

*the
dise mbodied*

spirit



the
disembodied

spirit

and

his composit

spirit



the
disembodied

spirit

Alison Ferris, curator

Bowdoin College Museum of Art
Brunswick, Maine



This catalogue accompanies the exhibition of the same name at

Bowdoin College Museum of Art
Brunswick, Maine
September 25 through December 7, 2003

Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art
Kansas City, Missouri
March 5 through May 23, 2004

Austin Museum of Art
Austin, Texas
September 11 through November 28, 2004

Design: Wilcox Design, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Printer: Meridian Printing, East Greenwich, Rhode Island



The Disembodied Spirit is supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Generous funding was also received from the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation and the LEF Foundation.

Major funding for the project is from Bowdoin College endowments restricted to support Museum of Art programs. The Stevens L. Frost Endowment Fund, the George Otis Hamlin Fund, the Karl R. Philbrick Art Museum Fund and a gift from the Alex J. Ettl Foundation all funded the project.

ISBN: 0-916606-36-8

Copyright © 2003 Bowdoin College

introduction **katy kline** 5

acknowledgments 6

tom gunning

ghosts, photography and the modern body 8

pamela thurschwell

some thoughts on the afterlife from spirit photography to phantom films 20

alison ferris

32

plates 44 checklist 88 for further reading 95 list of lenders 96

The more enlightened our houses are, the more their walls ooze ghosts.

Italo Calvino, "Cybernetics and Ghosts," lecture, November 1969, Turin. Published in *The Literature Machine*, 1987

It was several years ago that Alison Ferris began to be aware of the surprising preponderance of the spectral in contemporary art. Drawing on an academic background in photography history, theory, and criticism, she began to extrapolate concepts endemic to the medium and to identify cultural conditions from both the period of photography's invention and its resurgence today which were ripe for research.

Mining the insights and examples of art, literature, religion, cinema, and social history, she has managed to navigate an area which is by definition elusive and ill-charted. While claiming the ghost as an index of instability and acknowledging the haunting presence of absence, her exhibition and the essays in this publication afford paradoxically substantial insights into the limits of the visible and thereby into the nature of representation and human experience.

As Calvino noted, the more technology enlightens, the more our certainties destabilize. On behalf of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art I am delighted to share the deep insights afforded by art and artists into the haunting questions of human reality, and congratulate Alison on her fortitude in tracking and reading the elusive.

Katy Kline
Director

introduction

The Disembodied Spirit was several years in the making and therefore, there are many people to acknowledge and thank. First and foremost, our gratitude is extended to the artists and lenders for so generously sharing their work. I am also pleased that Dana Self from the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Dana Friis-Hansen from the Austin Museum of Art took an interest in the exhibition and agreed to host it at their institutions. I greatly admire and respect the scholarship of Tom Gunning and Pamela Thurschwell, and so I was thrilled when they agreed to write essays specifically for this catalogue. Their essays here brilliantly expand upon their already smart and creative forays into the realm of the ghostly. It has been a pleasure working with Jean Wilcox, who very sensitively created the beautiful design of this catalogue. Lucie Teegarden pays close attention to the details of all the Museum of Art's publications and has again carefully edited this one.

This exhibition has taken me to numerous institutions to look at work. The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin provided me with a fellowship which allowed me to travel to the center and spend a substantial amount of time examining their collection of spirit photography. While I was there, Linda Briscoe Myers, David Coleman, and Debbie Armstrong were particularly accommodating and helpful. Shari Zolla at the Studio Museum in Harlem, John Lawrence at the Historic New Orleans Collection, and, especially, Grady Hendrix at the American Society for Psychical Research in New York were kind enough to facilitate the use of their institutions' collections.

When it comes to locating specific works for a thematic exhibition, one especially relies on the generosity of colleagues in other institutions. Dana Friis-Hansen, Adam Weinberg, Deborah Willis, and Barbara Tannenbaum went above and beyond their call of duty in this respect and have my sincere thanks.

I talked about this exhibition in its many configurations to students at Bowdoin College and the Maine College of Art, and I also formally presented ideas found here at the College Art Association and to the Bowdoin faculty. The comments and observations of all those who offered them in these arenas was much appreciated. I especially appreciated the collegiality shown by the fellow presenters at the CAA conference—Mark Alice Durant, Jane Marsching and Karl Schoonover—all of whom have continued to show generosity in sharing ghostly discoveries and resources. A number of colleagues, at Bowdoin and beyond, have taken a keen interest in the exhibition as well as offered suggestions and support. I'd like to particularly thank in this regard Susan Bell, John Bisbee, Susan Canning, Andrea Inselman, John Jacob, Dana Self, Chris Thompson, Katarina Weslien, and Mark Wethli. I also appreciate the careful reading and comments about my essay from Pete Coviello, Scott Dimond, Pamela Fletcher, and Katy Kline.

A number of students and curatorial assistants have played a significant role in the research for the exhibition. Ashley East ('01), Aliza Marks ('04), and Kimberly Medsker ('04) have all contributed many working hours to this exhibition. However, Emily Shubert ('02), who worked with

acknowledgments

me for three and one-half years, spent the greatest amount of time on this exhibition and contributed to it with great enthusiasm; therefore she has my sincere thanks. I have been lucky to have worked, consecutively, with three outstanding curatorial assistants at Bowdoin—Amy Honchell, Chad MacDermid, and Caitlin Nelson—all of whom, in different capacities, contributed significantly to this exhibition.

I am tremendously grateful for the staff members of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art whose patience and hard work brought this project into fruition. I am especially appreciative of Suzanne Bergeron, assistant director for operations, who has been enthusiastic about this project from the beginning and contributed immeasurably to every stage of its development from overseeing the budget and collaborating on grant writing to coordinating the production of this publication. Most of all, I am thankful for director Katy Kline's support and guidance from the inception of this project.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my daughters Sophie and Eliza D'Anieri who have found innumerable ways to show their love and support for me while I've been working on the "ghost show." And, to Pete Coviello, who has been living with this project for as long as he has lived with me—this book is dedicated to you.

tom gunning

Sweating

images

ghosts, photography and the modern body



In 1848, following a decade which might be seen as the beginning of our modern age (witnessing the appearance of new industrial processes; the growth of such technologies as photography, locomotives, and the telegraph; and the emergence of new ideologies), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels claimed a new specter haunted Europe, that of communism. That same year, in the small upstate hamlet of Hydesville, New York, young sisters belonging to the Fox family claimed the ability to communicate with a spirit of a murdered peddler through a series of loud raps of unexplained origin. *The Communist Manifesto* heralded a world-wide movement that issued in a new era of political conflict that ultimately resulted in a global division whose recent collapse redefines our era. Curiously, what may have originated as no more than a childish prank carried out by younger sisters possessed with the mischievous ability to crack the joints in their feet loudly, also triggered a global movement, Spiritualism. The adherents of the Spiritualist movement also expected revolutionary transformations of the relation between religion and science and our understanding of the world, based on a belief in the ability to communicate with the dead. Now nearly forgotten, Spiritualism collapsed long before the Berlin Wall, and its legacy remains obscure. But can the ghosts of the dead, the phantoms or specters of the past, ever truly disappear? As the paradoxical appearance (or re-appearance — consider the French term for ghosts: *revenants*, those that return) of something that apparently had vanished already, ghosts are notoriously hard to get rid of. Exorcising, or laying, a ghost has always been seen as a difficult business, uncertain in its accomplishment, tricky in its undertaking.¹

As Marx indicated, it is in the nature of ghosts and specters to *haunt*, to linger somewhere in an unsettling manner, to be there and yet not to be there, to haunt rather than inhabit. In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud used psychoanalysis to explain the experience of something so bizarre and unfamiliar that it seems paradoxically familiar, as if we had already experienced it (*déjà vu*, that literal feeling of an inexplicable and deeply creepy repetition of an experience, gives a vivid example of this sensation).² The experience of the uncanny, Freud claimed, appeared when one encountered material familiar to the unconscious, but repressed from conscious memory. But Freud admitted that not all such returns of the repressed carried an uncanny feeling, nor was individual repression the only source of uncanny sensations. The experience could also arise from beliefs that civilized Western culture as a whole had discarded. What Freud termed “primitive” beliefs, the animistic practices of non-modern civilizations, could also cause an uncanny sensation, especially when someone who does not believe in ghosts, magic spells, or *Doppelgängers* encounters apparent evidence for such bygone beliefs. These superstitions, Freud indicated, have not so much been repressed as “surmounted” by modern civilization. But in certain circumstances modern men and women still find themselves haunted by logically abandoned ideas, which linger unexpectedly.

What if, rather than simply a residue from a surmounted past, ghosts and specters belong essentially to the modern era and, as Marx and the Spiritualists both claimed (in radically different ways), are harbingers of the future? In Freud's analysis, the not-yet-complete surmounting of "primitive" beliefs triggers an uncanny sensation. Mladen Dolar points out that rather than the primitive content, it is the modern disavowal of the animistic belief in ghosts and magic that brings the uncanny sensation into being.³ Ghosts may terrify folks in all cultures (although there is plenty of evidence of them also being benign, harmless, and even comic), but only in the modern world does their appearance unsettle our world-view, threatening our sense of rational order and scientific reality.

For the Spiritualists of the mid-nineteenth century, nothing about their new revelation seemed primitive. Like the then recently appearing telegraph and photograph, the Hydesville rappings, and similar purported messages from the spirit world that soon spread through America and Europe, claimed to announce a new modern world in which death would prove no longer to pose a barrier to communication.⁴ The messages and manifestations of the spirit world offered modern men and women scientific proof, evidence that could be tested by the senses, for beliefs that previously depended on faith alone. In the modern world, Spiritualists claimed, the spirit world manifested itself through means that could hold up to scientific observation; in this new modern religion, the spirits offered proofs of their existence.

The modernity of Spiritualism manifested itself not only in claims that the existence of the spirit world could be proved through direct contact, but also through the movement's embrace of modern technology as a means of communication and demonstration. The tapping of a telegraph message might well have inspired the rapping of the Fox sisters. For ordinary folk of the era the telegraph's instantaneous bridging of vast distances seemed no less mysterious and miraculous than messages from the dead. The Spiritualists immediately grasped the parallel between spirit messages and the new mode of electronic communication. The chief Spiritualist journal for several decades was named *The Spiritual Telegraph*; the new device provided Spiritualists with an analogy that made their messages from the spirit world seem not only possible, but modern as well.

Spiritualists even more directly embraced photography.⁵ Not only did the darkness needed to protect the sensitized photographic plate from exposure serve as an analogy for the darkness in which mediums held their séances, but photographs could also provide evidence of the existence of spirit beings. Anne Braude, in her remarkable study of American Spiritualism, *Radical Spirits*, has pointed out a shift in the first few decades of the movement from an emphasis on sound (music, voices, rappings) and verbal messages (whether decoded from rappings, a letter board or spoken directly by a medium) to more spectacular visual and sensual manifestations.⁶ Séances nearly always included messages from the spirit world, but as time went on their spectacular aspects increased: levitating tables; mysterious music (often from instruments that

seemed to float in mid-air); odd souvenirs, known as *apports*, such as flowers or fruits brought from the spirit world; and physical contact with the spirits themselves (which might tickle, kiss, or even slap séance participants). In Spiritualism's desire to offer tangible proof of its contact with the dead, the type of evidence expected seems to have become progressively more sensational and spectacular.

Fixing a Phantom Image

If seeing is believing, then not only spectacular demonstrations but also the new recording device of photography could act as a modern medium for a new revelation. It was widely believed in the mid-nineteenth century that, to quote a line from Dion Boucicault's popular 1859 melodrama *The Octoroon*, the photograph could not lie.⁷ Further, as a modern scientific process, photography seemed akin to Spiritualism. Just as Spiritualism depended on mediums whose passivity and sensitivity allowed the spirit message to come through clearly (such mediums were chiefly women, who were believed to possess these qualities more strongly than men), photography depended on a sensitized plate, which could capture the image of the world exposed before it. If these two sensitive mediums were combined — the photographic plate and the Spiritualist seer — then an image of the spirit might be produced.

This led to one of the strangest series of photographic images ever produced. Known as "spirit photographs," these images claimed to convey the impression of spirits from the other side, with visual communications and tokens from the dead. Spirit photography primarily appeared in the U.S. after the Civil War, when photography had become a widespread practice and Spiritualism had gained a new impulse due to the desire to communicate with loved ones lost in the war (and, entering into its third decade, was also in need of new manifestations in order to sustain interest). Its first famous practitioner was William Mumler, who produced a photograph of Mary Todd Lincoln, the widow of the recently assassinated president, showing Lincoln as a spirit surrounding and apparently comforting her.

This portrait exemplifies the conventions for most later spirit photographs. A subject posed for her likeness before a camera operated by a medium. Then when the plate was developed it showed not only the subject but also a host of "extras": images of people, usually faces, seeming to float around the sitter. When shown to the subject, she generally would recognize at least some of these extras as deceased loved ones. If the faces were unfamiliar, they could be identified as spirit guides whose presence around the sitter was now revealed. Such portraits with extras were produced by photographic mediums in the hundreds and possibly thousands. Any one aware of the techniques of photography could recognize in these superimposed figures processes of double exposure or composite printing, frequent practices in nineteenth-century photography. Recognition of spirits as identifiable persons now deceased usually depended on either a very blurry photograph and a willing imagination, or on the fact that, to contact the spirit of a

specific deceased, the medium often requested an existing photograph in order to aid her either to visualize or recognize the spirit as it appeared. Grieving relatives intent on contact could be extremely gullible and even the exposure of the fraudulent methods of several spirit photographers (including Mumler), did not always undo a faith rooted in a need for consolation.

