

“Forget Me Not – The Use of Real and Fake Photographs in Victorian Mourning Practices”

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Abstract

In the Victorian era, photography was relatively a new invention which was taking over the paintings of the time to give a true picture of what is, rather than an interpretation. Spirit photography became the new medium of Memento Mori becoming the new vogue of the Victorian age even though this practice was seen as fraud. It wasn't long before the 'photographic artists' were using skills of painters to manipulate photographs and the actual magical process was being diluted for self gain not for artistry yet the Victorians saw photographs as an aid to mourning and memory not as artistry.

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Introduction

On deciding for a topic of this dissertation, the nature of my subject was inspired by the works of Edgar Allan Poe and the photographic works of Duane Michals from his ‘The Spirit Leaving the Body’ series of photographs (**Fig 1**) along with my own experience of seeing and hearing “spirit entities.”¹ This forms part of my fascination of the relationship between spiritualism, mourning and photography. This monograph is mainly concerned with how spirit photography in the Victorian era helped shape the new Memento Mori and gave a physical truth through a photograph of what we look like after death with no signs of aging or the results of how the person died. Was this fakery or giving a necessary helping hand for mourning?



(Figure One)

“Spirit photography”² filled a void in Memento Mori with its heartbreaking stench of a grieving mother; the disease of suffering in the filled eyes of a dead child after death (**Fig 2**) yet, in the turbulent times of the Victorians their relationship with death was beauty, which they dignified

1 Spirit entity is an independent part of a person, widely believed to survive the body after death, and sometimes visible as a ghost. To a Psychic Medium, a spirit entity may become present as clairvoyant (Seeing a spirit entity) clairaudient (Hearing a spirit entity) clairsentient (Feeling a spirit entity)

² The Phrase ‘spirit photography’ was first coined by Andrew Glendinning in the publication, ‘The Veil Lifted: Modern Developments of the Spirit Photography’

the love for their dead loved ones through jewellery, clothing, paintings, and through photography.



(Figure Two)

“What we are, so once were they. What they are, so we shall be”ⁱ

Death in the Victorian times was never hidden away, but prepared for, both on a mental level and a spiritual level and celebrated through religious ceremony, mourning rituals and elaborate funeral displays. This became part of the normal grieving process, providing a tangible way to

keep a memory and a loved one alive through the photographic family album of the “visual culture of death.”ⁱⁱ

In Section I, I unravel Roland Barthes’ relationship and knowledge of photography and death. Section II researches the death culture of the Victorian era. Section III discusses the relationship of Post Mortem photography and how the use of photography played an important part of the mourning process of the family album. Section IV, looks at the trial of William H Mumler, an American spirit photographer who influenced a new belief to give hope of a new life after death and a transition into a new subgenre of Memento Mori photography. Section V discusses the processes of and methods used in spirit photography and lastly the conclusion answers the question whether spirit photography was just an aid in the mourning process of the Victorians, not a science of proof of life after death?

Having decided to research more on Spirit photography, I found this type of photographic practice was excluded for many years from the write-ups on the history of photography by popular sources such as ‘A world of Photography’ⁱⁱⁱ by Naomi Rosenblum and ‘The History of Photography’^{iv} written by Beaumont Newhall. ‘The Photographic news’³ apologised to its readers for printing an article in its newspaper about spirit photography declaring

“faith of photographers had been challenged on new grounds.... and expressed a wider fear that photography was brought into disrepute”

No reference could be found until ‘Seizing the Light: A History of photography’^{vi} by Robert Hirsch which includes a brief history of ‘The Case of William Mumler, a Spirit Photographer.’^{vii} In here, Hirsch’s writes ‘[William Mumler, Spirit Photographer] who ran a spirit photograph

³ A copy of this edition of the photographic news can be viewed online at <https://archive.org/stream/photographicnew00simpgoog#page/n12/mode/2up>

studio in New York in the [early 1860's] was eventually arrested as a swindler, though the [chargers] were eventually dismissed because of trickery was not proved.”^{viii}

The answer which I wish to seek is whether the sitters knew fraud may have been used to give an impression of a spirit entity and why did the Victorians find that belief is stronger than acceptance?

Roland Barthes

"[...] Death is, Eidos' [the true figure] this photograph before my eyes." ix

One of the most abiding and widespread influences of the use of photography to do with mourning and memory has been mediated through the reflections of Roland Barthes. In focusing the investigation on a photograph of his late mother and discussing the role of the spectator, the experience of loss, and the verification of presence, and of “what has been or has ceased”^x to be, Barthes “established an essential relationship between photography, death and melancholy.”^{xi} 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.

“Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke Death should itself be immortal: this was the Monument!”^{xii}

Barthes' desire to find again his mother through her photographs 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 an 'extra' but in regarding the photograph as a "ghost.... the ectoplasm.... what has been."^{xiii} Like the 'extra', the photograph was, in Barthes' mind, a "resurrection"^{xiv} which reproduced something that happened only once, and "will not happen again existentially."^{xv} In claiming this he accepts the linear notion of time, which is problematic as photographs may also reproduce something that is or will be repeated.

In the book 'Camera Lucida', Barthes looked at the idea on what made a photograph stand out. He mentioned two main factors in a photographic image namely the studium and punctum.

The most important connotation within Studium⁴ is culture. According to Barthes, it was culturally that he participated in the figures, faces, gestures, settings and actions. He stated that culture was a contact realised between creators and consumers. It was this cultural middle ground that was extremely important in the way ideas were put across from photographer to spectator. If two people from entirely different cultures were to meet to analyse the same photograph, chances were it resulted to two different interpretations although there may be other factors to be taken into account, however, culture was the most significant.

Barthes also comprehends the photograph as a means of making physical contact with another time; he cites, as the event that opens the study, he "happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother"^{xvi} and feeling a thrill of contact with the Emperor himself: "I realised, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the

⁴ On Studium: Roland Barthes called the studium a manner of education (politeness, civility) that allowed the discovery of the operator. He referred to it as an element that created interest in a photograph.

Emperor.”^{xvii} Yet the thrill of the photograph as contact quickly turns to a meditation on the photograph as self-division, a “repressed madness”^{xviii} that foreshadows his later characterisation of the photograph as “melancholy, the melancholy of photography itself.”^{xix} Barthes contends that photograph enables its referent to live on, to “make a claim in favour of its reality,”^{xx} a continued existence that he reads as a spectral survival, something that not only touches but “clings to”^{xxi} and haunts the viewer. The photographic spectre emerges, in this view, as an intimately experienced presence, yet ultimately one “without future,”^{xxii} conveyor of an excessive.

Barthes writes “I cannot transform my grief, I cannot let my gaze drift; no culture will help me utter this suffering which I experience entirely on the level of the image's finitude.... the Photograph.... without culture when it is painful, nothing can transform grief into mourning.”^{xxiii}

The perception and understanding of photographic images depends on the viewer. The same portrait for someone can have a high emotional value (something unspoken), and for another person it can be only a description of some human, a legal proof. In this case a verbal explanation can help to understand the meaning of the portrait to both of them to understand the photograph from different perspectives.

Mourning in the Victorian Era:

In the Victorian era, there was a morbid fascination and idiosyncratic obsession with death, dying and mourning. Practices and customs relating to death became enormously important that the treatment of death and dying was dubbed a “cult of death.”^{xxiv} This was evidenced by a cornucopia of practices, rituals and icons contrived to express grief and also to honour the recently departed. Periods of mourning were regulated, the mode of clothing was dictated while funeral and burial arrangements became more elaborate and expensive.

Much of the “Victorian death culture”^{xxv} developed out of subconscious reaction to various factors. Firstly, death was everywhere. People died regularly for there was no modern medicine to cure contagious diseases and they died in their own homes where such gruesome occasions were witnessed by everyone. They were surrounded by death. Secondly, Queen Victoria’s obsessive mourning (**Fig 3**) for the departed Prince Albert for over 40 years was a great influence in the mourning practices and rituals which became the standard etiquette all over the world. Thirdly, it was a major time of transition with new knowledge discovered in every field, including technology and evolution. New ideas were challenging religion and most people reacted by clinging to tradition, old ways and beliefs. They enthusiastically exaggerated and hugely dramatised their dedication to their belief in order not to lose them. And lastly, in addition to scientific discoveries and those effecting electricity and motorised vehicles, they also made new discoveries about the theories of death and questioned whether an individual had actually died.



(Figure Three)

Victorian arts and literature romanticised death specifically the "lingering death"^{xxvi} that enabled the sufferer have some time needed to prepare the spirit for the next life. This presents the idea of spirit photography as a side shoot of Memento Mori for it encircles the relationship with the language of death which was an important part of Victorian elegy, and the coming to terms with the "remains of the dead."^{xxvii}

Many people found spirit photographers to be the perfect vehicle for changing the culture of the mourning process in the Victorian times. Death became romantic in fiction the "lingering of death"^{xxviii} and Mumler became an extension of death through his photographic prints. Why

even after the case did so many visit his studio still wanting photographs of loved ones even though knowingly the prints may be taken by fraudulent means?

