exposures

Photography and Spirit

John Harvey

Photography and Spirit

exposures

Each title in this series addresses a significant theme and combines a wide-ranging essay with images drawn from the broadest possible history of photography.

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Photography and Spirit

John Harvey

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Dedicated to the memory of James Harvey Griffiths (1976–1998)

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Contents

Introduction 7
one Religion 24
two Science 70
three Art 107

References 158
Select Bibliography 166
Acknowledgements 171
Photo Acknowledgements 171
Index 172

1 William Mumler, 'Moses A. Dow, editor of *Waverley Magazine*, with the spirit of Mabel Warren', albumen print, *c*. 1871.

Introduction

> Spirits . . . take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them.
>
> Charles Dickens, *The Chimes* (1844)

There are spirits – and they can be photographed. These have been the settled, and in some senses mutually dependent, convictions of many people from all walks of life, including eminent intellectuals representing the fields of religion, science and the arts. Photography, it was claimed, captured the image of supernatural entities in the matrix of the medium, preserving their evanescent form as a permanent and scrutable artefact, which could serve variously as evidence of their existence and appearance, as a conduit for communication between spiritual and material realms, and (in the case of photographs of ghosts) as an enduring consolation for the bereaved (illus. 1).

The coming together of photography and spirit allied modern technology to ancient belief and apparatus to apparitions, reconciling reason to religion and thereby confirming conviction. They also united two expressions of faith: one in the existence of invisible realities, the other in the camera's indifferent eye and unerring ability to arrest the truth. Spirit, unlike any other subject matter that the camera would survey, drew attention to the paradox of photography's double identity: at one and the same time an instrument for scientific enquiry into the visible world and, conversely, an uncanny, almost magical process able to conjure up the semblance of shadows and, with it, supernatural associations. For example, John Werge recalled, in 1890, that when he first saw

photography it was a ghostly thing.[1] Thus photography and spirit were, far from being a union of opposites, peculiarly analogous and adapted to one another. Indeed, by the middle of the twentieth century, the natures and concerns of photography and spirit as medium and subject matter would be so intimately connected as to blur the distinction between the two. It was to be an association that would illuminate both photography's field of competence and the perceived essence and modalities of spirit.

This book examines photographs made since the 1860s that claim to show ghosts, elementals, religious apparitions and psychical emanations of living human subjects. Uniquely, it presents an integrated and comparative study of a diverse range of related phenomena, produced over a broad span of time and drawn from Europe and the United States of America, where the genre has been concentrated. The substance of the investigation consists of images taken by commercial photographers, mediums, scientists, amateur and leisure photographers, and (more recently) devices used for surveillance and communication.

The book neither adopts a chronological approach to the subject nor treats the material in sequence according to the class of spirit entity, photographic medium and process, photographer and region. Rather, the structure of the book has been determined by the need, for the first time, to situate the subject at the crossroads of the three most prominent domains of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture and thought – religion, science and art. This nexus provides a more rounded and interrelated perspective of the subject than is currently available. Photographs of spirit illuminate and serve as an index to some of the aspirations and developments of, as well as conflicts within and between, these domains. (For three-quarters of a century after the first photograph of a spirit was taken, religion and science had a vested interest in the claims and challenges made by this type of image, and were the principal contributors to the discussion of the phenomenon.) In the context of art and visual culture, the photographs are discussed in terms of their pictorial characteristics and visual precedents; the ways in which they have been informed by prior and contemporaneous modes of seeing and describing spirits; and technological developments. The evolution of

the images in relation to innovations in camera design and photographic processing is also explored, as are some of the many and contrary theories that have been put forward to explain their production. As such, the book seeks to dignify the photographs of spirits as artefacts of creative consciousness, either incarnate or disincarnate. It will also be shown that photographs of spirits have themselves exerted an influence on contemporary photographic art and theory. In these respects the approach of the work is distinct, in that it treats the photographs as other than only spectacular illustrations and evidence of paranormal activity, or curious examples of conspicuous fakery, or an embarrassing and best-forgotten anomaly of photographic practice and history.

It is now customary to consider the history of photography as beginning, prior to its conception (the coming together of optics and chemicals), in the pictorial traditions of other visual media. Therefore, we start with the role and characteristics of the graphic representation of spirits from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth.

Spirits: Before the Camera

Spirits were believed to inhabit an immaterial, invisible and eternal world, one that intersected with the visible, physical and temporal world, allowing disembodied souls and supernatural beings passage between the afterlife (in either heaven, hell or purgatory, and the present life. While imperceptible at ordinary times, they could materialize at pleasure.[2] Apparitions of spirits could be either a private or a public spectacle, seen by an individual only or by vast numbers of people simultaneously.[3] Whereas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the ability to see and communicate with spirits was often the preserve of mediums and sensitives, in the medieval and early modern periods they were seen by people from all strata of society and of all ages, most of whom made no claim to second sight. Apparitions could be summoned or spontaneous, fleeting or sustained; a singular or repeated occurrence; and a mundane or spectacular, portentous and enigmatic phenomenon. Their appearance was in some cases figurative – assuming the semblance of humans, animals

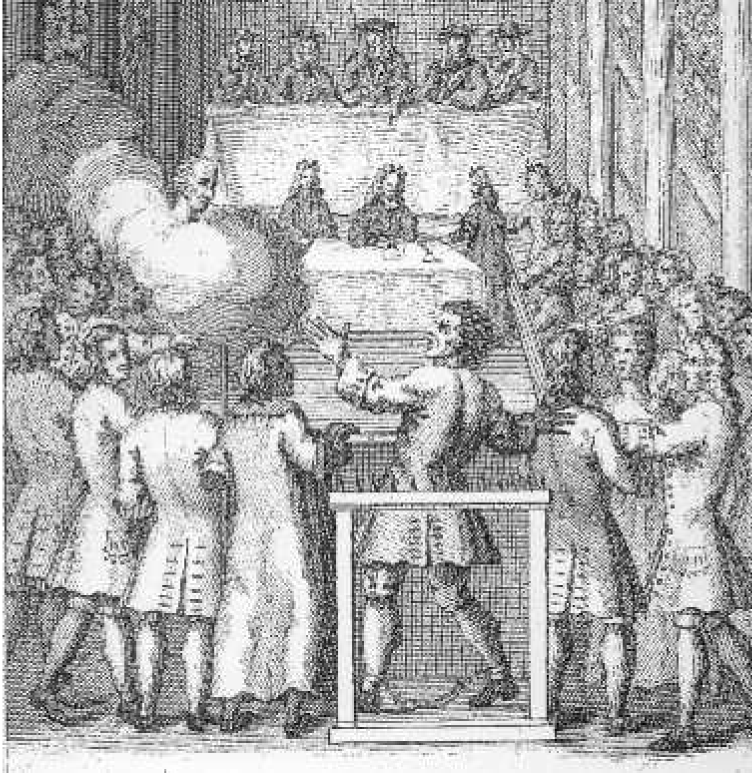
and combinations of such – and in others entirely abstract – taking the form of fire-balls, lights, celestial objects, mist and cloud, and geometric shapes (some of which forms would find their way into the visual lexicon of spirit photography). The manifestation of spirits was never – in the manner of many contemporary spirit photographs – accidental, but always deliberate and purposeful, seeking variously to wreak havoc, make mischief, scare, warn, admonish, punish, right a wrong, complete unfinished business, comfort, encourage or direct.

Spirits could be perceived by hearing, smell, touch and sight. Their sensible attributes signalled the place from which they hailed, the apparition's character and purpose, and aided their operations: the ethereal sound of choirs evoked the presence of angels; the hubbub (including the sound of knocking and voices), change in temperature, rushing wind and movement and of objects and persons announced the presence of the wandering damned and mischievous evil spirits; and the stench of brimstone, coarse, cold and clammy skin, and mournful wailing signified a spirit's devilish disposition, damnation and hellish abode.[4] Visibility often made demons appear more terrifying and angels more comforting. It enabled ghosts (possessed of spectral feet to lead, fingers to point and eyes to accuse) to expedite the purpose for which they had appeared, and to be recognized by the witness.[5] The appearance of spirits (that is, the manner in which they chose to represent themselves or were seen) was never neutral. For example, the abject blackness of demons, the swarthy or ruddy face of fairies, and their fierce expressions, sudden and erratic movements, and alarming manner of appearing and disappearing, disclosed – as did their sensible attributes – the creature's origin, nature and intent. The identity of entities (be they a species of demons, angels, elementals or ghosts) was also established with reference to a tradition of visualization – that is, how they had been customarily represented in images or described in textual and oral accounts. This tradition (which served both to delineate their salient characteristics and to inform expectations regarding the appearance of each type of spirit) is, in many respects, socially, geographically and historically specific. Consequently, the appearance of spirits varies, sometimes dramatically, across different cultures and even within the same culture over time.[6] Accordingly, spirits

have no innate form: they are cultural projections of – or 'artefacts' that are moulded and vivified by – human needs and emotions such as primal fear and loathing, fetish and neurosis, cruelty and prejudice, uncertainty and anticipation, and longing and idealism; they reflect belief systems, cosmologies and world views; and are influenced by literary, oral and pictorial accounts, past and present. Images of spirits in photographs are no different in this respect.

Before the invention of photography, seeing, representing and seeing representations of spirits were very often discrete acts. Then, eyes and mind together functioned as camera, capturing the materialization of an apparition in the form of a mental image. The visual memory was subsequently recalled in the form of oral or written accounts. Some of these accounts were illustrated, allowing the reader to see a token of what the witness had seen, through the filter of the artist's imagination. Leaving aside the question of the witness's reliability, the process of recollection, retelling and revisualization reshaped and deformed the initial experience, often considerably. Photography enabled spirits to be perceived and recorded simultaneously and, it was assumed, objectively; the camera's lens would observe the spirit's presence and the negative preserve the likeness of its cast. The processes of developing and printing would make it possible for more or less identical copies of the photographic image to be reproduced and disseminated, thereby retaining the integrity of the original.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, graphic illustrations were published principally in spirit histories. These were collections of testimonies describing allegedly genuine encounters with ghosts, angels, the Devil, demons, fairies, witches, wizards and conjurors, and with supernatural phenomena. They were compiled by Protestant and Catholic clergymen to prepare people for death, and to confute the fashionable belief in atheism and Sadducism, which denied the existence of God, the afterlife and the reality of spirits, and, thereby, 'to promote the cause of morality in society'.[7] Spirit histories were also (in the tradition of the medieval *exemplum*) accounts with a moralizing or homiletic intent, wherein spiritual entities confront witnesses in order to issue a salutary rebuke, warning or encouragement.[8]



2 'The Murtherer sees the murther'd Innocent plainly before his eyes', copper-plate engraving by I. V. Gucht, reproduced in Andrew Morton, *The Secrets of the Invisible World Disclosed; or, An Universal History of Apparitions* (1729).

Very few of these narratives were illustrated. The verbal descriptions were, in most cases, a sufficient and more precise articulation of the occurrence. Moreover, the accounts were often so complicated or convoluted in detail and development as to be un-picturable in a single static image. They were partial imaginings and lacked the nuance of the text – being too concrete or mannered and, occasionally, exhibiting an inadvertent comic theatricality (illus. 2). The engravings were, in almost all instances, the work of journeymen artists, often unsophisticated and hackneyed in execution and conventional in composition – too patently the product of human artifice, devoid of the aura of supernaturalism possessed by photographs of spirits (which were believed to have originated in the afterlife, and actually to depict and to have been communicated by spirits).

3 A rider perceives a ghost, copper-plate engraving by I. V. Gucht, reproduced in Morton, *The Secrets of the Invisible World Disclosed*.

Overleaf: 4 Girl on stairs with mist-like substance, Illinois, Polaroid film, 1959.

In contrast to photographs of spirits, too, the engravings in spirit histories were not, nor could be, evidential. Unlike photographs, the illustrations could not lay claim to an indexical relationship to their depicted subject. Proof of the existence of spirits was constituted, rather, in the corroborating testimony of honest and reliable witnesses,[9] of which the written text was a record and for which the accompanying illustrations provided a vivifying gloss that encapsulated the essence of the narrative and elaborated upon the context. Usually, the spirit is shown having appeared beside the witness, who reacts with alarm or dismay. At some distance from them, bystanders (like the soldiers who accompanied the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus) appear to notice only the witness's consternation. The setting for the spectre and spectators is a picturesque landscape or an interior. Blackening skies and the shadowy recesses of bedchambers and drawing rooms evoke a profound sense of unease, following Edmund Burke's (1729–1797) principle of the Sublime – that darkness and obscurity exacerbate terror and uncertainty.[10] Conversely, other prints effect a sense of disquiet by situating the spirit in entirely congenial surroundings, either indoors or out of doors. The ordinariness of the setting makes the extraordinary manifestation appear the more unsettling by contrast (illus. 3). The same impression can be observed in late twentieth-century amateur photographs that purport to show the accidental presence of a spirit form framed alongside friends and family members in otherwise banal undistinguished locations, nondescript holiday snapshots and scenes of humdrum domesticity (illus. 4).

One of the corollaries of a spirit's visibility and tangibleness was solidity. In a tradition that goes back at least to the Middle Ages, ghosts were believed to be corporeal and to assume several forms.[11] In one, the spectre was seen and represented enveloped in diaphanous winding clothes; in another, its 'body' is in a more or less advanced state of putrescence. (The *transi* – the skeletal personification of death – is closely related to this type.)[12] Apparitions of a corpse represented a restless and unholy spectre (tormented, and tormenting its hapless living witness), and reflected the social dread of decomposition and a fascination with the afterlife of the body (as opposed to that of the soul). The antithesis of this fearful and gruesome apparition was the spirit in the shape of a small

naked infant proceeding from the mouth of the deceased. Strictly speaking, this is a manifestation of a departing soul rather than of a revenant. This form would be evoked by twentieth-century spirit photographs of ectoplasm (or spirit matter) emerging from the medium's mouth and every other conceivable orifice (illus. 5).[13]

Previous: 5 Baron Albert von Schrenk-Notzing, 'Author's flashlight photograph of 16 May, 1913', gelatin silver print, reproduced in his *Phemonena of Materialisation* (1920).

More usually, the spirits of the deceased were indistinguishable from their living counterparts, except when they either materialized or vanished.[14] Though death deformed the mortal coil, it did not necessarily compromise the integrity of a person's spiritual appearance. The exception are manifestations of partial ghosts – incomplete by virtue of appearing either headless or as a head only (as they would often be in spirit photographs), or else to a certain extent hidden, truncated or obscured by an object, or bisected by the plane through which they materialized. Fully formed ghosts appear dressed in period clothes and carrying accoutrements such as a walking cane, a sword and a handkerchief, able to occupy three-dimensional space, and as mobile, physical and opaque as their witnesses of flesh and blood. Sometimes the picture depicts the ghost's shadow cast upon the ground, implying that the apparition was sufficiently solid to obstruct light. The face and form of the spirit are rendered in exactly the same manner as those of the beholder; indeed, the dead and the living were sometimes distinguishable only with reference to the text that the engraving illustrated. Some engravings attempted to make a distinction between the two by rendering the apparition predominantly white, thereby imbuing it with an unnatural luminosity and deathly pallor. The night-time landscape or gloomily lit interior served not only as a mood-setter but also as a foil to enhance the ghost's tonal contrast.

The difference between apparition and observer was also signalled by the adaptation of iconographic codes and pictorial devices traditionally used to denote supernatural entities in Christian art. Apparitions are sometimes shown enclosed in a luminous cocoon of light (as though transfigured), or enfolded in cumulus clouds (suggesting the heavenly realm), or encircled by billowing smoke (the unmistakable signifier of their hellish origin) (illus. 6). These framing devices served not only to isolate and separate the spirit and denote its radical disjuncture from the

6 Samuel speaking to Saul in *Saul and the Witch of Endor*, detail of a steel-plate engraving after the painting by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794–1872).

world of ordinary appearances, but also as a portal connecting the natural and supernatural worlds through which the spirit could come and go. The pictures' heightened theatricality and dramatic visual effect helped to compensate for the absence of those elusive and un-picturable concomitants of spirit manifestations apprehended by the other senses, and the psychosomatic responses of the observer – the feelings of heaviness, disorientation, trembling and possession.

Spirit histories from the early modern period also record that ghosts assumed temporary bodily semblance sufficient to enable them to handle and move objects. The phenomenon of solid ghosts, which persisted into the nineteenth century, was considered the most spectacular and evidential manifestations of physical mediumship. Famously, the medium Florence Cook (1856–1904) summoned the ghost of Katie King, a so-called full materialization, supposedly fashioned out of ectoplasm but possessing many of the attributes of a living person. At seances, King permitted the

sitters to handle the clothes she wore, caress her hair and exposed flesh, take her body temperature, feel her heartbeat and be photographed (illus. 7).[15]

The ghost's appearance of substantiality and 'lifelikeness' was not only conveyed by the conventions of representation but also conditioned by the characteristics of the medium. In the seventeenth century, simply wrought woodcuts and wood engravings in cheap chapbooks and pamphlets and on broadsheets schematized the spirit. Their sometimes crudely gouged and unembellished drawing, together with the small size of the matrix, prevented the differentiation of even major distinctions of substance. Therefore, even if spirits (whether human, heavenly or hellish) had been believed and perceived to be other than either corporeal or visually dense, the print would have been incapable of rendering them as such. Fine-line engraving on steel plate (introduced in the 1820s) and a larger format facilitated a language of representation better able to render contrasts and gradations of light and shadow, surface and texture, and hard and soft outline, material density and distinctions between opaque, transparent and translucent objects. Clouds, smoke and mist no longer looked like bloated sections of intestinal tracks but suggested weightlessness, fugitiveness and insubstantiality. Likewise, water and fire now acquired a measure of fluidity.

These were not the only elementals to be vitiated by the potential of the medium. Steel-plate engraving permitted the representation of the translucent and vaporous (accounts of which go back at least to antiquity). In his *Meditations* (AD 167), the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius refers to 'all that is of the soul [is] as dreams and vapours'; and in *The Iliad* (*c.* 800 BC), Homer describes ghosts as 'insubstantial as smoke'.[16] These metaphors comprehend the spirit's insubstantiality by comparison with natural phenomena, which, with the advent of steel-plate engraving, could be depicted with greater realism. Ghosts could now be plausibly represented as airy and ethereal, incomplete and partially present – gossamer reflections upon the air (illus. 61). This particular form of ghost and mode of spectral representation was to evolve further with the next significant innovation in printmaking: the invention of photography, a medium and technology associated with transparencies, fluids, vapours

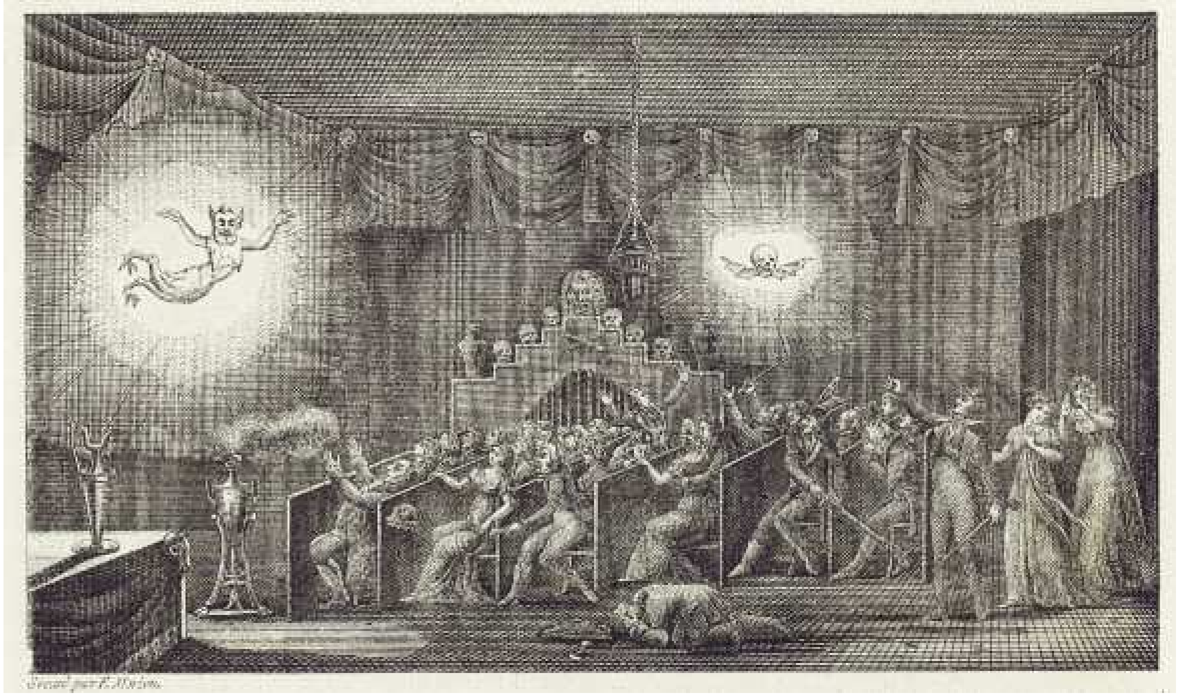
7 William Crookes, 'Portrait of Katie King', albumen silver print (copy print), 1874.

and materializing images, which was thus peculiarly akin and adapted to visualizing spirits.

While in engravings apparitions of the dead possess the appearance of the living, they were not so readily confused with other types of spirit. Supernatural entities including angels, the souls of the redeemed, fairies, evil spirits and devils had distinctive iconographies. Within each class, however, the spirit's appearance or representation could vary considerably. For example, in the medieval and Renaissance periods, the devils painted on church walls and illustrated in demonologia were depicted as monstrosities that amalgamated the human form with wings, horns, fangs, scales, cloven hooves, talons, tails, elongated ears and protruding snouts. But in societies without a strong visual culture of supernatural representation, animal features are less dominant; the devils described in spirit histories and oral traditions appear more distinctly human (although no less grotesque): black or dark in colour, oddly proportioned or having an exaggerated size, misshapen, missing limbs and (like witches) able to metamorphose into hell hounds and fire-balls. Similarly, while fairies are, in some accounts, described as being like humans on a diminutive scale, lithe of body, elegantly dressed and possessing noble features, other reports portray them as squat with fierce faces and clothed like brigands – a far cry from the spry sylvan-winged figures in Victorian and Edwardian illustration and, subsequently, in the Cottingley fairy photographs (illus. 8).

Even before photography, lens technology was used as a means not only to visualize the supernatural but also to evoke an imaginative sense of their real presence. In one form or another, the magic lantern had existed since the 1600s. Technically, it was the opposite of a camera. Whereas the camera took in light to produce an image, the magic lantern threw out light. The lantern's images were painted on glass and cast onto walls, cloth drapes and, sometimes, a wet, translucent cloth from behind. The invention of photography also enabled black-and-white images to be developed on glass slides. Many illustrations depicting the device in use show projections of supernatural creatures such as devils, spectres and *transi*.[17] Originally, these projections served as didactic images, designed to stir, sober and encourage onlookers to prepare for death, flee from

8 Elsie Wright, ‘Frances and the Fairies’, Cottingley Glen, West Yorkshire, England, silver gelatin print, July 1917 (copy print, c. 1925).



9 'Robertson's Phantasmagoria', steel-plate engraving by E. Morieu, reproduced in *La Nature* (1881).

sin and fear judgement. The lantern's capacity to terrify audiences was recognized from the outset. In the medieval age, similar images had been seen on church walls for hundreds of years. But, by the means of projection, they were made almost animate and, consequently, the more fearful and potent. Devils could be conjured out of, and just as quickly disappear into, thin air. In the late eighteenth century the quasi-supernatural aura of the technology was used to entertain rather than educate. Several showmen extended the potential of the medium in the form of horror shows, known as phantasmagoria. Often the lantern would project images from behind a translucent screen, out of sight – concealing from the audience the means of the magic (illus. 9). Images were sometimes projected onto smoke, and would also journey around the walls, and grow and diminish, as the projector was wheeled back and forth, to and fro, behind the screen. The more sophisticated, three-lens lanterns and double lanterns could also create 'special effects' (as it were), enabling the entities

to materialize, dematerialize and move, right before the audience's eyes. The spectral entities chosen for display in phantasmagoria are hardly different in type and form from those shown to audiences for religious instruction more than 300 years earlier.[18]

While types of spirit were broadly differentiable in terms of appearance, they were not always so with regard to their nature. For example, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century taxonomies of spirits classed fairies variously as entirely benign creatures, evil spirits or the earthbound souls of the dead. By the early nineteenth century, the distinction between spirit entities in terms of iconography and taxonomy had become more clear-cut. And, as belief in the objectivity of spirits diminished, their visual representation assumed increasingly stereotypical and symbolic forms: demons were rendered dark, horned and cloven-hoofed; angels as white-gowned, winged and haloed; and ghosts as donned in a winding-sheet or shroud.

one

Religion

The Spirit of Religion

During the mid-nineteenth century, the mind sciences searched for a biological basis for apparitions of the supernatural, interpreting the phenomena as manifestations of mania rather than materializations of spirit: illusions, delusions and effusions resulting from neurological disorders, intoxication or the imbibing of chemicals.[1] At the same time, new approaches to biblical and theological study sought increasingly to understand Christianity's spiritual aspects according to a naturalistic hypothesis. Higher Criticism – a scientific and rationalistic approach to interpreting biblical texts – questioned the nature of biblical inspiration, revelation and prophecy, traditional ascriptions regarding the authorship and date of manuscripts, the validity of miracles and narratives of miracles, and the divinity of Christ. Its demythologizing tendency made belief in angels, the Devil and evil spirits a matter more of folklore than of faith, turned phantoms into fantasies and, in its most excessive form, repudiated the existence of God, the idea of immortality and the supernatural in general.

At a time when many of the traditional Christian churches capitulated in the face of the challenge to these old and established certainties, new Christian movements emerged as a result of the increasing fragmentation of Protestantism and revivalism. The term 'religious revival' was first widely used by Protestants to describe the spontaneous spiritual rousings that took place in America after the 1720s – the period known as the Great Awakening. In New England, in 1734, the Awakening was fostered under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). Later, in the 1740s,

George Whitefield (1714–1770) brought the spirit of the Wesleyan revival from old England. The Second Great Awakening took place in England around the 1790s, and in North America somewhat later, where it was centred on New York state's 'burnt-over district', so named by the American revivalist Charles Finney (1792–1875) on account of the area having been subjected to the fires of almost continual religious revival. During the early nineteenth century this (still) frontier region spawned a variety of new religious movements and self-styled folk faiths such as Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism, Millerism and Spiritualism. All were founded in response to a religious vision and grew out of a historical and geographical context of revivalism. While their theologies were mutually antagonistic and antithetical in many respects, these movements were united in their disavowal of the sterile, religious academicism of mainstream churches and of scientific materialism, and in their insistence upon the reality of spirits, life after death and the tangible communication between the world of the spirit and the world of the living.[2]

Spiritualism is principally a religious movement which arose in North America during the mid-nineteenth century and which quickly spread to Great Britain and throughout Europe. Its advent was predicted in 1847 by Andrew Jackson Davis (1826–1910), the movement's John the Baptist.[3] He was a clairvoyant and visionary who prophesied, enigmatically, of a coming communion between incarnate spirits on earth and spirits in the higher spheres. A year later he claimed to have received notification from on high that a demonstration of this spiritual union was already taking place. At that very moment, in Hydesville near Rochester, New York, Kate Fox (1841–1892) and Margaret Fox (1838–1893) – sisters with mediumistic gifts – succeeded in contacting an entity who had been disturbing their family home with various manifestations of pneumatophony including raps and strange sounds, as well as poltergeist activity. Modern Spiritualism was born.

Rochester was home to not only the earliest public meetings of Spiritualism but also the Eastman Kodak Company, which produced the first Brownie camera in 1900. The name 'Brownie' had spiritual connotations: it referred to a good-natured, helpful, invisible brown elf or household goblin that haunted farmhouses and other country dwellings in

Scotland.[4] Photography and Spiritualism were kindred spirits in other respects. They shared a common goal – to create an enduring image. Whereas photography strove to produce a permanent print, Spiritualists searched for a permanent paranormal object – the abiding evidence of ephemeral phenomena. Photographing spirits involved the collaboration of two mediums – a Spiritualist sensitive and a light-sensitive plate. In both the photographer's darkroom and the dark room of the seance practitioners conducted their business, often under a ruby-coloured light.[5] Red is a spectral wavelength (in more senses than one), which, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was believed to be conducive to concentrating the apparitional image both inside the shadowy chamber of the medium's cabinet and onto the camera's dark slide.[6]

Spiritualism returned photography to its origins in occult science. Photography had grown out of the union of science and the supernatural, in alchemy. Fifteenth-century alchemists discovered how to merge silver and marine salts to transmute off-white to black when exposed to light.[7] Three centuries later, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877) stabilized the effect on paper. He published the results in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), the title of which summons up the idea that photographs, like the Veronica Veil and the Turin Shroud, were images made not by human hands, but by mysterious external forces (illus. 15). (Veronica, incidentally, is the patron saint of photographers.)

Spirit photography, or psychic photography, not only took on the mantle of the miraculous image but also accomplished a rapprochement between science and the supernatural.[8] The programme and practice of Spiritualism have in many important respects been shaped in response to mainstream science. Since the Enlightenment, the rationalistic sciences have challenged several of traditional Christianity's foundational beliefs. The new geology and Darwinism questioned the historicity of the Genesis account, the age of the earth, the origin and nature of humankind and, by implication, the necessity of God, the soul and an afterlife. Spiritualists not only hold to orthodox Christian doctrine on these matters but also seek to counter scientific revision and reductivism. During the nineteenth century, they did so by applying (if crudely) scientific method and devices – proceeding largely by way of observation and appealing to empirical

phenomena in the form of sights and samples of ectoplasm, sounds or auditions, writing, automatic painting and drawing, and cross-referenced information received from the spirit world – as evidence of post-mortem survival. Advocates of Spiritualism claimed to communicate with the spirits of the deceased through the agency of a medium or sensitive, in the context of a seance. Spirits, in return, corresponded in a variety of ways: by levitating, moving and materializing objects; by conveying messages audibly; and by manifesting themselves visibly in the form of ectoplasmic human bodies (either in part or as a whole), and on the surface of a photographic plate or film. Spiritualists believed that the proof of the spirit was in the seeing. Unlike earlier manifestations of spirit communication such as raps, remote or disembodied voices and poltergeist activity, which were ephemeral and authenticable only by the witnesses present, spirit photographs were an enduring and reviewable expression of disembodied consciousness. Similarly, unlike apports (ordinary objects, such as flowers, coins and stones that, it is supposed, have been transported – extraordinarily – by the spirits through the ether from one place to another), spirit photographs were anomalous and remarkable in terms of both their process and their product. In this way, photography provided permanent perceptible proof of the existence of disembodied communicants. Accordingly, the American Unitarian luminary Theodore Parker (1810–1860) concluded: 'Spiritualism has more evidence for its wonders than any other historic form of religion.'[9]

The evidence for authenticating wonders claimed by new and established Christian movements took many forms during the nineteenth century. Outward physical manifestations such as ecstatic jumping, which was attributed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, were interpreted as a sign of conversion, and used evangelistically to attract the curious and unrepentant.[10] Jumping was one of several spectacular and auricular post-conversion pneumatic phenomena. Speaking in tongues, for example, had occurred sporadically in both Great Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century. In the 1830s Edward Irving (1792–1834), a (proto-Pentecostal) minister of the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland in London, and founder of the so-called Catholic Apostolic Church, promoted the view that signs and miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues or *glossolalia*

(the ability to utter an unlearned foreign language) and prophecy, both of which had been the experience of the New Testament Church, were being restored, thereby signifying the imminent end of the age and coming of Christ.[11] Tongues-speaking was not confined to traditionally Christian movements. In 1858 two mediums, who came to be possessed by disincarnate spirits, were forced to speak in Latin and Indian, and sing in Swiss.[12] At Pentecost, one of the physical corollaries of the gift of tongues was the tongues of fire that descended and rested upon the disciples (Acts 2:1–4), representing a theophany (a visible manifestation of God). Images of 'tongues of fire' (so-called because of their iconographic similarity to representations in Western European paintings) were not uncommon in spirit photographs and interpreted as signifying partially materialized spirits (illus. 10).

Visions and Visitations

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries apparitional phenomena took the form of not only revenant visitations but also religious visions. Roman Catholicism had experienced a resurgence of visionary phenomenon. The Virgin Mary had, reputedly, appeared on a number of occasions.[13] Protestant Nonconformist movements (chiefly Baptist, Calvinistic Methodist, Congregationalist and Wesleyan Methodist) also experienced visions, most notably during the periods of their initiation or revival. For example, in 1901 visions were experienced by the newly established Pentecostal movement in the United States and in 1904 during the religious revival in Wales.[14] Visions perforated the temporal and seen with an image of the eternal and (otherwise) unseen. They were a mode of revelation and religious encounter distinct from textual, liturgical and sacramental forms of communal and private worship in that they stressed a local and intense manifestation of the immanence of God, and permitted the percipient to experience a direct encounter with sentient spiritual beings such as the Virgin Mary, saints from biblical times, Christ and the Devil (depending on the visionary's theological sensibility). Visions were miraculous acts of God, extraordinary and often unexpected,

10 '"Tongues of fire", or "spirit lights", each indicates the presence of a spirit', reproduced in George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (1919).

which often conveyed (by means of an accompanying audition) specific information (beyond the scope of the canon of Scripture) to a particular person concerning current and local and future and global events. They were a blessing – serving to reinforce faith and stimulate devotion, and as God's imprimatur and seal of approval upon the Church or cause to which they were revealed. (For this reason, the authenticity of the visions was often hotly refuted by opposing ecclesiastical traditions.) Advocates of visions sought to validate the phenomenon by an appeal to precedent: by establishing a resemblance between contemporary visions and those experienced in the Old and New Testaments and in the history of the Church, and by pointing to their salutary effects on the percipient.

