

305 Mary’s sister-in-law Susan Marshall, née McLements (1888-1942), was also an active medium in the Hamilton circle.

306 Walter David Falk in “Raymond Communicates,” *Paranormal Review* (2016): 17-19 lists the regular sitters with their trance names as follows: Elizabeth Poole (Ellen), Henry A.V. Green (Ewan), John David MacDonald, Hugh A. Reed (Sun Yan), Ada Esther Turner, Susan Marshall (Mercedes), Mary Marshall (Dawn), William Bernard Cooper (Victor), T.G. Hamilton, Lillian Hamilton, Dr. James A. Hamilton, and Eileen McTavish (T.G.’s medical secretary who took short-hand notes of séance proceedings from October to December 1929).

Others included individuals from the legal profession: a scrutineer to attest to T.G.'s darkroom process and a notary public to witness each participant's signing of a typed affidavit, and to authenticate the photographed supernatural phenomena.³⁰⁷ After T.G.'s death, Lillian continued to collaborate with some of his colleagues, namely Dr. Bruce Chown and his wife Gladys Chown, Hugh A. Reed, and Winnipeg photographer H.J. Metcalfe who operated the camera for her séances, and developed the plates afterward.³⁰⁸ Lillian was highly knowledgeable about psychics, as she studied topics within the field from the start of their experimentation until her health began to fail in 1955. Margaret Hamilton Bach also stated that Lillian had read Frederic William Henry Myers' *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, a book she remembers being in the Hamilton home in 1915.³⁰⁹ After T.G.'s death, she indexed the Hamilton records, catalogued all of his talks, scientific papers, letters, lecture notes and newspaper reviews about them.

Similar to her husband, Lillian was well educated, despite having had a modest upbringing. Warner notes that "throughout the decades after 1870 till the Second World War, advanced, intelligent women were active in psychic research and related experiments," even though their recognition remains minimal across disciplines.³¹⁰ Lillian graduated from the Winnipeg General Hospital School of Nursing in 1905, receiving the top award for "Highest General Proficiency,"³¹¹ and she was president of the Medical Faculty Women's Club at the University of Manitoba. Like her husband, she was also active within the local community as a member of King Memorial United

307 Walter Meyer zu Erpen, "Fact or Fraud?: Evidence for the Authenticity of the Mary Marshall Teleplasms," *Paranormal Review* (2016): 25.

308 Lillian did not collaborate with international researchers, such as the English circle associated with Fodor, as her husband had done. McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, 201. Regarding Metcalfe's assistance with the photographs, Lillian reported that he "will come & focus the cameras. Stay downstairs during the sitting and stay to develop any plates." Walter Meyer zu Erpen, "The Quest for Immortality: Psychical Research in Winnipeg and the Role of Medical Doctors, Lawyers, Clergymen, and other Community Leaders between 1918 and 1935," compiled 1992-2018. Available at:

https://survivalresearch.ca/Quest_for_Immortality_19922018_compilation.pdf, 21.

309 Meyer zu Erpen, "Quest for Immortality," 16.

310 Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century*, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 234.

311 Thomas Glendenning Hamilton, *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival*, 1st edition, ed. James D. Hamilton (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1942), 3.

Church, a lifelong member and past president of the Women's Missionary Society, and a member of the university's Women's Musical Club. These facts, however, are not commonly cited in scholarship, much like her investigations following T.G.'s death. Most discussions, including photographic analyses, focus on the period when she worked with her husband. Archival documents between 1935 and 1944, however, present a fuller picture of the ways in which Lillian's spirituality intersected with her psychical work.

Psychic Mary Ann Marshall provided her services as medium in the Hamilton séances for nearly sixteen years, and she was regarded as an exceptionally gifted psychic within the group. She was the primary medium for the images discussed in this chapter.³¹² The women who regularly sat in the Hamilton circle resided in Winnipeg, where members gathered routinely, often two to three times a week, to develop their psychic abilities and to ensure that positive results recurred in séance. In total, the Hamiltons held over 1,000 séances over the span of 25 years, of which the last ten years were led by Lillian. This chapter accordingly focuses on Lillian's investigations with Marshall and her album creations.

Gendered Procedures in Psychical Research

The Hamiltons were meticulous record keepers and were well connected with local and international psychic investigators.³¹³ They extensively recorded all of the procedures, processes, and equipment used in séance through handwritten and typed notes that transcribe the minute details of their experiments and the manifestations. T.G. and Lillian contributed equally to the execution of their experiments, undertaking different, yet gendered, tasks. T.G. set up each of his eleven cameras, developed plates in the darkroom, publicized their findings, and lectured about his survival theory. He had a team

312 Mary also worked independently between August 1943 and April 1944 and often received transmissions from T.G. McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, 205-206. Following Marshall's death, Margaret Hamilton Bach wrote that Marshall "practised her gifts as a private individual. Apart from sitting occasionally in the privacy of the home with friends, her gifts as a non-professional psychic were made available exclusively for the purpose of scientific research to my father, from 1928 to 1934; to my mother, from 1935 to 1944; and to Mrs. Sylvia Barber and her home circle from 1947 to 1958." Meyer zu Erpen, "Quest for Immortality," 25.

313 For instance, T.G. lectured at the British Spiritualist Alliance at Wigmore Hall in 1932; he lectured at University Women's Club in front of 500 attendants in 1927, which was reported in the *Winnipeg Free Press*; and he lectured at Business and Professional Women's Club of Winnipeg in 1931. These are only a few examples, as T.G. gave 86 public addresses from the spring 1926 to fall 1934.

of male colleagues who assisted him in these processes: his brother Dr. James Archibald Hamilton, engineer Harold Shand, lawyer Henry A.V. (Harry) Green, businessman W.B. Cooper, telephone engineer Hugh A. Reed, who assisted with some of the photography, and medical scientist Dr. Bruce Chown, who was T.G.'s primary co-experimenter from 1931 to 1935.³¹⁴ Though less visible, Lillian remained T.G.'s closest colleague, primarily working behind the scenes. She was responsible for transcribing notes during and after some séances, filing and cross-indexing all records and photographic plates and negatives.³¹⁵ She also compiled numerous scrapbooks that feature séance photographs with handwritten and typed captions, psychic journal articles, programmes, and correspondence.³¹⁶ Her albums also include degrees and documents relating to the Hamilton family, as well as those about T.G.'s medical training, and his career in medicine and politics. These scrapbooks are an integral part of the Hamilton Family Fonds, for they provide a picture of their routine activities, while also highlighting the Hamiltons' knowledge of, and connections to, international figures in the psychic field. These included Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his wife Lady Jean Conan Doyle, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Theodore Besterman, Nandor Fodor, and Dr. L.R.G. Crandon and his wife Mina "Margery" Crandon.³¹⁷ Many of them also visited the Hamilton home to participate in sittings.³¹⁸

T.G. was initially cautious in publicly speaking about and publishing his survival theory to guard his reputation as a revered member of Winnipeg's medical, religious,

314 Meyer zu Erpen, "Quest for Immortality," 14.

315 Over the years, a number of Hamilton group members, both male and female, acted as secretary, taking notes at séances.

316 Such journals include: *Light*, *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, *Direct Voice*, and *Survival*.

317 The Hamiltons collaborated with the British psychic researcher, Nandor Fodor, in a two-way test of spirit communication shortly before T.G.'s death in 1935.

318 William Lyon Mackenzie King visited the Hamiltons on August 20th, 1933, though he did not experience a séance. In a letter dated August 7th, 1933, he wrote to T.G.: "I have been promising myself for many years past the pleasure of seeing something of the work of which you gave an account before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, and shall be pleased if you can spare me a little of your time on Sunday the 20th." Dr. and Margery Crandon visited the Hamiltons December 21st-24th, 1926; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Lady Jean Conan Doyle, July 1st, 1923, and Arthur again through séance in May, June, and July of 1932 after his death on July 7th, 1930. Doyle's widow expressed interest in attending a sitting with the Hamilton group, writing to Mary Marshall on November 21st, 1932 in praise of their work and to request a visit. Doyle describes their experiences in the Hamilton group in his book *Our Second American Adventure* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1924). Lady Conan Doyle also wrote to the Hamiltons on June 28th, 1932 inviting them to visit her in Hampshire, England.

educational, and political communities.³¹⁹ After several years of keeping his medical and psychic practices separate, he went public about his research on telekinesis in a presentation to the Winnipeg Medical Society on May 26, 1926, with the encouragement of his medical colleagues. He gradually became a national and international spokesperson for psychic research. It was not until 1928, however, that the Hamiltons set aside their skepticism and accepted their communicators as living beings. Margaret dates her parent's acceptance of the survival hypothesis to this year as well.³²⁰ T.G. articulated this theory after several years of investigation: "The only theory that fits the whole of the facts is survival after death."³²¹ This appears to be a significant time for the Hamiltons, for 1928 also marks when they began collaborating with discarnate spirit controls, and when the first materialization of teleplasm was photographed on June 4th.³²² Upon discovering what looked like white cords flowing from Marshall, T.G. set aside their telekinesis experiments to primarily focus on further developing teleplasmic phenomena.³²³ And in 1931, he became the first president of the Winnipeg Society for Psychical Research.

Like the earlier generation of Victorian practitioners, the Hamiltons' investigations began with a death in the family, which encouraged them to engage with questions of immortality and life after death. Janice writes that her grandfather T.G. was "devasted by [his son] Arthur's death."³²⁴ T.G. and Lillian had four children, including the youngest, twins James Drummond (1915-1980) and Arthur Lamont (1915-1919). Arthur died during the 1918 influenza pandemic, from which other family members recovered. The middle child, Glen Forrester, later recalled that his father worried that he

319 From 1905 to 1915 he was a member of the Winnipeg School Board and chairmen from 1912 to 1913; from 1907 to 1935 he was an elder of Elmwood Presbyterian Church (now King Memorial United Church); he was elected as a Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for Elmwood between 1915 and 1920, helping the introduction of mother's allowance, women's votes, and the organization of Workmen's Compensation Board into legislation; in the early 1920s he was founding editor of *Manitoba Medical Bulletin* and president of the Manitoba Medical Association; and from 1922-1923 he was president of the Canadian Medical Association.

320 Walter Meyer zu Erpen & Shelley Sweeney, "What Does It All Mean?: Physical Phenomena as evidence of Life After Death," *Paranormal Review* (2016): 30.

321 T.G. Hamilton, "Séance Room with 14 [sic] Cameras: 1,000 Tests by One Researcher," *Psychic News* (Oct. 1, 1932): 1.

322 Meyer zu Erpen, "Fact or Fraud?," 26.

323 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 153. For this, she cites T.G. Hamilton, "Divisions of the Mary M. Teleplasms (Followed Chronologically)," Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 15, folder 10, UMASC, Winnipeg.

324 Hamilton, "'Bring on Your Ghosts!,'" 8.

had loved Arthur too much; that despite his extensive medical knowledge, he was unable to save his child. This feeling, longing for answers and solace in the post-WWI years, and wondering where Arthur's soul had gone, seems to have inspired the doctor to pursue serious psychical research.³²⁵

T.G. became interested in the paranormal during his university studies, although he was initially skeptical and concerned about tarnishing his professional reputation. Glen recalls that his father had read books on Spiritualism and psychical work during World War I.³²⁶ In 1918, T.G. began conducting basic experiments in thought-transference with two friends after one of them, University of Manitoba English Professor W.T. Allison, recounted to T.G. that he witnessed a Ouija board spirit communication.³²⁷ In 1920, the Hamiltons' interest expanded to include table-tilting with several friends, in which they were surprised to receive messages purported to be from British journalist and psychical researcher William Thomas Stead (1849-1912) and poet, philologist, and co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901). As a university student, T.G. had discovered an article by Stead, who was an influential, yet controversial figure for his Liberal views in the Victorian era. He was a pioneer of investigative journalism and editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, London, UK.³²⁸

After receiving several messages, Lillian wondered if one of their participants, their neighbour Elizabeth Poole, might have psychic potential that could be further developed with regular sittings.³²⁹ Poole had emigrated to Canada from Scotland with her husband and children. She quickly became a fixture in the Hamilton home after T.G. first hired her to help him deliver babies in the office that he operated on the main floor of the

325 James B. Nickels discusses this in an interview with T.G. and Lillian's son Dr. Glen Hamilton: "one may surmise that T.G.'s experiences during these investigations played a major part in his eventually coming to terms with Arthur's death through the belief that Arthur's life was ongoing in another world." "Psychic Research in a Winnipeg Family: Reminiscences of Dr. Glen F. Hamilton," *Manitoba History*, no. 55 (June 2007), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/55/psychicresearch.shtml.

326 James B. Nickels, "Psychic Research in a Winnipeg Family: Reminiscences of Dr. Glen F. Hamilton," *Manitoba History*, no. 55 (June 2007),

327 This was the Patience Worth entity. For more on Patience Worth, see Irving Litvag, *Singer in the Shadows: The Strange Story of Patience Worth* (New York: McMillan, 1972).

328 Stead was also interested in Spiritualism and founded the Spiritualist quarterly *Borderland*, which ran from October 1893 to 1897. He practiced telepathy and automatic writing with his assistant and editor Ada Goodrich Freer, who also wrote for the magazine under the pseudonym "Miss X."

329 Hamilton, "Bring on Your Ghosts!," 8.

family house. Though Poole was not educated, Margaret later wrote that her intellect and honesty quickly made her like a second mother to the Hamilton children.³³⁰ The women decided to meet weekly for several months to practice table-tilting. After a particularly successful sitting, in which the table tipped up onto two legs and remained stagnant for several minutes, Lillian called on T.G. to witness the phenomenon. Following this event, the Hamiltons began holding séances regularly with a close group of friends, meeting forty times over eight months. T.G., however, stopped the experiments because, as Margaret explains in *Is Survival a Fact?*, he refused to believe that spirits could be communing with them. He admitted it was a possibility but required further proof to dispel his concern for his reputation as a medical practitioner.³³¹ It was only after the request of friends in January of 1923 that the Hamiltons held a spontaneous séance in which Stead communicated again. Margaret Hamilton documents this message simply as “Go on with your work...More ahead...Stead.”³³² T.G began experimenting again after receiving this message from Stead, who came to play an important role for the duration of the Hamilton experiments, continuing to act as one of their primary spirit controls. Yet Stead was not the only one who encouraged T.G. to pursue psychic research. Lillian recognized Poole’s psychic abilities from the start, and encouraged her husband to pursue them, making her the impetus behind the Hamiltons’ investigative work.

Dissolving Binaries: Infusing Spirituality in Psychic Research

Many twentieth-century psychic researchers viewed the Spiritualist séance as unscientific and less reliable. Psychic researchers, including T.G., separated themselves from

330 Hamilton, ““Bring on Your Ghosts!”” 8. Poole and Mary Marshall were both uneducated and came from working class backgrounds. The women, however, played powerful roles in the Hamiltons’ investigations, even though Winnipeg was divided along class lines at this time. “Memory of the World Register: The Hamilton Family Fonds (Canada),” 9,

http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/canada_hamilton_family_fonds.pdf.

331 More specifically, in relation to the table raps heard during séance, Margaret writes: “While he admitted that such raps might be paranormal in origin, he positively refused to admit at this time to himself or to any of his associates that ‘Myers’ and ‘Stead’ might actually be communicating. He went so far as to admit that such a possibility might exist, but he demanded much more in way of proof. This was as far as he wanted to go. Because he felt that the widespread prejudice which then prevailed against this type of investigation would in the end destroy his reputation as a medical man, and because he also believed Mrs. Poole’s psychic powers to have become exhausted, he now put a stop to the sittings and firmly shut the door on any further inquiry. To put it bluntly, he had had enough.” Hamilton Bach, *Is Survival a Fact?*, 19.

332 Hamilton Bach, *Is Survival a Fact?*, 19.

Spiritualists, who distanced himself from the “admixture of the numerous superstitions and notions which seem to prevail widely among so-called spiritualists.”³³³ This is partly because Spiritualism was not institutionally structured like the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), which meant that it did not have a unifying body to establish parameters and define acceptable forms of evidence. Instead, Spiritualists practiced spirit communication in small, independent congregations that McMullin remarks were “marginal to mainstream traditions.”³³⁴ All sitters had equal access to the spirit world through mediumship, making it “a religion of the people,” as McMullin defines it.³³⁵ Meyer zu Erpen accordingly observes that Spiritualism is often referred to as a religion, philosophy, and science.³³⁶ Scholars such as Serena Keshavjee and Lynn Sharp also point out that like psychic researchers, Spiritualists employed empirical methods that were promoted as scientific experiments.³³⁷ Opinions on the matter are thus complex, but shed light on how researchers struggled to blend science with religion in the early twentieth century.³³⁸ Nonetheless, the twentieth-century séance was founded on empirical ideals, and the gendered dynamics in science infiltrated the study of psychics. Evelyn Fox Keller explains how the discipline of science as a masculine domain derived from seventeenth-

333 T.G. Hamilton to Walter Franklin Prince, January 24, 1924, Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 4, folder 5, UMASC, Winnipeg, in Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 24. And although the Hamiltons were not Spiritualists, they interacted with a number of individuals who were, including founder of the British College of Psychic Science Hewat McKenzie and his wife Barbara, British Admiral E.A.S. Hayward and his wife Celia, along with Lodge and the Doyles. Meyer zu Erpen, “Quest for Immortality,” 3.

334 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, xiv- xv. Meyer zu Erpen reports that Canadian Spiritualists were influenced by the British movement and similarly wished to gain recognition of their belief system as a legitimate religious denomination during the First World War, although Spiritualist activities date from the 1850s to 1870s across Canada. Walter Meyer zu Erpen and Joy Lowe, “The Canadian Spiritualist Movement and Sources for its Study,” *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990): 72.

335 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, xv.

336 Of this he writes: “As a science, Spiritualism attempts to investigate and classify the mental and physic phenomena demonstrated through mediumship as evidence of life after death. Walter Meyer zu Erpen, “Afterlife Beliefs in the Spiritualist Movement,” in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, ed. Christopher Moreman (London: Routledge, 2018), 218.

337 Serena Keshavjee, “Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in *fin-de-siècle* France,” *Aries* 12 (2013): 37-69; Lynn Sharp, *Secular Spirituality, Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2006).

338 UNESCO’s “Memory of the World Register: The Hamilton Family Fonds” best summarizes how Spiritualism merges science and religion and cannot be categorized as strictly one or the other: “Although early modern spiritualism was essentially Christian in character, it holds a unique place in history as a backlash against modern scientific ideas such as the Darwinian notion of the order of living beings that excluded the supernatural. Both spiritualism and psychical research embraced scientific methods to prove religious and non-religious beliefs in the afterlife.” “Memory of the World Register: The Hamilton Family Fonds (Canada),” 7, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/canada_hamilton_family_fonds.pdf.

century Europe to create “dichotomies between mind and nature, reason and feeling, masculine and feminine.”³³⁹ This subsequently left women alienated from leading scientifically informed studies because they were conceived of as passive, weak subjects for the scrutiny of the male scientists’ gaze.³⁴⁰

The association between passivity and femininity and intellect and masculinity further reinforced the hierarchy between thinking and feeling, and between men and women within the twentieth-century séance. Yet the characteristics of passivity, compliance, and subjectivity were perceived as necessary qualities for mediumship and credible spirit communication.³⁴¹ Many scholars, such as Tom Gunning, Warner, and Robertson, identify that these traits were presented as inherently feminine, while intellect and reason were presented as inherently male.³⁴² Viewed as “beneath” faculties of thought and reason, Ahmed maintains that emotions have historically been associated with women, “who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will, and judgement.”³⁴³ She articulates the ways in which feminist philosophers have elucidated the problems with this framework, whereby the subordination of emotions becomes a simultaneous subordination of the feminine and the body.³⁴⁴ As the séance became popularized in the nineteenth century, women mediums were the “norm,” rather than men.³⁴⁵ Warner writes that “the photographers and the mediums themselves included some men, but women began to outnumber them very soon, and predominated in psychic circles by the end of the [nineteenth] century.”³⁴⁶

339 Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 44.

340 Londa L. Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 191.

341 Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (Camden Town, London: Virago, 1989)

342 Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,” in *Cinematic Ghost: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Eras*, edited by Murray Leeder, 17-38 (New York: Bloomsburg Academic, 2015); Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, Robertson, *Science of the Séance*.

343 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 3.

344 For this Ahmed cites E.V. Spelman, “Anger and Insubordination” in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, eds. A. Garry and M. Pearsall (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); and A.M. Jaggar “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology” in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, eds. A. Garry and M. Pearsall (New York: Routledge, 1996). Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 3.

345 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 12; and Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 6-12.

346 Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 225.

Warner further remarks that women remained “at the physical center of spirit circles” in a reorientation of gender roles after the turn of the century.³⁴⁷ As the séance became scientized in the early twentieth century by male researchers, women remained crucial participants as mediums by virtue of their association with malleability and passivity.

Beginning with the Spiritualist movement, the realm of the spiritual, psychical, and paranormal remained a space for women’s agency. In her invaluable study on the connections between women’s rights and Spiritualism, Ann Braude asserts that the movement provided the first space for women to exercise religious leadership or speak in public.³⁴⁸ Warner elaborates on this to explain how Spiritualists were the strongest advocates for women’s rights, as the movement “gave women equality and opportunity, even special value.”³⁴⁹ As Robertson argues, mediums were not always as passive as previously presumed, but rather, they proved to be dynamic forces.³⁵⁰ She contends that mediums played the parts assigned to them at one moment, then at another, subverted “any known scripts of behaviour.”³⁵¹ In the twentieth century, women mediums sustained agency as the point of contact between supernormal forces and the scientists who investigated them. Women therefore exerted power in ways that only the séance could facilitate, for their “stereotypical feminine qualities” made them the primary instrument through which the spirits could communicate.³⁵² It became uncommon, however, for women to maintain leadership roles within the male-dominated field of psychic research.

Lillian’s work in psychics is therefore noteworthy, as she maintained faith and praxis in paranormal research while T.G.’s interest in telepathy and telekinesis experiments waxed and waned between 1918 and 1921. She was determined to find its value, so she continued to hold sittings after he initially gave it up,³⁵³ even though he

347 Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 3.

348 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1989).

349 Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 225.

350 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 12.

351 Ibid.

352 Ibid.

353 Ibid., 34. On July 24th, 1921, Lillian recorded a séance that she and Poole had with a short statement that reads: “Mrs. Poole and Lillian H. present. They place their hands on the table. In a few moments the ‘power’ is exceedingly strong – the table tilts on two legs ... L.H. tried to depress it back to the floor but found the table seemed to be resting on a sort of ‘air cushion.’” Seance notes, July 24,

dismissed her table-tilting experiments with Poole as resulting from “unconscious muscular activity,” rather than mediumistic skills.³⁵⁴ He believed psychic study worthy of his investment only after further experimentation himself, shifting his interest in their results from “potentially valuable” to being “convinced for the first time of the reality of psychic force.”³⁵⁵ This is consistent with notions of the rational male scientist as necessary for credible investigations, while also showing how women’s perspectives were considered less valuable than men’s in the field of psychics. Women were not aligned with critical reasoning and experimental methods, and consequently, they were relegated to supportive, rather than leading positions.

Lillian nonetheless encouraged her husband to pursue his experiments from the start. Their granddaughter Janice later wrote that “[a]lthough it was T.G. who achieved the recognition, she had pushed his investigations from the very beginning. Even after little Arthur died, daughter Margaret recalled that Lillian had been stronger than T.G. and he turned to her for strength.”³⁵⁶

Lillian’s contributions to their investigations mirrors much of the discussion surrounding gendered labour relations in traditional historiographies on photography that have since been redressed by feminist scholars.³⁵⁷ Her input aligns with Steven Shapin’s notion of an invisible technician; those who “have arguably been invisible as relevant actors to those persons in control of the workplaces in which scientific knowledge is produced.”³⁵⁸ T.G. constructed their laboratory, or séance room, and led their psychical experiments, while Lillian undertook much of the unseen labour that was required to

1921, quoted in T.G. Hamilton, “Second Period of Development,” Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 9, folder 15, UMASC, Winnipeg.

354 Ibid.

355 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 35; and L. Hamilton, “Steps in the Hamilton Inquiry” (c. 1945), Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 15, folder 6, UMASC, Winnipeg.

356 Hamilton, “Bring on Your Ghosts!,” 10.

357 And as explained in more detail in this dissertation’s broader literature review.

358 Further, Shapin argues that invisible technicians have “traditionally been invisible to historians and sociologists of science. Until quite recently, there was no single piece of work in the literature systematically dealing with technicians, their work, and their role in making scientific knowledge.” They have largely been excluded from scientific practitioners’ documentary records, and subsequently made anonymous, which “plausibly proceeds from their employers’ sense that what they did was not important, or even from their employers not noticing what it was they did.” Steven Shapin, *Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 360.

support his experiments. For instance, when Poole began to frequently receive messages from literary figure Robert Louis Stevenson between 1923 and 1925, Lillian used the Winnipeg Public Library to research his letters, essays, and journals to compare their séance notes to the information conveyed through Poole while in trance. She soon purchased all of the books required for further research in the field and stored them in a special place in their home that only she and her husband could access. And although Lillian's early experiments proved successful, Robertson notes that the "scientific self envisioned as explicitly male became the standard of a credible investigator."³⁵⁹

While women had gained some political traction, winning the right to vote in provincial elections in Manitoba in 1916, cultural ideologies distinguishing between men's and women's spheres permitted inequalities in political, social, and domestic realms.³⁶⁰ Even by mid-century, with few exceptions, women's opportunities for occupations primarily centred around jobs that extended from traditionally "feminine" work; that is, human services professions—childcare, housekeeper, caregiver—while remaining minorities in scientific and technical professions.³⁶¹ T.G.'s belief that women's psychology predisposed them to be "innately trusting, emotional, uncritical," and thus "more disposed to accept with less demand for fundamental detail" did not necessarily align with his wife's.³⁶² Lillian expressed how her spiritual beliefs "went hand in hand with evidence of a scientific nature."³⁶³ This shows that she did not view the scientific and the spiritual as binaries. Her perspective was therefore like that of many Spiritualists, who "denied basic categorial binaries: the distinctions between men and women, science and magic, life and afterlife, the past and the present," as Molly McGarry writes.³⁶⁴

359 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 34.

360 The distinction between men's and women's spheres in Canada sees articulation as early as 1843 with the inclusion of the term "male" in New Brunswick election law. This ideology concretized the notion that women had no place in political life. Manitoba was the first province in Canada where women won the right to vote in provincial elections.

361 Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, Jamie J. Fader, "Women and the Paradox of Inequality in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (2005): 71, 74. The authors go on to note that in 1920, only 12% of working women were self-employed.

362 T.G. Hamilton to Isabel M. Stewart, April 29, 1931, Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14, (A.79-41), box 5, folder 1, UMASC, Winnipeg.

363 Lillian Hamilton, "Steps in the Hamilton Inquiry," in Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 35.

364 McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past*, 19.

Robertson further observes that Lillian “embraced the close link between women and spirituality that several historians have identified.”³⁶⁵

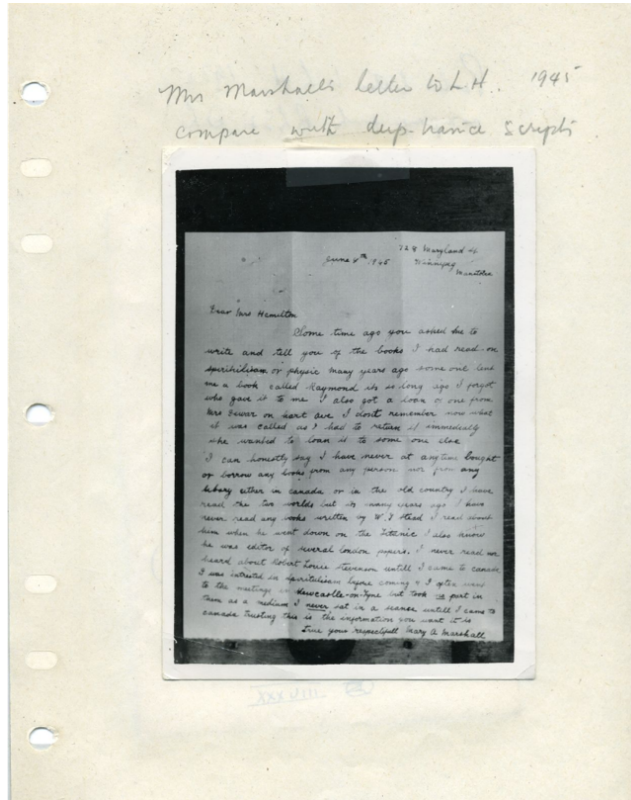


Figure 2: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Letter from Mary Marshall to Lillian Hamilton, June 4, 1945

As such, Lillian approached her experiments from an intellectual and spiritual perspective. McMullin observes this as well, writing: “It would seem obvious that Lillian’s focus was different from that of her husband.”³⁶⁶ As a psychical researcher, she attempted to rule out normal sources of knowledge that might have manifested in Marshall’s mediumship. This is illustrated in a letter that Marshall wrote to Lillian on June 4th, 1945 (fig. 2). The letter begins with a response to a question about her knowledge on the topics of Spiritualism and psychics, and what she had read about them. Marshall writes that she was interested in Spiritualism when she moved from “the old country” to Canada and that she “often went to the meetings in Newcastle-on-Tyne but took no part in them as a medium.” She mentions that she read “the two worlds but it was

365 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 35.