Spirit photographs did not exclusively consist of the spirit's image. Some photographs included, or consisted entirely of, written messages from beyond, similar to those received by mediums through automatic writing or planchette letter boards (the ancestor of Ouija boards). Other spirit photographs displayed allegorical symbols such as crosses, hearts, and lilies. It was claimed some mediums could produce photographic images without a camera, simply by laying their hands over the plate, or even by simply concentrating their thoughts. A few photographs were entirely abstract, conveying otherworldly images of the energies of the spirit world.⁸

Spirit photographs produced images of beings otherwise invisible to the naked eye. The psychic power of the medium rendered the spirit visible (or at least accessible), while the modern technology of the camera could fix this image, retaining it for all to see. Although this imaging of something no one else could see and confirm independently might provide grounds for skepticism, for believers this unique image of a previously invisible world provided one more analogy with the technology of science. As modern science requires specialized instruments to render otherwise invisible phenomena visible — its microscopes and telescopes and eventually a host of other sensitive machines of observation more powerful than the human senses, so it was claimed that Spiritualism required its own tools to render visible entities normally beyond the human senses.⁹

Photography also aided Spiritualism in slightly more conventional ways as well. As the manifestations of Spiritualism grew more fantastic, the need to record them for more than the small number who happened to witness them arose, especially since it was believed that photography was an unimpeachable witness. D.D. Home's most spectacular demonstration of his spiritual powers came when he levitated out one window of a London apartment and back in the next. Although attested to by several witnesses, their testimony would certainly have been stronger if some portion of Mr. Home's transit had been photographed.¹⁰

Perhaps the most spectacular demonstration a spirit medium could produce was a full materialization of a spirit, in which the spirit assumed a visible and often palpable body; seemed able to walk about a room, touch (and be touched by) witnesses. Photographs of such materialization are also numerous, although none perhaps more haunting (and strangely poignant) than those produced in the 1870s of "Katie King," a spirit materialized by one of the best known and most controversial English mediums, Florence Cook. Cook's manifestations of King gained attention partly through their support by William Crookes, a major nineteenth-century scientist, discoverer of the element thallium and one-time president of the Royal Society, precisely the sort of authority the Spiritualists most hoped to convince. Crookes was enraptured by Cook (some believed the fascination extended beyond her psychic abilities) and decided to photograph her King material-

izations using magnesium flares to illuminate the séance.¹¹ The photographs produced seem like a cross between tableaux of Pre-Raphaelite spirituality and a Victorian slumber party, as the very corporeal phantom (the spitting image of Cook) parades swathed in flowing robes and topped with a turban before a series of dignified gentlemen who seem on the verge of falling asleep.

Later photographs of supposedly fully materialized phantoms seem even less convincing, as the glare and clarity of the photographs seem to reveal the manifestations of such famous mediums as Eva C. or Eusapia Palladino to be paper cut-outs. Perhaps the strangest photographs produced by Spiritualists are those of manifestations of ectoplasm. French psychologist and psychic researcher Charles Richet introduced this term for the frothy substances that oozed from the orifices of a medium while in a trance. Photographs of this phenomenon show a formless substance somewhere between Silly Putty and mucus, with occasionally a degree of flakiness or papier-mâché thrown in.

The very formless and almost dematerialized nature of ectoplasm situated it ambiguously between the realms of spirits and the material universe. However, like many Spiritualist manifestations, this milky material flowing from the mouths, nostrils, and occasionally nipples and genitals of mediums calls up associations of abject bodily fluids, rather than ethereal energies. In some cases these effluvia actually produced images themselves, with likenesses similar to those of the extras in spirit photographs bubbling through the ectoplasm extruding from a medium's mouth or nose.

Seen today (and most likely for many viewers, even seen in their own time), spirit photographs, both those which claim to capture the image of the invisible spirits of the dead and those which record the visible manifestations of mediums during séances, carry a poignant sense of absurdity. Could anyone truly believe in these things? And yet, as one lingers over these images, there is a secondary effect of fascination. Something in these images attracts us, beyond their silliness. Perhaps it is precisely the blatant failure of these images to convince one of the realities they claim to make visible that impels our curiosity. If photography claims to be the inherently most realistic of artistic media, then the contradictions posed by spirit photographs — their naïvety, their absurdity, and their occasional breaching of taboos of bodily propriety, seem to challenge the boundaries of photographic conventions. As bizarre images that seem to both invoke and question our faith in photography as the impression of reality, they may provide inspiration for new attitudes towards photography, and new ways of making and using the photographic image.

The Disembodied Images of Modernity (and Post-Modernity?)

Why then do these photographs, failed evidence left over from a debate that seems to have been settled decades ago, still possess a certain power of fascination, and why have they even begun to

provide models for contemporary artists? Clearly they no longer serve to convince anyone of the survival of the human personality after death, or of the ability of the dead to communicate with the living. Their often naïve attempts at fraud, their mismanaged illusions, would seem to abolish the possibility of anyone taking them seriously as evidence. And yet they are evidence of a sort, images speaking (perhaps more poignantly due to their failure to convince) of the *desire* to believe, the *desire* for evidence of immortality and contact with the dead. If nothing else, spirit photographs prove that photography not only records the facts of history, but the obsessions and fantasies of the past as well.

Thus spirit photographs, although often inept in technique and awkward in composition or exposure, nonetheless share some common ground with the exquisite Victorian photographs of such creative masters as Julia Margaret Cameron or Charles L. Dodgson (better known as Lewis Carroll), who chose not to use photography simply to capture the everyday world around them, but saw it as a means of staging the realm of fantasy and the ideal, creating images that, for all their sublimation, speak nonetheless the language of desire and sensuality. Like the Spiritualists, these Victorian photographers sought through their photographic medium to idealize the material world in which they lived. But unlike the passivity of spirit mediums, the resistance the realist photographic medium offered to their attempts at a dream-like evocation, rather than rendering them silly as some earlier commentators claimed, often endows their images of the vulnerable interior life of the late nineteenth-century middle class with a startling poignancy.

As contemporary photography has become more open to experimentation with possible dream scenes in which imagined identities are tried on and acted out, often with a strong sense of the failure or inadequacy implicit in the fantasy roles the culture offers, these fantasies from a century ago no longer look simply naïve and amusing. Who can say that the original producers and viewers of such photographs did not notice the same slippage between assumed role and actual physical body that strikes us as well in Cameron's and Dodgson's staging of literary tableaux? Perhaps Spiritualists, realizing that the worldwide scientific acceptance of their manifestations they had expected no longer seemed forthcoming, expressed a certain desperation in these images, clinging to a desire no longer at home in a world whose promises of progress became increasingly inhuman. A dogged desire in the face of disillusionment, rather than a simple gullibility, may speak from these images as well as those of Victorian late romantic photographers. Or at least we contemporary viewers may now discover something of this hinted at, there for us to recognize.

There is more than the dialectical drama of desire and disillusionment being rehearsed in these uncanny photographs. Their evocation of a state of disembodiment and their challenge to photography to represent such a state, seemingly beyond the grasp of visibility, provides a powerful emblem of the fate of the body in the modern age. To grasp this new modern range of

Anton Giulio Bragaglia
Italian, 1890-1960
Self Portrait, 1911
gelatin silver print
Gilman Paper Company Collection



imagery devised to portray (and in a sense create) a new concept of the body and its energies, one might compare a chronophotograph by Etienne-Jules Marey, a conventional spirit photograph with superimposed "extras," and the avant-garde photodynamist photographs of Futurist Anton Giulio Bragaglia.

This brings together images with strongly contrasting purposes, but uncannily similar visual appearances. Marey's chronophotographs, inspired by the images of animal locomotion published by Edward Muybridge, exposed on a single photographic plate the outline and trajectory of the human body in motion.¹² The most widely circulated images registered the successive impressions of the stages of motion as men marched, jumped, executed fencing maneuvers, or climbed stairs before the camera. In Marey's photographs the mobile human body appeared as a series of semi-transparent outlines. Graphing the pattern of movement in their abstraction, these images were carefully produced as forms of scientific measurement and observation. Ironically Marey's scientific methods created images that have since entered into the canon of photography on unintended aesthetic grounds, influencing such modern art works as Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

Marey used brief photographic exposures to deconstruct the continuity of motion into a series of fixed phases, capturing those aspects of human motion below the threshold of conscious perception. As a scientist, he labored to overcome the plethora of useless visual information in a photograph and abstract the image into a self-inscribing graph of human motion. To do so, he eventually dressed his models in black with joints prinked out with white strips of cloth and metal studs, producing an abstracted image of human motion reduced to lines of motion. Thus his photographs unintentionally fascinated artists of the avant-garde who found in his images not only a complex representation of time and motion, but also a wraith-like dematerialization of the human body, reduced to its vectors of motion and a vague outline. This was a body de-corporealized, etherealized by the methods of modern science.¹³

Insofar as Marey had aesthetic intentions in his work, they were realistic, hoping to provide realist artists with more accurate models for the portrayal of human motion. However, the reception of Marey's work by non-realist painters, members of the avant-garde, reveals the significance the dematerialized body might have for a modern vision inspired by, but not limited to, the devices of scientific investigation. Both Marcel Duchamp and his friend the Czech painter František Kupka drew inspiration from Marey's specter-like, abstracted, and nearly transparent images. When Duchamp produced *Nude Descending a Staircase* drawing on imagery from chronophotographs, he launched a fatal blow against naturalism and the ideal of accurate depiction of the visible world.¹⁴ Kupka's images, also inspired by Marey, seem less radical; they take Marey's images not simply as a model of abstraction, but as an image of the non-material body of Spiritualism and the occult systems that followed in its wake.¹⁵ Kupka's human figures are surrounded by outlines that seem less to plot the vectors of motion than to portray a body in

constant spiritual vibration, emanating auras. The Theosophical concepts of astral and ethereal bodies, non-material doubles possessed by each human being, provided a non-rational pathway to abstraction for Kupka (as well as other abstract artists, such as Piet Mondrian). But Kupka could (mis)recognize these figures in the entirely logical images produced by Marey and other scientific chronophotographers.

Many other avant-garde artists followed Duchamp's lead in drawing on Marey's chronophotographs of motion to portray a new modernist image of the human body as the confluence of the forces of motion. These images especially excited the Futurists, those shock troops of modernity, for their incorporation of time and motion into the images and the transformation of the figure and ground this brought in its wake. Futurists declared that motion dematerialized objects and bodies, and the force lines that ripple through their paintings transcribe flows of energy beyond ordinary perception. Although often viewed with suspicion by the inner core of the Futurist movement, the photodynamist Bragaglia produced photographic images that resembled both Futurist painting and Marey's chronophotographs, but which he insisted were authentic works of art.¹⁶ Bragaglia's photography claimed an avowedly aesthetic (or anti-aesthetic) purpose, disavowing any relation to Marey, who nonetheless clearly served, along with spirit photography, as his inspiration. Bragaglia, as Marta Braun and Elizabeth Siegel have shown, also produced what he claimed were accurate spirit photographs, in fact superior to anything the Spiritualists had produced.¹⁷

Bragaglia anticipates a paradox that reappears with contemporary artists who work in reference to earlier spirit photography. Bragaglia did not claim his "spirit photographs" to be medium-induced impressions of the spirit world. He confessed they were staged. However, he also claimed that they gave a more reliable image of the spirit world than the supposed products of the spirit themselves. Although Bragaglia's paradoxical claim remains difficult to make sense of, it highlights an ambiguity central to the odd appeal of spirit photography: that these images might fascinate or evoke uncanny sensations even when severed from their (ultimately failed)

Etienne-Jules Marey
 French, 1820-1904
Walk, run, jump, 1883
 chronophotograph
 1 x 5 1/4 inches (2.8 x 13.2 cm)
 ©Collège de France



claim to evidence. Bragaglia's images, like those other spirit images he claimed to scorn, not only serve as a repository of deeply ambivalent human beliefs about the survival of the soul after death, but they express anxieties about the new modern body, seemingly in the process of being de-corporealized by the dehumanized processes of technology and modern life.

In an age where presence has mixed with absence in the core of our experience, death and life may no longer seem as clearly opposed as they once were. Think of Marcel Proust speaking to his grandmother on the telephone and the anxiety he expresses about the absence implied in all such communication over a distance through a technological medium. "A real presence, perhaps that voice that seemed so near — in actual separation! But a premonition also of an eternal separation!"¹⁸ The photograph itself, as Roland Barthes and other theorists have taught us, not only combines the experiences of presence and absence, but serves as a modern *memento mori*, an invocation of the death still to come.¹⁹ In his film *Orpheus*, Jean Cocteau claimed death comes to us through mirrors as we observe daily the decay of our physical appearance. Jean-Luc Godard extended this to the cinema, which he claimed offered the visualization of "death at work."

Modern devices of photographic reproduction and electronic communication intersect with the Spiritualists' ambition, albeit in a manner they did not anticipate. We are constantly in communication with the dead through their moving images and voices captured and preserved by the modern media. Presenting us with a simulacrum of the living, our technological images might also speak to us of our own death. But whether they also carry the consoling message of survival remains dubious.

Thus the failure, the naïvety, even the absurdity of these images (as well as their occasional deep poignancy and even awkward beauty), may condemn spirit photography on its own terms, as evidence that will withstand scientific scrutiny. But their play with uncertainty, as desire and fantasy confront a recalcitrant reality, pulls us into another viewpoint, one of recognition and even empathy. The terror of the phantom, its ability to haunt us from beyond the limits of physical death, lies partly in its lack of scientific certainty. French historian Paul Veyne put this eloquently:

For my part, I hold ghosts to be simple fictions, but perceive their truths nonetheless. I am almost neurotically afraid of them, and the months I spent sorting through the papers of a dead friend were an extended nightmare. At the very moment I type these pages I feel the hairs stand up on the back of my neck. Nothing would reassure me more than to learn that ghosts "really" exist. Then they would be a phenomenon like any other, which could be studied with the right instruments, a camera or a Geiger counter.²⁰

The Spiritualists of the mid-nineteenth century believed modern science and technology provided the instruments whereby the "other world" could be made as tangible as the world of the living. In this final act of technological conquest, overcoming death as the telegraph had overcome dis-

Georgiana Houghton

British, 1814-1884

Spirit Photograph No. 23, June 13, 1872, 1872.

from the series *My Own Mediumship*

carte-de-visite albumen print

3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches (8.9 x 5.7 cm)

Museum Purchase, Gridley W. Tarbell II Fund

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

2003.2.1



tance, they failed. But their failure may reveal that in some ways the opposite occurred. Modern technology may not have succeeded in materializing the spirit world, but in many ways it may have de-materialized the modern life-world. Ever since photography moved from recording the world more or less as the human eye sees it, to recording phenomena no human being can witness, as in Marey's chronophotographs of motion too rapid for the eye to register, it became to a degree uncanny. As the techniques of virtuality continue to expand our photographic images beyond all imagining, and more and more of our time is spent staring at images on screens of various sorts, the difference between our daily existence and that of phantoms becomes attenuated. The photographs in this exhibition must be approached as artifacts of human imagination and desires rather than messages sent from the other world. Nonetheless, they communicate to us images which are simultaneously bizarre and inexplicably familiar. They recall to us the modern world of unseen forces that surround us today and the manner in which modern life has transformed our image of the human body.

Notes

- 1 For discussions of the nature of specters in history and specifically in relation to Marx, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994). The best histories of Spiritualism are: for America, R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); and for England, Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychic Research in England 1850-1914* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989). References for the historical points I make about the Spiritualist movement can be found in these books.
- 2 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Vol. XVII, 217-256.
- 3 Mladen Dolar, "I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding Night: Lacan and the Uncanny," *October* 58 (Fall 1991) 5-23.
- 4 For specific discussions of the relation between Spiritualism and other occult systems and modern technology, see Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998).
- 5 Accounts of spirit photography can be found in: Paul Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (New York: Arno Press, 1973 reprint originally published 1911); Fred Gettings, *Ghosts in Photographs: The Extraordinary Story of Spirit Photography* (New York: Harmony Press, 1978), and in my essay "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films and Photography's Uncanny" in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, edited by Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), which also includes other references.
- 6 Braude, 177.

