Otherworldly Figures:

Rhetoric, Representation and the Public Performance of Femininity

in Nineteenth-Century Spirit Mediums' Autobiographies

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation theorizes nineteenth-century public performance of spiritual media as being inherent to the production of autobiography itself. Too often, dominant social discourses are cast as being singular cultural phenomena, but analyzing the rhetorical strategies of women attempting to access public spheres reveals fractures in what would otherwise appear to be a monolithic patriarchal discourse. These women's resistant performances reap the benefits of a fractured discourse to reveal a multiplicity of alternative discourses that can be accessed and leveraged to gain social power. By examining the phenomena of four nineteenth-century Spiritualists' mediumship from a rhetorical perspective, this study considers how female spirit mediums used their autobiographies to operate as discursive spaces mediating between private and public spheres; how female mediums constructed themselves in the public sphere as women and as spiritual authorities; how they negotiated entry into volatile and unpredictable publics; how they conceived of the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere; and how they coped with complications inherent to Victorian era constructions of feminine corporeality. In conclusion, this dissertation offers a highly situated performative theory of subaltern publicity.

DEDICATION

With love to my parents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project theorizes nineteenth-century public performance of spiritual media as being inherent to the production of autobiography itself. Spiritualist historiography typically addresses debates as to whether or not Spiritualism[1] could have been considered "mainstream," the relationship between science and religious ideologies, and--most relevant to this project--Spiritualism's appeal to women. While scholars of Spiritualism such as Alex Owen have referenced numerous third person accounts detailing the experiences of nineteenth-century spirit mediums, few (if any) have attended directly to first person accounts that reveal the complexities of mediums' self-representation. How did female mediums construct themselves in the public sphere as women and as spiritual authorities? How did these women conceive of themselves as leaders? How did they negotiate entry into often volatile and unpredictable publics? How did they conceive of the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere and

[1] Spiritualism "simply embodied the belief that a sincere seeker could contact those who had passed over to the 'other side' for comfort or insight" (Tromp *Altered States* 1)

cope with complications inherent to Victorian-era constructions of feminine corporeality?

This dissertation examines the phenomena of four nineteenth-century Spiritualists' mediumship from a rhetorical perspective, considering how female spirit mediums used their autobiographies to operate as discursive spaces mediating between private and public spheres. Current scholarship reveals a longstanding historical precedent for women deploying spiritual discourses in order to gain access to the public sphere (Lehman; Cox 18; Taves; Braude; Griffith). An example of this is trance speaking--a means by which women would deliver public lectures on various topics--apparently under the "control" of a male spirit. Once a woman was believed to have "absented" herself from a public forum, her words became acceptable. After first performing an absence of self, women were then compelled to perform the presence of a spirit controlled "other." As such, I cast performance as central to Spiritualist rhetoric in the public sphere. Public demonstrations of spiritual phenomena link performers and audience members rhetorically and symbolically through speech and physical action, while the autobiography forms similar links via the affective performance of the written word. However, beyond focusing simply on autobiography, I hope to contribute to existing scholarship on the intersection between femininity and the construction of subjectivity. According to scholars such as Rita Felski,

Alison Piepmeier, and Laura Laffrado, we mistakenly assume that Victorian women were mostly alike in terms of their responses to social prohibitions. For this reason, I answer Felski's call for further analysis of modes of women's autobiographical self-representation. With an emphasis on reading for difference, I have chosen to analyze the autobiographies of four nineteenth-century female spirit mediums, Leah Fox Underhill, Amanda Theodosia Jones, Nettie Colburn Maynard, and Lulu Hurst, along with relevant historical scholarship and accounts from nineteenth-century news sources. More specifically, I will examine rhetorical strategies that these women deployed in service of their own self-construction to illuminate how these strategies challenged the public/private binaries of their time.

In their own works on nineteenth-century femininity, Felski and Piepmeier speak to issues of women's representation and circulation in the public sphere. Each examines the rhetorical significance of how women were recognized by others and how they recognized themselves within particular historical moments. In the *Gender of Modernity*, Felski emphasizes considering "women's…own understandings of their positioning within historical and social processes" (127-33). This recognition is important, she says, because scholars of modernism tend to eclipse historical nuance "by subsuming the history of gender relations within an overarching meta-theory of modernity articulated from the

vantage point of the present"(129-30). Moreover, "representations of the modern have repeatedly positioned women in a zone of ahistorical otherness and have thereby sought to minimize their agency, contemporaneity and humanity" (2975). Similarly, Piepmeier's *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*, expresses a frustration with how feminist scholars have handled issues of gender, asserting that "current notions of agency are implicated in and perpetuate nineteenth-century models, affecting our assessments of literary value"(7). Like Felski, Piepmeier finds this problematic because "nineteenth-century women's engagement with the public world can become invisible to scholars when that engagement is embedded in the context of a society that values women's situatedness in the home and of a scholarship that views women as victims" (7). With this in mind, Piepmeier examines the writing of several influential nineteenth-century women with a view toward quashing the "victim/agent fallacy." In Piepmeier's view, it is not productive to determine whether or not these women can be defined as victims or agents--the point is to consider how agency or "acts of agency and resistance…emerge within a social, cultural, and perhaps a personal context of disempowerment" (9). As such, Piepmeier demonstrates how women's autobiographical writing constructs "their bodies strategically within and against competing discourses" (210). Further, like Piepmeier and Felski's works, Tromp's

Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism, is "an attempt to explore the narratives that Victorians told--both fictional and non-fictional--about themselves, ghosts and their culture"(17). With a view toward understanding the processes of cultural transformation, Tromp emphasizes the importance of exploring Victorian era Spiritualists' "self-conscious reconstruction of the self" (6). I extend this idea by unveiling vexed discourses of feminine corporeality found within the autobiographies of Leah Fox Underhill, Amanda Theodosia Jones, Nettie Colburn Maynard, and Lulu Hurst and challenging the "victim/agent fallacy" commonly projected on the Victorian-era woman.

Historical Context

Although scholars such as Isaacs, Burton and Grandy, and Owen claim that throughout the nineteenth-century, female mediums vastly outnumbered men, male mediums are a more visible component of the historical record because, as Owen says, "the best-known female mediums often tended not to write explanatory or self-serving tracts and memoirs and were less inclined to take up the position of ideologue or publicist" (xii). Therefore, very few works by female mediums could be considered autobiographical.[2] However, between 1885 and 1910, four

[2] Of the majority, some wrote general histories of Spiritualism and others wrote lectures

American-born women published works that were marketed as Spiritualist autobiographies. Of these four, three identified as lifelong psychic practitioners: Leah Underhill (formerly Leah Fox) was the elder sister of Kate and Maggie Fox--the two teenagers who allegedly launched the Spiritualist movement in 1848; Amanda Theodosia Jones discovered a method of canning and preserving food and came to be known primarily as an inventor; and Nettie Colburn Maynard claimed to have been one of Lincoln's spiritual advisors during the Civil War. The fourth autobiographer, Lulu Hurst, publicly repudiated Spiritualism, yet her work was appropriated by the broader Spiritualist community who believed her vaudeville act--a show of uncanny physical strength--to be divinely inspired. Of the four mediums I discuss, Underhill, born in the 1820s in upstate New York, writes the most comprehensive autobiography, spanning a period between 1848 (when Spiritualism allegedly began to be practiced) and the1890s. Jones, born in 1835 (also in upstate New York) would have been a contemporary of Underhill's, but never practiced Spiritualism before large and diverse audiences. Maynard, born in New England in 1841, did not start practicing mediumship publicly until the 1870s--by which time Spiritualism had come to be more widely accepted as first wave feminism had set a precedent for women speaking in public.

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on Spiritual subjects.

By the 1870s, a social precedent for Spiritualism had also been set, seeming to reach its zenith in the 1880s. Hurst, who practiced during the mid 1880s, had been born in 1869 in postbellum Georgia, when resentment against the Union was still running high. This may have prejudiced her against Spiritualism which was largely associated with the liberal north. Retrospectively then, although there are some significant age gaps between the mediums discussed here, their autobiographies span the second half of the nineteenth-century providing a comprehensive overview of what has come to be known as "Modern American Spiritualism" (Britten; Underhill). The next chapter will more thoroughly discuss both the history of Spiritualism and the specific timeframes in which these women practiced and published.

Approach

As Owen says, to approach scholarship on Spiritualism while preoccupied as to whether or not spirit forms "really" appeared is to foreclose all possibility of discussion. According to Owen's *Darkened Room*, the purpose of studying Spiritualism is to explore it as "a social movement with a specific world view, one which found expression in a unique series of symbolic practices" (Introduction). Because of my interest in exploring Spiritualism as multiple discourses comprised of compelling symbolic practices, I take Spiritualist claims of otherworldly phenomena at

face value. If, for instance, a medium's autobiography mentions conversing with or seeing a particular spirit, I do not try to determine whether or not she is delusional; instead, I treat seriously what she believes to be true. At times, the language I use—particularly terms such as "performance" or "strategy"—may suggest some degree of skepticism, while the way I describe the psychic phenomena detailed by mediums and their advocates may suggest an uncritical acceptance of it. I do not wish to endorse either of these perspectives, but I am aware that striking an appropriately objective tone is a salient challenge for scholars of Spiritualism--especially when attempting to examine what Spiritualism meant to people who believed wholly in the existence of otherworldly entities. When using secondary sources, I attempt to convey the stance of its author--keeping in mind that often these stances are deliberately nebulous. While scholars such as Ruth Brandon approach all claims to Spiritualist proceedings as an elaborate hoax, emphasizing what they believe to be fraudulent activity, I choose to take Owen's approach, wherein all claims to Spiritualist experience are *not* determined by the scholar to be "real" or "not real," rather, taken at face value and discussed as social and cultural phenomena.

Contributions

To the best of my knowledge, no research has yet been done on the rhetorical strategies of nineteenth-century female Spiritualist autobiographers. How did Underhill, Jones, Maynard, and Hurst's autobiographies operate as sites of rhetorical invention in recognizing, justifying, and addressing (or conspicuously avoiding) the consequences of entering an unwelcoming public sphere? As Marina Warner states in her book *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media in the Twenty-first Century*, while there is plenty of historic material on mediums written by the scientists who studied them, correspondence in the archives does not "illuminate the *interior* life and thinking of the mediums, themselves…from their point of view" (303). This project contributes to current scholarship on nineteenth-century feminism and spirituality by examining what Warner terms the "interior life and thinking" of female mediums, considering how they anticipated and responded to a variety of complex assumptions about their work and what they report about that work. Through a rhetorical analysis of various ways in which spirit mediums represented themselves in their autobiographies, this project maps tensions between gendered performance and rhetorical invention in the nineteenth-century public sphere. Further, I respond to Felski's call to attend to how women understood and constructed themselves within a particular historical moment as well as Piepmeier's call for altering our contemporary concepts of agency and victimhood. Like that of Felski and

Piepmeier, Laffrado's work on female autobiography is concerned with examining specific historic and cultural moments, but she also highlights how "women diverged from conventional gender scripts and also wrote of their divergences, implicitly offering subversive alternative female models" (6). These varying perspectives on how to read for difference and context have indicated possibilities for increasingly nuanced studies of nineteenth-century women's autobiography. However, I hasten to emphasize that although this study may explore scholarship on autobiography, my contribution is not aimed specifically toward this goal; rather, I theorize rhetorical performance as being inherent to the production of these particular autobiographies.

Methodology

I have taken a "grounded theory" approach to this rhetorical analysis. In *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Barney Glaser and Anselme Strauss describe a grounded theory approach as being "derived from data and then illustrated by characteristic examples of data" (5). The advantage of a grounded theory approach, as Glaser and Strauss say, is that "it can help to forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity" (4). As such, qualitative research conducted via a grounded theory approach is notable for its "sensitivity in picking up everyday facts about

social structures and social systems" (15). Here, it is worth mentioning that a grounded theory approach led me to the realization that this study does not and cannot conceive of Spiritualism as a unified discourse; that is, as a definitive social movement or religion. Rather, I see Spiritualism as being a cluster of alternative discourses that were accessed and leveraged for specific social and political purposes. For this reason, although the themes of embodiment, performance, and invention are present in each autobiography I examine, some are more applicable than others to specific mediums. I therefore found that I needed to use multiple theoretical lenses to stay faithful to the notion of Spiritualism as being a cluster of multiple discourses. For example, my chapter on Underhill's experiences as a Spiritualist presents a fuller discussion of corporeality than the other chapters do. The chapter on Jones discusses invention in greatest depth because invention is such a prevalent theme in Jones's work. Performance and postcolonial theory take precedence when I discuss Maynard's Native American spirit control "Pinkie," while my chapter on Hurst sees a return to embodiment and performance.

In order to find viable autobiographies for this project, I consulted William C. Hartmann's 1927 *Who's Who in Occultism, New Thought, Psychism, and Spiritualism* , and Henrietta Lovi's 1925 *Best Books on Spirit Phenomena 1847 – 1925*. I focused on autobiographies published between 1875 and the *fin de siècle*, because scholars have pinpointed the

1870s and 1880s as being the heyday of what is referred to as “Modern Spiritualism.” I chose the autobiographies of American-born women exclusively because I wanted to examine subjects whose experiences had been shaped by the Spiritualist climate of the United States, particularly during the Civil War and/or Reconstruction eras. This left me with the autobiographies of Underhill, Jones, Maynard and Hurst.

In this study, I do a close reading of all four autobiographies and pick passages from each text to analyze in greater detail. Since I am particularly interested in how female mediums negotiated entry into the public sphere, the passages I selected all have either one or both of the following elements in common:

1. Each reveals information about the medium’s awareness of social prohibitions with regard to gender and/or recognition of the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere.
2. Each demonstrates what I refer to as a “crisis of agency”—that is a tension between the medium’s active desire to self-construct while also remaining passive.

The passages I chose are representative of what I consider to be a nineteenth-century female medium’s effort to perform subjectivity. These passages, once read closely, can point to different strategies that women used to construct themselves and to claim agency. More specifically, within each passage, I examine word choice and imagery and

contemplate their implications for a certain medium's process of social negotiation. Further, in order to interpret these primary texts effectively, I draw on heuristics presented in James Gee's *How To Do Discourse Analysis*. In particular, I rely on Gee's "Figured Worlds" tool. That is, asking what "typical stories or figured worlds the words and phrases of the communication are assuming and inviting listeners to assume. What participants, activities, ways of interacting, forms of language, people, objects, environments, as well as values are in these figured worlds?" (4800-4809). Moreover, Gee's concept of "figured worlds" resonates with my project because "figured worlds" "mediate between the micro level of interaction and macro level of institutions" (4800-4809). I choose to interpret Gee's concept also as a mediation between the public and the private, which is a central preoccupation of this project in terms of how women perform gender.

To conduct my rhetorical analysis, I drew on Klaus Krippendorf's operational definition. That is, a rhetorical analysis should "involve the rearticulation (interpretation) of given texts into new (analytical, deconstructive, emancipatory, or critical) narratives that are accepted within particular scholarly communities" (17). Further, Krippendorf emphasizes the need for a rhetorical analyst to acknowledge "working within hermeneutic circles in which their own socially or culturally conditioned understandings constitutively participate" (17). As a twentieth-

first century reader, I must therefore be aware—wherever possible--of my own cultural biases and build my analysis departing from an assumption of bias. In short, my own “figured worlds” are likely to be radically different from those of my subjects. However, according to Gee, “People have many different, sometimes inconsistent, figured worlds in their heads, so we must figure out in given contexts which ones are operating at that time and place”(2755-66). To recapitulate, my research questions for this project are as follows:

1. How did female mediums construct themselves as women capable of leadership and spiritual authority in order to negotiate entry into the public sphere?

2. How did female mediums conceive of the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere and cope with complications inherent to Victorian-era constructions of feminine corporeality?

3. How did their autobiographies operate as sites of rhetorical invention in recognizing, justifying, and addressing the consequences of entering an unwelcoming public sphere?

Finally, this rhetorical analysis aims to examine Spiritualism from a predominantly feminist perspective, although (as specified earlier) other theories have been deployed as well. Further, while historical context is important to my study, my work is more rhetorically than historically driven. Although the historical context of the mediums I discuss shaped their

practices, which in turn reflected and affected the larger contexts that they inhabited, the heart of this dissertation is not about the processes of history, rather about how rhetorics operated within a particular period of time. I chose to work with women's autobiography because, as explained in the previous section, scholars call for a need to hear more about how women discuss their own experience in order to quash what Piepmeier calls the "victim/agent" fallacy. Instead of looking at sameness and assuming a monolithic nineteenth-century female experience, we need to look at difference. Since I cannot conceive of Spiritualism itself as a coherent movement, I believe that a discussion of it calls for privileging a different theory with which to understand each medium.

Limitations

I encountered considerable limitations with respect to the availability of primary sources. In many cases, nineteenth-century newspaper articles, book reviews, and journals were unavailable in digital format or for interlibrary loans. Fortunately, nineteenth-century editions of the *New York Times*, which ran a series of articles on Hurst in the summer of 1884, were readily available. I could not, however, access articles containing additional information on Hurst from Boston or Atlanta papers of the same period. Further, since Underhill's autobiography contains numerous reprints of articles published in local newspapers, such as the

New York Times and the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser,* when I could, I compared her reprints to the originals to see if she had made any changes. Unfortunately, however, very few of those newspaper articles were available to me. Of those few, I found no difference between the original and the reprints. Moreover, editions of the Spiritualist newspapers *Shekinah* and the *Banner of Light* published during the 1870s and 1880s indicate which mediums were (and weren't) in public circulation during that time, but they do not mention any of the mediums I discuss here. Instead they expound upon general Spiritualist principles and sometimes mention lectures in various venues. The lectures seem to be given primarily by trance-speakers who quickly faded into obscurity.[3] As David Nartonis suggests in his article, "The Rise of Nineteenth Century American Spiritualism: 1854-1873," this may have been because many mediums of the nineteenth century had private benefactors and/or practiced in exclusive circles repeatedly drawing the same audience/participants.

As men entered mediumship, they began to fill the historical record and many female mediums seemed to be disregarded despite the fact that they outnumbered their male counterparts. African American Spiritualists were similarly omitted from the historical record, and it appears that most

[3] Many of these speakers are referenced, but some are simply described in terms of what they do, rather than named.

information on African American Spiritualism is restricted to male practitioners. While there is certainly a need for more scholarship of this kind--especially work attending to female African American mediums--such research is beyond the scope of this study. However, Catherine Albanese's work *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* covers the spiritual and Spiritualist experiences of varying ethnicities in nineteenth-century America. Further, some noteworthy publications taking up the subject of nineteenth-century African American Spiritualism are those of I.M. Lewis as well as John Deveney's work on Paschal Beverly Randolph.

Women were inevitably marginalized in the field of science as well. Their contributions were often attributed to men, so it is not surprising that news sources on Jones have also been difficult to find. For this reason, I focus heavily on the social context surrounding Jones's career as an inventor giving particular attention to social attitudes toward women inventors as evidenced by nineteenth-century World's Fair Exhibits that would have affected public perception toward science and technology. As such, I examine both primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Women's Buildings at the World's Fair Exhibitions of 1876 and 1893, specifically the May 1893 edition of *Cosmopolitan* which contains Ellen Henrotin's article on how women were represented by their exhibits. In terms of nineteenth-century science journals referencing women (to

provide context for Amanda Jones's work) very little is available. I examined the *Scientific American Vol. 22* (1870) and *Vol. 25* (1880) and supplements from 1884 and 1891 to consider how women were reflected in emerging scientific fields. I found that they were not mentioned at all in the earlier journals, but later, when women were mentioned, it was in the context of education rather than invention. By this, I mean that women were mentioned as being welcome to apply to various technological institutes advertised in these journals. To further contextualize the experience of the nineteenth-century female inventor, I consulted both M. E. Joslyn Gage's 1870 *Woman as Inventor*, and searched fruitlessly for the *Woman Inventor*, a science journal for women that existed for all of two months: May and June of 1891 (Pilato 109). The fact that it lasted for such a short period of time suggests that it didn't have a large enough audience to stay afloat.

Moreover, in order to understand the social conditions and ideologies within which Maynard worked during the Civil War, I consult the writings of Abraham Lincoln--particularly those penned between 1861 and 1864--to understand the social conditions and ideologies of the Civil War. Although the Civil War no doubt played a role in Spiritualist activity, much of the information available on the nature of this role is highly conjectural and often contradictory. For instance, historian Howard Kerr claims that Spiritualism gained popularity as a result of the Civil War because it

suggested that people could communicate with dead relatives, while Robert Cox suggests that after the Civil War people simply lost faith and that there was a corresponding slump in Spiritualist activity. *Chapter 2* offers a fuller report of these contradictions, considering its implications in terms of whether or not Spiritualism could be determined to be a mainstream or marginal movement. Beyond this, I offer only a limited speculation of the Civil War's impact on Spiritualism. However, I do consult Henry Ketchum's 1901 biography of Lincoln as he was remembered during the Civil War to see if either Maynard or Spiritualism are mentioned, which they are not. Significantly, Maynard is not mentioned in later biographies of Lincoln either--a fact which is taken up in *Chapter 5* of this study. Finally, to contextualize the autobiographies themselves, I examine when and where they were published, as well their appearance; including attention to length, cover design, acknowledgments, endorsements, inserted images, and appendices. Despite my efforts, I found no information on the circulation of these since the publishing houses were small independent presses that all seemed to have gone out of business by the 1920s.

These limitations did not end with primary sources. While there is substantial scholarship referencing Underhill, there is little on Maynard, Jones, and Hurst. A lack of scholarship on Maynard would seem to suggest that her claims of working at the White House were never taken

seriously and that Lincoln's alleged involvement with Spiritualism was due more to his wife's eccentricity than his own penchant for spirit communication. A lack of scholarship on Jones would suggest that perhaps feminist scholars felt that highlighting Jones's Spiritualist practice would detract from a public perception of her achievements as a scientist and as an advocate for women's rights. Ann Braude, for instance, points out the uneasy relationship between feminist historiography and religion while Molly McGarry echoes the discomfort of second wave feminists in exploring the relationship between Spiritualism and suffrage. To align women too closely with Spirituality meant running the risk of essentializing their experiences. Finally, a lack of scholarship on Hurst could be evidence of the lack of clarity as to her audience. Although her July 1884 appearances in New York were immensely popular, her stage career seemed to last for only a few years and neither she nor her parents liked to think of her as a performer--rather a demonstrator of unusual phenomena. For this reason, Hurst fell neither into the category of entertainer or practicing Spiritualist, but in some nebulous middle-ground.

Lastly, although I can speculate as to the intentions of each female autobiographer I examine, there is obviously much that will elude me given that my readings are informed by my own historical positioning. Therefore, the fact that these autobiographies were published so long ago

presents significant interpretive challenges to the twenty-first century reader.

Chapter Summaries

In this project, I examine the phenomena of Victorian-era mediumship from the perspective of rhetorical analysis by considering how female mediums' autobiographies operated as discursive spaces between private and public spheres and challenged social binaries. This study explores how marginalized people gain access to the public arena when encountering what at first appears to be a monolithic patriarchal discourse. Specifically, four women show us not only that patriarchal discourse is itself fractured and protean, but that marginalized people may take advantage of these fractures by drawing on a multiplicity of discourses in order to exert social leverage. This first chapter therefore introduces and contextualizes my research problem and presents the following questions to guide this study: How did female mediums construct themselves as spiritual authorities within the nineteenth-century public sphere? How did they conceive of themselves as leaders and negotiate entry into often volatile public spheres? How did they conceive of the vulnerability of the

female body in the public sphere and cope with complications inherent to Victorian-era constructions of feminine corporeality?

Chapter 2 includes a review of literature, outlining background on the autobiographies of the mediums themselves. More significantly, the review offers historical and social context for this project and maps out the scholarly conversations surrounding issues of gender politics, representation, invention, and embodiment in the public sphere. As such, the review covers marginal and mainstream Spiritualisms as well as antebellum and postbellum Spiritualisms, discourses of Spiritualism and science; theories of performance and autobiography with respect to rhetorical invention; female corporeality, and public/private boundaries.

Chapter 3 takes up the autobiography of Leah Fox Underhill, the eldest of the three Fox sisters who, in 1848, allegedly launched what is now known as “Modern Spiritualism.” Underhill’s autobiography reveals both a preoccupation with the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere and common debates as to how widely Spiritualist principles were accepted, with Underhill arguing emphatically that by the late nineteenth-century Spiritualism had most certainly become mainstream. As such, I consider Underhill’s views on femininity and mainstream discourse in terms of Warner’s theory of publics and counterpublics.

Chapter 4 discusses the autobiography of the scientist, poet, and medium Amanda Theodosia Jones, with a view toward exploring modes of

rhetorical and scientific invention. Jones's autobiography reveals a compelling tension between varying models of invention that complicate Victorian-era assumptions concerning agency, gender, and authorship. These issues, examined through the lenses of nineteenth-century romanticism (Battersby) and current scholarship on invention (LeFevre) are further complicated by Jones's attempt to reconcile an ideal nineteenth-century womanhood with the prohibitively masculine realms of science and technology.