366 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, 206.

many years ago;” which is likely the British Spiritualist newspaper, *Two Worlds*.³⁶⁷ Throughout 1943 and 1944, the women exchanged numerous letters on the topic of psychic research. This letter suggests that Marshall brought her spiritual beliefs to the Hamilton home, where she was able to exercise her psychic abilities in a safe environment, free from the backlash of criticism that a number of her contemporaries faced; and where, I suggest, her spirituality was met in synchrony with Lillian’s.

The Feminine Subject Under Masculine Objectives in Scientific Endeavours

Fraudulent spirit photographs continued to be produced in the twentieth century, even as photography remained a critical component in validating supernormal phenomena. T.G. and his colleagues thus recognized the necessity to discern their work from darkroom trickery.³⁶⁸ Twentieth-century researchers endeavoured to transform the nineteenth-century séance into objective science. Investigators now required a dedicated space to conduct their experiments; typically, still in the home, yet confined within a secure room used solely for this purpose. The séance room was transformed from a feminine, domestic space—often the bourgeois Victorian parlour, where the earliest table-tilting occurred—to a masculine, scientific space that mimicked the controlled conditions of a laboratory.³⁶⁹ This allowed investigators to exert greater control over the variables of their experiments, and thus their experiments were more rigorous than Victorian practitioners’. They constructed spaces that adhered to scientific standards, excluding all things related to the trappings of domesticity—artwork, plush furniture, familial memorabilia.³⁷⁰ This meant that they could easily monitor the mediums’ behaviours throughout the séance, since any potential obstructions in the room were removed. The Hamiltons accordingly rid the séance of its “stereotypical feminine markings,” as most

367 *Two Worlds* was founded in 1887 as a weekly newspaper in Manchester, England.

368 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 115.

369 The Victorian séance was an activity among the upper class. According to Serena Keshavjee, by 1885, “mediumship and séances were well integrated into the drawing rooms of the best society.” Moreover, “The credibility of the Spiritualist doctrine had been boosted...by a number of high-profile scientists and literati who publicly endorsed its tenets.” Serena Keshavjee, “The Scientization of Spirituality,” 216. See also 216-17. This changed with the scientization of psychical research and the decline of the Spiritualist movement.

370 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 44.

other twentieth-century psychic researchers.³⁷¹ T.G. moved their provisional séance room in the parlour into a dedicated space, in which conditions could be controlled.³⁷² The early Hamilton photographs illustrate this transformation from a domestic sitting-room to an austere laboratory that was locked while not in use. Midway through 1923, the setting shifted from the Hamiltons' living room on the main floor, in which family photos are hung above candlesticks atop a brick fireplace and polished mantle, to the nearly empty space that T.G. constructed on the second floor of the family home (fig. 3). Janice Hamilton describes the laboratory-like séance room as containing:

a table and half-circle of simple wooden chairs facing a three-sided open cabinet. Mrs. Poole sat on a chair in the cabinet, and the people next to her controlled both her hands continuously. The room was always completely dark, although a red light in the ceiling could be turned on when necessary. At the other end of the room, T.G. arranged eleven large-format cameras, set a different heights and angles, and with different lenses. He operated the cameras himself, loaded the plates and developed them.³⁷³



Figure 3: UMASC, A79-41, PC 12, Box 12, Folder 1, Item 3, T.G. Hamilton and D.B. MacDonald restraining table and chair with medium Elizabeth Poole, 1923 re-enactment

371 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 44.

372 Hamilton, ““Bring on Your Ghosts!,”” 8. Sir William Crookes similarly devised a secured room in his home for experimentation under his strict control. Warner, *Phantasmagoria*, 227.

373 Hamilton, ““Bring on Your Ghosts!,”” 8.

The procedures that medical and scientific practitioners used for conducting experiments therefore deviated from the Victorian era—including their means of production—yet they still relied on the feminine qualities of the body to support their scientific empiricism. More significantly, the regulation of the space also meant the regulation of the bodies within it.

The female body was liable as an object for control under the scrutiny of the rational, male observer. To capture photographic evidence of supernatural phenomena, early twentieth-century psychic investigations relied on the mediums' body as obedient, passive, and subjective. Robertson elucidates how women's bodies—rather than minds—operated as sites where meaning was generated.³⁷⁴ Although it appears that T.G. did not cede to women's capacity for critical thinking, he admitted that the “men in the group are not as essential as the women.”³⁷⁵ Their assumed passive nature created powerful séance conditions upon relinquishing control of their bodies in the séance room. Yet McMullin notes that the “major weakness in the use of trance mediums working in séance was the inability to exercise strict control over the medium.”³⁷⁶ To mitigate this, a set of procedures was implemented to maintain as much control as possible. Before entering the room, mediums were sometimes stripped, inspected, bathed, and redressed. And throughout the séance, limbs were occasionally held or tied to avoid misconduct and accusations of fraud.³⁷⁷ Though T.G. safeguarded the mediums' bodies by having women assistants conduct this process, the more cynical investigators were sometimes aggressive, causing discomfort and swelling to the medium.³⁷⁸ Historian Linda Gordon reports that physical abuse of women at this time was illegal, yet still tolerated and normalized.³⁷⁹ Robertson further observes that because this type of tactile restraint

374 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 39.

375 Séance notes, August 5, 1928, Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 15, folder 12.

376 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, 183.

377 The Hamilton Family Fonds contains a photograph that illustrates this, described as “A glass lantern slide of the head, hand, and foot controls used to control the mediumship of Margery during séances with her husband, Dr. Crandon. See UMASC, Hamilton Family fonds, A.79-41, PC 12.

378 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 87. T.G. outlines the precautionary preparations in “Teleplasmic Phenomena in Winnipeg, Article 3: Mary M. Teleplasms, Including Another Miniature Face,” *Psychic Science: Quarterly Transactions of the British College* 9, 2 (1930): 89.

379 Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 250–288.

“coincided with stereotypically masculine modes of touch and aggression, it fell more easily in line with the project of psychical science.”³⁸⁰ She also makes a case for the intertwinement of masculinity and scientific credibility as evident in T.G.’s omission of women in reports and publications about his work. Robertson describes how this is not a singular mistake; that the women in his circle are only mentioned in passing, presenting them as secondary to the success of the experiments, and to the reportage of T.G.’s predominantly male colleagues.³⁸¹

The inherent emotionality and passivity of women are the primary factors that drew psychic investigators to use mediums for conducting paranormal research. These qualities, coupled with the objectivity of photography, provided a vessel for optimal spirit communication.³⁸² Women’s intrinsic subjectivity created the conditions under which objective research could be executed in “measurable, verifiable, and demonstratable” ways using the trusted objectivity of photography; for vision was the most privileged of the senses, and the camera was deemed essential by T.G. for conducting psychic research.³⁸³ According to T.G., séance-room experiments unveiled “the reality of an unseen world of Life, Mind and Objective Activity...captured by objective, unemotional cameras.”³⁸⁴ While the cameras themselves are unemotional, the photographs can be viewed through an affective lens that opens them up to their emotive possibilities.

Women’s position in psychic work can accordingly be read through Ahmed’s politics of emotion, which argues against feminist action as pre-emptively assuming the thought/emotion binary. Ahmed writes about such “feminist attachments” as rage and hostility: “Feminists who speak out against established ‘truths’ are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to

380 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 88. In her description of this restraint, Robertson uses the term “manhandling” to designate the process by which women mediums were regulated, inspected, and controlled within the séance.

381 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 25-26. T.G. writes that his group is comprised of “good men and true” in “Teleplasmic Phenomenon in Winnipeg,” *Psychic Science: Quarterly Transactions of the British College* 8, 3 (1929): 179. Omitting women’s roles applies to early twentieth-century history generally.

382 These qualities of femininity are noted by Robertson, Alex Owen, Ann Braude, and Tom Gunning.

383 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 99.

384 T.G. Hamilton, “Directory of Predictions,” November 29, 1931, Hamilton Family Fonds, PC12 (A.79-41), box 8, folder 3, UMASC, Winnipeg.

form the basis of ‘good judgement.’”³⁸⁵ The feminist designation subsequently becomes “hostile,” and by extension emotional, whereby feminism extends to the pathologized “emotionality” of femininity.³⁸⁶ As Ahmed explains, “whilst thought and reason are identified with the masculine and the Western subject, emotions and bodies are associated with femininity and racial others.”³⁸⁷ Accordingly, if the feminine subject is deemed emotional, and thus unable to deploy rationale with equal weight to that of the masculine, then the feminine body in the séance room consequently falls within this hierarchy. That is, the objective male investigator conducts empirical research over and through the feminized subject. Moreover, Ahmed discusses how “this projection of emotion onto the bodies of others not only works to exclude others from the realms of thought and rationality, but also works to conceal emotional and embodied aspects of thought and reason.”³⁸⁸

As Robertson contends, Lillian was irrevocably tied to qualities of womanhood, and by extension, qualities of impressionability, irrationality, and emotionalism as they have traditionally been associated with the feminine and with the domestic. This is in opposition to the rational, logical, and precise associated with the masculine. Such correlations consequently impeded Lillian and other women from gaining credibility as investigators in their own right. They were unable to transcend their positions as researchers, recorders, and witnesses.³⁸⁹ Lillian’s (invisible) work in support of T.G. and her minimal recognition post 1935 can be understood in light of Ahmed’s theory that the role of emotions implies the politicisation of subjects. She argues against the opposition between rational thought and emotions, for understanding emotion as “the unthought” simultaneously assumes the unemotionality of rational thought.³⁹⁰ This in turn excludes the ways in which we are moved by others. She thus calls for a feminism that always involves “an emotional response to the world, where the form of that response involves a

385 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 170.

386 Ibid.

387 Ibid.

388 Ibid.

389 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 36.

390 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 170.

reorientation of one's bodily relation to social norms."³⁹¹ Her theory is important for considering women's roles in the Hamiltons' experiments. For instance, her interrogation of how feminist attachments are tied with the power they seek to contest—patriarchy, gender relations, hierarchy—and her exploration of the criticality of emotions for feminist transformations—inequality, injustice, violence. Lillian's spiritual and scientific approach to psychics reflects Ahmed's challenging of the thinking/feeling binary. As Robertson observes, Lillian "adhered to scientific empiricism much like her husband, but she did not equate her dedication to empiricism with an inability to express grief and hope."³⁹² She instilled her albums with the emotionality of the séance, using emphatic hand-written annotations that capture her emotive reactions to the psychic materializations on film.

Lillian was able to gain agency through her album compilations by infusing the séances' empirical results with her emotional responses to them. For example, figure 4 conveys Lillian's ardency.³⁹³ This album page shows two photographs of the same teleplasm, which became visible again on May 28th, 1939. It was identified by Lillian as the residual screen of the T.G. teleplasm that had manifested on May 22nd. Important to this discussion are the emotions that she suffused into the album with emphatic captions: "nothing like this ever photographed before," "fraud impossible," and "fraud utterly impossible," twice underlined to further emphasize her adamant belief about the photograph's authenticity. Her albums report the objective details about her experiments, such as the date, the names of the sitters, the type of camera used, and the format of the photographs, in the way that professional researchers had done. But she also integrated her emotional responses, and thus convictions, about the phenomena captured. Lillian's emphatic annotations defy the thinking/feeling binary, while expressing her subjective perception about the teleplasm. She infused her albums with captions that demonstrate her ability to advance rational thought without assuming the "unemotionality" of it.

391 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 170-171.

392 Robertson, *Science of the Séanc*, 36.

393 This image, and the ways in which can be interpreted, is analyzed in greater detail below.

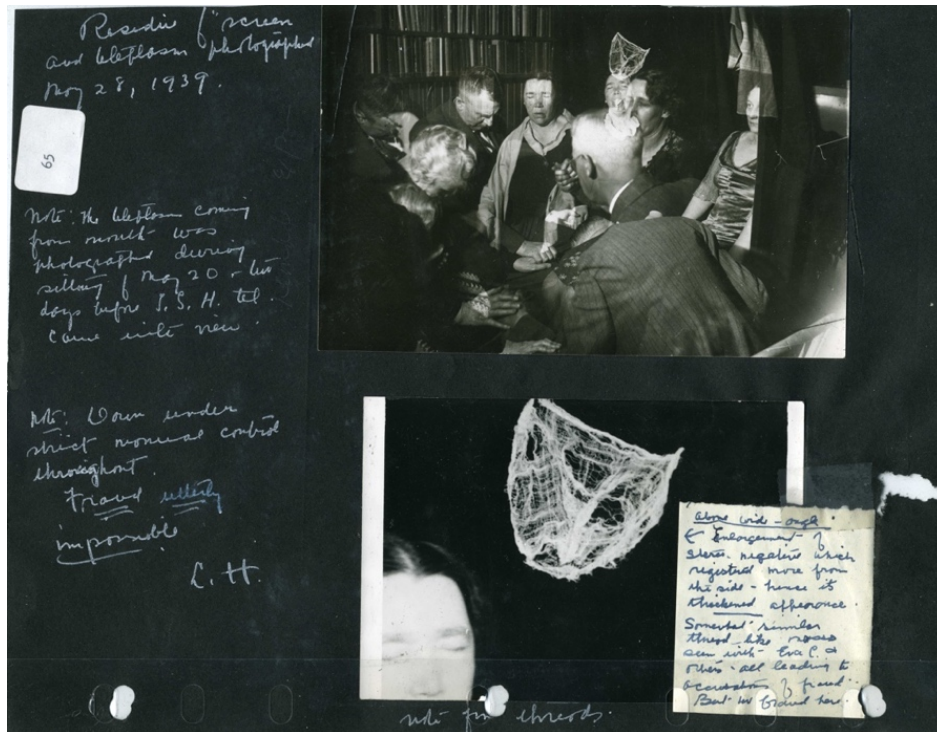


Figure 4: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, page 65, Residue of teleplasmic screen, May 28, 1939

“Fellow Feelings” and “Happy Objects”: Conjuring Positive Results in Séance

The emotionality of séance can also be interpreted by considering the feelings of sitters. They may arrive with different expectations of who or what might materialize and in what way, yet I suggest that we can understand their anticipation of the outcome through Martin Heidegger’s notion of “attunement.” Compared to emotions, attunements are less focused on particular objects and are often related to moods, which do not belong to the individual, but rather, manifest in our being with one another.³⁹⁴ Moods pre-exist our immersion in them, much like an atmosphere, wherein we can be “caught up in feelings like are not our own.”³⁹⁵ Ahmed reads Heidegger’s concept of attunement as something that “might register *that* we are affected by what is around, but is does not necessarily decide *how* we are affected.”³⁹⁶ She draws on Max Scheler’s “fellow feelings” to describe situations in which people share the same feeling, but that their feelings are directed at

394 According to Ahmed’s reading of Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. McNeill and N. Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 221.

395 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 222.

396 Ibid.

different objects.³⁹⁷ In relation to the séance, sitters may be attuned to a particular feeling—happiness, sadness, fear—throughout the séance, yet experience that feeling for varying reasons. For instance, Ahmed explains how shared feelings are mobilized amongst individuals: “in the case of when we are both sad because you have lost someone I did not know, my sadness refers to your sadness; I am sad because you are sad.”³⁹⁸ To help to relax mediums and facilitate trance, sitters would often sing hymns or play music on the phonograph. T.G. explains: “It seems probable that the mediums, through acquired habit, formed an association with certain music which they liked and this, used in an identical setting at each séance, aided in the onset of trance.”³⁹⁹ This was believed to encourage spirit communication,⁴⁰⁰ which can be understood as the sitters’ creation of positive feelings and getting “in-tune,” so to speak.⁴⁰¹ McMullin describes the importance of personal attributes amongst séance participants, including dedication, trust, and honesty amongst the members. He also notes the importance of the group to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century séance in Central Canada, and he explains that while the medium was indeed vital to the success of the sitting, it also relied on mutual support from all participants. Negative qualities, such as “inappropriate emotions, pessimism, lack of faith, or scepticism among sitters could lead to failure, even with the guidance of the best of mediums.”⁴⁰² Janice Hamilton further emphasizes the importance of trust amongst her family’s circle, writing that one of the key components to her grandparents’ success was the “trust and teamwork that developed among the sitters, the mediums and their contacts on the other side.”⁴⁰³ Participants contributed to the formation of a positive atmosphere, and their fidelity to one another and their experiments increased the potential for successful results.

This sense of trust is exemplified, again in the letter that Marshall wrote to Lillian in June of 1945 (see fig. 2). In it, she assures Lillian of her loyalty to the Hamiltons

397 Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 13.

398 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 223.

399 Hamilton, *Intention and Survival*, 24.

400 Ibid.

401 Ibid.

402 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, xiv.

403 Hamilton, “Bring on Your Ghosts!,” 9.

writing: “I never sat in a séance until I came to Canada trusting this is the information you want it is true” before signing off “your respectful Mary A. Marshall.”⁴⁰⁴ She reinforces the faithfulness that sitters practised in their spiritual investigations by using underlining to emphasize “never,” and by suggesting that she belonged to the Hamilton group. The séance, and its preliminary process of preparation, acted like a ritual in which collaboration amongst sitters was essential to the experiments’ success. The Hamilton experiments can therefore be viewed through the concept of attunement, for it does not register how we are affected, but that we are affected. The ways in which sitters were affected varied across each séance, though as McMullin writes, “the process of confirming the continuance of family ties beyond death appeared to be at least as important as the content.”⁴⁰⁵ I suggest that it was part of this process that led to positive results in the Hamilton circle.

Along with attunement, the processes by which visual evidence was captured corresponds with the idea of using positive feelings to conjure spirit communication in séance. Following from Ahmed’s concept of “happy objects,” the very expectation of psychic materializations pre-emptively prompted their resulting photographs to be “happy;” as objects that signified a sense of joy and reassurance for sitters.⁴⁰⁶ Cameras were set up in each sitting, yet positive results were never guaranteed. Participants eagerly sat in the dark, holding hands and using music to help relax the medium(s) into a trance state to facilitate spirit communication in an act that proactively anticipated psychic manifestations. Writing about family photography, Holland describes how securing positive results on film would have provided great pleasure for living up to viewers’ expectations, because their familiar structure contains “the tension between an ideal image and the ambivalence of lived experience.”⁴⁰⁷ Within this framework, the familiar structure of Lillian’s research is the methodical repetition with which the procedures were conducted, and the ideal photograph is one that contains a teleplasmic materialization. Positive séance results, then, can further be understood through Ahmed’s

404 Letter from Mary Marshall to Lillian Hamilton, June 4th, 1945, Hamilton Family fonds (PC 12, A.79-41), UMASC, Winnipeg.

405 McMullin, *Anatomy of a Séance*, xiv.

406 Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 29-51 (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010).

407 Holland, “‘Sweet it is to Scan...’ 173.

politics of emotions, in which objects—both material and imagined—become happy by virtue of association. She explains that “we can also anticipate that an object will cause happiness in advance of its arrival; the object becomes available within a horizon of possibility because it has already been given positive affect.”⁴⁰⁸ In this way, the séance and the rituals practiced within it act as a premeditated happy association for the resultant photographs. The photographs themselves can be also associated with happiness for substantiating the theory of human survival after death, as the Hamiltons hypothesized. Ahmed writes that we can be directed toward these things—here the images—based on the relation between emotion and object. As such, the séance and the results it yielded are granted status as happy objects by association with their positive affects.

Negotiating Negativity and Masculinity: Psychic Albums & Family Photography

One of the ways that Lillian gained agency was through her documentation of psychic investigations. She compiled multiple photographic albums for her three surviving children. Many of the album pages have multiple photographs adhered to them, and some of them feature different images from a single sitting. Cut-out fragments of photographs are used to emphasize enlarged teleplasms, and juxtaposed images are used to compare materializations from different dates. Lillian used handwritten and typed annotations alongside the photographs to provide factual information, such as names and dates, and to describe details pertaining to materializations. Preserving memories in the form of photographic albums was a domestic activity associated with women, and enmeshed in notions of femininity.⁴⁰⁹ Writing about family photography, Holland remarks that “looking inwards towards the domestic and creating an exclusive record of your family became an increasingly important message, directed largely at the women of the middle classes.”⁴¹⁰ Within the Victorian home, albums reasserted familial bonds and pastimes to create a sense of unity and belonging amongst family members. Family albums became an integral part of the modern family and even extended the notion of family beyond the domestic.

408 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 220.

409 Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

410 Holland, “‘Sweet it is to Scan...’ 160.

Emerging from nineteenth-century ideals, the home became a site of leisure. Albums also functioned as a form of entertainment, for they typically contained images of the outside world—including masculine enterprises. Leisure activities, as well as military and entrepreneurial endeavours, were preserved in family albums, expanding the notion of family beyond the home.⁴¹¹ As Holland notes, the home was used “both for scientific experimentation and the creation of works of art.”⁴¹² Although Lillian’s albums were intended more as records than art, they remain at the intersection of these practices. They align with Holland and di Bello’s concepts of family photography for transcending the domestic to include images that were associated with the masculinized terrains of psychics and science. Holland further remarks that family albums may act as a self-expressive “emotional centre” in which the past is confirmed and carried into the present.⁴¹³ Lillian created her albums with care and intention in the way one would in constructing a family album. She used emphatic, handwritten captions to infuse the pages with the emotions that were enlivened in séance. In viewing these expressive albums, those in the Hamiltons’ circle would have engaged in a particular act of recognition that Holland describes as a reconstruction of private histories that establishes personal narratives against public accounts.⁴¹⁴ Hundreds of unique photographs are held in the collection, yet we can presume that Lillian selected the successful photographs to include in her albums to help narrate her perspective of the sitting. In psychic photography, any image that showed ectoplasm would have been considered successful. And in family photography, positive, happy memories are saved for albums, while the “bad” images and mournful moments are excluded; those that do not support the narrative being communicated. The twentieth-century family album resolutely insisted on the “creation of *happy* memories.”⁴¹⁵ Disconnected from political and world affairs, the family album was centered around the private sphere, where it relinquished these external forces in the

411 Holland, “‘Sweet it is to Scan...,’” 140.

412 Ibid. 150.

413 Ibid., 173-174.

414 Ibid. For this, Holland cites V. Walkerdine, “Behind the Painted Smile,” in *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991); S. Watney, “Ordinary Boys,” in *Family Snaps: The Meaning of Domestic Photography*, eds. Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991); A. Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002).

415 Taylor, *A Dream of England*, 141.

interest of a new economic system framed around domestic consumption and domestic ideals after the world wars.⁴¹⁶

Lillian was able to enact authority in her collaborations with T.G. by (re)scripting the narrative of the séance through album compilations. She achieved this by selecting photographs that yielded positive results, including multiple angles and close-ups of particularly fascinating teleplasm. She then purposefully arranged and juxtaposed them onto the page. Lillian often incorporated other types of images, such as portraits to show their resemblance to a teleplasmic materialization of a face for instance. She also transcribed her emotional reactions alongside the photographs, which relay her perceptions of the sittings, thereby combining her thoughts and emotions, facts and reactions. By doing so, she established a sense of agency over how the experiments were reported after séances were completed; and perhaps a sense of independence as the creator of these books. Furthermore, as viewing and sharing personal photographs has been central to meaning making, understanding Lillian's albums in this way invites audiences into the narrative with her to participate in the act of reconstructing the significance of the photographs each time they are (re)visited.

Teleplasmic Materializations: Family Frames & Affective Wonder

Since photography no longer generated the same sense of wonder in mid-twentieth century as it had in the mid-nineteenth, images of indiscernible forms, such as teleplasm, were incredulous, and conceived here as extraordinary. Concepts of family photography, and Ahmed's theory of wonder, are used to conceptualize the photographs' content and meaning, because one must first be aware of the conditions in which they were produced, including the study of twentieth-century psychic investigations. Hirsch addresses the significance of understanding the terms of the photographs to describe how the context of the family album is essential to forming the subject/object relationship. She writes that when flipping through an album and recognizing family members, whether we have met them or not, "it is the context of the album that creates the relationship, not necessarily

416 Holland, "'Sweet it is to Scan...'" 164.

any preexistent sign.”⁴¹⁷ Lillian’s compositions function in this way to familiarize viewers with the séance and its documented manifestations. She appears to have acknowledged that without a frame of reference, the albums might not have been understood, and their meanings misconstrued; both of which could lead to negative consequences, including accusations of fraud. Integrating notations with the images was a necessary component for comprehending her investigations.

Lillian’s annotations describe the scenes depicted, but also convey her feelings about them. These can be read through a series of photographs and séance notes that document T.G.’s spiritual visitation after death. His face materialized in the form of a teleplasmic mass in May of 1939, and the albums contain several photographs of it that were taken from various angles. The T.G. teleplasm appeared on what Lillian described as a “fine ‘screen’” floating above Marshall and Wither on May 22nd, shown in figures 1 and 5. They depict the same materialization from the same date, but on separate pages and from different angles. The teleplasm contains the faces of T.G. and Lucy Cleland, who were engaged and broken up before he met Lillian, as indicated in the séance notes.⁴¹⁸ These pages detail the sitters’ names, the identified phenomena, and the processes by which they materialized, providing the necessary information for viewers to understand the photographs and the group’s experiments. Lillian also imbued her notations with her and the others’ belief about the authenticity of the teleplasms in a way that evokes the immediacy and emotionality of the séance.

First, figure 1 incorporates multiple moments of time in its three-photograph composition. The page features a photograph of Marshall and Wither with the “fine ‘screen’” teleplasm above them, taken straight on and cropped to exclude the other sitters. It also includes an enlarged stereoview of the screen to more clearly show T.G.’s and Lucy’s faces, which is placed alongside an undated portrait of Lucy (standing) with T.G. and an unknown female friend. This was included to compare the likeness between Lucy’s portrait and her teleplasmic materialization on the screen. Her captions clearly indicate who Lucy is; that she was a friend of T.G.’s “in his youth” and that she

417 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 53.

418 See figures 7 and 8.

“predeceased him.” She described the other photographs as well, though most poignant is her emphatic caption of the enlarged stereoview: “nothing like this ever photographed before,” underlined to call attention to this fact. Her emphasis attests to her belief about the teleplasm’s unique authenticity, while alluding to her emotive reaction to it.

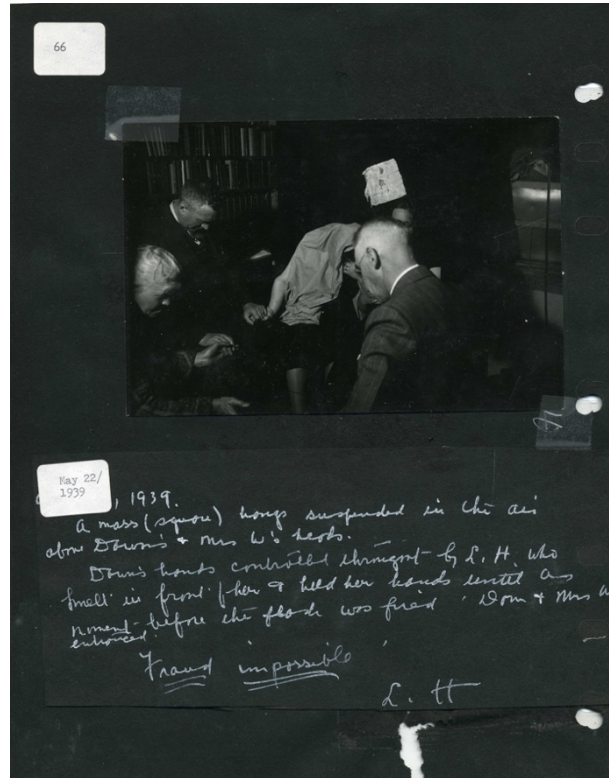


Figure 5: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Lucy Cleland and T.G. Hamilton teleplasm, May 22, 1939

Second, figure 5 shows another page from the same album. It contains a single photograph of séance participants sitting in a circle holding hands, with Lillian’s handwritten notations below it. The room is cast in darkness except for the bright light of the flash, which accentuates the white teleplasm forming the focal point of the image. Members are seated close with heads down and eyes closed, grasping each other’s hands beneath the floating square mass. Marshall leans into and rests her head on Wither’s shoulder, and both of whom appear tucked behind Reed in the foreground, though the image does not permit a view of anyone’s face. We do not see Lillian in the photograph, just the traces of her thoughts in handwriting. Her caption details how she knelt before Dawn (Marshall) to control her hands until the teleplasm formed, after which “Dawn and Mrs. W. embraced.” She narrates the scene through album annotations and

séance notes, which intimate the emotional experience the moment “the flash was fired.” She ends the caption with her conviction, “fraud impossible,” double underlined and authenticated with her initials beneath. Lillian’s emphatic writing seems to presume the unbelievability of what appears alongside the text: black and white photographs made so brilliant by the flashbulb that they look nearly overexposed, bright floating objects with likeness to cheesecloth or a newspaper page presenting two faces, and seemingly unaware participants seated together in the dark. These pages speak to a sense of wonder and fascination that anticipates correlative reactions from viewers. Lillian’s album pages function like family albums by providing the context for viewers to understand them, particularly since the images could be misread and their meaning lost, in their bewildering appearance. The photographs and notations work together to construct a frame of reference in which meaning can be made, and that simultaneously infuse the albums with the emotionality of the events captured.