- 7 "The Octoroon" in *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, ed. Peter Thompson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 163. The actual line, referring to the camera, is "'Tis true! the apparatus can't lie."
- 8 Madge Donahue's "skotographs," spirit photographs produced in the 1920s and '30s, preserved in the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York, were reportedly formed by her simply holding the photographic film in her hand and display mainly abstract images.
- 9 For a fascinating account of the difficulties such visual devices encountered in being considered as evidence, see Catherine Wilson, *The Invisible World: Early Modern Philosophy and the Invention of the Microscope* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also Joel Snyder, "Visualization and Visibility" in *Picturing Science Producing Art*, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998), 379-97 for a brilliant discussion of Marey's use of photographs as scientific tools.
- 10 Accounts of Home's levitation are numerous. An enthusiastic account can be found in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. I (London: Psychic Press, 1989, reprint edition, originally published in 1926), 198-202.
- 11 An account of their relation, keyed toward scandal mongering, can be found in Trevor N. Hall, *The Spiritualists: The Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes* (New York: Helix Press, 1963).
- 12 The most thorough and thoughtful treatment of Marey in English is Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey 1830-1904* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 13 Braun discusses Marey's appropriation by the avant-garde on 264-318.
- 14 Duchamp discusses the motivation behind his painting and its debt to Marey in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), 29-34.
- 15 Kupka's work is discussed in Michael Gibson, *Symbolism* (Köln: Taschen, 1999), 154-159.
- 16 Bragaglia's manifesto *Futurist Photodynamism* is reprinted in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 34-45, which also contains the key manifestos of the movement.
- 17 Marta Braun has been working on Bragaglia's photography as an ongoing project, as in her presentation to the Society for Cinema Studies in 2000 in Chicago. Elizabeth Seigel's research paper in the Dept. of Art History, University of Chicago, "Tricks and Traces: Anton Giulio Bragaglia's Photodynamism and Photospiritism," first brought this aspect of his work to my attention.
- 18 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past: The Guermantes Way*, trans. C. K. Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1982), 135.
- 19 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), especially 92-94.
- 20 Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), trans Paula Wissing, 87.

pamela thurschwell

*refusing to give up
the ghost* some thoughts on the

afterlife from spirit photography to phantom films





We might think that today disembodied spirits are more likely to haunt the aesthetic realm than the religious; the meanings of the modern specters we find in this exhibition may appear to differ in kind and motivation from the spirit photography of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and they may indicate some very different beliefs about ghosts. Yet in this essay I hope to trace some paths from those early photos through to some popular modern films in which the dead return, by considering the investment in the ghost as both a tool for mourning and as a spectral shield against the reality of loss. The spirit photography represented in this exhibition takes us back to the double origins of modern Spiritualism as both a way of satisfying a culture's yearning for a recognizable afterlife, and a new form of popular entertainment. The enormous upsurge of interest in the supernatural in Britain and America from the middle of the nineteenth century is usually attributed to the work of two resourceful American sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, who began to experience mysterious knockings and rappings in their upstate New York home in 1848. Very soon the girls figured out how to talk to the spirits who were haunting their house through a code of raps; their investigations revealed that the trouble was caused by the ghost of a peddler who had apparently been murdered in their house. Under the management of an older sister, the Fox girls began performing. As the rapping spirits conveniently followed them everywhere, they had soon launched a new craze for Spiritualism in Britain and America and launched themselves in successful careers as spirit mediums. The possibility that the dead were literally still available to be communicated with was a reality in Victorian-era Britain and America. From the 1850s onwards the intelligentsia, as well as the working and middle classes, were, some reluctantly, some enthusiastically, attending séances. Dickens, Tennyson, the Brownings, George Eliot, and G. H. Lewes amongst others all found themselves participating in Spiritualist displays. Not everyone was impressed by the spirits they experienced (Robert Browning wrote a damning poem, "Mr. Sludge the Medium," in response to his wife's enthusiasm for Spiritualism), but almost everyone experienced them. Sometimes no more than a good party game, sometimes the basis for an organized alternative religious belief, spirit rapping, table turning, and full medium materializations (in which mediums would lock themselves in cupboards in dark lighting and create spirits who would appear and entertain the assembled company) were an integral part of Victorian culture.

Spirit photography, which emerged as a profitable business in the 1860s, helped bring Spiritualism out of the aural and into the visual realm both as evidence and as entertainment.¹ The spirit photograph, as Tom Gunning has convincingly argued, combined the possibility of communicating with the elusive dead with the tempting accuracy of new technologies of reproduction. The photograph promised a certain kind of apparently irrefutable scientific evidence — the exact likeness. And yet that new "science" of photography was shadowed from the beginning by uncanny doubles and disturbing repetitions, both in theory and practice:

In 1856 Sir David Brewster in his book describing his new invention, the stereoscope, advised his readers that “[f]or the purposes of amusement the photographer might carry us even into the realm of the supernatural,” since it was quite possible “to give a spectral appearance to one or more of his figures and to exhibit them as ‘thin air’ amid the solid realities of the stereoscopic picture” (Stereoscope 205). That such images could display the iconic accuracy and recognizability of photographic likenesses and at the same time the transparency and insubstantiality of ghosts seemed to demonstrate the fundamentally uncanny quality of photography, its capture of a specter-like double.²

The popularity of spirit photography was inseparable from the mourning practices of Victorians who were struggling to grasp the significance of new scientific theories that seemed to dislodge so many of the received doctrines of Christianity. A poem such as Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, for instance, was both an act of mourning for the loss of a much-loved friend and an act of mourning for the loss of a world where heaven was assured. Allaying these anxieties, the familiar photographed spirit could be seen as guaranteeing an afterlife to even the most skeptical. The viewers confronted with the spirit image could console themselves about their own mortality; eventually they too might be hovering benignly above the heads of their still-living relatives.

But as Gunning indicates, the spirit photograph also explicitly revealed the paradoxically doubled nature of any photographic image. Photography insisted upon the accuracy of its reproductive and mimetic powers, and yet also immediately conjured up the realm of magic and specters. On a day-to-day level every photographic portrait of a person worked to evade death by appearing to stop time. By reproducing what seemed like the essence of the individual life, the photographic portrait of the living promised to circumvent mortality in a way similar to that of the spirit photograph. With the perfect likeness ostensibly guaranteed by the photograph, you might always have an image of your deceased mother, husband, or son available to you, frozen at a certain age. So in a sense photography, as Julia Margaret Cameron’s works elegantly display, didn’t need to be explicitly of the corpse to signify death, and it didn’t need to indulge in the double exposures of spirit photography to refer to the disembodied. According to Roland Barthes, the photo leads us inexorably towards death, our own and others.³

The photograph, insofar as it always gestures towards both the embodiment of the real and the disembodied spirit, can be seen as ambivalently placed in relation to mourning. Insofar as the photograph arrests memory and can be used to deny loss, it may conceivably prolong mourning indefinitely — you may never escape that haunting image of the dead in a modern world in which it is literally always available to you. The protracted public mourning over Princess Diana was certainly inseparable from the ubiquity of her image in the papers. But on the other hand the photograph may also aid the processes of mourning — loss may not be so unconquerable if you can disassociate your own ego from that of your lost loved one, one step at a time, using the photograph as a sign that the loved one is and was essentially different from

yourself. In this scenario, eventually you put that photograph away in a box under the bed and get on with the world of the living. The photograph can safely contain the past for the mourner or it can make it impossible to escape. It can be a small *memento mori* or a permeating image of the past that seems to threaten the continued existence of the self. The power of the photograph is in its referentiality – we imagine it refers to the truth of what was – but also in its insubstantiality – it's a two-dimensional attempt to capture life, endlessly reproducible perhaps, but essentially flimsy. If an image is disembodied to begin with, it may be that much more difficult to effectively destroy.

The dynamic I'm exploring here comes from Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), an essay that I think is at least as important for disentangling the meanings of the disembodied spirit as captured by photography or film in our modern culture as his other influential musing on ghosts, doubles, and repetition in "The Uncanny" (1919). In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud analyses the ways in which people react to the death of a loved one or the loss of a cherished idea. He claims that a normal state of mourning may involve an extended period of distress and depression but will eventually heal itself in time. Melancholia, although it resembles mourning in many ways, is a different creature. Symptoms of melancholia include "a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment."⁴ The melancholic resembles the normal mourner in everything but his self-hatred and expectation of punishment.

Mourning for Freud is a process, while melancholia, although driven by a ceaseless psychic activity, only finally signifies stasis – caught in an inexorable and inescapable relation to the lost object, the ego of the melancholic is in a constant state of damage and disintegration. In normal mourning, "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (253). Not so for melancholia – the work of melancholia eats away at the self. "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (254). The basic mechanism is a reversal; the melancholic cannot relinquish the object because he or she had conflicting feelings of love and hate towards it to begin with. The guilt of living with these feelings after the object's death makes the melancholic feel responsible for the death of the object; melancholics unconsciously believe themselves to be murderers – in a sense they have created their own loss. To deal with the guilt of this situation, the melancholic reacts by literally not letting the loved one go, often to the point of unconsciously taking on the traits of the other person in an extreme identification, designed to deny the fact that a loss has taken place. In a vampiric dynamic, the self is emptied out to keep the dead alive. As Freud poetically puts it, "the shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego" (258).

The questions that Freud's psychic economy raises are replete with the language of haunting. They also seem to suffuse the psychic work of both spirit photography and photography more

generally. How did the spirit photographs function for those who participated in them? As melancholic signifier or consoling step on the way to an acceptance of loss? How far away or how near are the dead in these works: hovering about the heads of the living or invading their souls? Where do disembodied spirits stop and embodied ones (ourselves) begin? On the one hand, these images might be seen as killing the dead yet again — by taming death and reducing its otherness until it becomes just a rather banal extension of life. (At the best spirit photography studios your apparition would be guaranteed.) On the other hand these images go about continually resurrecting the dead in a realm that hovers uncertainly between the terrifying and the consoling.

Our culture today may not seem as suffused in the belief in ghosts as the Victorian era was, and yet disembodied spirits continue to make their presence felt. One place ghosts have found a spiritual home, if you can forgive the pun, is at the movies. We now know that seeing dead people sells films even apart from the endless serial resurrections of the horror genre. From *Ghost* (1990) to *The Sixth Sense* (1999), the dead have, in recent years, reappeared in Hollywood in commercially and critically successful forms. What Theodor Adorno once referred to, in reference to post-war Germany's relationship to the Holocaust, as "coming to terms with the past" has become the stuff of popular entertainment, and this dynamic is often represented by the handy cinematic image of the ghost.⁵ In afterlife films such as *Ghost* and *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1991) living characters who have lost loved ones are forced, in the space of two hours, to recognize that that loss is unrecoverable; yet simultaneously, the magic of the flickering screen also denies, or at least defers, this necessary emotional lesson, because their unrecoverable dead are still hanging around the frame finishing up their own unfinished business. In more recent films such as *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* (2001) the dead simply don't know they are dead. In all these films mourning, or relinquishing the past, is a two-way street; the dead must release the living just as the living must release the dead. Unlike the ghost of Hamlet's father, who makes only a few brief appearances toward the beginning of the play as catalyst, modern-day cinematic ghosts are usually only banished at the end of the film when everyone, including the still living characters, also

The Others

© Buena Vista Home Entertainment,
Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Courtesy of Photofest, New York



dissolves into the final credits. Modern ghost films create an apparently unbridgeable gap between the living and the dead and then soothingly bridge that gap by representing the dead, both to the audience and to other characters in the film, and endorsing the possibility of contact between the two realms. Not coincidentally, these films tend to employ a minimal amount of special effects to disembody their ghosts for the screen. In *Ghost*, the dead Patrick Swayze appears on screen for most of the film as his usual beefcake self, but we, the audience, are the only ones who can see him. Dismayed by the fact that he can no longer make any impact on the outside world and wanting to rescue his girlfriend Demi Moore from the clutches of the business associate who had him killed, he takes lessons from another ghost in how to be corporeal. Beginning by moving a penny and kicking a tin can he eventually learns to kick ass (and operate a computer) to see that justice is done. Simultaneously, materiality is achieved.

The plots of *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* hinge on the fact that the thickly corporeal actor, Bruce Willis, and Nicole Kidman, sporting a Grace Kelly body to match her Grace Kelly hair, have no sense of their own post-death disembodiment and neither should the cinema audience. (My apologies to those who haven't yet seen the films. But to continue what I've begun, I suppose I should also tell you that Rosebud was his sled). We are given little or no access to the ghostliness of the ghost in recent cinema excursions despite film's eminent suitability for ghosting; instead the dead are shown to be still with us. This is appropriate perhaps to the quotidian religious atmosphere of modern-day America in which, some polls claim, more than 70% of the population believes in angels.⁶ Spirits can and are readily pictured by the popular cultural imagination in all kinds of forms from the most mundane and material — the dead wife still puttering around the kitchen — to the most spectacular and spectral — the heavenly choir at the end of the long tunnel. Perhaps it is the case that the dead have once again come to have a comfortable presence in our shared mass culture imaginary. But what shifts in the form and meanings of disembodied spirits can we find from the Victorian period to our current era? Is it that new kinds of compensatory magic might be needed to heal a world that's rife with postmodern loss? These afterlife films



The Sixth Sense

© Spyglass Entertainment Group,
L.P. All Rights Reserved.
Courtesy of Photofest, New York

function to allay anxieties and, in the more interesting cases, refuse to allay anxieties, that are inextricable from the technologies of reproduction that create their ghosts; they are films that are in part about the fantasies and fears that are created by film's promise of cinematic immortality. In a larger (and, I'm sure, largely unanswerable) sense, these movies pose the question of what forms of melioration make sense in modernity?

Cinema has, not surprisingly, carried with disembodied spirits from its very beginnings. The new and potentially manipulable techniques of film were deployed practically from the form's invention to create ghosts, just as the tricky techniques and fortuitous double exposures of photography had been used from early on to create the spirit photography that you find in this exhibition. Georges Melies' 1897 film *Enchanted Hotel* showed a confused hotel dweller watching his boots walk away without him and his furniture mysteriously collapse, while the following year saw the British director G.A. Smith *Photographing a Ghost* (in a print that has, unfortunately, not survived). This was followed in 1901 by a ten-minute film of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, called *Scrooge or Morley's Ghost*.⁷ It seems clear that these early cinematic ghosts were created in part because the technology available motivated their production (as the technology available has also inspired a slew of metaphors of haunting that have attached themselves to the language of film and photography).⁸ But recent ghost films often resist the path that film technology seems to lead towards; instead of making an image appear transparent or fleeting, these movies make the dead past appear as embodied as the fictional filmic present. When we watch a film, on some level of course, we know, even as we disavow that knowledge, that everyone on the screen is really simply a flickering two-dimensional image, but for the space of the film, the ghosts share the material reality of the living. The dead are with us again; the past can be reassuringly restored. Romantic comedies used to guarantee their audiences a united couple at the end; modern romantic ghost stories agree to break up the couple, sending one off towards life (and often a new partner) and the other towards death, but they do so by portraying an interlude, the space of the movie, in which nothing ever dies and the past can be resolved. There is, in these films, a happy marriage between life and death, an acceptance of loss made easy by an unexpected if temporary return of the dead used finally to help one or both parties through the transition. And it's usually pretty clear that for the dead, the transition is towards some place else (for Patrick Swayze in *Ghost*, a shaft of light in contrast to the cartoonish black demons who come to bear the bad dead characters away). Either way the dead are not headed towards utter extinction. But of course, this ambiguous transition applies to the audience as well — films that initially seem geared toward getting us to negotiate our way through proper mourning to an acceptance of death actually function to promise that we may all continue to live in the continuous present of screen time.