Spirit photographs, too, were the outcome of a connection and transmission between this world and the next. However, they possess characteristics that are significantly different from visions. Visions were percepts seen at the moment of manifestation by particular people, at a particular time and in a particular place, and unmediated encounters between those who had been chosen by God as witnesses and the person(s) depicted. Spirit photographs, for their part, were only secondary manifestations of the supernatural – the visible, residual and physical imprint of their invisible and immaterial presence; the inanimate trace of phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself, perceivable only after the manifestation had ended and the photographic plates and prints had been processed. However, whereas visions were insubstantial and ephemeral, spirit photographs arrested the phenomenon, providing a permanent record that could be seen by anyone, at any time and anywhere. Photography democratized the observation of spirit materializations to which, previously, only attendees of seances were privy, and helped convey a vision of the phenomenon beyond the boundaries of the movement to wider world. In this way, photographs of spirits were the visual propaganda of Spiritualism, providing a sensible confirmation not only of the existence of ghosts but also of Spiritualism's sensational confidence in its own achievements. Like miraculous medieval artefacts, spirit photographs served to fortify the faith of the faithful and to disarm the doubter's disbelief. The visions witnessed by Protestants and Catholics, and the materializations of spirits invoked and photographed by

11 'Bernadette Soubirous, while gathering firewood, sees the Virgin Mary in the rocky grotto at Lourdes', Italian picture postcard, second half of the 19th century.

Spiritualists, reflected a supernaturalist outlook on reality. These manifestations testified to the existence of an invisible realm and the possibility of seeing beyond physical sense. Visions could be either spontaneous, unrepeated, short-term and isolated experiences that were seen and confirmed by no one other than the percipient, or else recur at regular intervals and remain visible over a long period of time and to large numbers of people. Roman Catholic visions, such as those of the Virgin Mary, were investigated by the Church and approved only if they had been seen by a reliable witness, bore a special and positive message from the Virgin, and (in some cases) were followed by attested miracles or fulfilled prophecies. Approved visions were subsequently pictorialized in the form of graphic illustrations depicting the revelation and reverential witnesses and, as importantly, the natural landmarks (the visions almost always occur out of doors in a rural setting) at the site of the apparition, which, subsequently, became a permanent shrine (illus. 11). Whereas 'extras' and spirit materializations could be invoked at the medium's behest, and either originated in some higher intelligence or else were emanations of the dead, visions were God-given, unsummoned and spontaneous occurrences that did not require the mediation of technology (as did spirit photographs) or human mediation (in the manner of a Spiritualist sensitive).

Apparitions in the Roman Catholic tradition are envisioned as comprising an individual or a group of figures, often motionless like a tableau, in the attitude and dress in which they are represented – and by which they are identified – in traditional Christian iconography. They are set against a wall or the sky, or framed by a cloud or natural formation, on either life-size or (as often in a visual representation) on a smaller scale, and at a remove – establishing a sacred exclusion zone between the percipient and the perceived. In 1858 Bernadette Soubirous (1844–1879) was, at the age of fourteen, granted the first of several visions of the Virgin Mary in a cave on the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes in France. Six years later the occasion of the first encounter was recreated in a photographic studio by Paul Dufour (illus. 12). Bernadette is posed in costume along with models acting the part of her two sisters (who had accompanied her during the first apparition) before a painted backdrop

depicting a countryside scene. She kneels in an attitude that evokes innumerable scenes of the Annunciation and stares fixedly at the apparition, which is (fictively) situated outside the frame of the picture (as, too, were ghosts in some early engravings in spirit histories). Unlike romanticized illustrations of the scene that omit the sisters and depict the Virgin Mary, the photograph preserves the circumstances of the vision, which only Bernadette saw.

The absence of photographs of visions reported during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was due to the character, conditions and context of the phenomenon and to the percipient's background. Mystics distinguish three categories of vision. What are termed 'imaginal' or 'imaginative' visions are those where the visionary object is perceived in the 'mind's eye', rather than as an ocular phenomenon. 'Intellectual' visions are those where the object is 'perceived' without a mental image (more as a feeling or sense of presence), and 'corporeal' visions those where supernatural manifestation can be seen by the bodily eye (of the visionary) as either an external figure or a sensation experienced directly in the retina (as were the portraits of 'extras' directly on the photographic plate, behind the camera's lens), producing an effect corresponding to sight. Bernadette's visions belonged to this third category, although it cannot be known whether they were of the former or latter class.

Visions were often 'seen' in otherwise obscure villages or rural regions, away from the glare of the popular press, during periods of social deprivation, by members of the lower orders (usually children), few if any of whom, even after the rise of leisure photography, would have possessed a camera or considered it reverent to subject the holy person to its impassive stare. Nor were photographs necessary. Visions were often a private and personal encounter (or else experienced collectively by a specific community, as in the case of the vision at Knock, County Mayo, in Ireland in 1879), serving as a reward for and to renew faith rather than being a ground for it, and to be apprehended by faith rather than to require additional corroborating evidence to adduce veracity. (By contrast, Spiritualist materializations and photographs aimed determinedly to be evidential and persuasive: they were used to propagate the beliefs of Spiritualism, console the bereaved and provide proof of the afterlife.)

12 Paul Dufour, Bernadette and two companions re-create the occasion of the first apparition (October 1864), French picture postcard, second half of the 19th century.

Indeed, in view of the damage suffered by Spiritualism and its claims on those occasions when spirit photographers and pictures were proved to be fraudulent, it may have seemed judicious to the Roman Catholic authorities not to associate the phenomenon with photography. The photographs associated with Catholic visions document the visionaries usually. They comprise banal pictures of stern-looking children (who seem more disconcerted by the camera than they had been by the vision), whose apparent ordinariness belies and contrasts with the extraordinariness of their experience, and scenes of onlookers peering at an event that is taking place outside the composition – as ghosts were sometimes 'depicted' in illustrations to spirit histories (illus. 3) – and which was, presumably, either invisible to the photographer or, for some reason, impossible to photograph.[15]

The first photographs of a vision of the Virgin Mary were taken (at night) in Zeitoun, Egypt, in 1968, when, it was claimed, she appeared,

above the central dome of the Coptic church, sometimes for several hours, over a three-year period, to tens of thousands of people simultaneously. The apparition was broadcast on Egyptian television and photographed by a great many professional and amateur photographers. The images depict a figure with a diffuse, bright, white and luminescent body appearing, in some images, to float above the ground, and in others to walk upon the church's roof, accompanied by lights assuming the shape of a single or squadron of dove-like form(s) (illus. 13).

The iconography of the figure in the photographs follows that of the Virgin's apparition at Fatima, Portugal, in 1917. Lucia de Jesus Santos (1907–2005), one of the three children who saw her originally, described the figure as 'a lady, clothed in white, brighter than the sun, radiating a light more clear and intense than a crystal cup filled with sparkling water, lit by burning sunlight'.[16] The vision, in turn, adapts the description of Christ's appearance at his transfiguration, a resemblance that would have served to both authenticate and establish the divine pedigree of the Marian vision: 'And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so no fuller on earth can white them' (Mark 9:3). Photographically, the Virgin's resplendence affects a defocused, underexposed and amorphous form, cocooned by a diffuse halation, in a manner that invoked the iconographic tradition of representing the manifestation of supernatural beings in graphic art and painting and was also strongly reminiscent of the visual codes used to render ghosts in spirit photography during the early twentieth century. Prior to photography, Marian visions were (like graphic images of ghosts) illustrated in the form of prints that proffered only a putative reconstruction of the events, showing the visionaries' encounter with the Virgin. Mary is represented, as so often in paintings (on which the illustrations' iconography is broadly based), clearly delineated, apparently substantial, in colourful apparel, crowned with a halo or an aureole, emitting an aura of light, and standing on or enclosed by a cloud.

The spate of subsequent photographs showing the Virgin Mary taken by amateurs who had little compunction about subjecting the mother of Christ to the camera, or else captured her image fortuitously (which was seen only after the photograph was taken or developed), exhibit many of the above characteristics. In keeping with the tradition of

13 Apparition of the Virgin Mary at the Coptic Orthodox Church of St Mary, Zeitoun, Egypt, 1968 (copy print).

visionary manifestations, the Virgin's apparitions are often perceived as either diminutive in scale, as little as 10–13 centimetres high – simulacra in miniature (as too were the faces and figures of spirits sometimes in photographs) – or life-size. In some, more recent, photographs, she appears superimposed (statuesque) upon the ostensible subject of the photograph or in the shape of pallid flares, blurred lights and vaporous orbs (illus. 14). In the case of her appearance to Veronica Lueken in New York in the 1970s, the Virgin communicated the phrase 'Jacinta 1972' (alluding to Jacinta Marta [1910–1920], one of the three children who had witnessed the Fatima vision) in a supernatural scrawl that appeared

‘miraculously’ on a Polaroid instant photograph in a manner reminiscent of the psychographic and automatic writings of early twentieth-century Spiritualist practice.

Apparitions of Christ, angels and (very rarely) saints in photographs are, similarly, mediated in the form of a morphing haze and glowing abstract slurs (which in the context of spirit photography are interpreted as ectoplasm), or as barely discernible dispositions of highlights and shadows cast upon polished surfaces suggesting faces or partially materialized figures, elusive – like reflections on glass. Mysterious stains (produced by damp, condensation or corrosion), formations of cloud, the play of patterns produced by sunlight and shadow can in the mind of an observer be interpreted as the outlines and features of Mary or Jesus, as depicted in Western European art. Many consider such phenomena to be spontaneous and (often) ephemeral icons, which are given permanence only in the photographic record made of them.[17] In Britain, during the 1930s, similar blotches, blemishes and other ‘accidental’ smears were deposited on glass plates and photographic negatives produced with the assistance of Spiritualist mediums. In some instances, the marks bore – what to some might appear at best to be – a fortuitous and superficial resemblance to figures and facial features. However, for those who saw with the eye of faith, the marks ‘clearly’ represented the spirit forms of the departed. Such examples of construal are typical of pareidolia – a psychological phenomenon involving an often vague and random stimulus that, as a consequence of a type of illusion or mistaken perception, appears to the interpreter as something recognizable and distinct in structure.[18]

In the case of visions and images of religious persons and entities, identification was established on the basis of a consensually sanctioned iconography. Spirits in photographs were often recognized by their resemblance to ‘normal’ photographs taken of them when they were alive, or, with less certainty, where there were no photographs of the dead, to the memories of those who had known them. Whereas visions represented holy persons of considerable significance, spirit photography (in keeping with photography in general) was indifferent and democratic – representing people from all walks of life. The appeal of spirit photographs to the sensible and sensual, and to physicality and familiarity,

14 Karoly Legeti, Apparition of Virgin Mary and Christ Child, Karacsond Church, Hungary, 1989 (copy print).

stressed person-to-person contact, closeness and the persistence of continuities and commonalities between the dead and the living. Visions, by contrast, emphasized and preserved the sense of supernatural otherness and the separateness of the human and heavenly realms. The identification of more amorphous and indistinct apparitional forms in photographs of visions (which are often indistinguishable from those that appear in spirit photographs) depends on context. For example, phenomena photographed at grottoes and shrines are usually interpreted as emanations of the holy person associated with the site, while the same phenomena photographed at seances, in the studios of commercial spirit photographers

and in domestic and other environments known to be haunted are deemed to be ghosts. The ubiquitous pale and translucent orbs or discs seen in a great many amateur photographs of graveyards and other supposedly haunted places, when seen in the context of the Catholic Mass or a site of pilgrimage, are said to signify spiritual showers of host wafers. That the spirits of the dead and the divine appeared similarly denoted, albeit differently decoded, is not a recent phenomenon. As observed earlier, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries illustrators borrowed from religious art pictorial conventions for denoting supernatural persons and adapted them to the representation of ghosts. Today the direction of influence is reversed: it is the iconography of ghosts that informs the visual imagination of Roman Catholicism.

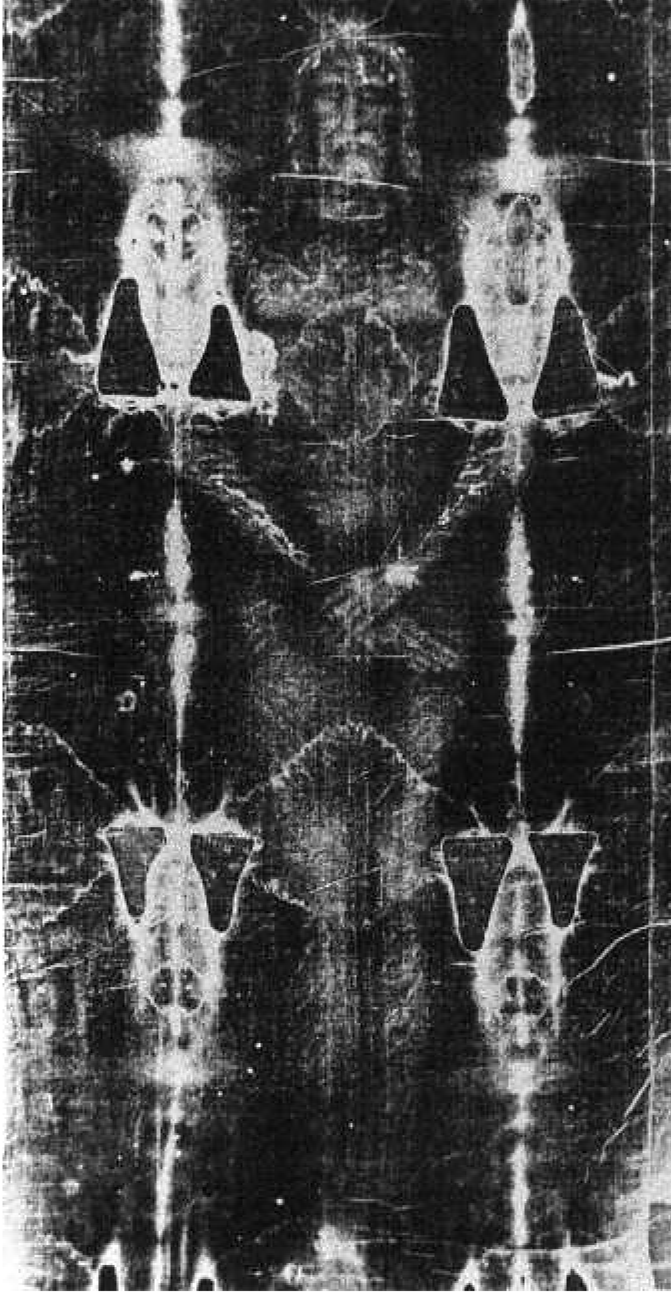
Relics and Representation

The spirit photograph was a posthumous, spontaneous relic (made to endure by courtesy of photography) in the age of mechanical reproduction. Unlike more traditional miraculous images, such as the Turin Shroud and Veronica Veil, it was neither unique nor official, nor did it possess the aura of an original. Some twenty years before the invention of spirit photography, there arose a renewed interest in the Turin Shroud (a linen cloth bearing the image of a seemingly crucified man, believed by some to be the burial cloth of Christ. In 1842 it was shown publicly from a balcony of the Palazzo Madama in Rome on the occasion of the marriage of Crown Prince Victor Emanuel II. To commemorate the exhibition, the authorities considered, but later rejected, making a daguerreotype of the Shroud. Photography may have been considered (as in the case of visions) to be insufficiently reverent a medium – too novel, frivolous and untried – to which to subject the relic, and the seasoned and pedigreed vehicle of reproduction, lithography, was chosen instead. The print shows the Shroud as seen at a considerable distance. Few artists were permitted close enough to relics to observe and record them. The first photograph of the Shroud was taken during its public exhibition in 1898 by the Italian amateur photographer Secondo Pia (1855–1941).

The negative revealed more detailed information than the positive image, and (paradoxically) it subsequently became the popularly accepted image of the Shroud and the most reproduced image of Christ (illus. 15).[19] In the case of both spirits and the Shroud, photography sought to draw forth an image that was – whether invisible or barely discernible to the naked eye – supernatural in origin, in order to provide evidence of existence and to prove identity. While retaining a residue of the *mysterium tremendum*, the medium converted an immaterial phenomenon into a material one, turning a private, privileged and occasional experience (whether seen at the seance or sequestered in a church) into a public, inclusive and permanent record – providing a vicarious encounter with supernatural realities, while serving as a focus of, and to further, faith.

Photography gave the object of its gaze a demonstrable and traceable genealogy extending backwards from print to negative, from negative to camera lens, and from camera lens to source. Moreover, unlike painting and drawing, its subject was not mediated through the interpretative filter of an artist's sight, mind and dexterity, and hence not subject to the error, licence and influence associated with representation. Like graphic illustrations of ghosts and, as will be discussed below, automatist drawings and paintings of spirits, manually mediated pictures of the Shroud and Veil did not possess the close and indexical association with the original. Often there was no choice other than to paint or draw the relic and, even then, such opportunities were rare and hard won. Indeed, it was not until 1860 that the artist Thomas Frank Heaphy (1813–1873) managed to ingratiate himself with members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and thereby obtain an opportunity to see the Veronica Veil and other such relics.[20] (Heaphy painted not only a copy of the Shroud but also, inadvertently, another supernatural portrait – of a young woman whom he had met on a train. It later transpired that the woman in the carriage had been a ghost.)[21]

Prior to the invention of photography, the disparity or discontinuity between the relic and its simulacrum was recognized and bridged by a process akin to direct-transfer printing: the surface of paintings representing the Shroud were pressed against the surface of the relic. It was believed that, in so doing, its sacred aura would 'rub off' onto the painting,



15 Secondo Pia, *Turin Shroud*, frontal view, enhanced photographic negative, 1898 (copy print).

as, it would seem, did paint onto the Shroud. Such a painting of the Shroud possessed (like a photograph) its own genealogy: a devotee could, then, touch a painting that, in turn, had touched the Shroud, which, in turn, had touched Christ. The principle by which properties can be transferred from one thing or person to another by contact is found in the New Testament. In the narrative of the woman with the issue of blood, she 'touched the border of [Christ's] garment' and was immediately healed, whereupon he perceived that virtue had gone out of him (Luke 8:43–7). In the account of the origin of the Veronica Veil, the principle is applied to the realm of imaging. As the story goes, Veronica wiped Christ's brow with her kerchief (as he carried his cross to Calvary) and, miraculously, a *vera icon* (or 'true image') of his face remained on it. The miracle consisted in the instantaneous transference (without human intervention or interpretation) of a three-dimensional image onto a two-dimensional surface – a proto-photography, if you will. One of the recent theories put forward to explain the phenomenon of the Shroud is that the image was forged by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), and comprises frontal and dorsal photo-negative 'imprints' (made using lenses, a camera obscura and chromium salts) of a tortured man, and bearing the face of the artist.[22]

Pseudo-photographic relics (such as the Shroud and Veil) forged an indexical link with, and preserve a visual residue of, their subject. They are distinct from other forms of relic, such as the physical remains of saints or artefacts associated with holy persons, in that they represented the extant shadow of the real rather than presented the thing in itself. In pseudo-photographic relics the shadow precedes the reality, reversing their customary chronological relationship in biblical typology, wherein the shadow comes first. Theologically speaking, the shadow (Greek *skia*) or type (Greek *tupos*) is a thing, person, institution or event in the Old Testament that corresponds to and anticipates the same in the New Testament. For instance, Adam was 'the figure' (or type) 'of him [Christ] that was to come', and certain Mosaic prescriptions regarding food, drink and holy days came to be regarded as 'a shadow of things to come' (Romans 5:14; Colossians 2:17). (The shadow implied something dim, transitory and inferior, which would be fulfilled in and made redundant by the

substance.) Elsewhere, the Greek term *hupodeigma* (translated 'copy' and denoting a sketch or draft of something in the future) is used in conjunction with the term 'shadow' to underline the close and pictorial correspondence of the type to the antitype (that which is identified with and presaged by the type) (Hebrews 8:5; 9:23). The term 'antitype' compounds the Greek term *anti* (meaning a copy, equal to or alike) with *tupos*, which renders also the sense of a pattern, a print or an impression, similarly emphasizing the representational relationship between type and antitype. The image impressed upon pseudo-photographic relics (in terms of its substantiality) is as a 'shadow' of its subject. Unlike the type, it does not foreshadow but precedes the true; it is not a prefiguration of the person but, rather, a 'post-figuration'. All photographs are, in this sense, an after-shadow or visual echo of what has been. But, in contrast to their character in typology, these shadows endure – often longer than the substance.

Pseudo-photographic relics and spirit photographs share not only the mystery and miracle of their manufacture but also the status of being representations of the spirit by the spirit. Moreover, both enable the percipient to see presently what is historical. The Shroud bore witness to the resurrection of Christ, the photographic plate or negative, showing a spirit, to a resuscitation of the dead. It was the photographic plate (rather than the photographic print) that constituted the paranormal object – the repository of the supernatural precipitation. The spirit stirred the wet emulsion on the plate, as the angel 'troubled the water' of the pool at Bethesda (John 5:4), performing the miracle of appearances by acting upon the silver iodide in the same manner of light.

However, the 'extra' was usually invisible at the time the photograph was taken.[23] It was surmised that the spirit was either present but on a wavelength outside the visible portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, or else communicated their image directly onto the plate's surface by some other means. Certain modes of skotography (photographs taken in the dark) demonstrated that neither light nor a camera were necessary prerequisites for an ectoplasmic exposure. (In some circumstances, it was believed, the camera – like the trumpet used to hear 'direct voice' manifestations – served, mediately, to focus and amplify the source of

transmission. In this respect, the lens was an artificial eye that enabled spiritual forms to be seen, just as the trumpet was a mechanical ear that enabled spiritual voices to be heard.[24]) The medium Ada Deane (active 1920s–1940s), for example, impressed spirit portraits upon the photographic plate by placing her palms directly onto its surface in a manner akin to the religious practice of 'the laying on of hands'.[25] Pentecostal and revivalist ministers used the technique as a formal method of blessing to invoke, and confer upon the recipient, the Holy Spirit during ordinations, healings and baptisms. Deane's adaptation of the ritual is, similarly, in order to summon and communicate spirit through a human conduit. Like the formation of the image of Christ on the Veronica Veil and the Turin Shroud, 'exposure' was achieved by body contact. In some circles, spirit photography was considered a no less miraculous and portentous phenomenon than the origination of these relics: both classes of image recorded an unexpected portrait – an image that (according to natural law) should not be there – and were, alike, evidential, permanent paranormal artefacts that purported to attest to the prior, real presence and supernatural nature of the represented subjects.

Deane also drew on the iconography of the pseudo-photographic relic. In a portrait of her taken in the 1930s, she smiles benignly through the folds of a translucent pall, purportedly made of ectoplasm, which frames and isolates her face in the manner of the kerchief depicted in paintings of the Veronica Veil (illus. 16, 17). The image also has a biblical resonance, recalling the incident when Moses placed a veil over his face to hide the radiance of his countenance after he had been in the presence of God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:33). Moses' other significant encounter on the Mount was the reception of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, written by God's hand (Exodus 20–24). These artefacts connote another class of paranormal object and medium of revelation known as psychographs (written photographic messages) where plates, having been exposed in the dark or without the aid of a camera, were found on developing to be covered with handwriting, for example, a manuscript of a sermon, passages copied by hand from the Bible or letters (illus. 18).[26] George Henslow (1834–1926), an Anglican clergyman and scientist, was of the opinion that the psychographs were not written at the time of

Opposite: 16 Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Veil of St Veronica*, *c.* 1635, oil on canvas.

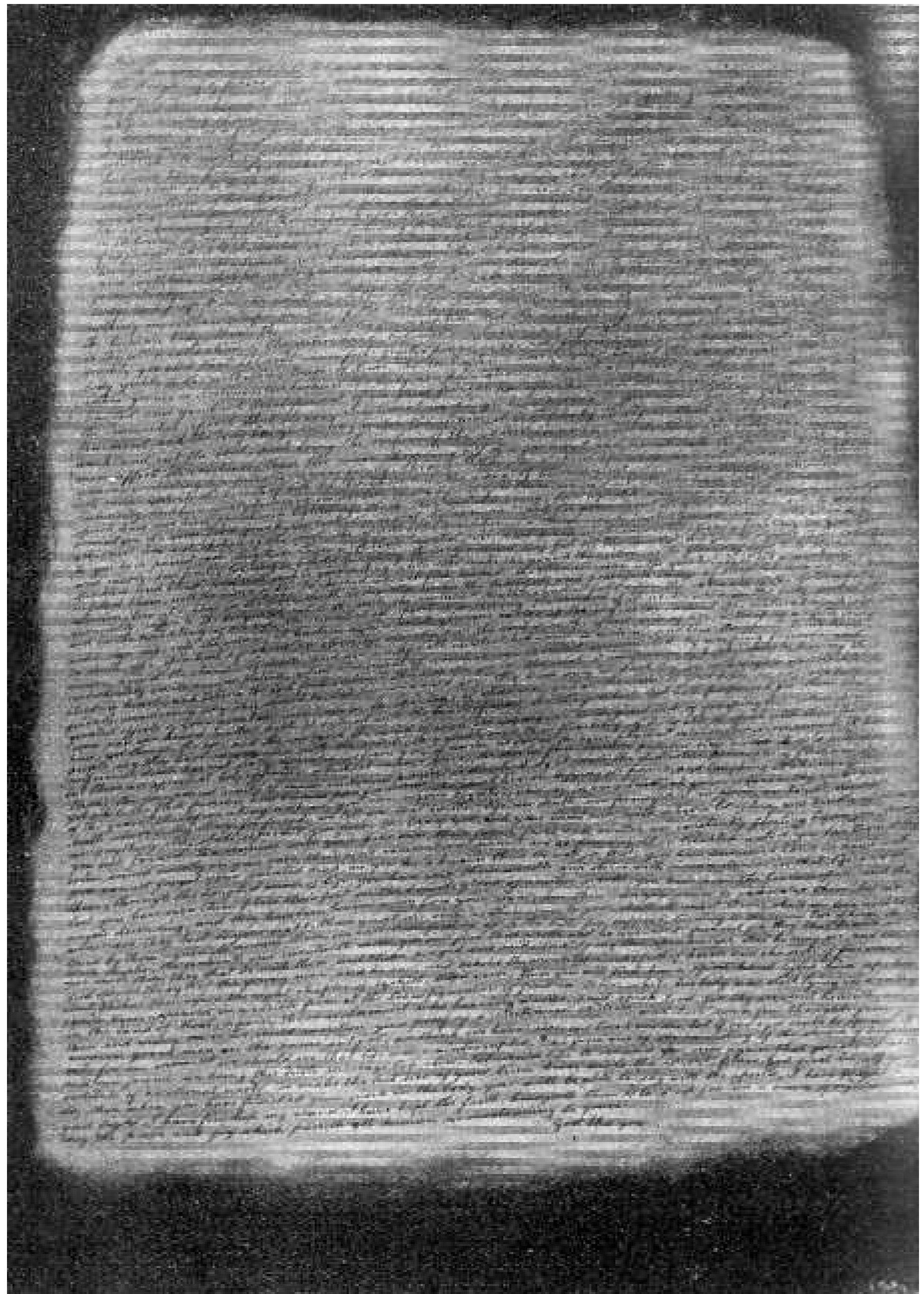
17 Ada Deane, 'The spirit guides "Stella" and "Bessie" with Mrs Barlow, Fred Barlow, Violet and Ada Deane', detail from a gelatin silver print, 1920.

exposure but 'prepared on tablets' prior to transmission.[27] Latterly, psychographs recall the thin malleable plates given by the angel Moroni at Palmyra, New York state, in 1827 to Joseph Smith (1805–1844), the founder of Mormonism, on which was engraved the original record of the Book of Mormon. Photographic writing also recalls the prehistory of photography. Exactly a century before Smith received the revelation, Johann Heinrich Schultz (who is credited with the discovery that silver chloride and silver nitrate darken under illumination, and laid the foundation for research conducted by Thomas Wedgwood [1771–1805] and Humphry Davy [1778–1829]) obtained copies of writing by placing written characters on the surface of chalk saturated with silver nitrate, and exposing it to light.[28]

Iconicity and Continuity

The appearance of spirits in the photographs was influenced by conventions for representing spiritual beings in the tradition of Christian art and visions, just as visionary photography adopted many of the visual codes of supernatural representation previously developed in spirit photography. The 'extra' framed by a fleecy cloud or a numinous, luminous emanation of whitish-grey vapour adapts the convention of the aureole or aura that was depicted surrounding angels and visionary persons (illus. 10, 19, 20). In other spirit photographs, the orbiting congregation of diffuse vignettes comprising portraits of the dead are, by association with Christian iconography, imbued with the aura of ministering spirits (illus. 68). This type of spectral composition evokes a New Testament image too. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews conceived of the valiant and worthy predecessors in the faith who had died as forming an invisible testimony and example to the professing church. Thus, he speaks of believers being, metaphorically speaking, 'compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1). There could hardly be a more literal visualization of the concept: the 'witnesses' in the photograph, like those mentioned in the Bible, are an assortment of famous and anonymous characters, who, similarly, testify to an enduring faith or, more precisely, to faith in endurance, to a belief in the

18 William Hope, 'A Sermon on Spiritual Resurrection' by Archdeacon Colley received through the mediumship of William Hope, psychograph, gelatin silver print, 1920s.



19 ‘A typical spirit photograph. Two ladies sitting; one almost entirely obscured by spirit-cloud. None of the five faces recognised’, gelatine silver print, reproduced in George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (1919).

survival of the soul, post mortem. These borrowings served as an interpretative code, signalling that the ‘extras’ were intended to be read as spiritual manifestations, rather than as extraneous, anomalous and anonymous intruders. In rare cases, ‘extras’ were not manifestations of the dearly departed but of heavenly creatures and holy persons, such as the apostle Peter and Joan of Arc. On one occasion, recorded in the 1880s, an angel was photographed ‘standing on a pedestal, with one foot on tiptoe, with a book in her hand, and holding her cloak with one hand under her chin, looking downward’ – a pose strongly reflecting the conventions of Victorian funereal sculpture.[29]

20 Taddeo Gaddi, *The Angelic Announcement to the Shepherds*, 1327–30, detail from a fresco in the Cappella Baroncelli, Santa Croce, Florence.

Spirit photographs also adopted and adapted the conventions of representing ghosts in the pre-photographic period. The mantled figure of the 'extra' in Frederick Hudson's work, for example, revives the diaphanous shroud of the medieval apparitional type; the cowl – a trademark of the work of the English photographer William Hope (1863–1933) – evokes a monk's hood and, thus, innumerable, stereotypical clerical hauntings (illus. 21, 22). In this way spirit photography established a continuity with the traditions of representation, thereby validating the authenticity of ghosts in photographs with reference to historical precedent, much in the same way as visionaries confirmed the identities of religious figures in their visions with reference to the iconographic tradition of Western European art. The neo-Gothic aura of spirit photographs, which these borrowings engendered, was counterbalanced by the quasi-scientific setting in which the sitter was photographed. Unlike conventional

Opposite: 21 William Hope, 'Rev. Charles L. Tweedale and Mrs Tweedale with the spirit form of the late F. Burnett', brown-toned silver print, 5 September 1919.

22 Frederick Hudson, 'Mr Raby with the spirits "Countess", "James Lombard", "Tommy" and the spirit of Mr Wootton's Mother', albumen print, *c.* 1875.

23 Ada Deane, 'Armistice Day 1924', gelatin silver print, 11 November 1924.

studio photography, there is often no furniture or other props to signify the identity, class or social aspirations of the sitter, only an austere dark cloth or blanket, in front of which the sitter is an isolated specimen – an arrangement derived from anthropological photography.

There is also evidence of stylistic borrowing from more recent Christian imagery. Ada Deane's *Armistice Day* series was spontaneously produced over three successive years beginning in 1922, during the two minutes silence at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. The plates comprise multiple male portrait 'extras' of British soldiers killed in the First World War, bobbing like ducking apples in a soup of ectoplasm. They serve as a

24 John Thomas, '74 o Enwogion u Pulpud Cymreig' (74 Famous Men of the Welsh Pulpit), print from original glass-plate negative, 1850s–1880s.

celluloid cenotaph that not only commemorates their sacrifice but also celebrates their survival after death (illus. 23).[30] The image reflects the influence of the working-class, Protestant visual culture in which Deane grew up. In particular, it bears a striking resemblance to the genre of composite photographs of famous preachers made in the nineteenth century (illus. 24).