“External symbols represented the physical memory of the deceased, which was especially important in the ‘searching’ period of grief, following the shock of death..... photographs, portraits or drawings of the recently deceased, sometimes lying in the coffin, were another common form of remembrance which brought comfort to the bereaved family, however macabre they seem to some late-twentieth century eyes”^{xxxix}

Even the class system of the Victorians, the wealthy were still influenced by Romantic movement and “life size paintings”^{xxx} of departed loved ones were hung in prominent places as a visual reminder.

“[I] often dined at home alone to [gaze upon her painting] [to] feel she was with me once more.”^{xxxi}

The “middle classes”^{xxxii} looked to “photography to paint a picture”^{xxxiii} “which looked like the real thing.”^{xxxiv} Post Mortem photographs clearly freed the dead of any pain and gave peace and calmness to the spectator and helped the way which death was preserved as less threatening.

There were different types of post-mortem portraits: those in which the corpse was lying in bed gently as if he were sleeping or the family portrait with all the family members who died or, even more chilling picture where the dead person was put in positions that seem alive, maybe sitting on a chair, and his eyes were drawn as open, in "post-production" (**Fig 4**). This summons a question worthwhile of further exploration in the future “What is a body” It is no longer a person, but an index that refers to it, a "visual echo of what has been"^{xxxv} an image. Even photography is an index, a mark that shows something was - and is no longer the image of this absence, the "body of experience"^{xxxvi}, “photography interrupts, actually stops, freezes a moment”^{xxxvii} a magic that stops time.



(Figure Four)

Post mortem photographs, like other memento objects, retain their story telling attributes as their meaning is never prescribed. These photographs give the viewer a traditional expression of the memory “image of eternal remembrance.”^{xxxviii} Commercial photographers even went as far to produce “death albums.... exclusively designed to house portraits of those who had died,”^{xxxix} to “cash in on [the] death culture of mourning.”^{xl}

The genre of post mortem imagery represents a shift in human awareness that can be philosophically described as coming to embrace the artificial as progress towards the infinity of memory and photographs search for “...their place in the afterlife of the imagination”^{xli} yet this is a photographic viewpoint not shared by Walter Benjamin

“Photography with its various aids (lenses, enlargements) can reveal this moment.

Photography makes aware for the first time the optical unconscious, just as psychoanalysis discloses the instinctual unconscious.....At the same time photography uncovers in this material physiognomic aspects of pictorial words which live in the smallest things.”^{xlii}

In the Victorian times it was socially accepted to have post mortem photographs, it was seen as an absolute and a visual remembrance of what was. Although the new medium of the camera “gives solid evidence.....people existed”^{xliii} and gives “a new way of seeing”^{xliv} the photograph becomes a symbol of eternity and marks the transition between the mimetic and the freezing function of time yet “[the] horrible truth of death, can be concealed in a photograph.”^{xlv} This statement from Barger book on the Post Mortem Portrait of Dr. Petrus, Vienna, 1854 (**Fig 5**) shows a dead Petrus who arrived at Albin Mutterer⁵ “body studio”^{xlvi} on a back of a horse drawn wagon in a seated position, with the eyes cunningly painted in once the glass plate had dried. This became Mutterer’s motto: “dead as alive, and this in appropriate similarity.”^{xlvii} According to David Lamb,⁶ “Treat [the] dead as alive seems at worst to waste time and resources,”^{xlviii} yet with Victorian values and culture it was seen as unethical not to photograph the dying or the dead. “Can a photograph lie?”^{xlix}

⁵ Albin Mutterer was considered a pioneer in Post Mortem photography and won “The Vienna International Exposition” of 1873 for his ‘funeral portraits’

⁶ David Lamb a Professor of Biomedical Ethics and a philosopher



(Figure Five)

In post mortem portraits, the photographers emphasise the face as the main feature, building up a story within the frame of the image, using daylight and/or “magnesium powder”¹ as a flash this produced little or no harshness to the face, giving a much more softer light and tones, filling in the gauntness and hollows of the face, to give a much more

Lighting of the face.... an important element of post mortem portrait since the hardness of the.... the features after death must be obviated by judicious lighting”¹ⁱ

This photograph (**Fig 6**) shows a lifeless head of a boy carefully wrapped in a blanket facing up to a matte picture of the celestial bodies, viewing this as a spiritual journey to heaven with emphasis on using tenderness, hopefulness and symphony. For the family, this photograph is more like “the last sleep,”^{lii} which isn’t eternal but a fairy tale less grim than death itself, a “memory souvenir”^{liii} for future generations. This would have heightened the sensitivity about the solemnity of the situation, thus the photographer (Albin Mutterer) becoming more of a “daguerreotype photo artist”^{liv} than a photographer.