Chapter 5 attends to Nettie Colburn Maynard, whose autobiography claims a close relationship with Lincoln when she purportedly acted as his spiritual advisor during the Civil War. Of particular salience in Maynard's autobiography is the fact that she operates only while in a trance state (which both Underhill and Jones believed to be unethical Spiritualist practice) and that one of her most popular spirit "controls" is a Native American child known as Pinkie. Here, I examine Maynard's work from the perspective of mimicry and post colonialism as she "performs" a colonial subject. The phenomena of channeling Native American spirits--which grew increasingly common in the decades following the Civil War--reveals issues of national identity, subordination and subjectivity.

Finally, *Chapter 6* takes up the autobiography of Lulu Hurst who denied any Spiritualist affiliation--despite the fact that her work was widely

endorsed by the Spiritualist community. Hurst's self-construction as a skeptic deals with scientific discourse of the later nineteenth-century and illuminates *fin de siecle* gender anxiety.

Chapter 7 revisits my research questions and outlines my findings. This chapter also considers how each medium's autobiography can be read as an argument relating to a specific aspect of Spiritualist practice and offers suggestions for further research.

In the following chapter, I address the shifting discourses of representation and circulation in Spiritualist communities. I also cultivate an awareness of the conversations that are typically taken up when considering femininity and Spiritualism and clarify how these conversations are relevant to my study. Further, in *Chapter 2*, I compare the social circumstances of the mediums I study and analyze how they may have been affected by dominant cultural conversations of the Victorian era.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The primary texts taken up in this study are Amanda Theodosia Jones's *Psychic Autobiography,* 1910; Leah Fox Underhill's *Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism*, 1885; Nettie Colburn Maynard's *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* 1897; and Lulu Hurst's *Autobiography of Lulu Hurst,* 1897. I selected these primary texts from William Hartmann's 1927 *Who's Who in Occultism, New Thought, Psychism and Spiritualism,* a comprehensive bibliography of Spiritualist literature, which reveals that although plenty of biographical material has been written about female mediums practicing in the nineteenth-century,[4] very little was written by the mediums themselves. When late nineteenth-century female mediums do write about themselves, however, they begin by engaging similar rhetorical tropes. For instance, each of the mediums in this study expresses reluctance at entering the public sphere to demonstrate her abilities, claiming that she does so only in the service of a higher cause. This particular trope is typical of nineteenth-century etiquette which decreed that women were to remain in the domestic or private sphere. A

[4] Two noteworthy examples are Leonora Piper and Cora L.V. Hatch (later known as Cora Richmond).

violation of such etiquette would therefore require an apology and explanation of why such a transgression was necessary. Each medium also expresses reluctance at accepting money for her services. In addition to apparently repudiating fame and remuneration, the female medium typically casts herself as being physically weak and prone to illness. Notably, of the four mediums I discuss, only Maynard and Jones mention serious childhood illness, while Hurst and Underhill claim to have always enjoyed good health. These claims--both to health and illness--bear particular relevance when examining the nature of Spiritualist practice itself, and will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Significantly, Hurst and Underhill were “physical” mediums, while Jones and Maynard were “mental” mediums. According to Alan Kardec, an affiliate of the early Society for Psychical Research, the fundamental difference between physical and mental mediumship is that physical mediumship means demonstrating spirit influences materially; for instance, physical mediums are purportedly able to move furniture and to summon noises (or “rappings”) from either tables, floors, or walls to spell out messages. It is believed that physical mediums are able to move objects either by requesting help from spirits or by summoning “electromagnetic force” into their own bodies. In contrast, while mental mediums may enter a trance state, they create no physical phenomena in their immediate environment. They may speak via a spirit “control” or may

simply relay messages from the afterworld to sitters. Underhill apparently helped people to communicate with spirits via “rappings” as a form of code--which she referred to as a “celestial telegraph”--through which messages could be spelled out. Hurst manifested a bizarre physical power that enabled her to challenge and overpower men twice her size. Jones and Maynard describe going into trance states and assuming other identities in order to relay messages. However, only Maynard falls unconscious when this occurs.

Spiritualist historiography indicates that the profile of the nineteenth-century female spirit medium follows some clear patterns. Typically, the mediums were from the Northeastern part of the United States--as were Jones, Maynard, and Underhill--and typically they were single women who needed to support themselves financially. They were politically liberal, and although none professed an explicit adherence to suffrage, all were in some way in favor of abolition and consorted with known civil rights activists. Two of the four women I discuss, Jones and Underhill were from upstate New York which, in the years following the Civil War, had become a bastion of Spiritualist belief. That particular region was also known as the “Burned Over District” because it was so frequently swept with the wildfires of religious fervor, and a number of controversial New Religious Movements began there (Albanese). It is for this reason, perhaps, that Spiritualism is usually portrayed by historians as

being an anti-structuralist and individualistic alternative religion. Spiritualism rejected orthodoxy in science, medicine, economics, and sex (Isaacs). It also encouraged social change and provided participants with an opportunity to reinvent and reimagine the future (Tromp; McGarry). More importantly, in most circles, Spiritualism was believed to provide evidence of an egalitarian afterlife which made its beliefs useful to feminists and abolitionists who called for the same equality in American life (Braude; McGarry). Ann Braude considers Spiritualism to be the first "women's religion," and Alex Owen discusses the paradox of limitation and freedom available to women within Spiritualist contexts. In particular, Spiritualism appealed to women because it championed natural laws and rejected original sin (Bednarowski). Moreover, as mediums, women could earn money and achieve celebrity and authority (Lehman). Since women were considered to be biologically predisposed toward mediumship because of their assumed passivity, Spiritualism provided them with an unprecedented opportunity to become spiritual leaders (Braude).

Conversely, however, Brett Carroll's *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* provides a revisionist version of Spiritualist historiography; claiming that Spiritualism was not as iconoclastic as it has commonly been portrayed. Its central tenets, Carroll says, simply reflected an extension of Enlightenment values. According to Carroll, Spiritualism was popular because it complemented rather than challenged familiar world views.

Carroll narrows the scope of his study by addressing ways in which Spiritualism responded to social issues pertaining to the Civil War. Antebellum America saw significant political tension between the Northern and Southern states, while postbellum America saw grieving families longing to communicate with the deceased (Carroll; Cox). Conveniently, Spiritualism presented the possibility of a unified afterworld and constant communication between the living and the dead. Ultimately, Spiritualism appealed to people because it offered comfort; it constituted a sympathetic response to the perception that America was growing increasingly fragmented.

The nineteenth-century was a time of industrialization and urbanization--a period during which people were separated from their families because of financial hardship and endured continual socioeconomic instability (Isaacs; Kerr). Increasing secularization, the theories of Darwin, the rise of social sciences, and rapid technological changes made the nineteenth-century an exciting, yet unsettling time, particularly with regard to religion. The changes in everyday life that accompanied the industrial revolution led to a sense of instability and anxiety among the American public which in turn led to a crisis of religious faith. Christianity no longer seemed to be addressing people's concerns, so they turned to Spiritualism for answers (Carroll; Isaacs; Kerr; Lamont). To those who considered themselves progressive and science-minded,

Christianity often seemed hopelessly outmoded, but others readily incorporated Christianity into Spiritualist beliefs and practices (Carroll; Cox). Because Spiritualism maintained that one could communicate with spirits of the dead, participating in a séance meant that metaphorically, sitters could appeal to the voices of a comforting and stable past to find answers to present dilemmas. As such, the Spiritualist movement was unique in that it purported to address existing tensions between science and religion in order to scientifically prove an afterlife. Since Spiritualism declared itself a "harmonial religion" people no longer needed to choose between religion and contradictory scientific discoveries. To believers, Spiritualism and science were considered to be ideologically enmeshed. As such, this review takes up historical scholarship on the relationships between Spiritualism, science, gender, identity and performance. The remainder of this chapter reviews relevant scholarly literature, which has been arranged into the following sections: I. Spiritualism and the Public Sphere. II. Antebellum and Postbellum Spiritualisms. III. Discourses of Spiritualism and Science. IV. Mediumship and Embodiment. V. Social Performance.

I. Spiritualism and the Public Sphere

Scholars are divided as to whether or not Spiritualism could be described as a mainstream movement. Robert Galbreath, editor of the

Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives, claims that because Spiritualism had no central authority, it is difficult to accurately trace its rise and fall in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although Spiritualism was considered marginal by historians such as Bednarowski (178), Isaacs (80) and Braude, because it was not officially recognized by established scientific or religious institutions, Galbreath speculates that it drew many thousands of followers in the nineteenth-century although its popularity waned at the *fin de siecle*. As such, Galbreath points out that the vast numbers Spiritualism drew meant that it could hardly be considered marginal. However, Laurence Moore's *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, takes an opposing perspective. Although Spiritualism was considered mainstream, he says, labeling a movement mainstream doesn't necessarily mean that it draws a social majority, rather that it attracts those in power. Historian Ernest Isaacs claims that Spiritualism was popular enough to be considered mainstream from 1855 onward, while Howard Kerr maintains that Spiritualism saw a slump in the 1850s and did not regain popularity until after the Civil War. Contradicting both Isaacs and Kerr, Robert Cox asserts that, although Spiritualism declined after the Civil War, it was likely at its peak in the 1850s (233). Endeavoring to articulate my own stance, I draw on Peter Lamont's attempt to ascertain Spiritualism's popularity by tracking the number of lectures in public venues via the nineteenth-century

Spiritualist publication *Banner of Light*. While Lamont is able to locate some patterns that are commensurate with Isaac's and Cox's views, he concludes that there is no real way of telling how many people were involved with Spiritualism when so many séances and lectures were held in private venues. However, Underhill provides a more specific departure point for this debate when, nearly forty years after her first public appearances, she notes a change in "public opinion" with regard to Spiritualism. By the 1870s, mediums were being welcomed by audiences in public venues instead of heckled. How did this change occur?

I grapple with these ambiguities by applying Gerard Hauser's concept of a reticulate public sphere to the Spiritualist autobiographies I have chosen. If, as Hauser posits, public opinion is to be understood by examining relationships between official and everyday discourses, how might Jones, Maynard, Underhill, and Hurst have conceived of the official and the everyday; the formal and the vernacular; and local versus general publics? As Hauser emphasizes, public opinion is not found in numbers alone, but in "vernacular rhetoric" which refers to democratic discourse reflecting multiple interests and identities. Further, although a vernacular discourse can be constituted as public opinion, it is not a singular discourse: since publics are plural, several vernacular discourses may operate simultaneously. Hauser describes his model of the public sphere as a "reticulate"--a web with intersectional nodes that signify where the

energy for competing discourses gathers (xi). As such, Hauser's model may be able to illuminate female mediums' comprehension of their positioning within a discourse that is simultaneously mainstream and marginal. More specifically, since Jones, Maynard, Underhill, and Hurst all appear to be addressing quite different audiences, they present diverse and dynamic opinions on how Spiritualism is viewed in the public sphere as well as representing localized models of vernacular rhetoric.

Further, in terms of public spheres theory, I propose that the Spiritualisms presented by all four mediums could be construed as "counterpublics," which--according to public spheres theorist Michael Warner—are described as being "in conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment" (63). Later, however, Warner redefines counterpublics to stipulate that a counterpublic can simply be marginal—or subordinate to a dominant public rather than directly opposing it. For Hurst, Spiritualism is a counterpublic because she believes that its central tenets are contrary to established scientific practice. To Hurst, whatever is officially sanctioned by an academic institution is legitimate knowledge, while anything else is not. To Jones, herself a scientist, Spiritualism is deeply scientific--it is, in fact an extension of established or institutionalized knowledge. In this sense, Jones's autobiography can be

better interpreted as providing a description of a "sheltering public" [5] rather than a public opposing mainstream beliefs. For Underhill, Spiritualism is a counterpublic in that it has long been a "truth" that an unwilling populace must be made to understand, while for Maynard, the secrecy surrounding Lincoln's apparent endorsement of Spiritualism casts it as counter to mainstream historical readings, albeit in a distinctly elitist sense.

As such, my study departs from the assumption that a mainstream patriarchal belief system cannot be defined as a monolithic force bearing down on everyone equally. A "patriarchy" is rather a fragmented and shifting set of discourses that are constantly being navigated and negotiated. Further, I emphasize that a male-dominated public sphere does not necessarily indicate a uniform expression of mainstream patriarchal values--rather it suggests the perception of the individual's relationship to a social collective or a set of institutional practices. This is not to say that there were not material boundaries and prohibitions for women negotiating the nineteenth-century public sphere, but simply that those boundaries were not fixed. For this reason, women's self-reflexive

[5] A sheltering public can be defined as a counterpublic "projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger sociability" (121). Further, a sheltering public is a place in which "it is hoped that the poesis of scene-making will be transformative, not replicative merely" (122).

experiences as described within various social contexts can be best understood when read for difference and personal ingenuity.

II. Antebellum and Postbellum Spiritualisms.

Spiritualism, for the most part, was localized in the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states. In the postbellum years it spread West, but was never particularly popular in the South--perhaps because of its appeal to abolitionists (Carroll; Cox). A number of Spiritualists were active abolitionists, partially because of Spiritualism's humanistic and egalitarian views and perhaps because of where it had taken root; the Northeast (particularly Massachusetts and upstate New York) was a hotbed of social and political reform. The mediums I examine who worked in the antebellum years (Maynard and Underhill) both had ties to the abolitionist movement. Although Jones professes a concern with social justice, the subject of slavery does not appear in her autobiography at all, perhaps because her Spiritualist career was mostly postbellum. Hurst, whose career was also postbellum, avoids mentioning politics altogether other than to reveal that several male family members had been Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.

Antebellum

As nineteenth-century America grew more secular, people felt as if they were left without national or spiritual unity, hence the attraction to Spiritualism. According to Carroll, an adherence to Spiritualism (itself decentralized and non-hierarchical) signaled an effort to create unity within a fragmented society; a desire for individual freedom and authority in religious affairs; and a preoccupation with defining and envisioning an ideal America as reflected by an orderly world. Carroll refers to this vision as “Spiritualist Republicanism” and emphasizes that for many, Spiritualism was a lifelong religion, not simply a temporary experimental movement as he believes that scholars such as Moore, Owen, and Smith-Rosenberg have suggested (12).

As mentioned earlier, while most scholars--notably Braude, McGarry, Owen, and Tromp--portray Spiritualism as an antistructuralist movement, Carroll interprets its practices as emphasizing harmony with the spirits and with fellow human beings. According to Carroll, since Spiritualism was rooted in Enlightenment values it did not conflict with dominant Western ideologies. Other scholars however, namely those mentioned above, tend to portray Spiritualism as a “counterpublic”(63). While Carroll maintains that Spiritualism was very much in keeping with Christian values, feminist scholars believe that Spiritualism involved challenging the patriarchal strictures of organized religion. Because of the

feminist focus of my own work, I tend to privilege arguments that support the idea of Spiritualism as a counterpublic, however, since the mediums I discuss in this study were all raised within the Christian tradition, I also aim to examine how they negotiated differing ideologies emblematic of Christianity and Spiritualism.

As such, when examining the political dimension of antebellum Spiritualism, Mary Ryan's *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, provides a valuable counterpart to Carroll's work. According to Ryan, the antebellum years meant vocal and often unruly gatherings outdoors in public places where people expressed their views. The consistent visibility of such a variety of interest groups--mostly divided according to ethnicity and social class--may have lent to the sense of social fragmentation that Carroll discusses. Further, in her article "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-century America," Ryan situates women in this antebellum sociopolitical climate. Since the heyday of American public expression--the 1830s--occurred in public spaces and was often raucous, it was difficult for women to be heard. Further, women were not expected to have opinions on politics and it certainly wasn't appropriate for them to share their thoughts before a male audience. Since women were not recognized as citizens, they had to find alternate ways to express political opinions. For instance, if a trance medium was "controlled" by the spirit of a man--

especially an educated one--his opinion (as expressed through her body) was given credence (McGarry; Tromp). According to Braude, men "addressed audiences in a 'normal' state expressing their on views on Spiritualist subjects. In contrast, the women at the podium were unconscious" (85). When women first appeared as public speakers they almost always did so while in a trance. Therefore, since it was apparently acceptable for a woman to speak publicly while controlled by a male spirit, the antebellum era saw a steady rise in trance mediumship. Finally, Christie Ann Farnham's work on women's education in the South during the antebellum years offers a sometimes surprising perspective on differences in how women from the North and South were socialized and educated. For example, while Northern women were more apt to be politically liberal and financially independent, Southern women were better educated in the sciences and classics--subjects often denied Northern women who were deterred from going on the job market. Apparently also, since Southern women weren't competing with men for employment, they experienced less stringent social prohibitions when it came to public speaking and performance.

Postbellum

According to Ryan, postbellum Americans were less vocal and far less engaged in public gatherings than they had been earlier in the

century. Because of this, identifying social reactions to salient political issues became increasingly difficult and the press began to interview citizens with a view toward establishing “public opinion.” This push for consensus perhaps made the country appear more unified than it really was, and dissenting voices were further marginalized. Since already marginalized groups were becoming even more so, the “informal democracy” of the antebellum years seemed to have become obsolete. Ryan uses these observations of antebellum and postbellum public engagement to explain that both the manufacture of consensus and the rise of capitalism had begun to eclipse the democratic process. Public good would eventually come to be determined by capitalism rather than by deliberation. Significantly also, Craig Calhoun, editor of *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, points out that Ryan’s work suggests “the bourgeois public was never the public. On the contrary, virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public sphere…arose a host of competing counter publics” (116). Given this vexed and often nebulous sociopolitical climate, the female medium attempted to assert herself by using the séance as a means of blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres.

Within the context of the séance, a woman could give public performances in private homes and openly express opinions on public matters she would otherwise have been encouraged to keep to herself. Nan Johnson’s *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910*

asserts that during this period, the idea of separate spheres was being firmly reinforced through women's domestic rhetoric manuals. Women were now advised all the more to stay out of the public eye. Mediumship had also begun to change. Public lectures delivered by trance mediums seem to have given way to séances held in private homes. Perhaps because of the widespread bereavement suffered during the Civil War, séances now tended to focus primarily on reuniting sitters with dead loved ones rather than simply communicating with unfamiliar spirits (Kerr; Moore).

III. Discourses of Spiritualism and Science

Nineteenth-century research emerging in human biology and the social sciences fostered a belief that women were inherently passive and weak-willed. Women were viewed as empty vessels; highly susceptible to suggestion and easily influenced by others. Both Cynthia Russett's *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* and Elaine Showalter's *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* claim that as women gained more political and social independence, men grew increasingly threatened, and their unease was reflected in flagrantly chauvinistic interpretations of biological phenomena. To cure social ills, white male scientists felt that it was imperative to reinstate hierarchy in the natural world particularly via discourses of biology and psychology.

Patriarchal institutions saw a need for the strengthening of gender binaries, thus, the notion of biological determinism came to the fore (Russett). Unsurprisingly, the nineteenth-century scientific establishment decreed that women were predisposed toward mental illness and were naturally less intellectual. Moreover, the view of women as empty vessels also revealed common nineteenth-century assumptions about the relationship between mind and body; namely that a mind-body split was considered to be an objective scientific truth. In her book, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century*, Marina Warner asserts that in twentieth century scholarship "mind-body dualism has been discounted (as in Gilbert Ryle's[6] famous scornful phrase 'the ghost in the machine')--for many reasons…but it is still difficult to turn one's back on…the principle of animation: the difference between life and death depends on an *animus* or *anima* imagined to lurk within an embodied personality" (9). Since women were constructed as being mostly "body"—that is, vessels or instruments--it was believed that they were natural communicators because they were able to internalize masculine minds and to surrender their own agency for the

[6] Gilbert Ryle is the author of the *Concept of Mind* (1949) which critiques the idea of mind/body dualism.

greater good. This view was starkly reflected in both psychoanalysis and telecommunications.

Psychoanalysis and Telecommunication

Spiritualism had fashioned itself as a scientific discourse because, since the industrial revolution, the scientific method and its assumption of empirical truth were considered unimpeachable. Although cultural assumptions at the time suggest that the linear and very public discourses of science would be antithetical to traditional domestic discourses of femininity, women were significantly involved in both psychoanalysis and telecommunications--albeit in subordinate roles (Bednarowski; Galvan; Gutierrez; Thurschwell). Specifically, women's alleged susceptibility to hysteria meant that they were most often the subjects of psychoanalysis. This alleged susceptibility also mean that women were typically hired to operate communication and mediation technologies such as telegraphy, telephone switchboards, and typewriters. Women filled these roles because it was believed that they could bring a sense of feminine comfort and domesticity to the otherwise unfamiliar and alarming world of machinery. Since women were believed to be inherently more sympathetic than men, they were expected to relay messages in a manner sensitive to the needs of both the sender and the receiver. Similarly, it was acts of sympathetic transmission in the Spiritualist séance room that made female

mediums so popular (Cox). Jill Galvan, author of the *Sympathetic Medium: Feminine Channeling, the Occult, and Communication Technologies,* provides evidence of how the practices of Spiritualism were mirrored by gendered communications technologies. For example, the practice of "spirit rapping" which meant spelling words by corresponding a number of spirit-inspired "raps" to letters of the alphabet, was frequently compared to the Morse code used in telegraphs, while typing was likened to Spiritualist practices of automatic writing. It was believed that the highly suggestible female was able to embody and transmit her bosses' thoughts while remaining invisible and unobtrusive herself.

With respect to the complex relationship between psychoanalysis and technology, Pamela Thurschwell's *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking 1880-1920*, theorizes that parapsychology seeped into science (particularly communications technologies) eventually coming to influence and inspire psychoanalysis. Thurschwell attributes psychoanalytic notions of repression and the unconscious to technological and Spiritualist ideas. Like communications technologies, psychoanalysis is a form of information transmission contending that messages are sent between mind and body, whereas telecommunications suggests that messages are sent between minds. Sheri Weinstein's "Technologies of Vision: Spiritualism and Science in Nineteenth-century America," characterizes this relationship between technology and Spiritualism as

expressive of a cultural anxiety relating to the loss of humanity as machines invade the workplace. For this reason, conceiving of a tool of communication as an extension of the body--rather than as an entity apart from it--might have been reassuring to Victorian-era communities. In this sense, Spiritualism fulfilled a need to connect with the past while technological progress addressed a desire to enter the future. While the conceptual links between psychoanalysis, technology, and Spiritualism were acknowledged by many nineteenth-century séance sitters, audiences still wanted to know where Spiritualism ended and technology began. Skeptics such as Harry Price and Eric John Dingwall were convinced that all Spiritualist practices were fraudulent; modeled on clever devices invented to mimic communications technologies of the day. On the other hand, believers argued that new technological inventions had been inspired by Spiritualist practices and that those practices were indeed reflective of a higher cosmic order (Galvan).

Gender and Invention

When considering Karen Burke LeFevre's theories of invention upon examining the circumstances of female inventors during the Victorian era it is evident that they were compelled to find alternatives to the masculinist romantic models that were emblematic of nineteenth-century ideologies. Denise Pilato's *Retrieval of a Legacy: Nineteenth-*

century American Women Inventors and Nina Baym's *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation,* take up the experiences of women in science during the nineteenth-century. Pilato discusses how female inventors were marginalized and how all forms of invention were considered to be dependent upon masculine agency--a view that is evidenced in Gage's 1870 *Woman as Inventor.* Gage writes: "If women have ideas they are taught to repress them as improper for their sex and the genius which does them and their sex honor is deemed a matter to be hidden from light" (20). This view is also supported from a scholarly perspective by Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics.* While Pilato describes the paradox of the Spiritualist woman inventor both gaining and losing ethos by claiming that her inventions were inspired by otherwordly powers, Baym demonstrates how women scientists such as Maria Mitchell--a nineteenth-century astronomer--did find their way into the public sphere and the restrictions they faced once they were there. It is evident that the romantic view of invention stifled women's creativity—as did the cultural climate in which female inventors operated. In this sense, LeFevre's *Invention as a Social Act*, takes on particular significance when considering issues of gender and invention within specific social contexts. LeFevre describes cultural attitudes toward individual invention as being instantiated in a "social collective" view of invention--that is, depending on

the social mores of the time, an individual inventor is either helped or hindered by the milieu in which he or she invents. Baym's, Battersby's, and Pilato's scholarship all illustrate how nineteenth-century romantic and social collective views of invention stymied women's progress. However, LeFevre details the possibilities of alternative forms of invention including the "internal dialogic" and "collaborative" models. When applied to the context of the nineteenth-century woman inventor, it is clear that these alternative models of invention were widely used and became embedded in the rhetorical strategies that women developed in order to be heard.

IV. Mediumship and Embodiment

Leigh Gilmore's *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation,* addresses the autobiographies of female mystics such as Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila, claiming that their "life-changing spiritual experiences began as illnesses, that is, as disturbances in the body. Each produced a discourse evolving from the body in pain" (134). As mentioned earlier, it is significant that many female mediums claim illness as a precursor to Spiritualist power. Of the four mediums I discuss in this study, only Jones and Maynard--who are considered to be "mental" mediums--mention suffering serious illnesses as children supporting the theory that claims to illness were a common rhetorical trope for nineteenth-century women who were considered to be at their most

feminine when weak and sickly. For instance, Albanese writes, “in some traditional societies, mediumship could be preceded by an inaugural illness, a journey into altered consciousness that functioned as a…rite of initiation into the world of sacrifice and suffering that attendance on the spirits demanded” (236). After Maynard and Jones recount their illnesses, their autobiographies seem to dispense with the body completely and their abilities are discussed purely from a spiritual point of view, focusing on the mental aspects of their experiences. In contrast, the writing of both Hurst and Underhill--whose abilities are distinctly physical--is the most body conscious. Hurst and Underhill frequently reference body parts and physiological reactions to emotion as well as acknowledging the vulnerability of the female body on display. Their autobiographies suggest that they do not necessarily subscribe to the idea of the mind-body dualism. Interestingly, as mental mediums, Jones and Maynard’s autobiographies do reflect a strong split--and in some cases a striking disconnect--between body and spirit. Therefore, according to what Gilmore establishes as autobiographical precedent, it seems to me that Jones and Maynard’s attitudes toward the body are more in keeping with nineteenth-century social mores than those of Hurst and Underhill. This bears increasing significance when we consider the purpose of women’s spiritual writings.