Crossing Over: From Service to Seance

By the second half of the nineteenth century Spiritualism had divided into two strands: the one – Christian Spiritualism – attracted those who

either came from a Christian background or saw no contradiction between the claims of Christ and the 'truths' of the new movement. They tended to organize themselves in the form of churches and to define themselves against the other strand – a national organization comprising those who repudiated the authority of Christ and considered Spiritualism to be a new revelation, one that superseded Christianity.[31] The cross-over between Spiritualism and the Protestant Established and Nonconformist churches was not restricted to the visual culture of commemoration. Spiritualism attracted the attention and gained the allegiance of prominent Protestant ministers and clergymen, and recruited from the ranks of the mainstream church members. (Hope had been a Salvation Army member prior to his conversion to Spiritualism.) It was particularly attractive to the working class, who had felt disenfranchised from the class structure of the Established Church, and the theological infighting of the denominations. In the process of migration, they brought to Spiritualism structures of service, patterns of organization and a popular cultural piety that were subsequently adapted and reinvested with significance to accommodate the practice of psychic mediumship. The seance was considered a religious activity.[32] For example, before a spirit photograph was taken, the unexposed plates were, in Arthur Conan Doyle's words, subject to 'a kind of blessing', hands 'laid on' the camera, a prayer spoken, a Psalm read and a hymn sung.[33] (This was the practice at Hope's photographic sessions, no doubt influenced by his religious background. His father had been a Nonconformist preacher.)[34] Christian Spiritualists had their own hymn book, which adapted the doggerel and sentimentality of Victorian hymnody to its own cosmology while retaining traditional tunes. As the Established and Nonconformist churches declined, Christian Spiritualists, like hermit crabs, salvaged and occupied vacated chapels, reshaping the ground plan and furnishings to fit their own 'liturgy'. This adaptive tendency is a conspicuous characteristic of spirit photography too. As will be shown below, 'extras' assimilated 'normal' photographs, reproducing engraved, painted and drawn portraits, and statuary representing the deceased. These were excised from their original context, altered and supplemented by ectoplasmic materials or mounted on diffuse clouds to form 'extras'.

Spiritualism, along with some of the Protestant Nonconformist denominations, democratized religion by giving a participatory prominence to the working class, and to women especially. In the context of Methodism, for instance, they had a focal role as ministers, and in the context of Spiritualism, as mediums. The migration of church members and leaders to Spiritualism during the Victorian and Edwardians periods reflected a growing religious uncertainty. Many, like the influential mediums William Stainton Moses (1839–1892), formerly an Anglican clergyman; Francis Ward Monck, who began his career as a protégé of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) and minister of a Baptist chapel; and Florence Marryat (1838–1899), a Roman Catholic, had been brought up on the tenets of orthodox Christianity and yet found in them no consolation regarding survival beyond death.[35] Others from a Christian background, such as William Barrett (1844–1925) and Oliver Lodge (1851–1940), sought proof of an afterlife through initiating and leading societies devoted to a scientific and impartial investigation into psychic phenomenon.[36]

As the churches and denominations suffered an alarming numerical decline, Spiritualist seances, societies and churches spread rapidly from London as far as the north of England and south Wales. The respective fortunes of the churches and Spirtualism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would wax and wane. Spiritualism had been in steady decline since the 1890s. Published accusations of fraudulent mediumship, testimonies to duplicity and exposés of seances stripped the movement of its public credibility. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, however, the fortunes of Spiritualism revived while those of the Church waned dramatically. In part, this turn-around pivoted on the public's response to the First World War. The British Empire alone had suffered the loss of more than 908,000 dead and a further two million casualties. The Christian churches were accused of having a barely intelligible, unconvincing and infrequently articulated theology of the afterlife. The Church of England confronted the issue after each world war. For example, in 1939, Anglicans concluded that the Church had not sufficiently emphasized the communion of the saints (living and dead), prayers for the dead or other doctrines pertaining to the soul's survival beyond

death. The attraction of Spiritualism derived from its ability to make 'accessible a reality which the Church has proclaimed but of which it has seemed only to offer a shadow'.[37] It offered the bereaved, in contrast, the prospect of not so much spiritual communion as spirit communication; not a distant heavenly hope, but the immediate consolation that their departed loved ones – many of whom had been brutally killed on the front line – were happy, safe and secure beyond the veil. The movement provided not a memorial to the dead but a tangible and enduring reminder of their continued existence in the form of photographs, materializations and other sensible evidence.

After Image: Departure and Desire

Prior to photography, the memory of the dead was preserved in the form of amulets, portraits and personal keepsakes, including letters and items of jewellery and clothing that had once belonged to the deceased, as well as more intimate relics, such as a lock of hair. Post mortem, death masks and death-bed pictures of the dying and the dead were the final opportunity to secure a loved one's image both for posterity and against inevitable corruption and decay. (Such artefacts also served to remind those who survived of their own mortality.)

Photography took up the death-bed genre. The corpse is arranged in a life-like pose, either prostrate in bed – in an attitude that of connoted a peaceful death and would have been deeply consoling for the bereaved – or seated, as though (momentarily) in prayer, blissful repose or dozing – the knowing pretence of presence in absence of anima. In the early years of photography, these would have been both the first and last photograph of many a loved one. This was especially so in the case of babies and infants (illus. 25). In family groups, in coffins reminiscent of cots, babies posed with parents and siblings, the living and the dead, together and forever embalmed in emulsion – alike, rendered lifeless in the instant of exposure.

The bereaved show no discomfort in the physical presence of the dead, whose bodies remain cherished and honourable even after their

25 John Thomas, Dead infant, print from original glass-plate negative, 1850s–1880s.

souls have departed. By arresting the appearance of a person's remains, commercial photographers satisfied the ambivalent determination on the part of the grief-stricken to confront death while, at the same time, denying its finality. This refusal to let go was further exploited by commercial photographers who claimed to reunite the living and the dead by capturing,

in the studio, the afterlife image of the departed soul (illus. 26). The photographs helped to turn grief into belief, and enabled the bereaved not only to come to terms with their loss but also to know with certainty that the great divide that separated them from the departed could be bridged. In contrast to post-mortem photographs, photographs of spirits were relics from the 'other side' – evidence not so much that the dead had been as that they continued to be; and reminders for the living not of their mortality (as in the tradition of vanitas or *memento more*) but of their immortality.[38] For, while spirit photography stressed the impermanence of life and the imminence of death, it did so as a means of contemplating and anticipating one's demise positively and fearlessly. In this sense, the photographs satisfied the same need as had books of religious instruction, such as Drelincourt's *The Christian's Consolation against the Fears of Death* (1707), which encouraged Christians to meditate on the promises and resurrection of Christ, and the goodness, mercy and providential timings of God in order to remedy anxiety.[39] By contrast, the succour offered by Spiritualism and spirit photography was not theocentric but anthrocentric and utilitarian in outlook, based upon knowledge rather than faith, and focused on the survival of the self rather than the solace of the Saviour.[40] Both post-mortem and spirit photographs portrayed an afterlife: either the interim before interment or the survival of the soul. Both genres comprised posthumous portraits of loved ones and acquaintances. Both showed what it looked like to be dead, and that (very often) the dead looked and behaved like the living.

Spirit photography added to the ritual and professionalization of bereavement. For many grieving relatives and friends, sitting for a spirit photographer was as customary as a visit to a 'normal' photographer had been when the deceased was alive, and as an appointment with the funeral director after their loved ones had died. The photographer-medium married heaven and earth, the dead and the living, on the surface of a glass plate. In this respect, they officiated in a 'priestly' role, invoking the spirit and transubstantiating the photographic emulsion. Like conventional portrait photographs and post-mortem photographs, spirit photographs were purchased primarily for consumption by the deceased's nearest and dearest, and circulated (often in the format of the popular

26 Robert Boursnell, 'Couple with the spirit of an old family doctor who died around 1880', collodion print, 3 January 1893.

carte-de-visite) among acquaintances and distant relations, as a remembrancer of appearances. Kith and kin were often crucial in confirming the 'extra's' resemblance to a departed friend or family member, either as they had been in life, or continued to be (tokenly) in normal photographic portraits. Often these witnesses, convinced by the comparison, turned to spirit photographers to secure the semblance of loved ones for themselves. And so, by sight of eye and word of mouth, enthusiasm for spirit photography spread with the virulence of a contagion.

The photographs of William Mumler (active 1832–84), an engraver for a Boston jeweller who moved to New York to work as a commercial studio photographer specializing in spirit photography, fuse the convention of the double-portrait and single-portrait composition. Sitter and 'extra' are immobilized in the instant of exposure (illus. 1, 27). The seated figure stares with indeterminate expression watched over by the wistful face of a phantom, each seemingly oblivious to the other's presence. In some photographs, they are shown close together yet unconnected: distinct in scale, spatial position and substance, each self-contained and lost in respective attitudes of reverie – their contemplative gaze cast, often, in contrary directions. In other examples, the proximity of the 'extra' to the sitter is often intimate; in some cases, the spirit appears superimposed upon the sitter's body. Unlike religious visions, there is little or no delimiting distance between spectator and spectre. Like visionary apparitions, however, spirits appear in photographs not only singly but also (in later examples of spirit photographs) in multiples (illus. 70). The proximity of the 'extra' to the sitter was a consoling visualization of Spiritualism's conviction that the spirits of the dead were always near to the bereaved.

Ghosts pose before the camera lens in attitudes and manners undifferentiated from their flesh-and-blood counterparts, apparently conscious that they were being photographed.[41] Some examples show the spirit with a consoling hand or arm affectionately placed about the sitter – signalling to the bereaved that love endures even in death. In Mumler's photographs, the disincarnate spirits look pallid, like a watermark on the backcloth, dressed in either a bleached version of their customary attire or in a white smock reminiscent of an angel's dress. (Spirits were often spoken of as surrogate guardian angels in acknowledgement of their care

27 John Thomas, W. Thelwell Thomas and his wife, print from original glass-plate negative, 1850s–1880s.

28 John Thomas, Angels attending the bedtime of a believer *in extremis*, stereograph, print from original glass-plate negative, 1850s–1880s.

and oversight of the living.) The ministering angel was also the subject of a genre of knowingly fictive depictions of spirits popular in the late nineteenth century. Unlike novelty ghost photographs, these images were not intended to amuse or bemuse but to comfort and console. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist photographer John Thomas (1838–1905) portrayed angels attending what is presumably the death-bed of a believer. The photograph objectifies the invisible comforters that grace the saint *in extremis* (illus. 28). The human actors are clothed in long white gowns, crowned with haloes and fitted with wings, following a tradition of representation that had persisted from early Christian art to the illustrations in his own denomination's literature.[42] The stereoscopic format not only endows the heavenly beings (as it did ghosts in novelty photographs too) with the illusion of depth but also furthers the depth of illusion. In photographs by later spirit photographers, the spectres seem like dim projections of a magic lantern slide; their vesture is, variously, more naturalistic, exotic or theatrical – assuming the appearance of native costume, or of drapes suggesting a classical toga, an ecclesial cowl and a funereal shroud (illus. 21).

After Life: Destinations and Demons

Spiritualism was, for the most part, neither theologically minded and cohesive nor credal and doctrinaire, tending rather to emphasize goodness, universal religious values and the emotional and spiritual (in their broadest terms). Typically, the respondents from the 'other side' and 'extras' in photographs included an ecumenical assortment of leaders and clerics, including ministers, priests, rabbis, fakirs and shamans, representing the world's major religions (living and dead) from antiquity to the present day, as well as 'primitive' spiritualities, signified by the ubiquitous presence of a Native American (the spirit of Chief Wapanaw accompanied Mr Colby, editor of the *Banner of Light* magazine, in one of Mumler's photographs).[43] In this respect, spirit photographs were propaganda against the concept of religious hegemony. Spiritualism's universalism implied that all souls, regardless of their creed, proceeded to the same place in more or less the same state, post mortem. Even the absence of, and even an antipathy to, religious belief did not prevent anyone from 'passing over' into this cosmic, cosmopolitan community.

In the tenets of orthodox Christianity, admission was precluded by sin. This was a serious transgression against the divine law and God's holiness that merited his wrath and judgement, and required ceremony, sacrament, petition and penitence, salvation and atonement to absolve. Spiritualists rarely addressed the concept of sin, and then only in terms that suggested it was an irksome flaw and temporary hindrance to achieving the ideal human condition. Similarly, evil was regarded as merely a negative principle as opposed to a malefic and spirit-deadening force. In Christian theology, death involves the segregation of penitent and unrepentant, the redeemed and the reprobate (the former experiencing, in that moment, a spiritual transformation resulting in complete sanctification), and their consignment, eternally, to either heaven or hell (or, in Roman Catholic doctrine, purgatory – a place or condition of temporal punishment for, and purification from, transgressions).
If spirit photographs were for Spiritualism the proffered proof of the afterlife, so (what are sometimes referred to as) purgatorial artefacts[44] or relics were for Roman Catholicism the salutary evidence of an existence

beyond the temporal world. The artefacts, it is held, bear the trace or imprint left by departed spirits. They include clothes supposedly scorched in the fires of hell, the (Shroud-like) portrait of their owner or handprints made on prayer books – serving as reminders for the living to attend Mass and pray for purgatorial souls that they might soon be admitted to heaven.

Having passed into the nether world without experiencing a significant and transformative rite of passage, the spirits of the dead continued to exhibit the same personality traits and habits, both good and ill – such as petulance, impatience and other discourtesies – as they had done in life. In some cases, they retained their occupation also. (The continuity of life before and after death was also expressed in the close relationship between the countenance, conventions and composition of the portraits of the deceased in spirit photographs and those in 'normal' photographs [illus. 29, 30].) Spiritualists conceived of the afterlife not as heaven in any traditional Christian sense, but as 'another world' – suggesting, again, a sense of continuity with the world of the living – a domain where spirits could continue to advance and adapt towards greater enlightenment and moral betterment (the spiritual corollary to Darwinian evolution). Those who were upright in this life were supported by angels and spirits on a path to progressive improvement.[45]

Understandably, a system of thought that refused to acknowledge the heinousness of sin and ideas such as damnation and perdition did not countenance the existence of hell or its demonic and eternally condemned inhabitants. In spirit histories up until the early nineteenth century, accounts of the apparitions of evil spirits, malevolent sprites, demons and devils were as abundant as those of ghosts. Disbelief in demons (as in angels, miracles, revelation and the divinity of Christ) had resulted from the leaven of Liberal and Higher Critical theology and the spread of agnosticism and atheism in both Christian and secular thought throughout Europe and North America. These, coupled with Spiritualism's universalism, are significant reasons why the movement neither held to the existence of, nor claimed to portray, devils and evil spirits (although some of the dead spoke, through mediums, of 'bad' or

29 'Photograph of Mr Wm Walker with message in the handwriting of W. T. Stead', reproduced in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (1922).

30 William Hope, 'Mr and Mrs Harry Walker and two friends with psychic likeness of Mr Walker's father', reproduced in Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*.

'inferior' spirits, being the – as yet – unenlightened souls of those who had lived badly while alive, or those who appeared to avenge or terrify mortals).[46]

Indeed, in the œuvre of photography and spirit, representations of the demonic are exceedingly rare and confined to the period since the late twentieth century. (This may reflect the recent reaction on the part of New Age philosophy to the reductivism that has resulted from the strictly materialist outlook on reality advocated by the empirical sciences, and a renewed interest in the occult.) Contemporary photographs of demons deploy an iconography derived from narrative descriptions in spirit histories, and show cloudy, dark or otherwise indistinct forms brooding in the background, with some bearing the

vague contours of malevolent eyes and fangs – the customary signifiers of demonism in the traditions of Western Christian art (illus. 31).[47]

Some Christian, and superstitious, detractors regarded all spirit photographs as representing demons or evil spirits (rather than the spirits of the departed) and, thus, to be manifestations of the Devil's work.[48] In the early days of spirit photography, Mumler had encountered a studio proprietor in the Bowery, New York, who wished his photograph to be taken. The proprietor predicted that Mumler would probably 'get the devil or his cloven foot', which was what (apparently) developed on the photograph.[49] In England, there was considerable antipathy to spirit photography because of its demonic associations. In response, the Crewe Circle – a group of photographers and mediums led by Hope, established in 1905 to conduct seances with the express aim of producing spirit photographs – took the precaution of keeping its activities private and destroyed all the negatives that had been produced prior to being discovered and made public by Archdeacon Thomas Colley (1839–1912) in 1908.[50]

Rather than deny or debunk Spiritualism and its manifestations, church leaders – who were unsympathetic to Spiritualism in either its Christian or post-Christian forms – regarded both with gravity and alarm. During the second half of the nineteenth century, as Spiritualism asserted itself for the first time in the United Kingdom, Spurgeon (who once thought it all humbug) came to the conclusion that it was devilish.[51] (Despite his protestations, miniature likenesses of Spurgeon's face were incorporated into ectoplasmic materializations that were exuded from the eye and mouth of the medium during seances held in 1928 and 1929 by Thomas Glendenning Hamilton and his circle in Winnipeg, Canada [illus. 32].[52]) Similarly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the movement reasserted itself, another influential Baptist minister, R. B. Jones (1869–1933), recognized in 'the consuming progress of this "hurricane of fire"', the harbinger of the approaching end time or 'latter days' before the Second Coming of Christ: 'In these latter days we need to be very wary, for they will be increasingly days of supernaturalism; much of the divine restraint upon Satan will be withdrawn, and he, knowing that his time is short, will redouble his efforts to deceive and destroy.'[53]

31 'Girl with a demon on her shoulder', detail from a Kodak Instamatic 126 format print, *c.* 1973.

The churches' dispute with Spiritualism and its phenomena was an issue not so much about truth as about trust. Church leaders believed that the communicating voices, ectoplasmic materializations and photographic 'extras' were supernatural, but not, however, manifestations of disincarnate souls; rather, they were regarded as 'abominations' – the machinations of deceiving spirits. Quoting Old Testament prohibitions regarding necromancy and consulting familiar spirits, and pointing to Spiritualism's disavowal of the doctrines of judgement, damnation and the atoning work of Christ, leaders denounced Spiritualism as evil, harmful and sinful. In so doing, the churches, quite literally, demonized Spiritualism.[54]

32 Thomas Glendenning Hamilton, 'The fourth Spurgeon miniature face of May 1, 1929', reproduced in his *Intention and Survival* (1942).

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Science

Passing On: From Seance to Science

Not all Christians regarded paranormal manifestations as necessarily evil. The Baptist theologian F. B. Meyer (1847–1929) believed telepathy and clairvoyance to be natural capacities of the mind, endowed by God, analogous to wireless telegraphy. Some brains, he speculated, had a sympathetic correspondence with the waves being transmitted.[1] The appeal to new technology was an attempt both to rationalize spiritual phenomena and to bridge the gulf between religion and science that had grown up since the mid-nineteenth century. During the period from the 1850s to 1930, the rapprochement took the form of a simultaneous spiritualization of science and 'scientification' of Spiritualism. The latter was expressed in a tendency to comprehend – and thereby give credence to – inexplicable paranormal occurrences in terms of normal and verifiable physical phenomena. Spiritualists considered electricity or magnetism to be the physical basis for phenomena.[2] Mediums or sensitives were said to store up energy to produce materializations, like a battery, while seances were referred to as experimental meetings.[3] Exotic-sounding terms such as 'teleplasma' and 'electro-biology' endowed the rhetoric of paranormal study with the aura of modernity and an established discipline.[4]

Scientific discoveries were requisitioned not as apparatus to investigate but as analogies to interpret spiritual phenomena. Radio waves (predicted by James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879) in 1864, and discovered by Heinrich Hertz in 1888) and the phonograph had respectively conveyed and recorded a disembodied human voice for the first time in 1877, and

proved that our voices could be heard after our death.[5] Furthermore, in 1893 telephony, radio broadcast and wireless communication demonstrated that sounds could cross great distances upon the air (like spirit voices through the ether). Telegraphy, invented in 1844, had given sound a visible form, and made wireless communication possible. Thereafter, it became a popular analogy for telepathy.[6] Such inventions not only provided a serviceable resemblance to psychic operations but also, as the psychical researcher Frank Podmore (1865–1910) argued, opened the mind to unimagined possibilities beyond the physical realm:

> No doubt . . . the introduction throughout the continent of the electric telegraph, an invention still so recent that the popular mind had not become familiarized with it, and still regarded its operations with something like childlike wonder, helped to quicken expectation and generally to induce a mental condition favourable in other phenomena.[7]

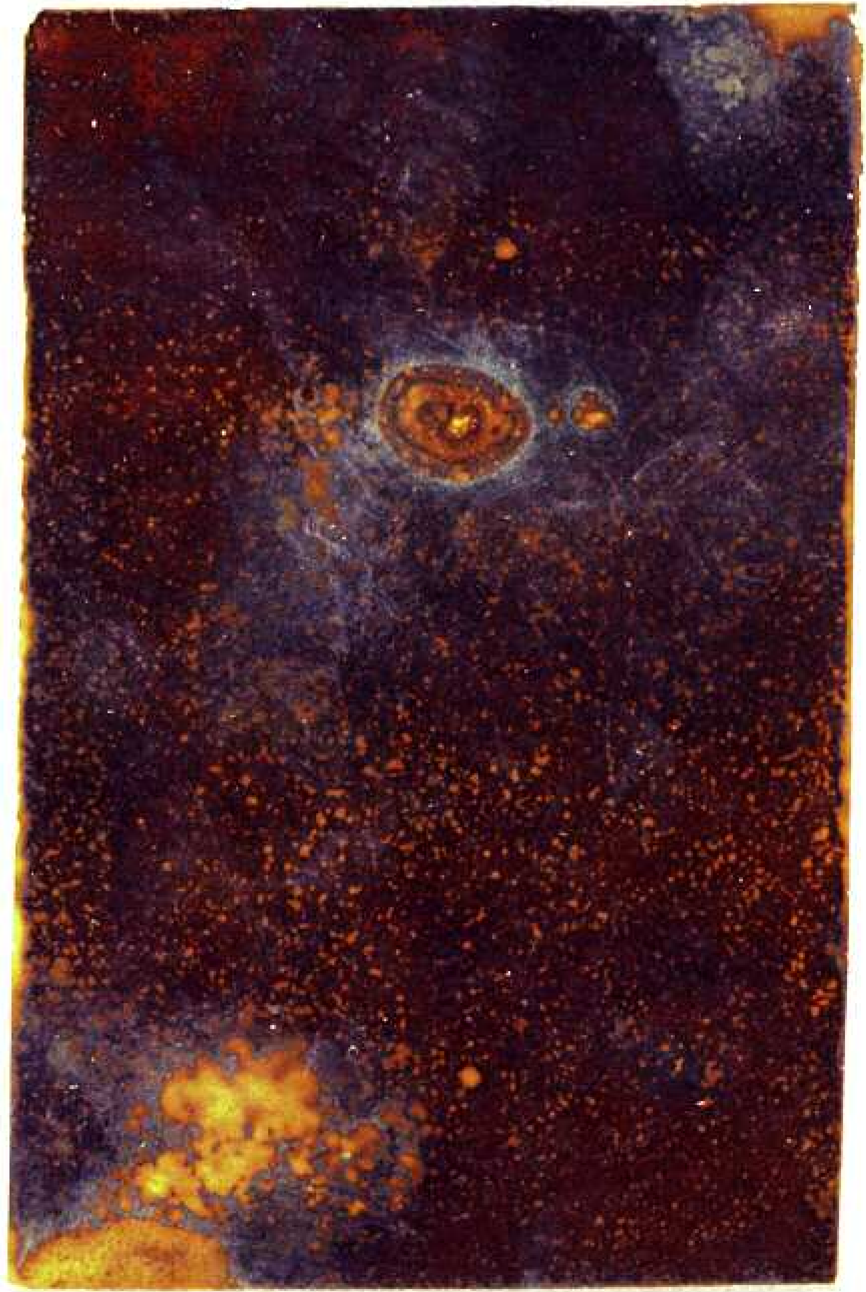
Inventions such as the photo-telegraphy and the telautograph (an instrument for transmitting half-tone prints by telegraphy) provided an adaptable analogue for the possibility that spirits might communicate images from their sphere to a photographic plate.[8] W. T. Stead (1849–1912) speculated that hauntings may be a form of recording, and suggested that a phonograph in combination with Edison's kinetoscope could be a technological parallel that might explain the recurrence of spirits in a particular place.[9]

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Spiritualists and scientists shared some of the same technologies, albeit adapted to very different ends, and a measure of common ground. For instance, skotographs (a term that describes the effects on photographic plates exposed in the dark) were made by Spiritualists to preserve the image and inscriptions of spirits after death. The term was first coined by Walter Sydney Lazarus-Barlow, physician at Middlesex Hospital, London. He used the technique of skotography not to render death but to preserve life, in experiments undertaken in cancer research. Wall describes how the doctor

> takes a piece of animal tissue, such as the liver, dries it at 100°c in a hot-air oven, pounds it to a powder, and exposes the photographic plate (at a distance of as much as 15 mm from the sample) in total darkness. On development, the position that the powder had occupied is revealed by a silver deposit.[10]

Both Spiritualists and scientists claimed to be able to see and visualize otherwise invisible and intangible realms. Telescopy combined with photography brought into close proximity previously unimagined and indiscernible depths of space and surface detail, as in the case of Mr Whipple's and John William Draper's daguerreotypes of the moon, made using a reflecting telescope as a camera around 1853 and 1839–40 respectively.[11] At the other end of the scale, the application of photography to microscopy enabled the perception of otherwise unseeable worlds. These achievements were also dependent on improved film sensitivity, shutter speed and lenses, and the broader range of apertures – advances that also facilitated the photographing of evanescent natural phenomena such as lightning and auroras. The development of magnesium light permitted photographs of what had previously been un-photographable subjects. For example, it allowed the somewhat oddball Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Charles Piazzi Smyth (1819–1900), to photograph, for the first time, the mysterious interior of the pyramids of Egypt, in 1865 – a subject that he also pursued through the mystical pseudo-science of pyramidology.[12]

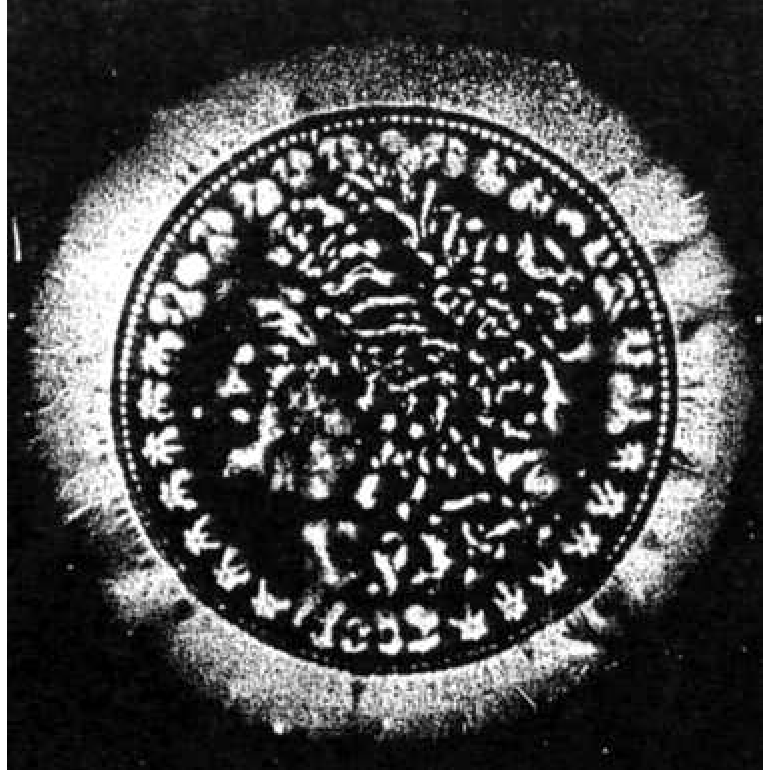
The conquest of space, photographically, was also pursued – with a visionary intensity – by the Swedish dramatist, painter and photographer August Strindberg (1849–1912). He combined his interest in alchemy and the mysterious forms of nature in 'celestographs', first produced in 1894 – photographs, made without a lens, or with a camera of his own manufacture with a lens of unground glass, or resulting from photo-chemical experiments (illus. 33). On some occasions, 'he exposed plates to the night sky in the developing bath, on the assumption that light would be directly transferred via the electromagnetic waves recently discovered by Röntgen during the same year'.[13] The photographs were uncannily prescient of images taken by the Hubble Space Telescope exactly a century later.[14]



33 August Strindberg, *Celestograph* [7a], photo-sensitive chemicals on prepared metal plate, 1894.

Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen (1845–1923) discovered x-rays and made the first radiograph (developed plates or film exposed to x-ray or gamma radiation). Early radiographic images bore an uncanny resemblance to the soft, milky and translucent apparitions in spirit photographs (illus. 41). Like spirit photographs, radiographs revealed reality beyond the surface of the physical: things that were previously and normally out of sight could now be perceived. Radiographs were first made in 1895, more than forty years after 'extras' were first discerned in photographs. Each represented a new way of seeing the human body, of recording what was beyond the externals of the physical world. Each represented a vision of our mortality: the radiograph shows a skeletal image (the intimation of our final physical state), which we carry around inside ourselves, even as we live; the 'extra' portrays a depth of being that not even x-rays could fathom – the psychical state: the soul or spirit that, it was supposed, survived physical death.

Historically, the ground for the discovery of x-rays was prepared by William Crookes (1832–1919), one of the most eminent physicists of his day. He observed that the application of a high-voltage electrical current to the anode within a vacuum tube (which he had built around 1875) would produce the inadvertent fogging of a photographic plate, even though it was placed within a light-proof enclosure. (Crookes also applied his science to the study of paranormal phenomena, most famously the materializations of Katie King [see below; illus. 7].) As J. Traill Taylor (1827–1895), editor of the *British Journal of Photography*, noted, the electrical current was invisible to the naked eye, even in a dark room, but visible on the plate.[15] The experiment showed that not only photography without the camera but also photographing the invisible was a proven, scientific possibility. In the 1890s similar experiments were conducted by Russian scientists in what was known as electrophotography or electro-graphic photography. Yakov Narkevich-Todko developed a means by which images could be made directly onto a photographic plate from an electrical discharge. In the West, a similar process, referred to as effluviography or 'electric photographs', was demonstrated in an experiment by Fernando Sanford: a coin was placed on a dry plate connected to one terminal with a small induction coil capable of emitting a spark of 3 or 4 millimetres. A piece of tin foil was



34 Fernando Sanford, electrically charged coin showing effluvium, dry-plate negative of effluviograph, reproduced in Walter E. Woodbury, *Photographic Amusements* (1896).

attached to the opposite side of the plate and connected to the other terminal of the coil. The negatives that resulted from this process show a diffuse skirt of 'light' surrounding the coin, caused by the escape of the charge from its edge, not unlike the character of the aureole that encapsulated the faces of some 'extras' (illus. 34, 10).[16]

The auras captured in photographs were thought by some to be the visualization of latent and previously undetermined psychic powers. In the race for new findings after the discovery of x-rays, pseudo-sciences emerged that sought to discover other invisible and fundamental, if hypothetical, forces. Straddling a fine line between science and science fiction, the pseudo-scientists (like the alchemists before them) hovered between the two worlds of natural and supernatural. Their philosopher's stone was a mysterious vital energy (an 'x-force') that permeated and

bound together all living things. The endeavour followed in the steps of research by the French physician Michel Augustin Thouret (1748–1810) into what he called animal magnetism (to disassociate it from ferro-magnetism), published as *Recherches et doutes sur le magnétisme animal* (1784). His studies were predicated upon the belief that living organisms contained a magnetic fluid. The idea was popularized and corrupted by Franz Anton Mesmer (1733–1815), who maintained that this 'mesmeric' fluid could, in the case of the sick, be manipulated to achieve a state of balance, and restore their physical health.[17] Animal magnetism provided a template for further conceptualization and speculation by experimenters such as Baron von Reichenbach (1788–1869). In 1845 he announced the discovery of a new, totally unknown physical force called *Od*.[18] Odic forces were manifest as currents or radiances perceptible only to psychically sensitive individuals. They, along with others, could (supposedly) emanate *Od* from their hands, mouth and forehead in particular. Fifty years later, in 1903, the French physicist René Blondlot (1849–1930) discovered a force he called N-rays – a novel form of radiation, which, he deduced, was emitted by all substances, including human bodies.[19] He found that N-rays could be reflected and polarized, and that they possessed well-defined wavelengths. His claims suffered a severe setback when it was revealed that their wavelengths proved to be a purely subjective phenomenon resulting from an excess of experimenter bias.