(Figure Six)

This portrait (**Fig 7**) is so dissimilar to other post mortem portraits as the photographer is mindful of composition of the body and the use of props. The photographer is challenged as a

photo artist without deemphasising the face. The angle of the camera serves a dual purpose; it positions the subject's face away from the camera and is distinctly out of focus to reduce the detail of the fatal trauma, thus, portraying the subject as if floating and one dimensional.



(Figure Seven)

"To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them As They Never See Themselves, by having knowledge of them They Can never have; it turns people into objects, indeed can be symbolically possessed. Just as a camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder - a soft murder, Appropriate to a sad, frightened time"^{lv}

Yet, Sontag sees the photographer and the subject in two different perspective.

“All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt.”^{lvi}

We see post mortem photographs as a history of what was, yet in spirit photography we see the future of what is, a new beginning. We can view these post mortem photographs as the souvenirs at the start of the age of enlightenment when “seeing was knowing,”^{lvii} yet death was often a relief for many Victorians from the rigours of disease and sorrows of this world and a chance to be reunited with family members, and spirit photography filled this void completely.

The Case of William H. Mumler:

“Those whom we love no longer leave us in dying, as they did of old. They remain with us just as they appeared in life; they look down upon us from our walls; they lie upon our tables. Our own eyes lose the images pictured on them, but the unfading artificial retina [photograph], which has looked upon them, retains their impres.”^{lviii}

“There were over ten mediums in New York in 1851 and over two million American spiritualists by 1855.”^{lix} It was this extraordinary social movement that gave a driving force when allied with the “truth value of.... photography.”^{lx} It was at 258 Washington Street, Boston, Massachusetts where Spirit photography began with photographer William Howard Mumler. In his book ‘The Personal Experiences of William H. Mumler in Spirit Photography’ published in 1875, a detailed account of his experiences were available. In here, is a fascinating account of his beginnings as a medium/photographer and that of the subsequent fourteen years of praise and condemnation, success and failure, wealth and poverty. He had a career full of vicissitudes and in 1884 died in poverty.

“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.”^{lxi}

In “1861”^{lxii} William H. Mumler, “claimed to have captured a spirit.”^{lxiii} The photograph was a self-portrait and standing behind him appeared a ghostlike female figure, “the background of the picture was clearly visible through the ‘extra’, which faded away completely below the waist.”^{lxiv} **(Fig 8)** Mumler gave the photograph to his spiritualist friend “as a joke”^{lxv} who then published the picture, with a signed decoration on the rear:

“This photograph was taken of myself, by myself, on Sunday, when there was not a living soul in the room beside myself, so to speak. The form on the right I recognise as my cousin who passed away about twelve years since.”^{lxvi}

The same photograph was shown to Mumler friend who announced:

“the photographic plate had probably been exposed before and used unclean”^{lxvii}

Mumler accepted this “because he lacked experience in photography”^{lxviii} yet an unknown scientist who was “thoroughly acquainted with photography.... [declared] this is to be impossible because of the Latent – image theory”^{lxix} Mumler saw this as a sign and professed

“the belief that the power by which these forms are produced is beyond human control”^{lxx}



(Figure Eight)

Considerable excitement was generated through “certain circles.... by the alleged production of photographic portraits of disembodied spirits”^{lxxi} and Mumler was inundated with requests from sitters who desired to be photographed with departed loved ones. He was soon running a lucrative business, describing himself to be a “a medium for taking spirit photographs.”^{lxxii}

“desire to believe, the desire for evidence of immortality and contact with the dead.”^{lxxiii}