Seemingly tilted toward the processes of mourning — the moment of recognition, the releasing of the past — perhaps these films really make available a kind of warm fuzzy cultural melan-

cholia in the sense that the *work* part of the work of mourning seems to drop out. Death is too easily processed by refusing to process it as difference; we see the live Patrick Swayze as continuous with the dead Patrick Swayze; he's still the slightly inarticulate man who loves his Demi and beats up on bad guys. I'm arguing that films like *Ghost* encourage, in the realm of fantasy, the sense that death is just another version of life, with a few more communication difficulties. On one level the audience is made successfully and happily melancholic by phantom-rom-com films. Like the endless resurrections of the serial form more generally (I've just seen a poster for *Final Destination II* with the tag line, "It's not over yet"), ghost films let us believe that nothing ever dies, not really. *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* appear to buck this trend by suggestively shifting the locus of melancholia away from the living and toward the dead who do not know and cannot accept their own status. We as audience become implicated in their melancholia by similarly not knowing that they are dead. There's a double education that needs to take place for the work (both the film and the work of mourning) to be complete. In both films the ghosts must learn to accept their condition — coming to terms with loss is coming to terms with the loss of their living selves as well as coming to terms with the loss of their loved ones. The child psychologist character played by Bruce Willis in *The Sixth Sense* must initially learn to accept the claim of the troubled young boy, Cole, whom he is attempting to treat, that he sees dead people. Interestingly, he only does so because he identifies Cole's problems as similar to those of an old patient of his (in fact the disturbed patient who shoots Bruce Willis and then himself at the beginning of the film). He goes back and listens closely to a tape of his conversation with this earlier patient as a child and turns up the volume on a point when he had left the room for a few minutes leaving the child alone; soon he can hear another voice muttering something about death in Spanish. Like the spirit photo, the tape recorder is a guarantor of mimetic accuracy. Recording media bear witness to the continued existence of the dead where the human eye and ear cannot.

In the course of the film, Bruce Willis must learn that what he thought was a failing marriage — he's incapable of communicating with his wife — is actually a marriage that has been terminated more definitively because he is very much a late husband. He must learn to let her go, relinquish her to another man and to the world of the living. At the very end of *The Sixth Sense*, when Bruce Willis has finally recognized his own ex-existence and accomplished this letting go, we see a flash of white and then a brief image of a wedding photo; a juxtaposition of his (perhaps heavenly, perhaps blank) future with his (happily coupled) past. Throughout the film we periodically see Bruce Willis's wife lying on a couch in their house watching home movies of their wedding. If we are alert viewers we might suspect from this that he is dead; that she is using the filmic image as a tool for prolonging mourning into melancholia. For the audience Bruce Willis is literally next to her on the couch; for her he is still alive on the TV. Again it is notable the ways in which, in these films, technologies of reproduction — the photo, the home movie, the tape recorder — function both to ratify the continuing presence of the dead among the living, and to disavow loss. Earlier

The Purple Rose of Coiro

© 1985 Orion Pictures Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of Photofest, New York



we saw Cole's mother look at a series of photos of him hanging on her wall. We and she notice that in every photograph there is the faintest of spectral glimmers hovering next to him. The photograph registers, ever so slightly, the possibility of another world. It seems that the spiritual supercharge of photography has not changed drastically since the Victorian period; the photograph is still imagined as bearing witness to the ineffable, just as film can still keep us in communication with the dead.

The Others also features photographs as part of its process of recognizing and accepting death. The film is set in the 1940s shortly after World War II. In one scene, Grace, played by Nicole Kidman, discovers an eerie album of photos from the late nineteenth century all showing people in various poses with their eyes closed. Her somewhat creepy housekeeper informs her that these are mortuary photos, photos of the dead, a practice which was popular in England and America from at least the American Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century and which has continued, although often unacknowledged, into the present day.⁹ (Again the link between death and photography is historical as well as theoretical; because early exposures took so long, dead people made the best, and at first, only human subjects for portraits. Alexander Gardner, one of the earliest and best known photographers of war dead, actually moved dead soldiers and weapons into more aesthetically satisfying positions in order to photograph them for the newspapers.¹⁰) Later in the film Grace discovers another mortuary photo, this time of her housekeeper, maid, and gardener dated 1897; the servants she has recently hired are dead already, as the photographic evidence shows. But it is only still later, at the end of the film, when she stumbles upon a séance being given by the current owners of the house (the supposed specters she believes are tormenting her and her children) that she is forced to acknowledge her own death and that of her children. We might see the acknowledgement of a kind of death in life as coming earlier in the film as well. On the one hand, Grace's pale-complexioned son and daughter are metaphorically linked to photographs; they are photo-sensitive and cannot be exposed to the light. They must be kept in a kind of darkroom. On the other hand they are also linked to death; the house is kept shrouded in darkness and the children cannot leave it; they behave like ghosts

before we or they know that they are. When we realize that the children are already dead their photosensitivity makes sense; they are more two-dimensional than three, already the disembodied spirits that photography promises to capture. Again we return to the photograph as a kind of privileged metonym and metaphor for the dead — that which reveals the disembodied spirit and preserves the past but does so by killing it and freezing it at one moment in time.

The Others ends with another version of the education of the dead; Grace takes on the knowledge of their deathly status, but the film makes no comforting gesture toward successful mourning by having the dead relinquish the realm of the living. Instead what Grace has to relinquish is her rabid Catholicism — early in the film she is shown to be fanatical in her faith, forcing her children to read the Bible continuously and learn many lessons steeped in hellfire and damnation. However, at the end of the movie her daughter asks her where limbo is, and she replies, “I don’t know. I don’t know any more than you do.” The only thing she knows is that whatever happens, they must never leave the house. *The Others*, unlike the other films I’ve discussed, gives us a portrait of death as real otherness. The interactions between the dead and the living are never made easy, never tamed. One might argue that, by continuing to haunt the house the Nicole Kidman character chooses melancholia; by insisting that they will share a space with the living, she maintains a grasp on her past and refuses to countenance loss. But paradoxically this melancholic dynamic may be the best way of respecting death in its unknowability; she and her children will be proper ghosts from now on — they have become the Others of the title, they can no longer pretend to themselves that they are the same.

One final film, which is not precisely a ghost movie but is all about the attractions of the ghost as embodied in the cinematic image, also participates in a melancholic dynamic. In Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, the romantic lead of the eponymous film within the film played by Jeff Daniels comes down off the screen to romance audience member Mia Farrow, an inveterate movie-goer who uses the silver screen to escape her own unhappy marriage and the poverty of the Great Depression. When Farrow finally is forced to decide between love offered by the real actor (also played by Jeff Daniels) and the fictional character, she mistakenly chooses the real person and the heartbroken movie character returns to the screen. When her living lover then deserts her, Farrow is left with nothing but the remains of a flickering and elusive vision of cinematic happiness and luxury. In the final scene she is back in the same theatre, watching Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance cheek to cheek in a world she can never again reach. Allen’s film suggests that the disembodied image is actually better than the real thing, that the “real” coming to life of the past or the lost or the missing may not satisfy your every desire for closure and narrative conciliation. Unlike most of these other films which assume that coming to terms with the dead or the lost and then putting them tidily away will make “real” life better, Allen’s film actually exhorts its audience to choose the ghost, and by so doing, I would argue, portrays the romance of “real” loss more poignantly.

It is Woody Allen, of course, who is the modern master of the art of disavowing death: “I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve immortality through not dying,” or alternatively, “I don’t want to live on in the hearts and minds of my countrymen, I want to live on in my apartment.” The modern ghost films that appeal most to our culture, on one level portray a version of mourning’s work – the return of the dead allows both the living and the dead to work through unfinished business, come to terms with the past. And yet these films simultaneously seem unable to countenance the nature of their own disavowals – they promise their audiences that perhaps death is simply like watching a film; that all losses can be restored onscreen. Films that insist on denying death in favor of a world of filmic fantasy or the continuing presence of the ghost may have something more interesting to tell us both about our attitude towards death, and those spectral modern forms, the film and the photograph, that maintain and shape those attitudes. Perhaps in this version of modern melancholia, disembodied spirits may find their natural home. What we need, perhaps, is a way of confronting death that respects the ghost without pretending to know his contours – in a sense, that lets him live on in his own apartment.

Notes

- 1 See Steven Connor, "The Machine in the Ghost: Spiritualism, Technology and the 'Direct Voice'" in Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds. *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999), 203-225, for more on the early importance of sound to the séance.
- 2 Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny" in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, edited by Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 47.
- 3 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, on the strange temporality of the photograph: "For the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past ('this-has-been'), the photograph suggests that it is already dead." (Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 79.
- 4 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Penguin Freud Library, Volume 11: 245-68, 252. Further references included in text.
- 5 Theodor W. Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 114-129.
- 6 According to Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science* (W.H. Freeman and Co., 2000), a Gallup poll of American adults showed that 72% believed in angels. A similar poll conducted by *Time Magazine* in 1993 plumped for 69%.
- 7 Mandy Merck, "The Medium of Exchange" in Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, eds. *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 163-178; 168.
- 8 Gunning provides many instances of spectral language being used from early on to describe photography. For film's fascination with the spectral see for instance Lotte Eisner's *The Haunted Screen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) and Geoffrey O'Brien, *The Phantom Empire* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993).
- 9 See Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) for a history of representing the dead photographically, as well as analysis of why these photos, unlike the contemporaneous spirit photography, might seem particularly creepy to us now in a culture in which death has become a taboo subject. With spirit photography we now feel assured that we are not actually looking at images of the dead; with mortuary photography we are certain that we are.
- 10 Ruby, 13.

alison ferris

alison ferris spirit



2 Ghosts in the

by [Name]

and cajon
 of woman affairs.
 if not the specters themselves
 my Blake, Archive, Zoe Beloff,
 his book *My Ghost*, a series of photo
 Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Gregory Crewdson introduced the
 figures implied that the paranormal exists more deeply in the suburban unfor
 we might have imagined. Anna Gaskell was commissioned by the Menil Collectio
 a series of photographs and video of a woman in a room which she titled
 basing the work on Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Jean-Paul Maurier's *R*
 New York photography gallery, Keith de Lillis re-introduced Georgiana Houghton, a
 with a photographer named Mr. Hudson.
 In 2001, Gary
 of his signature
 Las Vegas New
The Influence
 and tracks, in Madison
 ark, exploring how
 impact our daily lives
 Dorothy Cross created *Ghost Ship* and installed it on an old light ship in Dublin
 off the coast of Ireland. (Before satellite buoys light ships with two engines – marked
 present at underwater reefs.) Cross had UV light projected on the ship every twenty minutes
 coated with luminous paint, the ship glowed brightly, slowly dimmed
 light altogether.
 round the world and across history. Nearly every discipline in
 their metaphors, and each examines them according to
The Disembodied Spirit investigates ghost from
 lens of photography. Many of the artists mentioned
 photography, film, video, sound to represent
 first might seem insignificant that
 work is so prevalent today in the contemporary art world. But the
 exists
 of great



When one is, figuratively speaking, confronted with a ghost, the first question that comes to mind is: What does it mean that a ghost is *here*? Ghosts of all kinds are materializing in the contemporary art world and *The Disembodied Spirit* investigates why ghosts — representations of ghosts created by contemporary artists — are haunting us now. What is it about this particular time and this particular combination of social and cultural conditions that is bringing out the ghosts? Ghosts frequently indicate that some aspect of life, for better or worse, has shifted or been transformed; the ghosts in contemporary art are beckoning and cajoling us, with some urgency, to look more closely at the current state of human affairs.

In just the last few years, evidence of haunting, if not the specters themselves, could be found at the 2002 Whitney Biennial in the works of Jeremy Blake, Archive, Zoe Beloff, and Leighton Pierce. In the same year, Adam Fuss released his book *My Ghost*, a series of photographs that were also on display at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Gregory Crewdson introduced a new body of work whose figures implied that the paranormal exists more deeply in the suburban unconscious than we might have imagined. Anna Gaskell was commissioned by the Menil Collection to create a series of photographs and video depicting a haunted young woman which she titled *half-life*, basing the work on Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. At his New York photography gallery, Keith de Lillis re-introduced Georgiana Houghton, a nineteenth-century British medium who, in collaboration with a photographer named Mr. Hudson, produced some of the most theatrical examples of spirit photography of her time. In 2001, Gary Simmons created *Ghost House*, a site-specific project where he produced a series of his signature erasure drawings on the walls of an abandoned house at Ruby Ranch near Las Vegas, New Mexico. Tony Oursler, in 2000, mounted his ambitious multi-media installation *The Influence Machine*, a series of ghostly video projections, smoke machines, and sound tracks, in Madison Square Park, exploring how historical and current mimetic technologies impact our daily lives. In 1999 Dorothy Cross created *Ghost Ship*, which involved anchoring an old light ship in Dublin Bay off the coast of Ireland. (Before satellite buoys, light ships — ships with no engines — marked the presence of underwater reefs.) Cross had UV light projected on the ship every twenty minutes at night. Because it was coated with luminous paint, the ship glowed brightly, slowly dimmed, and eventually vanished from sight altogether.

Ghosts have haunted cultures around the world and across history. Nearly every discipline in the humanities is faced with ghosts and their metaphors, and each examines them according to its own particular methods and practices. *The Disembodied Spirit* investigates ghosts from a Western perspective, primarily through the lens of photography. Many of the works mentioned above make use of media-based technology — photography, film, video, sound — to represent ghosts and haunting in their art, a fact that at first might seem insignificant given that media-based work is so prevalent today in the contemporary art world. But the fact that artists are using film-based media to create representations of ghosts at this turn of the century is of great conse-

quence. Even when contemporary artists in the exhibition do not rely on photographic media to evoke the ghostly, their works can be and often are inflected conceptually by the photographic. To this end, it makes sense first to look back to the turn of the previous century — another moment when ghosts proliferated, especially in literature, but also in the now lesser known phenomenon of spirit photography. The works gathered in *The Disembodied Spirit* suggest links between spirit photography and contemporary works deploying the representation of ghosts, though the exhibition does not propose a linear historic progression. Rather an understanding of spirit photography can inform and perhaps complicate our understanding of the prevalence of the latter-day ghosts with which we began.