The merging of past and present, memory and image, in Lillian’s albums can be understood through Holland’s theory of how family albums operate. Holland explains that family albums function at the “disjuncture between image and remembered experience, the uncertain borderline between fantasy and memory.”⁴¹⁹ In Lillian’s séance photographs, the past becomes mixed with the present, while memories of deceased loved ones are conjured and their personal bonds with the living are enlivened. Holland also explains how family albums provide “the opportunity to relive or re-enact the past,” “recapture personal history, and make sense of individual lives.”⁴²⁰ Lillian was reassured of her husband’s continued life in the spirit world from his teleplasmic materialization, and from his communication with her through Marshall’s trance writing. Janice Hamilton describes how,

On several occasions throughout 1943 and 1944, Mary Marshall sat down in her home for half an hour and, supplied with pencil, paper, envelopes and stamps by Lillian, she went into a light trance and her hand wrote letters that began, “Hello, Lillian.” They described what T.G. was learning and experiencing, and they were signed “T.G.” Mary Marshall would immediately put each letter into the mail for delivery the next day to Lillian.⁴²¹

419 Holland, “‘Sweet it is to Scan...’ 174.

420 Ibid.

421 Hamilton, “‘Bring on Your Ghosts!’” 11.

These letters reaffirmed his spiritual existence, and much like Holland articulates, could function to help her make sense of his life after physical death. In this way, T.G. and Lillian could recapture and relive their personal history together by communicating through Marshall's mediumship. As such, I consider Lillian's albums, including their photographs, séance notes, letters, as existing on this borderline between image and memory. Upon viewing the albums, Lillian and her group would have been able to reinvigorate their memories of the moments that were captured on film—the fleeting moment that Ahmed articulates transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. Viewers of the albums today, then, are similarly able to experience the extraordinary. They can revisit the past with sitters of Lillian's séances, who were granted the opportunity to reinvigorate their bonds with passed loved ones through trance states.

This instantaneous merging of the past into a single moment frames the nature of psychical photography. They permanentize moments of communication that can then be used to “sustain complex relationships.”⁴²² For Lillian, Marshall's mediumistic skills allowed her to retain her connection to T.G. after his death via his letters and presence in séance, which has been immortalized by photography and preserved in her albums. We can further understand Lillian's album making as bestowing meaning onto their psychic work, and on those involved—herself and séance participants, as well as family and friends, for whom they were created. The albums also function as reassurance of T.G.'s spiritual survival. And much like Holland contends about personal photography, I suggest that the séance “derives its power from its role as a social practice, embedded in its context.”⁴²³ Routinely gathering in the dark each week to join hands and beckon discarnate beings into the material world became a ritual that fortified the séance as a social practice.

Lillian's albums have the capacity to rouse varying, unexpected emotions within viewers, by way of image and text. This, in turn, activates Ahmed's concept of wonderment by expanding our field of vision and touch. She articulates that ordinary is

422 Holland, “‘Sweet it is to Scan...,’ 179.

423 Ibid.

the unnoticeable background upon which objects can stand out or apart.⁴²⁴ Moreover, “wonder is an encounter with an object that one does not recognise.”⁴²⁵ The experience of wonder thus works through the unrecognizability of an object we encounter, transforming the ordinary to the extraordinary.⁴²⁶



Figure 6: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Residue of teleplasmic screen, May 28, 1939

This type of unidentifiable object is represented in an accidental double exposure that portrays inexplicable imagery at first glance. The images depicted in figure 4 and 6 appear in two album images. Both pages depict sittings from April 20th and May 28th, 1939, which are layered into the double exposure. In the first sitting, a teleplasm was captured coming from Marshall’s mouth, and in the second, the residual teleplasmic screen of T.G. was captured above her. Both pages also feature an enlargement of the screen, taken with a wide-angle lens, and with copious annotations by Lillian. She uses

424 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 179.

425 Ibid.

426 Ibid.

typescript beneath the image in figure 6, identifying it as a double exposure. Though double exposure was a well-known technique for producing fake spirit photographs, the Hamiltons' photographic documentation focuses on teleplasm that manifested physically in the séance room.⁴²⁷ The overall composition of Lillian's image is disorienting, slowing the process of perception in a way that is different from the intentional artistry of Hannah Maynard's multiple exposures discussed in chapter one.

While Hannah's photographs incite wonder through her clear articulation of play and whimsy, Lillian's photograph incites perplexity through its indeterminate representation of time and space. Each figure appears spectrally duplicated, hovering just below or beside its other half. Yet Wither's change in clothing reveals that they are in fact unique. The photographs were taken in the same space and with the same camera. The teleplasm emerging from and above the first Mary—from May 22nd—mark the focal point of the photograph. Both materializations appear layered over her face, which converges with Wither of the same date to her left, drawing viewers' eyes in a triangular motion before resting on the residual screen hovering above. The curiosity of these photographs incites a sense of wonder that, as Ahmed articulates, is an affective relation to the world.⁴²⁸ In observing the double exposures, viewers become affected by their unique yet mystifying composition that stands out from the rest of the images in the album. Thus, it is in this moment, in the suspension of disbelief, when the transition from ordinary to extraordinary takes place. Further, the albums provided verification of spiritual existence, and I claim, reconciliation with death through consolation and feelings of joy. Viewers of the albums are pulled into the séance experience through an affective relation to the images and the field of vision that its wonderment expands. As such, Lillian's albums are opened up to new forms of interpretation and meaning that are unique to each viewing experience.

427 One of the earliest ways that fake spirit photographs were produced was to use unclean plates. Practitioners would use a single plate to photograph multiple sessions, which was then developed in the darkroom to effectively produce a double exposure that merged sitters together in one image.

428 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 179.

Séance Notes as Supplementary Documentation of Spiritual Visitation

The corresponding séance notes, written by Lillian, attest to how T.G.'s materialization, and thus the photographs, operate within Ahmed's framework (fig. 7 & 8). They not only connote a sense of comfort and ease amongst sitters, but they denote Lillian's amazement, and thus relate to Ahmed's concept of wonder, with their exactitude of truth as it was presented to her in séance; for the Hamiltons' documentation captured the truth as they and the sitters believed it to be. Lillian begins by setting the scene, which includes herself, Mary, and Mrs. Wither, as if speaking directly to her readers—quotation marks included: “We are chatting in the living room. Suddenly we notice that Mrs. Wither has gone into what appears to be a light state of trance. She is quiet for a few minutes, recovers and speaks as follows”⁴²⁹ Lillian then transcribes the minutes of the sitting, beginning with Mrs. Wither addressing her to then describe a sudden mental image of T.G.: “Lillian, I have just had a picture of Dr. Hamilton. He was a young man and he had a young lady with him. They were in a wood and seemed to be examining a wild flower [sic] together.” The women's brief dialogue goes on to describe the details of T.G.'s and Lucy appearances, which is facilitated by Mary, who speaks of a clairvaudient message she received from T.G. for Lillian that she heard “quite clearly.” This message confirms what Mrs. Wither saw and reassures Lillian that her husband and Lucy are on T.G.'s “side of life.”⁴³⁰

Lillian's transcript suggests a congenial, comfortable atmosphere amongst the women, which is reinforced by her writing style. She even inserts their reactions within the conversation: “(laughing)”, “(also laughing).” She returns to narration for the remainder of the transcript, using first-person present tense to convey her feelings of amazement at the truth of the communications (fig. 7): “I listened to all this in utter amazement for it was all true, not a detail but what either indicated or spoke the exact

429 Lillian Hamilton, séance notes, May 22nd, 1939. The notes are typed, though Lillian appears to have later edited the document with pen, making slight alterations to phrasing and punctuation. These edits do not alter the facts or meaning of the séance notes, but instead seem to be personal preferences in writing style.

430 To use Lillian's words: “He also tells me that she is not in this world but has passed on and that he has met her on his side of life.” Séance notes, May 22nd, 1939.

truth. But it all happened so long ago...and was now known to me only—and to my husband if he was living as indeed he seemed to be!”

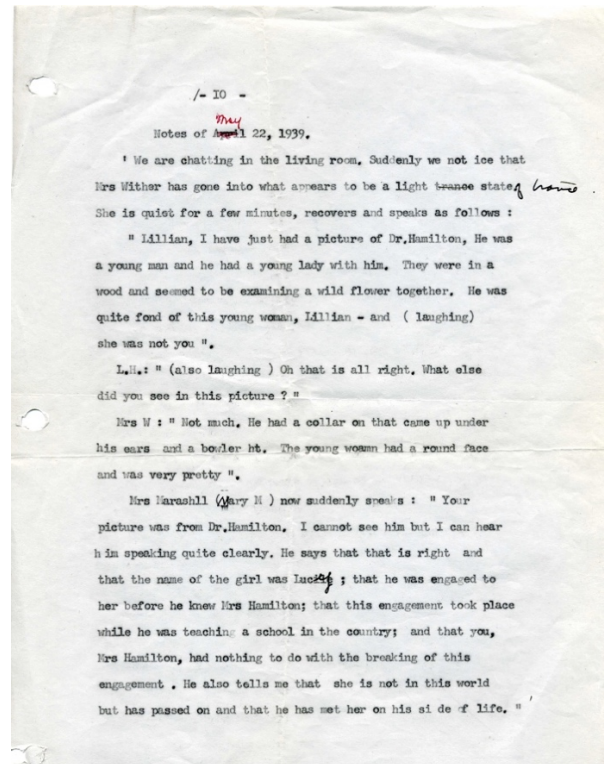


Figure 7: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Séance notes, May 22, 1939, p. 1

The notes are suffused with emotions—amazement, happiness, sorrow—that are felt by participants both embodied and disembodied. Lillian articulates that T.G. only spoke of Lucy once, “nearly forty years before,” and asked never to again as “he felt keenly the sorrow he had caused this girl who had loved him devotedly and whose life-happiness he had undoubtedly destroyed by his severing of their relationship.” Lillian’s notes also suggest an element of spontaneity that is unlike the structured procedures detailed in T.G.’s lecture notes. The syntax of the notes pulls readers into the séance in the way that the corresponding photographs expand our visual field and captivate our attention. Together, they elicit wonderment in their articulation of elements that are not of this world, but that of the spiritual. The emotions in the séance notes parallel those of their readers,’ activating the affective qualities of the transcript and the photographs. The annotated album, with its corresponding séance notes, creates a viewing experience that facilitates our immersion in the experience of the Hamilton séance. Following from this, I return to Ahmed’s “happy objects” for conceiving of the photographs as saturated with

positive affects, like hope, that then permeate the albums.⁴³¹ Upon viewing the albums, Lillian and her loved ones become synchronously oriented toward them as happy objects:

Groups cohere around a shared orientation toward some things as being good, treating some things and not others as the cause of delight. If the same object makes us happy—or if we invest in the same objects as being what should make us happy—then we would be oriented or directed in the same way.⁴³²

Viewers outside Lillian’s circle could similarly be oriented toward the albums, photographs, or captions through the shared, or “fellow feelings,” they evoked for twentieth-century viewers, while retaining their capacity to elicit them even today. The way in which she directs her writing, and the subtle details she includes, conjure a feeling of closeness with her as we read along and are prompted to imagine the scene as she experienced it.

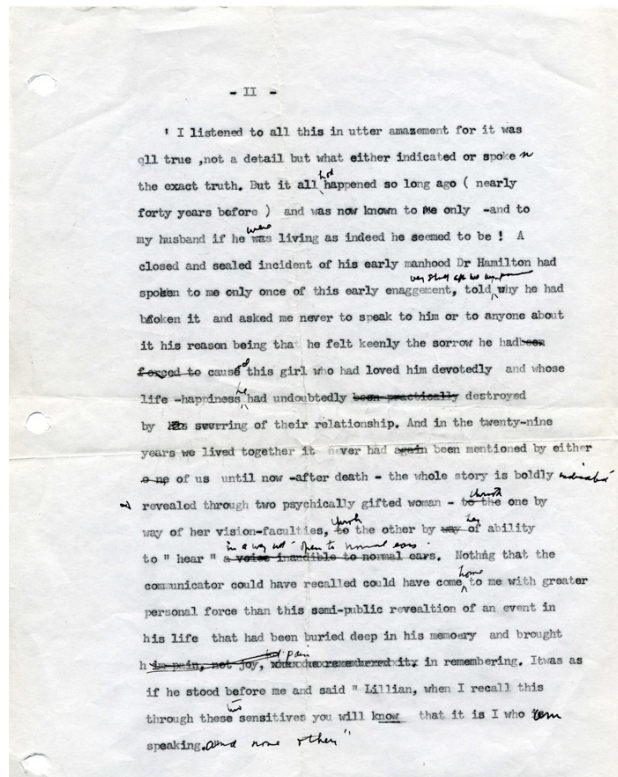


Figure 8: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Séance notes, May 22, 1939, p.

431 Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” 34.

432 Ibid., 35.

Conclusion

Lillian Hamilton led psychical investigations in her home for ten years, after the death of her husband, Dr. Thomas Glendenning Hamilton. Her approach to psychics aligned with Spiritualists' belief in denying categorical binaries, and her album compilations illuminate her spiritual and scientific method. The gendered nature of the séance is evident in Lillian's contributions to psychical experiments, which she simultaneously adhered to and challenged. Her album making allowed her to narrate the experiences and events of the séance from her perspective, even though the ways in which women's positions have been represented in psychic investigators' textual and visual reports illustrate an unstable and dynamic picture of gender binaries. In this way, she was granted agency in (re)scripting the Hamilton investigations.

Lillian's albums illustrate familial bonds between disembodied and embodied sitters, while simultaneously enlivening the relationship between viewers and subjects. They challenge traditional viewing practices by way of their mystifying appearance, prompting viewers to suspend their disbelief in the contemplative moment of wonder. The social practice of the séance further reinforces its use as confirmation of spiritual life, while sustaining the relationships between the living and the dead.

Though the twentieth-century field of psychics was male dominated, Lillian was able to establish agency over how the psychical experiments were permanently documented, and a sense of independence as the creator of these albums. I have suggested that Lillian used her practice, and her assiduous composition of albums, to reconcile her feelings of grief after the physical loss of her husband and with the reassurance of his continued life in the spirit world. Her albums continue to create a unique viewing experience that opens them up to new interpretations with each viewing, for they have permanentized the emotions that were elicited in séance, while retaining their capacity to evoke varying emotions within viewers.

This chapter has ultimately argued that if indeed the spiritual is linked to the emotional and by extension to femininity and women, then Lillian's practice, as approached from an intellectual and spiritual perspective, challenged gender binaries. In doing so, this chapter has illuminated women's multifaceted approaches to practising photography, and the varied contributions they made to its histories. It more specifically

highlights Lillian's contributions to this world-renowned collection, and as the motivational force behind the Hamiltons' psychical experiments.

Appendix

Figure 1: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Suspended square mass, May 22, 1939, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1409714>.



Figure 2: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Letter from Mary Marshall to Lillian Hamilton, June 4, 1945, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1410106>.

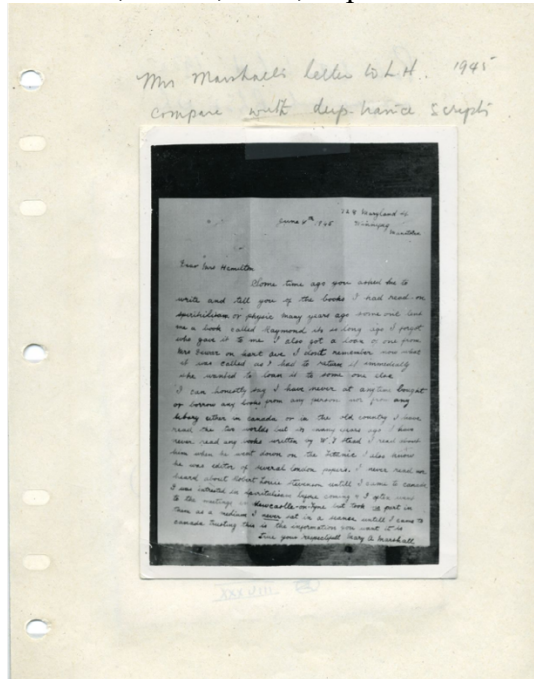


Figure 3: UMASC, A79-41, PC 12, Box 12, Folder 1, Item 3, T.G. Hamilton and D.B. MacDonald restraining table and chair with medium Elizabeth Poole, 1923 re-enactment, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524073>.



Figure 4: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Residue of teleplasmic screen, May 28, 1939, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1410641>.

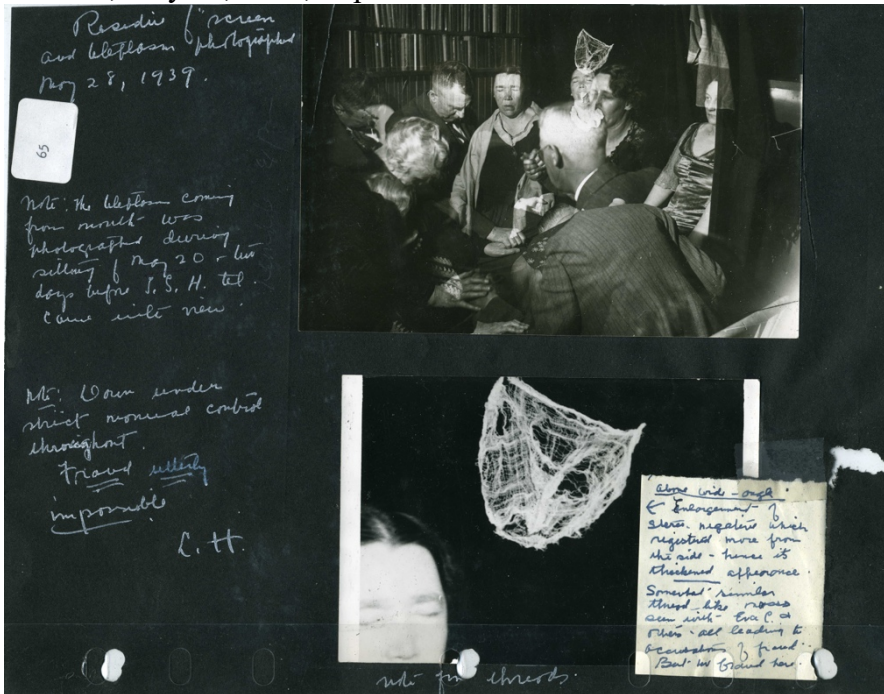


Figure 5: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Lucy Cleland and T.G. Hamilton teleplasm, May 22, 1939, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1410658>.

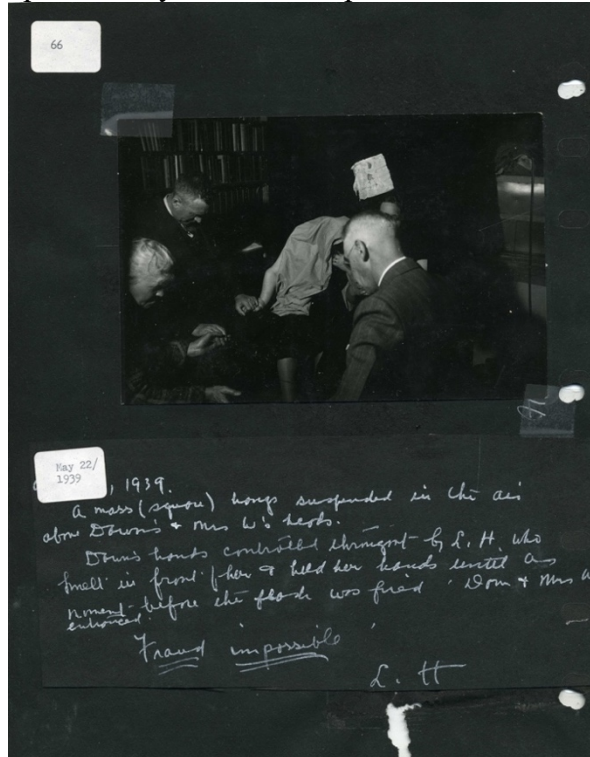


Figure 6: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Residue of teleplasmic screen, May 28, 1939, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1410588>.



Figure 7: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Séance notes, May 22, 1939, p. 1, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1410647>.

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Notes of ^{May} April 22, 1939.

" We are chatting in the living room. Suddenly we note that Mrs Wither has gone into what appears to be a light trance state ^{how}. She is quiet for a few minutes, recovers and speaks as follows :

" Lillian, I have just had a picture of Dr. Hamilton. He was a young man and he had a young lady with him. They were in a wood and seemed to be examining a wild flower together. He was quite fond of this young woman, Lillian - and (laughing) she was not you ".

L.W.: " (also laughing) Oh that is all right. What else did you see in this picture ? "

Mrs W : " Not much. He had a collar on that came up under his ears and a bowler hat. The young woman had a round face and was very pretty ".

Mrs Marshall (Mary M) now suddenly speaks : " Your picture was from Dr. Hamilton. I cannot see him but I can hear him speaking quite clearly. He says that that is right and that the name of the girl was ~~Lillian~~ ; that he was engaged to her before he knew Mrs Hamilton; that this engagement took place while he was teaching a school in the country; and that you, Mrs Hamilton, had nothing to do with the breaking of this engagement . He also tells me that she is not in this world but has passed on and that he has met her on his side of life. "

Figure 8: UMASC, A79-41, Annotated Photo Album, Groups XIV-XVIII, Séance notes, May 22, 1939, p. 2, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1409265>.

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" I listened to all this in utter amazement for it was all true, not a detail but what either indicated or spoke ~ the exact truth. But it all happened so long ago (nearly forty years before) and was now known to me only -and to my husband if he was living as indeed he seemed to be ! A closed and sealed incident of his early manhood Dr Hamilton had spoken to me only once of this early engagement, told why he had broken it and asked me never to speak to him or to anyone about it his reason being that he felt keenly the sorrow he had ~~been~~ ~~forced~~ to cause this girl who had loved him devotedly and whose life -happiness had undoubtedly ~~been~~ ~~practically~~ destroyed by ~~the~~ ~~swearing~~ of their relationship. And in the twenty-nine years we lived together it never had ~~again~~ been mentioned by either ~~one~~ of us until now -after death - the whole story is boldly ~~revealed~~ revealed through two psychically gifted women - ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~one~~ by way of her vision-facilities, ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~other~~ by way of ability to " hear " ~~as~~ ~~well~~ ~~as~~ ~~normal~~ ~~ears~~. Nothing that the communicator could have recalled could have come ^{how} to me with greater personal force than this semi-public revelation of an event in his life that had been buried deep in his memory and brought ~~in~~ ~~his~~ ~~mind~~ ~~not~~ ~~joy~~ ~~but~~ ~~the~~ ~~recollection~~ ~~of~~ ~~it~~ in remembering. It was as if he stood before me and said " Lillian, when I recall this through these sensitives you will know that it is I who ~~am~~ speaking ~~and~~ ~~no~~ ~~other~~ "

Chapter 3 - Familial Bonds & Collective Memory: Freedom to Practice Psychic Investigations in Sylvia Barber's Home Circle

Introduction

Sylvia Barber's photographs are enigmatic and captivating. Their hazy and ethereal appearance is evocative of the spirituality that infused Barber's practice. The photographs' high contrast black and white aesthetic illuminates the indeterminate nature of psychic photography, while rendering them mystifying and engrossing. Barber's images pull viewers into the darkened séance room with her, immersing them in the spiritual experiences that have been encapsulated on film. The photographs juxtapose fragmented body parts that have been cropped by the camera's frame—hands held across the séance table, partially visible faces—with whole bodies and faces, both embodied and disembodied. Some images feature three-quarter views of participants seated closely together with eyes closed; while others are simple, yet more ambiguous, depictions of the spirit world.



Figure 1: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 2/4, Medium Mary Ann Marshall practicing automatic writing, October 1, 1947, photographed by Sylvia Barber

One such image, taken from above, allows the viewer to look down at the small séance table around which participants are seated (fig. 1). Cast against a black background, the flashbulb produced a brightly lit photograph that shows the physical connections necessary for conjuring spirit communication within séance. The framing

obstructs our view of the sitters' bodies, showing only the gently overlapped hands of those seated closely together, fingers intertwined, and the paper upon which the medium practices psychic writing, too overexposed to be legible. A panned arrow in the border of the photograph points to a spectral-like shadow on the table, cast from an unseen object. The image's high contrast, coupled with the jarring perspective, is disorienting yet intriguing. It evokes an emotional response that draws viewers into the photograph, and into the moment, through an affective engagement that is incited through the viewing process. As a series, Barber's photographs elicit a range of human emotion—grief, sorrow, hope, contentment. They engage in questions of authenticity, life after death, and spiritual existence.

The Hamilton Family Fonds at the University of Manitoba holds copies of Barber's photographs and related séance documentation, and they are accessible through their online database.⁴³³ The Barber material online comprises some 30 digital images of photographs of séance proceedings, including psychic materializations, automatic drawings and writing. There are also newspaper articles that mention Barber's home circle.⁴³⁴ Her group also published three small books throughout the 1950s under the name "Patience Hope," a pseudonym that combined the names by which two sitters in séance were known. The books contain textual and visual documentation of the séances that Barber held in her Winnipeg home between 1947 and 1958. Barber is notable as the leader of her group's investigations, for capturing and developing the photographs, and for writing articles about their séance activities for national and international publications.⁴³⁵ That her group's documentation survives is also remarkable, for this is atypical with small home circles.

The Hamiltons, who are well known for their psychic research, contributed to these volumes; Lillian wrote notes for the first book, *Life's Purpose* (1951), and her daughter Margaret Hamilton Bach wrote the introductions for the second and third books,

433 The Barber collection is in the physical custody of Walter Meyer zu Erpen, pending transfer to the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections (UMASC). Digital copies of UMASC's material relating to Sylvia Barber's research can be found here: https://digitalcollections.lib.umanitoba.ca/islandora/search/sylvia%20barber?type=edismax&cp=uofm%3Ahamilton_family.

434 Articles from *Psychic News* and *The Winnipeg Tribune*.

435 These include the National Spiritualist Association of Canada's *NSA News Review*, first published in 1956, and *Psychic News*, which ran from 1932 to July 2010, when it changed ownership, and from 2011 to the present.

Life Continuous! Albert Tells His Story (1956) and *Appeal to Reason: Messages From the Spirit World* (1958).⁴³⁶ Each book is self-contained in content, yet together, they describe a continuum of endeavours to answer common questions about life after death and to ultimately prove spiritual existence after physical death. These texts document spirit communication between sitters of Barber's circle and intelligences purported to be from beyond the grave; namely the spirit control "Walter," who also collaborated with the Hamilton circle. The books were composed through automatic writing, primarily in the form of questions and answers. As such, the text appears as a transcript between physical and ethereal beings. For example, "What is the motive of spirit return?" is the first question sitters pose in *Life's Purpose*. The books also contain short messages and poems transmitted through mediumship by such literary figures as Robert Louis Stevenson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and such psychic investigators and Spiritualists as William Thomas Stead, William Crookes, and William Stainton Moses.

This chapter extends my discussion of psychic research from the previous chapter, which analyzes Lillian Hamilton's investigations in Winnipeg. Barber conducted and led her own séances as a serious psychic investigator between 1947 and 1958, with whom Lillian occasionally collaborated. Mary Ann ("Dawn") Marshall also continued to provide her services as a medium to Barber's circle. Tom Patterson notes that the photographs in the Hamilton circle were of materializations and observes that the most recent photographs of Mary's mediumship were Barber's, after the close of Lillian's experiments in 1944.⁴³⁷ Barber's photographs represent a largely unknown part of Winnipeg's cultural history, and an important addition to the history of women's and psychic photography, to which this chapter seeks to contribute. Most importantly, this study helps define women's deep investment in the study of supernormal phenomena. Though some authors have argued that psychic investigations had peaked in popularity by the 1930s, Barber's research demonstrates that women continued to explore psychic phenomena much later, and therefore her motivation for continued work is considered. I use her photographs to explore how psychic photography remained a meaningful practice to women and the familial bonds they forged within séance.

436 *Life's Purpose* was dated 1951, but it was actually published and distributed in 1952.

437 Tom Patterson, *100 Years of Spirit Photography* (London: Regency press, 1965), 33.

Using theories from affect and gender studies, I analyze a selection of Barber's photographs and books from a feminist, social history perspective. I also consider her place within Canadian and women's histories of photography in light of cultural and economic imperatives, particularly as a psychic researcher, writer, and photographer in her own right. As such, the ways in which Barber's documents operate is used to examine how women gained agency within this field in the 1950s. To this end, I read Barber's experience through Elizabeth Grosz's concept of freedom intertwined with Ahmed's concept of "for-ness" to consider feminist action as not simply being against something—patriarchal norms and structures, masculinized fields of study—but as a way to illuminate women's practices, activities, and contributions, and to suggest new interpretations. Grosz advances Bergson's theory of freedom to provide new ways of understanding subjectivity, agency, and freedom that are more compatible with a "feminism of difference."⁴³⁸ She connects these threads within feminist and political struggles as a means to affirm positive action in so far as it is enacted by the author, or self, and is integral to who they are. Following from Grosz, I understand women's freedom, agency, and autonomy as a network of acts rather than inherent qualities that one either has or does not have, to open up a space in which to (re)consider their unique practices and contributions that might otherwise be erased in a framework that perceives freedom as bestowed upon one by another.⁴³⁹ As such, and with consideration to Barber's widowhood, questions of subjectivity, agency, and autonomy are posed for examining the gender conventions at this time.