Historical precedent dictates that the spiritually-motivated autobiography must focus on the intellect and conscience. Gilmore comments on the fact that--generally speaking--the “self” that women write about in their autobiographies seems to want to avoid talking about the body--as if it weren’t relevant. “The mind/body split is reproduced through the public/private, outside/inside, male/female categories that order perception and experience and is derived from a way of knowing which cannot account for the knowledge of the body”(84). Hence, the autobiography is typically intended to privilege the life of the mind and the spirit--the “higher” qualities of humanity. The body is not considered to be a legitimate way of knowing--a view that Teresa Brennan challenges in the *Transmission of Affect*. Further, Gilmore says, “Indeed, until feminist criticism, predominant ways of knowing defined the body’s knowledge as that which is unknowable. The self has functioned as a metaphor for soul, consciousness, intellect and imagination, but never for body” (84). Ignoring or avoiding discussion of the body bears strong political implications--that is, before “feminist criticism” the “body’s knowledge” was likely considered to be feminine and therefore inferior. Victorian-era science supported the view that women were more strongly rooted to “nature” than men; they were essentially receptacles—or their capacity to reproduce. Paradoxically, women’s bodies were also viewed as abstractions; the fact that they were merely vessels for reproduction

meant that their subjectivity (typically associated with the mind) did not need to be acknowledged.

The female body was not considered to have “rights” because a woman’s assumed lack of intellect disqualified her from personhood. In his book, *Necro-Citizenship: Death, Eroticism and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-century United States*, Russ Castronovo argues that nineteenth-century American politics “fetishized death as a crucial point of political identification. This morbid politics idealized disembodiment over embodiment, spiritual conditions over material ones, amnesia over history and and passivity over engagement” (Intro). In other words, politicians encouraged the construction of passive citizens (like women and people of color) whose bodies could be viewed as mere abstractions. Abstract bodies were easier to control and contain. Castronovo speaks of the ruling class’s repudiation of embodiment while “its legitimation of abstract privileged and empowered person hood depends on people whose untranscendent lives also make claims to freedom and dignity by contesting the very desirability of citizenship in the first place” (10). Therefore, if embodiment is presented as unimportant and if the life of the spirit is paramount, then what does social justice matter to bodies in the material world?

IV. Social Performance

For the nineteenth-century female medium, performance plays a central role in theorizing self-representation and identity building. Full-bodied public performances display the ingenuity of modes of social resistance and become political in scope. In terms of public spheres theory, Michael Warner's ideas on building identity within a "sheltering public," as well as his theory of "poetic world-making," which suggests calling a public into being while simultaneously (and paradoxically) being called into the role of speaker, become relevant to analyzing the performative practices of female mediums. What identities are cultivated via "sheltering publics" and "poetic world making" and how they are built?

While Warner describes a counterpublic as a public "constituted through a conflictual relation to the dominant public" (117), Nancy Fraser extends this definition via the concept of "subaltern counterpublics" which she defines as discourses parallel or counter to dominant discourses. According to Fraser's article "Rethinking the Public Sphere," subaltern counterpublics consist of "members of subordinated social groups" (123). The idea of subaltern counterpublics is particularly relevant to this study because in the context of nineteenth-century politics, both women and people of color can be defined as subalterns. Thus, the concept of the subaltern counterpublic lends itself to considering Spiritualism in terms of postcolonial theory, as well as the various performances involved in the

construction of both the female and the postcolonial subject. As such, the notion of social performance is pivotal to my work because it illuminates how rhetorical invention occurs within public discourse. To clarify, studying performance shows us how people who are excluded from the public arena work when encountering what appears to be a monolithic patriarchal discourse. Resistant performances indicate that there is no such monolith; discursive fissures can be found in dominant ideologies and manipulated to gain leverage and social power. Ultimately, it is performance that gives rise to identity-building and feminine empowerment; a medium must perform mediumship in order to be called into being as a medium and to call a Spiritualist public into being.

In terms of poetic world-making, the medium can be understood to create her own public and to be simultaneously constructed by that public. In her book, *Victorian Women and the Theater of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists and Mesmerists in Performance*, Amy Lehman discusses performance as a contract between audience and performer. Poetic world-making can also be construed as such. Further, in Michael Warner's terms, poetic world-making also suggests the formulation of a sheltering public. Counterpublics shelter marginalized identities and circulate transformed versions of those identities as modes of performance. A counterpublic shelters by providing a space in which "members' identities are formed or transformed" (Warner "Publics" 424). That is, a

counterpublic provides a space for unorthodox opinions to be expressed and nurtured. Significantly, when engaging in social performance, mediums could deviate from their customary heteronormative gender practices by performing alternate identities. Judith Butler's theory of performativity as described in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* therefore becomes relevant to my research insofar as mediums subverted gender and class boundaries by appropriating "other" subjectivities. Whether or not mediums were actually being controlled by spirits or consciously performing alternate identities will always be debatable (Lehman). However, if personal agency is to be found in initiating variations on the ritual repetition of anticipated social codes, a Butlerian perspective might be that mediums claim agency by performing alternate genders and identities. Further, while identity politics assumes that one has already formed an identity upon entering the public sphere, Butler asserts that identity is formed primarily through the very process of gaining visibility in the public sphere. With this in mind, I claim that mediums forge new political identities by performing alternate subjectivities.

Resistant Performance

The idea of performance carries particular relevance when discussing the work of Maynard and Hurst. Maynard believes herself to be

controlled by the spirit of “Pinkie,” a young Native American girl, and Hurst’s extraordinary abilities were demonstrated in city theaters as a series of vaudeville performances. As such, I draw on Richard Schechner’s theory of restored ritual behavior; the work of social anthropologist Marvin Carlson on resistant performance, and Homi Bhabha’s theories on mimicry within postcolonial contexts. Carlson’s theory of resistant performance draws mainly on poststructuralist theory and feminist activism of the 1960s and 70s. However, it is relevant when discussing Hurst because she unwittingly deploys many of the techniques that Carlson discusses. Carlson explores resistant performance from the perspective of cultural anthropology, considering how communities experiment with overthrowing existing social orders within ritual contexts only to experience the relief and comfort of reinstating them once again. Nevertheless, from a poststructuralist perspective, resistant performance seeks to subvert existing social roles by refusing to participate in an uncritical repetition of those roles. Yet, as Carlson mentions, even a mindful repetition or replication of established social roles can backfire, with resistant performers inadvertently re-inscribing rather than undermining existing power structures. This happens because, as Butler asserts in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, our bodies are so thoroughly constructed by what Foucault calls the “social apparatus” that it is virtually impossible to act outside of or apart from the

hegemony that defines us. We see this repeatedly in Hurst's performances as gender roles are complicated, inverted, subverted, mimicked, mocked, re-inscribed, and reinstated. Lastly, Schechner's theory of "restored behavior" is relevant to examining the processes of ritual in performance; ritual that is instantiated within Maynard's trances and Hurst's uncontrollable onstage laughter. According to Schechner, ritual behavior is that which can be "restored"--that is, it is temporary and symbolic and may be identified and analyzed apart from the performer's usual behavior. This is significant because it helps the performer from becoming too identified with his or her role and helps the audience to see the difference between the performer and the performance. Being able to identify this difference should mean that an audience is able to view the performance from a critical perspective and to absorb its cultural subtexts. However, cultural subtext and the drawing of a distinction between the performer and the performance become increasingly complex when considered in terms of Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry.

As such**,** mimicry becomes a means of re-inscribing the boundary between the oppressor and the oppressed by emphasizing how the "other" can never be anything more than a poor imitation of the "original." Significantly, ritual mimicry can also provide a means by which the oppressed subvert their oppressors. According to Bhabha, as a subaltern, one is constructed as being an inferior reflection of the oppressor.

Institutionalized mimicry is therefore a key component of being a subaltern. The complications and connotations of performance and mimicry are evident in *Chapter 5*, which addresses the mediumship of Nettie Colburn Maynard. When in a trance, Maynard appears to be mimicking a Native American child whose speech patterns are based on a mimicry of an "original" white colonizer who in turn, perhaps, mimicked the modes of speech a Native American of that era was expected to adopt. Although Native Americans may have performed resistance by exaggerating behaviors that were expected from them—an act that white colonizers evidently found sinister—it eventually became common for whites to stage "red face" and "black face" plays wherein colonizers mimicked their colonial subjects. In some ways therefore, red and black face plays might be seen as an ironic reappropriation by the white oppressor of the identity he has foisted on the oppressed. More specifically, as Native Americans grew increasingly romanticized in the white American cultural consciousness (especially in Spiritualist circles), their "otherness" was emphasized in the assumption of "innocence" and access to spiritual powers derived from an assumed proximity to nature. As such, mimicry of the Native American subaltern's unique speech patterns became a means both by which to elevate and denigrate him.

Performing Autobiography

While the women I discuss perform gender and other common social roles of the Victorian-era, they also perform their autobiographies. The written word becomes an extension of other work they have performed before audiences in the public sphere. Each medium is able to use her autobiography in a different way to build identity and to construct herself in relationship to both Spiritualism and institutional discourses. Women used their autobiographies as sites of rhetorical invention by representing themselves in the following genres: confessionals, defenses, testimonials, instructional manuals, political commentary, and tools of social inquiry. Because autobiography plays an important role in examining social performance, I draw on Laura Laffrado's *Uncommon Women: Gender and Representation in Nineteenth-century U.S. Women's Writing,* which explores how white middle class women in the Victorian-era simultaneously supported and challenged prescribed gender roles. Like Piepmeier, both Gilmore and Laffrado stress reading for difference and call for an increased attention to the social contexts in which women's autobiographies are written; particularly the ways in which autobiographies "contest gender identity rather than simply enact it" (Gilmore xi). Arguably, female mediums were able to use their autobiographies in such diverse and versatile ways and to find agency in unlikely situations because discourses of Spiritualism lent themselves so well to multiple

interpretations. Spiritualism also offered fertile terrain for invention since it was itself linked to discourses of sympathy, fantasy, ideology, and emotion.

These autobiographies reveal that each medium viewed the public sphere quite differently and negotiated her own perceived boundaries between public and private in her own unique manner. In the next chapter, which takes up the autobiography of Leah Fox Underhill, I hope to further illuminate some of these ideas.

CHAPTER 3

MRS UNDERHILL' S *MISSING LINK*: CORPOREALITY, SOCIAL PERFORMANCE, AND RHETORICAL INVENTION IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUBLIC SPHERE

Leah Fox Underhill, medium and progenitor of the Spiritualist movement, published her autobiography the *Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* in 1885. The book is 477 pages long and was originally published in 1885 by Thomas R. Knox and Co. Underhill dedicates her autobiography to her husband, Daniel Underhill and includes his portrait on page 202. Portraits of Leah Fox Underhill's father, her mother, her two sisters, and illustrations of the Fox family home in Hydesville as well as the Fox sisters' later home on Troup Street in Rochester appear at earlier intervals in the book. Underhill's autobiographical narrative begins with the family's move to their house in Hydesville--where the first "spirit rappings" were heard--in 1847 and ends in the early 1880s with various anecdotes about séances at the Underhills' home in Manhattan accompanied by further endorsements from well-appointed members of New York society.

Acknowledging that there was already a great deal of Spiritualist literature on the market at that time, Underhill justifies the publication of her book by claiming that “nobody else possesses--both in vivid personal recollections and in stores of documentary material--the means and the

data necessary for the task of giving a correct account of the initiation of the movement known as Modern Spiritualism" (1). Since Underhill operated in both the ante and postbellum years, providing an overview of nearly forty years of mediumship, the autobiography is of particular value to historians of Spiritualism. Yet, as the eldest of the three "Fox girls," Underhill typically receives far less attention from both scholarly and popular writers than her younger sisters, Kate and Maggie. Born in 1814, Underhill started a career in Spiritualism--along with the teenaged Maggie and Kate--in 1848. What Underhill describes as "Modern Spiritualism" is widely believed by scholars and practitioners alike to have begun upon the girls' communication with the ghost of a murdered peddler buried in the basement of their upstate New York home. Maggie and Kate communicated with the ghost via a series of raps and knocks, developing something akin to a spiritual Morse code which they used to convey messages from the afterworld.

I aim to explore existing scholarship on the intersection between spirit mediumship and female embodiment by examining how Underhill uses her autobiography as a site of rhetorical invention to perform her ethos as a spiritual leader and to access an often hostile public sphere. By reading Underhill's autobiography against nineteenth-century historiography, I analyze her unique manner of enacting a feminine identity capable of operating both within and counter to common

institutional discourses of that era. Underhill controls and shapes public memory by contextualizing her 1885 autobiography within a chronology of personal correspondence and newspaper reviews, enacting agency by "talking back" to her critics. I argue that Underhill is able to construct an active feminine self by strategically negotiating often contradictory cultural prohibitions pertaining to gender and corporeality. As such, I draw on public spheres theory--specifically Michael Warner's work on building identity within "sheltering publics"--to analyze how women constructed their bodies both through the performance of autobiographical writing itself, and public performances of Spiritualism.

Representations

While no full-length scholarly works have been written on the Fox sisters, Maggie and Kate have been popularized on the mainstream literary market--notably, Barbara Weisberg's 2004 *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* and Nancy Rubin Stuart's 2005 biography of Maggie Fox, the *Reluctant Spiritualist: the Life of Maggie Fox*. In these biographies, Underhill is portrayed as being somewhat rapacious--quickly joining her sisters in their "spirit rappings" and discovering how to exploit the phenomena for material gain. Underhill, then Leah Fox Fish, had been abandoned by her husband and struggled to raise a daughter on her own--ample motive to seize any opportunity to

gain income. Primary sources, such as Frank Podmore's 1902 *Mediums of the Nineteenth-century* seem to corroborate this view, no doubt providing the basis for much contemporary criticism of Underhill. Further, it is possible that Maggie and Kate are viewed with less cynicism than Underhill because they seemed to be more adversely affected by their fame and their lives were infused with pathos. Both struggled with depression and eventually became alcoholics. Maggie had a doomed love affair with the Arctic explorer Elisha Kent Kane--who died prematurely and would not marry her because his family believed her to be too common. Kate eventually married an Englishman, but he left her widowed with two young sons. In 1885, when Underhill's autobiography was published, she had been comfortably married to Daniel Underhill, a wealthy New York Spiritualist for nearly thirty years. Meanwhile, however, Maggie's alcohol habit had left her nearly destitute, while Kate--having lost her husband in 1881--was on a similar path. By that time, Spiritualism had become a well-known—if not controversial—practice and there was much international interest in it, especially from the scientific establishment. The Society for Psychical Research opened in Cambridge, England, in 1882 and the American Society for Psychical Research in New York later that same year. The year 1885 also saw the publication of several men's Spiritualist autobiographies such as that of Orestes Brownson as well as Spiritualist-inspired novels by Edward Bellamy and William Dean Howells. Further,

the British Spiritualist Emma Hardinge Britten's acclaimed *Nineteenth-century Miracles* had come out in 1884, speaking in support of the Fox sisters, and printing their portraits.

Newspaper articles and reviews—both negative and positive--of the Fox sisters' demonstrations are included in Underhill's autobiography. Almost all of the articles date from the early 1850s, years during which the Fox sisters traveled extensively throughout the New York region. However, reports of their activity all but vanish by 1860. This was perhaps because following the Fox sisters' renown, mediums seemed to appear everywhere, and there were plenty of others--many far more flamboyant than the Foxes—to comment on. Further, Maggie had apparently sworn off Spiritualist activity in 1857 following the death of her lover, while Underhill held only private séances. Kate, the youngest of the three sisters, continued to engage in Spiritualist practices, but her activity was sporadic—and, for the most part—undocumented. The *Banner of Light*, then Spiritualism's primary news source, published little more than one or two fleeting mentions of Kate's appearances. For all intents and purposes, the Fox sisters had vanished from the public eye, only to reemerge in the mid-1880s when Underhill published her autobiography. Even so, there is a surprising lack of information on its reception which could have been due to the fact that the male mediums' autobiographies had garnered more interest. In August 1886, an article in the *New York Herald* detailed

Kate Fox's alcoholism and how she was arrested for being an unfit mother, but there is no further information on the Fox sisters until 1888, when investigative journalist Reuben Briggs Davenport published the infamous *Death Blow to Spiritualism* in which Maggie and Kate reputedly confessed that the "spirit rappings" were a hoax. After that, multiple news sources wanted to interview the Fox sisters—separately. Maggie and Kate both stuck to their story, but Underhill claimed that she couldn't understand why her sisters would have told such falsehoods. In a 1999 article published in *American Heritage*, Weisberg claims that "some spiritualists reacted to Maggie's betrayal by simply reaffirming their faith…. Others were less charitable: Since Maggie had fallen on hard times as a medium, they scolded, she had decided to earn her living as a spoiler" ("They Spoke With the Dead" 8). But of course, in 1885, when Underhill published her autobiography, she could not have known that her sisters would turn on her. Instead, the autobiography bears the tone of one who has triumphed over adversity and at last proved her worth.

Significantly, Underhill uses her autobiography to celebrate the movement of Spiritualism from a marginal to a mainstream discourse. In order to highlight her own role in the swaying of public opinion, Underhill illustrates how people have been influenced by her work, giving a specific example of an unbeliever—notably an enormous man whom she describes as "the Hercules." Initially, Underhill is terrified of "the Hercules"

who is none too pleasant at the spirit rapping demonstration, but is eventually convinced by a message the Foxes convey from his deceased brother. Following this, “the Hercules” becomes a valuable ally: “He said that nobody should molest us; that he saw no reason why it should be done and he emphasized this with a strong blow upon the table” (133). Through this example, Underhill implies that Spiritualism has become more socially respectable because it is fiercely defended by people who recognize its inherent worth. As evidence, she provides a testimonial from a Dr. C.D. Griswold:

> But since what is called ‘public opinion’ has become pretty well established, the rest of the world fall in, and see nothing very strange…after all. And thus it would be with the next point, or the claim of Spirituality, were it only understood that the immaculate judge, ‘public opinion’ had decided in its favor. Such is the value of *opinion* in a large sense. If the truth is told of other days, mankind valued their opinions, and kept them to themselves. But not so now. The article is known to be valueless; and each one seems desirous of getting rid of his stock. (156)

The irony of Griswold's claiming that "public opinion" is considered to be an "immaculate judge" is not lost on Underhill. Only when a number of formidable characters start to believe in Spiritualism does "the rest of the world fall in." The "falling in" happens passively, almost by accident. Although this is a cynical view, Underhill seems to believe that ultimately "public opinion"--such as it is--can eventually be swayed by the "truth." However, while one of Underhill's prime empirical determinants of the change in public opinion seems to be the fact that she now has high profile supporters and that mediums can demonstrate in public without being heckled, historian Mary Ryan might complicate this view by claiming that given the change in tenor of democracy and public life from the ante to postbellum period, Underhill was unlikely to have experienced the kind of harassment she endured in the late 1840s and early 1850s anyhow. According to Ryan, by the 1870s, capitalism, rather than deliberation, determined the "public good." The press had attained the power to manufacture consensus and from then on outdoor gatherings and boisterous self-expression had begun to dwindle as people retreated from public life. By the late 1880s, civic life was therefore considerably less raucous and vocal than it had been in the antebellum years. Simply put, audiences had become more complacent, which meant that they were less antagonistic and seemed more polite.

Other theories as to why attitudes toward Spiritualism changed include the widespread bereavement wrought by the Civil War and disillusionment with Christianity as a means of coping with stressors like industrialization and urbanization. Historian Ruth Brandon claims that a rising participation in Spiritualist practices indicated a sense of social desperation. Howard Kerr believes that interest in Spiritualism was on a decline at the end of the 1850s and that it was dormant by 1860s, but the aftermath of the Civil War meant a renewed interest as people wished to communicate with deceased family members. “The War had magnified the wish (basic to Spiritualism) to know that loved ones had ascended to immortality” (109). However, another reason for Spiritualism’s growing acceptance might have been the discursive force of the revival. With the surge in revivalism during the first half of the nineteenth-century, shifts in faiths, beliefs, and allegiances meant that people within a single geographic community might join a public of strangers who shared their ideologies (Warner 85). Since revivalism’s power depended on swaying a group of people who may have been strangers to one another, the necessity of creating affect and atmosphere became increasingly important. In this context, when considering the affective relationships not only within, but also between multiple localized publics, it is possible that—according to Gerard Hauser’s model of reticulate public spheres—something akin to “public opinion” did indeed change. For Hauser, public

opinion is not a question of numbers or institutionally sanctioned discourse. It is the proliferation of vernacular rhetorics; that is, the discourses of local publics that spread throughout a web of interconnected public spheres. In the sense that Spiritualism is cast in Underhill's work as sets of interconnected (and proliferating) local publics, Underhill's theory on public opinion---when held up to Hauser's model--seems reasonable. As more local publics engage in Spiritualist practices, the more globally acceptable it seems to become.

Autobiography as a Site of Rhetorical Invention

In 1885, Underhill's audience was most likely comprised of middle-class white women, primarily because this demographic had become a significant reading public and Spiritualism typically appealed more to women than to men. By becoming part of a print culture and incorporating into her autobiography the testimonials of high profile supporters such as Horace Greeley (a prominent newspaper editor) and the Posts (abolitionists), Underhill entrenches herself within a literary public sphere. However, the difference is that while a male citizen would be able to use his autobiography to express political opinions and overtly challenge the status quo, women were required to do so more subtly and to exhibit greater modesty.

For instance, Underhill demonstrates a calculated use of rhetorical techne by publishing her book toward the end of the nineteenth-century when her work as a Spiritualist has already been widely acknowledged. She now has the social status to influence not only the present and the future, but also the past. If indeed, “a techne is defined by its contingency on time and situation […] is knowledge as production, not product, and […] intervention and articulation rather than representation” (Atwill 2), Underhill chooses a historical moment during which she is able to shape public memory by reframing and reestablishing the significance of her career. In this sense, Underhill’s invitation for the reader to join her in the production of new knowledge, that is, a co-constructed interpretation of her life, resonates with Atwill’s description of techne.

Underhill further establishes ethos by detailing the difficulties she had early in her career, emphasizing that it was necessary for her to persist in her endeavors to bring Spiritualism into the public sphere because she was responding to a higher calling. Essentially, the spirits will not let her alone until she does their bidding—and from reading Underhill’s autobiography, it is clear that the spirits’ activity changes dramatically over the course of her career. In the early years, the spirits are often portrayed as violent and disruptive. Toward the end of Underhill’s career, however, the spirits are far gentler, communicating music and songs of a happy afterworld (417). It is as if, now that Underhill has agreed to serve them,

they are placated. After suffering comes reward, and suffering is strategically framed as a mark of authenticity--as is self-sacrifice.

Underhill emphasizes her self-sacrifice when she describes being in bodily danger. After a demonstration in Troy, New York, Underhill leaves for home earlier than her sister Maggie, who stays with family friends. In a letter to Underhill, an R.M. Bouton describes how the townspeople are harassing Maggie: “Five villainous-looking fellows are watching the house night and day. She has never left the house unattended, which has foiled them thus far” (123). When Underhill goes to retrieve her sister, she describes an ugly scene at the Bouton home:

> I found Maggie sick and nearly paralyzed with fright. There were strong-armed forces for protection on our side. We had not been in the house ten minutes when several shots were fired and stones thrown, breaking everything in their way. We crouched beneath the furniture and lay on the floor to escape the bullets, expecting at every moment some stray shot or stone would strike us. (Our hiding-room was in the interior of the house.) The mob threatened and did all in their power to destroy us; but, knowing the gentlemen inside were so well

> prepared for them, they retired for the night…Poor Maggie's nerves were terribly unstrung. (127)

In this description, Underhill describes Maggie's fear but never her own, which underscores Underhill's courage in the face of adversity—not to mention her self-sacrificing nature. Further, Underhill's use of the passive voice to describe the shots and stones coming through the window parallels other sections of her autobiography that detail the harassment of the spirits. "Tables and everything below us were being moved about. Doors were being opened and shut, making the greatest possible noises" (35). In the early days of Spiritualism, the Fox sisters endure being pinched and having the ends of their beds lifted up and dropped to the floor. Boxes of matches are shaken in their faces and "carpet-balls[7]…came flying at us from every direction, hitting us in the same place every time" (39). In these instances, Underhill describes being the recipient of violent activity suggesting that despite her courage she is vulnerable and in need of a male protector. As with the spirits, when the men attack Bouton's home, Underhill does not know specifically who her assailants are, only that they are men who must be fended off by other men, while the women can do nothing but "crouch beneath the furniture."

[7] A carpet-ball is presumably a small roll of carpet.