Seymon Kirlian (1898–1980), an amateur electrician and inventor from Russia, noticed that both animate and inanimate things generate an aura or halo when exposed to high-voltage, high-frequency, low-amperage current: the electrically grounded object discharges sparks between itself and an electrode producing the electrical field. When these sparks are captured on film, they give the appearance of coronas of light. This process, developed in 1939 and known as Kirlian photography, was a contact photographic technique (rather than one that required a camera), in which an object is placed near to, but insulated from (by a glass plate), the charged metal plate in a light-proof chamber. The image is produced when a light-sensitive medium such as film is exposed to the corona discharge (illus. 35). In one experiment, part of a leaf was cut off. Yet the glowing portion of the amputated portion still appeared on film, suggesting

35 Guy Lyon Playfair, 'A cut leaf, showing how the "aura" of the section which has been cut off is "restored"', Kirlian photograph, c. 1980.

that the auras were psychic emanations or metaphysical energy – the evidence of an etheric or spiritual body (like a chakra).[20] The phenomenon of the 'phantom' leaf poses an intriguing hypothesis with regard to spirit photographs: were 'extras' the residual emanation of once embodied spirits? The electrical discharge captured in Kirlian photography sometimes

appears as a bluish flame, which some have supposed explains supernatural occurrences recorded in the Bible, like the burning bush witnessed by Moses (Exodus 3:1–15) and the tongues of fire seen at Pentecost, and may, further, rationalize the halo and aureole or luminescence that medieval and Renaissance artists painted around holy people. Thus, rather than being purely symbolic visual significations of significant spirituality, these convention were also renderings of once perceptible projections of intense psychic potency.[21]

Belief in the phenomenon and significance of electromagnetic radiations (or auras) has been, since the 1970s, promoted by the New Age movement – a diverse, postmodern *mélange* of eclectic and idiosyncratic teachings and practices drawn from Spiritualism, Theosophy, transcendentalism, Eastern mysticism, the pseudo-sciences and ancient religions, among other sources. Photographs of the radiations, it is claimed, record energy colour fields (illus. 36). The technique exercised by Danièle Laurant, for example, bears many of the hallmarks of early commercial spirit photography: sitters pose against a dark and neutral background while the photographer 'lays hands' upon the sensor of the Polaroid camera. However, whereas Mumler and Hope would leave the sitter to deduce the significance of the 'extra', Laurant proceeds to interpret the diffuse hues, density and the proximity of the auras to the sitter's head (as would a palmist, lines), in order to discern the spiritual, physical and emotional well-being – and, sometimes, uncover familiar spirits, angels, deceased relatives and past-life impressions. The psychic and the psycho-therapeutic, channelling and counselling, coalesce.[22]

Photographs of auras are conspicuously colourful. Here, colour serves as the medium of spirit: the spectrum is the spectre. (In one sense this is entirely apposite, completing a circle of connections that had begun before the invention of photography: in the seventeenth century, the colour terms 'spectrum' [Latin: appearance] and 'hue' also referred to an apparition, ghost or phantom.) Nearly all extant photographs of spirits made from the earliest days up to the middle of the twentieth century are in black and white. As such, the corpus of photographs showing 'extras' suggest (if unintentionally) that ghosts have a somewhat pallid complexion, not unbecoming their deathly state. Ironically, the first permanent colour

36 Centre for the New Age, photograph of aura, Polaroid film, 2006.

photograph was taken by the physicist James Clerk Maxwell as early as 1861, the same year in which Mumler made the first spirit photograph. More than half a century would pass before colour photography and spirit photography would coincide again; the first spirit photograph in colour was produced (according to Doyle) by a Mr Walker using the Padget process.[23] Ada Deane made several colour photographs of spirits in the 1920s.[24] The sweet tints of the prints and, in particular, the somewhat flat and insipid hues of the spirit's face sentimentalize the subject and, in so doing, diminish the aura of the fugitive and uncanny. As a result, the 'extra's likely past life (as a printed illustration), and its resemblance to a scrap component in an elementary decoupage, are less well disguised.

Exposure: Testing the Spirits

Conventional photography was considered no less an instrument of science (with all the connotations of reliability, detachment and authenticity that the association suggested), though, as Wallace Nutting considered, even as late as 1928, the power of photography had been little understood and was regarded as a miraculous process.[25] Photography, with one foot in the camp of science, still had another in the realm of religion and the occult. Consequently, it was the ideal interlocutor between, and handmaiden to, both the physical and the psychical sciences.[26] The camera not only verified 'the reality of the existence of phantasms . . . [but also proved] that they are not a subjective hallucinatory phenomenon'.[27] Spirit photography was 'the most unassailable demonstration . . . of the objective reality of spiritual forms'.[28] This confidence was predicated on two reciprocal 'objectivities': first, that of photography itself, as being

> a method of graphic delineation, having as its essential quality the power of recording the shapes of things, and their minutest details, clearly and sharply, and with a degree of truth in drawing and rendering of tones which, by universal consent, justifies its title to preeminence among the methods of literal graphic representation;[29]

and secondly, that of the spirits themselves. Before photography, their independence of the influence of a witness's subjective emotions, impressions or expectations was seen in terms of the spirits' capacity to move objects, to touch, to be touched and to write. Photography provided another crucial test of objectivity, for, as the naturalist, anthropologist and biologist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) argued in 1878, if they can be photographed, they must produce light.[30] More than eighty years later, the theory still had its advocates. As Tom Patterson wrote in 1965:

> I am now convinced that light radiations which emanate from disincarnate spirits can leave their impressions upon the silver salt of an undeveloped film, in the same manner that the light of day or any other form of illumination leaves its pictorial effect upon the negative . . . I am quite convinced that our friends in spirit are for ever waiting to use our scientific discoveries for the purpose of improved communications with the physical and material world.[31]

(The simultaneous development of physical and spiritual telegraphy was cited as evidence of this intent.[32]) When, after a period of damaging controversy and proven fraudulence, the fortunes of both Spiritualism and spirit photography revived in the second decade of the twentieth century, it was in the context of an intellectual climate ready to think the unthinkable.

While 'extras' were visual phenomena (albeit only in a photographic form), spirit apparitions could in the context of the seance assume the appearance of material density, recalling the form of corporeal ghosts described in the pre-photographic age. These so-called solid ghosts could be seen, seized, squeezed and sampled by scientists. Fully formed, solid ghosts fashioned from this etheric clay walked about the seance room in view of all. Female spirits would sit on the laps of men of science and cheerfully consent to what in other circumstances might have been considered most improper manhandling in the pursuit of truth. Exposed as photographs, spirits were untouchable and unverifiable, simultaneously promoting and preserving the claims of Spiritualism. Summoned at seances, they were vulnerable to being accosted by members of the circle and exposed as fake. Spirits in this manifestation were treated more like

resurrections than apparitions. Like doubting Thomas, investigators grasped the spiritual body in order to lay hold on faith. Moreover, solid ghosts could be photographed by sceptical photographers, and without either the cooperation of a medium or a blessing on the plate to secure a successful impression. Solid materializations stood in the same relation to spirit photography as did the prostitute to pornography – reality replaced representation; that which was once at a remove (fixed in shadows) was now made immediate and accessible, permitting the possibility of interaction, knowledge and intercourse (in the fullest sense of the word).

Crookes investigated and made some forty-four photographs of Katie King – the fully materialized and solid spirit guide of the medium Florence Cook – under magnesium light using single, multiple and stereoscopic cameras.[33] The extant photographs show King in full view, clothed in a white dress and turban – summoning associations with the shrouded phantom – attended by her examiners and appearing to possess all the characteristics of a flesh-and-blood young woman, as well as a distinct resemblance to Cook (illus. 7). In Crookes's portraits (in contrast to commercial spirit photographs of the time), spirit and sitter are one and the same. (Whether spirit and medium were, too, remains a mystery.) If Cook had fooled Crookes, it is likely to have been because, as a scientist, he would not have expected the object of his enquiry wantonly to deceive him. After all, the stuff of his customary research – chemicals, natural forces and the laws of physics – behaved reliably, consistently and disinterestedly.

The practice, as it were, of placing the medium under the microscope was pursued further by the German psychotherapist Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929). His prolific output of some 225 photographs, sometimes very poor ones, of the medium Martha Béraud (Eva C.) were taken using flashlight at seances and at his laboratory over a four-year period. Schrenck-Notzing's photographs appeared in *The Phenomena of Materialisations*, published in Germany in 1914.[34] His photographs are the aesthetic antithesis of early spirit photographs conducted in commercial photographic studios. Sitter and 'extra', flesh and spirit, conjoin: his and other investigators' documentary photographs of physical mediumship show veils and strands of ectoplasm secreted from the medium's body (which, in Béraud's case, was often naked) in a manner that connotes and

conflates the physical ejections of birthing, menstruation and vomiting (illus. 5).[35] But perhaps equally unsettling was the emergence of ectoplasmic faces (veiled in what appears to be muslin) that look suspiciously like two-dimensional reproductions enlarged from photographs or culled from magazines, worn as a mask or stuck to the medium's body (illus. 48).

Spirit photography retained a complex and controversial relationship with earlier mediums of representation. Both Spiritualists and sceptical investigators of the genre observed the puzzling and ubiquitous presence in photographs of 'extras' derived from reproductions of portrait drawings, engravings and paintings, as well as, conspicuously, 'normal' photographs, sometimes in the form of half-tone prints. Doyle's most significant contribution to the study of this phenomenon appeared in his *Case for Spirit Photography* (1922). He outlines the development of the practice over seventy years, from the formative experiments of the English exponents Robert Boursnell (1832–1909) to Hope. Doyle's passionate advocacy of Hope's work, in particular, reflected his determination to defend spirit photographers against the accusation that they surreptitiously substituted prepared plates, on which were exposed fake 'extras', for undeveloped ones.[36] Other sceptical observers proposed (more charitably) that 'extras' were residual images, developed accidentally, due to the 'normal' portrait having been taken on a plate previously used for the same purpose but insufficiently cleaned, resulting in a residual image – the 'ghost' of the earlier sitter showing through.[37]

Therefore, while the presence of 'extras' in photographs was undisputed, there was considerable disagreement regarding what they were, how they got there and what they meant. William Marriott, a conjuror with considerable experience of sleight of hand, believed spirit photography to be 'a pernicious and growing conspiracy of fraud' perpetrated by one or a combination of the following methods:

1. The substitution of a dark slide containing prepared plates for the one loaded by the sitter with his own plates.
2. The substitution of prepared plates for unprepared ones before these are loaded in the dark slide.
3. The use of a pocket flash light apparatus for impressing an

unprepared plate after it has been placed in the dark slide.

4. The addition of extraneous chemical during the process of development.
5. The use of pinholes in the fabric covering the dark-room lamp.
6. The use of similar pinholes on the cloth used for focussing the camera.
7. The placing of a negative or a positive in the camera in front of the plate in such a position that the light passing through it will produce an image more or less blurred.[38]

Spiritualist investigators, favouring a supernatural hypothesis, countenanced several explanations. The medium William Stainton Moses (1839–1892) suggested that 'extras' consisted of 'fluidic substance' moulded from ectoplasm, which was present in front of the camera lens.[39] Others proposed that 'extras' were immaterial, produced by 'forces contained within ourselves', and thus a feat of visual telepathy (performed by the Spiritualist medium or sensitive), or what Tomokichi Fukurai (1874–1937) would later call thoughtography (Japansese: *nensha*) and, more recently, has been termed 'projected thermography' (the ability psychically to imprint images in one's mind onto photographically sensitized surfaces).[40] Fukurai would work with another *nensha* practitioner, Koichi Mita, who, it was said, created a thoughtograph of the dark side of the moon in 1931, thirty-eight years before the Apollo lunar missions. The most celebrated and controversial exponents of thoughtography in the West during the second half of the twentieth century have been Ted Serios (b. *c.* 1920) and Uri Geller (b. 1946). In the 1960s Serios (in the opinion of his researcher, the psychiatrist Jule Eisenbud) applied his psychic ability to develop mental images directly on Polaroid film (illus. 37).[41] Some of the images represent famous people, notable landmarks in distant places and pictures from books rendered partially out of focus and vignetted by darkness (in the manner of 'extras' in some types of spirit photographs). Geller claimed to project images (skotographically) onto film loaded into a 35 mm camera with its lens cap still on.

Alternatively, 'extras' originated in 'higher phenomena', external to the medium and precipitated directly onto the photographic plates.[42] Those who regarded spirit photography as a branch of psychic science

often conceived theories of transference in technological terms, using scientific paradigms. One early twentieth-century speculation evokes a fusion of magic lantern technology (see above) with x-ray photography, suggesting that an 'extra' was a 'picture' cast onto the plates by means of what Doyle described enigmatically as 'small projectors', or carried 'by a sort of ray' able to penetrate solids, such as the dark slide of the camera.[43] (The conceit that spirits operated, from the 'other side', a supernatural technology in some respects analogous to instruments and equipment in the physical world has been echoed, more recently, in experiments conducted by the Scole Group. Some of the 'spirit team' referred to themselves as 'scientists' who were actively engaged in the construction of devices that would amplify and focus psychic energies communicated from their world to the world of the living [illus. 38].[44])

Whatever their nature, it was commonly agreed that 'extras' were the evidence and operation of an intelligence or consciousness – proof that personality and creative intellect survived the dissolution of the body. The countenance of the 'extra' often resembled that of a departed relative. Such appearances posed the same veridical and ontological problems that religious visionaries had had to ponder. Were apparitions of Christ, the Virgin Mary and holy persons the actual supernatural presence of the person or merely representations of them? Were 'extras' the disincarnate spirits of the dead or merely simulacra, made and sent by the spirits or some other intelligence?[45] In and of itself, the spirit photograph did not provide sufficient interpretative clues. Visionaries sometimes reach their conclusion by an appeal to knowledge beyond the apparitional image. This often takes the form of an accompanying audition – a supernatural voice that authenticates the real presence. Clairaudience (the medium's gift or experience of hearing spirit voices) provided an equivalent external reference point. Several spirits, it was claimed, conveyed to mediums that their visible manifestation in spirit photographs was (following Stainton Moses's supposition) of the nature of an ectoplasmic mould (or spectral manikin), which they had fabricated in order to be seen. Therefore, the 'extra' stood in the same relation to the spirit as the religious icon to the person it depicted – as a proxy, and in the same relation as the photograph to its human subject – as the

37 Ted Serios, Thoughtograph appearing to show Marilyn Monroe, produced in the library of the Magic Castle, Hollywood, Polaroid film, 1960s.

emanation of the referent (rather than the referent itself, but with all the implications that the referent really existed).[46]

The Photographic Medium

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, spirit photography tended to move in an opposite direction to that taken by most art forms at the time. Instead of developing refinement and sophistication of convention, the genre began to look increasingly cack-handed, obvious and unpersuasive in execution. The transition to this type of 'extra' began in the works of William Eglinton (1857–?), Edward Wyllie (1848–1911), F. M. Parkes (n.d.) and Edouard Buguet (1840–?), all of whom were active during the

38 Scole Experimental Group, Stills of 'moving light phenomena', video film, 1998.

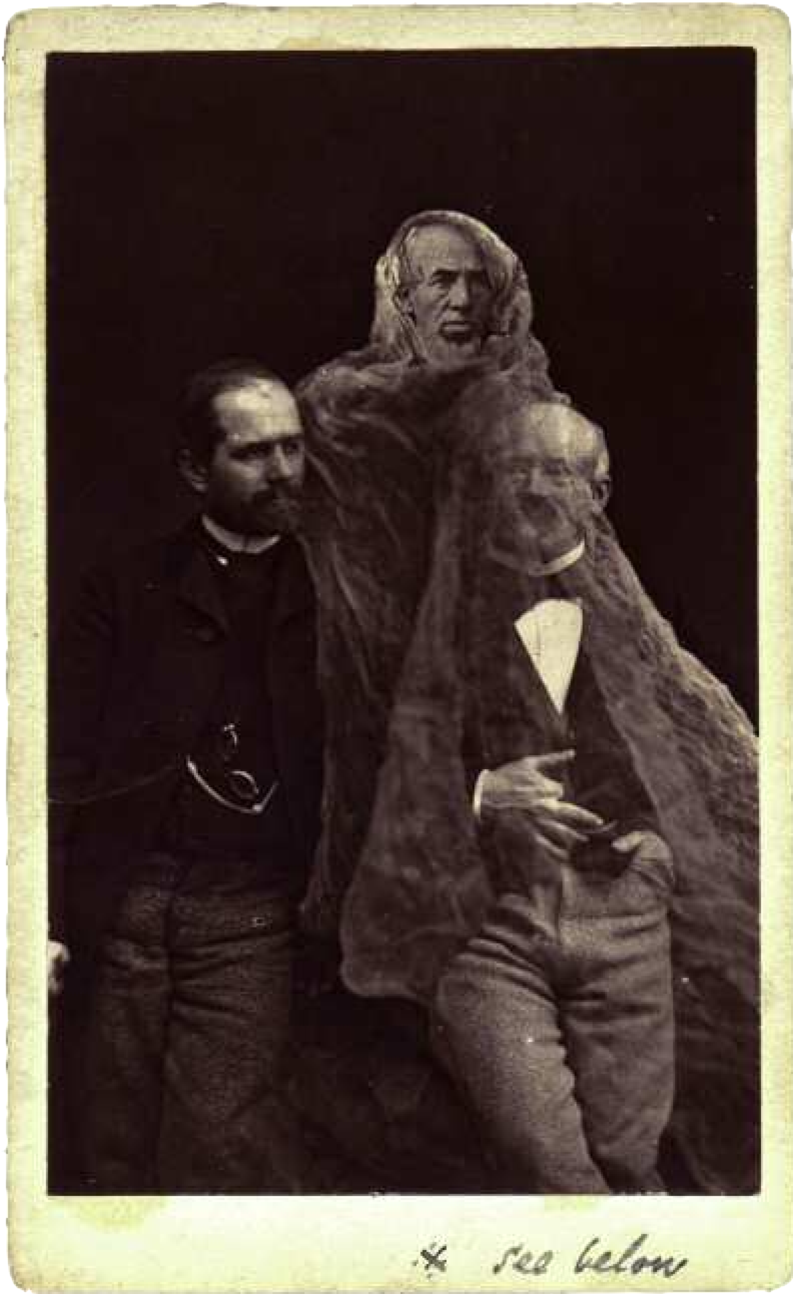
period from the late 1860s. In their photographs, 'extras' advance forward (as though superimposed upon the 'normal' portrait photograph), occupying a space somewhere between the sitter and the lens. The spirits are rendered more clearly visible than in earlier photographs – their faces appearing as well defined as those of the living subjects (illus. 39, 40). In other portraits, the photographs render the apparitions more diffusely, as though the spectral form had materialized short of the camera's range of focus (illus. 41). In what could be called the second phase of spirit photography (the 1880s–1890s), 'extras', moreover, no longer always appear on the same scale as the living subject, or as more or less whole figures.[47]

The evolution of the photographic ghost was a consequence of a significant technical revolution. Mumler had produced spirit photographs, showing elegant and subtle 'watermarks' or 'back-projections' of apparitions, using the wet-collodion process. This entailed skilfully bringing together two fickle light-sensitive chemicals on the glass plate immediately before exposure.[48] The opportunity and means by which the plate could be tampered with were therefore limited and rudimentary. (Mumler's photographs appear to have been made simply by developing two plates – one showing the living sitter, the other the ghost – one on top of the other.) By the late 1880s the introduction of the dry-gelatine process meant that chemically stable plates could be prepared well in advance of their use, thus allowing the unscrupulous photographer time

to tinker with the image. Improved enlarging lanterns, faster shutter speeds and rapid silver-printing papers (which enhanced black-and-white contrast) broadened the photographer's technical vocabulary, pictorial language and control considerably. Seen as a whole, the genre reveals the application of considerable invention, imagination and individuality on the part of the photographer and an evident evolution of the representation of ghosts: increasing sophistication, subtlety and ambition went hand in hand with technical advances in photography. For some of spirit photography's detractors, variety and mutability suggested duplicity. Supernatural phenomena, it was argued, should evidence the same constancy as natural phenomena: like lightning, which is not perceivably different from one age or place to another, manifestations of the eternal soul (if authentic) ought not to be subject to the vicissitudes of fashion and style either. However, lightning can take many forms in photography, depending on factors such as the lens, aperture and shutter speed of the camera, and the film speed and sensitivity. Photography was able to blur distinctions between the natural and supernatural in more senses than one. The camera could invest natural phenomenon with a supernatural quality. For example, in the early decades of photography, flowing water was rendered immobile and unnatural, as a viscous, milky substance uncannily prescient of the consistency and colour of ectoplasm. The development of faster shutters and film meant that pictures showing the cascade and eddy of brooks and falls, while still artificially motionless, could, nevertheless, now convey contour and clarity.

The third phase of spirit photography, from 1890 to 1940, is marked by a coarsening of effect. As Traill Taylor observed, some of the 'extras' looked not unlike an 'atrociously badly vignetted portrait, or one cut oval out of a photograph by a can-opener, or equally badly clipped out'.[49] On investigation, many 'extras' appeared to be reproductions of 'normal' portrait photographs (illus. 42). Others appeared to be, patently, reproductions cut from traceable magazine covers or other publications, which compounded the supposition of subterfuge (illus. 45). Hans Holzer, a contemporary spirit photographer and parapsychologist, was acutely aware of this embarrassing predicament:

39 William Eglinton, 'Mary Burchett with spirit of her school-master', cabinet card, albumen print, 1886.



40 Edouard Buguet, 'Mons. Leymarie and Mons. C. with spirit of Edouard Poiret', carte-de-visite, carbon print or Woodburytype, c. 1874.

41 F. M. Parkes, 'Mrs Collins and her husband's father, recognized by several', carte-de-visite, albumen print, 1875.

> The majority of – but not all – psychic 'extras' are not 'new' faces of the dead but faithful reproductions of photographs or paintings of them while in the flesh. This is so universally true that one would have to condemn almost all psychic photos taken over the past hundred years, including some highly evidential tests, if one were to consider the reproduction of 'cut-out'-type photographs as fraudulent *per se*.[50]

The faces also appeared as though they were stuck on what was frequently described even by advocates of spirit photography as 'cotton-wool clouds' of ectoplasm (illus. 10, 19).[51]

In this respect, the spirit photograph evolved into the antithesis of the novelty ghost photograph, which arose at the same time.[52] The latter actively exploited and subverted the popular assumption regarding the camera's unfailing honesty. Novelty ghost photographs deployed the same codes of spectral representation – soft, pale, low-contrast transparency (illus. 43). Unlike spirit photographs, however, they exploited no more than the public's knowing suspension of disbelief: the pictures were illusions, designed to entertain rather than to deceive. Spirit photographs claimed to be authentic, yet appeared to be fabricated. Novelty ghost pictures, for their part, were a transparent fiction (both literally and metaphorically). Yet, by a seamless, artful trickery, they aimed to persuade. Spirit photography confuted expectation. For one would have thought that anyone wishing to falsify an 'extra' would devise a far more sophisticated and credible technique. A jaundiced interpretation may conclude that spirit photography's lack of guile was deliberate, serving (perversely) to enhance its credibility. (That is to say, in order to make a fake look real, it was made to look really fake.)

In defence, practitioners and supporters of spirit photography pointed out that 'extras' did not, in all cases, resemble photographs taken of the subjects when they were alive. Some 'extras', they maintained, gave the impression of being either younger or older than any extant portrait of the deceased, or else appeared to resemble the deceased as they looked during their final illness (in other words, in circumstances that would not, ordinarily, have been photographed). Stranger still are claims that some of the portrait 'extras' were of people

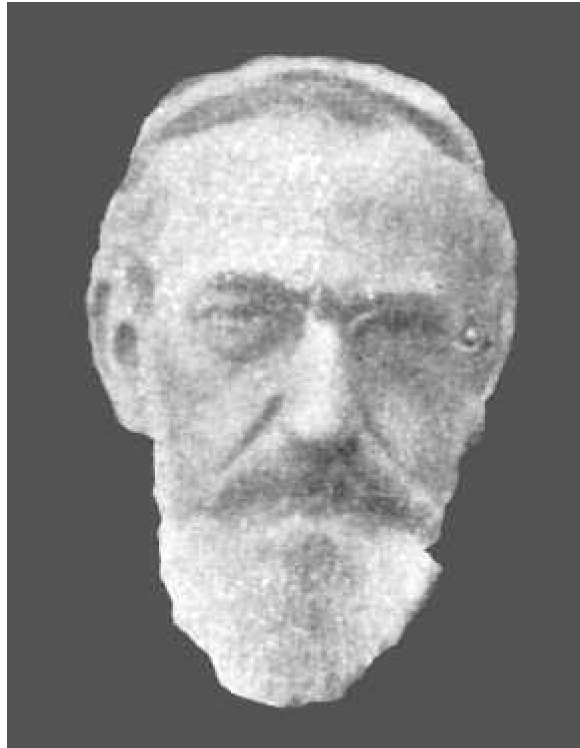
42 'Photograph of the . . . "Cyprian Priestess" magnified, showing the inartistic joining of the head to the body', reproduced in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (1911).

43 *The Ghost in the Stereoscope (Kindly Suggested by Sir David Brewster)*, hand-tinted stereograph, 1860s.

who had not been photographed when alive, although, interestingly, none of the photograph-like 'extras' appears to be of people who lived before the invention of photography.[53]

A demonstration of the relative likeness or dissimilarity of the 'extra' to a 'normal' portrait photograph of the deceased usually took the form of a juxtaposition. It is possible to reverse-engineer the 'extra's' face and retrace the process of adaptation of the source. In some instances, however, the portrait 'extra' is not a straightforward modification of the 'normal' portrait (illus. 29, 30). In the example in illus. 44, I have, first, excised the face of William Walker from the spirit photograph; secondly, rotated the orientation of the 'extra' portrait to resemble that of the 'normal' portrait;

thirdly, horizontally inverted the ‘extra’ portrait to resemble that of the ‘normal’ portrait; and, finally, increased the contrast of the ‘extra’ portrait to resemble the exposure of the ‘normal’ portrait. Having done so, however, the ‘extra’ portrait and ‘normal’ portrait still do not match entirely. The highlights on the forehead and nose are still the wrong way round, and the ‘extra’s’ nose appears to have been photographed from a slightly different angle. The implications are that either the ‘extra’ portrait is based on a differently lit – albeit very similar – ‘normal’ photograph, or the photographer has been exceedingly cunning, or the ‘extra’ is what it purports to be. In many cases of juxtaposition, the exercise proved to be a remarkable demonstration of either the interpreter’s poor eyesight, brazen disingenuousness or self-delusion; in many cases, the ‘extra’ appears either to be identical to an extant ‘normal’ portrait photograph of the person or to represent someone else altogether.



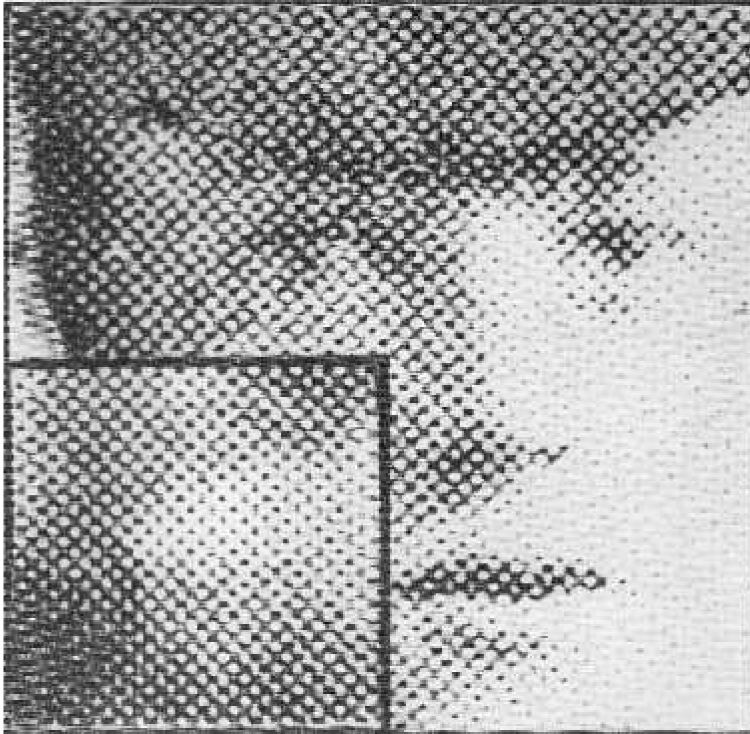
44 Excised and altered portrait of ‘Mr Wm Walker’, *c.* 1922.

Accusations of counterfeit had been voiced against spirit photography since its inception. The clamour continued unabated for the next thirty years, and led to a sharp decline in the practice of spirit photography towards the end of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, its revival in the second decade of the twentieth century went hand in hand with a period of the most intense critical scrutiny by psychic investigators belonging to organizations including the Society for Psychical Research and the Psychic College, London, as well as agencies within the Established and Roman Catholic Churches. James Coates and F. W. Warrick were among the most notable independent British analysts (themselves photographers of ghosts) who set out to deduce certain tell-tale signs of fabrication in spirit photographs. They published, respectively, *Photographing the Invisible* (1911) and *Experiments in Psychics* (1939) – two highly technical books recording thousands of experiments conducted in spirit photography. Their material included conventional portrait-type spirit photographs and images either taken through the camera lens, both conventionally and without sunlight, or projected directly onto the photographic plate without the intervention of the camera. Many of these experiments were conducted in collaboration with a female medium or sensitive, who acted as the catalyst in the process of transferring images of spirits to the photographic plates.

Warrick, on enlarging several earlier and contemporary spirit photographs, discovered portrait 'extras' comprising half-tone dots, which suggested to him that the images had been excised from newspapers or magazines (illus. 45, 46). Doyle, himself a keen photographer, had earlier recognized the same characteristics in relation to an 'extra' of his late son, received through William Hope's and Mrs Buxton's photo-mediumship. The 'extra's' portrait, Doyle observed, was 'pitted with fine dots, as in the case of process printing'. Indeed, Doyle, who collected a vast number of spirit photographs under the auspices of his Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures (SSSP), also considered this an attribute of 'extras' portraying 'persons whose faces could by no possibility have appeared in newspapers'.[54] Again, however, perhaps tellingly, there are no examples of these 'fine dot' 'extras' in spirit photography prior to the invention of process printing.

45 F. W. Warrick, 'Extras . . . and corresponding natural pictures which we must conclude were used to produce Extras (by whom?)', reproduced in his *Experiments in Psychics* (1939).

For Warrick, the presence of dots would have been damning evidence of conspicuous fraudulence were it not that some of the 'extras' that appeared in his own spirit photographs, supposedly made under test conditions, shared the same characteristic. In his view, signs of manufacture, reconstitution and derivation need not signify deceitful artifice on the part of the photographer or medium. Instead, they could lend support to the radically new understanding of the 'extra's' nature and process of formation, first suggested by Coates. The plastication theory (or the idea, as Coates put it, that 'extras' were objects rather than souls) found considerable support in the early twentieth century.[55] 'Extras', in other words, were not evidence that disincarnate spirits were photographed, but that images of the deceased are obtained by or through a supernatural agency.[56] Warrick



46 F. W. Warrick, 'Illustration in "half-tone" of the "screen marks" of an Extra', reproduced in his *Experiments in Psychics* .

elaborated upon this notion (that the 'extra' was a prepared and mediated similacrum of the deceased):

> It appears to me that a number of psychic 'extras' are the photographs of representations, or pictures; I venture to guess, in some cases, of reproductions from memory of images fixed in some substance or other, which images we must have stored up somewhere within ourselves, or within reach of ourselves, and that these are accessible to the 'operator' through the medium.[57]

The 'operator', Warrick and Coates believed, is the disincarnate or otherwise supernatural consciousness that scans – in order to obtain a vehicle for visualization – the store of visual images 'burnt into the memory' of the bereaved by the intensity of their longing for the departed and frequent

exposure to an image of them, usually a photograph. This is why, Coates suspected, most 'extras' of the dead resemble photographic portraits.[58]

The process of translating the psychic scan into a photographic image, Coates considered, could be akin to automatic painting. This is a mode of clairvoyance in which spirits communicate images through the medium, who serves as an amanuensis and paints them onto a support in a trance-like state: 'In portraits of the living or of the departed, painted by invisible artists through suitable media, they precipitate these on the canvas. Somewhat similar methods may be adopted to effect chemical changes in the emulsion on the plates.'[59] Warrick suggested that the supernatural consciousness either transfers the 'extra' to the plate in the manner of an apport or else 'the operator can take the plate to some fourth dimension, and carry out his work'.[60]

The theory that spirit photographs were, similarly, the work of spirit artists on the 'other side' (discussed in the next section) may have seemed the more plausible in view of the sheer intricacy, ingenuity, evident technique and conscious organization that characterized some examples. Deane, Warrick's medium-collaborator, mediated work of extraordinary complexity (illus. 23). Whether it was the spirits' or her handiwork, the works appear to have been made up of many different portraits assembled in the manner of composite photographs. Composite photographs and spirit photographs had one further affinity. Both were photographs of photographs or, where the persons depicted had lived before the invention of photography, photographs of drawings and paintings of them. Photographers first learned the craft of composition, tone and contrast photographing not people and places, but paintings and engravings.[61]

Photographers also learned to produce glass-plate collodion positives (known as hyalotypes) by a similar process as glass-plate negatives. Positive plates were, like negatives, transparent images, but did not invert the subject's tonal contrast. During the 1870s they were used as magic lantern slides. It is to this application that Coates alludes in the following:

> recent research, especially the work of the SSSP, has established the fact of the existence of invisible psychic transparencies by the examination of many negatives and thus throws further light on

> the methods used by the operators in the unseen in giving us not only portraits of the departed, as they were in this life, but many other deeply interesting results, scenery (including reproductions of statuary), paintings, pictures, etc.[62]

The concept of 'psychic transparencies' interpreted 'extras' that appeared superimposed upon or alongside the living sitter as other than the result of duplicitous double exposure. Thus conceived, 'extras' were by nature projections of 'psychic transparencies', sent from the afterlife. (Doyle's surmise that spirits communicated 'extras' by means of 'small projectors' [see above] is congruent with this hypothesis.) Coates inferred that 'psychic transparencies' were, like glass-plate positives, 'reproductions' of objects, communicated to the camera or deposited directly on the plate, possibly telepathically.[63] As such, 'extras' in spirit photographs were at source and prior to projection spirit photographs too.