* * *

Before discussing spirit photography proper, it is helpful to remember that photography itself, from its inception, was linked to ideas of the supernatural. French photographer Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, 1820-1910) writes in his autobiography that the invention of photography was greeted with much astonishment in the 1830s, more so than many of the other radical technologies that came into being in the nineteenth century. In his memoir he writes, “But do not all these miracles pale...when compared to the most astonishing and disturbing one of all, that one which seems finally to endow man himself with the divine power of creation: the power to give physical form to the insubstantial image that vanishes as soon as it is perceived, leaving no shadow in the mirror, no ripple on the surface of water?”¹ Acknowledging that this is how photographs were understood in the nineteenth century explains, at least in part, the temptation to put the young technology to the service of making visible something that of its very nature cannot be seen and does not exist in visible form. Proceeding according to this basic insight, Julia Margaret Cameron, using her signature messy physical photographic process, produced powerful images of ethereal young women as angels in *The Angel at the Sepulchre* (1869) and *The Angel at the Tomb* (1870). James VanDerZee’s spectral composite photographs from the 1920s exemplified, too, how photographic technology, even after its novelty and mystification had worn off, could continue to give visible form to the ineffable.

But even before Julia Margaret Cameron began creating photographic fictions of angels, a Boston photographer by the name of William Mumler claimed in 1861 that when he was developing a self-portrait — a photograph he had taken of himself alone in a friend’s studio — a second figure appeared on the print. At first, Mumler dismissed the occurrence, explaining that perhaps the photographic plate he used to make the photograph was not clean. But by then, twenty or so years after the invention of photography, themes of Spiritualism had already been folded into popular discourse and photography. As art historian Rosalind Krauss explains, “...photography was the first available demonstration that light could indeed exert an *action*... sufficient to cause changes in material bodies.”² Though not a Spiritualist himself, Mumler was

convinced by adamant believers that this “extra” appeared from the spirit world. After he was repeatedly able to produce photographs of sitters accompanied by spirits, Mumler opened his own studio in Boston. By 1869 he was so successful that he moved to New York City and his studio there, according to a number of accounts, came to be frequented by some of the most eminent people in the country.

Spirit photography was a material manifestation of Spiritualism, a popular and controversial mid-nineteenth-century religious movement. Practitioners of Spiritualism believed in the immortality of the soul, and their beliefs were enacted by attempts at establishing communication with the dead through means such as séances, telepathy, and spirit photography. Attracting men and women of all classes and races, Spiritualism evolved during a crisis of faith in the nineteenth century, at a moment when people had become disaffected with both Calvinism and the evangelicalism that often replaced it. Though there were national conventions and numerous publications focusing on Spiritualist matters, Spiritualism had no orthodox doctrine, no official leadership, no churches. Anyone who declared him- or herself a Spiritualist was one; likewise anyone who pronounced herself a medium could officiate at séances or in the photography studio — formal training was not required. Historian Anne Braude writes that Spiritualism “held two attractions that proved irresistible to thousands of Americans: rebellion against death and rebellion against authority.”³ Spiritualism not only claimed to provide evidence of immortality of the soul, it also provided an alternative to the religious order for the iconoclasts and nonconformists.

At the same time that Spiritualism was rising in popularity, many radical new technologies came into being: the steam engine, the telegraph, the electric light, the phonograph, and much more. Spiritualists embraced technology and all it had to offer in their attempts to contact the spirit world. Nineteenth-century citizens found the telegraph, which communicated messages over long distances, comparable to human mediums, who communicated between this world and the next, a correspondence that inspired the title of at least one Spiritualist paper, *The Spiritual Telegraph*. Science and religion, too, did not view their tasks as opposed but coincident inasmuch as they shared investigations of the parameters of “reality.” Researchers were proving that people were surrounded by invisible forces such as gravity, electricity, and bacteria — all phenomena that seemed no more or less improbable or hypothetical than the spirit world. Literary critic Roger Luckhurst writes that in England, “the craze for table-turning and spirit-rapping was seized on by men of science as an occasion to dramatize the passage from belief in supernatural agents to rational explanation.”⁴ Spiritualism, Braude continues, “participated in the optimistic equation of science and progress that bolstered the conviction of so many nineteenth-century reform groups.”⁵

Spirit photography directly enters the dialogue between science and Spiritualism. Photographs of spirits became a way to make contact with the spirit world and to provide what was

perceived as scientific evidence of an afterlife. The camera, a brand new technological invention, was generally regarded as a scientific instrument that produced objective images of reality. Of course, there was more to the production of spirit photographs than met the eye of the general public. The effects of spirit photographs were produced most commonly in a photographer's studio. During photographic sessions, sitters were posed as they would be in standard photographic portraiture of the time. While no spirits were visually evident to the sitters when the photographs were made, mysterious "extras" appear in the final prints: disembodied heads hover in the air above them, transparent faces glow on the sleeves of a jacket, ethereal figures gently place a hand on the shoulder of an unknowing sitter. But it was not simply the obscurity to the general public of the photographic process that led to the kinds of credulity spirit photography enjoyed. The same cultural forces that inspired the Spiritualist movement helped to animate a belief or a desire to believe in the photographic evidence of ghosts.

Just as anyone could practice Spiritualism, anyone could, too, practice spirit photography. Holdings at the American Society of Psychical Research (founded in 1885) show a remarkable range of spirit photographs. Some spirit photographers produced photographs for paying customers, others used photography to explore the manifestations of spirits under "scientific conditions," and still others claimed to have, just by chance, captured the image of a spirit on film. Those who sent such photographs to the ASPR were frequently seeking authentication by some form of authority or hoped that their images might contribute evidence to the larger ongoing investigation into the world beyond. Originally an American phenomenon, the practice of spirit photography, like Spiritualism itself, quickly spread to Europe where it was practiced in multiple variations until the 1930s.

With an eye cast to the current work now being done on ghosts, we might ask some leading questions about its precursors. How does spirit photography, which has been, for the most part, viewed as an aberration — one of those eccentric and embarrassing photographic practices from the nineteenth century — now function within the history of photography? How have critics to date made sense of spirit photography? Finally, how can an understanding of spirit photography assist us in our understanding of representations of ghosts created by contemporary artists?

Again, Rosalind Krauss can help us find an angle on some of these questions. In her 1978 essay "Tracing Nadar," Krauss is intent on establishing the notion that the operation of the photograph is that of "the imprint, the register, the trace."⁶ Krauss substantiates her twentieth-century argument, influenced as it is by semiology, by laying out the historical underpinnings of the photograph as "trace" through the writing and photographic practices of Nadar. She writes that in the nineteenth century, the photograph was understood as a "material object become *intelligible*."⁷ The inherent intelligibility of the photographic trace shared equally in "the positivist's absolutism of matter and the metaphysician's order of pure intelligibility, itself resistant

to a materialist analysis.”⁸ This understanding, she argues, was based in part on the belief in “...the power of light to transmit the invisible and imprint it on phenomena,” a belief that turned on “...the marriage of science and Spiritualism.”⁹ So, for Krauss, the semiotics of Spiritualism and early photography, both invested heavily in the physical realization of the trace, coincided powerfully in the nineteenth century.

In “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,” the first in-depth critical essay on spirit photography, film historian Tom Gunning takes Krauss’s arguments further. He agrees with Krauss, observing that “[C]ertainly all claims of spirit photography as evidence of an afterlife rest on this indexical claim: that ghosts invisible to the human eye are nonetheless picked up by the more sensitive capacity of the photograph.”¹⁰ But Gunning emphasizes that, while photography functioned to support nineteenth-century positivism, it was simultaneously experienced as an uncanny phenomenon, “...one which seemed to undermine the unique identity of objects and people, endlessly reproducing the appearances of objects, creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles alongside the concrete world of the senses verified by positivism.” He continues, “While the process of photography could be thoroughly explained by chemical and physical operations, the cultural reception of the process frequently associated it with the occult and supernatural.”¹¹

According to Gunning there was a constant debate within Spiritualist, Theosophical, and occult circles throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about what supernatural forces actually produced the apparitions in spirit photography. Gunning explains that while spirit photography at first functioned as proof, as records of the appearance of invisible spirits, soon thereafter — reacting in large part to accusations of fraud — spirit photographs were explained as “...products of unknown spiritual forces who used images of the dead as a way of communicating their existence to the living.” Spiritualists believed that because the deceased were so dramatically transformed after death they needed, essentially, to consult existing photographs in order to recreate their worldly selves before they could communicate effectively with the living. As Gunning observes, “We see here that a photograph, rather than providing indexical evidence of the appearance of the spirit, becomes a model for reduplication and the basis of recognition.” In this, he writes, “Photography becomes independent of its ordinary indexical references, since supernatural forces use it primarily as a process of reproduction and communication.” Spirit photography, according to Gunning, therefore disrupts the notion of the photograph as strictly an index, that is, something that can be traced back to its original. Instead, he writes, spirit photography “...reveals the uncanny aspect of this technological process, as one is confronted with doubles that can be endlessly scrutinized for their recognizable features, but whose origins remain obscure.” As a result, what is haunting about these images is “...their very lack of tangible reference, serving even within Spiritualist metaphysics simply as a nostalgic

reminder of how things once appeared, a *symbolon* passed between the living and the dead as a token of recognition.”¹² That the photographs were fake is beside the point — what we see rather is the vanishing of a secure and stable index of the authentic, the “real.”

* * *

Whereas the nineteenth century was characterized by the crisis of faith that resulted, in part, in the emergence of Spiritualism, the turn of the twenty-first century may well be characterized by the crisis of the index.¹³ With its antecedents residing in the cultural forces which produced Spiritualism, the crisis of the index consists, in part, of the inability to recognize the difference between the “artificial” and the “real.” Digitization, prosthetic and cosmetic surgery, cloning, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, virtual reality — this expanding field of activity, writes photography theorist and historian Geoffrey Batchen, “calls into question the presumed distinction between nature and culture, human and nonhuman, real and representation, truth and falsehood.”¹⁴ These dematerializing technological innovations produce both anxiety and optimism, while simultaneously altering, quite dramatically, received notions of representation and vision. Spiritualism suggested that the human soul or consciousness could exist independently from its material form — a fantasy which found vivid and uncanny expression in new technologies such as photography and the telegraph. Today, in a manner that recalls Spiritualism, cybernetics and virtual reality offer the fantasy of an ecstatically fragmented subjectivity, one that promises liberation, within fantastic worlds, from the material body and its constraints. Within the cultural space that cybernetics and virtual reality have opened up we also find the manifestation of ghosts. However, as we will see, rather than simply embracing the promise of liberation, artists use ghosts to disrupt and complicate this fantasy.

We are, of course, most familiar with ghosts as they appear not in photographs but in stories. A number of the artists in *The Disembodied Spirit* draw specifically on literature, the place where many of Western culture’s ghosts can be found, especially between 1880 and 1920. Ghosts in literature have been described by literary critic Helen Sword as enacting a whole deconstructive vocabulary. According to Sword, ghosts endlessly evade and defer meaning; they are simultaneously present and absent; they exist through a chain of substitutions or mediation; “they point, by dint of their materialized insubstantiality, to the arbitrary nature of the sign.”¹⁵ Sword also observes that ghosts’ very insubstantiality offers “a kind of interpretive cloud cover” and “an exhilarating opportunity for those who invoke them to escape semantic precision.”¹⁶

Characteristics of the ghost in literature are visually translated and transformed into a number of works of art in *The Disembodied Spirit*. In *Untitled*, Glenn Ligon revisits and appropriates text from *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, the premier twentieth-century text concerning the hauntedness of racial selves in America. The text begins, “I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like

those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids — and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me....” In Ligon’s work the text becomes more and more difficult to read as the letters blur, obscuring the text. Ligon refers in his works explicitly to suppressed histories which, nevertheless, refuse to be eradicated. Based loosely on Pauline Réage’s *The Story of O*, Tracey Moffatt’s *Laudanum* examines how the supernatural, the erotic, and race overlap and manifest in fears, anxieties, and desires around questions of proximity and distance. Anna Gaskell’s photographs from the series *half-life* are based on Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and, in turn Hitchcock’s film adaptation of the novel. Using distorted angles and theatrical lighting, the photographs depict a young woman whose identity is never revealed, wandering through grand nineteenth-century rooms. Tensions between bodily absence and presence prevail as it remains unclear if she is haunting these spaces, is haunted by them, or both.

While not based on a novel, Jeremy Blake’s *Winchester* is based on a historical story. The work depicts the Winchester Mystery House in San José, California, a house designed by Sarah Winchester, widow of the heir to the Winchester fortune and a Spiritualist whose husband and child both suddenly died. As result of their untimely deaths, Sarah Winchester believed that she was cursed by angry spirits who had been killed by guns manufactured by her husband’s family. Her house was built to accommodate ghosts with staircases going nowhere and miles of dark hallways in which they could roam. *Winchester* consists of old pictures of the house and ink drawings by Blake, all of which are digitally retouched and are, according to the artist, meant to provide an abstract or emotional tour of Sarah Winchester’s mind.

Sally Mann’s work, too, evokes a long and complex tradition of stories about haunting from the American South. Mann grapples with what modern history, specifically the history of the South, has rendered ghostly. She replicates historic photographic techniques, using antique lenses, to intimate that history, like ghosts, haunts our present. Mann follows history and its ghosts in a way that puts life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was once visible. Sociologist Avery Gordon writes that in creating ghost stories, essentially Mann’s project in these photographs, — “stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place” — one creates counter-memories for the future.¹⁷

Some artists in *The Disembodied Spirit* refer directly to Spiritualism and spirit photography in their works. In *The Poltergeist* Mike Kelley depicts himself with ectoplasm materializing from his mouth and nose. This white viscous substance — often produced by mediums in the early twentieth century — dematerialized as soon as it was produced and photography was the only way to capture it. Using what Karl Schoonover describes as the “violent corporeality” of ectoplasm

photography, Kelley offers an interpretation of the state of adolescence.¹⁸ A descriptive text that is part of the work attempts to rationalize superstition; however, the rationalization ultimately falls apart, overwhelmed by the adolescent features (and substance) that instead permeates the text and images.

Portraits by John Baldessari and Ann Hamilton can be seen, too, in relation to ectoplasm photography. In *Strobe Series/Futurist: Girl with Flowers Falling from Her Mouth (For Botticelli) #1*, Baldessari depicts a young woman — reminiscent of one of Julia Margaret Cameron's subjects — who quite gracefully expels flowers from her mouth. About the *Strobe* series Baldessari writes that it is focused on time, “that is, a moment drawn out, extended, perhaps ‘timeless’ time, an interlude in which magic might occur.”¹⁹ Ann Hamilton describes her photographs as recordings of the the trace of the encounter with another.²⁰ She produces the photographic images with her mouth. She places a film canister punctured with a small hole in her mouth. When she opens her mouth, the film in the canister is exposed, producing the negatives for the images. Hamilton generates her photographs within her body in a manner similar to that of mediums who produced ectoplasm with photographic images on them. Kelley, Baldessari, and Hamilton suggest through their work the possibility of breaching fantasy and materiality, the psychic and the physical.