Further, by using the word “stray,” Underhill suggests that she does not expect that the men are shooting to kill, rather to be disruptive. Similarly, when Underhill uses the word “destroy,” she suggests that the men wish to defame her rather than to actually kill her. The assailants outside are referred to as “the mob,” while her protectors are “gentlemen.” For Underhill, the mob is faceless—the shots they fire and the weapons they use seem far more real to her. “It is difficult to say which I most feared, the mob or the pistols” (126). Hostility—generally meted out by men—bears undertones of sexual threat. Underhill never explicitly mentions rape, but it seems that this is part and parcel of what it might mean to be “destroyed.” This is a recurring theme throughout the autobiography. Over and over, the Fox sisters are threatened and humiliated by a vulgar mob of men and eventually rescued and protected by gentlemen--and also by the spirits themselves, whose conduct oscillates strangely between reflecting the violence of the mob and the solicitousness of the gentlemanly saviors.

Shaping Public Memory and “Talking Back”

Underhill controls and shapes public memory by situating anecdotal evidence within a body of correspondence and newspaper reviews, enacting personal agency by “talking back” to her critics. Specifically, Underhill rewrites and reclaims a traumatic event in Buffalo in which the issue of sexual threat arises within the context of an 1851 spirit-rapping

demonstration. In Buffalo, the Fox sisters are subjected to the scrutiny of three doctors intent upon exposing them as frauds. Because Underhill and her sisters were made to strip naked for examination before a committee of ladies, the doctors are sure that although the rappings cannot be attributed to gadgetry, they are nonetheless fraudulent: “the *rappings*, assuming that they are not spiritual, are produced by the action of the will, through voluntary action on the joints” (Doctors’ report, qtd. in Underhill 169). To add insult to injury, one of the examiners, a Dr. Foote makes a pass at Underhill that distresses her:

> I had been so indignant at Dr. Foote’s first intimation to me of what was coming, that if, when I slammed the door in his face, it had happened to come in contact with his nose, which he had so impertinently and hypocritically attempted to intrude into our rooms, I fear I should not have much regretted the accident; but anger evaporated over the perusal of this precious scientific performance; which was certainly enough to make me smile aloud over its absurdity. (171)

Underhill is so offended by Foote’s presumption that she is forced to engage in unladylike behavior to preserve her dignity. Dr. Foote’s

inappropriate presence outside her hotel room is a significant imposition, his nose seeming to stand in for a phallus which Underhill "would not much have regretted" harming--although she hastens to add that of course it would have been by "accident." Underhill gloats over the "absurdity" of the doctors' findings, but instead of saying that the report made her laugh, she states that it was enough to make her "smile out loud" (171). Here, Underhill tries to temper behavior that some might consider unladylike by suggesting that she is gracious enough to not laugh. She is also aware that although she should regret harming someone, she would not have regretted harming Dr. Foote. Thus, Underhill shares with her audience something inappropriate that she did not do, but that she might have done. I read this as Underhill's suggestion that audience members may relate to her mischievous spirit but cannot condemn her for an unladylike deed. In this regard, Underhill's autobiography demonstrates a crisis of agency, or a tension between passivity and activity.

In *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*, Leigh Gilmore discusses the importance of reading historical autobiography with a view toward interpreting how female autobiographers establish agency. "It is in this act of interpretation of consciousness that we can say a woman may exceed representation within dominant ideology…Within these discourses exist unruly subjects who are unevenly objectified and who represent identity in relation to other

values and subjectivities" (12). In other words, as scholars, we should refrain from viewing patriarchy as a monolithic force bearing down on women with constant, evenly distributed pressure. It would be more productive to instead interpret patriarchy as a shifting and fragmented force that can be negotiated contextually. Underhill's autobiography offers multiple opportunities for this, in that she is constantly noting moments in which she is objectified and working to negotiate a movement away from those moments. For instance, Underhill notes that when the Buffalo doctors eventually publish a defamatory document in the *Commercial Advertiser* on February 17th, 1851, they repeatedly refer to the Fox sisters as "females"--a clear sign of contempt. Here, Underhill is all too aware of her objectification and seeks to reclaim agency by discussing the genesis of the document itself and the dubious ethos of the men who wrote it. In this sense, Underhill is "talking back" and therefore engaging in "interactive public discourse" (Warner 90).

According to Warner, public discourse is always understood to be some kind of conversation in which the "usual way of imagining the interactive character of public discourse is through metaphors of conversation, answer, talking back. Argument and polemic, as manifestly dialogic genres, continue to have a privileged role in the self-understanding of publics" (90). Therefore, in order to be considered a public, a group of people must conceive of themselves as a public existing

within a web of existing cultural conversations and be aware that they are being addressed as such. But cultural conversations within and between publics are positioned both within and against each other. Public discourse is volatile and subject to multiple interpretations. This means an inevitable "friction…between public discourse and its environment given the circularity in the conventions and postulates that make the social imaginary of the public work" (Warner 107). Warner goes on to describe this friction as "unavoidable because of the chicken-and-egg problem…the imaginary being of the public must be projected from already circulating discourse" (107). The notion of an "already circulating discourse" indicates an understanding of a public as an "inter-textual" entity. Here, Warner discusses how a single text or voice cannot create a public—a concatenation of texts is needed. It is therefore possible that the Fox sisters' early difficulties in the public sphere could be partly attributed to the fact that there was not yet a social space for responsive discourse and reflexivity; there was no "already circulating discourse" incorporating Spiritualist practices to give rise to the "imaginary being" of the public. In this regard, the letters and newspaper reviews that Underhill incorporates in her autobiography function beyond furnishing a testament to her authenticity and providing her with occasions for "talking back." Significantly, the testimonials in Underhill's autobiography provide a meta-testimonial to the broader discourses of Spiritualism itself. By juxtaposing

examples of how she was represented in the public sphere of the 1850s with anecdotes from later in her career, Underhill vouches for the fact that Spiritualism could certainly be identified as a public by the mid 1880s.

Nineteenth-century Cultural Institutions and Constructions of Femininity

Gilmore argues that women's autobiography "offers the insider's account of the doubled narrative of the feminine, where the story a woman struggles to tell about herself is inscribed within the scripts she receives from her culture" (157). Historian Carol Smith-Rosenberg identifies common nineteenth-century cultural institutions as beliefs and practices surrounding medicine, law, politics, religion and sex. Further, she describes how women of the nineteenth-century gained power through "disorderly conduct," managing to disrupt traditional male/female relations and gender roles by refusing to conform to social norms dictated by cultural institutions (Smith-Rosenberg). However, when women do not respond to gender norms appropriately, they are objectified and their bodies become delegitimated. With this in mind, it is interesting to see how Underhill uses her autobiography to enact a feminine identity that operates both within and against these institutions.

For example, although women were encouraged to come across as sickly and helpless, Underhill emphasizes her own physical well-being.

“Spiritualists rejected the idea that women were ill and incapacitated during a significant portion of the year simply because they menstruated” (Coudert 17). However, according to Coudert, this rejection of feminine fragility caused Spiritualists to become “a special target of the male medical profession,” many of whom declared mediums to be insane (17). Perhaps because of this, Underhill is careful to also emphasize her vulnerability as a woman in the public eye, and the importance of passivity, stating that: “persons of strong will” are likely to have difficulty receiving spirit messages (405). Consequently, Underhill is constantly negotiating between well-behaved and ill-behaved selves. This Manichean view of womanhood was all too common during the nineteenth-century. “It is as if women were divided into two distinct categories: the good, nurturing, gentle, passive, sexless, selfless wife and mother and the evil violent, hysterical, egomaniacal woman who literally drain men of their vital seminal juices” (Coudert 32). The reviews and letters that Underhill includes in her autobiography both lionize and degrade her. Underhill therefore takes the radical step of presenting herself as a complex character who may succumb to either positive or negative urges. As such, she includes an excerpt from a letter penned by “J.E.R.”--a male friend who addresses Underhill thus: “Impulsive as you are; accustomed as you are to excitement, and possessing (as you do) a woman’s fondness for the glare of the world’s gilded exterior; there is a part of your nature better

than the rest" (198). This savvy rhetorical move at once protects Underhill against being defamed should she frame herself in too angelic a light while she remains flawed enough to attract sympathy from her readers. Notably she is impulsive, but not manipulative. The trait of impulsiveness seems to suggest a raw honesty rather than a calculated disingenuity. However, while some audiences may have delighted in Underhill's apparent impulsiveness and renegade spirit, she could not stray far from prescribed gender roles if she wished her autobiography to be well received.

In her book *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910*, Nan Johnson discusses how, particularly after the Civil War, a glut of women's etiquette manuals emerged to ensure that women understood their domestic duties and the fact that they were serving society—and God—by staying within a sanctified private sphere. However, as women began to move into the workplace and into academia in the 1870s and 1880s, a spate of scientific research emerged claiming that they were biologically inferior to men and therefore ill-suited for cerebral activity. According to Russett, Victorians believed that "nature was an objective reality 'out there' apart from humanity, but reliably knowable and predictable. Science was a product of human discovery, not an artifact of the human mind" (83-88). Science, therefore, made a powerful weapon--and as women gained social visibility, the science against them grew more

biologically deterministic and unforgiving. However, this did not seem to deter women from entering the public sphere. Women began to assert themselves as speakers and thinkers (particularly via what were considered to be new religious movements) in the capacity of Quakers, Shakers, and Spiritualists—communities that public spheres theorists such as Warner might refer to as “counterpublics”--or publics that are “in tension with a larger public” (56).

Given the hostility that the Fox sisters suffered at the beginning of their career it is plain that Spiritualism could be considered a counterpublic—a public that clearly held “an awareness of its subordinate status” (Warner 56). This awareness is evidenced by the care and secrecy with which the Fox sisters moved from place to place and the discretion with which they chose their friends; all aspects of the process by which the sisters formed their identity as Spiritualists while sheltered by a counterpublic that eventually generated its own performances, print media, and discursive forms. Interestingly, although Spiritualist counterpublics are believed to have set a precedent for more women to speak out and be heard (Braude, Owen, Tromp), the Fox sisters themselves did very little “speaking” in their public appearances. Underhill and her sisters always engaged in physical mediumship—that is, they transmitted messages through physical phenomena rather than becoming “possessed” by a spirit and speaking for a length of time on a particular

subject as did trance mediums such as Cora Hatch and Ascha Sprague. In fact, Weisberg suggests that Eliab Capron, a family friend and author of the 1855 *Modern Spiritualism: Its Facts and Fanaticisms; Its Consistencies and Contradictions* likely spoke for the sisters during their demonstrations, and Underhill references his opening and closing "remarks" (Underhill 66). So although Underhill did enter the public sphere via her demonstrations, her activity could not quite be termed "public speaking"--a fact that no doubt operated in her favor when it came to detailing her career. Further, as Underhill emphasizes in her autobiography, if one must enter the public sphere, such action should be undertaken only at the behest of a higher power and personal ambition should never be mistaken for a higher calling (408).

Performance and Identity Building

Public spheres theory--specifically Warner's work on building identity within "sheltering publics"--illuminates how Underhill constructs her femininity both through the performance of autobiographical writing itself, and public performances of Spiritualism. For instance, it is significant that, at the beginning of the autobiography, Underhill excuses herself by claiming that she had never meant to write it in the first place: "I regret to be compelled to speak so much of myself in giving an account on the inauguration of the movement known as 'Modern Spiritualism'…" (30).

Since mediumship had taken a sensational and somewhat lascivious turn in the late 1870s with an emphasis on the materialization of scantily clad spirits, older mediums like Underhill felt the need to protect their ethos by distancing themselves from these lowbrow iterations of Spiritualist practice and to warn against fraudulence (Underhill 411-13). However, regardless of Underhill's opinion of the various types of mediumship that had come to the fore by the 1880s, the initial demonstrations of the Fox sisters had no doubt opened up a rhetorical space for female mediums to build identity both as women and as performers, meaning that they were thereby engaging in a process of "poetic world-making" (Warner). According to Warner, poetic world-making is a space "created by its own discourse" that opens only if the "discourse or performance" addressed to a public can "characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate and […] attempt to realize that world through address" (114). In other words, before performing, the performer must ascertain whom she is addressing, and beyond that, determine how her performance will bring the ideal of that particular audience into being. Warner asserts that poetic world-making goes beyond simply creating a public. In order to be sustained, this public's discourses must eventually be self-generating. However, performance and discourses created during an instantiation of poetic world-making are never replicable—they are always determined by their context (Warner 115). In the same vein, I argue that the repeated

production of spirit phenomena through performance is never the same and is always challenging the boundaries between the living and the dead. Thus, by "performing" spirit raps, the Fox sisters begin to destabilize cultural codes.

The repeated performance of a gendered social act signals what Butler refers to in *Gender Trouble* as being "at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (191). However, Butler points out that these gendered repetitions are never quite the same; a fact that leaves space for a destabilization of social mores, calling into question the rigorously policed limitations of the female body. As such, Underhill's autobiography reveals a strong awareness of corporeality suggesting that a young female body is constantly under threat and paradoxically becomes a social threat itself. The Fox sisters are threatening because they signify the "natural" undisciplined female body; the sisters' very presence causes strange phenomena as their bodies apparently wreak havoc on material environments. Underhill describes how she and her sisters were often restrained[8] during spirit rapping demonstrations--ostensibly, this was done to prevent fraud, but it must also have been a means of taming the feminine; controlling the social

[8] The Fox Sisters' ankles or feet were held down by psychic researchers or debunkers.

environment by means of controlling the female body. The image of the Fox sisters physically restrained evokes Butler's theories of materialization because it demonstrates that the material body is itself an excess; male attempts at constraint cannot adequately address female excesses of performance. Notably, however, as Underhill ages and accrues social status, her autobiography reveals less of a preoccupation with corporeality and the vulnerability of the female body exposed to a hostile public. Now, as an aging woman, she is no longer a sexual threat and is therefore well positioned to demonstrate that she was (and still is) a woman of strong moral character.

Conclusion

Underhill's autobiography describes a physical link between humans and spirits and argues that there is a significant (and tangible) connection between the material and immaterial worlds. However, a related theme in her writing seems to be that of intervention----intervening in public memory by offering new ways to interpret public discourses and to complicate the process of identity-building in the public sphere. In this sense, by representing herself through autobiography, Underhill engages a reader in contemplating her persona as a past self and as a projected future self. As such, like the "Gods and Goddesses" Atwill describes, Underhill is "either caught between dual identities…or…defined by the

power of transformation itself" (Atwill 49). As mentioned earlier, Underhill's autobiography reveals an oscillation between well-behaved and ill-behaved identities, as well as passive and active behavior. Now, in addition to navigating the binary between past and future selves, Underhill must use her autobiography to negotiate the evolving spaces between the corporeal world and the spirit world.

By naming her autobiography the "Missing Link," Underhill appears to be playing on popular Darwinian theory evoking the notion of evolution and a continual material process of transformation. Paradoxically, although women of Victorian era were believed to be more spiritually "pure" than men, it was thought that they were too limited by their bodies and their corporeal proximity to animal nature to reach a state of spiritual transcendence. Since Darwin intimates in *Descent of Man* that men are evolutionarily superior to women, it is possible that Underhill feels it necessary to challenge him in some way by implying that Spiritualist mediums--most of whom were female--are the "missing link" between the spirit and human worlds. In this regard, by entitling her autobiography the *Missing Link*, Underhill undercuts common cultural conceptions. By evoking Darwin's theory of the "missing link" to demonstrate the corporeal connection between apes and humans, Underhill presents its converse; a "missing link" between humans and spirits found within the female body—specifically that of the medium.

CHAPTER 4

A “GOLD BLOSSOM”: TECHNOLOGY, WOMANHOOD, AND INVENTION IN AMANDA JONES’S *PSYCHIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Born in 1835 in East Bloomfield, New York, Amanda Theodosia Jones has been described as a teacher, inventor, business woman, poet, and Spiritualist (Pilato 129). Jones’s 450 page *Psychic Autobiography* was published by Greaves of New York in 1910, two years before her death. The autobiography is dedicated to renowned psychologist William James, although there is no indication that Jones knew him personally. A *Psychic Autobiography* also includes an introduction by a Dr. James Hyslop, who at that time was the Secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research. In his introduction, Hyslop reminds readers of Jones’s success as a poet, citing the following collections: *Ulah and Other Poems* (1861); *Atlantis and Other Poems* (1866); *A Prairie Idyll* (1862); *Rubaiyat of Solomon and Other Poems* (1905); and *A Mother of Pioneers* (1908). The poems’ subject matter ranges from an appreciation of nature to eulogies for fallen soldiers.

While Jones makes no overt reference in her autobiography to political events or dates of national importance, she was by no means apolitical. Her dismayed reaction to the Civil War’s death toll can be found in her anti-war poems “A Soldier’s Mother” and “Prophecy of the Dead”

which first appeared in April 1861. Later in her life--according to the *Women's Who's Who* of 1912--she apparently took up the suffragist cause, but talk of any suffragist activity is again conspicuously absent from her autobiography. Two thirds of the book is dedicated toward documenting Jones's life as a Spiritualist, while the rest is on her life as an inventor and business woman.

This autobiography can be a baffling text to reckon with. Jones's prose is dense and convoluted and her writing style tends to be digressive. She periodically breaks what appears to be a linear narrative to include pages of poetry on flowers and angels as well as lectures on complex Spiritualist principles, often omitting key words or references that would help a reader to follow her train of thought. Further, when reading Jones's writing it can be difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy--especially when she discusses her dreams and visions. Significantly, however, the theme of invention--as it pertains both to writing and to technological ingenuity--features prominently in Jones's work, presenting her with a series of conundrums relating to authorship and gender roles.

In this chapter I argue that for Jones, the tension between womanhood and technology is linked to common nineteenth-century beliefs about invention and its privileging of masculinity (Battersby). As I see it, when Jones attempts to incorporate a typically Romantic nineteenth-century view of invention into her autobiographical construction

of self, she recognizes the degree to which her entry into science signals a loss of femininity. Hence, Jones's autobiography begins to reveal models of invention that can act as alternatives to--or extensions of--the rather limited Romantic model. Drawing on the scholarship of Karen Burke LeFevre, I demonstrate that Jones's autobiography illustrates increasingly collaborative models of invention in an attempt to open up a rhetorical space for women. While digressive portions of the autobiography (such as poetry and lectures) often seem to be deliberately obscuring the tensions between gender and invention, I argue that the process of autobiographical writing itself indicates Jones's attempt to reconcile her lost sense of femininity with late nineteenth-century constructions of technology and its authorship *vis a vis* gender.

Historical Context: 1876 and 1893

Extending LeFevre's premise that "the self that invents is…not merely socially influenced but even socially constituted" (2) it is important to examine the social collective of which Jones was a part. As a scientist, Jones is best known for inventing the vacuum method of canning food and for opening the Women's Canning and Preserving Company in Chicago in 1890. Although Jones discusses canning methods in her autobiography and similar information appears in anthologies documenting women's scientific inventions, it is difficult to find much on record in terms of Jones's

life as a factory owner and business woman. Historian Wendy Gamber claims that this is because women mostly operated small businesses and were consistently omitted from economic histories which have long privileged the study of corporations (189). For the most part, however, Jones's experience emblematizes that of the typical nineteenth-century female inventor in that she was unmarried and invented for her livelihood (Pilato 109). Jones was fortunate to have had a high school education in the arts, but had received little formal education in science (Pilato 193). Moreover, women who did study science in the nineteenth-century were typically steered toward human biology (which would help with nursing) and botany where their "natural" attention to detail would be useful in the cataloguing of intricate species of flora and fauna (Stevenson 128-32). Moreover, according to Gage's 1870 commentary on the female inventor, "Women have not dared to exercise their faculties except in certain directions unless in a covert manner. A knowledge of mechanics has been deemed unwomanly" (5). Nonetheless, between 1873 and 1914, Jones received a total of fourteen patents for mechanically based inventions.

The time period during which Jones was most active as a scientist is highly significant, both in historical and personal contexts. Although Jones does not provide specific dates in her autobiography other than her parents' marriage, her father's death, and her own birthday, she indicates two distinct chronological phases in her life, suggesting that she was

primarily a poet and a practicing Spiritualist advisor until she began to market her inventions and became a business owner. She continued to identify with Spiritualism after entering a new phase of life first as an inventor and later as a factory owner in the late 1880s and early 1890s, but her Spiritualist practice was far more solitary; life in the public sphere meant little time to return to poetry or Spiritualist “sittings.”

In a broader sense, the period during which Jones became active in the public sphere both as an inventor and a business owner coincide with the two largest World’s Fairs--of particular significance to women--held in the United States in the nineteenth-century. These were the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial and the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Although there is no evidence that Jones either attended or exhibited at these fairs, the Philadelphia and Chicago events can be used as historical benchmarks when contextualizing Jones’s career. Preparation for these international exhibitions and opinions on them afterwards directly affected people’s impressions of both scientific development and women in the public sphere. Further, according to T.J. Boisseau and Abigail M. Markwyn, reflection on the World’s Fairs is indispensable to historians of the Gilded Age as their study illuminates “how public perceptions were formed” (2). It is also worth examining the World’s Fairs specifically to contextualize Jones’s experiences as a woman scientist entering the public sphere, because source materials pertaining to the fairs reveals an

“unparalleled capacity to articulate the gender status quo at particular moments” (Boisseau and Markwyn 12).

The establishment of a Woman’s Building at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 marked the first time that women’s work was publicly recognized on a grand scale. For the most part, the Woman’s Building contained art and needlework. However, the Women’s Committee at the Centennial Exhibition made some strategic rhetorical moves in terms of cultivating an awareness of women’s relationship with technology. Visitors to the Women’s Pavilion were apparently agog at the sight of a young woman named Emma Allison operating an enormous steam powered printing press (Weimann 3). The point was primarily to show that women were capable of operating and inventing technologies bigger and bulkier (and perhaps more complicated) than kitchen implements. Further, the Centennial offered an example of a woman as a versatile employee suited for diverse tasks.

Although the response to the Women’s Pavilion seemed initially to have been rather lukewarm, the women’s message might have been more penetrating than people had imagined, for the years between 1888 and 1892 saw an increase in the number of accepted women’s patents. Female inventors were obviously still vastly outnumbered by men, but it seemed that they were being taken ever more seriously (Weimann 428). The fact that middle-class women were growing more interested in

technology and in women's achievements in particular, was reflected by Frances Willard's immensely popular 1887 *How To Win: A Book for Girls*, designed to empower young women by showing them how to make intelligent decisions and to take advantage of technological progress in order to become more independent. In short, women were now encouraged to recognize the liberatory potential of emerging technologies. However, it seems to be a general consensus among the nineteenth-century historians that to many, the Women's Pavilion at the 1893 Columbia Exposition was itself a disappointment. As Mary Pepchinski says, "authorization may have granted a Woman's Building a certain status, but this position alone was not sufficient to guarantee that the pavilion would convey a forceful argument about gender" (203).

The Women's Pavilion of the 1893 Exposition had initially drawn attention because it was designed by a female architect and was considerably more expansive than that of 1876, but as in the 1876 Exhibition, finding items to display in the category of science was difficult. It was particularly challenging to unearth female invented technologies that men would take seriously--that is, those used outside of domestic contexts. Organizers of the Women's Pavilion struggled to recruit women inventors, but since women (unlike men)[9] were expected to pay their own

[9] Men's inventions were usually sponsored by business organizations.

shipping costs, most of the inventions that ended up in the building were small kitchen appliances (Weimann 430). Also, at the Columbian Exposition, much women's work was being presented in buildings other than the Women's Pavilion, such as Transportation, Horticulture, and Fisheries, but few, if any, of those inventions were credited to their female authors. Instead, they were subsumed under larger categories that were attributed to men. "If men worked with women, or even if women did work for male manufacturers, the work was considered to have been done by men. Only in the Woman's Building could this be controlled" (Weimann 259). Ellen Henrontin's 1893 *Cosmopolitan* article on the Women's Pavilion reflects women's disappointment with the status quo. Henrontin writes: "In the invention room are many interesting devices, though none of the most valuable and scientific inventions are shown in this room, and it seems a pity that when the patent books of the United States show such hundreds and hundreds of women's names that more might have been represented" (562). However, although expectations were not met in terms of showcasing women's inventions, the 1893 Exhibition saw women who were more supportive of one another's efforts to enter the public sphere than they had been in 1876 (Stevenson 198). Nevertheless, beyond the 1893 World's Fair, the idea of drawing attention specifically to women's inventions did not gain momentum again until the 1920s, when entire

World's Fairs were dedicated exclusively to the accomplishments of women (Boisseau 136).[10]

The notion of "professional" science and the construction of the "professional scientist" seemed to have been preempted by the Philadelphia Centennial—and this professionalism was (like the field of science itself) considered to be an exclusively male province. In *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation*, Nina Baym quotes Robert Bruce who says that women were excluded from professional science prior to 1876 (89-93). Baym also asserts that the number of recognized professional scientists in the United States began to increase around the 1880s. But as Baym also observes, "The overall number of women trying to do 'real' science--that is, carry out an original scientific project under professional auspices and be known for having done it--seem to have been extremely small" (1591-95). This begs the question of how a professional scientist is distinguished from an amateur one. The answer, it seemed, was that a professional scientist--at least at the World's Fair--was determined by individual authorship, an issue which will be taken up later in this chapter.

[10] In both World's Fairs the Women's Building or Pavilion was apart from the main exhibition areas and was represented as a place where visitors could take refreshments.