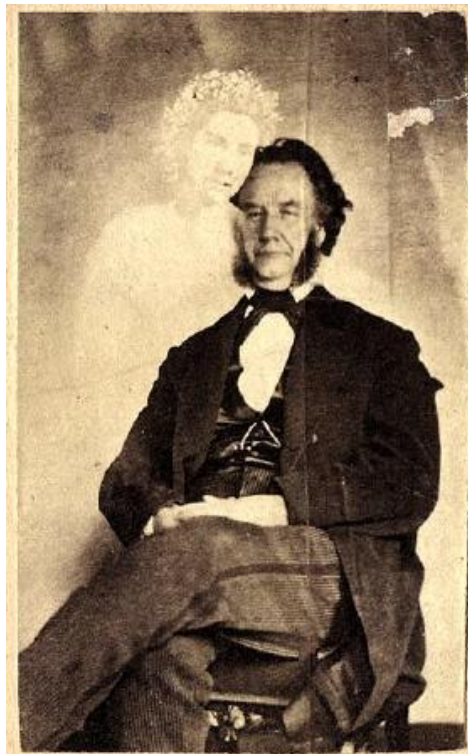
Belief is rendered here as a matter of desire, an attempt to remedy a lack, and one that remains tethered to the past in which the lack was generated, “[women] imagined what their futures would be like after a loved one’s death.”^{lxxiv} Spirit photography was used for “sentimental mourning”^{lxxv} and used alongside “carte de visite memorial portraits” in the new trend of death

and mourning, which became part of the widespread of bereavement. Considering travel in the Victorian times was mainly for the wealthy and the majority of the poor population were not literate, these spirit photographs were also “commissioned”^{lxxvi} for distant relatives who could not afford or quickly attend the burial, thus spirit photographs became a “visual literacy.”^{lxxvii}

As Mumler’s photographic technique developed, the image of the ‘spirits’ became more distinguished, and many people who came to be photographed acknowledged them as “likenesses of friends”^{lxxviii} and relatives who were dead.

Yet a photographer in 1861 wrote:

“.... the conditions of photographic portraiture.... is so frequently a successful and satisfactory likeness, than that it occasionally fails.”^{lxxix} (Fig 9)



(Figure Nine)

“The picture gives assurances of loved ones watching over us at all times, and the influence of such thoughts is to reconcile us to the trials of life.”^{lxxx}

Mumler’s reputation suffered a setback in 1863 when it was proved that one of the ‘extras’ was not only the likeness of a living man, but of one who had been photographed by Mumler only a few weeks previously. No more was heard of Mumler until 1869 when he began to practise in New York. After a few months he was arrested on a charge of fraud. Luckily for him the evidence of his frauds in Boston were ruled inadmissible in court and he was therefore acquitted for lack of evidence. The publicity presumably brought his career as a spirit photographer to an end, for nothing further seems to have been heard of him.

In 1869, the trial of William H. Mumler aroused a storm of controversy especially in the photographic press. Very convincing explanations for the extraneous images were offered, except one; that Mumler might have been genuine. The reputation of Mumler was viciously attacked. He was called a charlatan; a humbug who was “swindling the sorrowing and gullible widows in seemly morning garb with his cheap trickery.”^{lxxxi}

The most astonishing feature of the trial, however, was the fact that despite his confession and the overwhelming evidence against him, many witnesses continued to insist that they could not have been deceived and that Mumler’s work must have been genuine. They persisted even when Mumler said that one figure produced in court had been variously recognised:

“as the sister of one sitter, the mother of another, and the friend of yet a third; and when he declared that another figure, recognised by one sitter as a deceased friend, had also been identified by another as his still very much-alive father-in-law.”^{lxxxii}

The publicity presumably brought his career as a spirit photographer to an end in New York, for nothing further seems to have been heard of him, until one day Mumler had an unexpected visitor in 1871 who introduced herself as “Mrs. "Tundall" and took her photograph. A ghostly image of Abraham Lincoln appeared standing behind her, his hands on her shoulders. Mumler was later informed that his client was none other than Mary Todd Lincoln, the widow of president. When Mrs Lincoln saw the photograph she was not “disappointed”^{lxxxiii} because she could make out the transparent image of her dead husband which seemed “heavenly”^{lxxxiv} to her and while sitting for the portrait “[she] felt his hands on her shoulder,”^{lxxxv} giving her proof of his existence. This photograph (**Fig 10**) “only offered her [Mrs Lincoln] a fleeting solace”^{lxxxvi} yet it renewed her “faith”^{lxxxvii}



(Figure Ten)

Acceptance played an important part in Victorian mourning and spirit photography gave “adequate evidence [and] acceptance”^{lxxxviii} “with reflection of one’s belief.”^{lxxxix} To many, photographs became “personal memorials”^{xc} and touched them on many different levels. Spirit photography brought in a new thinking of mourning. One sitter who was photographed with her dead husband describes in her memoir, “I can sit hours [with my husband] just looking at the photograph.”^{xc}

From Sigmund Freud’s essay on the case, the reality of death was horrible, terrifying, grim and gruesome that takes people out of their comfort zone. With spirit photographs developed and looked upon in an aestheticised manner, Mumler’s romanticised ghostly developments- by “disseminating this beautiful truth of spirit communion”^{xcii} – was viewed as a cosmetic means of giving solace and “reuniting families”^{xciii} that have been ripped apart.