This chapter further considers Barber's photographs within Marianne Hirsch's framework of family photography. Adapting her theories, I elucidate how the photographs adhere to and disrupt Hirsch's concept of the "familial gaze." This gaze of familiarity is inherent within cultures and across time, yet remains unique to a given historical moment.⁴⁴⁰ This chapter shows how boundaries surrounding ideas about family are porous, for the family is an "affiliative group" that is constructed through relational,

438 Elizabeth Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, eds. Diane Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 142.

439 Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," 148.

440 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 11.

cultural, and institutional processes.⁴⁴¹ Barber's group is understood through these terms to consider viewers' relationship to the photographs, and how the fusion of this relation opens them up to the emotive possibilities of the photographs, and therefore the séance. I argue that Barber's photographs are representative of the need to recall an irrecoverable, irrevocable past, and to find meaning in the loss of physical life. In conceiving the photographs through the familial gaze, I suggest the photographs be viewed as icons vacillating between feelings of grief, loss, and sorrow, and joy, consolation, and comfort, and as contributing to collective memory. Hirsch draws on family history and narrative for her theorizations, using Holocaust imagery as her primary objects. Her theories on family photography and past lives are apt for exploring concepts of loss and memory within the psychic field, for highlighting the personal connections within Barber's circle, and for linking the functional and emotional aspects of psychic photography mid-century. In this way, the photographs expand the notion of family photography through the familial gaze.

This chapter highlights Barber's significance as a skilled psychic investigator and proficient photographer. The shared beliefs that invigorated her practice reinforced the status of medium as an autonomous subject with the power to act. While I acknowledge that many scholars have argued against women's agency in séance, for the inherent nature of trance is to initiate a passive channel through which spirits communicate, I suggest that this notion can be further unravelled to show the varied and complex ways that women participated in psychical experiments by examining them through alternative frameworks, such as Hirsch's and Grosz's.⁴⁴²

Further, I argue that the intimate group in Barber's home provided a space in which the women could participate within the masculinized field of psychics, while arriving at, and producing, what they perceived to be material evidence of spirit return. And while some historians have observed that the current of Spiritualism had calmed by the 1930s, Barber's group demonstrates that psychical research continued in Manitoba. This chapter accordingly shows how Barber participated in psychical research

441 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 10.

442 For details about scholarship on gender and mediumship, see this dissertation's literature review.

independent of the male scientific gaze that permeated it long after the scientization of the field when the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was established in 1882.

The séance's relevance to women appears to have maintained its strength as a source of comfort and consolation in postwar Winnipeg. Negotiating social change continued to be an imperative for women at this time, and one that Barber herself had managed, having after twice endured the death of a spouse. Harnessing Spiritualist beliefs to lead her circle in psychic experiments is one of the ways that I suggest she reconciled her grief and negotiated harrowing life obstacles. Moreover, I argue that Barber's photographs are a measure of loss in the devastation of death and obliteration of physical life, while at the same time representative of the guidance and healing that the women found in this group. Thus, there is power in the women's conjuring, (re)capturing, and (re)production of the past, and the knowledge it brings forth, from their perspective. In this way, the production of photographs becomes a vessel for Barber's agency and autonomy. This chapter aims to illuminate the significance of this group's mid-twentieth century psychic experiments, while highlighting women's varied contributions to photography.

Studies on Sylvia Barber

This chapter relies on archival research and primary sources for piecing together details about Barber's personal life and practice, as she has yet to be studied in a scholarly context. There is minimal documentation about her, and her biography was compiled by archivists and historians vested in excavating Winnipeg's haunted history. One such researcher, Walter Meyer zu Erpen, has compiled a biographical sketch from personal interactions with people who knew Barber, and by tracing her name in birth and funeral home records, marriage registrations, and city directories. Although no articles have been written about Barber, she is cited in newspapers and journals in connection with the Hamiltons' research and Mary Marshall's mediumship. For instance, the British Spiritualist newspaper *Psychic News* published four articles relating to Barber's work between the mid-1950s and late 1970s, one of which was written by her, while the others are dedicated to highlighting Marshall's "brilliant all-around mediumship made world-famous through the Canadian home circle of surgeon-psychic researcher Dr. T. Glen

Hamilton of Winnipeg.”⁴⁴³ A *Psychic News* article dated March 31st, 1979 serves as Barber’s death notice, as there was, at her request, no newspaper announcement nor graveside service.⁴⁴⁴ Yet this article does not contain biographical information. Patterson does include a passing mention of her circle in his condensed survey of spirit photography, *One Hundred Years of Spirit Photography* (1965), as a conclusion to his history of Canadian photographers—namely T.G. Hamilton and how he “conducted their researches [sic] on scientific lines and courageously published their findings.”⁴⁴⁵

Barber’s work is best summarized in an article she wrote for the National Spiritualist Association of Canada’s *NSA News Review* in 1957 titled, “How Spirit Prophecies Were Fulfilled.”⁴⁴⁶ It is used in this chapter for detailing how she formed her home circle and the factors that compelled her to pursue psychic work. In the article, Barber also emphasizes that an organized effort was being made from the other side to bring forth new eternal truths to those willing to receive them, to satisfy humankind’s spiritual hunger, and to take them another step upward. In doing so, she conveyed that the purpose of her research was to bring a spiritual awareness to the public, to educate them about the truth of the spirit world as she understood it through the evidence her circle received. Barber’s authorship here is notable, for she was able to exercise agency in how her story was told. By writing in the third person, she established an objective perspective that equates with her male contemporaries’, and those who preceded her in psychic research. In this way, she exuded professionalism and authority over her work in a field wrought with discrediting accusations by skeptics and nonbelievers. And though female investigators were denied the same recognition as their male colleagues, Barber’s circle demonstrates women’s ability to balance scientific pursuits with religious perspectives. Beth A. Robertson notes that unlike the objectivity of men, women were negatively

443 Quotation from subtitle of the *Psychic News* article entitled: “Her test seances astounded medical sitters: among famous people to prove their survival were: Conan Doyle, W.T. Stead, Oliver Lodge’s son and Robert Louis Stevenson” (Aug. 17, 1963): 5.

444 “Famous researcher stages novel test from Beyond,” *Psychic News* (March 31, 1979): 5. This article retells much of the same story as “How Spirit Prophecies Were Fulfilled,” written by Barber and published by *NSA News Review* (1957). Barber died on February 16th, 1979 in the Health Sciences Centre, Winnipeg, and was buried in Elmwood Cemetery on February 19th, 1979. These facts are from Walter Meyer zu Erpen, “Sylvia Barber Biographical Sketch,” 7.

445 Patterson, *One Hundred Years of Spirit Photography*, 33.

446 Sylvia Barber, “How Spirit Prophecies Were Fulfilled,” *NSA News Review* (September 1957): 5-7.

labelled “impressionable and spiritually sensitive.”⁴⁴⁷ Yet rather than being deterred or limited by these derogatory characterizations, Barber advanced these qualities. In bridging scientific and religious viewpoints, her group was able to challenge conceptions of women’s position in the psychic field by deploying scientific strategies through a Spiritualist lens.

The Formation of Barber’s “Familial” Home Circle: Unbound and Emotional

Records indicate that Barber was born Sigurjona Gudmundson in August 1892, and that her family came to Canada in 1899, settling in Selkirk, Manitoba. As an immigrant from Reykjavik, Iceland, she formed familial bonds with a group of Winnipeg women in lieu of being close with her blood relatives in Canada or making her own family. Throughout her life, Barber had two short-lived marriages. All that is known about her first husband is that his surname was Bryan, that he died before 1920, and that she may have married him outside of Manitoba. Her second marriage took place on May 17th, 1920, to Edmund Cyril Barber (1893-1931), who was a clerk before and after serving in World War One.⁴⁴⁸ While she did not have children, her private group of séance members was comprised of dear friends with whom she remained close for the remainder of her life, particularly Lillian and Margaret.⁴⁴⁹ Barber left Margaret money to pursue the work her family began, which points to the women’s dedication to investigating psychic phenomena, in addition to the strength of their bonds.⁴⁵⁰

Barber organized her home circle in 1947 after losing two husbands before the age of 40, which were formative life events that seem to have led to her afterlife investigations. According to the foreword in *Appeal to Reason*, her circle was the result of having visited the Spiritualist camp at Chesterfield, Indiana, where she sat with a number of mediums in the summer of 1946. At Camp Chesterfield, Barber repeatedly

447 Beth A. Robertson, *Science of the Séance: Transnational Networks and Gendered Bodies in the Study of Psychic Phenomena, 1918-40* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 21.

448 Military records indicate that his name was Edward, but directories indicate that his name was Edmund, which is also how his name is spelled in the record of his marriage to Sylvia.

449 At Barber’s request, there was not a memorial upon her death, and the Meders and Margaret were the only ones present at the cemetery. Meyer zu Erpen, “Sylvia Barber Biographical Sketch,” 3, 7, and 8.

450 This endowment established the T. Glendenning Hamilton Research Grant Program at the University of Manitoba. Sylvia is therefore significant as the impetus behind this program, to which Hamilton family members and friends also contributed.

received messages from spirit guides requesting her to develop a private group at home, while assuring her that the appropriate sitters would be found, and their findings made public. The following autumn, a friend went to her for a sitting, “who was in great need” of “help and healing.”⁴⁵¹ A group made up of four individuals was formed to investigate psychic phenomena in February of 1947. Then in April of the same year, Marshall attended a sitting at which the spirit control Walter asked Barber to invite the medium to participate regularly because there was some work that he wished to “put through.”⁴⁵²

Spirit “controls” are purported to be discarnate individuals who convey messages through séance mediums and sitters. In documentation they are referred to as “directors” or “engineers” because of their guidance and assistance to mediums while in trance. British naturalist and Spiritualist Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace emphasized the necessity of spirit controls, declaring that “the spirit photograph was a creation by spiritual forces rather than a record of their appearance.”⁴⁵³ Psychic photography was often then viewed as a “joint effort” since “supernatural forces use it primarily as a process of reproduction and communication.”⁴⁵⁴ Walter directed séance activities as the “engineer” responsible for the teleplasmic manifestations; he worked under Stead, Crookes, and F.W.H. Myers with meticulous care.⁴⁵⁵ His full name was Walter Stuart Stinson, and he was killed in a railway accident at age 27 in 1911. He was the brother of the famous Boston medium, Mina “Margery” Crandon, wife of Harvard Medical School doctor L.R.G. Crandon, who pursued research in connection with the American Society for Psychical Research.⁴⁵⁶ Walter was the primary spirit control for his sister until her passing in 1941, and for Mary Marshall during her work with the Hamiltons and Barber.⁴⁵⁷ Marshall had worked with Walter for nearly 20 years when he came through in Barber’s circle; she accepted his

451 Sylvia Barber, “How Spirit Prophecies were Fulfilled,” 5-7; and Meyer zu Erpen, “Sylvia Barber Biographical Sketch,” 8.

452 Patience Hope, *Appeal to Reason: Messages From the Spirit World* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: 1958), 5.

453 In Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films and Photography’s Uncanny,” in *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 36.

454 *Ibid.*, 37.

455 Patience Hope, *Appeal to Reason*, 10-11.

456 For more about Margery, see Thomas Tietze, *Margery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) and David Jaher, *The Witch of Lime Street: Séance, Seduction, and Houdini in the Spirit World* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2015).

457 The Crandons and the Hamiltons were friends, and T.G. conducted experiments of Margery’s mediumship when she and her husband visited Winnipeg in 1926.

request to join the group as a “non-professional psychic.”⁴⁵⁸ This means that she was not financially compensated for her mediumship, and thus participated out of personal interest in pursuing psychic research.

Walter’s work with Marshall is an extension of their collaboration in the Hamiltons’ investigations. Patterson also notes that Barber’s circle was in effect a continuation of the research that the Hamiltons conducted with Marshall.⁴⁵⁹ One of the key differences was that Barber’s home circle was smaller. Patience Hope writes that, “There were four sitters present at all times and sometimes five.”⁴⁶⁰ This was similar to the first Spiritualist séances of the 1850s, composed of close family and friends. The consistency of the group’s sittings and of its participants was therefore instrumental in the women’s formation of familial bonds. This chapter adapts Hirsch’s concept of the family, which is conceived of as an affiliative group. Hirsch writes that “the affiliations that form an [affiliative group] are constructed through various relational, cultural, and institutional processes—such as ‘looking’ and photography.”⁴⁶¹ Through the practice of taking and looking at photographs, then, the “familial gaze” works to affirm its affiliations. Hirsch also maintains that the family became an object for social and cultural examination and observation in the second half of the twentieth century.⁴⁶² As such, discussing the notion of photography is to “underline its contingency, to delineate the openness of its boundaries and the many factors, beyond biology, that underscore its definitional power.”⁴⁶³ Comprised of “devoted” and “close” friends, as she described them, Barber’s home circle was formed in the way that Hirsch describes family as “what we think of as our families.”⁴⁶⁴ The photographs they produced collaboratively signify the group’s togetherness and their cohesion as a family. They endeavoured to chronicle the ritual of

458 “World Famous Home Circle’s Physical Medium Passes: Her Test Séances Astounded Medical Sitters: Among Famous People to Prove their Survival Were: Conan Doyle, W.T. Stead, Oliver Lodge’s son and Robert Louis Stevenson,” *Psychic News* (August 17, 1963): 5.

459 Patterson, *100 Years of Spirit Photography*, 33.

460 Patience Hope, *Appeal to Reason*, 7.

461 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 10.

462 Ibid.

463 Ibid.

464 Ibid., 11.

séance, and (re)affirm their relationships to one another and to the celestial, as an integral part of producing results.

Marshall's dedication to Barber's group is testament to the women's familial bonds. She devoted her efforts to pursue scientific research exclusively with Barber from 1947 to 1958, aside from the occasional sittings she held with friends privately at home.⁴⁶⁵ Her mediumship was the main channel through which spirit guides communed with sitters in the Barber and Hamilton groups, yet she shunned public attention.

Margaret clarifies this in an article published in *Psychic News*:

Possessed of an innate dignity and poise, she was most unassuming and modest regarding her exceptional psychic gifts, and she shunned with abhorrence even the thought of any publicity in this connection.⁴⁶⁶

Marshall's anonymity was maintained throughout her experiments with the Hamiltons and Barber, in part, because of the notoriety that many mediums had attracted. Also, importantly, her son Reverend George Marshall (1909-1959), an ordained United Church minister, was opposed to her practice of mediumship. Fraudulent cases perpetuated perceptions of mediums as excessively independent, morally questionable, and predisposed to straying from classist notions of feminine respectability, which were inflected by cultural anxieties about women's newfound economic and sexual freedom of the 1920s.⁴⁶⁷ The Barber group members' full names and contact information were never published, and they were referred to by short form or nicknames in reports. This was done to keep their privacy inviolate, and to shield them against "the merely curious and the sensation-seekers,"⁴⁶⁸ particularly since investigators sought to demystify or expose psychic practitioners for fraudulence, beginning with the earliest examples of spirit communication. Yet this simple act simultaneously facilitated the strength of their relations through their shared privacy. Barber's documents therefore serve as evidence of

465 Prior to this, she had worked with T.G. from 1928 to 1935, with Lillian from 1935-1944. "World Famous Home Circle's Physical Medium Passes," *Psychic News* (Aug. 17, 1963): 5.

466 Ibid.

467 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 53.

468 "World Famous Home Circle's Physical Medium Passes," 5.

belonging in the small, intimate group, while confirming their bonds amid a male-dominated field.⁴⁶⁹

Guarding sitters' privacy was therefore of the utmost importance, and it was made easier by the comparatively limited amount of attention that Barber's work garnered. This also helped them evade being made into a spectacle for observation by male scientists or used as a theme in popular entertainment. Tom Gunning identifies that these were the two most common ways men categorized women mediums after the Civil War.⁴⁷⁰ The privacy of Barber's circle also saved them from the scientific principles that investigators like French astronomer Camille Flammarion instituted to test the veracity of mediumistic skills.⁴⁷¹ As an independent researcher practising in the privacy of her home with close friends, Barber was able to assert her own procedures and guidelines for communing with the spirit world without the scrutiny or subjectification of the scientific male gaze.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, many of the leading, male psychical investigators of the early twentieth century divested the Victorian séance of its domestic memorabilia. With this, the séance room was moved from the parlour to a dedicated room that was stripped of plush furniture and decorative accoutrement, such as family photographs and albums, artwork and ornamentation, and collectable objects—i.e., the markings of stereotypical femininity.⁴⁷² They did this in favour of an austere laboratory, that in its depersonalized construction, could operate under strict, scientific standards. All conditions were thus controlled for the most consistent and efficient results, often at the cost of female bodies' being subjected to and objectified under the scrutiny of the male gaze.

In one of Barber's images from October 1st, 1947, viewers get the sense that the séance was conducted in an area of the house that was not solely used for the purpose of spirit communication (fig. 2). The Hamiltons' granddaughter Dorothy Bach recalls that

469 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer discuss how school photographs "serve as evidence of belonging that can become a powerful confirmation in shifting political circumstances, or in situations of war, persecution, or genocide," in "School Photos and Their Afterlives," in *Feeling Photography*, eds. Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 257.

470 Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations," 27.

471 For more on Flammarion's role in psychical research, see Serena Keshavjee, "Science and the Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in fin-de-siècle France," *Occulture*, Special Issue of *Aries*, 13, no. 11, ed. Tessel Bauduin and Nina Kokkinen (2013): 50.

472 See also Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 44.

this was Barber's living room.⁴⁷³ The room was not cloaked in the heavy, black drapery that was typically hung to help dampen light from the outside, and to help contain the energy generated by participants within a small area of the room, creating the "ideal" conditions for photographing psychic materializations.⁴⁷⁴ Such conditions included using infrared light during some proceedings, and in *Life's Purpose*, Patience Hope confirms that this photograph was the only one taken in this light.⁴⁷⁵ Marshall and another woman who has yet to be identified are seated around a small séance table, and to the left in the background, we see a dresser or credenza with a tall, glass vase full of flowers sprouting out from the top. Additional glass items of a smaller size are placed beside it, with subtle glimmers of light reflected upon them. They are hard to discern, however, for the flashbulb has primarily captured Marshall and the other woman who is seated slightly behind her. Long, dangling items are seen hanging from the wall, or a door, behind them, hardly visible in the dim background. Clearly, this séance was not conducted according to the psychical research practice that established the séance room as a separate, dedicated space. In his 1946 text, *The Invisible World*, British-born American psychic investigator Hereward Carrington asserted the need for psychic laboratories to study such materializations and their intrinsic laws and mechanisms.⁴⁷⁶ Here, it is evident that Barber's séance did not comply with such standards, and instead, it functioned more like the feminine, domestic spaces of the earliest Spiritualist séances.⁴⁷⁷

473 In email correspondence with Meyer zu Erpen, October 11th, 2021. It is unknown whether séances were always held in the same room of Barber's house, or if the dark drapery was not used for some séances. Dorothy Bach was not a circle member, but she knew Barber and had visited her home after the years of the Barber séances.

474 T.G. Hamilton explains the importance of conducting psychic experiments in complete darkness in *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival*, ed. J.D. Hamilton (Toronto: Macmillan, 1942), 9-10.

475 Patience Hope, *Life's Purpose*, (1951; reissued, London: Spiritualist Press, 1971), 7.

476 Hereward Carrington, *The Invisible World: Experiences Out of a Lifetime of Psychical Research* (New York: The Beechhurst Press, 1946), 7.

477 Most of Barber's photos show her group working within the confines of the heavily curtained séance room that she created within her modest home.



Figure 2: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 2/1, Unidentified female sitter with Mary Ann Marshall practicing automatic writing, October 1, 1947, photographed by Sylvia Barber

In figure 2, Marshall is at the foreground of the image, illuminated by the brightly cast light of the flashbulb, which reveals her opened and upturned eyes. Yet her trance state would suggest that she was physically present but psychically remote. Hamilton regarded deep trance conditions as putting conscious sensibility in abeyance.⁴⁷⁸ This means that despite Marshall's opened eyes, her visual sense was presumably blocked in the darkened room.⁴⁷⁹ She appears to be absorbed in the spiritual and interior spaces of her psyche, while her spirit control presided over and directed her bodily actions. Her hand rests on a piece of paper, onto which she pens a letter through automatic writing. This image underlines that conducting successful psychic experiments under the directive of male scientists was unnecessary, for a large teleplasmic hand controls Marshall's to pen the handwritten letter. She likely would not have been able to see this hand—perhaps

⁴⁷⁸ Hamilton, *Intention and Survival*, 44. This point is further elaborated upon by Hamilton when describing a teleplasmic materialization believed to show a miniature likeness of the English statesman W.E. Gladstone in the mediumship of Mary Marshall: "The fact that the medium on regaining normal consciousness at the end of the sitting, appeared to be wholly unaware that the flash had been fired, indicates that her visual sense must have been effectively blocked." *Intention and Survival*, 118.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

only felt its touch—as séances were typically held in complete darkness. This was because psychic forces were thought to be highly delicate, and ectoplasm was believed to be soluble in white light. Red lights and camera flashes were used when permitted to avoid potentially damaging spirit productions, inhibiting spirits’ faculty for functioning, and risking the well-being of mediums.⁴⁸⁰ Investigators, such as Carrington, operated under the premise that “physical and biological energies can only manifest themselves in darkness.”⁴⁸¹ Hence the camera was used not only to evince that disembodied intelligences were the source of voices, touches, or moving of objects that occurred within séance, but to also see psychic materializations.⁴⁸² And the ectoplasmic hand encompassing Marshall’s in this photograph illustrates that Barber’s circle successfully conducted their early investigations outside of the curtained séance room laboratory she later created.

Barber’s documentation reveals that she did not implement the same physical regulations of mediums’ bodies that earlier male practitioners had subjected them to. Control measures, such as stripping and inspecting their bodies before entering the séance room, tying their hands and legs to chairs with rope, tape, or wire, to keep them restrained and ensure they were not pulling hidden pieces of cheesecloth, cotton, or other materials from various orifices of their body, and confining them to a séance cabinet were regularly practiced after the scientization of the séance.⁴⁸³ There is no documentation, however, of Marshall undergoing the same rigorous examinations of her body in Barber’s group that had become standard in psychic experiments.⁴⁸⁴ Barber also did not invite outside investigators to attest to the psychic phenomena produced by her group. She thus conducted séance proceedings on her own terms, without adhering to such protocols.

480 Irving R. Gaertner, “The Acting Power of Light as a Disturbing Element in Physical Mediumship,” *Psychic Research* 25, 1 (1931): 3-4.

481 Carrington, *The Invisible World*, 30.

482 It is important to note that while the camera has historically been used to prove the existence of life after death, there may be other ways to see psychic materializations.

483 These are only a few examples of how male investigators created laboratory-like conditions in séance, and many more extreme and physically damaging measures were implemented as the norm. For example, Harry Houdini went so far as to build a large, wooden cage in which mediums would be locked during séance. When the medium’s hands or head came out from the openings on the sides or top, the hands would then be grasped by her investigators for the utmost control. Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 89.

484 And as she had undergone in T.G. Hamilton’s experiments. These standards are explicated more thoroughly in the second chapter of this dissertation. Also see Robertson, *Science of the Séance*.



Figure 3: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/5, Mary Meder, Mary Ann Marshall (with ectoplasm covering her nose and an ectoplasmic voice box hanging from her ear), and Sylvia Barber (photographer), February 1, 1950

The photograph in figure 2, as well as two others that were taken on February 1st, 1950 (fig. 3 & 4) show how Barber's séance proceedings did not adhere to scientific standards. In them, Barber, Marshall, and regular circle member and long-time friend Mary Meder are shown in the séance with a teleplasmic "voice box" hanging from Marshall's ear while in trance. Patience Hope explains that this "'voice box' was built up of ectoplasm (energy) drawn from the sitters and medium and was used by 'Walter' to speak through independently of the medium's vocal chords."⁴⁸⁵ This means that Walter used Marshall's voice to answer the questions posed in the Patience Hope books. And this voice box appeared without objectifying the women's bodies using the scientific regulations that pervaded the field, for these photographs also show that the women's hands and arms are unrestrained. Marshall's hand overlies Meder's. Marshall is seated between Meder and Barber, all with closed eyes. The vantage point of the photographs allows viewers to observe the full length of their arms, extended onto the table, where their hands intersect; Marshall's enveloping Meder's and Barber's enveloping Marshall's. The photographs reveal that their other hands are relaxed and free. The top portion of their legs are visible and similarly unbound. The women are liberated from the ropes and wires that so often tied female mediums to their seats. Barber's sitters were able to hold

⁴⁸⁵ Patience Hope, *Life's Purpose*, 6.

hands around the séance table. According to Hamilton, this acted as a “reserve” for the medium’s energy. Moreover, in the Hamilton séances, additional female sitters acted as auxiliary mediums for augmenting energy to the medium.⁴⁸⁶ As such, the group’s spirit control, Walter, often requested hands to be held in “chain formation” because it assisted in teleplasmic production.⁴⁸⁷ And while handholding was historically enacted to ensure control across all participants, this image demonstrates that the women trusted each other not to falsify results with their freed hands. These images also show that ways in which gender was conceptualized, embodied, and implemented through male investigators’ systematic management of mediums’ bodies was not necessary for positive séance results. The women in Barber’s circle were unencumbered by the dominating restraints of the psychical field, and subsequently practiced within it as self-governing investigators. The lack of rigorous protocols in Barber’s circle therefore granted the women the freedom and agency to practice psychic experiments on their own terms and without restraint—physically and metaphorically.



Figure 4: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/4, Mary Meder, Mary Ann Marshall (with ectoplasm covering her nose and an ectoplasmic voice box hanging from her ear), and Sylvia Barber (barely visible as photographer), February 1, 1950

486 T.G. Hamilton, “Some Physical Phenomena Observed with the Medium Elizabeth M.,” *Journal for the American Society for Psychical Research* 25, no. 9 (September 1931): 381.

487 Hamilton, *Intention and Survival*, 24.

Theoretically and methodologically detached from organizations and the male leaders who regulated them, Barber's circle gravitated toward the personal, emotional aspects of séance. The emphasis on positive actions and feelings is woven throughout the Patience Hope books and demonstrated by the regularity of their sittings and the publication of their findings. In *Life's Purpose*, when asked what brought him to the circle, Walter explained that all who attend receive and give help to others, even if only through the kindness and good thoughts towards others.⁴⁸⁸ In the foreword to the second book, *Life Continuous! Albert Tells His Story*, Patience Hope establishes this sentiment as well, writing:

It is our hope, in bringing forward this record before the public, that it will be of help in diminishing the fear of death by showing it to be the natural process that it is; and also, that it will help to bring to people a greater awareness of their thoughts and actions, and the effects of these thoughts and action on themselves and others while still on the earth and in the hereafter, thereby preventing the perpetration of untold misery by humans, one on another.⁴⁸⁹

In extending this compassion and communicating the "mission of the spirit world," the books are meant to teach humankind a better way of life, in which superstition, creed, and dogma do not exist.⁴⁹⁰ Walter clarifies that one should not be interested in the truth brought forth through the spirit world for "worldly gains or for one's own gratification;" but rather, "by gathering in a circle like this and letting your thoughts mingle with the other, you are doing a good work [sic]."⁴⁹¹ Imbued with positive affect, the texts aim to help guide people toward a peaceful existence.

Barber's circle extends the positive feelings of hope and compassion for humankind that they evoked in séance through informal, everyday language that is easily understood by general readers. The Patience Hope books were compiled to answer some of the most commonly asked questions about the physical and spiritual worlds by people of all faiths. And Barber's effort to distribute answers to these questions is evidenced in an article found taped inside a copy of *Appeal to Reason*, titled "But You Do Take It

488 Patience Hope, *Life's Purpose*, 19.

489 Patience Hope, *Life Continuous! Albert Tells His Story* (1956; reissued, London: Spiritualist Press, 1971), 6.

490 Patience Hope, *Life's Purpose*, 86.

491 *Ibid.*, 19.

With You.”⁴⁹² It primarily focuses on “one of the most famous spirit guides,” Walter, and his manifestations through mediums Margery Crandon and Mary Marshall.⁴⁹³ Barber’s circle is mentioned as Walter’s new channel for communications, as the “director of activities,” yet the citation also serves as an advertisement for their third book. It states that the text is “available from 550 Atlantic Avenue, Winnipeg, Man., Canada. Price \$1.50.”⁴⁹⁴ *Psychic News* included numerous classified ads for the Patience Hope books between 1952 and 1975. Some versions include a mini review by W.H. Evans that reads: “A very valuable little work.”⁴⁹⁵ And other Patience Hope articles are listed as featured pieces in *Two Worlds*.⁴⁹⁶ That Barber’s books were written about in an international newspaper extends her work beyond the private realm of her home circle to the broader public sphere. The advertisements demonstrate that the Patience Hope books were intended for a public audience, rather than scientific communities, which privileged critical, objective thinking over feelings.