The subjects that spirits chose to 'photograph' (to serve as ciphers of their presence or activity) included existing 'normal' portrait photographs and, as Coates observed, artworks. Warrick conjectured that the range of photographable subjects could also take the form of collages made by an 'invisible operator' and comprising either materials fabricated in the spirit world or materials transported there from the physical world, by a process of reverse apportation, one might suppose.[64] The spiritual materials – or, better, (im)materials – sometimes bore a striking resemblance (or psychic equivalence) to materials in the physical world.[65] Consequently, what appeared to be an obviously contrived 'extra' – the face crudely cut out from photographs or half-tone prints and framed by a cloud of ectoplasm resembling white muslin, cheesecloth or cotton wool – may have been precisely that, while at the same time having originated supernaturally. This interpretation of the spirits' *modus operandi* and of the 'extra's' substance challenged the popular presupposition that coarse and unmistakably handmade 'extras' were necessarily and straightforwardly phoney. Accordingly, fake and authentic spirit photographs were rendered indistinguishable in the absence of evidence of deception on the photographer's or medium's part.

Psychic investigators could not arrive at either a precise or a provable determination regarding the contributions made by those who participated in manifesting 'extras' photographically. Some investigators argued that there was insufficient evidence to suggest that spirits produced them at all.[66] The phenomenon may have been, instead, a rare expression of an extraordinarily powerful visualizing capacity latent in the (embodied) human mind. Others believed that the dead and living parties collaborated, and sought to address a quadrilateral of interactions linking the medium, photographer, sitter and spirit operator.[67] However, it was not always possible to establish whether the disincarnate consciousness or incarnate consciousness supplied the visual memories from which the 'extra' was realized. In studio portrait photography (such as Hope practised), the sitter was very often a stranger to the photographer and the medium. Therefore, in this context at least, it was reasonable to deduce that the sitter, whose departed relative or acquaintance was represented by the 'extra', was the more likely source, since the photographer and medium had no knowledge or recollection of the deceased. Mediums collaborated with spirits often in a trance-like or semi-conscious state, with their cognitive faculties either sublimated or held in abeyance. For this reason, and in view of the significant degree of conscious artifice involved in producing, reproducing and projecting an 'extra', investigators strongly suggested that – regardless of who had yielded the visual datum for the 'extra's' appearance – it was the 'operator' who had assumed responsibility for its manufacture and delivery. Ultimately, as psychic investigators confessed to their chagrin, the process and dynamics governing the appearance (in both senses of the word) of the 'extra' were invisible, indefinable and, most likely, incomprehensible.

Mainstream scientists were challenging assumptions about the nature of the material world in ways that were equally remarkable and disquieting. For example, Ernest Rutherford (1871–1937) dismantled the interior and mapped (as with the solar system) the bodies and empty spaces that made what was then known to be the smallest component of matter; fulfilled the alchemist's quest by artificially transmuting one element into another; and unleashed an invisible power (radiation) that could kill just as surely as it could heal. Psychic investigators too looked into a world

beyond appearances – but none the less real for that. Likewise, they claimed to have observed the elemental (in the sense of a spirit entity or power believed to be physically manifested by occult means); discovered new forces and bonds, connecting the living and dead; and witnessed the metamorphosis of spirit substance into a physical phenomenon. The construction and transformation of this substance, to produce an 'extra', took place, they believed, within a domain (a 'psychicyber space', as it were) that was independent of spatial scale and beyond temporality, by a network of participants (wherein the distinctions between sender and receiver, and observer and participant, and artefact and artificer, were obfuscated), who were connected and communicating across the common boundary of consciousness and at unimaginable distances, swiftly and, using the interface of photography, technologically.

At the time, information exchange and creative interplay of this nature and complexity was without precedent, and attempts to elucidate it severely strained even the most serviceable analogies with modern scientific discovery. Today, we readily concede the existence of a realm without physical identity or specific location, linking remote intelligence (either human or artificial) to facilitate collective and decentred authorship. Accordingly, early twentieth-century ruminations about kindred activities in the psychic sphere seem now both familiar and to have been eerily prescient.

While the relationship between photography and spirit could be ponderously and inscrutably complex, it also could be simple and direct. Crookes's and Schrenk-Notzing's use of the camera as an impartial tool in the scientific investigation of the supernatural spawned a distinct tradition of spirit photography. Spirit photography, in this sense, did not require the photographer to possess the gift of mediumship or, necessarily, give credence to the existence of supernatural forces. Neither is the camera complicit in the conjuring or reception of 'extras', nor the glass plate or film an arena for the psychokinetic reconfiguration of the emulsion by spirits. Rather, photography participates in the proceedings solely as a means of recording the phenomena – a function that was predicated on either the visibility of the psychic manifestation (that is to say, its wavelength occupied a portion of the visible spectrum) or else its ability

to sensitize the emulsion of the emanation, while lying outside the competence of the human eye to see. During the middle years of the twentieth century, the function of the camera as witness was significant in recording, for both scrutiny and posterity, the extraordinary feats of physical mediumship performed by the celebrated Welsh Spiritualist Jack Webber (1907–1940). He would sink into a trance state and become cooperative with spirit controls that manifested themselves violently through his body. Webber exercised his psychic powers by levitating objects, oozing healing oil from his hands (like blood from stigmata) and extruding copious strands and veils of ectoplasm from his mouth. He was always securely tied to a chair with ropes throughout the proceedings to prevent sleight of hand or body.[68] The photographs taken by a journalist for a British tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Mirror*, using infrared film, at seances Webber held in the year before he died are among the most remarkable visual testaments to Spiritualist manifestations ever produced (illus. 47).[69]

Throughout the twentieth century, 'normal' photography was used to document (with a fetishistic and forensic intensity) the anomalous behaviour of people and things, seen and unseen; the setting of the seance; the paraphernalia of paranormal study; apports; samples of ectoplasm; plaster casts of spirit hands; samples of automatist writing; levitations; things in mid-flight or at rest, having been projected violently by either poltergeists or feats of telekinesis; chalk-mark measures of the movement of objects; and the sites of hauntings, banal in aspect yet charged with the frisson of what once was present. The photographs capture a split-second; the account of what came before and after, and the signifiers of kineticism, are excluded – movement is suspended. Consequently, the meaning of the photographs (the sense of the event) – as of the engravings in spirit histories – is dependent upon an external, explanatory narrative. The process of 'scientific' documentation was made far easier (not least for those who had little or no photographic skills) with the development of Polaroid technology (the facility to remove the developing print and obtain instantaneous dry photographs immediately after the picture has been exposed). In the 1960s and '70s, it was deployed notably by the Sorrat Group of psychic

47 Jack Webber with head covered by veil of ectoplasm, 1939 (copy print).

48 Juliette Bisson, 'Mme Bisson's Flashlight photograph of 19 January, 1913', reproduced in Baron Albert von Schrenk-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation* (1920).

49 Zoe Beloff, Still from *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.*, four-channel-stereoscopic, surround-sound DVD installation, 2004.

investigators in the United States. The Polaroid process also restricted the manipulative intervention on the part of the photographer and thereby served, too, as a guarantor of authenticity.

three

Art

The Spirit and Art

Spirit photography was one among several visual media deployed by spiritual mediums, in collaboration with the dead, to create paranormal artefacts. Before the invention of photography, mediums had used painting and drawing as a means of receiving, not messages from the spirit world (as they would do aurally and textually through auditions, the planchette and, later, psychographs), but visions of it. Prior to taking up spirit photography, Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884) received ephemeral and non-photographic 'extras', by way of a kind of vision: 'One day, looking accidentally on a blank sheet of paper, she saw upon it a lovely little face, just like a photograph, which gradually disappeared: then another became visible on another part of the sheet.'[1] More usually, the interface between the sensitive and the spirit resulted in a permanent artefact, such as images of flowers (which Houghton believed to contain a complex religious symbolism) received through drawing and an automatist technique (illus. 50).

Automatism in the context of Spiritualism involved – as it was thought to be the case in the creation of spirit photographs – an indeterminate interaction between the artistic skills and creative sensibilities of disembodied and living consciousnesses. (This is distinct from the Surrealists' use of automatism, where the 'author' empties their mind and allows the unconscious to direct the work.) The spirit's artistry was channelled through the medium who, in some circumstances, acted as an *amanuensis* – her or his hand moving a pencil, brush or pen under the

50 'Mary Jane', Spirit drawings of flowers, reproduced in Hester Travers Smith, *Voices from the Void* (1919).

spirit's direct control. At other times, completed pictures or manuscripts would materialize on paper or canvas placed either on or beneath the table with a measure of detail and a suddenness and completeness that prefigured the emergence of the photographic image in the process of development and printing. Similarly, in spirit photography, the Spiritualist medium would be either in immediate contact with the photographic medium (touching the surface glass-plate negative with their hands) or serve a mediate role as a receptor – amplifying and focusing the spirit energies while the supernatural entity manufactured the 'extra' on the plate.

'Automastic pictures', as they were sometimes referred to, depicted a range of genre including portrait, still life and landscape. The work of Wella and Pat Anderson of New York, who were regarded by some as the first mediums to produce what was known as 'spirit art', included full-length portraits of the ubiquitous 'Red-Indian' chief (a racial stereotype that has persisted to the present day), and prehistoric and biblical characters.[2] The practice is reminiscent of a far earlier 'spirit artist', the English poet and painter William Blake (1757–1827), who claimed to have received supernatural visions of biblical, historical, mythical and bizarre figures, such as the *Ghost of a Flea* (1819–20), which he made tangible in drawings and painting (illus. 51).[3]

Just as spirit 'scientists' on the 'other side' cooperated with psychic investigators and mediums on this side of the great divide in developing 'technologies to facilitate communication across the great divide', so too 'bands' of celestials including artists and exotic characters, such as an Arab, an Egyptian and an Atlantian, participated in the composition of paintings and drawings.[4] Their work, it was claimed, preceded the rise of spirit photography by four years. James Cooper wrote:

> As early as 1857, I was told that a Band of Spirits were perfecting arrangements to develop mediums [that is, visual media rather than Spiritualist sensitives], for the purpose of giving the world likenesses of the so-called dead, and in that year, while seated in my office alone, my hand was controlled mechanically, and a profile likeness was drawn that was strange to me.[5]

51 William Blake, *Ghost of a Flea*, 1819–20, tempera heightened with gold on mahogany.

Cooper, in company with many mediums, appears to have had no natural artistic gifts or experience, thus confirming further that the capacity to perform feats of considerable accomplishment came from elsewhere. This phenomenon recalls the facility, claimed by the Irvingites and other proto-Pentecostals in the mid-nineteenth century (referred to above), of speaking foreign and unknown languages without having learnt them. Other mediums, like George Walcott, possessed a natural talent for art

before he was possessed by spirits. He was noted for having collaborated in creating 'the first specimen of Spirit Art in Oil'.[6]

One of the visual media that the 'Band of Spirits' were developing, in order to send a semblance of souls to the living, was spirit photography. Spirit photography both subsumed and superseded the function and forms of other automatist media. Unlike previous modes of mediated communication (also including voice mediumship, in which the spirit supposedly speaks through the medium's larynx), photography obviated the necessity for the medium to be the instrument of production, the inevitable and inextricable confusion of the human and the spirit agencies in the production of creative works, and the accusation of impersonation or self-delusion on the part of the medium. Spirit photography was, moreover, more open to scrutiny: investigators were able to observe the process of taking and making, and thereby objectively establish whether fraud had been perpetrated. Even so, spirit paintings and drawings were hung alongside spirit photography on the walls of rented rooms of town houses, and regarded as both scientific specimens and artwork, in an acknowledgement that the images embodied truth as well as beauty.[7] This beauty, some considered, having been born of a union between the spiritual and the mundane, would eventually lead to higher forms of art.[8]

The Photographer and Spirit

While the remark attributed to the painter Paul Delaroche (1797–1859) on seeing a daguerreotype, that 'from today, painting is dead', ultimately proved too pessimistic (like the human spirit, painting was capable of post-mortem survival in a somewhat different form too), nevertheless its invention – and the implication that representations could be made independent of an artist – proved detrimental to the livelihood of a great many miniature portraitists. Those who survived did so by extending their repertoire to include photographic portraiture. While spirit photography did not threaten the continued existence of spirit art in quite the same way, some mediums, like David Duguid (1832–1907), who had begun their career as spirit artists made the transition to photography.

He was not a trained painter, nor did he paint in a trance-like state or mediate paintings instantaneously; indeed, some of the works took up to twenty hours to complete.[9] Photography provided him and other mediums with the opportunity (as it had done conventional painters) to produce images quickly, with considerably less effort, enabling them to reproduce, resell and distribute the same picture widely. Spirit photography's challenge was to the province of conventional portrait photography rather than painting. The former demonstrated that photographs could be developed now without the necessity of either a photographer or a camera, or a flesh-and-blood sitter for that matter: 'From today, the subject is dead.'

The practice of spirit photography was first taken up by both professional and amateur photographers (like Duguid) who discovered that they possessed mediumistic skills, or else worked alongside a medium (as Hope and Warrick did). Initially, photography (both normal and supernormal) had attracted a considerable number of those who had spare time on their hands to pursue the practice as amateurs (although, as Burton points out, the necessity of a knowledge of chemistry and physics soon thinned their ranks). Amateurs were not expected to have a permanent and purpose-built darkroom. Any closet or room could be converted for this use.[10] Ada Deane's darkroom comprised a kitchen table under which she crouched with her plates and over which an opaque tablecloth was draped. Among the ranks of professionals were Hudson, the first professional photographer to produce spirit photographs in Britain (in 1863, according to James Coates, although Doyle believed that his first images were made later, in 1872), and John Beattie, who ran a successful commercial photographic business in Bristol and also produced one of the earliest examples of spirit photography in England, also in 1872.[11] Edward Wyllie, an Irish photographer, from 1886 worked in California and abandoned his career as a professional to concentrate on spirit photography (illus. 71).[12] Boursnell, an engineer and amateur photographer, in partnership with a professional photographer, obtained marks and occasional hands on prints as early as 1851, a decade before Mumler produced his first spirit photographs (illus. 52).[13] Mumler, like many other amateurs, was initially attracted to the new technology as a demanding distraction from their regular

52 Robert Boursnell, 'Self-portrait with spirits', cabinet card, silver print, 9 March 1902.

occupations. Amateurs also included 'artist-mediums', such as Duguid, who practised automatic painting and drawing and took up photography in order to extend their repertoire of representational skills.[14] Most, it would appear, taught themselves (rather than serving an apprenticeship, as an aspiring commercial photographer would have done), guided by practical handbooks and manuals, or took instruction from professionals or other, more accomplished, amateurs.[15] Houghton took up amateur photography around 1856 and spirit photography under the tutelage of Hudson, following her sittings for him in 1872. In so doing, she fulfilled a prediction given to her by spirit guides in 1859 (two years after Cooper had received a similar message from the 'Band of Spirits', and two years before Mumler made his breakthrough), 'that the time was approaching when they would be able to impress their portraits on the photographic plate'.[16]

Spirit photographers worked both independently and, sometimes, like the spirit bands on the other side, in groups. During the first two decades of the twentieth century the Crewe Circle (mentioned above) came to be the most well known and prolific of these (illus. 53). In England, provincial clusters of photographs and mediums provided a basis for fellowship and support, as well as an incentive to practise,

53 Crewe Circle, with William Hope on the far left, reproduced in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (1911).

for those who were geographically marginalized and lacked the opportunities to interact with like-minded investigators and avail themselves of the resources for study in the metropolitan centres. In the period after the Second World War, the Chelmsford groups (active during the 1960s) and the Scole Group (active during the 1990s) have maintained the continuity of not only corporate production but also the iconography and techniques of early twentieth-century spirit photography.

Spirit photographers, like normal photographers, learned the craft and art by trial and error. Failures and blunders in the process of taking, exposing and printing produced a variety of unfocused forms, flares, blotches, superimpositions and other technical malformations of the photographic image.[17] To the inexperienced operator and untrained eye, these would have looked astonishing, inexplicable and suggestively supernatural – as did the spots that appeared on Wyllie's negatives in the 1880s, within which faces later appeared.[18] (Several spirit photographers began in this manner: Beattie, for instance, obtained nothing at the outset of his career, then nebulous forms, and gradually distinct images.)[19] Consequently the distinction between a mistake and a miracle was itself sometimes blurred, particularly by those practitioners who came to photography with supernaturalist presuppositions, and possessed either a gift for mediumship or sympathies with Spiritualism.[20] While spirit photography was neither a deliberate invention nor a programmatic development on the part of the movement, the discovery clearly served its mission: to promote faith in the afterlife and validate the medium's prowess, as well as counter those critical or dismissive of Spiritualism's claims. Even though, like Hope, some spirit photographers charged only for their time and materials (in the manner of conventional photographers), they were sufficiently adept at consistently visualizing the otherwise invisible wraiths to develop an international reputation (in some cases) and a sustainable business.[21]

Their popularity was further enhanced by the official organs of Spiritualism and by word of mouth. During the period from 1875 to the 1920s, the practice of spirit photography was commended in the plethora of Spiritualist newspapers, journals, monographs, reports, published testimonials and magic lantern lectures, and at occasional exhibitions at rooms rented in major cities detailing and theorizing upon the results of

the latest experiments.[22] Collectively, these publications and activities endeavoured to persuade their audience of the proof and truth of the phenomenon. Their exhaustive explanations of technical protocols, the conduct of mediums and the operations of spirits constituted a veritable manual for anyone wanting to know the *how* of spirit photography, while published illustrations of significant successes showed *what* could be achieved and served to create and disseminate norms and forms for the appearance of 'extras' and, thereby, established a tradition of expectation and representation and a degree of stylistic continuity.

Commercial spirit photographers operated in a specific locality (which did not preclude the world from making its way to their door) and from studio premises. A number of spirit photographers insisted that the success of the work was dependent on the use of their own equipment and darkroom – a precondition that led some investigators to suspect duplicity. Spirit photographers were not linked by any association or confederacy; most (particularly those living in the provinces) worked in relative isolation, and were kept informed of the 'state of the art' and the work of other practitioners chiefly by means of accounts published in the movement's various publications. Independence meant that their activities were not subject to an agreed code of practice and to the imposition of a sanctioned iconography for representing spirits, or overseen by any central body associated with Spiritualism. In principle, freedom from constraints provided an opportunity for the emergence of a diversity of modes of spectral representation. However, there is a surprising uniformity and narrow latitude of invention within the œuvre of almost any one photographer. Once a particular way of rendering ghosts was established (often, early in their career), motifs, compositions and spectral types are thereafter repeated with, at times, exasperating constancy.

Putting aside the possibility of an appalling lack of imagination on the photographers' part, there may be several, calculated reasons for this apparent and wilful stagnation. First, for the commercial spirit photographer, portraying the dead was first a business rather than an art; there was no call to innovate or improve upon a tried and tested 'product', except where potential competitors were improving significantly on their own results. Furthermore, since photographs were supplied to different customers on

an individual and serial basis, the formula could be repeated for successive sittings. Indeed, patrons who, having been impressed by the work of a spirit photographer, not only desired a photograph of their own but also, conceivably, one much like the one they had seen. Consistency pandered to anticipation and was indicative of authenticity. Indeed, to vary the apparitional 'style' might have suggested that spirits had no fixity or objectivity, and given rise to suspicions that there was more pretence than essence about spectral manifestations. As in scientific experimentation (which some spirit photographers considered their practice to be), the reliability and veracity of the phenomenon was demonstrable only by replication.

Phantom and Fabrication

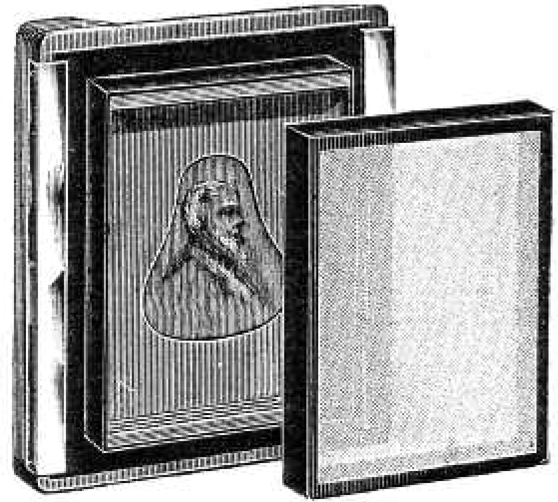
Whether or not spirit photographs were in any or all cases fake, the professionals and amateurs either had access to knowledge about or could perform all the techniques and processes necessary to manufacture 'extras' and any other imaginable 'fiction' for that matter. Contrary to the popular conception of photography as a mechanical and objective means of rendering reality, the camera, studio and darkroom all concealed and enabled the 'magic' of manipulation and a considerable degree of artifice and artistry. Indeed, photography's legitimacy as a high art (as opposed to a science only) was predicated upon its aspiration to the condition of painting. This implied that photographers should acquire a grasp of the principles of composition, tone and surface, and an aesthetic sensibility cognate to that of a painter. To this end, novices were urged to photograph pre-existing images (what was termed copy work), such as paintings, engravings and other photographs, in order to match established pictorial values more readily.[23] Therefore, the conspicuous presence in spirit photographs of 'extra' portraits derived from pre-existing portrait photographs and artworks, whatever else they might signify, was not in itself anomalous to the conventions of photography and the application of a commonplace photographic skill.

Photomontage (which might otherwise explain the presence of 'extras' in, for example, Deane's spirit photographs) is almost as old as

54 O. G. Rejlander, *The Two Ways of Life*, photomontage, 1858.

photography itself. Famously, *The Two Ways of Life* (1858) by Oscar Gustav Rejlander (1813–1875) comprises a variety of discrete photographs of figures and fragments of background organized into a single image (illus. 54). The cut-and-paste technique is hardly distinguishable from what was used by spirit artists or unscrupulous spirit photographers twenty years later. In these and other respects, spirit photography (whether originating in this life or the next) was merely the application of established photographic innovations, techniques and influences.

Likewise, the subtle differences between the 'extra' portrait and the 'normal' portrait of a person, the ethereal idealization and ubiquitous, diffuse enclosure of faces in clouds of ectoplasm, could be achieved by the processes of retouching and vignetting. In respect to the former, modifications to the negative after exposure and prior to printing were made in order to enhance contrasts of light and shadow, soften hard edges, remove imperfections and address the excess or deficit of facial characteristics. In respect to the latter, soft gradations of tone surrounding the head and shoulders of portrait faces could be achieved by, for example, softly



55 Illustration of retouching and vignetting, reproduced in Robert Johnson, *The Art of Retouching Negatives* (1913).

56 'Salmon's Vignetter', reproduced in Paul Hasluck, *The Book of Photography* (1905).

rubbing French chalk with a fingertip onto the plate.[24] Similar effects could be achieved using a vignetting glass, which was transparent at the centre but chemically opaque at the edges, and placed between the negative and the photographic paper to achieve a halo-like effect (illus. 55).[25] Other methods of vignetting could be improvised, with dexterity and experience, using vignetting frames, made from cotton wool, tissue and foil, mounted either on glass or between the paper and lens of the enlarger so as to appear out of focus or hazy when printed (illus. 56).[26] Interestingly, these were the very materials that appear, as themselves, incorporated into the collage-like mode of 'extras' produced in the 1920s and '30s (illus. 19). Moreover, it was not only Spiritualist mediums who could bring the departed into view. A skilled technician could resurrect dead celebrities: daguerreotypes were issued as cartes-de-visite showing prominent people, whose portraits had been copied from paintings and engravings, seated side by side with other people from history.[27] Actuality could be adjusted and reality reinvented using a variety of other means: combination printing, or double printing, permitted different exposures from background to

foreground; composite-negative work enabled the background of one negative and the foreground of another to be spliced together before printing; while composite portraiture involved the construction of an imaginary person by photographing several photographic portraits individually, using a process of multiple exposures, so that their successive images are overlaid, one on top of the other, on the negative.[28]

These techniques were deployed both singly and in amalgamation to attain 'artistic' effects and for amusement. Multiple exposure and superimposed negative plates were used conspicuously by novelty ghost photographs – what David Brewster (1781–1868), who rediscovered the kaleidoscope and invented the lenticular stereoscope, considered 'a rather tasteless novelty, which . . . developed into "spirit photography"'.[29] Whether or not Brewster was correct in his assumption that there was no distinction between the spoof and the spook, the bogus and the bogie, it is clear that anyone with the requisite ingenuity and technical knowledge could fabricate a phantom in a photograph – which is not to say that all spirit photographs were fake. After all, the fact that a five-pound note can be forged does not negate the existence of the real thing.

The photograph itself could act the phantom. The astronomer John Herschel (1792–1871), who first coined the terms 'photography', 'positive' and 'negative', discovered that if a photograph was saturated in a solution of mercury chloride, the image would disappear after a few minutes. Once washed, dried and then placed in a solution of sodium thiosulphate, the image would reappear.[30] Duplicity and fantasy were among the hallmarks of photography. The commercial studio was the sphere of dreams and deceptions, of reflections and the resetting of reality. Following the pictorial tradition of painted portraiture, painted scenery (which served as a backdrop to the portrait), papier-mâché outcrops and furnishings aimed to naturalize the sitter and aid the composition while denying the apparatus of photography (which, like some of the ghosts depicted in eighteenth-century engravings, is kept outside the compositional frame) (illus. 3).[31] They provided an illusion of context and amalgamated two worlds, one immediate, the other remote. Landscapes – evoking a nineteenth-century idyllic pastoralism, far from the city or the town – brought the outdoors into the studio and, conversely, placed the studio out of doors –

a vision of another place, evoking locations longed for or once visited (illus. 27).

For members of the working class, photography also helped to dignify and preserve a record of their life outside their habitual and often humdrum existence. Before the rise of commercial photography, painting, drawing and sculpture were the only means of portraiture and, as such, the monopoly of the wealthy classes. Customers could choose to be photographed amid a range of fictional scenes: on a balcony, or in a drawing room or conservatory (the contexts of civility), amid pedestals, columns, balustrades and books (the signifiers of learning and erudition) – a collage of culture before the camera. Photography enabled the working class to transcend their habitual environment and to fantasize about sharing in the trappings and aspirations of a far more affluent and leisurely lifestyle.

Into this invention intruded the faces and forms of 'extras' (providing a further accessory and adding another layer to the fabrication of appearances), the substantiality and familiarity of the props serving as a counterpoise to the immateriality and abnormality of the apparition. In some photographs the 'extra' is introduced with the same artful deliberateness as physical objects. The composition seems to anticipate its appearance – in a specific area of the image (usually a dark space formed by an area of neutral backcloth) readied for it, against which the ghost's form is rendered perfectly visible.

For example, the theatrical manifestation of an extra by Edouard Buguet assumes essentially the same compositional framework as an earlier Victorian painting, *The Artist's Dream* (1857), by John Anster Fitzgerald (*c.* 1819–1906) (illus. 57, 58). In both the photograph and the painting, the segregation of the physical and supernatural worlds is along the diagonal. Such conventionality on the photographer's part suggests a deliberateness and artfulness in inverse proportion to our sense of the image's authenticity. Fitzgerald's reputation today is founded on the paintings of fairies he made during the decade leading up to the development of spirit photography. As with other artists working in the genre, his paintings illustrate subjects such as Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and fairy folklore, and depict fantastical creatures in enchanted forests and the company of small animals, or scenes of dreams in which

57 Edouard Buguet, Spirit of the French poet Gerard de Nerval, together with a M. Dumont, carte-de-visite, albumen silver print, *c.* 1873.

58 John Anster Fitzgerald, *The Artist's Dream*, 1857, oil on millboard.

the sleeping figure is surrounded by goblins, fairies and monsters reminiscent of Hieronymous Bosch's (*c.* 1450–1516) grotesques and Henry Füseli's (1741–1825) rendering of nightmarish tormenters.[32] In Fitzgerald's painting, the luminosity, translucency and transparency with which the painter has rendered the supernatural entities make them look like glass ornaments. As was the case with eighteenth-century woodblock engravings representing ghosts, the substantiality of the artist's materials is inappropriate;

photography's lighter touch was far better suited to render a vision of the ethereal.

Undoubtedly the most celebrated examples of spirit fictions, magical manipulations and fairy 'fantasies' are the series of photographs taken by two working-class schoolgirls, Frances Griffith (1907–1986) and Elsie Wright (1901–1988), at Cottingley in the Aire valley of Yorkshire between 1917 and 1920 (illus. 8). The friends' subsequent confession to counterfeit and collusion confirmed what many critics had considered to be the case from the outset: that the images were manufactured (as in the case of many spirit 'extras') from identifiable and pre-existing pictorial sources. The fairy forms unwittingly betrayed the stylistic influence of Arthur Rackham (1867–1939) and Edmund Dulac (1882–1953) and were eventually traced to specific illustrations in *The Princess May Gift Book* (1914).[33] From early childhood Wright had been competent at drawing, and had worked for a commercial photographer as a retoucher in 1916 (one of the few occupations associated with commercial photography in which women were employed prior to the 1930s).[34] Therefore, she had the wherewithal, even if not the will, to fake an illusion. The photographs were taken on a quarter-plate 'Midg' camera, first produced in 1910. The plates were badly underexposed and the original prints blurred.[35] They were later touched up in order to define the fairies better for half-tone reproduction in magazines and newspapers by Edward Gardner (1869–?), a Theosophist with a keen interest in spirit photography, who, along with Doyle, was one of the most vociferous protagonists for the photographs' veracity.[36] Gardner's delineations on the photographs inadvertently compound the appearance of artifice.

The original plates and prints were submitted for inspection and pronounced (by an 'expert') to be genuine, inasmuch as there was no evidence that the images had been manipulated either in the camera at the point of exposure or, subsequently, during the process of development.[37] This, indeed, had been the case; for the girls had copied, cut out and cemented the fabricated fairies onto Bristol board and either pinned these models to branches or suspended them in front of the camera lens. In effect, they deployed – *plein air* – the converse of the studio photographer's stratagem for mixing and associating truth and fiction, choosing instead to set the scene against a real rather than an illusory backdrop,

and to fake some of the 'sitters'. Paradoxically, an element native to the background of one of the photographs – a waterfall, cascading too fast for the film's speed – is a more suggestive evocation of the supernatural than any artifice introduced into the natural world by the two girls.

The Ghost (of Christmas) Yet to Be

Pictorial sources were not the only influences that shaped the appearance of spirits in photographs. Literary visualizations of ghosts could exert just as profound an effect. This is strikingly so in the case of the visual character of the fearful foursome described and illustrated in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and for this reason it is worth discussing at some length. The Christmas spectres not only prefigure in some important aspects the rendering of 'extras' but also show curious similarities to certain visual anomalies associated with early photographs, as well as resemblances to late nineteenth-century scientific applications of photography. *A Christmas Carol* was first published five years before the birth of Spiritualism, some eight years before (according to Doyle) the first spirit photographs were taken in 1851, and eighteen years before Mumler produced his own version in 1861. Given the widespread and immense popularity of the story, Dickens's description of ghosts – and, as importantly, their pictorial illustration – are likely to have had a significant influence on the public conception and visual representation of apparitional forms.

Marley's ghost makes two appearances: initially, in the place of Scrooge's front doorknocker and, in the manner of so many 'extras', as a face only, which is all that is necessary to secure recognition. The face is seen, simultaneously, both partially in, and in front of, the door, evoking the convention of relief modelling, typical of Victorian funereal sculpture. Photographic 'extras', too, seem to be (at best) shallow in depth, rather than fully three-dimensional, a consequence of having been photographed in a frontal or profile position (usually). Like the portrait 'extra', Marley's ghost was a face afloat in the dark. Dickens describes it as surrounded by light of a bluish leaden colour (like that of a bruise), which glowed feebly in the otherwise obfuscated surroundings.[38] (Witnesses have testified that,

on those rare occasions when 'extras' were visible at the moment of being photographed, the faces possessed an integral luminosity.) Such a subtle spectacle as Dickens describes was barely illustratable; possibly, for this reason, the encounter was not pictured in the original edition of the *Carol*. Later attempts to visualize the scene usually sacrifice too much of the narrative description, and appear (as in a magic lantern slide illustration from 1880, produced by Frederick York of England) more comic than horrific: Marley's face looks like a pancake of crudely thumbed chewing-gum splattered on the door (illus. 59, 60).[39] Marley's 'extra' was distinct from a photographic 'extra' in one notable respect: Marley's hair was stirred; his stare was fixed. Here, the writer amalgamates the cinematic and the static, movement with the frozen moment.