Photography stops and turns back time and also allows for the return of what came before. “Whatever its nominal subject,” writes Batchen, “photography was a visual inscription of the passing of time and therefore also an intimation of every viewer’s own inevitable passing.”²¹ Bill Viola’s *Memoria* can be understood, in part, as the way we *experience* looking at photography, particularly in this context, spirit photography. Filmed in low light with an old black and white surveillance camera, *Memoria* is a video projection depicting the pained face of a man which appears and then recedes from the surface of a silk cloth. The man appears to be struggling to communicate something of dire urgency but just as we are about to discern what that might be, his image disappears again.

It is no coincidence that ideals of a disembodied self in both the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries evolved directly from radical media-technological innovations; these utopian visions offered new possibilities for life and experience within a drastically changing world. However, these utopian ideals were, and continue to be, shot through with anxiety, disturbance, and a kind of melancholy, qualities that are apparent in both spirit photography and, significantly, in much of the contemporary art included in *The Disembodied Spirit*. Clarence John Laughlin and Ralph Eugene Meatyard, for instance, depict the spectral in a manner that evokes the same pathos Barthes finds in photography — an indexical imprint of a “that-has-been” emerging from the presence of something that is no longer present. In fact, as cultural theorist Peggy Phelan points out, Barthes invokes terms such as magic and alchemy in his writing about photography, thereby coming close to “suggesting that photography is a medium, not only in the sense of an art form but also in the sense that it consorts with the spirits.”²² Laughlin and

Meatyard both regularly and unabashedly incorporated apparitions in their photographs of Louisiana in the 1940s and Kentucky in the 1950s and '60s, respectively. Both places were undergoing radical economic and cultural changes when each photographer was working; but rather than documenting these changes, both artists depicted their respective "homes" as haunted. One immediately thinks of Freud's uncanny or *unheimlich*, described most simply as an environment or circumstance with which one is familiar that becomes radically unfamiliar through the process of repression and repetition — here in Laughlin and Meatyard's work, the repression of a variety of social and racial pasts that would not fully disperse. By evoking the phantoms in their work, Laughlin and Meatyard express the experience of feeling simultaneously in and out of place, within and outside history.

More recently Gregory Crewdson explores the uncanny in his theatrical photographs depicting the unilaterally familiar American suburbs. Crewdson stages moments when suburbanites appear to be in the midst of some sort of transformation that is imposed upon them by a foreign entity. In *Untitled* we observe a young girl's contact with the supernatural in the back yard: out of an ethereally lit shed, the girl observes the emergence of hundreds of butterflies — the butterfly being a traditional, nearly universal, symbol for the spirit. Whereas the paranormal is imposed upon the characters in Crewdson's work, Leighton Pierce's *The Back Steps* depicts how the uncanny can be woven into part of everyday life. Pierce manipulates one shot of two young girls running down the stairs of his back porch at twilight on Halloween night. The scene is slowed down, blurred, and repeated over and over again so that the girls are visible only as swaths of gently moving color. The sound, consisting of the girls' faint laughter and the rustle of their movements mixed with silence, is on a different loop than that of the visuals, so that time and motion are skewed to create a beautiful, if unsettled, unworldly backyard.

The artists in this exhibition do not inveigh against an encroaching technological alienation; rather, they embrace technology, if somewhat warily, and derive from it vocabularies of fantasy and imagination — seen especially in representations of the ghost — with which to analyze "reality" and transforming human experiences. For instance, several of the artists in *The Disembodied Spirit* play out the potentially liberating instability of human existence and identity by depicting themselves and others as otherworldly inhabitants. Both Bruce Conner in *Sound of Two Hand Angel* and Francesca Woodman in *Untitled, Rome, September, 1977* from the *Angel Series* depict themselves as angels. Placing themselves, figuratively speaking, between two worlds, they suggest their contradictory desires to inhabit and escape the limits of the visible. In *Last Departure*, a less contemplative and far more theatrical work, Mariko Mori poses in Osaka's Kansai International Airport and is described by one critic as "a futuristic, kaleidoscope-eyed vision." She effects, he continues, "an ethereal, techno/traditional shaman — a human figure who serves as a medium between earth-bound humans and the spiritual unknown — who is at once both a cyborg and a bodhisattva figure from Buddhist Mandala imagery."²³ All three artists depict an uncanny form of disembodi-

ment which suggests, rather optimistically, that the subject has the option to leave the body and transport his or her consciousness to a distant destination.

Taken together, though, the works in *The Disembodied Spirit* offer a slightly different kind of argument — one that uses the inherent slipperiness and indeterminacy of the image of the ghost to evoke visible and invisible, multiple and opposing sensibilities about race, gender, history, politics, subjectivity, and representation itself. Sensing that we are susceptible to being seduced and placated by technology and its suggestion that we can escape social markers of gender, age, sexuality, and race, ghosts are entering the picture — particularly at the juncture of technology and representation — to trouble such benign fantasies. Social markers cannot simply be escaped because, as the ghosts in *The Disembodied Spirit* vividly remind us, they are too ingrained in all aspects of the human condition: fantasies of their disappearance, as we see throughout the exhibition, invite the specter and their return. But rather than simply state this as fact, artists in *The Disembodied Spirit* use the representation of ghosts to draw viewers in, to seduce them visually with phenomena that are difficult to explain, where time is obscured, where repetition is paramount, and disorientation abounds. Once lured into the representation of the ghostly, we find ourselves engaging with memories, stories, histories that, while they may not necessarily add up, can not easily be forgotten.

Notes

A number of the ideas presented in this essay were first explored in *The Disembodied Spirit: Spirit Photography and Rachel Whiteread's Ghost*, *Art Journal* (Fall 2003).

- 1 Rosalind Krauss, "Tracing Nadar," *October* 5 (Summer 1978), 30.
- 2 Krauss, 39.
- 3 Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 2.
- 4 Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.
- 5 Braude, 4.
- 6 Krauss, 34.
- 7 Krauss, 35.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Krauss, 42.
- 10 Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, edited by Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 64.
- 11 Gunning, 42-43.
- 12 Gunning, 65-68.
- 13 Geoffrey Batchen, "Ectoplasm: Photography in the Digital Age," In *Over Exposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, edited by Carol Squiers, (New York: The New Press, 1999), 20.
- 14 Batchen, 19.
- 15 Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 162.
- 16 Sword, 165.
- 17 Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 22.
- 18 Karl Schoonover, "Ectoplasms and the Idea of Photography," unpublished paper presented at the 2002 College Art Association for the panel "The Truth is Out There: Photography and the Paranormal," organized by Mark Alice Durant and Jane Marsching. A revised version of Schoonover's paper titled "Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography" will be published in the Fall 2003 issue of *Art Journal*.
- 19 Coosje van Bruggen, *John Baldessari* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1990), 35.
- 20 Judith Tannenbaum, "By Mouth and Hand: Ann Hamilton, 1990-2001," exhibition brochure published to accompany exhibition of the same name at The RISD Museum, November 9, 2001 - January 20, 2002.
- 21 Batchen, 13.
- 22 Peggy Phelan, "Francesca Woodman's Photography: Death and the Image One More Time," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (Vol. 27, no.4), 981-982.
- 23 Dominic Molon, "Countdown Ecstasy," *Mariko Mori* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 6.

plates

Plate numbers refer to the exhibition checklist starting on page 88.



Handwritten text at the bottom of the photograph, likely a title or artist's name, written in cursive script.

19 Julia Margaret Cameron *The Angel at the Tomb*, 1870 albumen print



26 Georgiana Houghton *Spirit Photograph No. 51, January 9, 1873, 1873,*
from the series *My Own Mediumship* carte-de-visite albumen print



36 **William Mumler** *Man with Spirit of a Woman Who Holds an Anchor across His Heart*, ca. 1865
carte-de-visite albumen print



33 J.R. Klausser *Clinton Langley*, 1916 gelatin silver print



In this picture the remarkable thing to
me is the arched inscription over the head,
only in rear & only in front of the
ornaments of the hat - G. W. S.

42 Edward Wyllie *Woman with Feather*, ca. 1900 gelatin silver print



7 Anonymous *Untitled* gelatin silver print



10 Anonymous *Untitled* gelatin silver print: postcard



32 Dr. Lindsay Johnson *Untitled* gelatin silver print



39 James VanDerZee *Memories of You*, 1931 gelatin silver print © Donna Mussenden VanDerZee



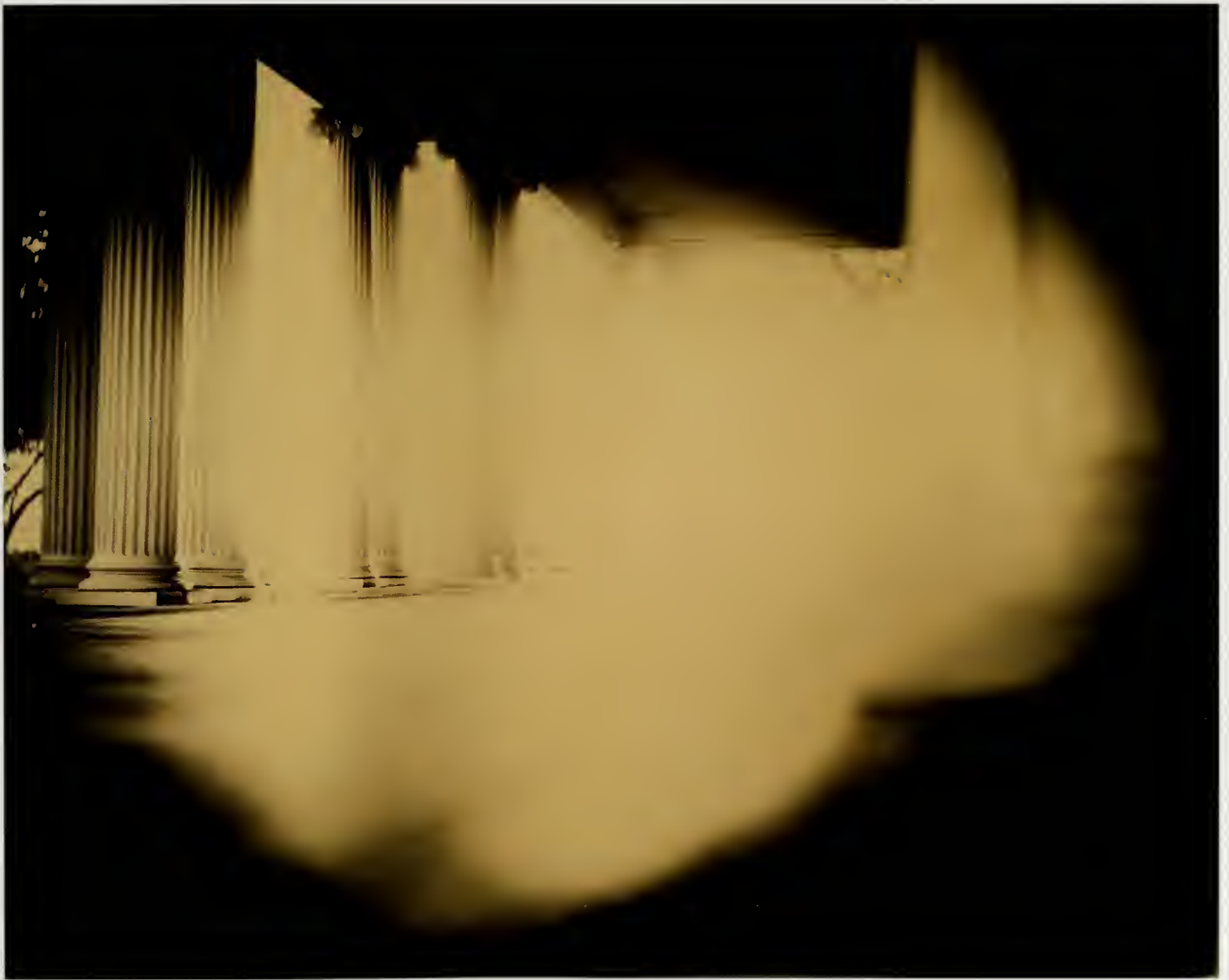
15 Anonymous *Greensburg, Kansas*, 1917 gelatin silver print



5 Anonymous *Untitled* gelatin silver print



68 Clarence John Laughlin *The Apparition #5 (or The Shadow of a Shadow)*, 1941 gelatin silver print © The Historic New Orleans Collection





84 Francesca Woodman *House No. 3, Providence* from the *Abandoned House Series*, 1975-1978 gelatin silver print





59 Anna Gaskell *Untitled #90 (half-life)*, 2002 C-print







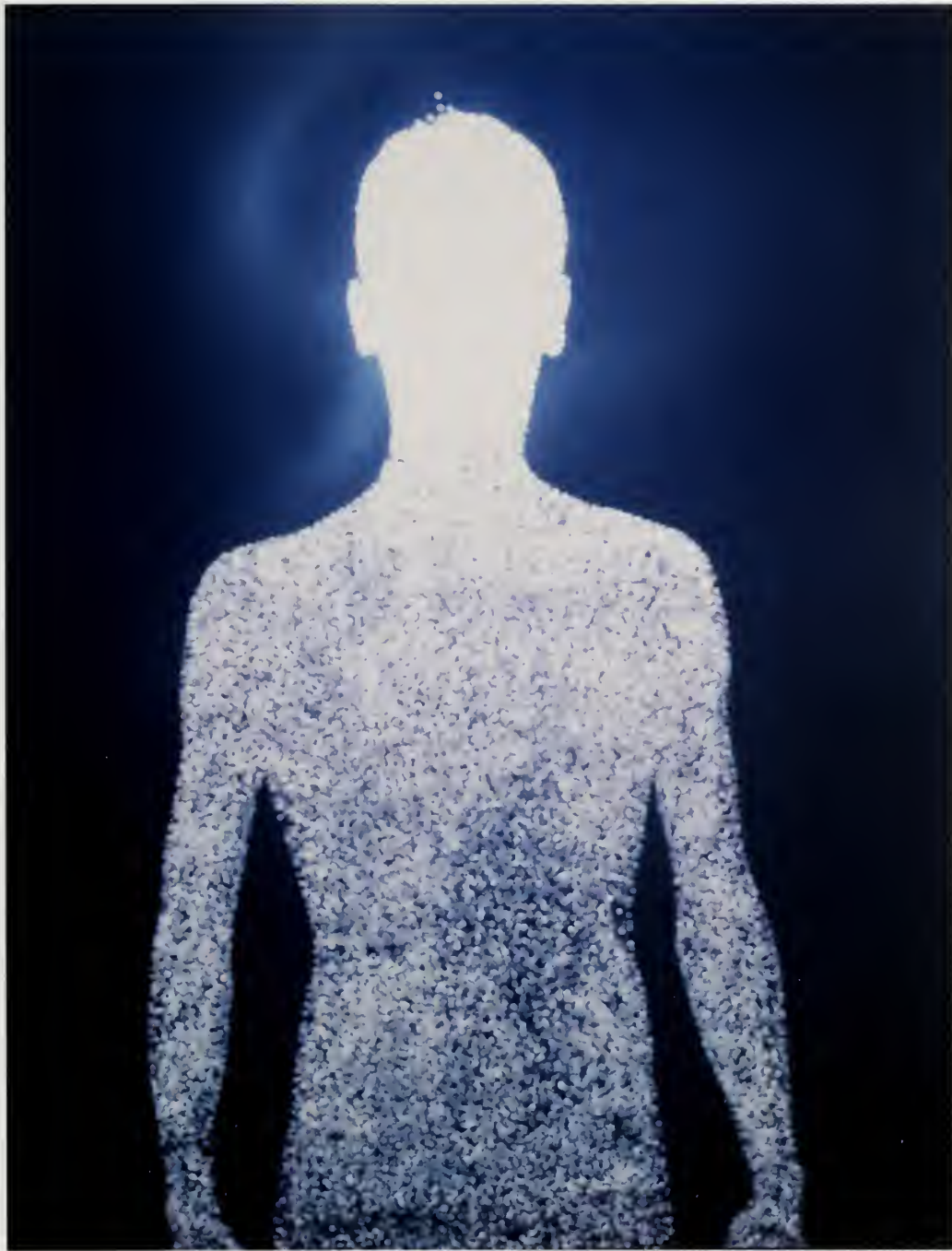
80 Leighton Pierce *The Back Steps*, 2001 digital video, color, sound; 5 1/2 minutes