Aligned with Spiritualist beliefs, Barber’s psychic evidence and séance proceedings were published by the Spiritualist Press in London, UK, and in Spiritualist newsletters, such as the National Spiritualist Association of Canada’s *NSA News Review*. Her group was concerned with helping those in need through spiritual knowledge, which placed its goals at odds with those of psychical research, namely the SPR. The SPR’s mandate was to investigate paranormal experiences under a purely scientific “methodological and administrative framework,” distancing itself from the Spiritualist movement.⁴⁹⁷ They also distinguished themselves from “old religious worldviews.”⁴⁹⁸

492 “But You Do Take It With You,” [source not identified, nd (ca. 1958)].

493 Ibid.

494 Ibid.

495 *Life’s Purpose* in *Psychic News* (May 31, 1952), *Life Continuous! Albert Tells His Story* in *Psychic News* (May 18, 1957), for example.

496 In total, *Psychic News* references texts by Patience Hope in 64 issues from 1952 to 1975. The Psychic News Bookshop began selling the Patience Hope books in 1972. The price for the books slowly increases to \$3.80.

497 Based upon the SPR’s history. There were prominent Spiritualists who initially welcomed the establishment of the SPR, though the society’s refusal to accept outside testimony of paranormal phenomena created a divide between these two groups, which subsequently stirred controversy within the SPR for what some (mostly Spiritualists) believed to be regulations too strict regarding proof. Some of its original members identified themselves as Spiritualists, though most of those resigned by the 1900s in preference for the London Spiritualist Alliance, because they believed the society was in opposition to survival. For more on the dichotomy between Spiritualism and psychical research and spirit photography, see the previous chapter of this dissertation.

498 See “Our History,” *Society for Psychical Research*, <https://www.spr.ac.uk/about/our-history>.

Conversely, Patience Hope explains that, “We do not pretend to be authorities on this vast subject but humbly offer out experience for those who are interested and those who are in need, in the hope that it will bring them some little help and comfort.”⁴⁹⁹ Barber’s circle proceeded with psychic experiments on their own terms, without employing purely scientific methods. The books are infused with the positive emotions that were evoked through spirit communication, as Patience Hope’s aim was to provide readers with the same guidance and consolation that the group received in séance. This included the uplifting feelings that their spiritual encounters invoked, and that are elicited through an affective engagement with the texts.

The positive emotions of the group are also demonstrated in a greeting card that is included in the Barber records. Dated May 17th, 1956 and addressed “To my wife on our anniversary,” hearts were drawn instead of O’s to symbolize hugs and kisses.⁵⁰⁰ This was written on what would have been Sylvia and Edmund’s 36th wedding anniversary. A copy of *Appeal to Reason* also contains handwritten messages of reassurance on the inside cover, which are addressed to Patience and read, “Our loving thoughts always with you,” signed “Hope, Omo, and the band.”⁵⁰¹ And below this: “Always standing by with you in this work till it is completed...!!,” signed “Faith and Friends.”⁵⁰² These notes are dated April 14th, 1958, the year of their final book, with “Victoria Hospital” also recorded, documenting that Barber was there for medical care when *Appeal to Reason* was published.⁵⁰³ The anniversary card and the penned notes suggest that these empathetic messages were sent to Barber in times of heartache and distress. They extend compassion and encouragement to her, while at the same time, they are representative of the ideas that the Patience Hope books convey. By putting forth this record of spiritual knowledge, the spirits and by extension the group, wished to absolve readers’ fear of death. They did this by validating that the body’s physical death is a natural progression that does not end

499 Patience Hope, *Life’s Purpose*, 7.

500 Source: Sylvia Barber’s photograph and card album, not yet deposited with University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections.

501 It is unknown how many copies were printed; and the copy I refer to here was digitized for me by Walter Meyer zu Erpen from a copy that Mary Meder’s daughter owned.

502 Patience Hope, *Appeal to Reason*, 2.

503 Ibid.

in the physical world; and that providing this information could help people achieve greater self-awareness about the impact of their thoughts and actions on themselves and one another.⁵⁰⁴ Barber's group hoped readers would find in these books the guidance and reassurance that they felt during séance.

Social Climate & Women's Freedom Within Séance

Proceeding from intense technological advances during the Victorian era, the period between 1870 and 1930 saw the interaction between photography and the occult at its most prolific.⁵⁰⁵ As noted in this dissertation's literature review, Cyril Permutt acknowledges the fluctuations in public and scholarly interest in supernatural photography, peaking first in the early 1860s and 1870s, then every 25 to 30 years with attenuations in between.⁵⁰⁶ Many scholars have also observed that interest in contacting intelligences from beyond the grave has historically peaked in post-war periods. R. Laurence Moore remarks that in the decades leading into the 1970s, a surge of publications about spirit communication and extrasensory perception was strongly supported by a North American audience, which correlates with the years when Barber's circle was active.⁵⁰⁷ In his history of the relationship between photography and paranormal psychology, Professor of photography Dr. Rolf H. Krauss suggests that this was because by the end of the 1920s, "there were no entirely new developments in the photography of paranormal phenomena."⁵⁰⁸ This aligns with Emily D. Edwards's correlation between periods of interest in spirit, psychical, and supernatural photography and intense technological developments and scientific discoveries.⁵⁰⁹ Psychic

504 As articulated by Patience Hope in the "Foreword" and by the spirit entity called Protector in "Protector's Note," both of which act as preface to *Life Continuous!*

505 Pierre Apraxine and Sophie Schmit, "Photography and the Occult," in Clément Chéroux, *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (Yale University Press, 2005), 13.

506 Cyril Permutt, *Beyond the Spectrum: A Survey of Supernormal Photography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 8.

507 R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

508 Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey* (Tuscan, Arizona: Nazraeli Press, 1995), 13.

509 Emily D. Edwards, "Possessed and Dispossessed by Mass Media," in *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Culture* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 16.

photography did, however, continue to be practiced.⁵¹⁰ Curator Andreas Fischer attests to this fact, writing that there was a continued belief in the possibility of “the beyond” materializing through photography in the hope of attaining its proof.⁵¹¹

In the 1930s, most women were not yet returning to the workforce that women first entered en masse during WWI, to perform work in jobs vacated by men who had gone to fight in the war. Women’s re-entry into the workforce would come later, during the 1960s. Normalized gender roles post-Depression and World War II still saw women in the private sphere as wives and mothers, and husbands in the public sphere as breadwinners. Print media from this time, however, points to the move toward women’s reintegration into the social sphere.⁵¹² In what Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau deem an “interregnum period,” the extended post-war adjustment that lasted until the mid-1950s re-established a sense of security, shaped by a nostalgia for the past. This was timely for practising spirit communication in the home.⁵¹³ Domesticity was still one of the primary post-war forces impelling Canadian families to return to the feminine-domestic, masculine-provider societal structure in pursuit of a better life.

In this period of uncertainty, many aspects of society returned to the pre-war status quo, yet women had also proved their abilities in fields outside the home, leaving them with more choices than they had before.⁵¹⁴ As many of them had entered into volunteer or employment positions while the men were overseas or labouring long hours during the war, the praise women received for their work likely raised the confidence of

510 Lillian Hamilton’s investigations until 1944 are a notable Canadian example of photography of teleplasmic phenomena. In the United Kingdom, Ada Emma Deane practiced spirit photography until 1933, and Stavelly Bulford practiced from 1921 until after the Second World War. In the 1960s, several Spiritualist circles formed in the English town of Chelmsford and included spirit photography in their activities. Also see this dissertation’s final chapter for a discussion of contemporary iterations of spirit photography by American photographer Shannon Taggart and Irish artist Susan MacWilliam.

511 Andreas Fischer, “‘The Most Disreputable Camera in the World’: Spirit Photography in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century,” in *The Perfect Medium* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art), 78.

512 This history is of course more complex than stated here and beyond the scope of this chapter. For more on labour relations and women’s enfranchisement post-WWII in Canada, see Jeff Keshen, “Revisiting Canada’s Civilian Women During World War II,” *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 30 (1997): 239-266; and Ruth Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History,” in eds. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Randall, *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): 91-92.

513 *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-War Canada, 1940-1955*, eds. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

514 Keshen, “Revisiting Canada’s Civilian Women During World War II,” 242.

women, as historian Jeff Keshen suggests.⁵¹⁵ Barber worked as a hairstylist from her home at 550 Atlantic, from at least 1938 and throughout the 1940s and 50s, before retiring.⁵¹⁶ And based on post-war provisions and her husband's employment afterward, Barber presumably supported herself after his death.⁵¹⁷ Her lifestyle fits with Canada's postwar economy, wherein women were encouraged to balance their traditional domestic roles with the modern, civilian roles now afforded to them. Keshen further observes that women's activities, and therefore their public status, was elevated with the creation of a Women's Division in the Department of National War Services in June 1940, for example. With this, the public recognized women's capacity for physical labour through various activities that were perceived as nonthreatening to men.⁵¹⁸ This contributed to a wider acceptance of women's independence, untethered from their dependence on husbands to provide economic and social stability.

Keshen's report, however, also points to the confines implicit within postwar ideology. The public roles now accessible to women were those equated with femininity and domesticity, thus hindering their ability to stray from the pre-war status quo and enter into a "masculine" workforce. Yet because, as feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz explains, "freedom is located in acts rather than subjects," the significance of women's individual activities merits recognition and consideration.⁵¹⁹ Grosz problematizes the ways that language is used in feminist and political discourse for identity formation in an effort to

515 Keshen, "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II," 245.

516 Prior to this, records indicate that Barber worked as a dressmaker at age 27, residing at 330 Hargrave St., Winnipeg. The directory in 1951 states that she was the widow of Edmund, and subsequent Henderson's Metropolitan Winnipeg Directories similarly list her at this address as his widow, without mention of occupation. She resided at 550 Atlantic from her marriage to Edmund until she moved into a nursing home in December 1977. The Henderson's Winnipeg City Directory reveals that Barber was a hairstylist working from her home from at least 1938 until 1944. Meyer zu Erpen indicates that the years during which she worked as a hairstylist from her home could be confirmed by consulting additional directory years.

517 Edmund received \$353.98 in January 1919 for 153 days of service in the Canadian military after being discharged on November 23rd, 1918 and deemed medically unfit for further service, based on his nephritic condition. This did not, however, prevent him from returning to work as a salesclerk. This gratuity would have been approximately one year of income, based on the average Canadian income in 1919. The Pension Act of 1919 allowed eligible disabled veterans to apply for a percentage of relief based on medical assessment and individual application. For able-bodied veterans—which Edmund was likely considered—the Board of Pension Commissioners for Canada offered only limited help, including a small allowance for clothing, but the war service gratuity was the main benefit at the time of his discharge. Considering Edmund's physical condition, and reportage of his gratuity, he presumably did not receive a pension or further income from the military, likely leaving Sylvia with minimal finances.

518 Keshen, "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II," 244.

519 Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," 148.

develop a concept of life in which the capacity for action is not negated by unfair constraints, oppression, or coercion, to instead, create positive understandings of freedom as action; as a “freedom to,” rather than a “freedom from.”⁵²⁰ The women’s decision to participate in the field of psychic studies can be understood as an expression of freedom in itself. This concept of freedom is furthered by Barber’s leadership in séance and her skills in photography and darkroom development. In the forward to *Life’s Purpose*, Patience Hope writes, “The photographs were taken by Mrs. S. Barber with ordinary cameras using roll film and floodlight...All films were developed by Mrs. S. Barber in the presence of one of the sitters.”⁵²¹ This passage confirms that she was indeed the group’s photographer and did not rely on others for documenting her experiments. Her photographs elucidate her skilled proficiency with the camera. Within the Barber records, there are séances that have been captured from four or five different angles, illustrating that Barber used numerous cameras to document the group’s proceedings during séance.

The activities of Barber’s circle can thus be comprehended as a freedom to practice psychical research, integrating their Spiritualist beliefs, unconstrained by, and independent from, the male-dominated and scientized communities that dismissed religious viewpoints. This understanding is not simply about being, or taking action, against something, but positively acting for oneself.⁵²² The notion of “for-ness,” as Ahmed describes it, opens up a space in which to (re)consider and (re)interpret Barber’s practice, unhinged from the negation of male-dominated practices, and with an understanding that it was for her own purposes and interests. As such, her connection to the spirit world facilitated her agency, for, as Grosz writes, “freedom is not a transcendent quality inherent in subjects but is immanent in the relations that the living has with the material world, including other forms of life.”⁵²³ The space that the séance provided was therefore significant for the women’s ability to exercise authority over their experiments, including their means of documentation and where and in what form they

520 Grosz, “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom,” 141.

521 Patience Hope, *Appeal to Reason*, 7.

522 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 178.

523 Grosz, “Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom,” 148.

were disseminated. Barber managed the sale of the Patience Hope books and did so privately out of her own home.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the male/female, thinking/feeling binaries that permeated the early twentieth-century psychic field effectively marginalized women practitioners.⁵²⁴ And while many of them were likely dissuaded from participation in the field by such categorical oppression, Barber's group harnessed the feminine aspects of séance that earlier male investigators stripped it of. Rather than distancing themselves from, as Robertson explains, "embodied, subjective, and often effeminized forms of religious fervour or sentimental emotion,"⁵²⁵ the women subverted the negative connotations surrounding these qualities by (re)integrating them into their practice. Robertson further maintains that the men built "an image of themselves that reflected a commitment to rational and impersonal paranormal experimentation,"⁵²⁶ which also echoes what historians Lorraine Datson and Peter Galison refer to as the "scientific self."⁵²⁷ This term describes the ways that investigators presented themselves as the "perfect" individuals for conducting a spiritualistic science, wherein male investigators were able to assert their authority through the same patriarchal hierarchies that already existed, and subsequently uphold them.⁵²⁸ Thus, rather than allowing themselves to be structured as passive, weak subjects to be scrutinized under the male, scientific gaze, Barber expressed her freedom by forming a small group of women to explore psychic experiments within the privacy of her home.⁵²⁹

She established her status as the lead investigator, photographer, darkroom technician, and writer by integrating the "feminine" characteristics that were perceived as beneath thought and reason into her practice.⁵³⁰ In this way, she effectively defied the

524 This is in reference to psychical research as distinguished from Spiritualist practices, as explained above and in chapter two of this dissertation. Few records survive, however, of Spiritualist groups in Canada.

525 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 23.

526 Ibid.

527 Lorraine Datson and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 191, 198-205.

528 Ibid.

529 Beyond Barber's photographs, little is known about the physical structuring, organization, and characteristics of this space, as it has not been documented in the way that the Hamiltons' séance room was.

530 This notion is adapted from Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. For a more detailed analysis of it within women's spirit photography, see chapter two of this dissertation.

rational, objective, masculine identity associated with psychic researchers. As a result, she simultaneously resisted the binaries between secular and spiritual perspectives that permeated the field and under which male investigators practiced. Barber thus infused the séance with her Spiritualist beliefs and captured feelings of amiability, affinity, and affection amongst participants that her more subjective approach allowed for.

Women's Familial Bonds: The Familial Gaze & Collective Memories

Independent from the restraints of male investigators, Barber used the support of her home circle to explore the emotional, spiritual aspects of séance. Returning to figure 1, this photograph was taken during a séance on October 1st, 1947, and it depicts Mary practicing psychic writing under spirit control, while in trance. The image does not show the women's faces nor bodies, but it is instead focused on the séance table and their hands atop it. While the purpose of their continuously held hands has been explained above, the necessity and significance of this act is also an affective trigger for reading the photographs through Hirsch's lenses of family photography.

As described by Hirsch, the familial gaze fosters and shapes our relationship to collective memory. This is the notion that when viewing photographs, audiences can adopt the memories that have been captured in them as their own through the familial gaze. In this way, the explicit subject matter of Barber's photographs is less relevant than the active engagement of looking; ideas about familial bonds, affinity, and the emotions evoked by them can be adopted—and thus adapted—by anyone when viewed through the lens of the familial gaze. In figure 1, the hands of the three women are shown gently resting across the small séance table; Marshall's hand holds a pen while writing a letter, and the other two reach their arms out toward each other with overlapped and intertwined hands. This simple gesture is evocative of the connectivity amongst the women, their trust in, and comfort with, one another, as they sit together on the right side of the table. Viewers cannot see who they are, yet indexicality of the image is unimportant, because the familial gaze is meaningful by way of its relatability. This simple gesture is universally understood as one of amiability, intimacy, affection, and care. And as Hirsch explains, we can comprehend family photographs and their content not solely through their indexical implications, but rather, through their iconic and

symbolic value.⁵³¹ Thus, the women's held hands can be read as a symbol of connectivity and attachment; attachment to one another, and to a world we cannot see, but can infer through an affective engagement with the photograph.



Figure 5: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/6, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm) and Sylvia Barber (photographer), April 25, 1950

Barber's photographs can also be read as icons of loss for depicting the deceased. Yet these materializations are often hazy and mystifying in their appearance. Dr. Ellis T. Powell, British barrister, journalist, and Spiritualist, suggested in 1920 that psychic photographs often have a flat quality to them because they are a "picture of a picture." He explains this as follows:

In spirit photography the unseen intelligences project the figure onto a psychic screen, and it is *this* which is photographed. That is to say, we photograph the spirit film picture, not the person represented on the film.⁵³²

As such, blurry compositions of spirit return, as the group understood them, operate within Hirsch's framework as "icons of untimely death, icons of mourning," rather than as indexical referents.⁵³³ For instance, in the photographs taken on April 25th, 1950,

531 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 258.

532 Dr. Ellis T. Powell, "Our Soldiers in the World Beyond: Notes on the Address Delivered by Dr. Ellis T. Powell at York on October 27th, 1918," *Light* xxxviii, no. 1977 (November 30, 1918): 379, in Lisa Morton, *Calling the Spirits: A History of Seances* (London: Reaktion Book, 2020), 216.

533 Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 260.

Mary's spirit control, Walter, is exhibited in the form of a teleplasmic mass that appears attached to her face (fig. 5, 6, 7). The photographs show the teleplasm from various angles and perspectives to capture his face in as much detail as possible. This method was used by the group to validate the objective reality of the teleplasm in the séance room. Figure 5 shows Barber as the photographer, snapping the photograph with the camera's remote in her left hand, while seemingly bracing herself for what is to come, or what is unknown. She is the focal point of this image, with Marshall slightly blurred in the background, beyond the lens's focus. The teleplasm is similarly unclear, contrary to its representation in figure 6, which was taken with another camera from a different angle. It is zoomed in and closely cropped to capture the essence of the ethereal materialization of Walter's face. This is the sharpest image of him, in which he appears focused and intense. He appears shrouded in fluffy, cloudy ectoplasm encircling his face, but covering his mouth. Walter's gaze is fixed directly at the camera, meeting his viewers' eyes and creating a direct connection to, and engagement with them, thereby connecting the photograph to its viewers. As archival documents, the photographs serve as "incontrovertible evidence of past existence and previous acceptance," to borrow Leo Spitzer and Hirsch's phrasing.⁵³⁴ These photographs also suggest an assertion of his continued existence after physical death and his recurring presence in séance. Walter serves as a reminder of loss, yet at the same time, as a channel for transmitting the hope and consolation that Barber's group sought. He becomes a powerful affective trigger, mediating viewers' engagement with the photograph, and carrying the emotive ephemerality of this moment in time and space, as it has been encapsulated by the camera.

534 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "School Photos and Their Afterlives," 257.



Figure 6: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 12, Item 1/1, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm), April 25, 1950 (enlargement reversed and cropped from photograph in Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/9), photographed by Sylvia Barber



Figure 7: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 15, Folder 23, Item 1/1, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm) and Sylvia Barber (photographer), April 25, 1950 (double exposure)

Returning to the photograph's mystical appearance, figure 7 is obscured as an accidental double exposure. Marshall and Barber are seated side by side with their hands together on the table, which also has paper and pens on it for automatic writing. Each woman appears displaced in space, as their images have been twice imposed onto a single frame, almost as a mirage. Such a depiction emphasizes the discontinuity between past and present time, highlighting the camera's inherent "temporal belatedness."⁵³⁵ This is unlike traditional family photographs that diminish gaps in time and facilitate continuity between the moment the photographs were taken and the moment they are viewed. Barber's accidental double exposure disorients and slows viewers' perception, which simultaneously disrupts the viewing process and the familial gaze. Much like the double exposures discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation, this photograph is jarring upon first glance. Yet unlike Lillian Hamilton's double exposure, Barber's does not depict multiple times and spaces, but rather, the same séance captured seconds apart. This creates a familiar, yet perplexing, composition that acts as an affective trigger, drawing viewers into the image and the moment it captures, and evoking a sense of disbelief. This composition also creates a disjuncture between this photograph and the others in the series, which demonstrates how her photographs can simultaneously operate within, yet interrupt, the familial gaze. As an icon of loss, it nonetheless contributes to collective memory.

Women's Practices: Freedom & Consciousness

The group's documented psychic materializations can further be read through Grosz's theory of freedom. According to Grosz, freedom is immanent within the relations one has to the material world, and to other life forms.⁵³⁶ And because freedom is located in acts, rather than subjects, then the effectivity of action is greatly structured by one's ability to advance matter for one's own interests and purposes.⁵³⁷ In conjuring intellectual entities, as the group purported to do, Barber and her sitters were effecting action within the

⁵³⁵ The term "temporal belatedness" is used by artist Christian Boltanski to describe his work in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "School Photos and Their Afterlives," 263.

⁵³⁶ Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," 148.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

séance room, as evinced in Marshall's automatic drawings and writings, and Barber's photographs. In this way, Grosz's "matter" can be read as the "vital energy" that early psychic researchers, such as Flammarion, theorized as matter, form, thought, and life.⁵³⁸ He writes that these "are all one," and that they are the force responsible for psychic energy and teleplasmic materializations.⁵³⁹ Evidence of this force is ubiquitous throughout the universe:

In reality, there is only one principle in the universe, and it is at once intelligence, force, and matter, embracing all that is and all that could possibly be. That which we call matter is only a form of motion. At the basis of all is force, dynamic and universal mind or spirit.⁵⁴⁰

Forces of energy, or matter, were believed to be produced in séance through the simple act of, as Ann Braude describes, "joining hands in dark rooms and calling on the spirits to speak."⁵⁴¹ Such invisible and immaterial forces are that which Barber claimed to have materialized and been captured photographically within her circle. From this, we can understand the women as advancing their autonomy as agents of freedom by harnessing the power of mediumship, and by projecting the energy conjured within séance into the form of teleplasm and automatic writing. Barber's documentation illustrates her ability to engage with matter, here in its spectral form, via the most widely used visualizing technology of the mid-twentieth century. According to Robertson, the camera was:

unlike the fallible human eye, [and] provided the most reliable rendering of the otherworld. Not only was the mechanism untouched by human emotion, but it could also reveal what evaded the regular ocular senses.⁵⁴²

The camera was thus regarded as the most powerful tool for validating psychic phenomena, and Barber's technical aptitude with it demonstrates her agency within the psychic field.

538 Camille Flammarion, *Mysterious Psychic Forces: An Account of the Author's Investigation in Psychical Research, Together with Those of Other European Savants* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Co. 1907), 429.

539 Ibid.

540 Flammarion, *Mysterious Psychic Forces*, 429.

541 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1989), 23-24.

542 Robertson, *Science of the Séance*, 116.

According to Grosz, the outcome of one's choices are always unknown, for the expression of freedom is correlated with possibilities of action. Thus, freedom is the choice to act within life, which she conceives as consciousness that is projected onto materiality. This is akin to séance activities, for the type or form of emanations that were generated within it were invariably indeterminate. Yet the mediums' capacity to enter into trance was the necessary component for spirit communication and resulting documentation, which was predicated on their willingness to enter trance states. As such, the active decision to allow entrancement and to participate in séance activities facilitated the women's agency. More specifically, I apprehend the group's publication of their investigations as a way to mobilize their freedom and autonomy as active agents in a male-dominated field, particularly as women were not extended the same respect, nor granted the same opportunities, as men in the mid-century psychic field. The camera was a vital tool for making permanent supernormal manifestations—as markers of successful séance results—and for immortalizing the medium's state of consciousness as an act of choice and freedom, exemplified in the Patience Hope books.

Viewing Barber's documentation also opens up new interpretations through Grosz's framework of freedom as transformative. She writes:

It is not that subjects are or are not free; rather, actions, those undertaken by living beings, may sometimes express such freedom. Freedom is a matter of degree and characterizes only those acts in which one acts with all one's being, and in the process those acts become capable of transforming that being.⁵⁴³

Entering into trance, as an act of choice, transforms the mind. Dissociation occurs as the conscious mind is suppressed to allow the medium to receive communications from discarnate entities.⁵⁴⁴ Returning to figure 2, which depicts Marshall in trance, the image can be read as an expression of freedom, for a medium's body in this state becomes overtaken by the communing spirit. And the ability of a medium to go into trance and perceive spirit entities is an act that involves all sitters to participate fully, "with all one's being." As discussed in the previous chapter, all attendants must be attuned to positive feelings for successful results, and any negative thoughts or scepticism could lead to

543 Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism, and Freedom," 147-148.

544 "Glossary," *Society for Psychical Research*, <https://www.spr.ac.uk/research/glossary>.

failure, or a lack of psychic manifestations.⁵⁴⁵ Together, sitters collectively contributed to the medium's entrancement which facilitated the production of psychic phenomena. Barber's practice can thus be considered within Grosz's theory of freedom for transforming the séance room into the ideal conditions for facilitating spirit communication and psychic materializations through sitters' active creation of a positive atmosphere.

The relationships that were forged between physical and ethereal beings within séance is another way the women expressed freedom; the freedom they enacted together through their relation to each other and to other life forms, such as Walter, for the greater purpose of effecting positive change in the material world. Art writer Olivia Laing reflects on the notion of freedom in prefacing her collection of essays, which are united around themes of resistance and repair. In looking through the past, she seeks resources and ideas that can be sustaining in the present and the future. Laing is interested in how an individual can find a freedom that not only sustains them, but that is shareable and not dependent on oppressing or excluding others.⁵⁴⁶ As a small, independent group, the women in Barber's circle reflect Laing's inquiry into a type of freedom that enlivens, rather than stifles. The group possessed freedom in their séance ritual without relying on the suppression, omission, or denunciation of others. They instead used their investigative findings to bring forth awareness to humankind by sharing the insights they gained. In doing so, they reveal to us the spirit world and the celestial knowledge it provides.

Conclusion

Sylvia Barber's photographs illuminate the significance of psychic photography as a meaningful practice to Canadian women. Practising independently from male-dominated institutions, Barber's home circle provided her the space in which to practice Spiritualist beliefs after enduring the death of her second husband. The group published three books detailing the séances that she held in her Winnipeg home between 1947 and 1958. They

545 This notion of "attunement" is informed by Martin Heidegger and Sara Ahmed's reading of his theory. See chapter two of this dissertation for a discussion of this concept.

546 Olivia Laing, *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), 6.

are intended to provide hope and reassurance to readers by providing answers to questions about the loss of physical life and the spirit world.

This chapter has conceptualized Barber's practice, and her séance documentation, throughout Hirsch's framework of family photography. I have shown how the trust amongst the women, and the intimacy of their small group, helped forge familial bonds that contributed to the success of their investigations. I have suggested that the photographs can be viewed as icons of loss, grief, and sorrow, yet also joy, consolation, and comfort that contribute to collective memory. This is the notion that audiences can adopt the memories on film as their own through the familial gaze, and through their relatability to the subject matter. Within this framework, the symbols they represent and the emotions they evoke become more important than the subject matter they depict. Understanding Barber's images in this way expands the notion of family photography through the familial gaze.

This chapter has also considered the gender conventions of this time for investigating Barber's agency. I have understood the women's freedom through their choices to act, rather than as an inherent quality, which has allowed me to understand the contributions this group makes to Canadian, photographic, and women's histories. In this way, Barber's home circle can be understood as a way for the women to practice psychic experiments and participate in the masculinized field, thereby granting the women agency. Barber's photographs highlight that the women conducted experiments on their own terms, without objectifying mediums' bodies, while producing what they concluded to be psychic manifestations. This is significant for reinforcing the status of medium as having the autonomy and power to enact freedom.

This positive, feminist perspective opens up new ways to understand Barber's practice within her sociocultural circumstances, and to interpret her psychic documentation. I have argued that the Barber records are representative of the healing and guidance that the women found within this circle, and that they can be read as a vessel for comprehending her agency in mid-twentieth century Canada. This chapter has illuminated Barber as a skilled photographer in her own right, as well as a darkroom developer, séance leader, psychic investigator, and writer who has made a unique contribution to photography.

Appendix

Figure 1: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 2/4, Medium Mary Ann Marshall practicing automatic writing, October 1, 1947, photographed by Sylvia Barber, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524264>.



Figure 2: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 2/1, Unidentified female sitter with Mary Ann Marshall practicing automatic writing, October 1, 1947, photographed by Sylvia Barber, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524258>.



Figure 3: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/5, Mary Meder, Mary Ann Marshall (with ectoplasm covering her nose and an ectoplasmic voice box hanging from her ear), and Sylvia Barber (photographer), February 1, 1950, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524093>.



Figure 4: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/4, Mary Meder, Mary Ann Marshall (with ectoplasm covering her nose and an ectoplasmic voice box hanging from her ear), and Sylvia Barber (barely visible as photographer), February 1, 1950, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524122>.