Ordinarily, we conceive of photographic 'extras' as having materialized and lingered long enough to be shot, while sustaining (like the living sitter) a completely immobile expression and orientation. Perhaps this is because (as mentioned earlier) 'extras' look photographic; certainly, it is because the camera arrests the motion of all things, living or dead. Photographs purporting to show 'extras' in motion are very rare: in one early twentieth-century example the spirit face appears to have darted, like a firefly, from one part of the composition to another.[40]

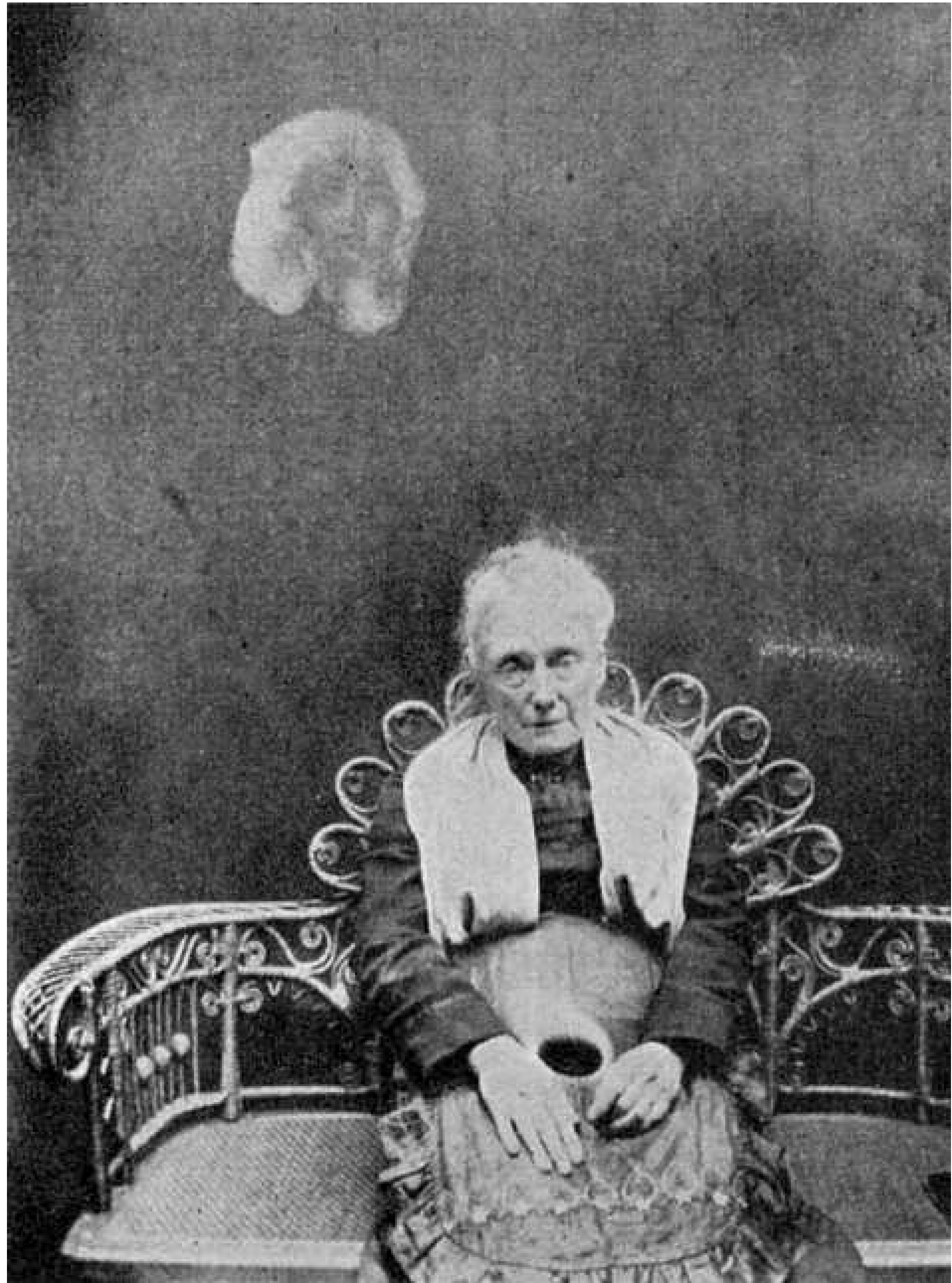
When Marley's ghost makes his second appearance, inside Scrooge's chamber (and this time, from top to toe, and in the round), his form, though detailed, is less palpable than on the previous occasion:

> it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes . . . His body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind. Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

Famously, the scene was illustrated by John Leech (1817–1864) in the first edition (illus. 61). The artist suggests Marley's transparency by making partially visible a section of wall-panelling through the ghost's chest. John Tenniel (1820–1914) adopts the same technique in his frontispiece illustration for another of Dickens's ghost stories, *The Haunted Man* (1846).

Overleaf: 59 Frederick York, 'Marley's Ghost', from a series of 25 magic lantern slides illustrating Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, hand-tinted glass-plate positive, 1880.

60 'Mrs Deane. A photograph taken at the British College of Psychic Science. Circumstances connected therewith not known', reproduced in George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (1919).



Like Scrooge, the principal character, Redlaw, meets his haunter on Christmas morning. The ghost, in this case, is Redlaw's *Doppelgänger* – a wraith of himself. In another depiction of the scene (by Leech again), printed in the same volume, the ghost appears opaque. This is entirely congruent with the text: Dickens makes no mention of the spirit's insubstantiality, only of its colourlessness.[41] Leech's rendering expresses the similitude of the ghost to its living counterpart, while Tenniel's version stresses their substantial difference (illus. 63). As such, the illustrations represent two sides of the same coin. (In the 1920s Deane was photographed similarly in the company of her spirit double [illus. 64]).

61 John Leech, 'Marley's Ghost' (detail), tinted steel-plate engraving, reproduced in Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1864).

Leech's 'Marley' and Tenniel's 'Redlaw' were a significant departure from the established pictorial conventions for depicting apparitions. Like Leech's depiction of Redlaw's spirit, earlier graphic works distinguished apparitions from mortals only with reference to the sense of the text that the picture illustrated. Photography facilitated superimposition. In York's photographic slide of Marley's second appearance in *A Christmas Carol*, the photographer made one glass-plate negative derived from a shot of the chamber and Scrooge only. He made a second plate from a shot of only the ghost against a white background. The two plates were then placed one on top of the other, and the combined images developed onto paper or, in this case, a positive glass slide. This technique could be responsible for the presence of supposedly real ghosts in a large number of spirit photographs made since the late nineteenth century.

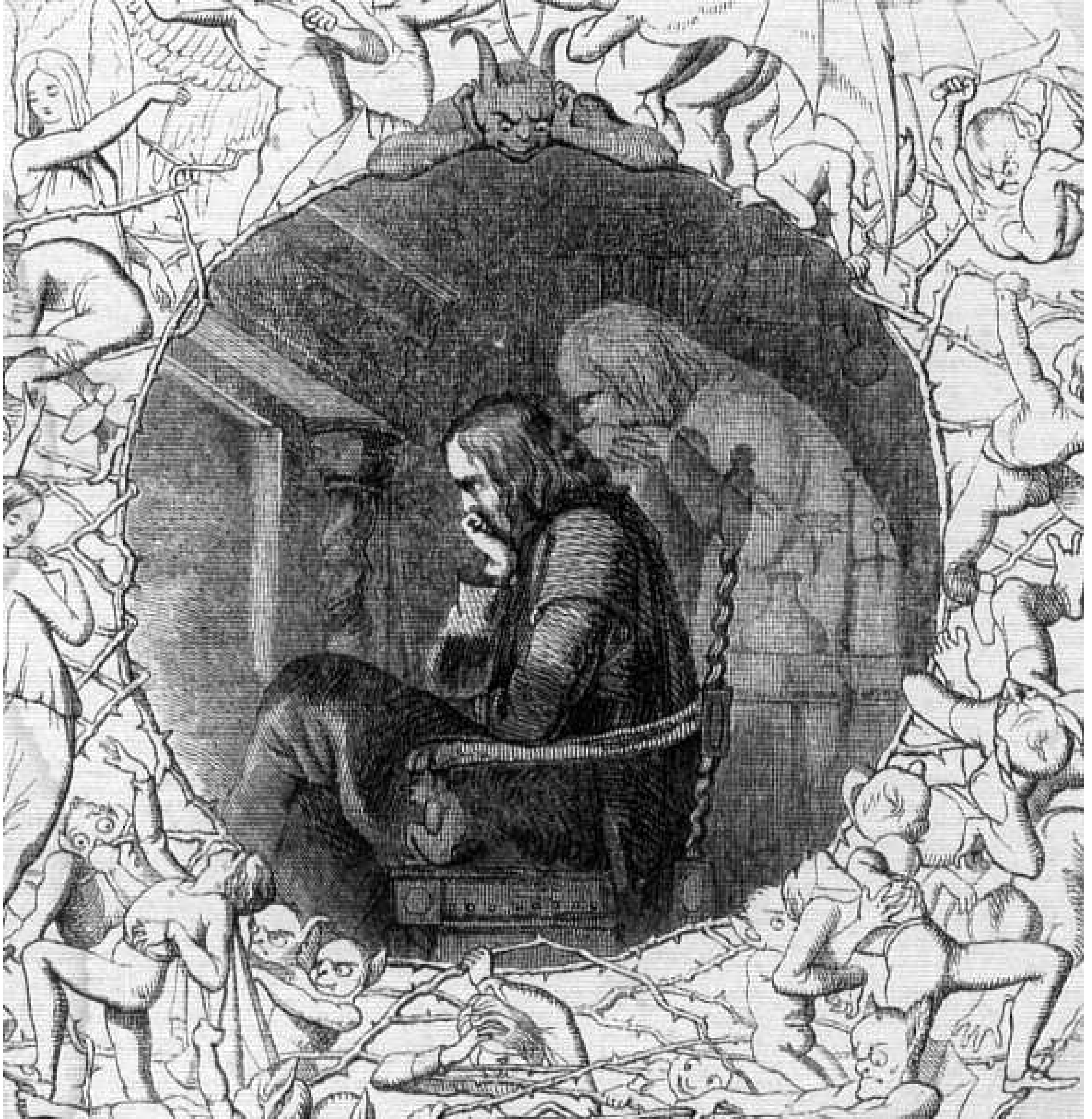
If Dickens did indeed influence the photographic image of the ghost, he did so, in measure, by mediating a far older tradition of visualization. Explicit descriptions of ghosts as transparent entities are almost wholly absent from the tradition of ghost stories and spirit narrative in the period from the twelfth century to the nineteenth, and prior to the *Carol*. As mentioned earlier, however, there are some tentative allusions in much earlier literature. As such, the attribution of transparency to ghosts in later literary, pictorial and photographic representations may have had a metaphorical or symbolic, rather than a strictly literal, function. That is to say, the convention (like Leech's rendering of Redlaw) was used to imply or connote a substantive difference between the spirit and the mortal, which would otherwise have been unperceivable. Whether or not ghosts were,

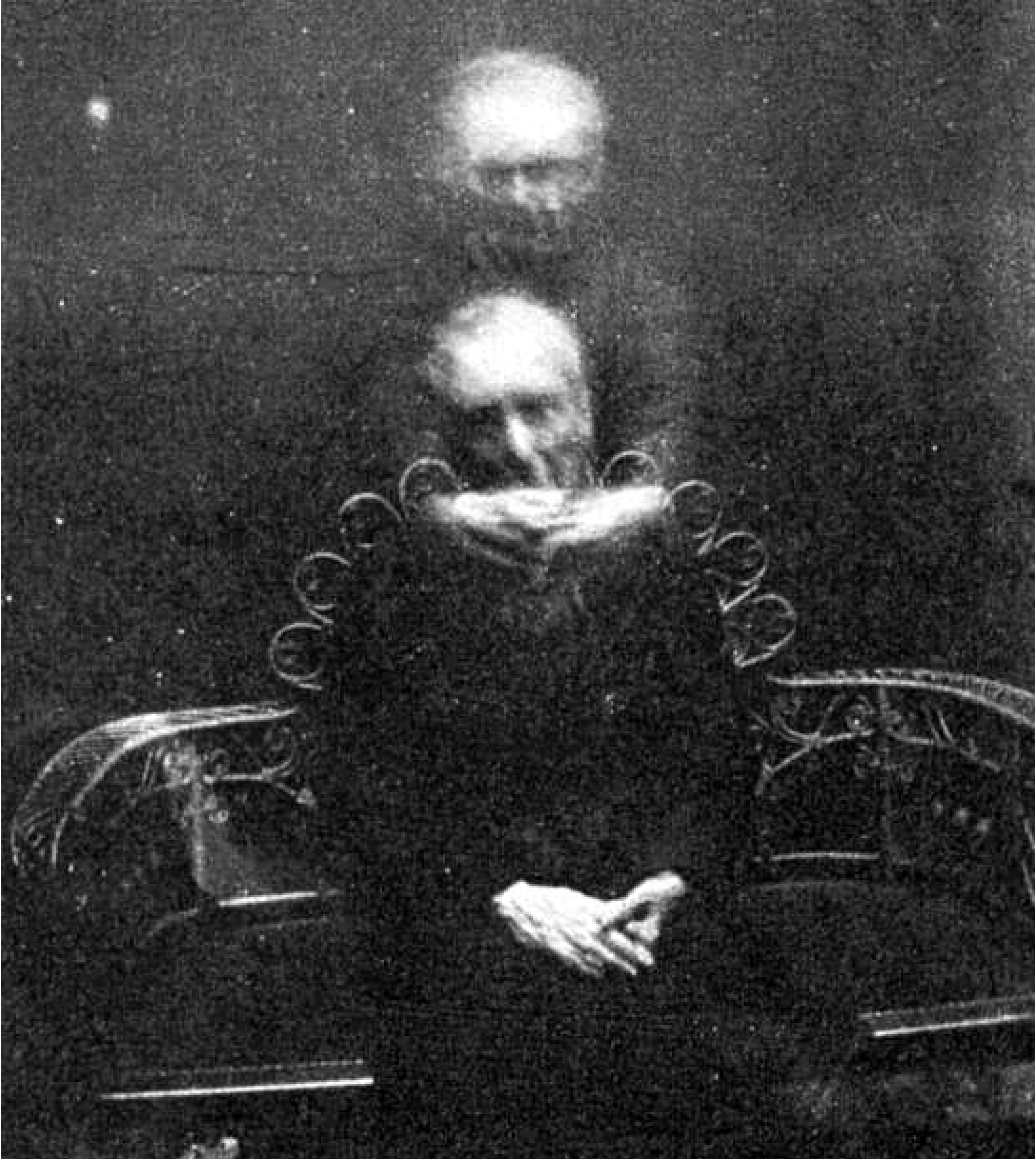
in reality, see-through – transparency served to articulate one of their incommunicable attributes. It suggested that, like the ethereal fairies and gossamer goblins in Victorian painting, spirits were without weight or density, unencumbered by gross materiality, existing in a domain somewhere between visibility and invisibility – between two worlds, simultaneously present and absent.

Dickens could not have anticipated the radiograph. Therefore, the transparent Marley, through whose outer vesture Scrooge saw buttons rather than bones, bears only a fortuitous resemblance to it. Nevertheless, the similarities between x-ray images and Dickens's depiction of Marley are curious and conspicuous. For while 'Marley's body was transparent, the chain he drew . . . made . . . of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel' was not. Leech depicts those objects – the chain and its charms are rendered opaque, implying that they were solid – even though they had passed through the door of Scrooge's chamber and, later, vanished, along with Marley's spirit body (illus. 61).[42] Leech's picture bears a remarkable similarity to one particular radiograph made using the Röntgen process (illus. 62). In this, a transparent hand is adorned

62 'A photograph taken by Dr Voller of Hamburg using the Röntgen system', radiograph, reproduced in *L'Illustration*, 25 January 1896.

Overleaf: 63 John Tenniel, 'Redlaw and doppelganger', steel engraving, reproduced in Dickens, *The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas-Time* (1848).





with jewellery, which, being metal, blocks the path of the rays and appears dark and solid, like Marley's accoutrements.

In *A Christmas Carol* and Dickens's other ghost stories the unseen world becomes visible in order to change a person's perspective. This was a function of the magic lantern show too. Indeed, the structure of the *Carol* is somewhat like a lantern show, in that Scrooge's ghostly guides introduce him to a sequence of changing scenes. Furthermore, in Dickens's third Christmas ghost story, *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), goblins use 'enchanted mirrors' to reveal situations to people, and to reflect the protagonist's own thoughts, as if in a 'glass or picture'. The latter anticipates thoughtography, where 'extras' are interpreted as visualizations of the living subject's thoughts and, in some cases, memories of the deceased, projected and fixed onto the photographic glass plate.[43]

Magic lantern slides showing photographic illustrations of *A Christmas Carol* were not always equipped to render the peculiarities of Dickens's vision. This was especially true with regard to the image of the Ghost of Christmas Past. This ghost's materialization was not illustrated in the original edition of the *Carol*, and not without reason. Dickens's description of the spirit is, of all Scrooge's visitors, the most bizarre and complex, and one of the most arresting representations of any supernatural entity in literature or art. He creates the ghost by way of visual paradox, amalgamating opposites – in respect to its age, size, complexion and physical characteristics – almost to the point where the spirit is rendered unimaginable:

> It was a strange figure – like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of

Previous: 64 'Mrs Deane *and her double* (?), a photograph taken at the British College of Psychic Science. The camera-cap was removed by a college assistant'; reproduced in Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (1919).

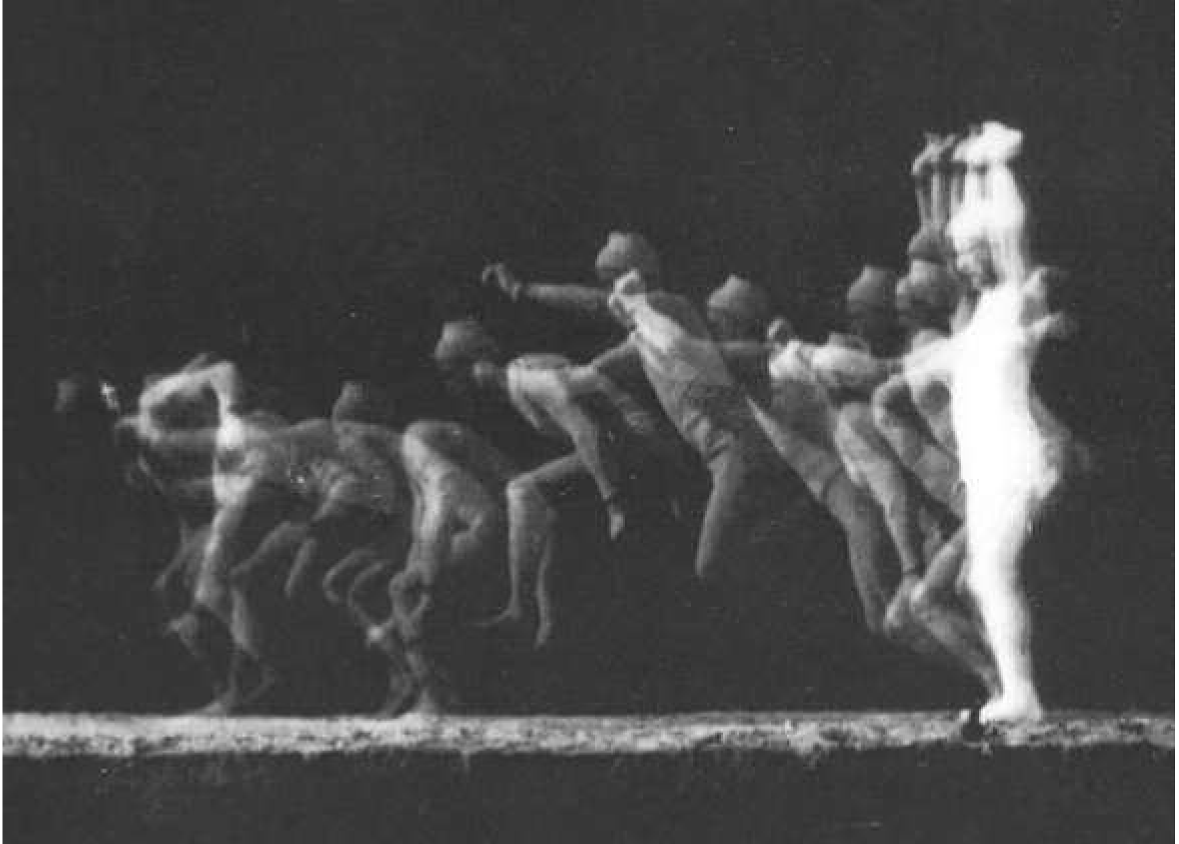
> that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.[44]

Pictorial illustrations either show (taking the coward's way out, as Leech did) the child disappearing under the great extinguisher, or else they depict the concept of the childlike figure only. For all intents and purposes, Dickens's description is beyond illustration: for how would one hope to portray through engraving 'some supernatural medium', through which the child was viewed, and 'which gave him the appearance of having receded from view, and being diminished to a child's proportions'?

However, the facility to convey a discontinuity of size and scale, between the percipient and subject, and between the subject and its habitual dimensions in the world of the living, was the stock-in-trade of photography. The photographer's enlarger could push and pull portrait 'extras' to virtually any scale, relative to the picture's format. If, in this first description of the Ghost of Christmas Past, we see parallels to the phantasmagorical effect, Dickens's second description of the same ghost was nothing short of prophetic of a future condition of photography. Scrooge perceived even stranger attributes belonging to the boy:

> For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part now in another, and what was light one instant, at another was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.[45]

Dickens portrays here a spirit that is constantly and erratically changing in illumination, seen as though under a slow strobe, or by the staccato light of a welder's arc lamp, or in the flickering pulse of a failing light-bulb. (These are feeble and anachronistic metaphors for an unprecedented and



65 Étienne-Jules Marey, 'Jump from a standing position' (detail), chronophotograph, *c*. 1882 (copy print).

extraordinary visual phenomenon.) Most remarkable of all is the ghost's fluctuation between a singularity and a multiplicity of form: 'being now a thing with one leg, now with twenty legs'. In the 1880s Étienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904), a French physiologist, invented new ways of studying movement through photography. His first method was to take multiple images on the same plate, so that all the movement could be analysed on the single print. The results were astonishing: a single figure, apparently proliferating body parts, each creating visual echoes of itself, and dematerializing (as it were, becoming transparent) in the process (illus. 65).

Prior to this encounter with the third apparition, Scrooge saw a light 'which streamed from under [the chamber door and into his bedchamber],

in an unbroken flood upon the ground . . . the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light'.[46] Here, Scrooge's alarm is more intense than on the previous occasions, prompted, this time, by an appearance that was not human-like but entirely abstract – by 'a blaze of ruddy light' (the colour of the light under which seances were to be conducted some forty years later). Fear is sometimes the more profound for want of a precise subject, when it is most inexplicable. Lack of distinctness and clarity, argued the eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke, were attributes of objects, such as supernatural creatures, that, seen in the context of danger, enhanced their terror. Traditionally, darkness was the medium whereby the source of fear was made obscure and, thus, more terrible. Dickens, conversely, uses light to deploy dread – evoking perhaps more the fear of divinity (God is light) than a fear of the Devil, although its redness (a colour often associated with the demonic) may have indicated the contrary.

In contrast, photographic 'extras' are rarely frightening in appearance. This is because, relatively speaking, they are clearly visible entities; and to the bereaved sitter alongside whom they emerge, often recognizable and reassuring. Ghosts in spirit photography are not ghouls. A notable exception to this manifestation of magnanimity is Hope's photograph of Mrs Longcake, attended by the spirit of her mother (illus. 66). It is an unnerving image, for reasons that might now seem obvious: the face (the only human attribute visible) is obscured by the cowl; the spirit's personality is, as a consequence, evasive (unreadable) – for we cannot engage the spirit's eyes (they are dark sockets only), and the facial expression is blank. The 'extra' appears to have drifted into view like a helium balloon. The length of the cowl, for the most part transparent and indistinct, implies that the spirit is inordinately tall. (In spirit histories, extreme height was judged to be a certain indicator of fearful supernatural otherness.) The orientation of the extra is abnormal too. Ordinarily, the 'extra' assumes a more or less vertical position, in keeping with the sitter. Here, its uncommon attitude is remote from our experience of being in the world: the 'extra' leans forward alarmingly, and from a considerable elevation, but without falling. The motif of the spirit wrapped in a cowl or shroud, which Hope's photograph adapts, defines Scrooge's fourth visitor: the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be. Note how, as in Hope's rendering of the spirit, obscuration – in particular,

66 William Hope, Mrs Longcake and the spirit of her sister-in-law, gelatin silver print, 1930s.

67 Charles Dickens: in memoriam, steel-plate engraving by Poulton, reproduced in *The Hornet*, 15 June 1870.

the concealment of the phantom's eyes and the absence of all but one human attribute (a hand) – are sources of profound discomfort for Scrooge.

When Dickens died in 1870, the popular publications issued pictorial *in memoria* depicting the author in an attitude of thought, and surrounded by phantoms representing the myriad characters he had created in his writing (illus. 67). Such images, probably intentionally, echoed the scene from *The Chimes* (1844), Dickens's second supernatural Christmas story, where Toby Veck, the protagonist, fantasizes a congregation of goblins, spirits and fairies with him in the church bell-tower. The illustration also bears more than a passing resemblance to Francisco Goya's print *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797), a self-portrait of the artist surrounded by demonic-looking animals. Dickens's demons were not all so dreadful. The depiction of Dickens asleep resembles both Fitzgerald's

68 Sitter surrounded by multiple 'extras', cabinet card, silver print, 1900s.

compositions of hapless slumberers surrounded by spirits and fairy folk, and the trance state that nineteenth-century mediums assumed – the characters floating above him in his study, in a vaguely ectoplasmic cloud, are like the spirits invoked by the medium (illus. 68). For Dickens's audience, the image may have recalled a scene from *A Christmas Carol* also, in which the ghost of Marley teleported Scrooge into the street outside his house, where 'The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went . . . Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell.'[47] Leech's illustration of this apparition strongly resembles a strange

69 John Leech, illustration of phantasmagoria, steel-plate engraving by W. W. Linton, reproduced in Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1864).

70 'Photograph of a group of children's faces which enveloped the face and bust of the lady so as to hide them from view, i.e. the visible is not, but the invisible is, photographed',reproduced in James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible* (1911).

photograph, made in the early twentieth century, showing a bouquet of multiple 'extras' beclouding the head of the living subject (illus. 69, 70). This visual analogy may be entirely fortuitous. However, in other examples of spirit photographs we can observe, more confidently, the direct influence of an existing convention of representation and composition. In the memorial image, we see Dickens encircled by characters and scenes from his novels – somewhat in the manner that saints and Christ are shown surrounded by acolytes and ministering angels in medieval icons.

In Dickens's memorial image, the characters that encompass his portrait are the inventions of the author's mind's eye made visible. Analogically speaking, this idea anticipates a theory that 'extras' were not sentient shades, but the sitter's mental expressions of the image of the deceased: photographable memories or projections from the magic lantern of the mind, as it were. Dickens's descriptions of ghosts, along

with his illustrators' rendering of them, are projections of the imagination too. They are fictions, which drew upon and amalgamated natural phenomena, traditional spectral imagery, extraordinary innovation and an almost prescient vision. He cast the unknown into the mould of the known by conjoining familiarity and strangeness, the plausible and the impossible (immortal form made from mortal mind).

Spirit photographs share in this condition in many respects. Setting aside the issue of whether the photographs are authentic or fake, and whether they are images of the dead derived from the dead or made by the reminiscence of the living, it is true that spirit photography reflected the visual mindset, pictorial conventions and expectations of their age (which *A Christmas Carol* helped to foster). Arguably, Dickens's conception of the transparent ghost informed and popularized this particular style of spectral representation. Some thirty years later, this conception would serve to imbue photographed spirits with a measure of familiarity and (perhaps) of credence too.

The reinvention of the spirit by photography was characterized by a reactive and adaptive iconography and typified by a move away from, followed by a return to, modes of visualization associated with the pre-photographic age. For example, in the numerous literary collections of eighteenth-century spirit narratives (discussed above), ghosts were described as misshapen in appearance or missing limbs. At the time of the inception of spirit photography, severely deformed individuals were exhibited as grotesques, monstrosities and marvels in freak shows and travelling fairs. Since abnormal physical types were identified as anomalies of the natural world, rather than as representatives of the supernatural world, early spirit photographs show apparitions of the dead with entirely normal bodies, incomplete only in respect to the extent of their materialization. Even when just their head or torso is apparent, the implication is that what cannot be seen is hidden rather than missing. Later spirit photographs revived the medieval and early modern sensibility for the malformed, and the Victorian fetish for the grotesque. The 'extra' protrudes from, or attaches itself to, the body of the sitter, like some hideous deformity (illus. 71, 72). Spirit photography also kept in step with the development of modernist visual styles, exhibiting a similar trajectory from the figurative

(as seen in examples produced in the nineteenth century), through collage (typically, the apparitions of 'extras' apparently culled from published material), to abstraction (as discernible in the work of Warrick and Coates).

The generalization and distillation of the spirit form reflected, too, a significant change in the social role of spirit photography. Spirit photography at its inception (which, in the United States, was coterminous with the Civil War, in 1861) and, subsequently, in Europe, during the decade following the start of the First World War, was conscripted to console the bereaved. As time healed and the sense of loss became less acute, the demand for the solace that spirit photography afforded diminished. Relieved of the burden of consolation, the genre could now relinquish the burden of representation. Henceforth, like modern painting in the wake of the invention of photography, spirit photography was liberated to pursue a purer path. Christian theology had already moved even further in the direction of non-figuration. Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) in his influential book *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) conceived of an encounter with divinity in terms not of apparitions of angels and holy persons but of a 'non-rational, non-sensory experience or feeling whose primary and immediate object is outside the self' – what he called the numinous (from the Latin *numen*, meaning 'deity').[48] This was a mysterious, and simultaneously fascinating and terrifying, category of confrontation with God as the unapproachable wholly 'other'. The de-figuration of the ghost in spirit photography, likewise, reintroduced a sense of the spirit's strangeness and apartness, depersonalizing the apparition by the removal of traditional signifiers of identity and personhood, and emphasizing instead its status as a phenomenon. The shift towards a vaguer and more elusive style of visualization also revived something of that sense of dread and uncertainty evoked by eighteenth-century illustrations of encounters recorded in spirit histories that made the object of fear more fearful by placing it out of sight, outside the picture frame.

Overleaf: 71 Edward Wyllie, 'Mr Robert Whiteford, professional photographer of Rothsay, with "extra"', cabinet card, silver print, 1909.

72 Gaspard Bartholinus, 'Lazarus-Johannes Baptista Colloredo', copper-plate engraving, reproduced in Bartholin, *Anatomicae Institutiones Corporis Humani . . .* (1611).

73 Hannah Hoch, *Die Starken Männer* (The Strong Men), 1931, photomontage and watercolour.

Legion: Revision and Diversification

The growth of new iconographies for the ghost was coterminous with the decline of spirit photography as a coherent genre, and with the wane of Spiritualism and of the studio photographic tradition. The latter was affected by the rise of leisure photography, facilitated by the development of hand-held cameras, commercial processing, instant photography and, latterly, digitization. The simpler and easier means of image-making encouraged more amateurs to take up photography, and spirit photography in particular. While photographic methods became increasingly standardized, the larger pool of practitioners spawned an unprecedented stylistic diversity in the rendering of 'extras'. The democratization of photography, like that of the Bible during the Protestant Reformation, implied a loss of an authoritative interpretation and manipulation by an elite. Outside the 'priesthood' of photo-mediums and the hallowed environment of the photo studio and the seance, the image of the spirit proliferated and disintegrated. Consequently, today, they are seen in almost any way and anywhere by anyone.

74 Young woman with 'extra' in the middle distance, mobile phone camera photograph, Capal Bangor, Wales, 2005.

The Folding Pocket Kodak camera, introduced in 1898, represents not only the initial step towards popular empowerment but also the first example of portable media technology. More than a century later, camera technology is now miniaturized, digitized and hybridized with other devices such as the mobile (or cell) phone and portable computer to provide a seamless interaction of image, sound and text. The camera phone facilitates the instantaneous taking, copying (rarely printing) and sending of photographs. Unlike traditional cameras, the phone camera is used not only on special occasions but also to capture the more transitory and spontaneous moments of experience and to share them across a network of remote social relations, phone to phone, face to face.[49] Unlike text messages, photographic images are the 'visual evidence of an event . . . showing when something [is] happening as well as what [is] happening'.[50]

This capacity to provide dual verification of an event has revived the camera's credibility as a dependable device for providing proof of spirits. The limited degree of control over exposure and processing (in camera), and the perceived lack of any facility or reason for failure that might give rise to superimpositions, narrows considerably the opportunity for manipulation and fakery (illus. 74).[51] Whereas in the nineteenth and early twentieth

75 Adult Services Department, Willard Library, Evansville, Indiana, webcam photograph, 2006.

Fig. 15
The illustrations are representations of Arches.