Romantic Views of Invention and the Social Collective

In her autobiography, Jones describes a vision of a "blazing comet" signaling that "God has a gift for me--a wonderful, great gift" (339). This vision suggests that the divine had conveyed to her all the knowledge she needed to conceive of her food canning invention. Further, this notion of divine inspiration typifies a Romantic view of invention:

> Spirits may clear away the mists before us;--it is our eyes
> that see! Spirits may point the way; it is our feet
> that walk! Spirits may scatter thoughts like
> meadow-flowers; our hands must gather them.
> Whatever spirits know, they have no right to tell
> us--they have no *power* to tell us--unless we
> have the necessary mind and brain
> development enabling us to fully apprehend.
> *Then* we can meet as equals--not before. And
> so this gold blossom dropped beside me,--so I
> picked it up. (339)

Here, the relationship between individualism and the divine is clarified according to Platonic tradition. An invention is a "gold blossom" fallen from heaven that needs only to be picked up by the right person. This claim suggests that the artist or creator is a rare individual who is sensitive enough to receive messages from the Gods. Only those who are blessed

with “eyes that see” are able to find the path indicated by the spirits. Brilliant ideas need only to be recognized by a person with “the necessary mind and brain development,” that is, someone in a state of evolution that is on a par with the spirit world itself.

This Platonically inspired Romantic view assumes that inventions migrate fully formed from the divine into the mind of an individual “chosen” author. But this was a problematic belief for a Victorian-era woman because it did not allow for women’s creativity or invention. The individual with “the necessary mind and brain development” was assumed to be a man. Women found that people were “eager to tell them that Nature had provided women with a physique that would punish them with madness and disease if they attempted to rival the males” (Battersby 90). According to Battersby, the Romantics took “maleness as the norm for artistic or creative achievement, however ‘feminine’ that male might be. Great artists and scientists have *male* sexual drives, whether or not they are biologically female. Males can *transcend* their sexuality; females are *limited* by theirs--or, if not, must, themselves have *male* sexual energy” (Battersby 18). Battersby’s reference to a ‘feminine’ male is highly significant in that the nineteenth-century genius (particularly the poet) was believed to have feminine qualities such as sensitivity and intuition. However, since the creative drive itself was understood to be masculine, the ‘feminine’ qualities of a creative male were commended rather than

denigrated. Although constructions of male biology do not necessarily have to exclude feminine qualities, female biology is unaccepting of anything other than the feminine; hence, creative women like Jones were expected to lose their femininity when they indulged in inventive work. “The occasional female creator could be countenanced; but being a creator and a truly feminine female were deemed to be in conflict” (Battersby 6). Significantly, however, Jones expresses far more concern about losing her femininity when engaging in scientific pursuits than she does when writing her poetry. Although she claims creative genius in both realms, creativity in science places her womanhood at greater risk than creativity in the arts. Perhaps this was because creativity in poetry was widely understood to signify an adoption of certain socially sanctioned “feminine” qualities. Invention in the sciences, however, did not seem to accommodate femininity in any form; instead, invention in the sciences emphasized the male nature of creativity all the more. As Battersby says, women choosing to begin a career also had to choose “what to *be*: a woman or a sexual pervert” (45).

Nonetheless, in some places in Jones’s autobiography she exhibits a fierce desire to assert her own authorship and to take credit in the same way that a man does:

> No spirit told me this. I have inventions--
>
> patentable--patented. They are as much my

> own as are my many poems--mostly studied
> out by slow and painful process, often at bitter
> cost. To every patent application I have taken
> an oath, unperturbed: “This is my invention.--
> This I claim.” (343)

Here, Jones stresses that she was not told what to do by a spirit helper and emphasizes the individual toil and suffering associated with creative genius. It is a “slow and painful process,” but one that indicates authorship--an expression of individuality. As a woman, Jones quickly realizes that she must claim authorship over her technological inventions or, as was often the case with female inventors, the credit would be taken from her by a man. Her inventions, she says, have been earned “often at a bitter cost” (Jones 343). The vexed relationship between women and science therefore arises in part from what LeFevre terms the “social collective” view of invention, in which Jones is hindered by a culture discouraging women from being active creative agents.

A Lost Womanhood

Widespread gender anxiety meant that women’s inventions were always seen as either superfluous to prevailing social needs or—in some cases—as a threat to the existing social order. In *Retrieval of a Legacy: Nineteenth-century American Woman Inventors*, Denise Pilato discusses

how, due to an overwhelming social bias against granting patents to women, female inventors were frequently discredited (2). Further, most women's inventions were used in the home and were therefore considered less important than inventions used in other, more public spheres--particularly the battlefield. Smith-Rosenberg, Russett, and numerous other scholars have outlined the various ways in which the Victorian-era scientific establishment, threatened by women's social progress, attempted to find scientific evidence of women's intellectual inferiority so as to bolster a conviction that women should remain in their "natural" socially designated sphere. Various women negotiated these prejudices by claiming that their inventions were divinely inspired by male spirits. However, this tactic often backfired as many patent issuers interpreted references to spirits as markers of feminine weakness and superstition (Pilato 18-19). In a similar vein, LeFevre discusses ways that inventors are attached to the social collective. If the inventor's attachment is strong, "their ideas may be very much in accord with the prevailing collective views or rules; if their attachments are weak, they may be more likely to produce ideas that…will face considerable resistance from people who are more firmly attached to collective views" (82). It is evident that a woman's attachment to the social collective in the realm of science was weak. The "resistance" that LeFevre describes came in many forms, particularly in

the common social perception that engaging in scientific pursuits was tantamount to a rejection of femininity.

A collective concern worried that once women were out in public (so to speak), they would lose their charmingly feminine qualities. This concern apparently caused people to balk at visiting the Woman's Building at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago for fear that they would be confronted by a disconcerting gruffness. An example of the perceived incompatibility between femininity and scientific invention is reflected in a *New York Times* article of June 25th 1893. A reporter speaking in support of the Women's Building at the Chicago World's Fair evidently feels it necessary to reassure potential visitors "that the atmosphere of the entire building is not the atmosphere of…equal suffrage and…woman's right to invade the domain of man, but the sublimely soft and soothing atmosphere of womanliness." This unexpected "womanliness" is further characterized by an emphasis on "personal adornment" and "beautification." Notably, however, the article focuses entirely on needlework and textiles. The author makes no mention whatsoever of any womanly excursion into the sciences, which would have certainly been perceived as an invasion. Instead, the feminine is "sublimely soft," too soft to overstep her boundaries. Given these assumptions and prejudices, it is not surprising that even women who championed women's rights were reluctant to be too closely associated with yet another supposedly de-

feminizing force: the suffrage movement.[11] It is also unsurprising that after becoming a patented inventor, Jones's autobiography reflects increasing discomfort with her social role as a woman and with how she is perceived by other women.

For example, Jones describes one particularly troubling dream in which she is in the mountains--an image of significance because, according to Battersby, mountains were often associated with the Romantic sublime. There, Jones sees a "little group of women" standing near to her, while a larger group of women (consisting of a thousand or so) gathers further away. The larger group "seemed to look on me with favor; still they kept apart" (Jones 360). When Jones turns to look at the "little group" that are "pressed so very close" she sees that "there were four or five among the group that scowled at me. The eyes were full of hatred. That was terrible! They would have murdered me it seemed, but had not weapons save their stabbing eyes. I had been used to woman's love and had not realized a woman's power to hate"(360). The mountains seem to symbolize an arduous journey with the possibility of coming upon impasses and chasms at every turn. These particular mountains appear to be uniquely populated with women, suggesting that this dangerous

[11] Although many high profile women spoke at the World's Fair to emphasize women's contributions to society, these speakers refused to be directly associated with suffrage and some even denounced it.

excursion into the Romantic nature of invention is one that many women attempt to make, but that few successfully manage. Who are the women who stand in judgment of Jones? What has she done to inspire such animosity? Is it possible that these women are jealous of Jones's power? Is it possible that the women are her abandoned feminine side and that they shun her because she's been audacious enough to enter the male world? No matter what the speculation, this dream offers a vivid and disturbing portrayal of gender anxiety.

In contrast, when describing her life prior to becoming a scientist and inventor, Jones demonstrates little to no anxiety over prescribed gender roles. In the years defined primarily by her poetry writing and work as a Spiritualist advisor, she moves from one Spiritualist community to the next, always welcome at the local spas and always surrounded by like-minded people. When she goes public with her canning method, however, she enters the male domains of law, business, and science. It is at that point that Jones seems--albeit inadvertently--to feminize Spiritualism and its various nurturing communities. Once Jones has recognized and internalized common cultural constructions of the male public and the female private, Spiritualism comes to represent a sacred domesticity. It is perhaps for this reason that Jones tends to idealize her experience as a woman prior to entering the public sphere. Upon becoming a competitor within the marketplace she wonders: "Was ever woman's life so

revolutionized? Out in the open, haunting shops and factories, planning manifold devices, solving mechanical puzzles—what had become of all my pretty times? No more rhyming, story-telling, broidering, playing tunes, gossiping, sowing seeds, and plucking lovely flowers" (Jones 355). The verb "haunting' is significant here as it suggests that Jones sees herself as a ghost--this could mean that she conceives of herself as invisible in a predominantly male world--and also that she conceives of her feminine self as being dead. The "revolution" did not come without sacrifice--and the public sphere is framed as being dull and inhuman: "manifold devices" and "mechanical puzzles" are devoid of affect. Meanwhile, Jones idealizes a past in which she had the luxury of engaging in musical and literary arts--not to mention the carefree frivolity of "gossiping" and "plucking lovely flowers." Apparently, Jones misses the domestic sphere, but her wistfulness and nostalgia suggest a belief that--as with childhood--she can never return to its innocence. Later also, as Jones mentions the plight of the working class woman, it becomes clear that she is aware of her own class privilege and that the experience of being a woman with "pretty times" is not available to everyone. Thus, the dream of the hateful women could signify guilt--as is evidenced by thousands of women who appear to witness Jones and her small passionless coterie as "other." It is as if Jones is looking into a mirror trying to anticipate how others will see her

when they look at her--to see what she will reflect back upon the feminine principles of her culture.

Earlier in the book, Jones has a prophetic vision in which she is in a setting similarly emblematic of what Battersby describes as the “Romantic sublime,” that is, on a stone bridge spanning a chasm separating one mountain from another. Jones describes the bridge as “so strong and heavy, neither flood nor earthquake could have done it harm; and just above the bridge the rocks were all as one” (345). From the bridge, Jones sees “two shining spirits--tall women-spirits--angels if you choose to call them so--descend and come to me across the mountain” (345). One of the angels is holding a sleeping baby which she puts in Jones arms, indicating a cross high up on the mountain from whence she has come. She then says, “*Let no one take the child*. Bear it--a precious burden, till you have reached the cross. Then lay it down, close to the foot, and pass! *Nothing shall hurt the child*” (345).

The Christian symbol of the cross does not necessarily come as a surprise since Jones was raised in the Christian tradition and many nineteenth-century Spiritualists carried Christian beliefs into their practices. The fact that the spirits are female is significant since they indicate not only a sense of community among women, but also a preoccupation with the creative principle of birth. One of the angels is holding a child of indeterminate gender, while the other angel appears to

be assisting her. Linking the image of the child to the cross seems to suggest a form of sacrifice. Jones is to be the vehicle by which the child (perhaps symbolizing an invention) becomes known to the world; the means by which its power is unleashed. Like Jesus, the child is to be left as an offering to the human race, but unlike Jesus, the child will not be put to death. Jones's invention--or her brainchild--is to remain intact; it is safe from harm. Jones does not give birth to the child herself, instead, she "discovers" it via the angels. The child cannot reach the cross without Jones who is indispensable to the process of bringing knowledge to the world. The conveyance--or application--of the child to the cross is as essential a component of invention as the mysterious origin of the child itself. In a sense, the casting of Jones as a vehicle for future knowledge can also be seen as a link between past and present, a representation of transition--passing across the stone bridge--and of the potential for intellectual growth and human progress. Jones's dream of the hostile women on a similar mountainside can also be interpreted in terms of a movement between past and present. Once upon a time, Jones was like the other women--the many thousands that stand on the steep slopes of the mountain. Through her inventions, she is set apart from them; "othered." However, if the exchange between the smaller and larger group of women is to be understood as a transition between past and present, it can be interpreted in typically progressive nineteenth-century terms.

According to Timothy Hickman, this means constructing the past as an "other" entity--an entity from which a departure must be made (286).

As Hickman tells us, a key component of modernist thought involved clarifying and re-inscribing the boundaries between past and present in order to reify a linear movement of progress. For example, in a close reading of Willard's *How to Win*, Hickman illustrates how Willard, as well as other writers and speakers of the nineteenth-century, deployed "a strategy that separated the antiquated from the modern and thus helped to produce the sense of modernity itself" (286-7). By doing this, Victorian-era Americans were able to enact the importance of a particular cultural moment; the possibilities available only *now*. According to Willard, the past is male, but technology has changed this by opening up more possibilities for women to travel, learn, and organize. The present, therefore, is distinctively female--however, as Hickman points out "not all writers identified changed gender relations as the definitive element of their era, nor did they agree on modernity's meaning. Highlighting technological change was a more common way to identify the present as a break from the past" (291). In response to Hickman, I would argue that although not everyone cited changing gender relations "as the definitive element of their era," it appears that gender and technology were inextricably linked. It stands to reason, therefore, that "highlighting technological change" also implied changing gender relations. As evidenced by Jones's

autobiography and numerous other sources of that era--including the documentation from exhibitions at the World's Fair--technology itself was considered to be a distinctly masculine field. Certainly, technology could be used by women to achieve feminine ends, but--as Jill Galvan points out--the nineteenth-century woman often became the passive instrument of technology, too. In telecommunications, for instance, the stereotypically receptive woman's function was to humanize and domesticize messages sent by telephone or telegraph. The "sensitive" woman was therefore seen as an extension of technology rather than its operant.

To some degree, however, it appears that Willard attempts to address this complication. Assumptions about women must be updated along with emerging technologies. If women could assert a break with social mores of the "past," they would conceivably be able to present new constructions of a feminine relationship to technology, as evidenced in the World's Fairs and beyond. By constructing images of the past and present and by ostentatiously moving back and forth between them, Willard suggests that women are no longer who they were; they change with the times. The idea of producing a "sense of modernity" suggests a sociocollective model of invention, one that feminists hoped would open a rhetorical space for women.

Internal Dialogic and Collaborative Models of Invention

As I see it, Jones's autobiography indicates an attempt to negotiate an assumed incompatibility between gender and genius by extending the definition of the Romantic model of invention to encompass other more collaborative models. When reading Jones's work through the lens of LeFevre's theories on invention, Jones can be interpreted as attempting to separate a creative self from a critical self in what LeFevre terms an "internal dialogic" approach to invention. Based on Freudian psychology, the internal dialogic can operate as an internalized sociocollective that LeFevre describes as "the locus of evaluation…[that]…lies within the individual but is also influenced by the social world from which it came"(56). For Jones, casting her internal dialogic voice as an active voice speaking to a more passive self seems to point to an attempt to retain her femininity: she is essentially feminine, albeit temporarily instructed by a male voice. This passage indicates how Jones engages a second construction of self that exists apart from a more ordinary self. She writes:

> Waking that day out of my usual air-bath slumber…I said (these are the very words): *'I see how fruit must be canned without cooking it. The air must be exhausted from the cells and fluid made to take its place. The fluid must*

be airless also--a light syrup of sugar and

water--that, or the juice of the fruit.' (343)

Jones believes herself to be unusually lucid after an "air-bath[12] slumber," which perhaps explains why she feels that her words emerge from another self, enabling which--in LeFevre's terms-- might be referred to as an "internal social construct" (2).

Jones further extends the idea of the internal dialogic experience by establishing the collaboration of a controlling male spirit who provides her with instruction. Jones describes this spirit, a Dr. Jonathan Andrews as: "…old and very old, if time in Spirit-life be measured by progression… He might have visited a myriad worthier; but one I loved had brought him,--he had chosen me" (191). However, even while Dr. Andrews has Jones under his control, "Never once did he transgress the limit. Meantime, each was at liberty,--he to speak his thoughts, and I to think my own. Sometimes I disagreed with him at first and had to be convinced by argument or explanation" (192). Therefore, while Jones acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge and the importance of collaboration, she continues to remind the reader of individual authorship. When the first canning method does not work, Jones must come up with another idea on

[12] The "air-bath" is a feature of a spa mentioned in Jones's autobiography. While no specific sources offer a definition, it can be inferred that an air-bath simply means lying out in the open air to refresh oneself.

her own. “Did I appeal to spirits? No not I! Some lady--thought to be a medium--had said unwisely: ‘Scald your fruit:--not boiling water--some degrees below.’ Well what was that but cooking? Still it served to set me thinking. Warmth it seemed, would aid expansion; let us have a little warmth” (343). This particular passage is lifted from a letter that Jones writes to her cousin, Dr. Cooley, who is instrumental in helping Jones to develop her invention through work in the laboratory. “The laboratory tests were promising; we saw the air escape--tearing the grapes apart, and knew of nothing more to do after the flasks were filled with fluid only to seal them up (though that was difficult) and wait to prove results” (341). Later, Jones and Dr. Cooley again engage in correspondence over how to alter the experiment (343). Of her collaboration with Dr. Cooley, Jones says,

> See what it is to be a Scientist. Up to that point the thoughts had been my own of precedence and right. And yet, without his supplementing thought, this work of mine had ended then and there. I do not say he was inspired, but I had been inspired to visit him, and more than that to put my trust in him as one whom others trusted--souls released from earth. (346)

The use of the capital “S” for the word “Scientist” connotes its importance to Jones--“Scientist” is a title that one must earn. Here, Jones emphasizes that the cultivation of individual genius requires support. Although Jones claims ownership over the invention because it was she who had been “inspired,” she needed Dr. Cooley’s help and she believes that the spirits brought her together with him. This speaks to Jones’s recognition of the necessity of collaboration in the formation of knowledge and the construction of meaning. That is, invention becomes social when inventors “involve other people as collaborators or reviewers whose comments and invention, or as ‘resonators’ who nourish the development of ideas” (LeFevre 2). Moreover, from a rhetorical perspective, discussing male helpers may lend Jones a certain credibility that--as a woman--she may not have been able to claim otherwise. Just as a man must vouch for Jones’s authenticity in the foreword to her autobiography, Dr. Andrews and Dr. Cooley serve to vouch for Jones’s competence in the realm of science.

Conclusion

The Romantic view of invention (as well as the social collective in which it occurs) becomes a hindrance to Jones as she attempts to construct herself as a woman both in her autobiography and in a male public sphere. However, with regard to the transgression of gender roles,

Jones does find ways to temper social judgment--and her own judgment of herself. One approach Jones takes is what LeFevre describes as an "internal dialogic" view of invention in which the author attempts to separate a critical self from a creative self. For Jones, the inventive self is dictatorial and active, pushing her to try new things, while the ordinary Jones is more passive or "feminine" in nature and must be prodded by the "other" voice. Further, in an effort to gain acceptance from her readers, Jones deploys what LeFevre refers to as a "collaborative" approach to invention. That is, in order to retain her femininity, Jones discusses her male helpers, emphasizing her difference from them in an attempt to preserve her own individuality and sense of authorship while simultaneously building an ethos as a scientist.

Jones's own movement across models of invention could be read as an attempt not only to negotiate between male and female worlds, but also between constructions of the past and present in order to reconcile the two. Jones's autobiography describes a "past" Spiritualist lifestyle in conflict with "present" institutions of science and business. However, as I have shown, Jones's personal constructions of past and present are quite different from those advocated by women such as Willard. While Willard views technology as bearing liberatory potential for women to exercise their womanly influence, Jones experiences a life dedicated to technology as being stressful, impersonal, and unwilling to accommodate femininity.

For this reason, I read *A Psychic Autobiography* as an attempt to reconcile various seemingly incompatible aspects of nineteenth-century life, reasoning that the uneven quality of Jones's writing and its frequent lack of clarity point to the difficulty of such an endeavor. At times, Jones may include poetry where a reader might have liked concrete explanations or she may omit key details of an event because those details do not act in service of her introspection. For Jones, perhaps reconciliation can only be found in those more indeterminate sections of her work--in dreams, and in the spaces between past and present, reality and fantasy.

CHAPTER 5

PINKIE AT PLAY: POSTCOLONIALISM, POLITICS, AND PERFORMANCE IN NETTIE COLBURN MAYNARD'S *WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN A SPIRITUALIST?*

In this chapter, I examine Nettie Colburn Maynard's 1891 autobiography *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist? Or, Curious Revelations from the Life of a Trance Medium* in order to discuss Maynard's rhetorical strategy both as a medium and as an autobiographer. Two features of Maynard's mediumship distinguished her from other established mediums of her time. One was that she went into a trance whenever she was controlled by a spirit;[13] the other was that, of the spirits she believed were controlling her, one of the most consistent--and popular--particularly when Maynard was in the company of ladies, was "Pinkie," a Native American child-spirit. The phenomenon of white mediums being controlled by Native American spirits became common following the Civil War and continued well into the 1870s (Cox 233). As such, I seek to examine the cultural significance of the Native American spirit within postbellum publics by considering Pinkie through a

[13] Not all mediums fell unconscious during trances and many conducted séances without ever going into a trance at all.

postcolonial lens, drawing on Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry and performance. As Pinkie, Maynard, an "unlettered girl," is able to negotiate entry into high society by opening up a space in which women of differing backgrounds could engage with one another socially and express political opinions. By adopting the stance of a little girl, Maynard is able to discuss personal issues with society ladies while appearing to remain a disinterested party. Significantly, the fact that Maynard goes into a trance and is not aware of what her controlling spirit says means that her clients' confidentiality can be maintained. Further, from a narrative perspective Maynard avoids accusations of social transgression by stressing that she has no agency whatsoever after she is taken over by a spirit and by appearing to erase herself from the scene she presents. In this autobiography, Maynard places Lincoln at its center by claiming that the book is about his Spiritualist experiences, rather than hers. This move allows her to develop an ethos. By constructing Lincoln as a stable "truth" at the center of the book, Maynard creates an increased sense of stability and credibility at its margins--where she places herself. In this manner, Maynard claims historical space and authority for herself and for Pinkie. As rhetorical constructs within the autobiography, both Pinkie and Maynard perform subjectivity by enhancing one another's potential as citizens and empowering one another to act in a dominant public sphere.

Maynard's autobiography suggests that advice from spirit guides played an integral part in winning the Civil War. Maynard's autobiography, published only a few years before her death, documents her work as Lincoln's primary Spiritualist advisor.[14] Despite these claims, Maynard's name is conspicuously absent from historical sources documenting the Lincoln administration. For this reason, the fact that Maynard's autobiography was published decades after the Civil War operates in her favor, being that narratives of Lincoln had already been firmly established in the American cultural consciousness. Overall, Maynard's descriptions of Lincoln are very much in keeping with the mythos created in the years following his assassination. Maynard tells a familiar story of Lincoln, delicately overlaying it with the rather less palatable narrative of Spiritualist practice. However, toward the end of the nineteenth-century it would not have been difficult to persuade sympathetic readers that the Civil War had been won by virtue of a higher agency and that Lincoln himself had been spiritually inspired.

There is no corroborating evidence in the historical record to confirm that Lincoln knew Maynard—nor is there much background on Maynard herself. Although Maynard does not give her birthdate--modestly

[14] According to Maynard's autobiography, Lincoln also consulted with other psychics on matters pertaining to the Civil War; Charles Colchester, Charles Foster, Mrs. Lucy A. Hamilton, and Charles Redmond (92).

claiming that such personal information would not be of interest to readers--details in her autobiography suggest that she was born in 1841, raised in Connecticut, began practicing Spiritualism in the mid 1850s, and came to be introduced to the Lincolns in the 1860s—once Lincoln was in office—by their Spiritualist friends, the Cranston Lauries. Apparently, prior to the death of their son Willie, the Lincolns had never demonstrated much interest in Spiritualism, although they were friendly with some of its practitioners. However, when Willie died in 1862, first Mary Lincoln and then the President began consulting spirit mediums. By that time, because of the Fox Sisters, Spiritualism had come to be quite well known, although as a medium, Maynard (then Nettie Colburn) kept a much lower profile than the Fox sisters, engaging mostly in private consultations (rather than large public demonstrations) and trance speaking[15] before select Spiritualist audiences.

Outside of this autobiography, very little information is available on Maynard. Her book does, however, receive recognition from Hudson Tuttle, a well-known Spiritualist whose letter of commendation was published in the March 7th, 1891 edition of Spiritualist newspaper *Banner of Light.* Tuttle describes Maynard as being “not as well known to

[15] Not all trance speakers were considered mediums. While mediums held séances and passed messages to individuals, trance speakers could not necessarily do this--and simply lectured on esoteric subjects.

Spiritualists as she was years ago under the name of Nettie Colburn. She set out as a trance speaker…and was…continually engaged by societies. She was eloquent, and had that sterling integrity of character which endeared her to all" (Maynard 237).[16] Notably, Maynard practiced trance speaking in public, but rarely practiced mediumship in public. The fact that Tuttle describes her as a trance speaker rather than as a medium signals that she might have been viewed with respect by old guard intellectual Spiritualists who disliked and mistrusted the sensationalist turn that mediumship had taken in the 1870s (Lehman; Owen). Trance speaking was held in higher regard than mediumship since the (usually female) speaker delivered educational lectures under the control of an erudite (usually male) spirit. Since the speakers were understood to be literally absorbed by the persona of their controls, they could not be accused of impropriety. It was also assumed that since the female speaker lacked a formal education she was incapable of the kind of fraud that apparently prevailed at séances. Since trance speaking was held in higher esteem than mediumship in general, it is possible that Maynard refers to herself as a "trance medium" to convey that although she relays messages from the dead, she wishes to maintain the social cachet of a trance speaker.