Figure 5: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/6, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm) and Sylvia Barber (photographer), April 25, 1950, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524013>.



Figure 6: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 11, Folder 12, Item 1/1, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm), April 25, 1950 (enlargement reversed and cropped from photograph in Box 11, Folder 13, Item 1/9), photographed by Sylvia Barber, <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524071>.



Figure 7: UMASC, PC 12, A79-041, Box 15, Folder 23, Item 1/1, Mary Ann Marshall (with Walter Stinson miniature face in ectoplasm) and Sylvia Barber (photographer), April 25, 1950 (double exposure), <http://hdl.handle.net/10719/1524203>.



Chapter 4 - Gender Subversion & Frames of Time: Contemporary Iterations of Spirit Photography

Introduction

Spirit photographs are rooted in a deep desire to see the unseeable, to commune with the dead, and to prove spiritual existence beyond bodily death. But how are we to think of them in our current social, cultural, economic climate? Contemporary artists have been exploring such questions in recent years, with an increase in the number of practitioners probing the historicity of Spiritualism, psychical research, parapsychology, the occult and supernatural, and all of the subtopics within and around these subjects. The start of the twenty-first century saw an influx of exhibitions that presented a wide range of artists working within these topics, across North America and Europe. Scholars, historians, and artists have been extracting Spiritualist documentation from the archive, analyzing its relevance amidst the current moment, and producing rich bodies of works that harken back to the Victorian era, while exposing the ways in which our contemporaneity is similarly situated in a time of instantaneity—rapid technological advancements and increased secularization, and as I write this, a global crisis that is underlining the fleeting nature of life. As technology enhances the possibilities for connectivity amongst people, it simultaneously necessitates greater distance between us in the physical world. Contemporary spirit photography, and interpretations and (re)creations of its historical predecessors, highlights these parallels, while looking toward a future that appears at once uncertain, yet full of possibility as we as tread on shaky ground in the unknowability of life, together.

Iterations of contemporary Spiritualism are flourishing in mainstream culture with exhibitions, news articles, podcast and television episodes covering various activities and events that can be broadly categorized as Spiritualist topics. For instance, a recent article by *Business Insider* reviews the small hamlet of Lily Dale, New York, the now-popular Spiritualist community on the shore of Lake Cassadaga. Other mainstream newspapers, such as *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*, have similarly reported on the mediumistic practices at Lily Dale, shedding light on the fifty-two registered mediums who reside in the tiny hamlet, but also the “curious day-trippers,” the “truly bereaved,” and everyone in between who make up the twenty-two thousand visitors flocking to the

camp each summer. *The Washington Post*, *The New Yorker*, *Toronto Star*, and *PR Newswire* are among the network of media contributing to the widespread distribution of Spiritualism's principles and tenets, informing readers that Spiritualism was "more than a fad;"⁵⁴⁷ the latter of which most recently posted an article about how and where to book virtual appointments with psychic mediums—a stark contrast from the Victorian news outlets that shamelessly condemned Spiritualist practices.⁵⁴⁸ Spirit photography at this time most explicitly received severe and unforgiving criticism as it called in question the very nature of seeing and that which the still-new medium of photography could in fact capture.

Contemporary artists are continuing to explore the realm of the supernatural, yet they deviate from Victorian practitioners in their perspective; that is, the role of the spirit photographer versus the role of the artist. Artists today are exploring what the world of Spiritualism has to offer its proponents, and the merely curious, without approaching their work with an agenda to conclude whether or not supernormal phenomena and its documentation are authentic, or "real." As artist and photography critic Brad Feuerhelm recently remarked, "it isn't necessary that one believes what they are looking at, but that it represents a particular subset of human phenomenon related to spirituality, death and the way we desire to document these topics through art and photography."⁵⁴⁹

This chapter examines two contemporary artist-researchers who have combined historical and contemporary elements of Spiritualism and psychic research in their work. American photographer Shannon Taggart represents Feuerhelm's sentiment, as an artist who sought to illuminate current Spiritualist practices by immersing herself in its culture. For nearly two decades, she travelled throughout Europe and the US on a personal journey documenting Spiritualist communities. She amassed these investigations in her critically acclaimed volume, *Séance* (2020), which is the first comprehensive study on contemporary Spiritualist practices. It features 150 of her original photographs, beginning with her first visit to the Spiritualist community at Lily Dale, New York, in 2001. *Séance*

547 Cited from Casey Cep in "Why Did So Many Victorians Try to Speak With the Dead," *The New Yorker* (May 24, 2021), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/05/31/why-did-so-many-victorians-try-to-speak-with-the-dead>.

548 These are few examples in a plethora of articles on the topic that have been published by top media conglomerates.

549 Shannon Taggart, "Ep. 53 - Shannon Taggart," *Nearest Truth*, podcast, 40:39min., <https://nearesttruth.com/episodes/ep-53-shannon-taggart-on-photography-seance-spiritualist-ritual/>.

also features rare historical photographs and contributing texts by artists, collectors, curators, and writers, including a self-written introduction and a final section that offers unique stories to accompany each image. Irish artist Susan MacWilliam similarly adopts a neutral perspective in her equivocal works of photography, video, and installation that look beyond truth claims and instead, probe viewers to think about overlooked and obscure histories. For over twenty years, her work has been driven by her curiosity to more deeply consider the realm of the paranormal and super-sensory, while exploring her interest in the traditions of psychical research and its means of production. More specifically, MacWilliam combines her archival research findings from the Hamilton Family Fonds at the university of Manitoba with video documentation from interviews with prominent parapsychologists and psychical researchers to create her video *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* (2009). What brings Taggart's and MacWilliam's works together in this discussion is their sympathetic approach. Both artists have a strong desire to understand their subject matter and the original circumstances in which historical documents were produced to provide a clear picture of the study of the psychical and the spiritual. They achieved this by conducting firsthand research on site, not just interviewing, but by conversing with and often forming meaningful relations with contemporary mediums, investigators, and practitioners in the field.

This chapter therefore adapts an artist-as-researcher framework to analyze Taggart's and MacWilliam's books, photographs, and videos. Although not a new concept, "artist-as-researcher" has been applied, adapted, and expanded within such distinct yet overlapping disciplines as visual arts, education, ethnography, and social science. Scholars have explored this concept in an endeavour to demarcate the blurry, ill-defined category of research-based artist and what it might mean today.⁵⁵⁰ In relation to archival research in particular, curators and critics have applied various terms to identify

550 Scholars, researchers, educators, and artists also draw from much work by E.W. Eisner, N.K. Denzin, and L. Richardson for conceptualizing the term "artist-as-researcher." Texts include: Elliot W. Eisner, "The Promise and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation," *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 6 (1997): 4-10; Elliot W. Eisner, "What Artistically Crafted Research Can Help Us Understand About Schools," *Educational Theory* 45, no. 1 (March 1995): 1-6; N. K. Denzin, "The Art and Politics of Interpretation," in eds. N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 500-515 (New York: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994); Laurel Richardson, *The Art of Writing Inquiry*, eds. Lorri Neilsen, Ardra Cole, and Gary Knowles (Halifax, NS: Backalong Books and Centre for Arts-informed Research, 2001).

this research-based methodology within artistic praxis. Curator Mark Godfrey identifies key characteristics of the artist as historian, describing it as someone who opens up new ways of thinking about present conditions and the future by excavating historical documents.⁵⁵¹ It also refers to a methodology that allows creativity and freedom exterior to academic history without sacrificing its rigor.⁵⁵² Godfrey outlines a form of research that begins in the archive and leads the artist to follow one object of inquiry to the next, without knowing where they will lead or what conclusions will be drawn.⁵⁵³ In the introduction to MacWilliam's monograph, *Remote Viewing*, curator Karen Downey describes the artist's methodology as a "fieldwork approach, conducting social research among the international parapsychology community."⁵⁵⁴ As such, I analyze MacWilliam's video *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* by mobilizing these concepts to account for the multiplicity of approaches, methods, and perspectives that are unique to her practice, and to consider the connections she draws between the historical documents in the Hamilton collection and her present day interviews with psychical investigators. Following from Godfrey, this methodology "invite[s] viewers to think about the past; to make connections between events, characters, and objects; to join together in memory; and to reconsider the ways in which the past is represented in the wider culture."⁵⁵⁵

This framework is apt for analyzing Taggart's photographs as well, for her aim in *Séance* is to tell a story that inspires questions, rather than to prove or disprove its beliefs. She combines photographic indexicality with technical manipulation to blur the lines between physical and spiritual worlds, and to visually represent the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding Spiritualist praxis. As research artists, MacWilliam and Taggart insert themselves directly into their work and the environments in which this interpersonal, research-based methodology is facilitated, allowing them to create interpretive representations of their findings. Taggart and MacWilliam use lens-based

551 Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historia," *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 143.

552 Ibid.

553 Ibid.

554 Karen Downey, "Introduction," *Susan MacWilliam: Remote Viewing*, ed. Karen Downey (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), 15.

555 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historia," 143.

media to shed light on the mysteries of the supernatural world, and human curiosity about it, with a sense of intellectual inquisitiveness and respect for their subject matter.

Combining the artist as researcher framework with theories from visual arts, gender studies, and affect, I explore the processes by which Taggart and MacWilliam created their works. I align them with their Victorian predecessors to consider how women artists use the space of the spiritual and psychical as a creative outlet. I highlight the continuity between historical and contemporary spirit photography and how the artists play with the aesthetics of early spirit photography, visually merging fact with fiction in their subjective accounts, to draw viewers into the enigmatic moments they have captured and to elicit unique interpretations. In this way, their works encourage viewers to question the ways in which images are used for evidence and thus knowledge formation. From this, I argue that the position of artist as researcher grants them agency in the way that Hannah Maynard, Lillian Hamilton, and Sylvia Barber found agency in practices of spirit photography in varying and unique ways by challenging the gender conventions of their time. I further show that while there is much continuity between Victorian and contemporary spirit photographers, Taggart's and MacWilliam's practices challenge gender and societal expectations, in part, through their sympathetic approach.

By immersing herself in Spiritualist communities, Taggart had access to a broad array of practitioners, which allowed her to feature a proportionate amount of both women and men mediums in *Séance*. In *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, MacWilliam strategically dismantles gender roles by playing the role of objective, male psychical investigator. I argue that the research artist position allowed them to direct their studies in the way that male investigators did throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by adopting this role in their work. Additionally, she forms an affective relation with viewers by echoing the experience of conducting archival research through technical video manipulation, and in doing so, draws them into the video, and thus the moment, with her. In assuming these active roles, Taggart and MacWilliam are able to use the camera to form human connections across time and space, and to immortalize the fleeting nature of life—both physically and spiritually—through an affective engagement with the artworks. Such connections are intrinsic to Spiritualist beliefs and underpin the nature of psychical investigations.

I also consider how Spiritualist practices remain relevant in contemporary society; how the artworks invite viewers to engage with them spiritually, and in doing so, engage with their own spirituality. The viewing relationship is therefore significant for illuminating the connections forged amongst viewers, between artworks and viewers, and between subject matter and viewers. This is especially relevant in a time when all aspects of life are accelerated and the yearning for connection, stability, and reconciliation become heightened amid the demands of our social, cultural, economic climate. I understand Taggart's and MacWilliam's use of lens-based media as a way to open up a space where human connections can be formed, which is apt for interrogating how technology has come to stand in for physical connection.

The artists effectively conflate time and space by bringing the past into the present through technical manipulation of visual materials—both historic and contemporary. This strategy opens up a space in which viewers are invited to step into the moments they represent and question the mysteries of psychical and Spiritualist histories. Their works also then encourage multiple and varied interpretations of the experiences, communities, locations, séances, and Spiritualist and psychical objects they present in immersive photographs and videos that draw audiences into each moment captured. Taggart and MacWilliam further implore us to consider the factual accuracy of visual materials and the ease with which they are, and have been, accepted as truth. Additionally, their artwork highlights how the archive is indeed never complete, nor is it evidentiary documentation of historical facts. Rather, their works assume a subjective perspective that allows the artists to be present in their artwork, while showing that history itself is not fixed but fluid and contingent on our current readings of it.

This discussion is also influenced by cultural critic Olivia Laing, who proposes a concept of time that allows for criticality and emotionality. Reflecting on her experience writing about the tumultuous “political weather” in 2019, during which threats, crises, and catastrophes were emerging at a rapid rate, she writes:

What I wanted most, apart from a different timeline, was a different kind of time frame, which it might be possible both to feel and to think, to process the intense emotional impact of the news and to consider how to react, perhaps even to image other ways of being.⁵⁵⁶

556 Olivia Laing, *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), 2.

Laing's contemplation on time reflects my own consideration of how historical objects become (re)invigorated, (re)interpreted, and (re)created in a contemporary context through affective relations and engagements with them. This line of thought also defies the thinking/feeling binary, and its associated gender implications, allowing for new interpretations and meanings to emerge. The capacity to think critically about the conflation and displacement of time in spirit imagery is also then retained without leaving behind emotion. This chapter calls for a consideration of time; one that carries the past into the present in order to better understand our current moment. More specifically, this chapter conceives of contemporary spirit art as a means for finding new ways of understanding how knowledge and evidence were (re)produced throughout the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries, and for reckoning with the precarity of life and death, both then and now.

Contemporary Spiritualism & Literature: Public Reception

Numerous solo and group exhibitions have taken up various aspects of spirit photography and Spiritualism, positioning them within and along such disparate topics as the human psyche, the occult, science, magic, and portraiture.⁵⁵⁷ In addition to MacWilliam's archival research in Winnipeg, many artists have created plays and books of fiction and non-fiction based on the Hamilton collection. Some include: *Queer Spirits*, A.A. Bronson and Peter Hobbs; *The Elm Street Visitation*, Carolyn Gray; *My Winnipeg*, Guy Maddin; and *Widows of a Hamilton House: A Novel*, Christina Penner.⁵⁵⁸ A number of documents in the Hamilton collection have also been featured in Canadian exhibitions. For example, at the Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, SA, and at the University of Manitoba, where they were the focus of *Investigation of the Human Psyche: Spiritualist & Parapsychology*

557 For example, John Latour: *Therebefore and Hereafter*, Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain, Toronto, ON (2018); and *Occult and Art*, 80WSE Gallery, NYU (2016). For a more exhaustive list, see this dissertation's literature review.

558 A.A. Bronson, and Peter Hobbs, *Queer Spirits* (New York: Creative Time, 2011); Carolyn Gray, *The Elm Street Visitation* (Winnipeg: Scirocco Drama, 2007) (A play presented by Manitoba Theatre Projects); Guy Maddin, *My Winnipeg* (feature film, 2007); Christina Penner, *Widows of Hamilton House: A Novel* (Winnipeg: Enfield & Wizenty, 2008). Others include: Peter Aykroyd (with Angela Narth), *A History of Ghosts: The True Story of Seances, Mediums, Ghosts, and Ghostbusters* (New York: Rodale Press, 2009); Peter Cornwell, *A Haunting in Connecticut* (feature film, 2009).

Collections.⁵⁵⁹ Internationally, the Hamiltons' photographs have been featured in *Spiritus*, Magasin3 Stockholm Konsthall, Sweden (2003); *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* in Paris and New York (2005);⁵⁶⁰ and Princeton University's coinciding symposium *Dark Rooms: Photography and Invisibility*. These exhibitions shed light on the historical significance of the Hamilton collection, while highlighting the interest it has sparked in recent years.

Scores of critics have published reviews about these exhibitions. And while some writers use language that reflects their Victorian detractors, describing *The Perfect Medium* as "a very weird show" with many images in it that are "revolting little things," Taggart's and MacWilliam's work receives laudatory acclamation.⁵⁶¹ For example, Taggart's photographs are described by artist and writer Alex Jovanovich as "beautiful, tender, and frequently eerie, as images of wonder and faith;"⁵⁶² and by writer Olga Yatskevich as "enchanted and remarkable."⁵⁶³ The first major exhibition of *Séance* has most recently been displayed at Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.⁵⁶⁴ A selection of her *Séance* images have also been presented at The Gallery of Everything, London, UK, in the exhibition *The Medium's Medium* (2019). Similarly, Irish critic Jenny Cathcart cites that MacWilliam's work "channels spectral phenomena with beautifully eerie installations, images and sculptures."⁵⁶⁵ Interestingly, Taggart reviews MacWilliam's 2019 publication, *Modern Experiments*, writing that it

559 *To Conjure*, Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina, SA (2003-2004); and *Investigation of the Human Psyche: Spiritualist & Parapsychology Collections* (2018).

560 At Maison européenne de la photographie in Paris, France, and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

561 As described by Carol Armstrong in "'The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult,' Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York," *Artforum* (December 2005), <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/200510/the-perfect-medium-photography-and-the-occult-9862>.

562 Alex Jovanovich, "Invisible Worlds: Shannon Taggart's Clear-Eyed Pictures of Spiritualist Communities," *Bookforum* 26, no. 5, (Feb./Mar. 2020): 1.

563 Olga Yatskevich, "Shannon Taggart, Séance," *Collector Daily* (December 18, 2019), <https://collectordaily.com/shannon-taggart-seance/>.

564 The exhibition runs August 31st-December 17th, 2021. It is organized in collaboration with the Pensacola Museum of Art in Florida, where it will also be on display September 16th-December 4th, 2022.

565 Jenny Cathcart, "Susan MacWilliam Conducts Modern Experiments," *Culture: Northern Ireland* (September 12, 2016), <https://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/visual-arts/susan-macwilliam-conducts-modern-experiments>.

“expands parapsychology’s audience, inviting new spectators to enter para-history and investigate the unknown.”⁵⁶⁶

Taggart: Capturing the *Séance* in Representing Parallel Histories

Shannon Taggart’s Spiritualist project was a personal quest in search of the elusive substance, ectoplasm; the paradoxical energy force that is both material and spiritual. She first began researching this topic after hearing about a medium’s accurate account of her grandfather’s death that even she had not known about. At Lily Dale in 1989, Taggart’s cousin received a message during a reading with one of the community’s professional mediums in which a family secret was revealed that was later proved to be true. She was compelled to continue the research she had begun at the Spiritualist camp after her first summer visit for two main reasons: first, her realization that Spiritualism had been absent from the textbooks and histories she had studied—including those of photography—despite its influence on nineteenth-century art, science, technology, entertainment, and social reform; second, her suspicion that the mediums knew something about life that she did not. It was not until her first summer at Lily Dale that she became aware of spirit photography, and the ways in which photography was deeply imbedded within Spiritualism. This revelatory inquiry inspired her to start her own side project to further explore Spiritualism, especially since she became “disenchanted” with news and public relations while working as a successful photojournalist.⁵⁶⁷ Her summer research trip unexpectedly turned into an eighteen-year long project after realizing that she had only begun to scratch the surface of her research, which she says, took her “into unknown territory.”⁵⁶⁸

Taggart’s project culminated in her first book publication, *Séance*, in which she abandons her desire to categorize contemporary Spiritualist practices. She therefore did not set out with a thesis to prove or disprove, nor was her book produced out of skepticism or a wish to debunk its beliefs. Rather, she explains that her effort was to build

566 Shannon Taggart, “Modern Experiments, edited by Riann Coulter and Susan MacWilliam,” *Society for Psychical Research* (March 3, 2020), <https://www.spr.ac.uk/book-review/modern-experiments-edited-riann-coulter-and-susan-macwilliam>.

567 Shannon Taggart, “Photography and the Supernatural: Andy Sharp in Conversation with Shannon Taggart,” *Repeater Books*, February 26th, 2021, 1:00:37min., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kri5F-tqih8&ab_channel=RepeaterBooks.

568 Ibid.

on the “strange record of Spiritualism.”⁵⁶⁹ As such, *Séance* represents Taggart’s fascination with the lost histories of Spiritualism and spirit photography, presenting its various forms and associated activities—séance, ectoplasmic materialization, automatic writing and drawing, trance speaking, apported objects, orb photography. In the introduction, she writes: “The one thing I am sure of is that firm conclusions are unavailable, and that this uncertainty is an inherent part of Spiritualism’s nature.”⁵⁷⁰ Taggart makes it clear that she does not consider her photographs to be definitive proof of supernatural phenomena, even though viewers can observe photographs of ectoplasm in the text.

As a research artist, Taggart occupies the realms of both Spiritualism and contemporary art. She vacillates between them as a reputable photojournalist who has built a network of contacts who trust and admit her a high level of access to Spiritualist communities. She photographed them as an outsider who maintained critical distance, while simultaneously participating within them. She attended séances, past-life regressions, astral travel workshops, and spoon-bending classes, and she documented practices such as table-tipping, trance healing, and experiments in electronic voice phenomena (EVP). Taggart engaged with trained professionals and fellow students, all the while documenting the resultant phenomena, rather than simply recording them as an objective outsider.

When she began her project in 2011, Spiritualism was still largely held in disrepute, which provided a sense of freedom as to how she could represent its communities and practices intelligently and respectfully. After nearly two decades of research, Taggart asserts that Spiritualism remains hard to define. She explains that “Spiritualist congregations are fluid, and many who attend church services don’t claim to be Spiritualists.”⁵⁷¹ The same holds true for some mediums who have been professionally trained at Spiritualist institutions. For Taggart, its practitioners are defined as “those who have been inspired by nineteenth-century Spiritualist ideas and practices, and who

569 Taggart, “Photography and the Supernatural: Andy Sharp in Conversation with Shannon Taggart.”

570 Shannon Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm,” in *Séance* (Somerset, UK: Fulgur Press, 2019), 45.

571 *Ibid.*, 44.

respond to the boundaries set by NSAC or the SNU—whether they defy them or follow them.”⁵⁷² Spiritualism does not have a doctrinal text and there remain no standards for recording its manifestations. As such, there are innumerable ways for producing contemporary spirit photographs.

Séance encourages viewers to interpret the photographs without guidance or instruction from textual annotations. It is organized into eight chapters and organized by theme, Spiritualist activities, and the locations in which Taggart studied them; yet the large format photographs appear without captions or chapter delineations. Viewers must turn to the final section, “The Stories,” to read about each photograph’s unique narrative, as recounted by Taggart. This layout reflects Spiritualism’s privileging of vision above all senses. It prompts viewers to focus on the visual elements of the images and arrive at their own understandings without interference or distraction from text, and without informational assumptions or persuasion to view them a certain way. This layout also reflects how artist plays with the idea of stories. Taggart uses the text in “The Stories” to tell a different story; one that the photographs cannot, then “plays them together,” as she describes.⁵⁷³ The interplay between image and text effectively opens up greater possibilities for interpretation and deeper insight into the experiences and experiments she captured. Viewers can come to each photograph with a fresh conception of what they might mean and process the visuality of the images on their own terms. Yatskevich describes the images’ lack of annotations as “inviting us to follow its visual flow without interruption.”⁵⁷⁴ This approach adds to the mysteriousness of Spiritualism’s visual material, while facilitating Taggart’s goal of presenting a story that encourages questions.

Illustrating her first on-site research location, chapter one is about Lily Dale. This small community is also home to the National Spiritualist Association of Churches, making it the largest Spiritualist community worldwide. Taggart fell in love with it after her first visit and has since attended and documented many of the talks, programs, and workshops that are organized for its open season each summer. *Séance* opens with a

572 Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm,” 45. NSAC refers to the National Spiritualist Association of Churches in the United States, and SNU refers to Spiritualists’ National Union in England.

573 Taggart, “Photography and the Supernatural: Andy Sharp in Conversation with Shannon Taggart.”

574 Yatskevich, “Shannon Taggart, Séance.”

historical photograph of Inspiration Stump from 1930, which leads readers from Taggart’s introductory text to “The Photographs” section as they turn the page (fig. 1).



Figure 1: Message service at Inspiration Stump. Lily Dale, NY, c.1930

This photograph depicts a large group of visitors congregating around “the Stump,” which is considered to be a place of “great spiritual energy.”⁵⁷⁵ It is also viewed as Lily Dale’s open-air cathedral, consisting of an old, giant hemlock. Since 1898, mediums twice daily deliver hour-long readings known as “message services” to attendees. Its significance within the community is demonstrated by the large number of visitors who venture out into the woods late at night to practice meditation, mediumship, and orb photography around it. Taggart photographed her own late-night visit into the old-growth forest, Leolyn Woods in 2012 (fig. 2). Inspiration Stump is barely visible in her documentation of it, for the image is shrouded in black, save for a row of one of the many benches that surround this natural landmark. Viewers’ eyes are led from the lower left corner of the photograph, where the back row of benches catches her camera’s flash, up toward the right, where a low, white picket fence guards the Stump from behind, forming a line throughout the image that resembles a cathedral aisle. A few dimly lit trees are barely discernable in the background, forcing viewers to physically move in close to the photograph to decipher the subject matter and locate Inspiration Stump in the

575 Shannon Taggart, “The Stories,” in *Séance* (Somerset, UK: Fulgur Press, 2019), 223.

darkness. The focal point is the last row of benches—seemingly mundane—yet the act of leaning in to the image summons viewers to enter into the energized space, as visitors of Lily Dale do. In this way, viewers are drawn into the photograph, taking on the artist’s perspective of this scene and formulating meaning in the process of viewing this ephemeral, yet now-stabilized moment through the medium of photography. They are encouraged to immerse themselves in the affective experience of visiting this seminal location; to step into the Spiritualist community and follow Taggart’s journey throughout *Séance*, as it is poignantly situated as the text’s first, full-page illustration in “The Photographs” section.



Figure 2: Shannon Taggart, *Entering Inspiration Stump*. Lily Dale, NY, 2012

For this project, Taggart immersed herself in Spiritualist culture, participating in solo and group experiments. In doing so, she inserted herself into her work, giving presence to herself as a research artist. While waiting for a *séance* to be in England, 2013, she photographed an impromptu instrumental-transcommunication (ITC) and smoke-scrying experiment by herself (fig. 3). ITC is the practice of contacting spirits using any means of electronic technology to capture them. Smoke scrying also involves the subjective interpretation of the smoke patterns as they emanate from a source of fire—candle, campfire, fireplace—and observing the flames as they continuously morph into new configurations. ITC is a form of physical mediumship and also relies on spirits’

actions for affecting any associated objects and devices, including the camera. Taggart starred into a blazing fireplace and observed the smoke rising up into the chimney in front of her, while photographing the metamorphizing forms from a straightforward perspective. The image reveals the subtle contours of a face staring back into Taggart's, and by extension, her viewers'. She focused the photograph on the smoke, smouldering against the deep, dark fireplace. The stark contrast between the grey-white smoke and the black background creates a small but ghostly display of two shadowy eyes and a small nose with a gaping mouth. Materializing in this fraction of a second, the face likely disappeared as quickly as it appeared, for the blurry lines of the face are suggestive of motion—the smoke billowing from the fire, and the face transpiring, presumably from the ITC experiment. Here, the artist weaves her own narrative into *Séance* by including this solo experiment that was captured in a spontaneous moment of opportunity. The



Figure 3: Shannon Taggart, Instrumental-transcommunication and smoke-scriving experiment outside the séance room. England, 2013

photograph is at once representative of her unique experience with ITC and is an invitation for viewers to interpret it idiosyncratically, regardless of their familiarity with the subject. The lack of contextualization surrounding Taggart's photograph, including the close-up perspective, opens up a space to view the image from her perspective, creating a sense of closeness with her viewers as she draws them into her experience and her time. She leaves the questions of whether a face indeed materialized before the camera, or if the shapes and shadows of the smoke are simply, or coincidentally, in the form of a face open for interpretation. Taggart stakes no claim as to whether we are indeed seeing an otherworldly apparition or not. Her fluid methodology was advanced not to "evade historical representation, but to represent historical experience more adequately" in a contemporary context.⁵⁷⁶

Taggart's photograph fluctuates in meaning and across subjectivities, while calling into question the boundaries between real and unreal. Jane Connarty draws on Allan Sekula's writings about the archive to explain how the merging of fact and fiction subverts the objectivity of the archival image; how it calls into question the way we experience images today as a mediation of reality.⁵⁷⁷ Taggart captures this experiment subjectively, and in this way, subverts the objectivity of the image, without an explicit narrative. In removing narrative authority, Godfrey writes that "the viewer is encouraged to subject all conveyed information to questioning...the narrator insists on the contingency of knowledge, reminding the viewer that none of the stories told is objective or factual."⁵⁷⁸ Here the power embedded within conventional narrative perspectives dissolves as time becomes conflated and viewers step into the moment with Taggart by looking through her lens, as though they too are gazing into the fireplace. The photograph acts as a mediator between the artist and the viewer, and between her experience and theirs. Viewers can similarly gaze into the smouldering eyes in the hazy smoke of the fireplace and use it as an entry point to consider the boundaries between fact and fiction,

576 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," 145.

577 Jane Connarty, "Introduction," in *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*, eds. Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol, U.K: Picture This Moving Image, 2006), 9.