(Figure Eleven)

After the trial Mumler, came to London to demonstrate his powers in 1874. In France, Mumler photographed Nicolas Camille Flammarion⁷ (the sitter) along with a gentleman oozing ectoplasm⁸ (**Fig 11**). What was so striking regarding this photograph was how Mumler captured the overall essence of the scene, the graphic and abomination of grotesqueness, the tortured soul, the smothering of life. With the stark black of the sitters' clothing and the background, the lighting was set up to show the ectoplasm emerging from the face. Flammarion was pinned back in his seat while keeping composure, this was more like a still from a gothic horror movie or a scene straight out of Edgar Allan Poe's Dark Romanticism of the time, in which the Dark Romantics understood intuition and emotion over science.

“The true genius shudders at incompleteness - and usually prefers silence to saying something which is not everything it should be.” - Edger Allan Poe.^{xciv}

“Daguerrotyped plate is infinitely... more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands”^{xcv} Edgar Allan Poe

V. Processes and Methods used in Spirit Photography

Any supposed spirit photograph can be fairly judged by a photographic expert, and yet many photographers and psychic investigators, wrote many books on the subject of the trickery used in spirit photography.

⁷ Nicolas Camille Flammarion was a Astronomer, psychic investigator and author

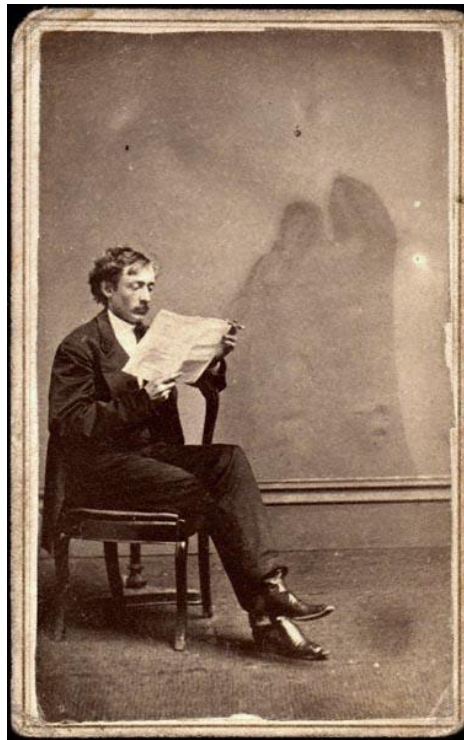
⁸ Ectoplasm is a liquid substance excreted from the body of the psychic medium which gradually forms part of a living entity

“[It is] absolutely essential that the original negative should be available to him, together with the fullest possible details of the conditions under which the photograph was taken, including light conditions, make and type of camera and film or plate, lens aperture and length of exposure. It is also desirable to know something of how the sensitive material was processed, i.e. time of development and temperature of developer, type of developer used and details of actual processing methods - particularly the type of developing tank and the degree of agitation given to the developer.”^{xvii}

Common causes of peculiar markings often mistaken for ‘extras’ include fogging caused by leakage of light during exposure or processing; uneven development due to faulty methods of agitation or badly designed developing tanks; contamination of the developer by other chemicals, particularly those used for fixing; inadequate fixing, washing or drying of the developed film or plate; and, of course, most commonly, double exposure.

In many spirit photographs, the sitters are looking forward engaging with the camera and it’s operator but not positioned in the centre of the shot thus leaving a dead space. Why not the use a table or a pot of plant to fill the dead space? A conclusion was therefore drawn of spirit photographs having being observed as fake; maybe the sitters were in acting with a small reward to pose for the photographer, or even the use point “post-visualisation techniques.”^{xviii} This theory is integral to the creation of combination prints and is a counterpoint to pre-visualization, developed by Ansel Adams,

“who believed that the photographer should be able to visualize fully the finished image at the time the shutter is squeezed.”^{xix}



(Figure Twelve)

In (Fig 12) the viewer's perception represents two ghostly shadows next to each other, one of a woman and the other of a cloaked and hooded figure on a wall behind the gentleman sitter who is amusing himself with a newspaper and not caring less to the spirit extra or the photographer.