[16] Tuttle's *Banner of Light* article was reprinted in the introduction to Maynard's autobiography.

In addition to empowering herself by identifying with trance, Maynard emphasizes her access to Lincoln and creates a rhetorical space in which to align herself with him. Further, Maynard builds an ethos by inserting references to politically high profile sitters at her séances and by providing anecdotes about President Lincoln, including details so specific and personal that it seems she could not have invented them. Here, Maynard describes her first meeting with him:

> …I was led forward and presented. He stood before me, tall and kindly, with a smile on his face. Dropping his hand upon my head, he said, in a humorous tone, "So this is our 'little Nettie' is it, that we have heard so much about?" I could only smile and say, "Yes, sir," like any school-girl; when he kindly led me to an ottoman. Sitting down in a chair, the ottoman at his feet, he began asking me questions in a kindly way about my mediumship. (71)

When describing her introduction to the President, Maynard speaks, as usual, in a passive voice. After she is "led forward and presented" she finds in Lincoln a paternal figure who puts his hand on her head--or more

specifically, “drops” it because he is so tall and formidable a presence. Although Lincoln’s gesture may seem unduly patronizing to contemporary readers, the President was far older than Maynard--she was the same age as his eldest son Robert--and the autobiography asks us to read the gesture as one that Lincoln intended to put her at ease. Maynard is clearly intimidated by Lincoln, and mentions being embarrassed by her monosyllabic answers to his questions, but his manner is almost overwhelmingly “genial and kind.” Twice, in this short passage, Maynard describes Lincoln as “kindly,” almost as if she is surprised that he would speak to someone as unimportant as she in such a friendly manner. As Maynard’s autobiography progresses, her growing familiarity with Lincoln becomes evident and in later passages she no longer appears to be so intimidated by him. By repeatedly mentioning Lincoln’s kindness and lack of pretension, Maynard supports the cultural mythos surrounding Lincoln and his reputation as an exceptionally humble and tolerant man. Notably, Lincoln’s tolerance plays another role in the cultural mythos of his tenure as president; he is lauded for having the patience to cope with his much maligned wife--Mary Todd Lincoln (Baker 194-201). The relationship between Maynard and Mrs. Lincoln will be taken up later in this chapter.

The Autobiography

In her autobiography, Maynard puts special emphasis on her lack of education--a common rhetorical trope for female mediums and trance speakers of that era. As an “unlettered girl,” she was considered to be at her most convincing when she offered details on subjects she couldn’t possibly know anything about. For instance, Maynard often reminds readers of her humble origins, claiming that mediumship had taken her “an untaught child, from my humble home in the ranks of the laboring people and led me forth, a teacher of the sublime truth of immortality…” (22). Further, by framing evidence of Lincoln’s involvement with Spiritualism as a question (“Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?”) rather than as a statement, Maynard attempts to give the impression that she could not presume to tell a reader what to think and that she has no choice but to breach gender and class boundaries in service of the broader discourses of Spiritualist historiography.

Maynard’s self-deprecating comments at the beginning of the autobiography give the reader the impression that she is modest with a strong sense of propriety and social boundaries--a common trope in nineteenth-century works. Maynard’s original text, published by Rufus Hartranft of Philadelphia, is a red volume with a gold engraving of Lincoln on the cover and and a portrait of Lincoln on the frontispiece. The engraving, by a “Mr. Halpin” is endorsed by both Mary and Robert Lincoln,

serving to advertise Halpin's skills. The 264 page book bears an epigraph: "After all, it is the old old story, Truth is stranger than Fiction," and is dedicated to Maynard's husband, William Porter Maynard. The publisher's preface takes up eighteen pages attesting to both Maynard's integrity and appealing to sympathy by letting the reader know that at the time of publication Maynard had been declared a "hopeless invalid" unable to leave her bed. This is followed by a foreword in which Maynard assures readers that her book is not intended to "proselyte in the cause of Spiritualism" and goes on to apologize for her writing style: "School privileges were denied me through protracted illness in childhood, and home training did not prepare for authorship; therefore, I beg the indulgence of my readers" (1). Again, Maynard speaks in the passive voice, conveying a certain degree of fatalism. Furthermore, Maynard emphasizes her femininity by declaring her unworthiness, and then, in mentioning "home training" she reminds her readers of her tendency toward domesticity and perhaps a reluctance to be out in public.

The first four chapters are a history of how Maynard came to Spiritualism and discovered her abilities. The next two chapters describe the difficulties her brother faced as a Union soldier on the front and her efforts to procure a furlough for him. Chapters seven through nineteen are dedicated to describing her meetings with the President. Upon her arrival at the White House, Maynard is officially employed by the Agricultural

Department in the seed room[17] to serve as cover for the unofficial work she does for Lincoln. Although Maynard is careful not to discuss money, it can be inferred that she is paid for working part time in the seed room rather than collecting fees for her services as a medium. The final two chapters and conclusion of the autobiography discuss Spiritualism in more general historical terms. The body of the work is interspersed with portraits of various society ladies as well as members of Lincoln's cabinet, such as Daniel Somes.[18] The remaining fifty pages of the book are made up of "Spirit Poems" penned by Maynard herself while in a trance state and an Appendix containing correspondence between Maynard and various society figures in Washington D.C. at the time of the Civil War. However, the Appendix contains no correspondence from either the President or his wife. Either the Lincolns sent no letters at all (preferring to arrange Spiritualist liaisons by word of mouth) or the letters have been lost or deliberately omitted.

As mentioned, Maynard attempts to provide a social history of Spiritualism so as to contextualize her own experience within it. Although Maynard does not specifically acknowledge the Fox sisters, she seems to accept the widespread theory among Spiritualists that the movement

[17] Workers in the seed room bagged seeds to send to citizens growing food for the war effort.

[18] An inventor and statesman from Maine.

began in 1848 with the Hydesville rappings.[19] It is possible that Maynard does not wish to mention the Fox sisters by name, because by the time her autobiography was published, the sisters had already become embroiled in a series of scandals. As if anticipating a reader's prejudice, Maynard states that the first twenty-five years of Spiritualism, that is, Spiritualist practices between the late 1840s and the beginning of the reconstruction, were aimed at leveling "a stern and unyielding warfare against the world without, yet withal to rather bear with its oppressors than to attempt their overpowering; to uproot old and stereotyped errors, change ancient ideas and do battle with school-craft ignorance and bigotry" (126). By impressing this upon her audience, Maynard clarifies that she identifies with Spiritualism only as it was in its purest form. Here, her language is particularly interesting as she describes Spiritualism itself as being part of a larger struggle for the souls of the American people. When she mentions "warfare…against the world without" and "battle with school-craft ignorance" she speaks of taking aggressive action, but she also suggests a passive resistance by using the word "unyielding" and by speaking of Spiritualism bearing "with its oppressors ...[rather]…than to attempt their overpowering." In pitting Spiritualism against "the world

[19] The birth of American Spiritualism is widely attributed to the Fox Sisters and the mysterious rappings at their house in Hydesville which were believed to be messages from the Spirits.

without," Maynard creates a binary that suggests the insularity of Spiritualism and a certain privileged knowledge. Further, by speaking of the need to "uproot…stereotyped errors," Maynard evokes gardening and typographical machinery--"errors" of bigotry are not natural, they are man-made--but can be removed by natural means. Given a typically apologetic nineteenth-century writing style; Maynard's rhetoric of reticence and veneer of feminine passivity, it is surprising to see her use such strong language and to speak in what could be conceived as extremes, for example, the "ignorance" of the world without is characterized not simply by outmoded ideas, but by "ancient" ones. As such, Maynard demonstrates an identification with the more intellectual and sophisticated members of the Spiritualist movement rather than those embroiled in spectacle and showmanship. To emphasize this differentiation, she writes of "…many changes of a discouraging character which overshadowed believers" (Maynard 126). She does not go into detail on this but alludes to unscrupulous activity operating under the guise of Spiritualism.

Trance

In terms of credibility, the success of Maynard's performance as a medium seems contingent upon her ability to be as unobtrusive as possible-- that is to enter the public sphere metaphorically but not literally. She achieves this by slipping into unconsciousness--or a period of deep

trance--while under the control of a spirit. In her autobiography, she describes a particularly significant occasion upon which she provides information on military strategy via a spirit named Dr. Bamford. Significantly, when she is controlled by spirits at Lincoln's behest, they are almost always the spirits of elderly white men. Here, she describes emerging from a trance state:

> In my hand was a lead pencil, and the tall man,
> with Mr. Lincoln was standing beside me,
> bending over the map, while the younger man
> was standing on the other side of the table,
> looking curiously and intently at me…The only
> remarks I heard were these: "It is astonishing,"
> said Mr. Lincoln, "how every line she has
> drawn conforms to the plan agreed upon."
> "Yes," answered the other soldier, "it is very
> astonishing." Looking up they both saw that I
> was awake, and they instantly stepped back,
> while Mr. Lincoln took the pencil from my hand
> and placed a chair for me. (165)

When Maynard awakens she brings attention to her own lack of agency by noting that she finds a pencil in her hand. Both Lincoln and his "tall" companion are standing nearby and Maynard is acutely aware of their

physical presence, appearing always to notice men's bodies--and their imposing size--more readily than she notices women's. Moreover, the fact that all of them, (including Maynard) are standing up, suggests an exigence and formality that does not seem to exist when Maynard is consorting with women. For instance, Maynard usually seems to meet with women in intimate domestic spaces such as bedrooms and parlors, but she meets with men in larger, less intimate spaces: in this case, what appears to be a conference room. When the men notice that Maynard is conscious, they "instantly stepped back." Not only do they seem startled by her, but when she awakens, they appear to remember social codes. They should not be standing too close to her, which is why they immediately move away. This suggests an appropriate degree of space between the bodies of men and women is measured differently during Spiritualist activity than it is in everyday life. Further, in this passage, Maynard seems to share in her observers' astonishment. She has no recollection of having been in a trance state and no free will after she loses consciousness. In this regard, Maynard's experiences with being controlled by spirits are markedly different from those of both Leah Fox Underhill and Amanda Jones.

Although Underhill and Jones both have spirit controls, they are not completely subsumed by these entities as is Maynard. In her autobiography, Underhill holds as highly suspect the notion that a spirit

would exert control over the medium so that she is no longer aware of her own subjectivity (283; 412). In contrast to seeing a loss of consciousness as a mark of authenticity, Underhill believes that it indicates a form of misdirection. Jones too, downplays the notion of an all-encompassing spirit control. She calls being controlled by a spirit "personating," which she defines as a brief period of time when she acts "as though I were another than myself. Of course, I always knew that no one had displaced me in reality" (Jones 92). According to both Underhill and Jones, the medium who is controlled should not lose a sense of self or an ability to think for herself—whereas according to Maynard, the presence of a spirit control means that the medium is completely and utterly possessed, with no cognizance of the outside world.

Maynard's entry into trance is quiet and peaceful rather than dramatic. There is no quivering or gasping; no production of ectoplasm; and no use of a spirit cabinet. Maynard emphasizes that for her, entering a trance state is a dignified affair; relatively undisturbing despite the fact that her consciousness is effectively "stolen." Maynard describes her first trance experience in the company of a Connecticut politician:

> Governor Seymour, who was standing behind me, laid his hand upon my head and in a moment a quiet and dreamy feeling stole over me, and a prickly sensation passed through my

> fingers and along my arms. This is the last I remember until an hour later when I awoke in a different part of the room, finding myself seated on the sofa with the company gathered about me. It appeared that I had been completely entranced, had personated different individuals who were known to be in the spirit world, and had spoken to a number present. (22)

This is the first time that Maynard describes being touched on the head. Later in the autobiography, Lincoln touches Maynard's head apparently in a gesture of fatherly goodwill, and still later, he does so again--ostensibly to instigate Maynard's trance state (Maynard 22). To Maynard, being touched on the head by these formidable men seems to carry with it a sense of patriarchal blessing--it connotes a conferring of power. That is, Maynard constructs this physical contact as a means by which she is granted the authority to connect with the spirits. Lincoln confers his masculine power upon her so that she is able to serve him. This sense of hierarchy is not enacted physically when Maynard is with other women--nor does she seem to be as aware of her physicality. Maynard experiences brief discomfort when "a prickly sensation" travels through her arms and hands, which is noteworthy because it is one of the few times that we see Maynard acknowledge her own body. It is as if she can only

recognize her own embodiment on the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness--although she seems to embrace passivity in both states. Interestingly, Maynard's clients apparently have more agency over her spirit controls than she does herself: for instance, clients will usually receive the spirit control they request--which again absolves Maynard of responsibility for transgressive behavior. Maynard describes the spirit of Dr. Bamford as "quite a favorite with Mr. Lincoln. His quaint dialect, old-fashioned methods of expression, straightforwardness in arriving at his subject, together with a fearlessness of utterance, recommended him as no finished style could have done" (85).

Enter Pinkie: Native American Child Spirit

Only on one memorable occasion does "Pinkie" whom Maynard describes as "the little Indian maiden" appear to Lincoln and his guest, a distinguished general in the Union army. Pinkie "turned at once to the stranger, addressing him as 'Crooked Knife' her Indian name for him" (Maynard 131). This name however, appears to be strangely appropriate as, after Pinkie vanishes, the General "laid aside his cloak, revealing his whole uniform and a crutch" (Maynard 132). Pinkie's knowledge is astounding to these men, perhaps because it is delivered by a racial "other"--and a female child at that.

By adopting the stance of a Native American, Maynard is able to associate herself with nineteenth-century beliefs about Indian mysticism and power. However, further research into postbellum era Spiritualism reveals that the Native American control was not quite as unusual as it might initially have seemed: “As white Americans rued (or celebrated) the vanishing Indian in novels, plays, poetry and song, as they swilled ‘Indian’ tonic and drank their patent medicines, Indians became ever more visible as spirits” (Cox 190). White Americans turned toward Native Americans whom they believed to be more attuned to the natural world and uncorrupted by commerce and industrialization. They were also considered to be superior healers with an intimate knowledge of medicinal plants. It is possible that American Spiritualists believed that in turning toward native or indigenous populations they were returning to an originary power--accessing an untainted essential self that was to be found through appropriating the power of a more natural “other.”

Scholars of American Spiritualism have noted that “the most significant group of non-Christian spirits to appear in the 1850s and 1860s were those of Native Americans” (Taves 196). According to the British-born Spiritualist, Emma Hardinge[20] “the Indian Spirits were the most esteemed” (Taves 196). In her book *Modern American Spiritualism*,

[20] Later Emma Hardinge Britten, author of *Nineteenth-century Miracles*, referenced in Chapter 3.

Hardinge describes how the larger Spiritualist community assumed that Native American spirits freely forgave white settlers for the violence they had inflicted upon indigenous populations (481). According to white constructions of Native American lore, Native American spirits wanted to cure whites of their social ills, which was the primary reason that they became “controls” for white mediums (Cox 189). Specifically, in Maynard’s case, Pinkie’s presence indicates associations with healing a country torn apart by war and with “curing” the sickening fact of slavery while returning to a more innocent and spiritually pure lifestyle. That Pinkie is a mere child could be interpreted in a number of ways signaling either innocence and purity or indeed a stunted growth; an arrested Spiritual development. Notably, Pinkie appears to women far more often than she does to men and serves to offer amusement and comfort as well as to negotiate the terms of Maynard’s relationships with high society women. The child-spirit emerges to help Maynard bridge a social gap and to find common ground with influential women such as Daniel Somes’s wife “Mrs. Somes” and Anna Mills Cosby, “the wife of the recent consul to Geneva” (160).

Maynard refers to her social life in Washington as being among the “most pleasant memories of my Washington experiences. Tuesday afternoons we usually attended Mrs. Lincoln’s receptions, often meeting there the ladies and gentlemen who graced our own” (178). It is clear that Maynard avoids speaking too much of the First Lady; Mrs. Lincoln is

mentioned surprisingly little for a book purporting to be about President Lincoln's Spiritualist activity. It is possible that this rather conspicuous lack of reference to Mrs. Lincoln plays into Maynard's rhetorical strategy. Historians assert that Lincoln's wife had a significant influence on him, but that it was this very influence that gave rise to unflattering, and often misogynistic judgments of her as being domineering, mentally unstable, fretful, and shrewish (Baker 211-18).

At the time that Maynard's book was published, Mary Lincoln would have been dead for nearly ten years, but she was still a controversial public figure. The First Lady had gone down in the annals of history as the difficult wife whose idiosyncrasies the saintly Lincoln had endured. Maynard offers some corroboration of this view; claiming that the First Lady "would while under excitement or adverse circumstances, completely give way to her feelings…She was ever kind and gracious to me; yet I could never feel for her that perfect respect and reverence that I desired to entertain regarding the chief lady of the land" (65). Beyond this, Maynard seems reluctant to refer to the First Lady too often, preferring to mention other society ladies introduced to her by the Cranston Lauries. Maynard infers that these women quickly grew fond of "Miss Pinkie" and so included Maynard in their gatherings (129). It is evident also that Maynard did not receive money for the sittings she conducted with the society women, but that she was given room and board for periods of time, given

gifts for Pinkie or offered a “souvenir” of the psychic encounter. Maynard recounts requesting portraits as souvenirs for occasions on which she is “kept busy reading the characters of the different persons present, and relating incidents in their lives of which they knew I could have no knowledge whatever”(153). Requesting a client’s portrait is apparently deemed both flattering and appropriate. Further, Maynard’s subsequent ownership of client portraits suggests both a sense of propriety over these women as well as a form of intimacy--portraits are usually given to family members. In this manner, Maynard is able to insert herself into high society circles, often striking what must have been a delicate balance between remembering her place and cultivating a sense of familiarity with her clients.

Maynard’s autobiography suggests the extent to which Pinkie provided Maynard access to this intimacy and propriety. As a child, Pinkie could assume a level of familiarity from which Maynard herself might have balked for fear of being considered inappropriate. Through Pinkie, Maynard may find clients in intimate settings. For instance, when Mary Lincoln is panicking about her husband’s military strategy and the welfare of the troops during the Civil War, it is Pinkie who enters Mrs. Lincoln’s bedchamber to comfort her. Maynard writes:

> No hint of the battle had as yet reached the
> public. I was surprised. I threw my things aside

> and we at once sat down. “Pinkie” controlled me instantly, and, in her own original way, assured Mrs. Lincoln that her alarm was groundless; that while a great battle had been found and was still in progress, our forces were fully holding their own; and that none of the generals, as she had been informed were slain or injured. She bade her have no fear whatever; that they would get better news by nightfall, and the next day would bring still more cheering results. (100)

This passage is significant both because it describes a sitting with women only, and with a very high profile woman at that. This passage also indicates a rare occasion on which Maynard speaks in the active voice--the moment at which she “threw her things aside.” Notably, both the women are sitting down--which evokes a stronger sense of social equality than the image of the tall men standing with the much shorter Maynard around a table in a study. Pinkie both “assures” and attempts to “cheer” Mary Lincoln, which appears to be one of her primary functions as spirit guide. Interestingly, this portion of the autobiography suggests Mary Lincoln doesn’t know whether or not she can trust Pinkie--possibly because Pinkie is a child and/or Native American-- but is somehow certain

that she can trust Maynard. The fact that Maynard can go into a trance at will suggests agency, but her apparent inability to decide upon her control indicates passivity. The effect of this contrast is to heighten a visible difference between Maynard and her controlling spirit--thereby compelling the First Lady to conceive of Maynard and Pinkie as two separate entities. When Maynard assures Mary Lincoln that Pinkie is worth listening to: "This calmed her somewhat, and after I awoke she talked very earnestly with me to know if I fully trusted and believed in what was said through me. I assured her of my confidence in whatever was communicated, and it seemed to give her courage" (100). What remains unclear is how Maynard--if she is in a trance state--is aware of what Pinkie is saying to Mrs. Lincoln. Presumably Maynard knows only because of what Mrs. Lincoln tells her. However, although Mrs. Lincoln is a little wary of Pinkie, other society women seem to adore her.

Anna Mills Cosby's letters provide a testament to the co-construction of Maynard and Pinkie's subjectivities. Pinkie or "Pinkey" seems to be a special favorite of Cosby who mentions the child multiple times in correspondence with Maynard inviting Pinky to visit and suggesting that Pinky come to interpret her dreams (Maynard 250; 252). Cosby often inquires after Pinkie's wellbeing and offers messages for Maynard to pass along. "Tell Pinkey she must go with me to the Capitol…Tell her, also, I heard a driver to-day caressing his horse and by

the most endearing terms call it his dear Pinkey" (Maynard 253). Cosby's anecdote draws attention to the fact that Pinkie's name is one that might be given to a pet. Further, while not white, Pinkie is not entirely "red." Her nativeness or "redness" has been diluted and diminished in order to render her a less threatening "other."

The ritual of Maynard's trance and her acknowledgment of Pinkie as her controlling spirit becomes an intricate performance involving mimicry, displacement, and fetishism. In the *Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses the notion of skin color as a fetish object: "Skin, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype, is the most visible of fetishes, recognized as 'common knowledge' in a range of cultural, political and historical discourses, and plays a public part in the racial drama that is enacted every day in colonial societies" (112). By lightening Pinkie's "redness" the child's racial difference is maintained, but "cultural, political, and historical discourses" are tempered. Pinkie is expected to operate not as an advocate for her own people, but for the Union and on a more individual basis, to assuage the fears of Mary Lincoln and interpret the dreams of ladies such as Anna Mills Cosby.

Although the Native American subaltern would not have been acknowledged as an American citizen, that subaltern still had to be considered in a material or corporeal sense; especially in terms of how her body was to be used and how it would occupy physical spaces.

Paradoxically then, when the Native American spirit becomes an individual capable of disseminating wisdom and political authority, the subaltern gains a subjectivity in death that she certainly did not enjoy in life. As such, Pinkie is rhetorically empowered by death when she assumes a recognizable subjectivity by virtue of her public communications. If Pinkie ever existed, we do not know how she died. In fact, Pinkie was likely only recognized in terms of what Russ Castronovo refers to as "necro-citizenship," a means by which an emphasis on "disembodiment empties political identity of specificity even as it hints at the indisputable materiality of bodies that refuse abstraction" (5). In other words, although the living subaltern is not acknowledged to be an actual American subject, she must still be considered in terms of how her material presence will be handled. Only in death, when the subaltern's material body no longer needs to be considered, is the spirit rhetorically empowered. Pinkie's empowerment, however, is never used in the service of living Native Americans. Pinkie does not demand that whites recognize her as having been an earthbound subject. She shows no resentment toward the white people who must have threatened her homeland and may even have killed her. Because of this, the white recipients of Pinkie's wisdom are not required to take a reflexive stance on how she came to the spirit world.

Native Americans in the Postbellum Public Sphere

Constructing Native American spirituality as being emblematic of a mythic return to nature made Native American spirit controls especially desirable and central to the American Spiritualist experience. Robert Cox claims that the proliferation of Native American imagery in post Civil War era Spiritualism was due to a belief that Native Americans "performed a vital function for the living within a racial system that facilitated an adjustment to a universe of constrained sympathetic reach…as much healers of sympathy as they were sympathetic healers" (191). In other words, Native American spirits made white people feel as if they were reaching out to the "other" emulating a quasi-egalitarian society that they did not need to act upon literally. The "constraints" of sympathy meant being sympathetic, but not sympathetic enough to identify too closely with subalterns. When Cox suggests that Native American spirits become "healers of sympathy," he intimates that the ostensive presence of Native American spirits helped whites to define clearly where the boundaries of their sympathy lay and to keep social prohibitions intact.

Cox goes on to claim that the possession of the white medium by the Native American spirit was as close as Victorian era cultures ever came to "true interracial fusion" (203). The white medium allowing a "red other" to take control denoted "a miscegenation nearly unthinkable between white and black but one that became the rule between white and Indian" (Cox 203). By adopting Native American "control" spirits, the white

hegemony constructed Native American experiences as available to be "acquired, possessed, and co-opted…negotiated through the sympathetic bonds that united Indian and white. The absence of family connection, of racial or intellectual affinity precluded the ordinary channels of sympathetic congress, for Spiritualists were repeatedly assured of Indian otherness in each of these regards" (Cox 205). Since whites had managed to commune with Native American spirits while keeping social boundaries in place, they had to find a way to sympathize with Native Americans that did not elide perceived ethnic differences. This was done through a connection to the American landscape--a landscape that, to some degree, liberal whites imagined that they had in common with Native Americans (Cox 233-34). An American citizen's social power depended on what--and how much--land he owned. Colonialists constructed the Native American as transcending the notion of ownership altogether by cultivating a belief that Native Americans were too much part of the landscape itself to lay claim to it. Constructing Native Americans in this manner helped white settlers to absolve themselves of guilt, as did lauding the nobility of Native American suffering.