578 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian", 167.

life and death, materiality and spirituality. Here the photograph becomes a portal through which time collapses and spaces are created for the vast histories of ITC and smoke scrying to merge with the current moment. The image elucidates how historical consciousness can be brought to the fore through the medium of photography, while reminding viewers that the photograph and its meaning are never factual objects, but instead, are representations of subjective encounters and are always in flux. In this way, her images are detached from photographic “truth.” This distance, between real and unreal, allows viewers to connect with the ephemeral forces of Spiritualism by participating in the act of viewing in the way that Taggart participated in spirit communication. She creates a visual language of current Spiritualism that presents her experiences of it, while still allowing the photographs to be read subjectively and unguided. Elaborating on this process, Taggart explains: “Inspired by Spiritualism’s faith in the automatic process, in certain situations, I surrendered control to the camera.”⁵⁷⁹

Relinquishing control over the camera has been common practice within spirit photography and how many of its earliest practitioners worked. In the late nineteenth century, Spiritualist leader Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace declared the spirit photography was not necessarily a record of spiritual forces, but rather, a creation by them.⁵⁸⁰ Building on this psychic history decades later, T.G. Hamilton similarly theorized that metaphysical powers contributed to the success of his psychical experiments.⁵⁸¹ By the early twentieth century, spirit and psychic photographs had been understood as a joint effort with supernatural forces that used the medium of photography to communicate their continued existence to the living, rather than as mere records of the invisible spirits’ appearance.⁵⁸² Taggart similarly renounced control of the camera, while leaving room for spiritual phenomena to occur. In a review of *Séance*, Communications Officer and Council

579 Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm,” 48.

580 Quoted in Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,” in *Cinematic Ghosts: Haunting and Spectrality from Silent Cinema to the Digital Era*, ed. Murray Leeder (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 36.

581 T.G. Hamilton, “Research Shows Many Functions for Teleplasm,” Hamilton Family Fonds, MSS14 (A.79-41), box 15, folder 6, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg.

582 Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations,” 36.

member for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) Tom Ruffles observes this point as well:

Despite [Taggart's] technical skills, she occasionally found the camera capturing something anomalous, but was this to do with the (photographic) medium, or was she tapping into some psychic manifestation – as those who seek pro-paranormal explanations often assume technological imperfections are indications they have captured proof of the other world?⁵⁸³

This assumption, or question, often arises within paranormal photography, as the notion of necessitating collaboration with otherworldly intelligences has historically been accepted. In this way, Taggart's contemporary spirit photographs are methodologically produced under the same rubric as her historical predecessors, yet they are unencumbered by questions of authenticity and the need to provide valid proof of spirit communication. *Séance* effectively merges history with contemporaneity to illuminate this “underdocumented culture,” as Ruffles describes it.⁵⁸⁴

Working as a photojournalist, Taggart began this project using a straightforward documentary perspective. A number of her photographs evince this style, showing scenes from events that she participated in, and apparatuses and paraphernalia used in spirit communication, such as *séance* cabinets and psychically bent spoons. After realizing, however, that there was much ambiguity surrounding Spiritualism and its “unseen energies,” as she describes them, she soon questioned how to photograph the invisible.⁵⁸⁵ She adjusted her strategy accordingly to encapsulate, and potentially capture, the ephemeral, incorporeal impressions of spirit communication. She then embraced a more fluid approach to account for this uncertainty. She began to accept and play with “mistakes” in spirit photography classes, and she “welcomed chance and sought accidents.”⁵⁸⁶ This resulted in mesmerizing blurs of distortion and bright flashes and shadows that appeared in her experiments in long exposures and lights, evoking the presence of spiritual phenomena.⁵⁸⁷ Taggart effectively combined fine art and historical

583 Tom Ruffles, “The Joy of Mere Words,” *WordPress* (Feb. 8, 2020), <https://tomruffles.wordpress.com/2020/02/08/seance-by-shannon-taggart/>.

584 Ruffles, “The Joy of Mere Words.”

585 Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm,” 48.

586 Taggart, “Photography and the Supernatural: Andy Sharp in Conversation with Shannon Taggart.”

587 Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm,” 48.

photography with journalism and anthropology to create an individualistic methodology that is unfettered from academic tradition. Along these lines, Godfrey explains that adaptive approaches for historical representation such as this allow artists “to work with a methodological freedom and creativity without sacrificing rigor.”⁵⁸⁸ Taggart’s subjective approach, paired with openness for photographic experimentation and spontaneity, also lent her deeper insight into what she calls “psychological spaces.”⁵⁸⁹ She elaborates on this process:

Opening the shutter for long exposures—playing with light and time—I found myself closer to the psychological truth of the moment. I welcomed chance and sought accidents, manifesting some striking synchronicities as a result.⁵⁹⁰

In this way, the psychological-emotional truth of the photographs presides over their evidential truth. Simultaneously strategic and serendipitous, Taggart used the camera to open up the “invisible realities” of new worlds and interior spaces in ways that have previously been unexplored in spirit photography.⁵⁹¹ In departing from factual accuracy and adopting a more informal, interpretive approach, she could more clearly illuminate the ephemeral and often equivocal elements of Spiritualism and the internal processes of mediumship.

Taggart’s inventiveness for registering spiritual energy is illustrated in a photograph taken in 2016 at Arthur Findlay College in England (fig. 4). It depicts a group meditation experiment with five practising mediums, standing side by side to form a horizontal line across the image. The mediums appear at the bottom of the photograph, forming the focal point of the photograph. Our eyes are then drawn up and along the bright, translucent lines that appear to emanate from each person to the top of the frame. These lines give the impression that the photograph was taken using a long exposure. Taggart creates the illusion of a foggy or mystical atmosphere by photographing her subjects with a softened focus, that, combined with the slow shutter speed, creates a grainy texture on the surface of the photograph. This technique suggests the presence of

588 Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” 169-170.

589 Rebecca Horne, “Picturing the Invisible: Séance,” *lensculture*, <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/shannon-taggart-picturing-the-invisible-seance>.

590 Taggart, “Introduction: Spiritualism, Photography, and the Search for Ectoplasm.” 48.

591 Horne, “Picturing the Invisible: Séance.”

spiritual energy; and perhaps even the feelings evoked in the moment—feelings of connectivity to one another and to the spirit realm that is described in “The Stories” and evoked through Taggart’s aesthetic choices. One of the participants, medium Marc Lainhart, recalls that his clairvoyance was “triggered” during his “spiritual unfolding” fifteen years before this experiment.⁵⁹² His deceased father and cousin appeared to him moments before he found out that the latter had just committed suicide.⁵⁹³ Lainhart’s experience, articulated through Taggart’s text, becomes amplified by the visual elements of the photograph. Technical manipulation, composition, and lighting show photography’s potential to render his story, as told from an objective standpoint, a powerfully emotive encounter—between Lainhart and his family members, between Taggart and the mediums, and between the photograph and its viewers.

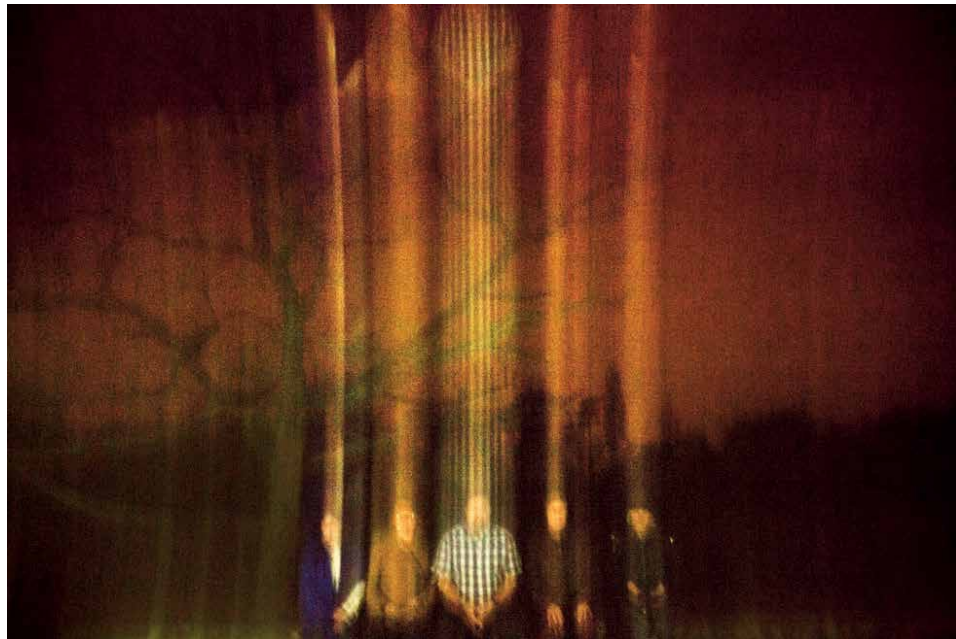


Figure 4: Shannon Taggart, Group meditation experiment with mediums Clare Haigh, Susan Barnes, Marc Lainhart, Elizabeth Cousins and Hayley McClean. Arthur Findlay College, England, 2016

The viewing process activates the emotive power of photography, for Taggart has foregrounded its mediumistic qualities of the photograph in figure 4 in a way that elicits both spiritual and mechanical interpretations. As such, the textual surface and radiating lines of lights evoke the psychological truth of the moment, as Taggart describes, which presides over the evidential truth of the moment. The story of this photograph does not

592 Taggart, “The Stories,” 261.

593 Ibid.

inform us about the experiment's results, but rather, Lainhart's "path to mediumship" is articulated as period of immense grief and pain.⁵⁹⁴ Taggart's methodology further elucidates Godfrey's notion that working within creative methodologies maintains artistic freedom without relinquishing cogitative precision and care. The artist's critical thought and meticulous attention to detail is here underscored by her extensive, immersive research into Spiritualism.



Figure 5: Shannon Taggart, Spirit photography class experiment—medium Annette Rodgers with spirit extras interpreted to be a Mongolian spirit guide and an aging Nikola Tesla. Arthur Findlay College, England, 2018

Séance demonstrates that aesthetic trends, such as disembodied faces floating alongside portraits of living subjects, have remained consistent in spirit photography. In another photograph that Taggart took at Arthur Findlay College in 2018, discarnate intelligences are purported to be encapsulated with medium Annette Rodgers (fig. 5). The photograph was taken during a class experiment after attendants were, as Taggart writes,

594 Taggart, "The Stories," 261.

“taught to pray for ‘spirit extras.’”⁵⁹⁵ Her description also shows that terminology, such as “spirit extras,” coined by the first spirit photographer William Mumler (1832-1884), is still relevant in current practices.⁵⁹⁶ Two human faces indeed appeared in Taggart’s photograph, and after much deliberation and initial dispute amongst students about the identification of the figures, one face was interpreted as Rogers’s Mongolian spirit guide, and the other as Serbian-American engineer and physicist Nikola Tesla (1856-1943). The debates surrounding the spectres’ identification is understandable, for while Taggart’s photograph has been developed in full colour, the effect of the overlapping faces produced an overall blurry composition. Taggart’s stories do not reveal how each photograph was produced. They instead focus on her experience with the subjects, locations, and the circumstances surrounding the events and the individuals captured. This photograph appears to have been taken using a long exposure, meaning that the slow shutter speed would have allowed more light to filter into the frame, while also providing more time for spirits to manifest before the shutter closed. The prolonged exposure time therefore allows the camera to register movement, such as the materialization of spirits or ectoplasm. Rogers sits in the traditional three-quarter portraiture pose, though her face is barely discernable in the photograph’s hazy appearance. Tesla’s face appears superimposed over her heart, with her spirit guide just above. He also looks the clearest, with his dark eyes deeply set in their sockets, staring straight into the camera. Fused together into a single frame, the three figures illuminate Taggart’s interest in the “melding of bodies”: physical bodies in class, mediums embodying spirits, and the merging of consciousness between them.⁵⁹⁷

The notion of melding with other bodies—both physical and spiritual—underpins the nature of spirit communication. And it is conceivably in these moments that spirits

595 Taggart, “The Stories,” 260.

596 William Mumler is historically known for being the “inventor” of the spirit photograph in 1862, though this fact has been deeply researched and contested by Felicity Hamer in her Master’s thesis. See “The Role of Women in Victorian-era Spirit Photography: A New Narrative in Art History,” Concordia University, 2015. This study has also been published in articles: “Helen F. Stuart and Hannah Frances Green: The Original Spirit Photographer,” *History of Photography* 42, no. 2 (September 2018): 146-167 and “Spirit photography: 19th-century innovation in bereavement rituals was likely invented by a woman,” *The Conversation* (September 29, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/spirit-photography-19th-century-innovation-in-bereavement-rituals-was-likely-invented-by-a-woman-164033>.

597 Taggart “Photography and the Supernatural: Andy Sharp in Conversation with Shannon Taggart.”

convene with practitioners to produce spirit photographs.⁵⁹⁸ Such images can thus be read as a (re)negotiation with past moments, histories, and lives, or to a reconciliation of these pasts with the present. Taggart’s story about this image discloses that one of the tutors, Kim Moore-Cullen, had discussed Tesla with a colleague right before class, and that “‘If [he] heard me, he would follow. Tesla’s about helping people. And he was an immigrant to America. It makes sense that he would appear for an American photographer.’”⁵⁹⁹ This image thus demonstrates that collaboration between the embodied and disembodied remains key to spirit photography. Its aesthetic qualities also highlight the parallel between historical and contemporary spirit photographs.



Figure 6: Cloud of ectoplasm with faces of the dead, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Ada Emma Deane, c.1930

Taggart used the camera to engage with Spiritualism’s history, and in doing so, evoked the aesthetic of early spirit photographs. The overlain apparitions in this image of

598 The collaborative nature of spirit photography is discussed in chapter two of this dissertation.

599 Taggart, “The Stories,” 260.

Rogers and the spirit extras, for example, are reminiscent of early spirit photographs, such those by Adam Emma Deane. She was the most productive photographic medium in the UK during the early twentieth century, aside from the sensationalized spirit photographer William Hope, who produced nearly two thousand spirit photographs between 1922 and 1933.⁶⁰⁰ Artist Tony Oursler features a discussion of Deane and her photographs in his contribution to *Séance*, in which he praises her as an exemplary historical figure who produced some of the most striking spirit images and collages of her time (fig. 6). Her success is attributed, in part, to the fact that she always had cases in which her spirit extras were identified as deceased people she presumably had not known, much like the figures in Taggart's photograph. For example, in figure 6, several faces are shown in Deane's photograph of ectoplasm, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.⁶⁰¹ The blurring and merging of faces are similar in Deane's and Taggart's photographs, creating continuity between the aesthetic of contemporary and historical images. Curator Andreas Fischer similarly observes how Taggart's images are reminiscent of historical examples, which also serve as blueprints for producing and documenting Spiritualism's materializations in modern day.⁶⁰²

Taggart's method can also be aligned with Deane's for her openness and spontaneity. In the early days of her photographic career, Deane fashioned an improvised darkroom beneath her kitchen table by curtaining off the space beneath it to extinguish light.⁶⁰³ Deane also produced spirit photographs during impromptu shoots, such as a 1921 gelatin silver print of Colonel Allerton S. Cushman, his wife, and the spirit of their deceased daughter Agnes.⁶⁰⁴ They made a last-minute request for a sitting with Deane, which at the time, authenticated her psychic gifts since she would not have had time to doctor the negative plates beforehand.⁶⁰⁵ Deane later worked at the British College of

600 This number includes her work with psychic researcher F.W. Warrick, which was published in *Experiments in Psychics: Practiced Studies and Direct Writing, Supernormal Photography and other Phenomena* (Boston: Dutton, 1939).

601 For more on the significance of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle within Spiritualism and spirit photography, see this dissertation's introduction and chapter two.

602 Andreas Fischer, "A Photographic Journey into the Realm of Spiritualism," in *Séance* (Somerset, UK: Fulgur Press, 2019), 36.

603 Andreas Fischer, "'The Most Disreputable Camera in the World': Spirit Photography in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century," in *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (Yale University Press, 2005), 76.

604 *The Perfect Medium*, 86-87.

605 *Ibid.*, 86.

Psychic Sciences, which was an important centre for producing and distributing spirit photographs,⁶⁰⁶ yet her improvisational darkroom and impromptu sitting show that spirit photographs can be produced in unexpected moments of creativity and inventiveness. This is similar to Taggart's open approach to her project, as evinced in her ITC experiment, which I conceptualized through Godfrey's description of "methodological freedom." By creating spontaneous photographic moments and giving license to photographic improvisation, Taggart's methodology aligns with Deane's. Both photographers anticipated variations in visual materializations, which gave them more freedom as to how they could represent Spiritualism's materializations. This is counter to how early twentieth-century psychical investigators insisted on scientific standardization in for conducting experiments. In this way, Taggart's photography is suggestive of early spirit photography, while effectively playing with its aesthetic.

Taggart's pursuit of ectoplasm proved successful, for chapter seven is devoted to "Ectoplasm as Archetype." It focuses on her work with medium Kai Muegge, which began in 2013 after many years of correspondence. He describes ectoplasm as "a device, a screen for projection—a place to put the unarticulated."⁶⁰⁷ Spiritual energy, or that which cannot be articulated, is illustrated in a number of Taggart's photographs with Muegge. In one of them he appears in complete darkness, save for the red light illuminating the ectoplasmic materialization that he holds between his hands (fig. 7). Muegge's head is tilted down toward the formation that exhibits four distinct faces on the ectoplasmic screen. The outlines and shadows of spectres are highlighted by their dark contrast against the bright light. Taggart's story about this photograph informs viewers that it is "filled with images of the dead," which is reinforced by the fact that "visually, ectoplasm symbolizes the belief that life and death remain connected, and that the veil between the two can be lifted."⁶⁰⁸ That the embodied and disembodied figures appear together in the photograph, merged on the precipice of physical and spiritual worlds, calls attention to the precarity, and effectively the uncertainty, surrounding life and death.

606 Fischer, "'The Most Disreputable Camera in the World': Spirit Photography in the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century," 76.

607 Taggart, "The Stories," 273.

608 Ibid., 274.

Muegge states that ectoplasm “can act as a physical location for the ineffable, the aspects of life that are too great or extreme to be expressed in words.”⁶⁰⁹

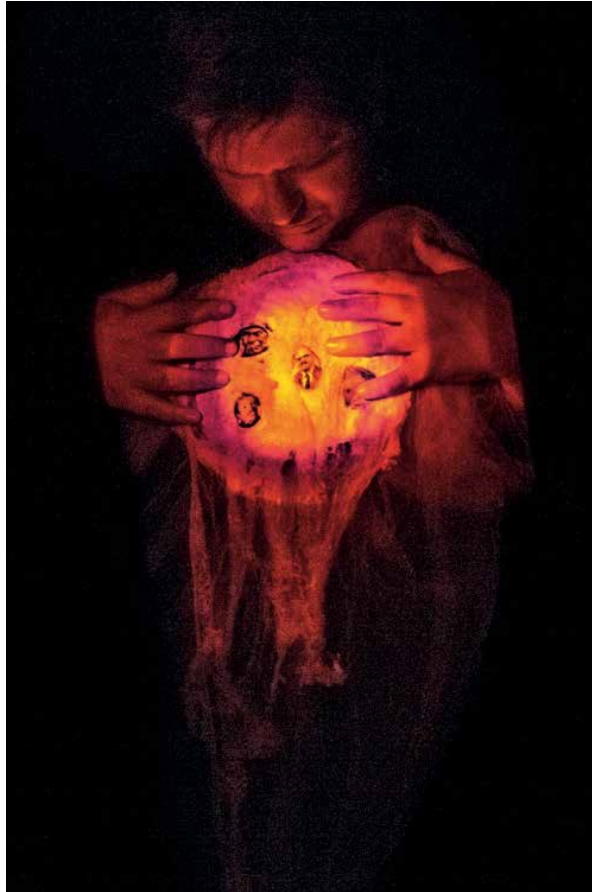


Figure 7: Shannon Taggart, Medium Kai Muegge displays ectoplasm filled with images of the dead. Basel Psi Association, Switzerland, 2018

Taggart’s photograph reinforces Spiritualism’s relevance today. She writes that in Muegge’s work “the story of Spiritualism is re-enacted, re-presented, and re-told,” which becomes further amplified through her articulation and documentation of his physical mediumship and its resultant materializations.⁶¹⁰ As noted in this dissertation’s introduction, a number of scholars such as Molly McGarry, Alex Owen, and Cyril Permutt observe that interest in Spiritualism has gone cycles through periods of public and scholarly interest since the mid-nineteenth century.⁶¹¹ This pattern also shows that its

609 Taggart, “The Stories,” 273.

610 Ibid. 274.

611 Cyril Permutt, *Beyond the Spectrum: A Survey of Supernormal Photography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1983), 8. Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey* (Tuscan, Arizona: Nazraeli Press, 1995); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century*

relevance peaks during times of social upheaval and anxiety, as well as technological advancements. And while mid-nineteenth century scientists popularized their photographs through “wonderment and pleasure” to encourage public interest, we can conceive of contemporary photographs as operating in this way too, particularly as they are not intended to be evidential documents of spirit life.⁶¹² Rather, in stirring public interest and inspiring questions about the precarity of life, Taggart’s image highlights the immediacy of our current moment of digitization and acceleration that effectually creates fissures between human connection. So perhaps in inviting viewers to question the photograph’s subject matter and its meaning, the artist is also inviting us to question how technological acceleration affects us on a deeper, emotional level. In conjuring the images’ mystical potential, we are encouraged to consider the comfort and reassurance that physical connection inspires amidst a demanding social, political, and economic climate. Together, the material and immaterial beings appear in an incongruous juxtaposition that yields, as Gunning describes, “an eerie image of the encounter of two ontologically separate worlds.”⁶¹³ Here Taggart’s photograph suggests not only the conflation of physical and spiritual worlds, but also that of ourselves and technology; that the distance between these seemingly disparate worlds is no greater than the gap between us and the extent to which digital automation has been incorporated into our lives.

Recalling Olivia Laing’s proposition for a different kind of time frame for reflecting on recent crises and catastrophes, I suggest that Taggart’s strategic integration of spiritual and technological elements creates room for the possibly to think and feel, as Laing proposes. Taggart’s photograph defies linear thinking, and in fact linear time, so we can image this frame of time as also opening up a space in which the impact of intense emotional experiences propels critical inquiry.⁶¹⁴ Such a conceptualization defies

England (Camden Town, London: Virago, 1989); R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

612 Corey Keller, “Sight Unseen: Picturing the Invisible,” in *Brought to Light: Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 23.

613 Tom Gunning, “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision,” *Grey Room* 26, no. 26 (2007): 99.

614 This thought is inspired by Gilles Deleuze, who follows from Proust when he identifies affect as a felt impression that precedes thought. He suggests that it reaches us “through our senses” and motivates us toward critical inquiry. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: George Braziller, 1972): 161.

binary oppositions between thinking and feeling and instead facilitates a coalescence between them, rather than the negation, or stifling, of each other. This coincides with Spiritualist's denial of basic categorical binaries—between men and women, life and death, science and spirituality, past and present.

Taggart participated in Spiritualist activities for *Séance*, and her photographs invite us to similarly participate in the viewing process. While photography and Spiritualism grant opportunities to view realities imperceptible to the naked eye, the difficulty of capturing the unseeable also provided her with an opportunity to use the “camera’s technology to represent in an impressionistic manner the essence of the séance,” as Ruffles observes.⁶¹⁵ This essence, which cannot be explicitly defined or categorized, is an inherent part of the physical and psychical séance experience. And a significant part of it is the connectivity between sitters, which is forged by the trust amongst them and their shared desire to explore questions of life after death. As artist and participant, Taggart actively contributed to this essence by immersing herself in Spiritualist activities. She simultaneously examined and documented her personal experiences. In accepting the images imperfections, she generated additional layers of possibilities for them to be conceptualized and understood, which simultaneously emphasizes the relationship between image and viewer. The photograph then becomes the medium through which this connection extends beyond the séance or classroom and reaches viewers of the photographs. Viewers then become necessary for the full realization of Taggart’s photographs, as they explore the evasive and mysterious qualities of the images. Artist Sarah Potters reflects on this notion of artworks needing viewers to experience them in relation to her own work:

Being an artist can be very solitary, [with] long days in the studio laboring alone. The work needs other eyes on it—it needs to be displayed and experienced by others. Once viewers can experience the work, the circle is completed and the work and its intentions is fully realized.⁶¹⁶

As such, viewer participation in the artwork is a crucial element for the full realization of each piece; for the works to reach their full potential as viewers use them to similarly

615 Tom Ruffles, “The Joy of Mere Words.”

616 Chloe Hyman, “Spring/Break Art Show: Spiritual Art Advisory,” *Femme Art Review*, <https://femmeartreview.com/2019/03/10/spring-break-art-show-spiritual-art-advisory/>.

question and attempt to make sense of the precarious nature of life and death. In this way, viewers are invited to engage with the photographs spiritually, and in doing so, engage with their own spirituality.

Taggart's work effectively bridges the past, present, and future. She achieves this by seeking out the unexpected elements of Spiritualism that can never fully be anticipated or predicated, while remaining open to how the project will manifest itself. Upon viewing the images, audiences become involved in this process as the "future and past are compressed into the viewer's present" through Taggart's documentation of contemporary Spiritualism.⁶¹⁷

MacWilliam: (Re)presenting the Archive & Gender Subversion

Susan MacWilliam explores cases of the paranormal and questions evidence as a foundation for knowledge formation. She dismantles notions of narrative within history by retrieving and reproducing historical documents. She combines these with her own (re)interpretations and (re)creations of investigative tools and ectoplasmic manifestations in a contemporary context. MacWilliam does this by examining cases of paranormal activity through the lens of the psychic, the supernormal, and the psychical—all of which have been deemed more recently as parapsychology. The scope of her work is extensive, spanning trance mediumship and materializations, dermo-optical perception, optograms, and x-ray vision. Her interest in spirit photography and the relationship between medium and research has informed much of her work, particularly in the years leading up to the turn of the millennium. For instance, her 2009 video, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, is composed of archival documents that, when combined, cut, and repeated in skillful manipulation, conflate time and blur fact with fiction. The video was commissioned for the 53rd Venice Biennale and was included as part of her larger installation that has been documented in the text, *Remote Viewing* (2009) (fig. 8).⁶¹⁸

617 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," 159.

618 *Susan MacWilliam: Remote Viewing*, ed. Karen Downey (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2008). The text features two other video installations: *Eileen* (2008) and *Dermo Optics* (2006), and contributing essays by other artists, scholars, and members of the paranormal community.



Figure: 8: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, in *Remote Viewing*, 2009, Installation 53rd Venice Biennale. Photograph by Prudence Cuming Associates © British Council

Following her education at Manchester Polytechnic, MacWilliam returned to her birth city of Belfast, where she developed her practice independent from the nationalistic, political, or religious issues of the city. Having begun her career in painting, she gradually began integrating three-dimensional materials into her practice, such as installations featuring theatre curtains and plasticine intestines spilling from a faux fur rabbit, for example. It was her inquisitiveness about the extraordinary that led her to the explorations of séance room photography and studies of histories of psychical research, and video installations became the next step for her. Chief Executive Officer and Director of Visual Arts Ireland Noel Kelly writes that upon returning to Belfast, MacWilliam took her apparent “apartness” from the “hip curatorial visits that would continue to question her reasons for not addressing the political situation” as a “point of negotiation for a series of bodies of work that continue to this day.”⁶¹⁹

For *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, MacWilliam conducted archival research in the Hamilton Family Fonds during her residency at the University of Manitoba Rare Books

619 Noel Kelly, “An Outsider in Her Native Town - The Work of Susan MacWilliam,” *Circa* no. 118 (Winter 2006): 49.

and Special Collections in 2008. Her video was inspired by séance proceedings from June 10th, 1931, in which the surname of French astronomer and eminent psychical researcher Camille Flammarion appeared strewn across the Hamiltons' séance cabinet. This is reputedly the first known case of a spectral word to be materialized in the form of ectoplasm. Of this, Irish author and editor Brian Dillon writes, "It is also part of the historical record of occult research, a spirited fragment from the archives that returns, recognisable but repurposed, in MacWilliam's work."⁶²⁰ Emanating before Hamilton's camera and then (re)interpreted in the artists video, the text becomes a script that transverses physical and spiritual realms; a form of narrative that MacWilliam (re)imagines not to relay the facts as they were originally read, but to create a line of inquiry that further calls into question the representation of objective knowledge within the archive. The ectoplasmic text is the primary subject matter of her video, and she uses it to highlight the significance of how subjective perception plays into our understandings of history, and how narrative is implicitly imbedded within them by recreating aspects of this séance through her own lens. MacWilliam's method of reproducing archival photographs and reports creates new textures that not only make them visible in a new context but facilitates alternative modes of interpretations and affective evocations.

Mark Godfrey cites that recent historical research and representation have been more central to contemporary art.⁶²¹ More specifically, in reflecting on post-1960s historical representation in art, he observes that,

The emerging centrality of photography in Conceptual art might have presented opportunities for other artists to revisit the task of historical representation in new ways, particularly since photo-conceptualists were less burdened by the weight and twentieth-century eclipse of historical painting.⁶²²

MacWilliam exemplifies this opportunity by combining archival research with contemporary media to (re)present psychical photographs in a way that invites us to question the ways in which knowledge was constructed in the twentieth century. In analyzing her archival-based work alongside Godfrey's observation, I show how the artist

620 Brian Dillon, "Some Jealousy of Ghostly Beings," *Remote Viewing*, ed. Karen Downey (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), 25.

621 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historia," 142.

622 Ibid.

as researcher framework is apt for interrogating the twentieth-century's intertwining of historical fact and scientific evidence, and the ways in which technology and the gendered body were used to advance truth claims in séance.