“The ghostly figure could be pre-painted onto the wall using a fluorescent substance such as Quinine Bisulphate, the sitter would not even know, but would smell a suspect substance and because of the sensitivity of the emulsions, the painted area would be developed as black.”^{xcix}

By far the majority of spirit photographs, particularly the earliest examples, were produced by “double exposure;”^c the ‘spirits’ being photographed before the proper sitting. Underexposure enabled the spirit to be given a suitably transparent or ethereal appearance. Marks produced by the rebates of two different dark slides were clearly visible in the negatives of many spirit photographs. Frequently, of course, “a sitter insisted on providing his own plates, and in this case previously prepared ones would be substituted for them.”^{ci}

Methods other than the substitution of plates were also commonly employed. One of the simplest, yet most effective, was for a suitably made-up accomplice to show himself through an opening in the studio background while the exposure was being made. The sitter, holding a pose with his head in a clamp and his face towards the camera, would be quite unaware of the ‘extra’. Suitable choice of lens aperture would put the spirit face “sufficiently out of focus to make it appear slightly blurred in the resultant photograph.”^{cii}

Conclusion

“Look at such a picture long enough and you realise how much the opposites come together yet again: the most exact technique can give its products a magical value which a painted picture can no longer have for us. However skilful the photographer, however carefully he poses his model, the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now.”^{ciii}

Not every spirit photographer who has been thoroughly and competently investigated has been found to be proved fraudulent, however it appears more fakes entered into spirit photography for self gain, rather than the science to prove life and death. Every spirit photograph submitted to expert examination could, in the absence of fraud proof conditions, have been produced, either deliberately or accidentally, by normal photographic processes. Therefore, while it cannot be proved that spirit photography is impossible, there appears to be little real evidence to warrant rational belief in such a phenomenon.

But did the Victorians care if these photographs were fake? Yes and no, because for many, a spirit photograph was for remembrance and helped with mourning especially with the (American) civil war of the time, many mourners had “no [physical] body to mourn for.”^{civ}

When a family member died at war and appeared in a spirit photograph - be it real or fake, the photograph transcends the “spectator [to properly] grieve for the loved one”^{cv} and “images faked to fill the voids in the family circle”^{cv} was an “attempt at realism.”^{cvii}

“The Daguerrean image achieves an unprecedented identity of aspect with the real thing represented”^{cviii} Edgar Allan Poe

The reliability of the judgment of many who have claimed to recognise spirit extras is also open to considerable doubt. In the case of those who sit in the hope of obtaining evidence of survival the ‘will to believe’ is a dominant factor. Aristotle had a theory that humans want to see likeness because it gives “pleasure and aid in reconciling our securities and insecurities”^{cix} yet according to Lacan⁹ “gaze effect”^{cx} this gives the viewer of the photograph an awareness of seeing and our own gaze or imagination assist us with linking persons through “self regulation.”^{cx}

“[Photographic] results which would be amazing were it not that familiarity blunts the mind the miracles”^{cxii} Arthur Conan Doyle

The will to believe is greater than the will of truth. All sitters wanted to believe in the spirits watching over them, they also wanted to be part of a mystery and the magical experience of a

⁹ Jacques Lacan (13 April 1901 – 9 September 1981) a French psychoanalysis who challenged many of Freuds ideas of the unconscious, he looked at symbolisms in the forms of expressions and emotions. The real of the photographic print and how this controls our emotions and how we cannot distinguish between fiction and reality so we interpret the real as reality.

new apparatus called the camera, “mirror with a memory”^{cxiii} to be the talk of the town amongst their respected peers. Spirits have no innate form, they are moulded and vivified by human needs and emotions such as primal fear and loathing, fetish and neurosis, cruelty, uncertainty and anticipation the idealism that we all look the same in the spirit world, remembering the dead person how they were not how they should be (decomposing matter.) Some spirit photographers tapped in to the belief systems. Recognition is part of the subjective consciousness, the eyes scan the photographs and the brain see’s what it wants to see quoting the popular saying ‘The wish is father to the thought.’