In a similar vein, Castronovo claims that white writers, poets and politicians of the nineteenth-century tended to romanticize what they believed was a Native American drive toward death over slavery; that is, if he cannot be "free," the Native American chooses the noble act of suicide-

-an act over which he has sole agency. Freedom is to be found in death, and perhaps only in death: “Native Americans had been processed by an iron rhetoric that made the choice between two absolutes, freedom and death, the same option” (Castronovo 34). Castronovo explains that constructing Native Americans in this manner exempts white oppressors from having to recognize their participation in a Native American genocide. Freedom is construed as a “non-cultural, eternal value…making the fate of Native Americans a matter of individual proclivity, ahistorical, and natural” (34). As Castronovo points out, any ethnic group can appropriate the idea of choosing death over any perceived enslavement--but the point is that “the officially recognized citizen is not sentenced to a political fate as drastic or final as suicide. Such a citizen can still choose liberty *or* death, whereas nonwhites and women suffer the conjunction of liberty *and* death” (35). Since death is romanticized in such a manner and the nobility of the transcendent spirit is emphasized, colonists mythologize their subalterns while simultaneously condemning them to death.

Mimicry

As rhetorical constructs, Maynard and Pinkie both rely on and subvert a key concept in both postcolonial and performance theory: mimicry. Bhabha speaks of the postcolonial subject as the “subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (338). Again, it is unclear

as to whether or not Pinkie actually existed, when she died, and how anglicized she had been before her death--but it is important to note that she is “almost the same” as her addressees in that she speaks their language, understands their frames of reference, and behaves in a manner consistent with their expectations. Colonizers attempt to fashion indigenous communities in their own image, yet feel threatened by the colonized being in whom they see themselves reflected.

Jacques Derrida posits “the relation of the mime to be the mimed…is always a relation to a *past present*. The imitated comes before the imitator. Whence the problem of time, which indeed does not fail to come up” (176). Here, Derrida refers to the typical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized--the colonizer convinces indigenous communities that he, the colonizer, is the originary model--the one who must be mimicked. However, this idea becomes more complex when applied to Maynard’s situation because, when considering an afterworld and its inhabitants, there is inevitably a confusion of “past present.” Ostensibly, Maynard “mimics” the deceased Pinkie but, even while she is in a trance state, she cannot escape her colonizer persona. This act of mimicry is further complicated by the fact that Pinkie in turn mimics the white colonizer. Such a paradox of mimicry challenges the colonizer’s construction of an “originary” model. If Maynard herself imitates the imitator, the boundary separating the imitator from the imitated is blurred

and the notion of both a temporal and physical originary model is destabilized. Further, in temporal terms, Derrida asserts, “The difficulty lies in conceiving that what is imitated could be still to come with respect to what imitates, that the image can precede the model, that the double can come before the simple” (176).

In my view, this linear notion of time provides a useful lens through which to consider Maynard-as-Pinkie, in that her practices of mimicry may be interpreted as an example of a “double that can come before the simple.” Pinkie--as a white woman’s mimic or “double”--has preceded Maynard, the white woman who by default mimics both Pinkie and her originary white subject. I am drawing here on Derrida’s point that being able to tell the difference between the imitator and the imitated in terms of a “past present” relationship “is what constitutes order” (177). He continues: “And obviously, according to logic itself…what is imitated is more real, more essential, more true, etc., than what it imitates. It is anterior and superior to it” (177). But rather than simply constituting order as Derrida would suggest, my point is that if Maynard imitates the imitator herself she becomes part of the “paradox of the supplementary double” that is, she displaces an already displaced imitator.

The idea of colonizers mimicking their subalterns is not a new one--nor was it uncommon. As many scholars have already discussed, during the mid-nineteenth-century and beyond, white actors frequently put on

black-face shows in which they would mimic African Americans (Sayre 125). Less frequently discussed is the proliferation of “red-face” performances that arose around the same time. When the oppressor mimics the oppressed, he subjects his own body to a form of mock colonization as the subaltern now appears to take over. Mimicry of the subaltern carries a theme of ridicule; one that highlights his “otherness” and the futility of his efforts to perform whiteness. Even as colonial powers attempted to reform their subalterns, they became threatened by a subject who appeared to perform whiteness too effectively. In other words, red-face and black-face performances could be interpreted as being a defensive move on the part of a white hegemony--a protection against the uncanny power of the subaltern who began to seem overly familiar with the social mores of an elite white discourse community. Thus, the oppressor appropriates the act of mimicry itself, reclaiming it from the oppressed. In this manner, channeling “native” spirit controls means a reclamation of the disturbing act of mimicry; a mimicry of the mimicry itself, or a perceived need to reabsorb whatever power the mimic has supposedly assumed.

Conclusion

In life, Pinkie would have been considered to be what Castronovo describes as a “social corpse,” that is, a person who cannot be ignored as

a material body, but who does not count as a citizen. In a sense then, Pinkie passes directly from one construction of death to another. Just as Pinkie can only exist partially, Maynard can only recognize Pinkie partially, leaving her image open to the interpretation of sitters who see the “Indian” child as external to Maynard and external to themselves--an entity that attends to their needs. As Castronovo says of Spiritualism “This otherworldly politics that ignores difference…seemingly induces egalitarian race relations in this world. But the emancipatory policy culled from clairvoyants was dedicated to remembering the dead and the patriarchal order in which they once lived” (171). This “remembering” is frequently expressed in the act of mimicry--the clairvoyant controlled by the subaltern spirit becomes a mimic of the act of mimicry itself; the white subject mimics the colonized subject mimicking the colonizer.

According to Bhabha, mimicry denotes a degree of ambivalence with respect to constructing a social identity: “in order to be effective, mimicry must constantly produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy…” (338). This ambivalence—a willingness and also an unwillingness to perform colonial discourse—turns the postcolonial subject into a “partial presence” (Bhabha 338). Maynard’s experience under Pinkie’s control emphasizes the slippage in meaning that Bhabha describes; a mimicry of mimicry itself produces an

excess of difference--and twice as much indeterminacy than the single slippage evinced by a unidirectional mimicry. Evidently, for some Spiritualists, this indeterminacy was troubling; having not sufficiently colonized the Native American in life, they sought to do so in death. The “difference” or “slippage” evident in Pinkie’s “control” of Maynard thus bears a contradictory double function; integration, along with a reinscription of racially marked social boundaries.

CHAPTER 6

THE SPIRITUALIST WHO WAS NOT ONE: RHETORIC, REPRESENTATION, AND RESISTANT PERFORMANCE IN LULU HURST'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Lulu Hurst, also known as the "Georgia Wonder" allegedly exhibited superhuman powers of resistant strength when placed into competition with a male adversary who would attempt to wrest various objects from her grasp. Hurst's performance therefore served to undermine cultural assumptions of female weakness. While Spiritualists interpreted her powers as being otherworldly in nature, Hurst publicly opposed Spiritualism believing that her ability could be explained by ordinary physics (a claim that she never successfully proved). While Hurst claimed a desire to display her abilities as a scientific curiosity, her predominantly male audience used her performance to interrogate and re-inscribe traditional gender roles. For Victorian-era men, apparently threatened by women's growing visibility in the public sphere, challenging Hurst provided an opportunity to redefine the boundaries of masculinity. I argue that because of the polysemic nature of Hurst's performance, she is best understood when observed both within the context of nineteenth-century historiography and within the context of what Marvin Carlson terms "resistant performance"--that is, a performance that subverts the status

quo by exposing its underlying assumptions. Hurst's "resistant performance" is also reflected by how she constructs herself in her autobiography. In service of an objective "truth" which Hurst feels Spiritualists miss, she deploys the strategy of the confessional to resist assumptions about her uncanny power and to attempt a reinscription of prevailing scientific discourses.

Although Hurst describes herself as a "country lass," she was likely quite well-educated. Born in 1869 in Cedartown, Georgia, Hurst was home schooled by her mother,[21] who had apparently benefitted from excellent schooling herself. According to historian Christie Ann Farnham, Southern women of the antebellum era were far better educated--particularly in the sciences--than Northern women because Southern men were more permissive; they did not see educated women as likely to compete with them for jobs within the region's agrarian economy. In particular, Farnham stresses that in the South—unlike the North—female graduates were allowed to read their commencement speeches before an audience and were encouraged to show off their talents. In contrast, Northern women were expected to be more modest and were strongly discouraged from speaking in public (Farnham). The combination of a Southern upbringing and being younger than the other mediums discussed in this study, make

[21] Home-schooling was common practice at the time.

Hurst's experiences quite distinct from theirs. The Fox sisters of course, had appeared before a New York public, but they had done so in the 1850s and had suffered the consequences. The fact that, thirty years later, Hurst could appear comfortably before New York audiences, shows how social attitudes toward putatively occult phenomena had changed. Claims of otherworldly powers seemed to no longer engender fear or hostility--rather a good-natured sense of sportsmanship.

However, despite this ostensive change in public opinion, the issue of women in the late nineteenth-century public sphere was still distinctly problematic. When it came to "the woman question," scientific progress seemed to give patriarchs "a decisive authority in matters social as well as strictly scientific" (Russett 63-69). Laws of nature attesting to male superiority were considered to be objective truths, meaning that nineteenth-century science saw a "stress on differentiation and hierarchy"; and biologically predetermined attributes were thought to form character (Russett 146-50). It was into this sociopolitical climate that Hurst came into public view. But rather than having her alleged strength dismissed, Hurst's performances became a forum for men to compete with one another and reinscribe the terms of what constituted nineteenth-century masculinity. Thus, although Hurst was publicly described as a "wonder," she was effectively sidelined when the question of manhood became the focal point of her performance. What Hurst could do in her own right did not matter;

what mattered was what she could do to undermine the Victorian-era man. Ironically, only the Spiritualists--whom Hurst denounced—credited what Hurst could do in her own right. Only the Spiritualists attempted to reintroduce Hurst as a central figure in her own performance.

A “Country Lass”

Hurst, the sixteen year old girl described by the press as the “Georgia Wonder,” the “Magnetic Girl” or simply the “Phenomenon,” performed a limited run at New York City’s Wallack Theater in the summer of 1884. This particular performance began at nine o’clock in the evening on July 10th and was covered by a reporter for the *New York Times*:

> Twenty strong, well-built club athletes, some of them rubber-shod with short coats buttoned close around their shapely chests, climbed onto the stage of Wallack's Theatre last night and labored like blacksmiths for an hour to either tire out or "expose" Lulu Hurst, "the phenomenon of the nineteenth-century," as the billboards call her. About 100 more less muscular but equally enthusiastic club men gathered in the front seats to watch the fun. The athletes retired from the stage after the

> performance covered with perspiration and confusion. The Georgia girl, who had tossed them about like so many jackstraws was perfectly cool and not in the least tired. (*New York Times*, July 10)

Notably, more attention is given to the men's physiques than to Hurst's. The men are "well-built" with "shapely chests" and are evidently as accustomed as "blacksmiths" to physical challenge. When the athletes or "experimenters" leave the stage, the effect of their fruitless efforts is evident. They do not simply feel confused--they are "covered" with it. When Hurst is reinserted into the scene, her demeanor is described only in relation to the experimenters. She is "perfectly cool."

A newspaper article similar to this one appeared in the *New York Times* every single night of Hurst's ten day run--but other than that, secondary sources on "the Georgia Wonder" are scant. The July 10th edition of the *Times* dedicated its longest front page article to Hurst's performance, trumping the capture of a diamond thief, several allegedly accidental shootings, and a runaway locomotive. The reporter goes on to discuss the various dignitaries (including a prominent general, and an ex-senator) attending Hurst's performance and expresses surprise at how many ladies were present. The author's surprise would not have been untoward--during that era it was rare for respectable women to attend

evening theater, which was often a haven for prostitutes. Ladies usually went to matinees. On the opening performance, the reporter comments on Hurst's modesty, noting that she remains quiet, allowing her manager to do the speaking. In between acts the "simple" and "unassuming" Hurst goes backstage to sip lemonade while her mother brushes her hair. In each act, a male audience member is invited onstage to challenge what appears to be Hurst's uncanny physical strength. The man or "experimenter" does not touch Hurst directly, as this would be a violation of etiquette. Instead, the struggle takes place through the use of particular objects: an umbrella, a walking stick, or a chair that the man attempts to either take, or move away from Hurst. By virtue of the performance, these mundane items are transformed into ritual objects and literal sites of struggle and resistance. The umbrella and walking stick in particular are emblems of the bourgeois male who was Hurst's primary audience. Through the dramatization of reversed gender roles, Hurst finds ways for an experimenter's strength to be turned back against him by using his own accessories. The events are refereed by Hurst's manager and her father, who tries to ensure no one is hurt beyond the odd pratfall. Hurst describes her confrontations with experimenters as "tests," the implication being that her strength can be proved through a series of replicable experiments. For the audience, however, a "test" seemed to imply the experimenter's masculinity was on trial.

The man onstage, or the “experimenter” is acutely aware of his connection to the audience from which he has been separated. Once an audience member removes himself from the larger group and agrees to become an experimenter, he is vulnerable to the group’s judgment. He becomes “Other.” As such, it is necessary to distinguish between the concept of audience as a group, and the individual experimenter. To do this, I draw on Iris Marion Young’s reading of Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. The “audience” as a whole can be defined as a “group,” that is, “a collection of persons that recognize themselves and one another as in a unified relation with one another” (23). Since, according to Young “all social relations must be understood as the product of action,” I propose that this particular group (Hurst’s audience), can be interpreted as being engaged in the collective act of defining masculinity. However, once an individual is separated from that group to go onstage, he becomes an “experimenter,” that is, a component of a series, which is “a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects their actions are oriented around and/or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others” (Young 23). Individuals within a series may choose to respond differently to external stimuli but they are still beholden to the same dominant social structures. Further, although each experimenter may behave according to a different personal history, his actions onstage are largely circumscribed by the social collective of

which he is a part. However, insofar as this individual is separated from the group, he becomes part of a series or serial collective. “In seriality, a person experiences not only others, but also himself or herself as Other, that is, as an anonymous someone” (Young 24). As I see it, in Hurst’s performances, each experimenter is more or less anonymous, becoming “Other” both to the audience from whom he has been separated and to himself, in that he made aware of his isolation from the collective with which he identifies. As part of a seriality, the experimenter is cast as “Other” by an audience who determines what is (or is not) manly behavior.

Hurst herself is also “Other”—not only to her audience and experimenters, but in her own isolation from a female social collective. This Otherness seems to be fomented by Hurst’s habit of laughing while engaged in a “test.” One of the most famous features of Hurst’s 1884 performances was known as the “Chair Test,” which Hurst describes in her autobiography as: “the attempt of any number of men […] to put a chair to the floor while I rested my hands on it” (18-19).

> I stood facing the big man without moving a muscle. One of the strange things connected with me, in making the tests, was that I could not keep from laughing. I cannot say that my success depended on my laughing, but any way I always had to laugh just as though it was

> a necessity to my success, and for this reason
> many of newspapers referred to me as
> 'Laughing Lulu Hurst.' (20)

Here, Hurst suggests that the laughter is purely involuntary—she is not ridiculing the experimenters (that is the privilege of her male audience)—rather, she is laughing simply because she "could not keep from it." The *New York Times* article of July 10th describes Hurst's laughter as "hysterical" and seems to want to apologize for it, claiming that "the phenomenon" simply can't help it. Perhaps to temper the effect of her laughter, Hurst acknowledges both the gender and class difference between herself and the audience--she describes herself as a "country lass" impressing a "splendid class of gentlemen" (80). Be that as it may, the *Times* reporter notes that when a group of Hurst's test subjects talk with her after the performance she seems unexpectedly comfortable with them. Although Hurst does not speak during her performance, she never mentions feeling nervous or self-conscious. In fact, when she is asked if she is afraid, Hurst's genuinely surprised response is "At what?" (*New York Times*, July 10)

Although Hurst's autobiography was published only a few years after Maynard's and several years before Jones's, her writing seems less deferential than that of the other mediums taken up in this study. This could be because Hurst was younger, but perhaps it was also because

she was from the South, where Farnham tells us that women faced fewer social prohibitions. Although Hurst's stated goal is to debunk Spiritualism, she writes quite unapologetically about her own childhood and life experiences. However, it is worth noting that, in accordance with nineteenth-century social mores, Hurst does attempt to reassure her readers that she is aware of gender roles.

> I greatly preferred the sweet, domestic calm, peace and solitude of my home-life to any notoriety, or emolument I might gain by the publication of this volume. But outside of and above all other considerations, I realized as I grew older that the consciousness of a duty faithfully performed is in itself the greatest reward. (262)

Not only is Hurst aware of what she is supposed to prefer--the womanly sphere of the hearth--but she also deploys a trope typical of female autobiographers at that time--that is, to claim that the autobiography is being written in response to a sense of social duty. As she matures, Hurst realizes that she has a social responsibility, and so she must sacrifice her preference for "domestic calm' in favor of a higher calling that may mean the added burden of "notoriety." The duty to which Hurst refers, is a

commitment to debunk Spiritualism and quash superstition. Outperforming men does not seem to be a conscious component of her agenda.

The "Sex Which is Not One"

For men, apparently threatened by the women's movement, challenging Hurst was a way to reinstate masculine values. Men saw Hurst as playing an important role in their own vexed self-definitions of masculinity--an issue prevalent at the *fin de siecle* which Elaine Showalter describes as being as much a "battle within the sexes" as between them (Showalter 9). According to Hurst, the men:

> …were arranged along the cane on the opposite side of it from me, as the big man was before. I laughed in their faces and put my hand on the cane, and lo! "the Power" came and they went; hither and thither they swayed and bent, and doubled up and straightened out. They braced, and fell too. They lost their balance, and over they went in a heap one on top of the other. (21)

Although Hurst suggests earlier that she is not ridiculing her experimenters, the language she uses in this passage--particularly her claim to have "laughed in their faces"--seems to be evidence to the

contrary. Here, the men come to seem ridiculous in their movement “hither and thither” and their apparent lack of control over their faculties. They are like marionettes who can be “swayed and bent” as well as “doubled up and straightened out” at Hurst’s whim. While on stage, the experimenters appear to be stripped of agency, but they seem to invite powerlessness and ridicule. In fact, according to the *New York Times*, the “fun” for audience members comes in observing other men being bested. “The audience got their wonted allowance of fun out of the performance by guying[22] the experimenters as they have been doing ever since the wonder began to exhibit the mystery of her muscle” (July 19). One way to interpret an episode such as this is that Hurst’s predominantly male audience chose to appropriate her performance to interrogate and reinscribe gender roles. By appealing to masculinist desires to prove themselves and “one up” the competition--Hurst is able to command the attention of a male audience. Hurst's performances allowed men to compete against one another and to celebrate one another’s virility--or to ridicule a lack thereof.

In effect, Hurst occupies the rhetorical space that Luce Irigiray refers to as “the sex which is not one” (23). That is, the female is always conceptualized in terms of the universal subject, which is male. In the

[22] heckling

Second Sex, Beauvoir asserts that “woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is ‘the Other’”(Introduction). This statement is clearly realized in Hurst’s performances in that her act is interpreted as highlighting expectations for male behavior rather than female behavior--of defining the masculine rather than the feminine. Hurst is the means by which men can prove themselves (or not); the means by which men can decide what makes other men manly. The power of Hurst’s performance depends on a male counterpart--and her abilities are determined in terms of male capability. Women are peripheral--a category existing as a mere byproduct of male self-definition. As the Other, Hurst does not define what a man is. Rather, Hurst acts as a supplement, helping men to define themselves and to establish themselves as subjects—albeit subjects who cannot necessarily match her strength.

Given that both the audience and experimenters are male, taking on Hurst as opponent does not metonymically pit male against female, rather the female is displaced in favor of establishing a man’s relationship with other men--and with his culture. In this regard, Beauvoir’s assertions that men are “transcendent” while women are “immanent” bear extra relevance. A man is defined by his relationship to the world and his contribution to the public sphere, whereas a woman is defined by her

passivity and by mundane, repetitive (and apparently domestic) tasks. Beauvoir's claim of repetition and passivity as being emblematic of the female experience is also reflected in Hurst's performances. Although Hurst is touted as possessing superior strength, she does not actively demonstrate that strength, rather, the spectacle of her strength emerges almost as an involuntary reaction--that is, men attempt to take objects away from her or move them. When men make these attempts, the force of their exertion is apparently turned back upon them, sending them flying across the stage. For each man who approaches Hurst onstage, the experience is new; for Hurst, the performance is merely a repetition.

Like Beauvoir, Judith Butler sees the repetition of acts as being integral to a system of institutionalized cultural subjugation, but her theory of performativity suggests that liberation can be found in the calculated and subversively decentered repetition of acts--in that no repetition is ever exact. Hurst's performance could be read through the lens of postmodernism: she paradoxically occupies the roles of both the performing subject and the object of the male gaze, while simultaneously occupying neither of these roles. During the performance, the prohibition of female strength is momentarily lifted and is celebrated--but only as long as it occurs in the service of reminding the male of his social role and shaming him into performing it adequately. Hurst's gender identity has been destabilized as has that of the man she humiliates. However, when

the performance is over, the social order returns to its “natural” hierarchy. Hurst's extraordinary strength, her felling of men, has become a ritualized performance operating at the very boundaries of gendered discourse. Hurst can never fully replicate the conditions of a previous performance and the repetition with which she engages becomes ritualistic in that it seems to reflect a parallel universe in which women may ritually--albeit temporarily--defeat a male opponent.

Resistance and Subversion

While Hurst is apparently able to fling full-grown men about as if they are rag dolls (and in one particularly thrilling instance even set a man’s pants on fire by spinning him into a gas jet) male audiences find her performance compelling rather than threatening. The only person who expresses disapproval of Hurst’s antics is a woman who, during a performance, complains that it is not Hurst’s place to exert her physical strength and that she has transgressed gender boundaries. The woman is dismissed as being mentally unstable and is escorted from the theater by her brother. However, one might ask, if indeed Hurst possessed these powers, why didn’t more people perceive her as a potential threat to the patriarchal establishment?

Laura Laffrado asks this question in her own work, asserting that certain women transgressed gender boundaries with impunity because the

male establishment simply did not recognize their potential for subversive power. During the nineteenth-century, “a woman’s salient identity markers served to cast her in a reductive, recognizable female model. Thus…motivations of women under consideration…would have been reduced to stereotypical creations of patriarchy” (Laffrado 10). More simply put, these women were interpreted as being non-threatening because it was assumed that they simply did not have any inclination to act otherwise.

But in postmodern terms, Hurst’s actions suggest subversive potential, particularly when men become objects of the male gaze. With each new conquest, Hurst directs the focus of the male gaze onto her ostensive opponent. The *Times* describes this objectification in the following terms: “A young man took hold of the cane as though it were glass and simpered at Lulu. ‘Now Adolphus,’ said a voice, ‘the eyes of the country are on you’” (July 20). The verb “simper” suggests femininity as does the young man’s manner of handling the cane. The newspaper article refers directly to the experimenter’s hyper-visibility--one that seems to imply Hurst’s corresponding lack of visibility. Interestingly, the “voice” tells the hapless Adolphus that the “whole country” is watching him, when clearly the audience consists only of white male New Yorkers. This is indicative of the chauvinism of the era--only the judgment of the white middle-class male is valid. Once a man is shamed in this milieu, he might

as well be shamed before the entire country. In a similar vein, Carlson references performance artist Catherine Elwes who demonstrates that through performance “the gaze of the male spectator can be returned or at least challenged or made problematic” (177). In this scenario, the male gaze is challenged as men are apparently coerced--or at least complicit in--putting themselves on trial and objectifying themselves. To my mind, this action “offers possibilities for disruption of the conventional system of spectatorship impossible in representations offering permanently fixed and objectified images of women” (Carlson 177). The possibility of problematizing the relationship between male spectator and female performer is evident in Hurst’s performance in that a female presence is elided by calling attention to a male spectator who relinquishes his power once he is called upon to participate in the performance. Hurst is able to render male observer/participants temporarily passive and helpless before an audience consisting of other men, which calls male social roles into question. Further, “If performance can be conceived as representation without reproduction, it can disrupt the attempted totalizing of the gaze and thus open a more diverse and inclusive representational landscape” (Carlson 181). In other words, while the status quo attempts to reify and naturalize gender socialization by emphasizing the endless reproduction and homogeneity of gendered behaviors, subversive performance can destabilize gender categories by accounting for difference between

members of a same sex group, or again, as Showalter would say “within the sexes” (9).

The notion of a struggle both within and between the sexes is expressed with particular eloquence in a *Times* review of Hurst’s final Wallack Theater performance. When one “strapping big fellow” was invited onstage to challenge Hurst he “threw two kisses to the audience and kicked out one leg playfully behind” (July 20). Here, the man’s mimicry of a woman can be interpreted in terms of colonizer and subaltern. Hurst is seen to be mimicking a man and a little too effectively at that; the man seems compelled to put her back in her place, thereby reminding her of her station in life when she is mimicked herself.[23] In effect, Hurst’s opponent is reminding her that she does not have a man’s power and never will. The “strapping young fellow” overtly mimics the feminine, which in this case is cast as a provisional authority. Fearing he will be feminized, the man appropriates a feminine role as an ostentatious act of subversion--and social boundaries are effectively reinscribed.

To return to Young’s theory of seriality, this one experimenter deliberately highlights his own “Otherness” from the audience by adopting feminine affectations. In a sense, the effect of this parody, the satirizing of

[23] This man actually succeeds in overpowering Hurst which was apparently an unusual occurrence.