For the video, MacWilliam also used reconstruction as a means to understand and get close to the original materials. She physically reconstructed the Hamiltons' séance cabinet that the Flammarion teleplasm materialized on, which became an important process for the context of the film. Measuring and working out the dimensions of the cabinet, to then physically build it, became a device for materializing objects from the past in the present. This aspect of MacWilliam's process is highlighted by Belfast writer and poet Ciaran Carson Caron, who is recorded sitting in the cabinet speaking about the walls around him, and the formation of the word. The cabinet thus becomes an important location for his voice as viewers watch and listen to him inside the reconstructed séance cabinet. In this way, MacWilliam not only brings the cabinet, but also the story or the history of the 1931 Flammarion teleplasm, into the present. Combining reconstruction with video editing alongside original photographs, she (re)presents the cabinet in a contemporary context. This allowed MacWilliam to explore the past, which in turn, invites us to explore with her and (re)consider how historical narratives and knowledge are formed.

Like Taggart, MacWilliam used a sympathetic approach in her research-based artistic praxis, which helped her evade setting up a voyeuristic relationship between the camera and subject. She forged meaningful, reciprocal relationships with her subjects, whom she invited to participate in *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*. She collaborated with other artists, members of the paranormal community and their descendants. Performing parts in the video are Carson, Danish American poltergeist investigator Dr. William G. Roll, and Arla Marshall, Canadian granddaughter of Scottish medium to the Hamiltons' séances Susan Marshall. MacWilliam thus acts, as film and video scholar Lucy Reynolds notes, "simultaneously as archaeologist/archivist and critical interventionist."⁶²³ In the video, Carson's voice interrupts the first eight seconds of the video's silence, intoning the language of film and photography, which he reads straightforwardly from an out-of-

623 Lucy Reynolds, "Outside the Archive: The World in Fragments," in *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*, eds. Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol, U.K.: Picture This Moving Image, 2006), 14.

frame script. The close-up shot of him speaking is quickly interspersed with images of analogue cameras that flash before our eyes (fig. 9). The way the video is shot elicits a sense of closeness with Carson, pulling viewers into the scene with him, rather than establishing distance between the work and the audience from an objective standpoint. We are called into this space, and into this moment, that MacWilliam creates through strategic composition. By beginning her video in such a way, the artist sets up a participatory viewing experience that viewers retain throughout *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*. And in drawing her audience into her work, she invites us to question, perhaps, the ways in which visual culture has continued to shape how we make meaning of the world around us, and the degree to which our use of technology contributes to this knowledge formation.



Figure 9: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still featuring Ciaran Carson

Speaking in contemporaneity, Carson's, Roll's, and Marshall's words call on other times, places, and events. They (re)visit the past, which is simultaneously enfolded in present time; the time the video was produced, and the time the video is viewed by audiences. MacWilliam's method, paired with the viewing process, thus creates layers of time on each occasion that *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* is viewed. These layers can also be understood in relation to Reynolds's conceptualization of archival documents that are methodologically repurposed. She writes:

It is the found footage filmmaker who removes the idea of ‘fragment’ from solely negative connotations. For fragmentation can also mean a process of multiplication, the engendering of additional configurations of meaning.”⁶²⁴

Multiplication occurs in the development of creating artworks from existing documents, reconfigured and reproduced in a new context, which thus generates new interpretations. These fragments are also brief moments of stopped time; the time the Hamiltons’ photographs were taken, and the time they were recaptured, reworked, and reproduced, to then be collapsed by the video’s digital recording. Olivia Laing suggests that in the stopped time of painting or the compressed time of a novel “it is possible to see patterns and consequences that are otherwise invisible.”⁶²⁵ MacWilliam’s strategic video editing and cutting works within this framework, for the multiplied, (re)generated frames of time construct a space for new textures of the history that she (re)presents to be revealed. Yet the continuity of video disrupts the stopped time of photographs and textual reports that MacWilliam reproduces in *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, which at the same time, enlivens them with the fluidity of video. This medium perpetuates the continuation of time and allows her to strategically bring to the fore what she deems the climactic and evocative moments of the 1931 séance in a way that still photography cannot. And while she works with both lens-based media, video provides her with greater opportunities for highlighting the continual unfolding of the past that she seeks to display. I suggest, then, that the video creates another kind of time frame, as Laing proposes, in which to both think and feel, and to open up new ways of imagining a history; a past that now exists in MacWilliam’s nuanced representation of it. As discussed in chapter two, the emotional state of séance participants was crucial to positive séance results, and in defying the thinking/feeling binary, the video aligns with the intrinsic nature, or essence, or séance. Her practice is therefore “open and collaborative,” as Dillon describes it, for featuring Carson, Roll, and Marshall, but also for the ways in which she simultaneously stops and opens up time through her methodological art making.⁶²⁶

624 Reynolds, “Outside the Archive: The World in Fragments,” 22.

625 Olivia Laing, *Funny Weather: Art in an Emergency* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), 2.

626 Dillon, “Some Jealousy of Ghostly Beings,” 25.

Audiences are also participants in theorizing how space is created for thinking and feeling through the video's construction of time. The act of participating in the viewing process circumvents passively watching the video without actively engaging their senses. *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N's* fragmentary composition captivates viewers' attention. It stirs a critical examination of how the archival documents are presented and accepted as evidential facts within history. Reynolds argues that "the found footage film requires the viewer to become an archivist, transforming a passive state of perception into an active process of restoration, by piecing together new meaning drawn from personal memory, association and imagination."⁶²⁷ In this process, the viewers' relationality to the content is a subjective encounter that does not rely on scientific rationalization or proof of authenticity. Instead, viewers are invited to conceptually enter into MacWilliam's research excavation. Here they can to pose their own questions based on personal experiences and knowledge, and as Reynolds contends, ultimately draw their own conclusions. This situates viewers as active participants in the formulation of finding meaning in the video. In *Remote Viewing*, Dr. Slavka Sverakova describes the essence of MacWilliam's video works, by writing:

it does not matter if it does not add up in a rationale sense; it does not matter if the evidence is not convincing. What matters, is that the art works on its own terms and effectively taps into the observer's willingness to connect its ambiguities and incongruities to a sense of surprise or disbelief.⁶²⁸

In engaging with the video's quizzical structure, viewers gain a sense of inquisitiveness that leads them to more questions than answers; for MacWilliam does not aim to provide conclusions, but to convey information about how psychical investigations were conducted and documented. More specifically, she does not seek to narrate or teach a particular history, but instead, to play with truth claims in psychical histories. As such, the essence of the video lies in the connections forged between viewers and the artwork, and the thoughts and emotions it rouses.

The relation between viewer and artist is also significant and can be understood through MacWilliam's strategic video composition. The ways in which she represents her

627 Reynolds, "Outside the Archive: The World in Fragments," 22-23.

628 Dr. Slavka Sverakova, "Susan MacWilliam Portraying a Worldview," in *Susan MacWilliam: Remote Viewing*, ed. Karen Downey (London, UK: Black Dog Publishing, 2008), 114-115.

research methodology parallels Godfrey’s conception about archival research that leads the artist from one object of inquiry to the next, without knowing where they will lead or what conclusions will be drawn.⁶²⁹ She lures viewers into *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* by capturing their attention with unpredictable changes in subject matter, perspective, audio, and time. Throughout the video, scenes change and flash upon the screen at varying lengths, and at times, pause unexpectedly for viewers to hear the audio repeat or to experience silence. This “subversive approach to editing,” as Dr. Sverakova describes it, reflects the process of conducting archival research. MacWilliam and I have experienced this in the Hamilton Family Fonds—sorting through archival boxes and folders that contain hundreds of photographs, reports, newspaper articles, lecture and séance notes without knowing what will be uncovered next. For instance, Dr. Roll rhythmically says, “teleplasmic letters” nine times at minute three of the video with extended pauses in between that leave viewers wondering if each time will be the last.



Figure 10: Susan MacWilliam, Archive Images, Hamilton family fonds, UMASC, Winnipeg

Figure 11: Susan MacWilliam, Appearance of Flammarion teleplasm, June 10th, 1931, Hamilton family fonds, UMASC, Winnipeg

629 Godfrey, “The Artist as Historian,” 143.

MacWilliam creates a sense of wonder as well with polyphonic voices at minute 6:16, in which Carson's voice is heard synchronically, again stating different photographic terms. This invokes a sense of confusion as the voices merge into dissonant sounds for what feels like an extended period of time. The repetition of audio can thus be interpreted as a representation of the documents in the collection (fig. 10 & 11). Additionally, at minute four of the video, the camera zooms in on Carson while he is speaking as if the interviewer, and by extension the viewer, is leaning in toward him. This creates a sense of closeness and intimacy with him and the artwork as we watch the video. This moment is followed shortly by long, silent pauses in which Carson does not speak, yet the camera remains focused on him, forcing viewers to stop and think. This silence mimics the process of reading archival documents, stopping to contemplate the findings at unpredictable intervals once something intriguing is revealed.

As the audio unexpectedly morphs and transmutes in this piece, the subject matter and perspectives do as well. The camera angle changes frequently as different images are flashed before viewers' eyes, creating fragmented scenes in which the subject matter shifts from one scene to the next. For example, halfway through the video, images of cameras are quickly shown on the screen. The speed at which the images change increases with speed as the video progresses (Fig. 12). Such fragmentation is much like the archive; pieced together but never complete. In (re)presenting the Hamiltons' séance documentation in this nuanced way, MacWilliam inserts herself into this history. From this perspective, she shows the fallibility and inscrutability of the archive through technological manipulation, which creates room for new ways of thinking about the imagery.⁶³⁰ Viewers are drawn into this space of the archive where they can view the materials from her perspective as if they too are conducting archival research. This then allows them to form a subjective interpretation of the materials presented in the video. Viewers are summoned into the research process, which in turn, forges a relation between them and the artist. In such a way, MacWilliam's video composition and editing becomes a conduit for viewers to enter into the past, and into this history, with her. As viewers are drawn into the artwork, they are also drawn into the experience and emotions

630 Godfrey discusses this concept in his artist as historian theory.

of the Hamiltons' 1931 séance. This space facilitates an affective engagement with the work that elicits a range of emotions, from disbelief and confusion, to intrigue and excitement. And through this engagement, they, like MacWilliam, have the creativity and freedom to form their own understandings of the video.



Figure 12: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still

By providing minimal contextualization or information about psychical experiments, MacWilliam further encourages us to formulate unique thoughts and emotions about *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*'s relevance to the current moment. On current spirituality and photography's role in it, German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans senses that Western society's last ten years of political shifts derived from a lack of meaning in the capitalist world, which is "happily filled with substitutes like religion, nation, sport, and consumption, plus, of course, family values."⁶³¹ Yet this absence of meaning is "expressed a great deal in a quest for spirituality."⁶³² Tillmans believes that photography's effort to simultaneously seize and a preserve the fragile, fleeting moments of life is actually about connecting across time and space, rather than trying to make these moments eternal.⁶³³ His belief is illustrated throughout spirit photography's history, from

631 "Spirituality is Solidarity: Wolfgang Tillmans and Martin Hägglund in Conversation," *Aperture* 237, Spirituality (Winter 2019): 34.

632 Ibid.

633 Ibid.

its earliest nineteenth-century practitioners, through to twentieth-century psychical investigators. This sentiment is similarly woven throughout contemporary practices, as Taggart and MacWilliam have demonstrated through their sympathetic approaches. Taggart has shown this in her photographs of group meditations, spirit photography classes and workshops, but more significantly in the relations she formed with community members during her eighteen-year project. MacWilliam has shown this in her collaborations and personal interviews with members of the psychical community. Their works further confirm that spirit photography opens up and makes visible a new reality that is continuing unveiled each time their works are viewed. Tom Gunning similarly remarks on the notion of spirit photography as portraying a “fissured space, one that allows visitors from another dimension to peek through, hovering within (or beyond), the space occupied by the ‘normal’ figures.”⁶³⁴ Whether embodied or disembodied, spirit photography reveals this new reality, or space, where the connections that Tillmans describes can take place.



Figure 13: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still featuring Ciaran Carson

MacWilliam brings this space to the fore by reversing traditional gender roles in the video. Marshall’s voice is heard at intervals throughout *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, which is interspersed with Carson’s, reciting a section of the 1931 séance transcriptions

634 Gunning, “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision,” 213.

from spirit control Walter's part.⁶³⁵ The first time she speaks, at 32 seconds, a shot of Carson sitting in the cabinet is placed in view (fig. 13). As women typically performed mediumship in séance, they were the ones who sat alone, confined to the darkness of the cabinet while phenomena materialized in the séance room. Here, gender roles are reversed as Marshall embodies the role of the male spirit Walter, and as Carson performs the role of medium.

Later in the video, at 8:30, Marshall is heard again describing a teleplasmic ship that transpired in the séance (see fig. 14). She then asks, "does it look like a ship to you?." This seemingly simple question positions her as the interviewer, or investigator, and the male respondent as the subjected body that is beckoned to respond. MacWilliam calls attention to how gender played an important role in psychical studies, determining who was active and who was passive; that is the objective researcher commanding the subjected body. Her part is important here too as the creator and director of *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, resisting the gender constraints that were imparted on women within psychics. In this piece, the artist is conceptualized as performing the role of the twentieth-century psychic researcher who directed the séance conditions and prompted the medium's body to speak, in part, by establishing the parameters around which the experiments took place. The position of research artist allowed her to direct her own investigations in the way that researchers like T.G. Hamilton and Sir William Crookes, for instance, controlled the séance room. And Even though collaboration with spirit entities has been accepted within the field since its earliest practitioners, it was nevertheless the male investigator who typically constructed the séance room and instituted its conditions, including who and how others participated. In this way, MacWilliam (re)captured women's agency within psychical studies, for as chapter two has shown, Spiritualism and the realm of the paranormal provided a space for women to enact agency and gain leadership opportunities. Taggart explains that the women's right movement was particularly linked to Spiritualism, "because it was a revolutionary

635 Walter was the primary control throughout the Hamiltons' 25 years of experiments. See chapter two of this dissertation for details about Walter and his role in their investigations.

religion, it placed men and women as equals.”⁶³⁶ This occurred privately, within the home during séances, and within the public realm. Taggart continues to state that “at a time when it was dangerous for women to speak in public, Spiritualists offered their platform for suffragettes.”⁶³⁷ They were the biggest advocates for not only women’s but human rights for the disenfranchised, giving a voice to reformers and radicals, abolitionists, free love and child rights advocates, marriage reformers, and holistic medicine practitioners.⁶³⁸



Figure 14: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still

Adopting this lead role, MacWilliam calls attention to how gender has conventionally determined which roles are played by whom within the field of psychics. She elicits a sense of authority by positioning herself as the conventionally male, psychical investigator who conducts experiments over their typically female subjects through varying techniques. In *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, she inserts herself as the interviewer of her invited subjects, who are members of the psychical community or their descendants. She implores them to respond to the materializations in search of empirical claims of the extraordinary. MacWilliam thus commanded her subjects’ actions as the

636 Shannon Taggart, “Spiritualism, Photography and the Search for Ectoplasm,” Shannon Taggart, *Science Museum*, June 30th, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWr_4I8Gvw4&ab_channel=TheMediaofMediumship.

637 Taggart, “Spiritualism, Photography and the Search for Ectoplasm.”

638 Ibid.

director of the video, the footage of which she strategically manipulated using overt editing techniques. She embodies the typically male, twentieth-century psychical investigator by replicating how Hamilton filmed teleplasm from a plenitude of angles. He mounted six to twelve cameras throughout the séance room, which were fired at the push of a button from a handheld remote. Her video illuminates how she too used his method of setting up multiple cameras at various heights and angles to (re)create the séance conditions for which teleplasm transpired and was photographed in the Hamilton home. Throughout the video, viewers observe perspectives from all angles—straight on, above, below, and over the shoulder. Dillon explains that MacWilliam becomes “herself the object or protagonist of the restaged scene of apparition or materialisation, hazing the distinction between subject and investigator—which is to say between the predominantly male perspective of occult research and its female object.”⁶³⁹ In such a manner, the research artist position facilitated her subversion of gender roles, calling attention to twentieth-century gender conventions, while depicting how they have changed in contemporary practices of spirit photography.

Conclusion

In an age of digital acceleration, contemporary art practices have increasingly centered around themes of spirituality, history, and a general nostalgia for the past. Historical documents may get left behind or forgotten in the hastening of technological developments and digitalization. Artist and writer Uriel Orlow points out that this incites an “intensifying desire to capture things before they are lost for good.”⁶⁴⁰ The fervour to capture that which is disappearing, or perhaps already lost within public memory, is entwined with ideas about the artist as researcher. Orlow explains that the digitization of the archive simultaneously engenders its dematerialization, which subsequently produces a need to reassess the document’s material qualities.⁶⁴¹ Taggart’s and MacWilliam’s artworks reflect on the archive and on history in this way, as something that is “never

639 Dillon, “Some Jealousy of Ghostly Beings,” 8.

640 Uriel Orlow, “Latent Archives, Roving Lens,” in *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists’ Film and Video*, eds. Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol, U.K: Picture This Moving Image, 2006), 34-35.

641 *Ibid.*, 35.

fixed in meaning or material.”⁶⁴² Their works open up new ways of thinking about how history is constructed, and thus new ways of understanding the past, through strategic techniques in photography and video. They use the camera to call attention to the acceleration of technology and the need to sustain human connection amid it.

Taggart’s photographs effectively blur the line between fact and fiction in a way that questions the ease with which images are accepted as truth, both then and now. They conjure both spiritual and mechanical explanations by permitting photographic imperfections and improvisations in her documentation. In departing from factual accuracy and adopting a more informal, interpretive approach, she could more clearly illuminate the ephemeral and often equivocal elements of Spiritualism and its associated activities. *Séance* therefore features a combination of straight and artistic photography—factual and fictitious—generating a space where the questions and complexities of contemporary Spiritualism can mutually exist.

MacWilliam (re)creates the experience of conducting archival research in the Hamilton Family Fonds through strategic filming and editing techniques. Her technical manipulation in *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* simultaneously echoes her research methodology and mirrors the problematic of relying on the archive or archival documents as complete, as evidentiary documentation of historical facts. Her video calls into question how knowledge is formed and reproduced, as drawing on evidence as a basis for knowledge—as practiced by nineteenth- and twentieth-century investigators—both evades questions of authenticity, while allowing viewers to interpret the video on their own terms.

This chapter has conceptualized Taggart’s and MacWilliam’s sympathetic methodologies through the concept of research artist. Adopting this approach, they formed meaningful relations with their subjects, which facilitated their subjective accounts of contemporary and historical Spiritualism and psychic research. This chapter has shown that by viewing *Séance* and *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N* through a different kind of time frame, the thinking/feeling binary is challenged. Their works create room for new interpretations and meanings to emerge by drawing us into the moments they capture,

642 Uriel Orlow, “Latent Archives, Roving Lens,” in *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists’ Film and Video*, eds. Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol, U.K: Picture This Moving Image, 2006), 35.

while facilitating a participatory viewing experience that opens us up to the times and spaces they represent.

Through *Séance* and *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, I have shown that while there is much continuity between historical and contemporary spirit photography, artists such as Taggart and MacWilliam use their work to challenge how the gendered body has been perceived and used in mediumistic practices. Taggart's book features both men and women practitioners, while MacWilliam more explicitly subverts gender roles in her video. MacWilliam dismantles how the gendered body has historically determined how, and the degree to which, women participated in spiritual and psychical studies by playing with gender conventions. This chapter has thus argued that in adopting the artist as researcher role, Taggart and MacWilliam have been able to not only show the relevance of Spiritualist practices in contemporary culture, but to also show how in fact the field of research has changed since spirit photography and Spiritualism commenced in the mid-nineteenth century.

Appendix

Figure 1: Shannon Taggart, Message service at Inspiration Stump, Lily Dale, NY, c.1930, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 2: Shannon Taggart, Entering Inspiration Stump, Lily Dale, NY, 2012, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 3: Shannon Taggart, Instrumental-transcommunication and smoke-scrying experiment outside the séance room, England, 2013, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 4: Shannon Taggart, Group meditation experiment with mediums Clare Haigh, Susan Barnes, Marc Lainhart, Elizabeth Cousins and Hayley McClean, Arthur Findlay College, England, 2016, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.

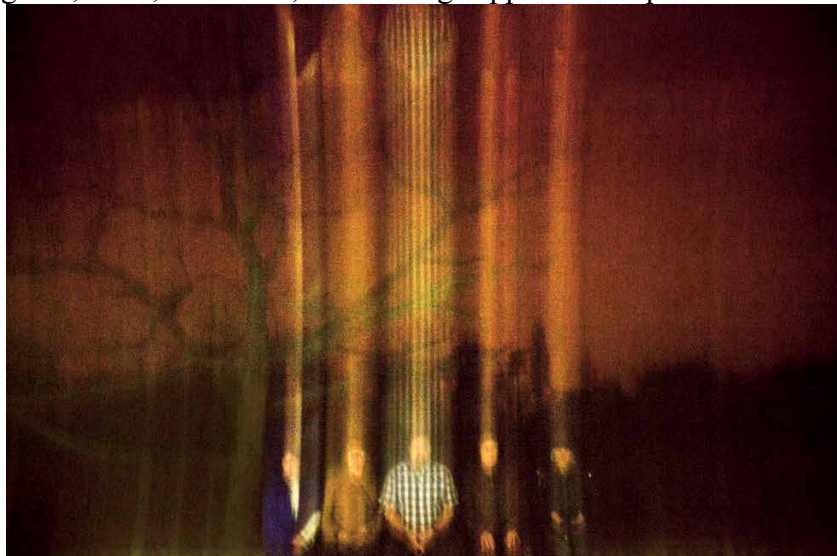


Figure 5: Shannon Taggart, Spirit photography class experiment—medium Annette Rodgers with spirit extras interpreted to be a Mongolian spirit guide and an aging Nikola Tesla, Arthur Findlay College, England, 2018, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 6: Shannon Taggart, Cloud of ectoplasm with faces of the dead, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Ada Emma Deane, c.1930, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 7: Shannon Taggart, Medium Kai Muegge displays ectoplasm filled with images of the dead, Basel Psi Association, Switzerland, 2018, in *Séance*, 2019. Image appears with permission from the artist.

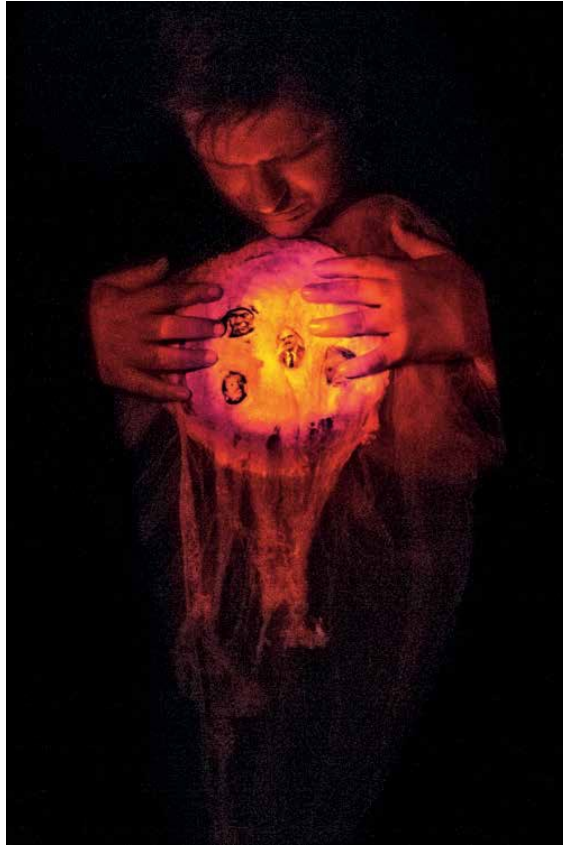


Figure: 8: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, in *Remote Viewing*, 2009, Installation 53rd Venice Biennale. Photograph by Prudence Cuming Associates © British Council. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 9: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still featuring Ciaran Carson. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 10: Susan MacWilliam, Archive Images, Hamilton family fonds, UMASC, Winnipeg. Image appears with permission from the artist.

Figure 11: Susan MacWilliam, Archive Images, Hamilton family fonds, UMASC, Winnipeg. Image appears with permission from the artist.



Figure 12: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still. Image appears with permission from the artist.

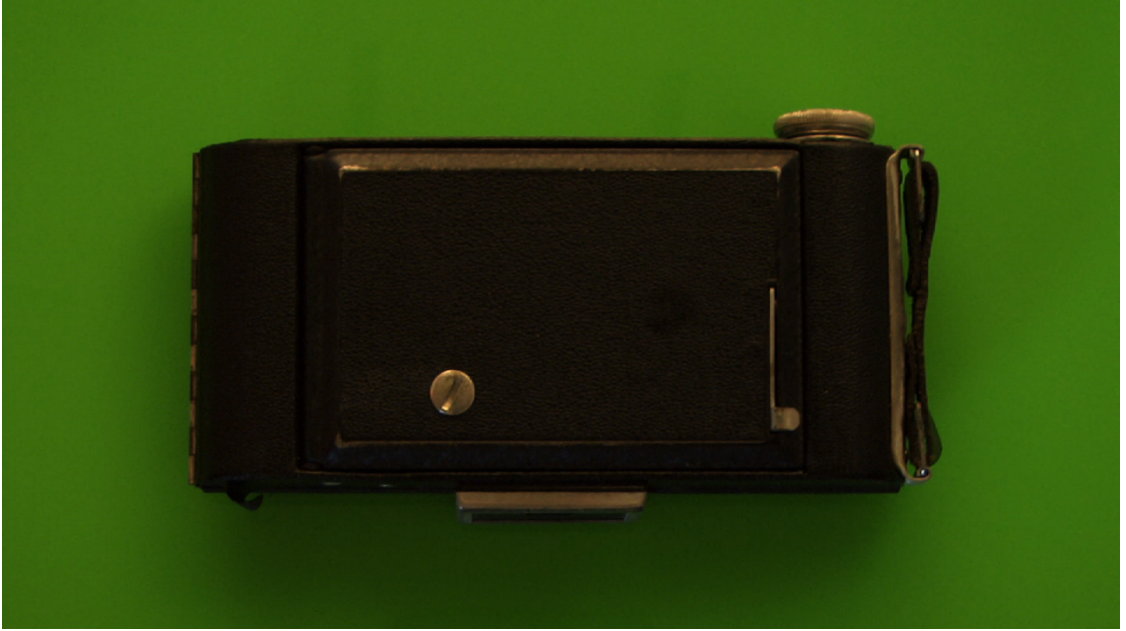


Figure 13: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still featuring Ciaran Carson. Image appears with permission from the artist.

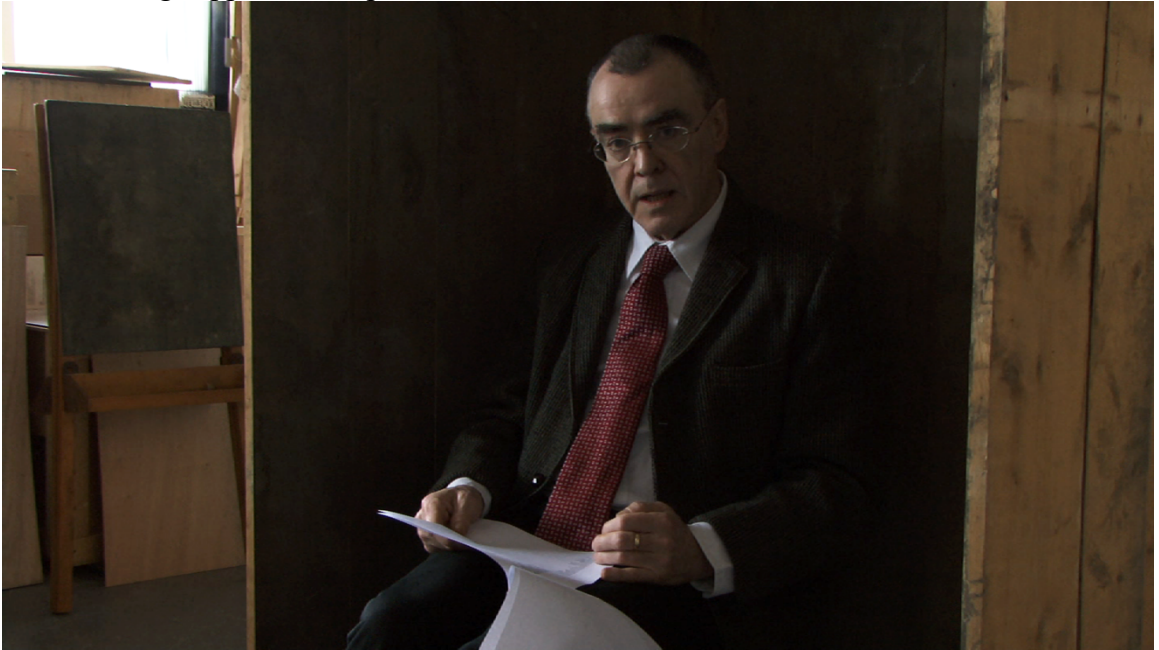


Figure 14: Susan MacWilliam, *F-L-A-M-M-A-R-I-O-N*, 2009, video still. Image appears with permission from the artist.



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