(*1d*) Apparently produced by some chemical. I cannot conceive how the chemical could have been applied by Mrs. Deane in such definite positions without her being discovered in the act. Maybe the purpose of the arches is to force upon us the inference of the presence of an invisible operator, able on these occasions to show purposiveness and no more. What other object could there be ?

76 Ada Deane and F. W. Warrick, 'Freak Markings . . . The illustrations are representations of Arches',reproduced in Warrick's *Experiments in Psychics* (1939).

centuries spirit photography, the camera and the Spiritualist sensitive were separate and cooperating agencies, the phone camera is the photographic medium both (and simultaneously) in the sense that it serves as the means and intermediary for transmitting, receiving and linking (visibly and audibly) those who are present and absent on either side of a divide. Many of the photographs are sent via the camera phone between friends or family – presencing absence by defeating distance and uniting loved ones, technologically, in the manner that spirit photography (albeit statically and momentarily) connected those who were bereft with those who had passed on.

Webcams are another medium of remote experience, enabling the observer to be virtually (that is, in effect but not in fact) in two places at once – both in front of the computer monitor and at the scene under surveillance. Images periodically reload and refresh, skimming off a surface of reality in real time, frame by frame. The cameras watch over anything and everything from municipal building to domestic residence, blurring (along with the image of the subject) distinctions between the public and the private, moments of indifference and scenes of prurience. Spectres, too, are the involuntary subjects of this pixilated 'peep show' – inadvertent or anticipated 'extras' in a 'movie' that runs 24/7 – their appearance captured and chronicled by a global network of spirit-titillated voyeurs. The 'extra's' on-screen presence is often as faint and fleeting as condensation exhaled onto a window pane (illus. 75). Typically, like phone phantoms and the apparition of anomalies in contemporary amateur ghost photography, spirits in 'cam' cameos take the form of ethereal, translucent, grey shapes (recognizably figures); orbs, coils, mists and flares purporting to be ectoplasm; and flaws and flickers upon the sizzling surface of the medium. One might accord Warrick and Deane, along with their contemporary, Madge Donohoe, the dubious distinction of anticipating this burgeoning of iconographic codes. Their photographs extended significantly the range and conventions for depicting 'extras': along with the traditional vaporous images of faces and busts, they recorded a veritable dictionary of freakish slurs and stains, luminous marks and psychographs (illus. 76). The coextensive proliferation of websites that host and boast photographs of ghosts (and, to a lesser extent, of angels, Jesus and the Virgin Mary) testifies to the continued and popular fascination with photographs of spirit. They

77 Ectoplasmic slurs photographed in a bedroom, Cheshire, England, digital photograph, 2001.

tease and tantalize, confuse and conflate the spiritual and the spurious, the trashy and the transcendent (illus. 77). The pictures appear to show us something where there should be nothing. It seems as though the extraordinary has bled into the ordinary. Something of the past, which should no longer be there, has persisted – like an indelible stain that has not been entirely expunged by death and the passing of time.

The passing of time and technology, along with habituation of the camera custom, have bred a contemptible familiarity with the process and processing of imaging and altered our relationship to historic spirit

photography. Today photography is no longer a mysterious, magical and necessarily trustworthy medium. Spirit photographs meet with wry smiles of incredulity that betray the percipient's knowing acquaintance with the seamless and sophisticated ways in which, by means of contemporary technology, images can be influenced, appearances adjusted and fantasies fabricated. (The nexus between reality and image has been broken for ever.) Many of the photographs of spirits produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries appear either laughably cack-handed in their execution (obvious superimpositions and collages of cotton wool and gauze, heads excised from portrait photographs, and cigarette smoke) or extraordinarily subtle and creative transformations of the transparencies (but 'special effects', nonetheless).

However, the value of these works – as photographs – is not diminished by disbelief. One is (still) struck by the sumptuous tonalities, detail and compositional elegance of the original artefacts – qualities wholly absent from the often tawdry reproductions in publications of spirit photographs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The images exude a mood that mingles doleful melancholy, expectation and anxiety. They conjure up a surreal poetic, born of the juxtaposition of the commonplace and the incongruous: stiffly posed sartorial propriety, aspidistra and black velveteen pose alongside vaporous swirls, floating faces and furniture, ethereal figures stained upon the backcloth of the photographic studio like the faded images of Christ on holy relics, and distressing evacuations of copious dun-coloured substances from the mouths of mediums.

The enduring legacy of spirit photography has not been to evince convincingly the existence of the ethereal but, rather, to re-enchant a reality that has been reduced by the materialist sciences to only that which can be perceived by the senses. It has also served to re-establish the mystery of the medium and to contrive conventions to communicate consoling illusions and the promise of curing a separation anxiety disorder affecting mind, body and spirit, and ally the conscious and the unconscious world and the temporal and the eternal – things present, things past and things to come. Spirit photography both reflected, as a child of its age, and influenced a way of seeing, a visual language, subject matter and working procedure that artists engaged either fortuitously, deliberately, allusively, descrip-

tively or interpretatively. Close to the 'spirit' though not to the truth of Spiritualist photography were the Surrealist and Dadaist collages and photomontages produced in the 1920s to the 1940s. Like the counterfeit spirit photographers and novelty ghost photographers, artists such as Max Ernst (1891–1976), Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971), John Heartfield (1891–1968), Hannah Höch (1889–1978) and Man Ray (1890–1976) used double printing and combination printing, superimposition and solarization to pit the incongruous in a sometimes abrupt and at other times lucid dialectic of form – a visual poetry whose grammar and syntax comprised disjunctions of objects; arresting and unsettling hybridizations of source materials and decontextualizations from original sources and purposes; discontinuities of space and perspectives; and ruptures in the surface of appearances, in some cases prompting irrational, uncanny and nightmarish correspondences and associations, in others serving as a political critique, and in yet others asserting its condition as artifice and status as an artwork (illus. 73). The poetics of spirit photography and Surrealist and Dadaist photomontage are both a discourse with desire and memory. However, the object and objective of communication are in many respects antithetical. Whereas Surrealist photography sought to convey a disjunction between reality and the dream state, spirit photography expressed the reunification of those separated by death and sought to transcend the division between the material and psychical worlds. Spirit photography addressed the domain not of the subconscious but of the 'post-conscious' (the life of the spirit, after death). Moreover, the photographs did not seek to excavate buried guilt and ruminate upon sexual anxiety (as Surrealist photography did) but to reflect a realm of resolution and a condition of psychological and psychic integration. Neither did spirit photographs seek deliberately to deform and debase the subject matter, nor to disturb and repel the percipient.

The residual influence of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spirit photography extended beyond the techniques of collage and photomontage to include more painterly and pictorial concerns. For example, many of the painted portraits by Francis Bacon (1909–1992), such as *Study for Portrait III (After the Life-Mask of William Blake)*, like photographic portrait 'extras', incorporate a phasing of facial aspects;

deformation and disintegration of substance and contour; slippage between figure and ground; and the perception of someone (or something) emerging, destabilizing and flickering, before extinction (illus. 78). (Bacon mentioned that he possessed a book called *Positioning in Radiography*, which he used as a source book for 'x-ray photographs and for a repertory of positions in which x-rays should be taken'.)[52] His vocabulary of slurs and smears of the painterly gesture, dry-brush strokes and punished pigment; the austere backgrounds; and decentred compositions are anticipated by the chemical-like marks and eccentric arrangements of the figure in Warrick's photographic experiments (illus. 79).

The British photographer Chris Webster (b. 1965) assimilates and amalgamates the psychographic handwriting, collage, composite work and the techniques of retouching (drawing and painting on the surface of the negative and print) in such a manner as to make explicit (what is covert in the 'authentic' spirit photograph) acts of intervention, manipulation and the process of accretion – the paint signifying 'some sort of oozing ectoplasmic goo'.[53] The photographs are as much a trauma of surface as the simulacrum of appearance. The 'ghosts' of personal recollections, memories of other photographs and false (fabricated) memories, chemical stains and alchemical dreams, bleed one into the other to conjure images of loss and longing suffused with purgatorial anguish (illus. 80).

Webster's elixir of fantasy mysteries transmuting mysterious fantasies, played out in the darkness between two worlds (of dream and waking), summons some of the same preoccupations explored in the work of David Lynch (b. 1946), a film-maker 'fascinated by the disabled, deformed and grotesque variants of biology'.[54] Cinematically, Lynch's own stock iconography of types, symbols and metaphors for supernaturalism variously draws upon and gestures to the vocabulary and conventions of spirit photography. At the beginning of *Eraserhead* (1977), the translucent bust of Henry Spencer floats in space at right angles to the baseline of the picture frame like a portrait 'extra' against the dark backcloth of the photographer's studio. The slow billow of smoke without fire that is mysteriously extruded in Fred Madison's apartment in *Lost Highway* (1997) is reminiscent of the clouds of materializing ectoplasm documented by spirit photography (illus. 81). Flickering electric lights, featured most recently

78 Francis Bacon, *Study for Portrait II (After a Life Mask of William Blake)*, 1955, oil on canvas.

79 Ada Deane and F. W. Warrick, Two portraits of Warrick with freak marks, reproduced in Warrick, *Experiments in Psychics* (1939).

80 Christopher Webster, *Chthonic Trinity*, 2002, oil on photolinen.

in *Mulholland Drive* (2001), either symbolize the life force in jeopardy or announce the presence of spirits. (In the early twentieth century, electricity was considered to have opened the way for communication between the dead and the living and to be the physical basis of psychic phenomena. In Mumler's view, mediums were to spirits what vacuum tubes were to electricity – they made the invisible visible.)[55] Figures in Lynch's films emerge silently, gradually and ominously from gloomy corridors and pathways, like an image developing on a negative or a spirit materializing against the darkness. The red curtains that appear in threatening, bizarre and mysterious locations, such as the Black Lodge in the television series *Twin Peaks* (1989), serve as a foil for figures (much in the same way as the cloth backdrop for sitters in commercial studio spirit photography, and the folded drapes in several of Bacon's paintings), a veil of demarcation and a threshold joining two places.[56]

Zoe Beloff, an artist working in photography and video, addresses not the conventions of spirit photography but the culture of the photographic seance. In *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.* (2004), a four-channel stereoscopic, surround-sound DVD installation, 'the viewer enters a darkened room to discover life size stereoscopic figures that appear to inhabit our own three dimensional space. These phantoms re-enact a series of ten seances held in Algeria and Paris from 1904 to 1912 with the French medium Eva C.' (illus. 49).[57] The work is based on ten photographs taken by Schrenk-Notzing of the medium (Eva C.) published in his *Phenomena of Materializations* (1914), referred to above, and attest to a (sometimes

81 David Lynch, still from *Lost Highway* (1997).

unwitting) compact between sitter, sensitive, operator and spectator, between longing and looking. The installation's three-dimensional character recalls the stereoscopic techniques used to document spirit materializations in the late nineteenth century and, in the layering of images in space, the diorama – 'a formal structure that enclosed a world where science merged with sideshow, which was very much what happened in the séances of Eva C.'[58] Furthermore, the illusory and fictive nature of the installation, together with the use of a system of projection, not only engage and extend the adaptation of the magic lantern in exhibitions of phantasmagoria, but also question and reconstruct what may have been the equally contrived and deceptive nature of the seance per se.

One of the most abiding and widespread influences of spirit photography has been mediated through the reflections of Roland Barthes (1915–1980) on the unique significance and distinguishing characteristics of photography in *Camera Lucida* (1981). In focusing the investigation on a photograph of his late mother, and discussing the role of the spectator (as distinct from the operator or photographer), the experience of loss, and the verification of presence, and of what 'has been' or has ceased to be, Barthes established an essential relation between photography, death and melancholy. The melancholy of photography resided in its propensity for fateful prophecy and temporal ambiguity: it showed not only people who were dead but also people who will one day die, and people who are dead as though they were alive. Spirit photography, for its part, claimed to show those who were dead as though they were alive too. In spirit photographs, however, the 'now dead' lived, not in cryogenic suspension, as a perpetual moment of life (frozen before death and captured on film), but with the inference that the photograph represented one instant in a continuity of life that extended eternally beyond the bounds of the exposure.

Barthes' desire to recover (find again) his mother through her photograph was an expression of grieving no different in intent from that expressed by bereaved sitters who posed in the hope that the photographer could capture an 'extra' of a loved one alongside them. His own reconciliation came not in attempting to photograph a ghost but in regarding the photograph as a 'ghost' – 'the ectoplasm of "what has been"'.[59] (In adopting the discourse of Spiritualism, Barthes revived the predilection of early

writings on photography to describe photographs as spectres, shades and phantoms.) Like the 'extra', the photograph was, in Barthes' mind, a 'resurrection . . . neither image nor reality, a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch'.[60] In the same manner as ectoplasm are the extrusion and formation of the dead, so 'photography is literally an emanation of the referent', and the evidence of presence. This was a surety that spirit photography recognized and, in the cases of fakes, actively subverted and exploited. 'Photography never lies,' Barthes insisted, 'or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of a thing . . . never to its existence.'[61] Thus, to adapt another of Barthes' distinctions, while the connotative significance of ghosts, fairies, angels and holy persons as either representations or actual manifestations was always a matter of dispute, their denoted presence in photographs as anomalous accessories was never in question.

Photographs could no more authenticate the existence of spirits than language (in the form of written and spoken testimonials) could prove the veracity of supernatural encounters in the pre-photographic age. Apparitions, whether observed or preserved (photographically), were made meaningful or significant only in conjunction with certain types of aesthetic and cultural knowledge, what Barthes called the 'lexicon of a person's idiolect'.[62] In the context of photography and spirit, this lexicon includes the iconographic codes governing the representation of supernatural beings in Western religious art, and certain presuppositional beliefs regarding the scientific credibility of the means of recording, the survival of the soul and the possibility of communication between the living and the dead. When brought to bear upon the witness of photography, the miasma and smears; luminous, translucent and unfocused forms; and defiantly crude cut-out faces are mobilized to evoke the eloquent expression of the evanescent spirit fixed in aspic of emulsion. The diversity of spectral form testified not only to varieties of idiolect but also to developments in the visual language and technology of representation: photography revised received pictorial models for rendering ghosts, in accordance with its medium and technical characteristics. At the same time it assimilated past conventions and incorporated external pictorial sources, while asserting photography itself to be, in essence, a medium of spirit.

References

Introduction

1 John Werge, *The Evolution of Photography: With a Chronological Record of Discoveries, Inventions, Etc*. (London, 1890), p. 178.

2 The exception is poltergeists. Being always invisible, poltergeists manifest their presence in strange noises and odours, or by moving objects or making them disappear. Poltergeists are often malevolent and mischievous spirits, sometimes violent and dangerous in behaviour, which attach themselves to specific places and people.

3 See, for example, [Anon.], *An Account of Terrible Apparitions and Prodigies, Which hath been seen both upon Earth and Sea, in the End of Last, and the Beginning of this Present Year, 1721* (Glasgow, 1721).

4 Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits, Fully Evinced by Unquestionable Histories of Apparitions and Witchcrafts* (London, 1691), p. 31; Edmund Jones, *The Appearance of Evil: Apparitions of Spirits in Wales*, ed. John Harvey (Cardiff, 2003), p. 14.

5 The expectation that there is a visual likeness between a person's physical form (when alive) and their spirit form (after death) is found in accounts as far back as the Old Testament and antiquity. Homer spoke of the 'ghost resembling the man himself'. King Saul 'perceived that' the ghost summoned by the witch of Endor 'was Saul'; Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Ennis Rees (New York and Oxford, 1991), p. 463; 1 Samuel 28:14.

6 For example, Eastern conceptions of ghosts differ markedly both from those in the West and within the same culture. In the East, ghosts are often worshipped. In Chinese folklore, one type of ghost exhibits vitality rather than the aura of death (with which apparitions of the dead are associated in Occidental traditions), and the graces of beauty and femininity. Another type of Chinese ghost is definitively small and believed to be the spirit of a dead foetus. Eastern ghosts can be extremely violent. The Malayan Pontianak (which, similarly, derives from a still-born child) is corporeal, flesh-eating and blood-sucking. What Malays call Hantu Tetek is a female ghost who uses her huge breasts to attack and suffocate her victims. Like those recorded in some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western folklore and demonologies, however, Chinese and Malay ghosts were sometimes regarded as being synonymous with (or difficult to distinguish from) evil spirits.

7 Baxter, *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits*, pp. [vi], 1; [Anon.], *Fair and Fatal Warnings; or, Visits from the World of Spirits; Being Concise Relations of the Most Curious and Remarkable Apparitions, Ghosts, Spectres, and Visions* (London, [n.d.]), title page.

8 Long after belief in spirits had diminished, entirely fictional spirit histories were published to inculcate spiritual and ethical values, and as a vehicle for religious propaganda. In an account such as the pseudonymously written *Wesley's Ghost, and Whitefield's Apparition* (1846), the revenant reverends are made the mouthpiece for the author's diatribe against the moribund and ineffectual condition of the Christian church in his day. Famously, the device was used by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) to issue invectives against greed, selfishness and carelessness for the needs of mankind.

9 Joseph Glanvil, *Saducismus triumphatus* (London, 1681), p. 10.

10 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759), 2nd edn (Menston, 1970), p. 90.

11 Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Itinerary through Wales and The Description of Wales* (1191) (London, [1908]), p. 55.

12 Richard Baxter, *Of the Nature of Spirits; Especially Man's Soul* (London, 1682), p. 47; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages: The Living and the Dead in Medieval Society* (Chicago and London, 1998), pp. 195–219.

13 Ectoplasm is a supposedly spiritual substance – dingy, whitish-grey in appearance – that can be psychically moulded, like dough, into body parts or fully formed beings, such as Katie King. The substance was also variously referred to as 'plasm', 'teleplasm' and 'ideoplasm'.

14 Experiments in palengenesis were conducted with human remains. Out of compounds made from powdered cranium or blood grew the appearance of a smoky and small human being. Lewis Spence provides a concise gloss on human palengenesis and its relation to one particular medieval belief about ghosts: 'As it was incontestably proved that the substantial form of each body resided in a sort of volatile salt, it was perfectly evident in what manner superstitious notions must have arisen about ghosts haunting churchyards. When a dead body had been committed to the earth, the salts of it, during the heating process of fermentation, were exhaled. The saline particles then each resumed the same relative situation they had held in the living body, and thus a complete human form was induced. While the saline body possessed a different consistency to that of the living body, it may not have been considered any less opaque. This could be one explanation why ghosts were often described, in regard to their external countenance, as being indistinguishable from living persons'; *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism* (London, 1920), p. 142.

15 William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London, 1874), p. 54.

16 Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* (AD 167), trans. Maxwell Staniforth (London, 2004), p. 18; Homer, *The Iliad*, p. 464.

17 See David Robinson, *The Lantern Image: Iconography of the Magic Lantern, 1420–1880* (Nutley, 1993).

18 At the end of the nineteenth century, this medieval menagerie of malevolent apparitions stood in stark contrast to the benign, familial

and reassuring presence of 'extras' that slipped surreptitiously onto the photographic plate. The magic lantern was also used to project strong light in theatrical performances. In combination with an angled sheet of glass, set before the audience and the stage, the light helped to refract the image of the pretend ghost from the pit to the stage above. As a result, the audience perceived an illusive, transparent spectre apparently to occupy the same location as the actors. See B.T.J. Glover, *Lantern Slides* (London, 1928); Steve Humphries, *Victorian Britain through the Magic Lantern* (London, 1989).

one: Religion

1 In early centuries, while apparitions were believed to be real, it was not denied that that they could, on occasion, be the product of excessive religious enthusiasm, hallucinations or the fantasy of melancholic and timorous individuals; Richard Gilpin, *Daemonologia Sacra; or, A Treatise of Satan's Temptations* (Edinburgh, 1867), p. 33; Samuel Hibbert, *Sketches of the Philosophy of Apparitions; or, An Attempt to Trace Such Illusions to Their Physical Causes* (London, 1825), pp. 61–99.

2 Religious visions and spiritualist phenomena cannot always be clearly distinguished. The revelations, visions and locutions of ecstatic visionaries are in many respects similar in character to accounts of spirit apparitions and paranormal activity witnessed by mediums and sensitives. Christian Spiritualists (see below) viewed their own encounters of ghosts as contributing to a historical continuity of spiritual phenomena comprising visions of the Cross and the Virgin Mary, and spectacular aerial progenies; Horatio Hunt, 'My Experiences as a Medium', *Christian Spiritualist*, 13 (June 1895), pp. 45–6; Horatio Hunt, 'Battle in the Heaven', *Christian Spiritualist*, 19 (December 1895), pp. 173–4; William Howitt, 'Roman Catholic Spiritualism: The Appearances of the Holy Virgin in France and Alsace in 1872–3', *Christian Spiritualist*, 3rd ser., 1 (January 1875), pp. 11–28.

3 Davis investigated and was convinced by Mumler's claim to produce photographic images of ghosts; James Coates, *Seeing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Psychometry, Telepathy, Spirit Photography and Allied Phenomena* (London, [1922]), p. 24.

4 The name 'Brownie' was inspired by a series of articles on the spirit written and illustrated by Palmer Cox (1840–1924) and published from 1883 to the year of his death in *St Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, the *Youth's Companion* and the *Ladies Home Journal*; see James I, *Daemonologie* (1597), facsimile edn (Amsterdam and New York, 1969), p. 65.

5 Gambier Bolton, *Ghosts in Solid Form: An Experimental Investigation of Certain Little-Known Phenomena (Materialisations)* (London, 1914), p. 7.

6 Ruby or red is a non-actinic wavelength of light that has no effect on the photographic plate or film. The cabinet is an enclosed box, with a curtain at the entrance, within which the medium sits to communicate with spirits. The dark slide is a light-opaque holder that prevents the plate from being exposed to light when it is not inside the camera.

7 [Anon.], *The Hand-Book of Heliography; or, The Art of Writing by the Effect of Sun-Light* (London, 1840), p. 6; Frederick J. Cox, *A Compendium of Photography: Containing Concise Directions for Photographic Portraiture* (London, 1866), p. 1.

8 The terms 'spirit photography' and 'psychic photography' (the two most common appellations given to the genre) were not, strictly speaking, interchangeable. They expressed distinct views regarding the site of origination: the latter implies that supernatural images arise principally from the consciousness of the medium, and the former that they originated principally in the consciousness of the disincarnate spirit. The term 'spirit photography' was first coined by Andrew Glendinning on the following wise: 'because the abnormal portraits, so far as they have been recognised, are portraits of persons who have cast off the earthly tabernacle, I claim that the name spirit photographs, or photographs of spirits, is as near as we can get to accuracy in the present state of our knowledge'; Andrew Glendinning, ed., *The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments of Spirit Photography* (London, 1874), pp. 42–3.

9 Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, p. 208. See also Mary Elizabeth Parkes, 'In the Importance of the Dissemination of Spiritualism as Religious Evidence', *Spiritual Magazine*, 3rd ser., 1 (December 1875), pp. 554–7.

10 In London, the practice was prevalent among working-class children who would dance with vacant stares as though in a semi-trance-like state; C. Maurice Davies, *Unorthodox London; or, Phases of Religious Life in the Metropolis* (London, 1876), pp. 57–61.

11 Davies, *Unorthodox London*, pp. 59–60.

12 Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London, 1902), p. 257; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 24 (1927–8), p. 204.

13 These appearances occurred at Rome in 1842, and in France at Lourdes in 1858, Pontmain in 1871 and Pellevoisin in 1876, and in Ireland at Knock, County Mayo, in 1879.

14 The awakening represented the most controversial and well-documented reinvigoration of the Christian church anywhere in the world during the twentieth century. In keeping with earlier revivals in Great Britain and North America, this spiritual renaissance was characterized by supernatural phenomena, increased institutional activity and cooperation, and mass repentance and conversion, especially among the working class. While the revival began in and was centred on Wales, its fame and influence spread to Europe and the United States, effecting smaller outbreaks of religious fervour and contributing to the development of the Pentecostal and

Holiness movements in the following decades, and of the Charismatic movement later in the twentieth century.

15 For example, visions seen in daylight, in the sky and in the direction of the sun, such as those witnessed at Fatima on 13 October 1917.

16 Lubna Abdel Aziz, 'Limelight: Miracle at Lourdes', *Al-Ahram*, 75 (26 August–1 September 2004): weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/705/pe2.htm [retrieved 17 July 2005].

17 The identities of the Virgin Mary and Jesus were confirmed with reference to the established pictorial tradition of representation, for example, the former was often described as being 'dressed like an icon', or appearing as she did in a picture.

18 A classic case of pareidolia in the context of religion and the supernatural is the case of *Salem* (1908), painted by S. Curnow Vosper (1866–1942). The picture shows Salem Chapel in Cefn Cymerau, Cwm Nantol, Merioneth, Wales. Several legends grew up around the painting, one of the most popular being that the old woman, on entering the chapel, took pride in her shawl and committed the sin of vanity, which accounts for the features of the Devil that can be picked out among the folds over the arm holding the Bible. Electronic Voice Phenomenon, too, is a form of auditory pareidolia. It is alleged that spirits communicate through tape recorders, radios and other electronic devices. Sceptics insist that the audient hears random patterns of distortion, white noise, interference or cross-modulation noises that sound like words or speech.

19 A second photographic survey, conducted in 1931 by Giuseppe Enrie, confirmed Pia's findings. Enrie took three pictures of the Shroud face: one life-size; a detail of the shoulders and back; and a sevenfold enlargement of the wound in the wrist.

20 Heaphy devoted many years of his life to producing accurate copies of the earliest known likenesses of Christ: C. Dobson, *The Face of Christ* (London, 1933), p. 7; see also Thomas Heaphy, *The Likeness of Christ*, ed. Wyke Bayliss (London, 1880).

21 Georgiana Houghton, *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Seance: Welded Together by a Series of Autobiography* (1881) (London, 1882), p. 32.

22 Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Turin Shroud – In Whose Image? How Leonardo da Vinci Fooled History* (London, 2000), pp. 335–6.

23 C. D. Leadbeater surmised that 'extras' were invisible to the naked eye because they emitted only ultraviolet rays of a type able to be detected by a camera; W. T. Stead, ed., *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index* (London, 1894), p. 252.

24 George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (London and New York, 1919), pp. 4–6.

25 *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 25–6 (1927–8), p. 165.

26 Stead considered spirit writing more important than spirit faces, since it not only provided the 'exact calligraphy of the writer, but also [betrayed] the mind at the back of it'; Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism*, p. 160.

27 Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism*, p. 209.

28 Mervyn Thompson, *The Camera Book* (London, 1926), p. 147.

29 E. Lawrence, 'Spirit Photography at Terre Hante', *Gallery of Spirit Art: An Illustrated Quarterly Magazine Devoted to and Illustrative of Spirit Photography, Spirit Painting, the Photography of Materialized Forms and Every Form of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. [12].

30 John Harvey, *The Art of Piety: The Visual Culture of Welsh Nonconformity* (Cardiff, 1995), pp. 49–51.

31 Jean Bassett, *100 Years of National Spiritualism* (London, 1990), pp. 17, 28; Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London, 1983), p. 240.

32 Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago and London, 2004), p. 82.

33 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (London, 1922), p. 86; Alexander Verner, *Table Rapping and Automatic Writing* (Bolton, 1903), pp. 11–12; John Jones, *Spiritualism: The Work of Demons* (Liverpool, Manchester and London, 1871), p. 29.

34 Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, p. 62.

35 Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 1, 38; Alfred Russell Wallace, *Spiritualistic Experiences* (Los Angeles, 1918), p. 24. See also Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death; The Risen Dead; The Spirit World* (London, 1891); Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism*, pp. 188–9. Converts from Christianity to Spiritualism often described their transition with the same evangelical intensity, drama and rhetoric as those who had passed from unbelief to faith in Christianity; C. Ware, 'Some Experiences of Mediumship', *Christian Spiritualist*, 19 (December 1895), pp. [176–7].

36 Most notably, the Society of Psychical Research in Great Britain, and its cognate agency in the United States of America; Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 371.

37 Michael Perry, ed., *Spiritualism: The 1939 Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury* (North Somercotes, Louth, Lincolnshire, 1999), p. 51. Death effectively removed loved ones from the liturgical, devotional and emotional consciousness of congregational life. Their memory could be perpetuated only formally and abstractly on plaques commemorating donors (if they hailed from affluent middle-class families), on war memorials (if they had died serving in the forces) or in vestry photographs (if they had been chapel officers or ministers). As a result, the memory of most working-class men who had survived the war and died having held no significant position in the church, and most women and children (who had been neither wealthy, nor office-holders, nor combatants), faded into oblivion.

38 Doyle refers to a photograph that fuses the post-mortem and spirit genres, wherein the 'extra' resembles a dead man 'as he lay in his coffin'; Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, p. 109.

39 Charles Drelincourt, *The Christian's Consolation against the Fears of Death* (London, 1707), pp. 21, 71, 305.

40 Perry, *Spiritualism*, pp. 13, 17.

41 R.C., 'Spirit Photography, as Demonstrated through Mr Parkes', *Spiritual Magazine*, 3rd ser., 1 (June 1875), p. 288.

42 John Harvey, *Image of the Invisible: The Visualisation of Religion in the Welsh Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff, 1999), p. 77.
43 William H. Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography* (Boston, MA, 1875), p. 12.
44 Examples are in the collection of the Museo delle Anime dei Defunti o del Purgatorio, Rome.
45 Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, p. 156.
46 Allan Kardec, *The Book of Mediums; or, Guide for Mediums and Invocators* (Northampton, 1978), p. 128.
47 Even when 'dark figures' materialize on the plate, they are not interpreted as signifying malevolence or a sinister disposition; Alfred Russel Wallace, *Miracles of Modern Spiritualism* (1878) (London, 1955), p. 190.
48 Glendinning, *The Veil Lifted*, pp. 106–7.
49 Mumler, *The Personal Experiences*, pp. 23–4.
50 Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, p. 64.
51 [George Sexton], 'Mr Spurgeon and Spiritualism', *Christian Spiritualist*, 410 (October 1874), pp. [145–7].
52 T. Glen Hamilton, *Intention and Survival: Psychical Research Studies and the Bearing of Intentional Actions by Trance Personalities on the Problem of Human Survival* (London, 1977), pp. 59–76.
53 R. B. Jones, *Spiritism in Bible Light: A Series of Addresses* (Cardiff, 1920), p. [iii].
54 Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Warfare with Satan and the Way of Victory* (Bournemouth, 1928), p. 35. Roman Catholics, for their part, interpreted spirit possession as demon possession; Owen, *The Darkened Room*, p. [i].

two: Science

1 F. B. Meyer, *The Modern Craze of Spiritualism* (London, 1919), pp. 12, 44–5. Meyer was unusual among nineteenth-century Nonconformist ministers in having a broad outlook on spiritual experience. He became a leader of the Keswick Convention – a pan-denominational higher-life movement that originated in England in 1875 and emphasized the doctrine of the baptism and supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.
2 Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London, 1902), p. 287.
3 Gambier Bolton, *Ghosts in Solid Form: An Experimental Investigation of Certain Little-Known Phenomena (Materialisations)* (London, 1914), pp. 11, 15.
4 *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 20 (1921–2), pp. 327, 342.
5 W. T. Stead, ed., *Borderland: A Quarterly Review and Index* (London, 1894), pp. 234–5.
6 *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 19 (1919–20), p. 33.
7 Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, p. 287.
8 E. J. Wall, *The Dictionary of Photography and Reference Book for Amateur and Professional Photographers*, 12th edn (London, [1920]), pp. 516–17, 638.
9 The kinetoscope was the device for viewing images recorded by the kinetograph – a camera designed to photograph a sequence of still frames. When viewed in rapid succession, the still frames appeared to coalesce as a moving image, due to the principle of the persistence of vision; Stead, *Borderland*, pp. 234–5; David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York, [1996]), p. 34.
10 Wall, *Dictionary of Photography*, p. 604.
11 John Werge, *The Evolution of Photography: With a Chronological Record of Discoveries, Inventions, Etc*. (London, 1890), p. 197.
12 Henry Chapman Jones, *Photography of To-Day: A Popular Account of the Origin, Progress and Latest Discoveries in the Photographer's Art* (London, 1913), pp. 324–5; James Coates, *Seeing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Psychometry, Telepathy, Spirit Photography and Allied Phenomena* (London, [1922]), p. 14.
13 Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism* (Cologne, 1997), p. 606.
14 In June 1994 NASA released the Orion Nebula images, which confirmed the birth of planets around newborn stars; www.aerospaceguide.net.spacehistoryhubble-history.html [retrieved 13 April 2006].
15 Similarly, the translucent mist of (what is interpreted as) the partial materialization of 'extras' closely resembled the nebulous forms on vapographs – plates effected by the action of various emanations or vapours; John Traill Taylor, '"Spirit Photography", with Remarks on Fluorescence', *British Journal of Photography*, 40/1715 (17 March 1893), p. 168; Wall, *Dictionary of Photography*, p. 668.
16 Frank R. Frapbrie and Walter E. Woodbury, *Photographic Amusements: Including Tricks and Unusual or Novel Effects Obtainable with the Camera* (London, 1896), pp. 120–21.
17 See Franz Anton Mesmer, *Mesmerism: A Translation of the Original Scientific Writing of F. A. Mesmer* (Los Altos, CA, 1980).
18 See Carl von Reichenbach, *Abstract of 'Researches on Magnetism and on Certain Allied Fields', Including a Supposed New Imponderable*, trans. W. Gregory (London, 1846); *Reichenbach's Letters on Od and Magnetism, 1852 . . . With Extracts from His Other Works, So as To Make a Complete Presentation of the Odic Theory*, trans. F. D. O'Byrne (London, 1926).
19 See René Blondlot, *'N' Rays: A Collection of Papers Communicated to the Academy of Sciences* with *Additional Notes and Instructions for the Construction of Phosphorescent Screens* (London, 1905); Thelma Moss, *The Body Electric: A Personal Journey into the Mysteries of Parapsychological Research, Bioenergy and Kirlian Photography* (London and New York, 1979).
20 See [Anon.], *The Energies of Consciousness: Explorations in Acupuncture, Auras and Kirlian Photography: Papers Presented at the 2nd Western*

Hemisphere Conference on Kirlian Photography, Acupuncture and Human Aura (New York, 1973).