"Otherness" itself, causes him to seem altogether less "Other" to the audience, who adore him. Even in his isolation, he reminds the audience of his connection to the social collective from which he emerged, and that collective is eager to reclaim him.

The Spiritualist Who Was (Not) One

To Hurst's dismay, she finds herself claimed by a social collective of Spiritualists. Indeed, her own ostensive ideological separation from Spiritualism seems to cause the movement's adherents to claim her all the more assertively. Hurst is particularly perturbed by the Buffalo Spiritualists who apparently reflect the strongest spiritualist presence of any city she has visited. Given the particularly unpleasant experiences of the Fox Sisters in Buffalo in the early 1850s, it is ironic that Hurst identifies Buffalo as the most discomfitingly avid bastion of Spiritualism.[24] Of the Buffalo audiences, Hurst says "Usually we found them very intelligent people, but in my opinion, how deluded!" (143). In Buffalo also, Hurst meets various mediums--including table-rappers and slate-writers--whom she immediately identifies as frauds, while simultaneously claiming that she holds an "unshaken confidence" in the institution of science:

[24] According to Underhill, in Buffalo, the Fox sisters were forced to submit to medical tests conducted by a hostile group of physicians referenced as the "Buffalo Doctors."

> I viewed everything by nature's rules, which are never set aside by freak nor accident, and whose laws are never abrogated. I knew that natural science and spiritualistic observation stand directly opposed to each other…on the one side stands the authority of the whole history of science, the totality of all known natural laws, which have been discovered under the presumption of a universal causality; and the other announces the discovery that causality has a flaw, and by this flaw we are told that the laws of gravitation, of electricity, of light and of heat are altogether or a hypothetical validity. (145)

Although the media constructs Hurst's power as being a freak of nature, Hurst dismisses the idea of a "freak," attempting to naturalize her abilities by appealing to what she considers the unerring and objective "authority" of science. Hurst declares that while science can prove an unimpeachable system of cause and effect, Spiritualism denies its laws. To further contextualize Hurst's pronouncement, it is important to note that, in fact, Spiritualists believed that natural science was in keeping with, rather than "opposed to natural science." While both skeptics and Spiritualists claimed

to have science on their side, *only* skeptics--not Spiritualists--believed that science and Spiritualistic observation were opposed. Constructing science and Spiritualism as contradictory thus appears to galvanize Hurst's identification with skepticism. Ironically, however, Hurst insists that her abilities can be explained by physics and mechanics, but she never gives a plausible explanation for the phenomena other than that she believes people perceive of her "power" as supernatural because they wish strongly for it to be so.

Hurst claims that she left the stage to learn more about her gift by studying science. As such, she clearly states the purpose of her autobiography: "I will make an explanation of the 'MYSTERIOUS FORCE' which so astonished and mystified the entire public, and demonstrate the fact that I have at last succeeded in unraveling and solving the 'GREAT SECRET'" (1). Hurst details the doctors and scholars who come to examine her, inserting their testimonials that her power is "natural" rather than "supernatural."[25] She continues to insist that the doctors who study her find nothing untoward about her abilities--even as she (and they) describe those same abilities as the 'Power' and the 'Force' and the 'Great Secret.' However, if Hurst's power is "natural" why does it continue to be

[25] To this day, no one has provided a detailed and/or comprehensive scientific explanation of how Hurst managed to deploy her apparent strength.

described in occult terms? Lingering in the autobiography's contradictory subtext, readers cannot help but wonder if perhaps Hurst is revealing ulterior motives, covertly promoting an argument that runs counter to her stated objective of debunking Spiritualism.

Further, a Spiritualist press--the Psychic Publishing Company of Rome, Georgia—evidently published the Fourth Edition of Hurst's 1903 autobiography which is the only edition currently available. The Library of Congress, however, reveals that the autobiography was originally published in 1897--also in Rome, Georgia, by the L. Hurst Book Company. It is unclear as to whether Hurst "sold out" to the Psychic Publishing Company, or if she set up the company herself. Most readers would assume that Hurst most likely would not have wanted her autobiography published by a company aligning itself with Spiritualist values, but she must have had enough of a relationship with Spiritualists to have approved the publication--and to have conceived of Spiritualists as being a potential audience. This discrepancy, however, casts Hurst's intention as an author and as a public figure into doubt. Is this alleged desire to distance herself from Spiritualists simply a rhetorical ploy? The cover of the autobiography itself seems to reflect Spiritualist values as it bears an illustration of a young woman with lightning bolts shooting from her hands, wreaking havoc upon a stage full of men. The comparison to electricity is significant from a Spiritualist perspective because mediums' psychic powers were

often compared to the unseen forces of electricity. On the autobiography's cover, one frightened looking gentleman hovers in a chair several feet off the ground, and another is trapped between what look like dueling billiard cues. Two men hang for dear life onto a chair that seems to want to carry them toward the ceiling, two are struggling with inside-out umbrellas, and two more assume undignified poses on the floor; one lies flat on his face, while another has just endured a painful pratfall. The scene evokes both the occult and ridicule, whetting the reader's appetite to learn more about Hurst's "Marvelous Power." In the autobiography's preface, Hurst's force is likened to electricity, engines and machinery. However, by later comparing her abilities exclusively to machinery, Hurst appears to want to replace associations with electricity to draw on discourses of mechanics, which was considered to be among the most rational and "masculine" branches of science.

Moreover, there are considerable discrepancies between the autobiography's preface (written presumably by an editor at the Psychic Publishing Company) and what Hurst tells us herself. To begin with, the editor (whose name is not given) tells us that the Doctors "pronounced her wonderful 'Force' and its phenomena to be inexplicable and unfathomable" (Introduction). Hurst, on the other hand insists that several "world renowned" physicians agreed that there was absolutely nothing "abnormal or occult in my power" (28). The editor goes on to describe

Hurst's power as a "commentary on Human Nature" and a "bulwark to human reason" (Introduction), but scarcely a few pages later, Hurst herself declares that her power is not a mystery, promising to explain her ability with a series of tests "separately, so that anyone can accomplish them" (2). While Hurst does say that her power is "bordering on the supernatural," she won't say it *is* supernatural (162).

Although Hurst's stated intent is to distance herself from Spiritualists, she is ultimately unable to make a convincing argument to explain the source of her powers--a fact she glosses over with technical-looking diagrams of her performances--and a claim that natural laws *should* triumph over superstition. Ultimately, however, Hurst does not seem to deliver on her pledge to offer a "natural" scientific explanation for her uncanny powers and seems to obscure the fact that she has not fully delivered on this promise by offering quasi-convincing diagrams of herself engaged in demonstrations of the "Force." The diagrams are intended to look like illustrations from a physics textbook and contain letters and numbers to point out various places on the cane, umbrella, or chair where force is exerted by experimenters--yet in the end, Hurst still cannot explain exactly *how* that force is exerted. The very fact that Hurst is unable to present a logical argument perhaps made her autobiography all the more convincing to Spiritualists. Further, although Hurst criticizes the Spiritualist community, she dedicates her autobiography to her parents and husband

“and also to my dear friends of beautiful Cedar Valley, all of whom were most steadfast and enthusiastic believers in the occult nature of ‘the great unknown power.’” However, if Hurst disparages believers in the occult, why would she seem to extol its believers back in her hometown?

The Confession

The opening chapters of Hurst’s autobiography describe peculiar phenomena at her childhood home: hickory nuts from the tree outside raining into rooms through closed windows, pebbles falling from the ceiling, and her aunt’s undergarments strewn around the house. As Hurst describes this phenomena it sounds eerily familiar--very close to what the Fox sisters describe when they begin to experience spirit visitations. Later, however, toward the end of the autobiography, Hurst offers a confession: although the “power” or the “force” that she uses to overcome athletic men is “real,” the phenomena she describes earlier, phenomena typical of a young spirit-medium’s coming of age, were all her own childish pranks. However, Hurst never explains how these pranks were performed. Nonetheless, the effect of this--a description of the phenomena followed by a confession--seems intended to debunk Spiritualist claims to Hurst’s power as well as to support her claims to the truth when she discusses her performances as the “Georgia Wonder.” After all, coming clean about the pranks points to Hurst’s ability to self-police with regard to truth claims.

Leigh Gilmore defines confession as a “discursive practice that both produces and polices ‘truth,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘identity’”(14). In Hurst’s case, the revelation of truth--that is, the confession itself--is deferred until the final section of her autobiography. However, the effect of this deferral is to ensure that readers finish the book with a clear sense of what is sanctioned ‘truth’ and what is not. In addition, Hurst prompts readers to recognize their own credulity in believing the tale recounted at the beginning of the autobiography; their susceptibility to an unpoliced truth. Further, Gilmore discusses “the relationship between truth-telling and agency. Authority in autobiography springs from its proximity to the truth claim of the confession—a discourse that insists on the possibility of telling the whole truth while paradoxically frustrating that goal through the structural demands placed on how one confesses” (107). In other words, the more truthful an autobiographer is believed to be, the more authority she is able to claim. The confession therefore becomes a rhetorical trope by which an author attempts to convince readers of a commitment to truth by disclosing potentially embarrassing information.

However, as Gilmore points out, this confession bears a paradoxical function in that the ostensive disclosure of one truth may serve to obscure others, due to the “structural demands” of the confession itself--that is, the construction of oneself as a reliable narrator precisely because one has strategically chosen to admit to unreliability. It is evident

that Hurst demands to be seen as a reliable narrator since she has chosen to confess her former unreliability. The effect of Hurst's confession is to demonstrate that ultimately she has control over the truth, that it is she who shall reveal what is true and what is not. In this manner, she wrests the agency of policing the truth from her audience and claims it for herself.

Unlike Rita Felski who appears to see women's confessionals as a near-desperate move to self-authenticate, Gilmore interprets confessionals as being strategic: "the extent to which its subjects police themselves and strive to produce a 'truthful' account defines them as highly self-conscious" (225). A self-conscious narrator seems to obviate the necessity for the audience to police her. However, Hurst first positions herself as being truthful and then uses the confessional at the end of the autobiography to overturn this apparent truth. She does so in order to expose her audience's own proclivity toward superstition. In effect, she wants *them* to be the ones to confess; to confess that in their gullibility regarding the hickory nuts, the pebbles, and the strewn garments, they believed in something wholly untrue to begin with--and that it was their own fault (not hers) for allowing themselves to believe. According to Gilmore, claims toward identity and truth "are contingent upon repressing information," (227). However, the issue here is not so much repression of scientific information regarding how Hurst's force is deployed, rather it is

the lack of such information. As I see it, the audience is thus persuaded to substitute one form of the truth (the confessional) for another that cannot be delivered--a plausible physical explanation for Hurst's strength.

Conclusion

The literature on performance suggests that in order to be considered resistant, the performer must be conscious of what he or she is doing. Although there is no indication that Hurst consciously intends subversion on stage, I argue that her actions can be considered resistant in that they exposed "the underlying social, cultural, and aesthetic practices and assumptions that supported and validated the specific phenomenon being displayed" (Carlson 166). In Hurst's performance, the assumption of male strength and the eliding of female power in favor of the male drive toward competition are revealed and the male gaze is deflected from Hurst onto her opponent.

Further, while the media constructs Hurst as a biological aberration, she attempts to normalize herself by appealing to patriarchal and ostensibly value-free scientific institutions; particularly mechanics and physics. As such, her autobiography becomes a site of resistant performance wherein she overturns the social values ascribed to her, recoding them to counter public representations. For instance, when Hurst describes otherworldly phenomena at her home in Georgia she exposes

her readers' credulity and assumes that she has persuaded readers to accept incomplete scientific explanations for her ability. However, when readers encounter these incomplete scientific explanations, readers might actually be led (albeit in a roundabout fashion) to support Spiritualism. The more Hurst protests Spiritualist beliefs, the more she draws attention to the inadequacy of scientific explanations.

In the next chapter, I offer my conclusions to this study, reflecting further on Hurst's unique practices as well as those of the other mediums I have discussed.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: PUBLICLY PERFORMING RESISTANCE VIA FRACTURED AND PROTEAN DISCOURSES

This study opened with Underhill and closed with Hurst covering four mediums whose experiences are disparate enough to suggest that Spiritualism itself is comprised of a set of fragmented and shifting discourses. When addressing the diverse ideologies and lifestyles of spirit mediums, McGarry writes: “Some were entwined with worlds of wonder and popular spectacle, others with metaphysical traditions like mesmerism and animal magnetism, still others with liberal Protestant circles linking Shakers, Quakers, and Unitarians” (73-77). Further, Carroll sees Spiritualism as being unabashedly Christian, conservative and Republican--a view that is reflected in Nettie Colburn Maynard’s autobiography when she discusses her admiration for Lincoln--while Owen defines Spiritualism as a social movement; a view that is reflected by Underhill’s claims.

In the autobiographies of Underhill, Jones, Maynard, and Hurst, we see how the central tenets of Spiritualism lend themselves to multiple discourses and practices. For some, Spiritualism expressed secular humanism, while for others, it was rooted in religion. Some, like Jones,

see Spiritualism as supportive of science, while others, like Hurst, see it as antithetical to science.

Like Jones, Hurst believes in the unimpeachable objectivity of science. Unlike Jones, Hurst is convinced that if she educates herself in the sciences then she will be able to explain (and thereby reclaim) her own physical power. Jones does not expect scientific explanations. For Jones, since Spiritualism is inherently scientific in scope, science involves a certain degree of mysticism. From this perspective, Hurst and Jones's autobiographies can be read against one another to highlight the social implications of common nineteenth-century ideologies. As beginning and end points to this study, however, Underhill and Hurst's work initially appear to be fundamentally different--if not oppositional--in that one apparently seeks to establish the "truth" of Spiritualism while the other seeks to debunk it. However, these differences have provided me with useful rhetorical benchmarks in that they offer a compelling frame to an analysis of femininity, authorship, and performance over time and across discourse communities.

A Return to the Beginning

How did female mediums construct themselves as women capable of leadership and spiritual authority in order to negotiate entry into the public sphere?

Victorian-era women knew that they had to appear humble and accepting of their social status. If and when they entered the public sphere, they had to make excuses for it. For instance, mediums typically claimed that despite their reluctance to enter the public sphere, they had been compelled to act by forces beyond their control—forces that would eventually benefit society at large. In doing so, they cast themselves in the archetypal nineteenth-century feminine role of self-sacrifice. Further, when Underhill, Jones, and Maynard practiced mediumship they were careful to claim no direct spiritual authority of their own; any wisdom they were able to disseminate was received from a higher power. However, as I have mentioned earlier, these autobiographies are interesting to me because, although reflective of typical nineteenth-century tropes, they reveal distinct differences in how women constructed themselves in the public sphere as female spiritual authorities.

For example, Underhill stresses her role in tempering an unruly spirit world. For the Fox sisters, the spirits wreak havoc, moving furniture and making loud noises. It is the Fox sisters (led by Underhill) who apparently harness this energy, bringing spirit communication into the orderly realm of technology—the raps in this case emulating the telegraph, or a “celestial morse code.” This particular construct--that is, the idea of a woman settling misbehavior--echoes the rhetoric of feminist organizations such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, which argued that if

women were allowed to participate in politics, they would purify society by tempering men's inherently base instincts. In a similar vein, because prevailing nineteenth-century discourses of invention privileged a masculinist romantic model, Jones seeks authority by emulating more collaborative (and therefore feminine) modes of invention. Jones formulates a model of invention by which she, along with the spirits, becomes a co-creator of knowledge—again a construction that supports cultural stereotypes of women as collaborative rather than competitive. Men such as Jones's cousin (and the otherworldly Dr. Andrews) become her collaborators, rendering her own personal achievements less of an affront to late nineteenth-century social codes. Like Jones, Maynard demonstrates a degree of willing self-subordination, yet seems to choose the terms of that subordination very carefully. Depicting herself as submissive to the beck and call of Washington society or to the spirits themselves, Maynard attempts to deflect attention from herself by paradoxically drawing attention to her alleged experiences under a Native American spirit control named Pinkie. Being a Native American child, Pinkie seems to epitomize subordination, yet the fact that she is Native American allows her to be mythologized and romanticized. The mythic Pinkie is then able to gain access to exclusive society circles. Finally, Hurst enters the public sphere in the company of her father, a well-respected Southern deacon. Since Hurst is always presented by a male

escort, she does not have to worry about sexual harassment. The protection and constant presence of her father likely allowed her to be quite bold, speaking freely with male audience members and reporters. Further, Hurst never has to atone for the transgression of claiming spiritual authority since she never constructs herself as having done so.

To some degree, each of the four women discussed in this study conceived of herself as a leader or at least as a social pioneer. Underhill's leadership is demonstrated in caring for her two impressionable younger sisters. When Underhill illustrates her ability to protect both Kate and Maggie, she adds to her feminine ethos, encouraging admiration for her maternal strength. Jones also sees herself as having the ability to care for other women (particularly those of the working class) by opening a "Rescue Home" and guaranteeing a place of employment where women would not be mistreated. Further, Maynard sees herself as a leader in that she is apparently able to influence military strategy as well as to minister to the emotional needs of Washington Society ladies. While these three women construct themselves as leaders by highlighting their ability to minister to and care for others, Hurst constructs herself in quite different terms. She sees herself as engaging in a form of public service by debunking Spiritualism; eventually leading people from ignorance to knowledge.

How did female mediums conceive of the vulnerability of the female body in the public sphere and cope with complications inherent to Victorian-era constructions of feminine corporeality?

The autobiographies in this study all reveal a preoccupation with physicality; both the political potential and the limitations of the gendered human body are of central importance to their narratives. While on display, Underhill is constantly reminded by her audience--and consequently reminds her readers--of how the female body is perpetually under threat and in tension with surrounding environments. Hurst is also reminded of her gendered body, but she ostensibly attains sexual invisibility by drawing attention to the male body that fails to live up to Victorian-era standards of masculinity. Hurst's own body is temporarily (and ritually) unsexed by her actions and therefore untouchable. Unlike Underhill, Hurst's body operates in tension with her environment not because it represents an excess of femininity, but a ritual expulsion of it.

All four mediums' experiences illustrate the cultural tensions surrounding the social performance of an individual female actor. For Jones, the tension between the individual and the collective manifests in her experiences with invention--both rhetorical and technological--and the uneasy relationship between femininity and science. The complexity of Maynard's social role is expressed in the image of the postcolonial subject; the female body is "colonized," reflecting the treatment of Native

Americans in the larger culture. For Underhill, this cultural tension manifests in her acute awareness of gendered corporeality; the marked nature of the female body in the public sphere. For instance, when staying at a hotel in Manhattan, the Fox sisters find that they must frequently contend with unwanted advances. Underhill writes: “I complained that *that* man had dared to come to my door, within my private hours, without first sending up his card for permission; that he had insulted me, and…I begged he might never be admitted again under any circumstances” (Underhill 167). While Jones apparently does not experience such direct intimidation, she demonstrates her awareness of her own physical frailty and of the exploitation of working class women (Jones 338).

Underhill attempts to position herself physically by pointing out that, because she is robust and healthy, she is able to defend herself and her two sisters against unwanted male advances. Had Underhill been any weaker, physically or emotionally, she or her sisters might have been “ruined,” but it was her maternal strength that preserved them. But while Underhill is often tired after her spirit encounters, Jones is fortified by hers. She positions herself as being a corporeal instrument of the spirits and describes an increase in her physical strength when she is influenced by a controlling spirit. For Jones, being “controlled” means allowing a spirit to co-inhabit her body and to empower her.

Like Jones, Maynard is a mental medium who relinquishes her body to the control of the spirits, yet Maynard apparently allows herself to be completely taken over by a spirit entity, whereas Jones does not. Significantly also, Maynard seems to reject ownership of her own body referring to it as “the organism.” Hardly “hers” to begin with, Maynard relinquishes “the organism” to a spirit control, possibly erasing herself out of deference to the society in which she is invited to operate. Hurst, however, does not defer to her audiences. Instead, she seems to enjoy humiliating them. Hurst suggests that she has total command over her own body and is apparently able to exercise her ability at will. She does not seem to conceive of her displays of strength as performances (this would likely be gauche for a deacon’s daughter) rather as “demonstrations”—a word connoting scientific method and practice. More significantly, Hurst’s body is protected. Her parents are present, caring for her, suggesting that her acceptance into the public sphere is (to some degree) contingent upon her being considered a child. Going onstage while she is a “girl” seems to hold quite different implications from going onstage as a woman. Interestingly, Kate and Maggie Fox were about the same age as Hurst when they first appeared before audiences, but were sexualized in ways that Hurst was not, perhaps because a male family member was not there to dictate the terms of their corporeal representation.

How did these autobiographies operate as sites of rhetorical invention in recognizing, justifying, and addressing the consequences of entering an unwelcoming public sphere?

Female mediums anticipated and responded to a variety of complex assumptions about their work by providing their own definitions of Spiritualism, mediumship, and its functions. With respect to Underhill, Jones, Maynard, and Hurst, I propose that mediums' autobiographies can be read as arguments for (or against) Spiritualism and the terms of its representation in the public sphere. Autobiography itself is a means by which to enter the public sphere with a specific--and usually explicitly stated--purpose. For instance, Jones's writing presents an argument for Spiritualism and its role in scientific invention--but also becomes a vehicle by which to reclaim her femininity. Maynard presents her autobiography primarily as a tribute to Lincoln, with the only slightly subtler agenda of highlighting her own role as a Spiritualist in Union military strategy. Underhill's autobiography appears to be an attempt at vindication; a way to dispel rumors about Spiritualist practice and to reclaim her respectability, but by the same token, her autobiography argues that by virtue of her own efforts, Spiritualism became mainstream. Finally, Hurst claims that her autobiography was written as an anti-Spiritualist manifesto, a means by which to debunk dangerous superstitions. Therefore, while

each woman presents her autobiography as a broad argument relating to Spiritualism, her own specific personal narrative is carefully framed as being subordinate (yet indispensable) to the larger argument itself. This is significant because it indicates how Spiritualism--and attitudes toward it--changed and fragmented over time.

Each medium appeals to audiences in her own unique manner. Underhill emphasizes the indignities that she and her sisters suffered in order to bring the “truth” to a wider audience. Underhill attempts to provide evidence for her own social role by framing her autobiography as a narrative of the history of Spiritualism and supports her claims with letters and newspaper articles. Meanwhile, Jones appeals to audiences by attempting to convince the reader not (as Underhill does) of a “truth” or a desire to force that truth on anyone else, but simply to help and heal people. Jones also appeals to pathos when she tries to describe her development as a scientist, a process that is clearly painful as she is at odds with the larger culture and must sacrifice her femininity. Maynard makes a similar appeal to pathos by casting herself as a *naïf*—so innocent and humble as to be incapable of self-assertion, but makes a savvy rhetorical move by framing her autobiography as an epideictic work on Lincoln in order to stir nostalgia and patriotism in her readers. Finally, Hurst appeals to discourses of reason and logic when she exhorts her readers to repudiate superstition because it suggests a return to ignorance

and superstition that progressive nineteenth-century culture has left behind. The irony, of course, is that Hurst's readers were apparently the very people she wished to dissociate from. However, due to Hurst's omission of a clear scientific explanation of her "powers," it remains unclear as to whether or not her autobiography was a clever ploy to garner the support of Spiritualists (with whom she identified more than she would admit) or whether it was a genuine lack of foresight on her part.

Further Research

I confess a deep fascination with Hurst who I believe may have had a hidden Spiritualist agenda and ulterior motives for writing her autobiography. To the best of my knowledge, no scholarly work has yet been done on Hurst. Further, no one has yet been able to satisfactorily explain the phenomena of her strength in scientific terms. Unlike the other mediums mentioned in this study, Hurst's career was closely supervised by a male authority, first her father and later her husband and manager Paul Abbott. As such, I would like to further explore the rhetorical implications of her autobiography by accessing archival materials that have been unavailable to me. To what degree was Hurst's autobiography really her "own"? What happened to her after she stopped performing? What was the social impact of the myriad Hurst "copy-cats" who cropped up when she faded from the public eye? Were they also claimed by the

Spiritualist community? Did Hurst know any Spiritualists intimately? What sorts of exposure had she had to Spiritualism prior to her demonstrations?

Further, if we accept that Spiritualism had a political impact on women, it would seem relevant to explore Spiritualist practices into the twentieth century, particularly during periods of social unrest. Also worthy of further study, is the differing opinions of scholars regarding the impact of war--in particular the Civil War and World War I--on Spiritualism. For instance, while some scholars argue that war fuelled Spiritualist activity, others believe that war dampened spiritual faith. A study of Spiritualist women's autobiographies of the World War I era, for instance that of Mrs. Cecil Cook, may reveal what kind of impact the Great War had on Spiritualist activity.

Moreover, I wonder about the relationship between Spiritualism and ethnicity. As mentioned earlier in this study, I am well aware of the need for further research to be conducted with respect to mediums of color, both in the nineteenth-century and beyond. While nineteenth-century historians see a link between Spiritualism and women's political organization in terms of First Wave feminism and the Abolition movement, to the best of my knowledge, no one has yet examined the relationship between Spiritualism and/or esoteric spiritual practices during feminism's Second Wave and/or the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. Finally, I believe it would be worth examining autobiographies of highly visible

twenty-first century mediums (such as Allison Dubois and Rebecca Rosen) of the Iraq War era, attending to autobiographical narratives emerging from mediums in cultural moments when gender norms are contested and women become increasingly visible in politics.

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