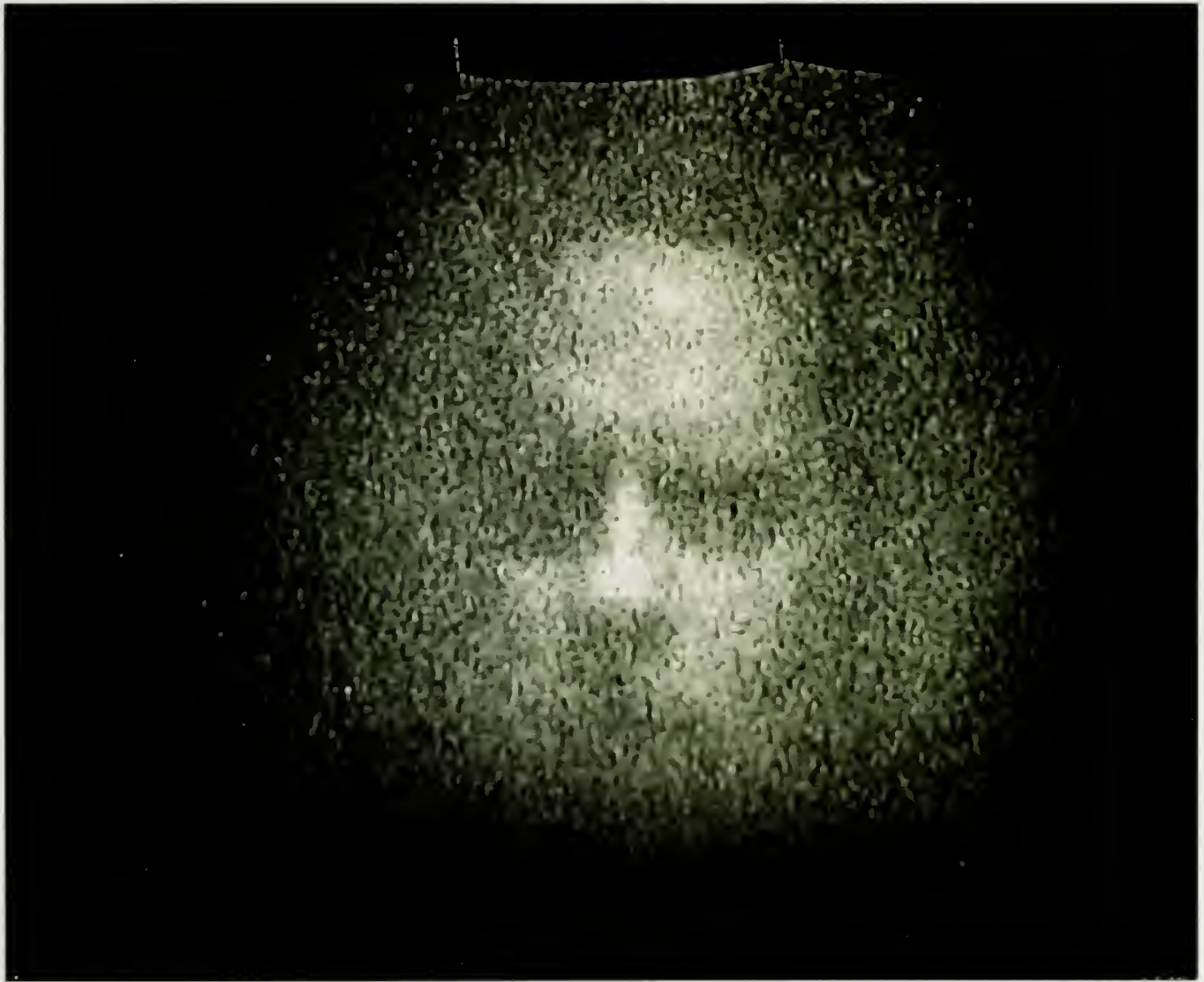
55 **Bruce Conner** *Sound of Two Hand Angel*, 1974 gelatin silver print photograph



51 Christopher Bucklow *Guest 7:49 pm 17 May 1998, 1998* unique cibachrome photograph



65 Bill Jacobson *Song of Sentient Being* (#1612), 1995 gelatin silver print





57 Adam Fuss From the series *My Ghost*, 1999 daguerreotype © Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco



52 **Nancy Burson** *Nancy (Healing series)*, 1996 chromogenic color print



48 Joseph Beuys *Levitazione in Italia*, 1978 colored inks on card
© President and Fellows of Harvard College



76 **Bruce Nauman** *Failing to Levitate in the Studio*, 1966 gelatin silver print © 2003 Bruce Nauman/Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York



2 Anonymous *The 4th Spurgeon Face*, 1929 gelatin silver print



45 John Baldessari *Strobe Series/Futurist: Girl with Flowers Falling from Mouth (for Botticelli) #1, 1975* C-print



Self portrait talking to vince



I am an invisible man.
No, I am not a spirit like
those who haunted Al-
ger Allam Khan: for my
mind of your holy world
is not so glorious. I am
a man of substance, of
flesh and bone, fiber and
knit-threads—and I might
even be said to possess
a mind. I am invisible,
understand, simply be-
cause people refuse to
see me. Like the bodi-
less hands you see some-
times in circuses, you
cannot see through them
because they are surrounded
by the same or lesser inter-
ference. What they
do for me may seem
like miracles, but they
are only the work of
hands of white imagination.

llig 1992





74 Tracey Moffatt *Laudanum*, 1998 1 of 19 photogravures on rag paper



82 Meghan Scribner *Winter Lullaby*, 2003 resin, cotton, wood rocking chair



79 **Cornelia Parker** *Thirty Pieces of Silver (exhaled)*, 2003 30 silver plated items crushed by 250 ton industrial press, metal wire



37 Mr. A. Norman Ernest F. Mansfield and Others at Camp Chesterfield, Indiana, 1924 gelatin silver print





Works in *The Disembodied Spirit*

Measurements are height before width before depth.
Works marked with an asterisk (*) are illustrated.

Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Works

1-14 are gelatin silver prints by anonymous British photographers, courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle, Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, unless specified otherwise:

1. *Church Army Lantern Dept.*
gelatin silver print: postcard
5 ³/₈ x 3 ³/₈ inches (13.7 x 8.7 cm)

* 2. *The 4th Spurgeon Face, 1929*
7 x 5 inches (17.7 x 12.7 cm)

3a. *Le Père (mort)*
4 ¹/₄ x 3 inches (10.8 x 7.6 cm)

3b. *Untitled*
3 x 2 ¹/₈ inches (7.6 x 5.4 cm)

4. *Untitled*
5 ¹/₈ x 3 ¹/₈ inches (13.0 x 8.0 cm)

* 5. *Untitled*
4 ¹/₄ x 2 ⁵/₈ inches (10.8 x 6.7 cm)

6. *Untitled*
4 ¹/₄ x 2 ¹/₂ inches (10.8 x 6.4 cm)

* 7. *Untitled*
3 ³/₈ x 2 ⁷/₈ inches (8.7 x 7.2 cm)

8. *Untitled*
5 ¹/₄ x 3 ¹/₄ (13.3 x 8.3 cm)

9. *Untitled*
gelatin silver print: postcard
5 ¹/₄ x 3 ¹/₂ inches (13.3 x 8.9 cm)

* 10. *Untitled*
gelatin silver print: postcard
5 ¹/₈ x 3 ¹/₄ inches (13.0 x 8.3 cm)

11. *Untitled*
3 ¹/₂ x 2 ⁵/₈ inches (8.9 x 6.7 cm)

12. *Untitled, 1932*
2 ³/₄ x 3 ¹/₄ inches (6.9 x 8.3 cm)

13. *Untitled, 1932*
7 ³/₈ x 5 inches (17.8 x 12.7 cm)

14. *Untitled, 1932*
7 ¹/₈ x 5 inches (18.0 x 12.7 cm)

* 15. **Anonymous**
American
Greensburg, Kansas, 1917
gelatin silver print
5 ¹/₂ x 3 ¹/₂ inches (14.0 x 8.9 cm)
Collection of the American Society for Psychical Research, New York

16. **Anonymous**
American
Woman with Jesus
gelatin silver print
8 x 6 inches (20.3 x 15.2 cm)
Collection of the American Society for Psychical Research, New York

17. **Anna Atkins**
British, 1799-1871
From the Great Observatory, Chatsworth, August 26th, 1851, 1851
from the volume *Cyanotypes of British and Foreign Flowering Plants and Ferns*
cyanotype on paper
18 ¹/₁₆ x 14 ³/₄ inches (45.9 x 37.5 cm)
Museum Purchase, Gridley W. Tarbell II Fund
Bowdoin College Museum of Art
2001.13

18. **Julia Margaret Cameron**
British, 1815-1879
Call, I follow, I follow, let me die!, 1867
carbon print
13 ³/₄ x 10 ⁵/₈ inches (34.9 x 27.0 cm)
Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

* 19. Julia Margaret Cameron

British, 1815-1879

The Angel at the Tomb, 1870

albumen print

13 1/8 x 9 1/4 inches (33.3 x 23.5 cm)

Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

20. Julia Margaret Cameron

British, 1815-1879

The Angel at the Sepulchre, ca. 1872

albumen print

14 3/8 x 10 3/4 inches (36.5 x 27.3 cm)

Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

21. R.L. Green

American

Helen L. Brickett and Her Spirit Friends, 1894

gelatin silver print

6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.5 x 10.8 cm)

Collection of the American Society for Psychological
Research, New York

22. William Hope

British, 1863-1933

Untitled, 1920

gelatin silver print

4 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches (10.8 x 8.3 cm)

Courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle,
Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

23. William Hope

British, 1863-1933

Man with Spirit Manifestation of a Woman, 1924

gelatin silver print

3 x 5 inches (7.6 x 12.7 cm)

Courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle,
Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

24. William Hope

British, 1863-1933

Untitled, 1928

gelatin silver print

5 1/8 x 3 1/4 inches (13.0 x 8.3 cm)

Courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle,
Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin

25. Georgiana Houghton

British, 1814-1884

Spirit Photograph No. 23, June 13, 1872, 1872, from the series

My Own Mediumship

carte-de-visite albumen print

3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches (8.9 x 5.7 cm)

Museum Purchase, Gridley W. Tarbell II Fund

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

2003.2.1

* 26. Georgiana Houghton

British, 1814-1884

Spirit Photograph No. 51, January 9, 1873, 1873, from the

series *My Own Mediumship*

carte-de-visite albumen print

3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches (8.9 x 5.7 cm)

Museum Purchase, Gridley W. Tarbell II Fund

Bowdoin College Museum of Art

2003.2.3

27. Georgiana Houghton

British, 1814-1884

Florence Marryatt (Mrs. Ross Church) and Mrs. Keningale

Cook, 1874

carte-de-visite albumen print

4 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches (10.8 x 6.4 cm)

Courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York

28. Georgiana Houghton

British, 1814-1884

Dr. Speer, etc., 1874

carte-de-visite albumen print

4 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches (10.8 x 6.4 cm)

Courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York

29. **Georgiana Houghton**
British, 1814-1884
Spirit of the Ladies' Father, 1874
carte-de-visite albumen print
4 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches (10.8 x 6.4 cm)
Courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York
30. **Georgiana Houghton**
British, 1814-1884
Mrs. Clarke, 1876
carte-de-visite albumen print
4 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches (10.8 x 6.4 cm)
Courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York
31. **Georgiana Houghton**
British, 1814-1884
Spirit Photograph No. 77, March 9, 1876, 1876, from the series *My Own Mediumship*
carte-de-visite albumen print
3 1/2 x 2 1/4 inches (8.9 x 5.7 cm)
Museum Purchase, Gridley W. Tarbell II Fund
Bowdoin College Museum of Art
2003.2.2
- * 32. **Dr. Lindsay Johnson**
British
Untitled
gelatin silver print
4 1/8 x 3 inches (10.5 x 7.6 cm)
Courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle,
Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities
Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin
- * 33. **J.R. Klausser**
American
Clinton Langley, 1916
gelatin silver print
9 x 6 inches (22.9 x 15.2 cm)
Collection of the American Society for Psychical
Research, New York
34. **William Mumler**
American, 1832-1884
Woman with Spirit Arms Touching Her Head, 1865
carte-de-visite albumen print
3 3/4 x 2 1/4 inches (9.5 x 5.7 cm)
Collection of the George Eastman House International
Museum of Photography and Film
35. **William Mumler**
American, 1832-1884
Woman with Spirit Child, ca. 1865
carte-de-visite albumen print
3 7/8 x 2 1/4 inches (9.8 x 5.7 cm)
Collection of the George Eastman House International
Museum of Photography and Film
- * 36. **William Mumler**
American, 1832-1884
*Man with Spirit of a Woman Who Holds an Anchor across His
Heart*, ca. 1865
carte-de-visite albumen print
3 3/4 x 2 1/4 inches (9.5 x 5.7 cm)
Collection of the George Eastman House International
Museum of Photography and Film
- * 37. **Mr. A. Norman**
American
Ernest F. Mansfield and Others at Camp Chesterfield, Indiana,
1924
gelatin silver print
3 3/4 x 4 1/2 inches (9.5 x 11.4 cm)
Collection of the American Society for Psychical
Research, New York
38. **James VanDerZee**
American, 1886-1983
Gaynella, ca. 1920
gelatin silver print
8 1/2 x 6 1/2 inches (21.6 x 16.5 cm)
Courtesy of Donna Mussenden VanDerZee
- * 39. **James VanDerZee**
American, 1886-1983
Memories of You, 1931
gelatin silver print
9 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (25.1 x 20.0 cm)
Courtesy of Donna Mussenden VanDerZee
40. **James VanDerZee**
American, 1886-1983
I Remember Father, 1926
gelatin silver print
9 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (25.1 x 20.0 cm)
Courtesy of Donna Mussenden VanDerZee