21 Rubin Krippner and Daniel Stanley, *Galaxies of Life: Human Aura in Acupuncture and Kirlian Photography* (New York, 1973), p. 1.

22 Jean-Loup Champion, ed., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven and London, 2005), p. 167.

23 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (London, 1922), p. 77.

24 Champion, *The Perfect Medium*, p. 77.

25 Wallace Nutting, *Photographic Art Secrets: With a General Discussion of Processes* (London, 1928), pp. 60–61.

26 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (London, 1926), vol. I, p. 148.

27 Cesaré Lombroso, *After Death – What?* (1909), facsimile edn (Wellingborough, 1988), p. 258.

28 Alfred Russel Wallace, *Miracles of Modern Spiritualism* (1878) (London, 1955), p. 179.

29 George E. Brown, *The Ilford Manual of Photography* (London, 193?]), p. 49.

30 Wallace, *Miracles of Modern Spiritualism*, pp. 179–80.

31 Tom Patterson, *100 Years of Spirit Photography* (London, 1965), p. 9.

32 James Robertson, *The Rise and Progress of Modern Spiritualism in England* (Manchester, 1893), p. 29.

33 William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London, 1874), p. 43; see J. Hawkins Simpson, *Twenty-Two Different Photos of the 'Katie King' Series Still in Existence, Taken by Sir W. Crookes, FRS, in 1874; A Modern 'Legion'; The Late D. D. Home, A Freak of Nature and How He Came to Be Such, Etc. Etc.* (London, 1874).

34 See Baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *The Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics* (1914), trans. E. E. Fournier d'Albe (London, 1920).

35 Bolton observed that, in some cases, ectoplasm would emerge, first, as a vapour, proceeding from the left side of the medium (if the medium was male) and from the pelvis (if a woman); Bolton, *Ghosts in Solid Form*, p. 28; Nandor Fodor, *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (London [*c*. 1933]), pp. 113–14.

36 Harry Price, 'A Case of Fraud with the Crewe Circle', *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, 20 (May 1922), pp. 271–83; Everard Fielding, 'An Experiment in Faking "Spirit" Photographs', *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, 20 (February 1922), pp. 219–33.

37 William H. Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography* (Boston, MA, 1875), pp. 4–5; Frapbrie and Woodbury, *Photographic Amusements*, pp. 5–10.

38 *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*, 20 (April 1922), p. 263.

39 James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Supernormal Photography, Script and Other Allied Phenomena* (London, [1911]), p. 52.

40 See T. Fukurai, *Clairvoyance and Thoughtography* (London, 1931).

41 See Jule Eisenbud, *The World of Ted Serios: 'Thoughtographic' Studies of an Extraordinary Mind* (New York, 1967).

42 Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, pp. ix, 23.

43 Stead, too, surmised that spirits used 'celestial cameras' to produce spirit photographs prior to the transmission of 'extras' to this world; Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, p. 23; Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. II, p. 145; Stead, *Borderland*, p. 234.

44 The Scole experiment took place over five years, beginning in 1993, at Scole in Norfolk. It was intensively investigated by senior representatives of the Society for Psychical Research, who witnessed an astonishing variety of phenomena, providing what some considered to be incontrovertible evidence for the survival of disembodied consciousness. Among the permanent paranormal artefacts produced during the group's sessions were handwriting, symbols, messages and images that appeared on factory-sealed and unopened film; Grant Solomon and Jane Solomon, *The Scole Experiment: Scientific Evidence for Life after Death* (London, 1999), pp. 211–43.

45 M.A., Oxon. [W. Stainton Moses], *Psychography: A Treatise on One of the Objective Forms of Psychic or Spiritual Phenomena* (1878) (London, 1882), p. 479.

46 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, new edn (London, 1993), p. 80.

47 The camera was usually fixed between 8 and 20 feet [2.5 and 6 metres] away from the sitter.

48 W. K. Burton, *Modern Photography: Comprising Practical Instructions in Working Gelatine Dry Plates, Printing Etc.*, Photographic Handy-Books no. 7 (London, 1887), p. 2.

49 Taylor, '"Spirit Photography"', p. 34.

50 Hans Holzer, *Spirit Photography: The Threshold of a New Science?* (London, 1970), p. 44.

51 George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (London and New York, 1919), p. 125.

52 David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: Its History, Theory and Construction, with its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education, Etc.* (London, 1856), p. 195.

53 Nevertheless, there are numerous testimonies to the contrary. For example, of four plates produced by F. M. Parkes, one was of a lady 'who had departed this life previous to the advent even of the daguerreotype, without having ever allowed her portrait to be taken'; R.C., 'Spirit Photography, as Demonstrated Through Mr Parkes', *Spiritual Magazine*, 3rd ser., 1 (June 1875), p. 288.

54 Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography*, pp. 19–20.

55 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 226.

56 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 216.

57 'Extras' captured using binocular cameras appeared flat in comparison to the sitter; Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, pp. 74–5; F. W. Warrick, *Experiments in Psychics* (London, 1939), p. 6.

58 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 226.

59 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 211.

60 Alfred Russel Wallace believed that the spirit image on photographic

plates constituted a type of visual apport; Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism*, p. 93; Warrick, *Experiments in Psychics*, p. 27.

61 L. J. Hibbert, *A Manual of Photographic Technique* (London, 1921), p. v.

62 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 267.

63 Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 226. Quite how the 'operator' committed the 'extra' to the photographic emulsion remained a mystery. However, in a seance held through the mediumship of Peter A. Chesser, a marine engineer, one soul conveyed the following explanation: 'Spirits impress their image on the plate by depositing thereon repeated layers of magnetism'; Andrew Glendinning, ed., *The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments of Spirit Photography* (London, 1874), p. 132.

64 Warrick, *Experiments in Psychics*, pp. 26–7.

65 Harry Price (1881–1948) cautioned against a too literalistic interpretation of the nature of psychic substance: 'If I describe them as being like what we habitually see and use every day, it is because they are like what we see and use every day. If I say – as I intend to – that the materialized hand . . . is a right-hand rubber glove, at the end of some sort of support, covered with a piece of (rather worn) cheese cloth, the whole being placed in the mouth, it is because that is exactly what it looks like'; Harry Price, 'Regurgitation and the Duncan Mediumship', *Bulletin of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research* (London, 1931), pp. 37–8, 51.

66 Edward Bush, *Spirit Photography Exposed* (Wakefield, [1920]), p. 3.

67 Spirit photographs taken in a commercial studio usually involved a photographer, a medium and the sitter or subject of the portrait. On some occasions, however, the photographer was also the medium (sometimes referred to as a 'photo-medium'). In experimental spirit photography, where the studio was a laboratory, the medium and the sitter were one and the same. Occasionally, in this context, the photo-medium took self-portraits, and thus assumed all three roles simultaneously.

68 S. A. Moseley, *An Amazing Séance and an Exposure* (London and Edinburgh, 1919), p. 19.

69 Roy Stemman, *One Hundred Years of Spiritualism: The Story of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, 1872–1972* (London, 1972), pp. 38–9.

three: Art

1 Georgiana Houghton, *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Seance: Welded Together by a Series of Autobiography* (1881) (London, 1882), p. 68.

2 J. Winchester, 'Spirit Art', *Gallery of Spirit Art: Quarterly Magazine Devoted to and Illustrative of Spirit Photography, Spirit Painting, the Photography of Materialized Forms and Every Form of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. 3.

3 William Blake had drawn his visions in 1819 in the presence of the artists John Varley (1778–1842) and John Linnell (1792–1882). These drawings depicted imaginal and intellectual visions of classical, historical, biblical, supernatural and fictitious figures, such as Pindar, Corinne the Theban, the task-master whom Moses killed in Egypt, the Devil and the Ghost of a Flea; Kenneth Clark, *Blake and Visionary Art* (Glasgow, 1973), p. 9.

4 Winchester, 'Spirit Art', p. 4; James Cooper, 'The Ancient Band', *Gallery of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. 6.

5 James Cooper, 'Spirit Art and Artists', *Gallery of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. 6.

6 Cooper, 'Spirit Art and Artists', p. 6.

7 *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 20 (1921–2), pp. 111, 231–4.

8 [Anon.], 'Introduction', *Gallery of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. 1.

9 [Anon.], 'Mr David Duguid', *Gallery of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. 13.

10 W. K. Burton, *Modern Photography: Comprising Practical Instructions in Working Gelatine Dry Plates, Printing, Etc.* (London, 1887), pp. 1, 20.

11 Arthur Conan Doyle, *Essays on Photography* (1882), ed. J. M. Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green (London, 1982), pp. xviii, [7]; James Coates, *Photographing the Invisible: Practical Studies in Supernormal Photography, Script, and Other Allied Phenomena* (London, [1911]), p. 36; John Traill Taylor, '"Spirit Photography", with Remarks on Fluorescence', *British Journal of Photography*, 40/1715 (17 March 1893), p. 167.

12 Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (London, 1922), p. 89.

13 Boursnell's spirit images of this period were, thus, abstract and partial in comparison to the more fully formed 'extras' that Mumler produced in 1861 (the year in which spirit photography is generally considered to have begun). It took another forty years before Boursnell himself secured 'extras', on the occasion when W. T. Stead sat for him; Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (London, 1926), vol. II, pp. 123, 131–4.

14 William H. Mumler, *The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography* (Boston, MA, 1875), pp. 4–5; Coates, *Photographing the Invisible*, p. 71; Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, vol. II, p. 138.

15 From the 1830s onwards there was a spate of books describing the principles and techniques of photography published by camera and plate manufacturers and independent photographers. They provided a wealth of not only basic but also specialized knowledge about the mechanics of the camera, studio equipment, the principles of exposure, chemicals for processing and fixing, papers and information about suppliers and trade outlets.

16 J. A. Bartlett, 'Spirit Art – Its Achievements and Possibilities', *Gallery of Spirit Art*, 11 (August 1882), p. [30]; Georgiana Houghton, 'A Photographic Séance' *Spiritual Magazine*, 3rd ser., 1 (April 1875), pp. 237–8.

17 Opaque and transparent spots could be caused by dust on poorly cleaned glass plates or dry collodion floating on the plate. Fogginess

was attributed to bad conditions in the darkroom or exposure to diffuse light in the camera, while streaks and stains were caused by chemicals and the emulsions' reaction to the carrier or dark slide; Frederick J. Cox, *A Compendium of Photography: Containing Concise Directions for Photographic Portraiture* (London, 1866), pp. 33–7.

18 Both F. M. Parkes and Staveley Bulford, a 'talented psychic-student', experienced the same type of transition; Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. II, pp. 130, 135, 145.

19 Cesaré Lombroso, *After Death – What?* (1909), facsimile edn (Wellingborough, 1988), p. 260.

20 For example, 'spirit fog' was used by spirit photographers to describe an amorphous cloud or light effusion on the plate. It is indistinguishable from the effects of photographic fogging. Conventional photographers were aware that these 'frequent results [were] responsible for some of the most absurd fancies [namely, that they represented] a "ghost"'; R. Child Bayley, *The Complete Photographer* (1906) (London, 1926), p. 26; George Henslow, *The Proofs of the Truths of Spiritualism* (London and New York, 1919), p. 158.

21 Mumler's reputation was such that he could charge as much as $10 for a spirit photograph taken at his studio in New York; Cyril Permutt, *Photographing the Spirit World: Images Beyond the Spectrum* (Wellingborough, 1983), p. 13; Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. II, p. 131.

22 For example, in 1903 Spiritualists in London set up 300 of Richard Boursnell's photographs on the walls of the Psychological Society.

23 L. J. Hibbert, *A Manual of Photographic Technique* (London, 1921), p. v; Cox, *A Compendium of Photography*, pp. 49–55.

24 Robert Johnson, T. S. Bruce and Alfred Braithwait, *The Art of Retouching Negatives and Practical Directions How to Finish and Colour Photographic Enlargements, Etc.* (London, 1913), pp. 17, 67.

25 Paul N. Hasluck, *The Book of Photography: Practical, Theoretic and Applied* (London, 1905), pp. 152–4.

26 Cox, *A Compendium of Photography*, p. 46.

27 Robin Wichard and Carol Wichard, *Victorian Carte-de-Visite* (Princess Risborough, Bucks, 1999), p. 42.

28 Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883) (London and New York, 1951), pp. 222–3.

29 See David Brewster, *The Stereoscope: Its History, Theory and Construction, with Its Application to the Fine and Useful Arts and to Education, Etc.* (London, 1865).

30 Alfred Brothers, *Photography: Its History, Processes, Apparatus and Materials* (London, 1892), p. 128.

31 Cox, *A Compendium of Photography*, p. 13.

32 Christopher Wood, *Fairies in Victorian Art* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 98–113.

33 Joe Cooper, *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies* (London, 1990), pp. 60–62.

34 Cooper, *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies*, p. 80; see Val Williams, *Women Photographers: The Other Observers, 1900 to the Present* (London, 1986).

35 Edward L. Gardner, *Fairies: A Book of Real Fairies* (1945) (London, 1966), p. 10.

36 Strictly speaking, fairy photographs were not a species of spirit photography. Doyle believed fairies to be a 'sub-human form of life' as distinct from a spiritual manifestation; Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of Fairies* (London and New York, 1922), pp. 2, 134; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 20 (1921–2), p. 70.

37 Doyle, *The Coming of Fairies*, p. 17.

38 Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Books: A Christmas Carol; The Chimes* (London, 1985), vol. I, pp. 19–20.

39 Fred Guida, *A Christmas Carol and Its Adaptations: A Critical Examination of Dickens's Story on Screen and Television* (Jefferson, NC, and London, 2000), pp. 53–4.

40 An example of a more contained exercise of motion – somewhat akin to Dickens's description of Marley – is evident in the following account. It describes a ghost that appeared to his widow in a form that strongly resembles the photographic 'extra'. The ghost, however, also manifested a subtle kineticism both in the course of the materialization and in its subsequent engagement with the witness. The widow's testimony is recorded in the Journal for April 1919. She recounts seeing, first, a 'yellow-blue ray of light', and then she 'watched . . . and something like a crumpled filmy piece of chiffon unfolded and the beautiful wavy top of Eldred's hair appeared, a few seconds and his forehead and broad, beautiful brow appeared, still it waited and his lovely blue eyes came . . . It shook and quivered, then his nose came . . . then his tiny little moustache and mouth. At this point he turned his head slightly and looked right into my face, and moistened his lips slightly with his tongue . . . and it all flickered quite out.' Eldred disappears with the same surprising instantaneity as did Marley's face when the doorknocker returned; *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 19 (April 1919), pp. 45–6.

41 Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas-Time* (London, 1848), p. 33.

42 Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, pp. 25–6.

43 Charles Dickens, *The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845) (London, 1846), p. 54; Elaine Ostrey, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (New York and London, 2002), p. 85.

44 Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, p. 43.

45 Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, p. 45.

46 Scrooge's third visitor comes in the form of a burly, jolly, green Santa Claus-type figure. The spirit's supernaturalism, on this first encounter, is expressed through his unusual height (a very traditional symbol of spectral alterity), and through the context of the manifestation, which has been transformed – the walls and ceiling of Scrooge's sitting-chamber being, now, hung with living green – like a grove, with varieties of festive food; Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, p. 75.

47 Dickens, *The Christmas Books*, p. 36.
48 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923), trans. John W. Harvey, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1950), p. 68.
49 Mizuko Ito, 'Everyday Contexts of Camera Use: Steps Toward Technosocial Ethno graphic Frameworks'; www.itofisher.com/mito/archives/camphones.okabeito.pdf, pp. 5–6 [retrieved 19 April 2006].
50 Tim Kindberg et al., 'The Ubiquitous Camera: An In-Depth Study of Camera Phone Use', *Pervasive Computing*, IV/2 (April–June 2005), pp. 45, 48.
51 Contrary to expectations, mobile phone cameras may be prone to capture anomalous images. For example, 'some mobile phones have a "burst" option with the camera mode, where several pictures are taken in rapid succession. It is a possibility that if a product was to contain a software error, components of one image might occur in another image, causing a "double exposure" effect' (correspondence between the author and Sony Ericsson, 21 June 2005).
52 John Russell, *Francis Bacon* (1971) (London, 1979), p. 113.
53 Brian Paul Clamp in Christopher Webster, *Cipher* (Aberystwyth, 2005), p. 3.
54 Authorship and the Films of David Lynch, The British Film Resource: www.zenbullets.com/britfilm/lynch/eraserhead.html [retrieved 10 April 2006].
55 R. B. Jones, *Spiritism in Bible Light: A Series of Addresses* (Cardiff, 1920), p. 125; Mumler, *Personal Experiences*, p. 66; Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London, 1902), p. 287.
56 Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch* (London, 1997), pp. 16–17.
57 Zoe Beloff, *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.* (2004): www.zoebeloff.com/eva/ [retrieved 16 April 2006].
58 Beloff, *The Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C*. (2004): www.zoebeloff.com/eva/EvaLoad.html [retrieved 16 April 2006); [Anon.], *The Hand-Book of Heliography; or, The Art of Writing by the Effect of Sun-Light* (London, 1840), pp. 91–5.
59 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, new edn (London, 1993), p. 87.
60 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 87.
61 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 87.
62 Roland Barthes, *Image – Music – Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (Glasgow, 1977), pp. 42–6; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London, 1975), pp. 6–7.

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Index

Numbers in *italic* refer to illustrations

abstraction 141
actinic light 159
alchemy 26, 75, 101, 151
amanuensis 99, 107
amateur photography 111–13, 144, 147
angels 10, 20, *28*, 46, 60, 62, 78, 141, 147, 157; Moroni 46
animal magnetism 76
anthropological photography 52
apports 27, 100, 163
atheism 11
auditions 27, 30
auras *35*, *36*, 78
Aurelius, Marcus (*Meditations*) 19
automatism 27, 39, 99, 107–8, 110, 113, 160

Bacon, Francis 150, *78*, 155
'Band of Spirits' 108, 113
Banner of Light magazine 63
Barrett, William 55
Barthes, Roland 156–7
Bartholinus, Gaspard *72*
Beattie, John 111, 114
Beloff, Zoe *49*, 155
Béraud, Martha (Eva C.) *48*, *49*, 82, 155–6
bereavement 56–8, 62, 98, 141, 156, 160
Bible, inspiration of 24; miracles in 24;
tablets of the Ten Commandments 43; typology 41
binocular camera 162
Bisson, Juliette *48*
Blake, William *51*, *78*, 108, 150, 163
Blondet, René 76
Bosch, Hieronymous, 122
Boursnell, Robert *26*, *52*, 83, 111, 163, 164
Brewster, David *43*, 119
British Journal of Photography 74
'Brownie' camera 25, 159
Buguet, Edouard *40*, *57*, 86, 120
Burke, Edmund 13, 135
Buxton, Mrs 96

camera obscura 41
Carolsfeld, Julius Schnorr von *6*
Catholic Apostolic Church 27
'celestial cameras' 162
celestograph *33*, 72
chakra 77
Chelmsford groups 114
Chinese ghosts 158
Christ, photographs of *14*, 34, 147; visions of 36, 85, 149, 159, 160
chronophotograph *65*
Civil War, American 141
clairaudience 85
clairvoyance 99
Coates, James 96–100, 111, 141
collage 149–51
Colley, Archdeacon Thomas 46
combination printing 150
commercial studio photography 57, 101,113, 119, 123, 144, 155, 163
Communion of the Saints 55
composite photographs 53, 99, 119
conjurors 11
Cook, Florence 17, 82 *see also* King, Katie
Cooper, James 108–9, 113
copy work 116
corpse 13
Cottingley fairies *8*, 20, 123, 164
Cox, Palmer 159
Crewe Circle *53*, 66, 113
Crookes, William *7*, 74, 82, 102
cyber space 102

Dada 150
daguerreotype 38, 118, 162
dark slide 26, 83–5
Darwinism 26, 64
Davey, Humphry 46
Davis, Andrew Jackson 25
Deane, Ada *16*, *23*, 43, 52–3, *60*, *64*, *76*, *79*, 80, 99, 111, 116, 147
death, commemoration of 56ff; masks 56; personifications of 13; death-bed pictures *25*, 56
decoupage 80
demonologia 20
demons 10, 23, *31*, 65–6
Delaroche, Paul 110
Devil 24, 28, 66, 135, 160
devils 20, 22, 64
Dickens, Charles *67*, 124–5, 128–9, 132–9, 158, 164
didactic images 20
digital photography 144–5
'direct voice' manifestation 42–3

Donohue, Madge 147
double exposure 100, 165
double printing 150
Doyle, Arthur Conan 54, 80, 83, 85, 96, 111, 123–4
Draper, John William 72
dry-gelatine process 87
Dufour, Paul *12*, 31
Duguid, David 110–11, 113
Dulac, Edmund 123

Eastern mysticism 78
Eastman Kodak Company 25
ecstatic jumping 27, 159
ectoplasm 27, 42, 52, 54, 69, *77*, 83, 85, 89, 92, 100, 103, 117, 138, 147, 151, 156–7, 158, 162
Edison, Thomas 71
Edwards, Jonathan 24
effluviography 34, 74
Eglinton, William *39*, 86
Eisenbud, Jule 84
'electric photographs' (electrophotography) 74
electricity 70, 151
electro-biology 70
electro-graphic photography 74
electromagnetism 42, 72, 78
Electronic Voice Phenomenon 160
engravings 12, 16, 19–20, 32, 99, 116, 118–19, 122, 133
enlarging lantern 89, 133
Enrie, Giuseppe 160
Ernst, Max 150
ether 81
evil 63
evil spirits 10, 20, 23–4, 64, 66
exemplum 11
exhibitions, of spirit photography 114, 164
'extras', and mediums 31, faking 80ff, 94–5, 116ff; forms of 54, 75, 92, 135; identity of 48–9, 52, 60, 120; precedents for 124–5, 139–40, 150ff; significance of 78

fairies (*see also* Cottingley fairies) 10, 11, 20, 23, 120ff, 138, 157
fakery 89–100, 116, 119, 123, 145, 157
familiar spirits 69
Fatima, Portugal, vision at 34–5
Finney, Charles 25
First World War 52, 55, 141
Fitzgerald, John Anster *58*, 120–21, 137–8
flowers 107
fogging 163–4
Fox, Kate 25
Fox, Margaret 25
freak shows 140
Fukurai, Tomokichi 84
funereal sculpture 48, 124
Füseli, Henry 122

Gaddi, Taddeo *20*
Gardner, Edward 123
Geller, Uri 84
ghosts, and spirit histories 11, 49, 64; evidence of 30; full 17; iconography of 34; in photographs 60; partial 16; solid 17, 81; types of 13, 23
glass-plate negatives 99, 108, 128
glass-plate positives 99–100, 128
glossolalia (*see also* speaking in tongues) 27–8
goblins 122, 129
God, confrontation with 141; visible manifestation of 28
Gothic, neo- 49
Goya, Francisco 137
Great Awakening 24–5
Griffith, Frances 123–4
grotesques 140
grottoes 37
Gucht, I. V. *2*, *3*

halation 34
hallucinations 159
hand-held cameras 144–5
Hantu Tetek 158
Hamilton, Thomas Glendinning *32*, 66
Hausmann, Raoul 150
Hayward, Reuben *74*
Heaphy, Thomas Frank 39, 160
Heartfield, John 150
heaven 9
hell 9, 16, 64
Henslow, George 43–4
Herschel, John 119
Hertz, Heinrich 70
Higher Criticism 24, 64
Höch, Hannah *73*, 150
Holy Spirit 27, 43
Holzer, Hans 89, 92
Homer (*The Iliad*) 19
Hope, William *18*, *21*, *30*, 49, *53*, 66, 78, 83, 96, 101, 111, 114, 135
Houghton, Georgiana 107, 113
Hubble Space Telescope 72, 161
Hudson, Frederick *22*, 49, 111, 113
'hue' 78
hyalotypes 99

iconography, Christian 16, 28, 31, 36, 38, 43, 49, 62, 78, 157; of visions 34, 36, 43; of spirit histories 65, 140; of spirit photography 46, 144, 147, 151
icons, religious 36, 85, 139, 160
'inferior' spirits 65
instant photography 36, 78, 84, 103–5, 144
Irving, Edward 27, 109

Joan of Arc 48
Jones, R. B. 66

kinetoscope 71, 161
King, Katie *7*, 17, 19, 74, 82, 158 *see also* Cook, Florence
Kirlian photography *35*, 76–7
Kirlian, Seymon 76
Knock, Co. Mayo, Ireland 32

Laurant, Danièle 78
'laying on of hands' 43, 54, 78
Lazarus-Barlow, Walter Sydney 71
Leech, John *61*, *69*, 125, 128–9, 133, 138–9
Legeti, Karoly *14*
leisure photography 32, 144
Leonardo da Vinci 41
levitation 103
lithography 38
Lodge, Oliver 55
Lourdes 11, 31
Lueken, Veronica 35
Lynch, David 151–2; *Eraserhead* 151; *Lost Highway 81*, 151; *Mulholland Drive* 152; *Twin Peaks* 152

magic lanterns 20, 22–3, 62, 85, 114, 125, 132, 139, 159
magnesium light 72
magnetism 70, 163
Marey, Étienne-Jules *65*, 134
marine salts 26
Marriott, William 83
Marryat, Florence 55
Marta, Jacinta 35
'Mary Jane' *59*
Maxwell, James Clerk 70, 80
mediums, 26ff, 70, 138; and the Church 54; and photography 36, 58, 101–2, 113–14, 147, 156, 162, 163; body of 16, 82, 149; cabinet of 26; trumpet of 42–3; voice of 64, 110
memento more 58
Mesmer, Franz Anton 76
Meyer, F. B. 70
'Midg' camera 123

Millerism 25
mind sciences 24
miraculous artefacts 30, 38
Mita, Koichi 84
mobile-phone camera *74*, 145, 147, 165
Modernism 140–41
Monck, Francis Ward 55
Morieu, E. *9*
Mormon, Book of 6
Mormonism 25
Moses, William Stainton 84–5
Mumler, William *1*, 60, 63, 66, 78, 80, 87, 111, 113, 124, 155, 159, 164

n-rays 76
Narkevich-Todko, Yakov 74
Native American 63, 108
nensha 84
neurological disorders 24
New Age 65, 78
novelty ghost photographs *43*, 62, 92
numinous 141

occult 26, 65, 80
Od 76
'operator' 98–101, 163
orbs 35, 38, 147
Otto, Rudolf (*The Idea of the Holy*) 141

Padget process 80
painted backdrop 31, 119–20, 123
paintings 99–100, 108, 116, 118
palengenesis 158
parapsychology 89
pareidolia 26, 160
Parker, Theodore 27
Parkes, F. M. *41*, 86
Pentecostalism 27–8, 43, 109, 159
permanent paranormal objects 43, 162
Peter, Apostle 48
phantasmagoria *9*, 22, *69*, 133, 156
'phantom' leaf 77
phonograph 70
photomontage 116–17, 150
photo-telegraphy 71
Pia, Secondo *15*, 38
Playfair, Guy Lyon *35*
pneumatic phenomena 25, 27
Podmore, Frank 71
poltergeists 27, 103, 158

Pontianak 158
Price, Harry 163
process printing 96, 100
'projected thermography' 84
projection 85, 100
Protestantism 24, 30; Anglicanism 54–5, 96; Baptist 28; Calvinistic Methodism 28; Congregationalism 28; Nonconformity 28, 54–5; Reformation 144; Salvation Army 54; Unitarianism 27; visual culture of 54; Wesleyan Methodism 28
purgatorial artefacts 63
purgatory 9, 63–4, 151
'psychic transparency' 100
Psychic College 96
psychograph *18*, 147, 151
psychokinetic 102
Psychological Society 164
psycho-therapeutic channelling 78

Rackham, Arthur 123
radiation 101
radio waves 70
radiographs 74, 129, 151
Ray, Man 150
Reichenbach, Baron von 76
Rejlander, Oscar Gustav *54*, 117
relics, religious 41–3, 63, 149
retouching *55*, 117–18
revenant 16
revivalism, religious 24–5, 28, 43, 159
Rochester, New York 25
Roman Catholicism 28, 30, 63, 96; Mass 38, 64; pilgrimage 38
Röntgen, Wilhelm Conrad *62*, 72, 74, 129
Rutherford, Ernest 101

Sadducism 11
saints 28
Sanford, Fernando *34*, 74
Santos, Lucia de Jesus 34
Satan 66
Schrenk-Notzing, Baron von Albert (*The Phenomena of Materialisations*) *5*, *48*, 82, 102, 155
Schultz, Johann Heinrich 46
Scole Group *38*, 85, 114, 160
seance 26–7, 30, 37, 53, 55, 81, 144, 155–6
Second World War 114
sensitives *see* mediums
Serios, Ted *37*, 84
Seventh-Day Adventism 25
Shakespeare, William (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) 120
shrines 31, 37
shutter speed 89
silver iodide 42
silver-printing paper 89
sin 63–4
skotography 42, 71, 84
Smith, Joseph 46
Smyth, Charles Piazzi 72
Society for Psychical Research 96, 160, 162
Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures 96, 99
solarization 150
Sorrat Group 103
Soubirous, Bernadette *11*, *12*, 31–2
soul 16, 20, 26, 48
speaking in tongues *see also glossolalia* 27–8
'spectrum' 78
'Spirit Art' 110
'spirit cloud' *19*
'spirit fog' 164
spirit histories 11, 17, 20, 32–3, 64–5, 135, 140–41, 157, 158
'spirit lights' 28
spirit photography (psychic photography), defined 159
Spiritualism, and afterlife 64ff; birth of 25–7; and photography 30–33; Christian Spiritualism 53–4, 159; as national organization 54
Spurgeon, Charles Haddon *32*, 55, 66
statuary 100
Stead, W. T. 71, 163
stereoscope *43*, 62, 119, 155
stigmata 103
Strindberg, August *33*, 72
Sublime 13 *see also* Burke, Edmund
superimposition 100, 145, 149–50
Surrealism 107, 150

Talbot, William Henry Fox (*The Pencil of Nature*) 26
Taylor, J. Traill 74, 89
telautography 71
telegraphy 70–71
telekinesis 103
telepathy 71, 100
teleplasma 70
teleportation 138
Tenniel, John *63*, 125, 128
Theosophy 78, 123
Thomas, John *24*, *25*, *27*, *28*, 62
thoughtography *37*, 84, 132
Thouret, Michel Augustin (*Recherches . . .*) 76
tongues of fire *10*, 28, 78
trance 99, 101, 111

transcendentalism 78
transi 13, 20
transparency 128–9, 134, 140, 159
Turin Shroud *15*, 26, 38–9, 41–3, 64

vacuum tube 74
vanitas 58
vapographs 161
Veronica Veil *16*, 26, 38–9, 41–3
vignetting *56*, 117–18
Virgin Mary, photographs of *13*, 147; visions of *13*, 28, 30, 32–5, 85, 159, 160
visions, religious 28, 30–32, 36, 60, 85, 107, 140, 159, 160; types of vision 32
visual culture, of commemoration 54; of Protestantism 53
Vosper, S. Curnow 160

Walcott, George 109
Wallace, Alfred Russel 81, 162
Warrick, F. W. (*Experiments in Psychics*) *45*, *46*, *76*, *79*, 96–100, 111, 141, 147, 151
Webber, Jack *47*, 103
webcams *75*, 147
Webster, Christopher *80*, 151
Wedgewood Thomas 46
Werge, John 7
Wesley, John 158
wet-collodion process 87
Whitefield, George 25, 159
Witch of Endor *6*, 158
witches 11, 20
wizards 11
working class 53, 55, 120
Wright, Elsie *8*, 123–4
Wyllie, Edward *71*, 86, 111, 114

'x-force' 75
x-rays 74–5, 85, 129, 151

York, Frederick *59*, 125, 128

Zeitoun, Egypt, vision over Coptic Church *13*, 33
Zurbarán, Francisco de *16*