Another relevant point arises here. The increase in popularity of amateur photography has been phenomenal, and many thousands of cameras are now in constant use throughout the world. It is surely reasonable to assume that if there are persons who possess psychic power to produce genuine spirit photographs, at least a few of this multitude of snappers would be so gifted and that extras would begin spontaneously to appear in their pictures. In the 1960’s well-authenticated cases of capturing spirit entities using Kodak box camera came to the for front of spirit photography, this became known as the “Chelmsford photographs.”^{cxiv}

When considering the methods employed by fraudulent spirit photographers it is important to remember that although their apparatus were simple and even crude by present-day standards, photographic processes were much more of a mystery to the layman than they are nowadays. Throughout the period concerned, practically all professional photography involved the use of glass plates as a base for the light-sensitive emulsion.

Little has been heard of spirit photography in recent years; certainly no practitioners have achieved prominence since the 1960s. Sensational claims occasionally appear in the spiritualist press, sometimes with reproductions of allegedly paranormal pictures, but no reports of serious investigation of these claims have been forthcoming. It may be, of course, that the virtual

disappearance of spirit photographers is part of the general decline in physical mediumship so often lamented by the spiritualists themselves, but a far more mundane explanation seems probable, namely, the development of modern photographic materials, and techniques.

Every spirit photographer who has been thoroughly and competently investigated has been proved fraudulent. No reliable record appears to exist of a definitely recognized spirit extra being obtained on any photograph under completely fraudproof conditions. Every spirit photograph submitted to expert examination could, in the absence of fraudproof conditions, have been produced, either deliberately or accidentally, by normal photographic processes. Therefore, while it cannot be proved that spirit photography is impossible, there appears to be no real evidence to warrant rational belief in such a phenomenon.

Even though spirit photography has questionable motives, it still aided sitters to mourn for their loved ones with “tears of joy”^{cxv} and the feeling of “happiness after death”^{cxvi} for mourning was a painful experience even if doubters “seek to expose spirit photographs as the wishful thinking of the bereaved”^{cxvii} and concluded: “The weak people who resort to these places [spirit photographers’ studios] are deluded.”^{cxviii} Though one sees and uses photographs as a way of mourning others see it as a “more exotic type of memento mori.”^{cxix} Even with post mortem photographs, it satisfied the desire of the bereaved to find a solace in the traits of the dead loved one, yet with the paranoid Victorians and their mourning practices it’s unconceivable that “paranoia places its faith in [photographic] exposure,”^{cxx} and two expressions of faith were also unified, photography which “depict realities”^{xxxi} that were unseen and imperceptible, the other in the “indifferent eye”^{xxxii} and impeccable ability for showing the “truth of the camera Obscura.”^{xxxiii}

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Figure Two - <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/504755070711142839>



Figure Three - <https://mysendoff.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Queen-Victoria.jpg>



Figure Four - <http://www.viralinova.com/super-morbid-victorian-era-traditions/>



Figure Five -

<http://www.zeno.org/Fotografien/B/Mutterer,+Albin%3A+Portr%C3%A4t+des+verstorbenen+Dr.+Petrus>



Figure Six - Barger, Ann Bunge Jacqueline, 2015 'Beyond the dark veil' Last Gasp (pp. 89)



Figure Seven - <https://www.pinterest.com/amberflame123/postmortem/>



Figure Eight - http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoax/photo_database/image/mumlers_spirit_photos



Figure Nine - <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/image/2008/11/17/moses-dow-editor-waverley-magazine-spirit-mabel-warren.html>

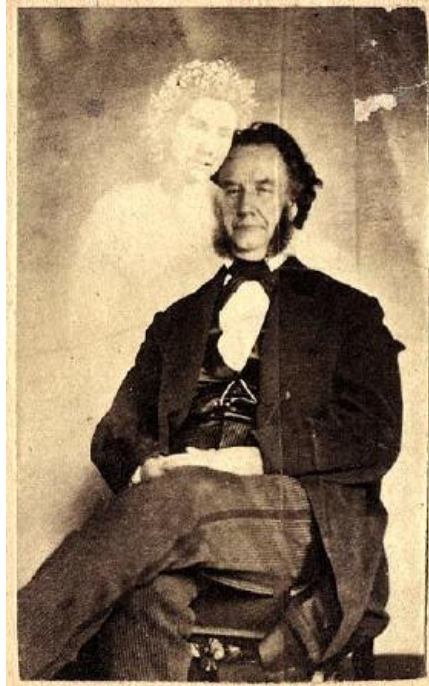


Figure Ten – <http://www.crimesofwomanhood.com/gallery.html>



Figure Eleven - <http://www.bl.uk/learning/cresearch/magical/dianeblog/dianemagic.html>



Figure Twelve – <http://www.bl.uk/learning/cresearch/magical/dianeblog/dianemagic.html>