41. **Edward Wyllie**
 American, 1848-1911
M.E. Falk with Native American Girl, 1897
 gelatin silver print
 6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.5 x 10.8 cm)
 Collection of the American Society for Psychological
 Research, New York
- * 42. **Edward Wyllie**
 American, 1848-1911
Woman with Feather, ca. 1900
 gelatin silver print
 6 1/2 x 4 1/4 inches (16.5 x 10.8 cm)
 Collection of the American Society for Psychological
 Research, New York
- Twentieth-Century Works**
43. **Diane Arbus**
 American, 1923-1971
A house on a hill, Hollywood, Cal. 1963, 1963
 gelatin silver print
 20 x 16 inches (50.8 x 40.6 cm)
 Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery, New York
44. **Archive**
 Chris Kubick and Anne Walsh
 American, b. 1970 and 1962
 Listening Station for *Conversations with the Countess of
 Castiglione*, Volume I from the series *Art after Death*, 2001
 slide projector, slides, compact disc player and head
 phones; 44 minutes, 32 seconds
 Courtesy of the artists
- * 45. **John Baldessari**
 American, b. 1931
*Strobe Series/Futurist: Girl with Flowers Falling from Mouth (for
 Botticelli) #1*, 1975
 C-print
 13 3/8 x 10 1/2 inches (34.0 x 26.7cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery,
 New York
46. **John Baldessari**
 American, b. 1931
*Strobe Series/Futurist: Girl with Flowers Falling from Mouth
 (for Botticelli) #2*, 1975
 C-print
 13 3/8 x 10 1/2 inches (34.0 x 26.7cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery,
 New York
- * 47. **Zoe Beloff**
 British, lives in New York, b. 1958
Beyond, 1997
 CD-ROM for Macintosh
 Courtesy of the artist
- * 48. **Joseph Beuys**
 German, 1921-1986
Levitazione in Italia, 1978
 colored inks on card
 14 1/2 x 8 3/4 inches (36.8 x 22.2 cm)
 Collection of Busch-Reisinger Museum of Art, Harvard
 University Art Museums, The Willy and Charlotte Reber
 Collection, Purchase
- * 49. **Jeremy Blake**
 American, b. 1971
Winchester, 2001-2002
 DVD with sound for projection or plasma screen,
 18-minute continuous loop
 dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist and Feigen Contemporary,
 New York
50. **Christian Boltanski**
 French, b. 1944
Jewish School of Grosse Hamburgerstrasse in Berlin in 1938,
 1994
 cotton cloth, photograph, fluorescent lamp
 86 x 62 x 2 3/4 inches (218.4 x 157.5 x 6.9 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery,
 New York

- * 51. **Christopher Bucklow**
 British, b. 1957
Guest 7:49 pm 17 May 1998, 1998
 unique cibachrome photograph
 40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm)
 Private Collection, courtesy of Paul Kasmin Gallery,
 New York
- * 52. **Nancy Burson**
 American, b. 1948
Nancy (Healing series), 1996
 chromogenic color print
 39 x 39 inches (99.0 x 99.0 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist
53. **Nancy Burson**
 American, b. 1948
Gary (Healing series), 2000
 chromogenic color print
 39 x 39 inches (99.0 x 99.0 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist
54. **Jim Campbell**
 American, b. 1956
Untitled, 2003
 custom electronics, 768 white LEDs, and cibachrome
 transparency
 22 x 30 x 3 inches (55.9 x 76.2 x 7.6 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
- * 55. **Bruce Conner**
 American, b. 1933
Sound of Two Hand Angel, 1974
 gelatin silver print photogram
 88 x 37 inches (223.5 x 94.0 cm)
 Courtesy of Tim Savinar and Patricia Unterman
- * 56. **Gregory Crewdson**
 American, b. 1962
Untitled (Butterflies and Shed), 2001
 digital C-print
 48 x 60 inches (121.9 x 152.4 cm)
 Courtesy of Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn
- * 57. **Adam Fuss**
 British, b. 1961
 From the series *My Ghost*, 1999
 daguerreotype
 11 x 14 inches (27.9 x 35.6 cm)
 Courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco
- * 58. **Adam Fuss**
 British, b. 1961
 From the series *My Ghost*, 2000
 daguerreotype
 8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)
 Courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco
- * 59. **Anna Gaskell**
 American, b. 1969
Untitled #90 (half life), 2002
 C-print
 49 ⁷/₈ x 48 ¹/₈ inches (126.7 x 122.2 cm)
 Courtesy of Tony Podesta and Heather Miller
60. **Anna Gaskell**
 American, b. 1969
Untitled #91 (half life), 2002
 C-print
 74 ⁷/₈ x 61 ¹/₂ inches (190.0 x 156.2 cm)
 Courtesy of Casey Kaplan
61. **Anna Gaskell**
 American, b. 1969
Untitled #94 (half life), 2002
 C-print
 25 ¹/₈ x 21 ¹/₈ inches (63.8 x 53.7 cm)
 Courtesy of Tony Podesta and Heather Miller
62. **Ann Hamilton**
 American, b. 1956
Monnett, 2000-2003
 photogravure on paper
 22 x 26 ¹/₂ inches (55.9 x 67.3 cm)
 Courtesy of Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles

- * 63. Ann Hamilton
American, b. 1956
Emmett, 2000-2003
photogravure on paper
22 x 26 1/2 inches (55.9 x 67.3 cm)
Courtesy of Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles
- * 64. Ann Hamilton
American, b. 1956
(*whitecloth · table*), 1999
mixed-media installation: electrical and mechanical
components, wood, silk
33 x 48 x 120 inches (83.8 x 121.9 x 304.8 cm)
Courtesy of Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
- * 65. Bill Jacobson
American, b. 1955
Song of Sentient Being (#1612), 1995
gelatin silver print
50 x 40 x 3 inches (127.0 x 101.6 x 7.6 cm)
Courtesy of Julie Saul Gallery, New York
- * 66. Mike Kelley
American, b. 1954
The Poltergeist, 1979
series of seven images and texts
Energy Made Visible, drawing, 40 x 27 1/2 inches
(101.6 x 69.9 cm)
Bo Bo Cuck, drawing, 40 x 62 1/2 inches (101.6 x 158.8 cm)
Ectoplasm #1-#4, gelatin silver prints, 40 x 26 1/2 inches
(101.6 x 67.3 cm each)
1 text image: 40 x 33 inches (101.6 x 83.8 cm)
Courtesy of Carol Vena-Mondt
67. Clarence John Laughlin
American, 1905-1985
Elegy for Moss Land, 1940 (printed 1961)
gelatin silver print
8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)
Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection
1983.47.4.692
- * 68. Clarence John Laughlin
American, 1905-1985
The Apparition #5 (or *The Shadow of a Shadow*), 1941
(printed 1947)
gelatin silver print
11 x 14 inches (27.9 x 35.6 cm)
Courtesy of the Historic New Orleans Collection
1981.247.1.906
- * 69. Glenn Ligon
American, b. 1960
Untitled (two etchings from a suite of four adapted from
"Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, 1952) 1992
intaglio
25 x 17 3/8 inches (63.5 x 44.1 cm) each
Collection of the University Art Collection, New School
University, New York
70. Sally Mann
American, b. 1951
Untitled, 1998 (#7 from the *Deep South* series)
gelatin silver enlargement print toned with tea
37 1/4 x 47 inches (94.6 x 119.4 cm)
Courtesy of Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York
- * 71. Sally Mann
American, b. 1951
Untitled, 1998 (#11 from the *Deep South* series)
gelatin silver enlargement print toned with tea
37 1/4 x 47 inches (94.6 x 119.4 cm)
Courtesy of Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York
- * 72. Ralph Eugene Meatyard
American, 1925-1972
Untitled (Arched doorway with ghost), 1966
gelatin silver print
7 3/8 x 7 1/4 inches (17.8 x 18.4 cm)
Collection of the Akron Art Museum, purchased with
funds from Anne Alexander and the Museum
Acquisition Fund. Courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery, San
Francisco

- * 73. Duane Michals
 American, b. 1942
The Bogeyman, 1973
 series of seven gelatin silver prints
 each photograph 3 ³/₈ x 5 inches (8.7 x 12.7 cm)
 Collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh;
 The Henry L. Hillman Fund, 2001
- * 74. Tracey Moffatt
 Australian, b. 1960
Laudanum, 1998
 series of 19 photogravures on rag paper
 each photograph, 30 x 22 ¹/₂ inches (76.2 x 57.2 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery,
 New York
- * 75. Mariko Mori
 Japanese, b. 1967
Last Departure, 1996
 cibachrome print, aluminum, wood, smoke aluminum
 3 panels, each 83 ³/₄ x 48 x 2 ¹/₄ inches (212.7 x 121.9 x
 5.7 cm)
 Collection of Eileen and Peter Norton, Santa Monica,
 California
- * 76. Bruce Nauman
 American, b. 1941
Failing to Levitate in the Studio, 1966
 gelatin silver print
 20 x 24 inches (50.8 x 61.0 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York
77. Cornelia Parker
 British, b. 1956
Silver that was Trapped in a Ghost Town Door, 1997
 silver
 12 x 6 x 3 inches (30.5 x 19.2 x 7.6 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and
 D'Amelio Terras, New York
78. Cornelia Parker
 British, b. 1956
Tarnish From a Spoon Bent by a Psychic, 1999
 oxidized silver on cotton handkerchief
 24 ⁵/₈ x 24 ⁵/₈ inches (62.5 x 62.5 cm)
 With thanks to the Society for Psychical Research,
 London
 Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and
 D'Amelio Terras, New York
- * 79. Cornelia Parker
 British, b. 1956
Thirty Pieces of Silver (exhaled), 2003
 30 silver plated items crushed by 250 ton industrial
 press, metal wire
 43 ¹/₄ inches diameter (110.0 cm diameter)
 Courtesy of Julie Thornton, the artist, and Frith Street
 Gallery, London
- * 80. Leighton Pierce
 American, b. 1954
The Back Steps, 2001
 digital video, color, sound; 5 ¹/₂ minutes.
 Courtesy of the artist
81. Michal Rovner
 Israeli, b. 1957
Penguns, 2001
 pure pigment on canvas
 34 ³/₄ x 36 inches (88.3 x 91.5 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist
- * 82. Meghan Scribner
 American, b. 1969
Winter Lullaby, 2003
 resin, cotton, wood rocking chair
 80 x 34 x 66 inches (203.2 x 86.4 x 167.6 cm)
 Courtesy of the artist

- * 83. **Bill Viola**
 American, b. 1951
Memoria, 2000
 DVD playback equipment with DVD projected on silk
 dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery,
 New York
- * 84. **Francesca Woodman**
 American, 1958-1981
House No. 3, Providence from the *Abandoned House Series*,
 1975-1978
 gelatin silver print
 5 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches (13.3 x 13.3 cm)
 Courtesy of George and Betty Woodman
- * 85. **Francesca Woodman**
 American, 1958-1981
Self-Portrait Talking to Vince, 1975-1978
 gelatin silver print
 5 1/8 x 5 1/8 inches (13.0 x 13.0 cm)
 Courtesy of George and Betty Woodman
86. **Francesca Woodman**
 American, 1958-1981
Untitled, Rome, September, 1977 from the *Angel Series*, 1977
 gelatin silver print
 3 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches (8.3 x 8.3 cm)
 Courtesy of George and Betty Woodman
- Batchen, Geoffrey. "Ectoplasm: Photography in the
 Digital Age." In *Over Exposed: Essays on Contemporary
 Photography*, edited by Carol Squiers, 9-23. New York,
 The New Press, 1999.
- Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights
 in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
- Buse, Peter and Andrew Stott. *Ghosts: Deconstruction
 Psychoanalysis History*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.
- Kittler, Friedrich. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. trans.
 Michael Metteern. Stanford, CA: Stanford University
 Press, 1990.
- Krauss, Rosalind. "Tracing Nadar." *October* 5 (Summer
 1978): 29-47.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the
 Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of
 Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Gunning, Tom. "Phantom Images and Modern
 Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick
 Films, and Photography's Uncanny." In *Fugitive Images:
 From Photography to Video*, edited by Patrice Petro, 42-71.
 Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Sconce, Jeffrey. *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from
 Telegraphy to Television*. Durham, NC: Duke University
 Press, 2000.
- Sword, Helen. *Ghostwriting Modernism*. Ithaca, NY and
 London: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Thurschwell, Pamela. *Literature, Technology, and Magical
 Thinking, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge
 University Press, 2001.

s u g g e s t e d
 r e a d i n g

*list of
lenders*

Individuals

Archive
John Baldessari
Zoe Beloff
Jeremy Blake
Christian Boltanski
Nancy Burson
Jim Campbell
Ann Hamilton
Casey Kaplan
Tracey Moffatt
Bruce Nauman
Eileen and Peter Norton
Cornelia Parker
Leighton Pierce
Tony Podesta and Heather Miller
Private Collection
Jeanne Greenberg Rohatyn
Michal Rovner
Tim Savinar and Patricia Unterman
Meghan Scribner
Julie Thornton
Donna Mussenden VanDerZee
Carol Vena-Mondt
Bill Viola
George and Betty Woodman

Galleries and Institutions

Akron Art Museum, Akron
American Society for Psychical Research, New York
Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
James Cohan Gallery, New York
D'Amelio Terras, New York
Keith de Lellis Gallery, New York
Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle
George Eastman House International Museum of
Photography and Film, Rochester
Feigen Contemporary, New York
Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco
Frith Street Gallery, London
Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York
Harvard University Art Museums, Busch-Reisinger
Museum of Art, Cambridge
Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans
Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York
Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
Robert Miller Gallery, New York
New School University Art Collection, New York
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,
The University of Texas at Austin
Julie Saul Gallery, New York
Sperone Westwater, New York

Photography Credits

Cover: Anonymous (British) *Untitled*, gelatin silver print; postcard.

5 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches, Courtesy of the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle, Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Back cover: Adam Fuss, from the series *My Ghost*, 2000. daguerreotype, 8 x 10 inches.

© Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

Interior:

John Back; pp. 64 and 65

Eric Beggs; front cover, pp. 45, 50, 51, 52, 55, and 74

John Berens; p. 76

Jan Brantley; p. 56

Christopher Burke; back cover and p. 70

Charles Duncan; pp. 58 and 77

Dennis Griggs; pp. 46 and 69

Allan Macintyre; p. 72

Adam Reich; pp. 53 and 67

Edmund Shea; p. 66

Joanne Steinhardt; p. 82

Stephen White; p. 83



Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine