Spiritual Matter:
Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism, Whiteness, and Material Performance

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Alice. When you were an infant, you slept on my chest while I conducted my research, and as a toddler you tugged at my skirt and brought me snacks while I revised my dissertation. You give me hope for the future.

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the "physical manifestations" of nineteenth-century Spiritualism including animated objects, tipping tables, spiritual machines, spirit materializations, ectoplasm, as well as cases of animating human remains. I discuss the American spirit mediums Jonathan Koons, John Murray Spear, J.H. Conant, Elizabeth Denton, Anne Denton Cridge, Mary Schindler, G.A. Redman, Mary Comstock, Paschal Beverly Randolph, Kate and Maggie Fox, Margery Crandon, the English mediums Florence Cook and Elizabeth d'Esperance, and the French medium Eva Carrière. While my analysis is rooted in the American context, I follow where these repertoires traveled, which allows us to see this form of mediumship as a transatlantic phenomenon.

I argue that these spirit mediums turned racial Whiteness (particularly feminine Whiteness) into a practical spiritual technology through literalization. Literalization, as a logic of performance that collapses the gap between matter and meaning, uniquely exposed the implicit racial and sexual meanings behind Spiritualist activities. Ultimately, I contend that Spiritualist material performance comprised a set of experimental practices employed to test the power of White identity to transcend matter by absorbing material powers associated with racially othered spirits. The first two chapters look at White mediums channeling Indian and Black spirits, the third looks at how male mediums employed female bodies as spiritual resources, and the fourth looks at how female mediums racialized and sexualized Whiteness through materialization.

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The so-called "modern" Spiritualism was a movement based on communication with spirits, originating in Hydesville, New York in 1848 with two adolescent girls, the Fox sisters, who reportedly invented "the spiritual telegraph" by communicating with spirits through raps on material surfaces.[1] As the story goes, tables (as well as beds, dressers, and other objects) began to produce sounds and move in their presence at any hour of the day or night in their own home as well as the homes of their friends. Following their example, many young women became mediums in the following decades across the United States, England, and Western Europe, and by the end of the nineteenth century, Spiritualism had somewhere between thousands and millions of adherents (Albanese 220-221). It is impossible to know precisely how many people participated

[1] There is discrepancy regarding the exact age of Kate and Maggie at the time of the first rappings. Emma Hardinge Britten, citing Mrs. Fox, reports that they were 12 and 15. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle describes them as 11 and 14.

because Spiritualism was loosely organized, having no central leaders or churches. However, Spiritualists did have papers and publications, which Molly McGarry has called "a community in print" (21), as well as public figures and characteristic repertoires. One repertoire was called a "spirit circle," where a medium and a small group of visitors would sit around a table and call on spirits to communicate through raps or tilts of the table (represented in Fig. 1). In the first few decades of Spiritualism, the movement was also characterized by public demonstrations of trance speaking performed in lecture halls across the United States. In the 1870s, mediums began to perform partial and full-form materializations of spirit bodies in darkened domestic or laboratory settings (Fig. 2 represents a full-form materialization). Both the table-tipping and materialization repertoires (the iconic "physical manifestations" of Spiritualism) spread across the Atlantic, becoming particularly popular in England and Western Europe.[2]

The image on the left is from an anonymous anti-Spiritualist text, *The Rappers*, written to expose the "Mysteries, Fallacies and Absurdities" of spirit mediums in New York in 1854. What was absurd to this author about the movement was the centrality of the female performer, the serious gazes of male investigators, and the antics of the table. In the conclusion of the text, the author offers his main objection: "The legs of a table and entrancements and spirit-writings are both the Rapper's church and his religious services" (282). The author is pointing to the ambiguous status of Spiritualist performance—not quite a religious ritual, but taking the place of one. Spiritualism was a movement united

[2] While spirit communication was also rising in popularity in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, the traditions of spirit communication in these contexts were more disconnected from the American practices and outside the scope of this project. I do not intend to generalize the vast range of national contexts where Spiritualism thrived but rather to focus on how Spiritualist repertoires traveled among Anglophone cultures, the United States being the place of origin for the movement and center of my analysis.

by a repertoire that spread like a contagion, through tables and particularly among White women. [3]

The second image is an engraving made from a photograph reportedly taken at a séance in Terre Haute, Indiana on November 18, 1879 of Anna Stewart, a spirit medium who was known for "full-form materializations" of women, girls, and the Virgin Mary. Stewart is dressed in a dark shawl with her hair tightly braided. The unnamed spirit looks almost identical to the medium but is slightly taller, wearing a white dress, light shawl, and flower crown, with her long hair down. This séance was held in a dimly lit room with a small number of visitors adjacent to a "materialization cabinet" curtained off to seal out light completely (where the spirit formed). The image was published in a Spiritualist periodical *Gallery of Spirit Art.* The editor of the journal explained materialization, what he called "the culminating phenomenon of Modern Spiritualism," as "the clothing of the spirit form in a material garment of sufficient density to make it tangible to objective vision" (1883, 70). White skin, light, and white cloth on a background of darkness made up the aesthetic of materialization, as if these substances blended into each other.

Significantly, materialization was and continues to be the most controversial of Spiritualist "manifestations." In 1883, the British spirit artist Anny Mary Howitt differentiated materialization, which she saw as "theatrical, vulgar and overly physical" from her own practice of automatic drawing, which she described as "sublimation of matter into spirit," meaning the elevation of matter into an art object and beyond the taint

[3] I choose to capitalize Black and White when used as racial signifiers but leave black and white uncapitalized as descriptive colors. While it is still largely the convention to capitalize Black and not White in academia, I believe the convention is changing, as it already has in more popular forms of writing like journalism. I contend that leaving White uncapitalized perpetuates the myth that Whiteness is not real or visible while Black and Indigenous people are overburdened by the visibility of race in social life and in writing.

of the physical world (Orberter 338). In 1989, historian Ann Braude argued that when materialization replaced trance speaking (in the 1870s), this new repertoire "emphasized the medium's passivity in new and humiliating ways and downplayed her empowerment" (*Radical Spirits* 177). Braude is referring to aspects of the materialization repertoire that I will discuss in the fourth chapter including psychical researchers binding mediums to chairs or tying them to the floor. She goes on to claim that "While materialization diluted the meaning of mediumship, it also opened Spiritualism to new and more spectacular forms of fraud and self-aggrandizement" (177). Indeed, multiple materialization mediums were exposed as frauds in the last quarter of the century, and that was because these mediums invited investigators to test them. I do not consider this shift to be a dilution of mediumship but a crossover from more socially acceptable female behavior (the trance medium delivering comforting messages from the spirit world) into a territory deemed problematic for White women to enter (matter as a dark underside to transcendent spirit).

All of these critiques—the anonymous author of *The Rappers*, Howitt, and Braude—betray anti-theatrical and anti-physical biases, which have largely overdetermined how Spiritualism has been interpreted by its contemporaries as well as historians. The anti-theatrical bias played into a discourse of fakery, where protecting the movement from criticism meant continually arguing for its authenticity and seriousness. The anti-physical bias played into a theological discourse about the transcendence of spirit over the realm of base matter (contemporary critics of Spiritualism would ask: Why would a spirit tip a table? Is it not undignified?). Significantly for this dissertation, the anti-physical bias has overshadowed the centrality of "matter" and performing objects to the Spiritualist movement.

I propose that by overlooking the significance of material performance in Spiritualism, we miss the fact that the primary gesture of the movement (to make spirit material) was implicitly sexualized and racialized. Whiteness was the invisible frame for Spiritualism, not just because White people dominated the movement, but because the very basic premises and aesthetics of Spiritualist performance invested in Whiteness (particularly feminine Whiteness) as a spiritual and moral good. In this dissertation, I pose the questions: What were the ontological and metaphysical assumptions that grounded the relationship between feminine Whiteness and performing matter in Spiritualism? How was this relationship expressed and manipulated in the performances of spirit mediums, and to what ends?

The above images and the discourse surrounding them must be understood as racialized, not only because they centered White women, or even because of the aesthetic connection between light, fabric, and skin, but because of the logic of physical mediumship, which centered human spirits animating objects or becoming enfleshed through material substances. The racial and sexual meanings become clear when contextualized within the political and intellectual discourses of the nineteenth century—a time when racial theories of human origin, definition, and reproduction were being actively conceived and debated in the physical and emerging social sciences. As the following chapters unfold, the séance was a racial drama because Spiritualists operated within a metaphysical hierarchy in which White spirits were thought to transcend their bodies while racial others were seen as darker, heavier, or otherwise bound to matter or to their bodies. This metaphysical hierarchy was born of the White-settler myth that Black

and Indigenous people were necessary sacrifices to "modernity" while White people of European descent were destined to progress in this world and the next.

This Spiritualist racial metaphysics was rooted in a dynamic of White mediums channeling Black and Indian spirits. But even when mediums were not actively addressing or channeling racially othered spirits, racial meaning was implicitly communicated through various modes of investing in or testing the boundaries placed on Whiteness. I hope to expose how the two separate but related histories of enslavement and settler-colonization were transformed into spiritual resources to activate what Spiritualists called "spiritual matter." As the spirit medium Emma Hardinge Britten claimed in 1870, "Indian spirits play a prominent and most noble part in the Spiritualism of America. Nearly every medium is attended by one of these beneficent beings" (481).[4] Conversely, the medium J.H. (Frances or Fanny) Conant published a message from a Black spirit in 1861 explaining that Black spirits "produce the most wonderful physical manifestations" (animating objects, that is) because they "are more material than you," her White audience (*Banner of Light* 9.11, 6). In Spiritualist discourse, there was constant slippage between White as skin hue and whiteness or light as the essence of spirit as well as a moral category. In contrast, darkness was associated with ignorance, sin, earth, non-White peoples, and matter. But as these statements from Britten and Conant suggest, the supposed materiality of racial others could become a resource for mediums seeking to activate matter.

[4] Britten was an English-born actress-turned-medium who had some links to occult secret societies that emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but she remained a mainstream spokesperson for the American movement and frequently warned against the dangers of free love and sexual indecency associated with Spiritualism.

This dissertation takes matter as the key object of investigation because the spirit/matter binary anchored the sexual and racial meanings at play in Spiritualism. There has been a great deal of attention in theatre and performance studies to the violence of ethnic impersonation (Philip Deloria's "playing Indian" and blackface minstrelsy being prime examples) as well as cultural appropriation (descendants of White settlers attempting to practice Indigenous shamanism). I intend to show that there was a different dynamic at play in Spiritualist material performance: a kind of violence that looked more like a metaphysical or magical operation inspired by racial difference. For example, White spirit mediums frequently acted on a crisis of disembodiment by seeking a racialized other as experimental substance and/or spiritual substitute that could help them overcome the spirit/matter binary. I argue that Spiritualist choreographies, testimonies, and spirit communications help us see a vital materialism born of the supposed transcendence of racial Whiteness. The two parts of my argument involve: 1) Showing that séances were implicitly racialized (in addition to explicitly racialized, which could look more like caricature, appropriation, or impersonation); and 2) Showing how that implicit meaning was exposed through literalizing gestures that centered matter in a range of ways. Significantly, from tipping tables to full-form materializations, Spiritualists found the presence of White, pale, or translucent female skin to be instrumental in their practices, first through a touch to help the spirits move a table, and then in forming a spirit-body. The tipping table was the first anti-transcendent gesture of the Spiritualist movement, and as the movement spread, Spiritualist material performance continued to disturb the epistemological mastery of Whiteness (the assumption that the White subject is transcendent and masters the material world from above) by making Whiteness more

and more material. What this helps us think about is a certain tension between performance as a material medium and Whiteness as an ontology—exposing how attempts to manifest Whiteness in performance are often destined to falter because the presumed immateriality of Whiteness runs counter to the need for material presence in performance. In other words, this dissertation tells a story of the impossibility of adequately performing Whiteness, and of an entire (messy, repudiated, and unique) performance movement that was built around the attempt.

Spiritualism as a Racial Project

There have been a number of social histories establishing the significant impact of Spiritualism upon American culture and politics, while more recent work in literature and cultural studies has critiqued racial formations in Spiritualism. R. Laurence Moore (1977) considered the uniqueness of Spiritualism in its public practice, that is Spiritualists' openness in seeking absolute proof of the afterlife (against more secret occult spiritualities). He makes an argument that Spiritualists imitated scientific procedures which allowed them to outwardly demonstrate spiritual experiences. Ann Braude's book *Radical Spirits* (1989) may be the most cited source on the topic, framing Spiritualism as deeply involved in the women's suffrage movement. She takes the Fox sisters' rappings in 1848 to mark the beginning of the movement, and she gives a precise 37 years to its rise and fall, 1885 being the year when the Spiritualist movement declined (due to the debunking of famous mediums in the 1870s and 80s). Braude takes American Spiritualism seriously because it created spaces where mediums could speak in public about controversial issues. She looks at mediums in small towns and cities, séances in

drawing rooms and trance speakers at political assemblies, showing that the movement in America was composed of people of all social classes performing in a range of private and public venues. Following Braude's work, Molly McGarry's book *The Ghosts of Futures Past* (2008) asks how different reform movements were mobilized from spirit circles. McGarry argues that Spiritualists reached into the past to imagine new futures, and that Spiritualists were instrumental in unsettling American narratives of history and progress. She comes to a more complex view of gender in the séance, arguing that mediumship was "a kind of purifying transfiguration and release from the earthly, gendered body" (154). While this is an apt description of some visions of Summerland (Spiritualist heaven), many Spiritualist practices contradicted this notion. I hope to show how mediumship capitalized on the reproductive power and mysteries of female bodies. As Anne Delgado has argued: "the female body becomes a revered site for generating materialized ghosts" in the nineteenth century, and Spiritualism provided a whole new type of "female subjectivity that defied scientific definition altogether" ("Bawdy Technologies" 5).

Most spirit mediums in the movement were women, and even mediums who were men were credited with possessing feminized qualities or they directly invoked female powers in some way. Ann Braude characterizes the success of the Fox sisters' performances in this way: "Americans throughout the country found messages from spirits more plausible when delivered through the agency of adolescent girls" (26). That is because Spiritualists understood femininity (ideal White femaleness) to be defined as passivity and attractiveness to outside agentive forces. Spiritualists understood passivity to be the most significant precondition for mediumship, but there was another, which, I

suggest, was White disembodiment (born of the association between Whiteness and transcendence), effectively making space in the White body for other spirits to enter.

While there were some famous Black Spiritualists including Paschal Beverly Randolph (featured in the third chapter), Sojourner Truth, Harriet Wilson, and Harriet Jacobs, Spiritualism was a White dominated movement. Black Spiritualists tended to be trance lecturers, which was, in Ann Braude's term, "empowering" because it allowed Black women and men to speak in public on controversial issues under the authority of spirits. Trance lectures were very different from the physical manifestations that I seek to understand, and they have already been overemphasized in the secondary literature because of their utopian and egalitarian politics (being associated with abolitionist activism and the women's suffrage movement). I find it significant that only White mediums seem to have performed the hyper-physical séances that I think of as material performance (from table-tipping to materialization).

Looking primarily at the "physical manifestations" of Spiritualism and the discourse concerning "matter" in the movement, I suggest that the movement invested in Whiteness through a project of producing and managing "spiritual matter." Significantly, Spiritualists defined themselves as "modern" against Black, Indigenous, immigrant, ethnic, and folk practices that concerned communication with spirits. In this way, Spiritualists proceeded in self-imposed ignorance of a huge variety of other practices in order to constitute the movement as a space in which White people could safely experiment with non-Whiteness. Along these lines, Russ Castronovo argued in *Necro-Citizenship* (2001) that Spiritualist séances were "performances of white interiority" that depended on Black bodies, enslavement and Black death as content and metaphor in their

rituals to experience spiritual liberation. Through White mediumship, he writes, "liberal (un)consciousness absorbs and then discards the black body as the ground for privileged white disembodiment" (186). Castronovo reads the prior histories against the grain, bringing commitments of past scholars into question, specifically narratives of political progress. Following his project of critiquing racial formations in the séance, Robert S. Cox's book *Body and Soul* (2003) foregrounds the concept of Victorian sympathy. Cox argues that what motivated White Spiritualists to connect with murdered Indians and slaves was guilt and a hope that sympathy could atone for American colonization and slavery. Ultimately, he concludes that the "American practice of race" effectively "gutted the sympathetic cosmology," making any efforts for social reform fall short (234-235).

The overwhelming number of Indian spirits in Spiritualism has largely been discussed with reference to Philip Deloria's concept of "playing Indian," which has mostly framed the séance as a space of ethnic impersonation. Bridgett Bennett (2005) describes Shakers and Spiritualists in performances that were almost anthropological in seeking to understand Indian spirits and spirituality. Ultimately, she argues, Shakers and Spiritualists created shows about White anxieties; the vanishing Indian trope was a potent metaphor for Shakers who saw themselves as vanishing from the world, and the connection between Indians and spirit mediums (as vacant or disappearing women) continued to play out in Spiritualist séances. Kathryn Troy's *The Specter of the Indian* (2016) offered an in-depth analysis of Indian communications in Spiritualist séances (1860-1880), arguing that "the witnessing of Indian spirits affected American minds and reception of federal Indian policy by influencing concepts of racial difference" (xii). Troy refuses the "playing Indian" model and instead argues that spirit mediums attempted to

fight against the vanishing Indian trope by frequently citing their return. Like the feminist social histories, these studies of race capture the immediate political contexts and meanings of Spiritualist performance in the nineteenth century. What they generally fail to capture, however, is the implicit racial frame of the séance. Implicit meaning operates in the material dynamics of the performance, while explicit racial meaning (appropriating a slave narrative or impersonating an Indian) is clear at the level of representation. I hope to contribute to this literature on the raciality of Spiritualism by investigating the significance of matter in the context of White mediumship. I contend that raciality in Spiritualism heavily relied on conceptions of and performances that featured matter.

Some scholars have chosen not to differentiate Spiritualism from other traditions of communicating with the dead, ignoring the implicit racial frame entirely. John Kucich (2004) argues that "spiritualism" (with a lowercase s and a broad meaning, referring to those who communicate with the dead) should be seen as one example among Indigenous and African-derived spiritual practices.[5] Kucich focuses on "how spiritualism mediated the power relations within and between cultures in the United States" (xiii). While I agree with his critique of historians who study Spiritualism only in the context of European-derived spiritualities (Christianity, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism), I think his account makes a mistake in creating a flattened "multi-cultural" spirit communication landscape, ignoring the work that Spiritualists thought they were doing by insisting they were "modern" or White against racialized Others, as well as the relationship between Spiritualism and eugenics. Christine Ferguson has recently critiqued the blind spot in

[5] I choose to capitalize Spiritualism to singularize it, for while it was not a religion in a conventional sense, and the movement was comprised of a range of practices in different contexts, I contend that Spiritualism, as initially developed in the United States, had a particular logic to it that cannot be collapsed into the huge range of spirit-communications worldwide.

many of these studies of Spiritualism, arguing that "the crucial part of the transatlantic Spiritualist movement's story that they leave untold" is "its largely neglected role in formulating and disseminating hard hereditarian thought, eugenic doctrines of sexual reproduction, and occult raciology" (2). Ferguson is reacting, like Castronovo did, against the narrative of Spiritualists forwarding progressive or multicultural politics.

I am greatly indebted to the work of these scholars who have given us a sense of what was normative in the movement and influential in the cultural movements that surrounded Spiritualism.[6] There are many unresolved tensions in this secondary literature, however, so it is unsurprising that scholars in the arts and humanities have recently returned to Spiritualism (as dissertations by Reddy, Hoffman, Fritz, and Yerby are a testament). My project is necessary, I suggest, because there have been no critical engagements with the matter and performing objects in Spiritualism, and furthermore, my home in theatre studies allows me to think more deeply than previous scholars have done about what performance means in Spiritualism. In art historian Meredith Reddy's recent dissertation, for example, she focuses on "the actions of mediums and the conjured objects of the séance" (2), but her focus on the objects of Spiritualism is an attempt to fit these objects into another regime of objecthood (the art object). In contrast, I see matter as a pivotal and unstable concept that was actively investigated through performance, exposing understandings of raciality and sexuality during a time of great violence and upheaval.

Raciality, Sexuality, and Indigeneity of Matter

[6] This is not a comprehensive literature review, for I have included only the sources that I find myself in direct dialogue with. See my bibliography for a sense of the vast literature on Spiritualism.

Spiritualist material experimentation was highly charged with ethical questions concerning racial and sexual difference because of three very different but related sets of power relations in the nineteenth century: the "total objectification" of slavery (as Hortense Spillers put it), the efforts to eliminate or assimilate Native peoples within White culture, and the sexual subjugation of women in the patriarchal order. The height of Spiritualism overlapped with the Civil War, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the Indian wars, as well as an era when women began to speak publicly on political issues. Persons frequently treated as objects were engaged in struggles for self-possession and sovereignty. At the same time, technological innovations including electricity and the telegraph made the substrate of material production increasingly immaterial, and commodity culture elevated things so that they could appear magical or transcendent. In this context, Spiritualist practice brought two sets of questions into focus about the respective statuses of humans and objects: one about how persons are related to objects, and the other concerning the relationship between material and immaterial worlds. In this context of political upheaval and technological development, Spiritualists made connections across biological, social, and technological registers in their performances. Folded into issues of raciality were conceptions of reproduction and technology as performance logics—the reproductive logic made it clear why a female body was necessary for mediumship and technological innovation provided a means of transforming powerless or inert matter into a powerful or agentive force.

I contend that sexuality and raciality cannot be separated when it comes to performing matter in Spiritualism, but there is a reason why specifically the racial element is often overlooked. In the photograph of Anna Stewart above, few scholars

would point to Whiteness as the key signifier. Scholars in Whiteness studies have shown how Whiteness establishes itself as an unmarked category by producing racial others as the marked (Dyer, Morrison, Frankenburg). This situation is metaphysical in the sense that the material world, in this racial hierarchy, is composed of defined others and a pervasive Whiteness made powerful through un-definition, invisibility, and transcendence.

This project begins with the awareness that racial Whiteness is the source of ongoing violence in the United States and beyond its borders. This violence is physical, psychological, epistemological, and, I suggest, spiritual. Critical race theorists have shown how enslavement involved the objectification of Black people such that, in the eyes of White people, Black people could only speak from a space of death, lack, or pathology (Franz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Achille Mbembe). Conversely, Indigenous studies scholars have shown how White settlers framed Native Americans as doomed, already dead, or confined to a distant history as a means to possess the land (Vine Deloria Jr., Patrick Wolfe, Jean O'Brien). Enslavement and colonization produced two senses of racial otherness that White people differentiated themselves from (while still capitalizing on these power relations).

In this project, I point to a specific form of Whiteness that emerged during the mid to late nineteenth century as racial lines in the United States took new shape during the Indian Wars, the Civil War, and Reconstruction periods. I do not stay bound in my analysis by the national frame, however, because the form of Whiteness I investigate traveled abroad through Spiritualist repertoires. I hope to show how the feminine Whiteness of Spiritualism was made to transcend specific contexts within the United

States. W.E.B du Bois characterized the "religion of whiteness" as a "modern" invention of the nineteenth century (*Darkwater* 924). This "modern" Whiteness traveled back and forth across the Atlantic. As Paul Gilroy phrases the issue in *The Black Atlantic*:

> Notions of the primitive and the civilised which had been integral to pre-modern understanding of "ethnic" differences became fundamental cognitive and aesthetic markers in the processes which generated a constellation of subject positions in which Englishness, Christianity, and other ethnic and racialised attributes would finally give way to the dislocating dazzle of "whiteness" (9).

Whiteness could travel precisely because of its dislocating effect, freeing the significance of White skin from European or English ancestry. Paying attention to Whiteness in this way (as a cultural force that covered over more contextual, place-based, or specific notions of personhood), helps us see what scholars have a tendency to overlook, namely the implicit racial Whiteness of Spiritualist performance.

I understand Whiteness, not as a fixed identity category, but as a form of technology. In her "phenomenology of whiteness," Sara Ahmed suggests that we look at race as an inherited orientation, that is to say "*we inherit the reachability of some objects*" (154). She clarifies: "I am not suggesting here that 'whiteness' is one such 'reachable object', but that whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach. By objects, we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do 'things' with" (154). Ahmed argues against notions of race as identity, placing emphasis on the status of Whiteness as background to action, but there is more to work to be done on the *how* of raciality. Along these lines, I think about Whiteness as a technology, emphasizing the fact that Whiteness allows certain people to "do things" in particular ways. Technology is commonly defined as:

"the branch of knowledge dealing with the mechanical arts and applied sciences" or "the application of such knowledge" ("technology," def. 4), but in a broader sense, technology describes the means by which humans interact with the material world. I think of technology as the total equipment for life—practical, aesthetic, and social. Looking at Whiteness in this way helps me articulate how Whiteness was done, how performers relied upon and produced Whiteness in the process of animating objects and investigating matter.

Metaphors and Literalization

As the Spiritualist movement spread in the United States, to England, and France, spirits became more and more material, and mediums were associated with communication and image production technologies in new ways. First there were tipping tables, then floating hands caressing visitors, moving objects and self-playing musical instruments, performing human remains, the forming of partial spirit-bodies, followed by "full-form materializations" like the one in the illustration above, and then unformed spirit flesh (ectoplasm). Because Spiritualist performance was ambiguous when it came to genre (not-quite religious ritual, entertainment, technological process, or scientific investigation but taking meaning from all these genres), metaphors have constantly been used to explain what was happening in the séance room. For example, female mediums were frequently described as batteries, motors, telegraphs, trains, and cameras.

As a result, scholars in media studies have tended to come to the conclusion that female mediums were enacting metaphors. However, I contend that metaphor has come to overdetermine how spirit mediums made meaning. Jeffrey Sconce's *Haunted Media*

(2000) took the connection between the telegraph and mediumship (that Spiritualists referred to the Fox sisters as the "inventors of the spiritual telegraph") to ground an argument about how media technologies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (radio, television, cyberspace) have been accompanied by the appearance of metaphorical ghosts. Significantly, Sconce thinks Spiritualists and psychical researchers were elaborating "a theory of woman as technology," playing out metaphors through female bodies (14). This is a theme that gets picked up by Marina Warner in *Phantasmagoria* (2006), where she argues that female spirit mediums were understood as metaphorical cameras in séance repertoires at the end of the nineteenth century. As Warner argues:

> Unseen phenomena—spirits like angels and cherubs, shades of the dead, ethereal or astral bodies, subtle matter—have been visualized and communicated so effectively that the conventions they rely on and adapt have themselves become invisible. The metaphors that enflesh them introduce them into reality. But that reality can be expressed only through metaphor (13).

I want to trouble Warner's assumption that unseen phenomena can only be expressed through metaphor. To ask the basic question: How does a metaphor work? By letting one term stand in for another, a metaphor creates meaning through an implied bridge between disparate things or ideas. While the general assumption is that a metaphor produces meaning, it might not always do so smoothly, and it is not the only way to represent invisible or immaterial presences. Tracy Fritz' recent dissertation on Spiritualist poetry urges us to think critically about how Spiritualists used language to make meaning, suggesting that "carefully crafted depictions of touch" (45) in Spiritualist poetry were more important than metaphors. She argues that Spiritualist texts have an implicit politics in the way that they insist on embodiment, touch, and the presence of words (9). Fritz

relies upon insights from literary critic Peter Stockwell regarding the "surrealist technique of literalisation" that creates a cognitive pause for a reader or interpreter of a text. In Stockwell's words: "Surrealist writings aimed to access the unconscious mind, by creating as far as possible a disjunction between intentionality and writing, between words and coherent representational meaning" (Stockwell 130). A surrealist literal image produces a feeling that what we think we know about the world and about words might be wrong, and this can be extremely uncomfortable. In this way, what makes literalization different from metaphor is that literalization takes the reader out of the text, asks them to read and reread the line, and then while imagining what is possible in the world of the poem, it brings the reader to question their own preconceived notions of reality. Meaning itself becomes a slippery concept when the goal of a text is to make someone feel or doubt something on a very basic level (actually touching spirit, in the Spiritualist context, or doubting the inertness of matter), as opposed to communicating a specific, intentional message. Literalization could be seen as an anti-linguistic gesture, and a rich opportunity to think about the slippery relation between text and embodiment. This insight about how literalization functions as a cognitive rupture in poetic text points us in the right direction in thinking about how Spiritualist performance functioned.

Daniel Cottom argues that one of the main charges against Spiritualists by their contemporary critics was that they took metaphors literally (The assumption being that ghosts and haunting are socially acceptable as metaphors, but someone who actually sees ghosts is hallucinating). For critics of Spiritualism, Cottom suggests, "the organization of meaning was an issue more important than the question of how far the phenomena were genuine" (37). For Cottom, the signature move of both Spiritualism and surrealism was

the celebration of unreason, exposing the contradictory nature of reason itself and gesturing toward an opening in the cracks of accepted reality. According to their critics, when Spiritualists reasoned, they did so badly or irreverently, taking terms from the physical sciences like electromagnetism, for example, and building machines for spirits to touch magnets and charge a battery (as John Murray Spear did, which I discuss in the third chapter). However, it matters that Spiritualists thought of themselves as highly reasonable and practical. They were incredibly earnest in their literalness, not only urging others to question the way they understood reality, but suggesting, by way of example, that an entirely new world was available, one where spirits were ever-present, intervening in potentially every material movement on Earth. In contrast to the surrealist mode of disconnecting from conventional reality, literalization in Spiritualism was about dwelling in a new reality.

I am employing the term literalization to help me articulate the unique logic of Spiritualist material performance. The definition of literalize is "to represent or accept as literal rather than metaphorical, allegorical, etc." ("literalize"). The term has historically been deployed in relation to sacred texts. To literalize, in this sense, is to get at the most direct and least symbolic meaning of a text. Literalization, as I see it, can be much more expansive, suggesting a unique performance process. Literalization is distinct from materialization because it is not directed toward one specific material form or outcome, but rather describes performances that resist conventional understandings of meaning and matter altogether. To put it differently, materialization has a specific trajectory: from the immaterial to the material, while literalization often shifts back and forth, as if there is no divide at all between the immaterial and material worlds. In the case of Anna Stewart, for

example, the spirit formed in a dazzling display of White skin and white fabric, literalizing a connection (that was widely held as metaphor in the wider culture) between spirit and feminine Whiteness. Fabric, skin, light, the other side all seem to blend together as spirit comes in and out of form. This scene presented ontological chaos—Whiteness and light were not only symbols for goodness or transcendence, but they provided the means to touch spirit. Literalization, in this sense, is a performative tool, a means of blurring categories of being and meaning.

The charge against Spiritualists that they were too literal can be turned around. I see their literalization not as an error, but as an affirmation or investment in something else—Spiritualists insisted on being literal which meant touching and producing spirit instead of letting spirit be an invisible presence or concept. For Cottom, this was the epitome of "unreason" (to collapse a symbol with its referent). Against this line of reasoning, the central argument of this dissertation is not only that spirit was literalized, but that racial Whiteness was literalized through material performance logics, making objects, materials, substances, body parts, and flesh perform as a test or investment in Whiteness. To phrase my project in more simple terms, I ask how Spiritualist literalization related to the complexities of sexual and racial representation and embodiment.

As I hope to show, each case study in this dissertation relied upon an implicit sexual and racial metaphysics that was exposed through literalizing gestures or operations (touching concepts or spirits, or conversely, thinking through tables or machines). In the following chapters I look at different kinds of material performances that I think of as exceptionally literal: In the first chapter, Jonathan Koons and John Murray Spear's

project of unearthing Indian remains reveals the assumption held by many White settlers that Indians were bound to the land itself, and therefore a spiritual/material resource. In the second chapter, I show how mediums approached Black spirits as performing objects, in a sense creating puppets of the dead. In the third chapter, I look at John Murray Spear's "modelizing" as a method of inventing while under the influence of spirit, and Paschal Beverly Randolph's "blending" spiritual essences through the sexual act and through mediumship. In the fourth chapter, I look at the materialization repertoire where spirit mediums made Whiteness into spiritual excretion.

Material Performance

Studies of Spiritualism in history, cultural, and media studies tend to associate the theatricality of Spiritualism with manipulation and spectacle, so while they might not be overtly anti-theatrical, they root their arguments in an old anti-theatrical bias (theatre is fake). Take, for example, Bridget Bennet's statement that "Spiritualism is a highly performative phenomenon" ("Sacred Theatres" 115), referring to how mediums staged séances in deliberately artful and manipulative ways (designing the lighting, staging, etc. to have a particular effect on an audience). Along these lines, Simone Natale argues that Spiritualism was "a brilliant form of entertainment" (1). While it helps to see the movement in the context of growing entertainment industries (for Spiritualists frequently overlapped with political lecture circuits, magic shows, and scientific demonstrations), his argument aligns with what critics of Spiritualists were saying all along: Spiritualism is a sideshow, not a serious engagement with spirit. We should be skeptical of such characterizations because they obscure the unique performance philosophy of

Spiritualism. Furthermore, anti-theatricality can veer into anti-femininity when scholars support nineteenth-century anti-theatrical discourse that rested on the assumption that femininity was defined by manipulation or superficiality (hence the urgency for male investigators to unmask fraudulent women).

My approach to performance is inspired by Diana Taylor's work in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, and her contention that in addition to being defined as practice and event, "performance also functions as epistemology" (3). That is to say, "Embodied practice, along with and bound up with other cultural practices, offers a way of knowing" (3). Taylor unsettles the centrality of Western notions of knowledge that assume the archive (and its association with written language) to be the privileged record of the past. She writes to recover knowledge rooted in Latin American performance against a White colonial archive that deems colonized or non-White peoples ahistorical for their apparent lack of Euro-centric modes of writing or record. Looking at performance as epistemology can be an incredibly valuable mode of reading against or through an archive. I do not look to the archive to arrive at the truth of the event (what really happened), but rather analyze the texts in the archive as traces of a contagious way of behaving. Spiritualist repertoires carried a certain mode of questioning related to feminine Whiteness and matter. When we understand performance in this way, as an open, unfinished unfolding of repertoires, we can see how this form of feminine Whiteness traveled and changed through repetitions and elaborations. Significantly, Spiritualist performance tended to have an ambiguous temporality; a séance was a structured event, but many Spiritualist practices did not have beginnings or endings in a conventional sense. John Murray Spear, for example, carried out processes under the influence of spirits while supposedly

withholding from himself the true purpose of the operations. In this sense, one could say that he was caught up in one unending Spiritualist performance for the latter half of his life.

I think it is necessary to center perspectives on performing objects in my view of performance because of the obvious examples (tables tipping, floating objects), but also because spirit mediums frequently made themselves into objects or treated their spirits as objects. In this context, objecthood has two overlapping meanings: 1) Inertness, powerlessness, darkness, or a connection to matter; and 2) Being used as an instrument by a separate agency. Significantly, racialized spirits tended to be objectified in the first sense and spirit mediums in the latter, but these meanings were often overlapped or reversed, revealing a certain play between the raciality and sexuality of objecthood. Both of these "objective conditions" as Spiritualists would say of the mediumistic state, were opportunities to be filled up with spirit.

Performance has a way of making an idea materially manifest in time and space, giving an idea flesh by directly embodying it. Spiritualists give us an in-between kind of performance, not quite theatre, ritual, or puppetry, but a repertoire that made meaning in a way that centered touch, transparency, and transformation. Throughout these chapters, I pose the question: How did Spiritualism operate as a philosophy of performance to overcome or respond to difference, where one form of difference (matter/spirit) anchored others (white/nonwhite, feminine/masculine, past/present, powerful/powerlessness)?

Materialization and Vital Materialism

Spiritualists significantly reevaluated the basic categories of matter/non-matter and human/nonhuman through embodied performance practices, and I consider these practices to constitute a unique form of materialist philosophy. I am using the term materialism to refer to a way of thinking that centers matter as opposed to the immaterial or abstract realm of ideas. My goal is not to apply a specific materialist tradition from philosophy to interpret Spiritualist materialism,[7] but rather to pay attention to how the practices themselves revealed a way of thinking about and with matter. That being said, I am in dialogue with recent new materialist literature because of the radical ontological thinking that Spiritualists often espoused, specifically the idea that there is no difference between matter and spirit, which could lead to an almost anti-humanist position. For example, in one spirit communication delivered through the Boston-based spirit medium J.H. (Frances or Fanny) Conant in October of 1860, a spirit by the name of Thomas Price came to deliver the message: "I want to tell those [Christian] friends that there is no God…I was ready to go, for I was no better than any other vegetable or animal" (*Banner of Light* 8.5, 6). I see a connection with twenty-first century new materialists who take an anti-humanist stance.

New materialism refers to a wide range of scholars across disciplines in the sciences, arts, and humanities, but what connects them is an effort to problematize Euro-centric conceptions of matter and often to recognize matter's agency.[8] As Jane Bennett argues:

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[7] I do not take Marxist historical materialism as a framework, but I recognize a connection between commodity culture and Spiritualism that I hope to address in further research. Significantly, both the Fox sisters' rappings and the first edition of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* appeared on opposite sides of the Atlantic in 1848.

[8] See Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, Graham Harman's Object Oriented Ontology, Jane Bennett's "vital materialism," and Eduardo Vivieros de Castro's contribution to the ontological turn in Anthropology.

> I will emphasize, even overemphasize, the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces (operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts) in an attempt to encounter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought. We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism-the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature-to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world (*Vibrant Matter* xv-xvi).

Both of these statements, albeit from different orientations, attempt to flatten a hierarchy that assumes the human to be the pinnacle of material formation. The first statement, a spirit communication, was an attempt to undo the Christian duality of matter/spirit. The second statement, a key gesture at the heart of Bennett's "vital materialism," is a call for attention to the agency of matter in response to the violent outcomes of Western humanism. I do not intend to conflate the two, but to draw a connection and suggest that Spiritualism could offer a valuable perspective to contemporary debates about materialism. Spirit mediums awoke many different materials that were considered inert or dead in their experiments: dirt, metal, stone, fabric, household objects, corpses, etc. One could see Spiritualist material performance as a case of "vibrant matter," in the sense offered by Jane Bennett, where the agency or vitalism activated in performance was not strictly human, but rather led Spiritualists to question the state of matter and life itself. There are many forms of vital materialism, but Spiritualism is significant among them because of its status as a practice-based mass movement. I ask: What can vital materialism lead to, what kinds of actions does it authorize, and what, specifically, did it activate for Spiritualists in the nineteenth century?

Attempting to do an analysis of both human and nonhuman actors in performance requires me to first attend to how human repertoires secure unequal power relations. Judith Butler drew off of Michel Foucault's work regarding the body in *Discipline and Punish* to show how bodies "materialize" through discourse, performing sex and gender

in countless iterations. In her words: "'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled" (1). Butler's sense of materialization is about normativity: the quotidian practices of gender formation. I will use the term materialization in a different sense, but I want to hold onto her insight that the materialization of sex in social life is never complete.

For Spiritualists, materialization meant transforming an immaterial force into a touchable, visible form. I think about materialization of White femininity in Spiritualism not as normative but hyperbolic and extreme (resulting not only in producing whole female bodies but the excretion of flesh and body parts). Spiritualist materializations both relied upon normative assumptions about sex but also over-performed them, destabilizing the ontological terms separating humans from matter. Spirit mediums were making bodies material out of the invisible or immaterial realm, and perhaps unsurprisingly, they generally looked the same, feminine, White, wrapped in a white garment, etc. But, significantly, they could not exist for very long, always performing in a precarious state of formation or dissolution. And just as often, Spiritualist performances failed to produce a "manifestation" at all, producing only a vibration of the table or, if the medium was exposed as a fraud, a sense of complete disappointment in an audience. Butler's notion of performativity helps us see just how unstable sex actually is in social life, that it must be continually, forcibly reiterated. Spiritualist materialization took this aspect of sex to

absurd lengths, drawing out and taking pleasure in the precarious, partial, and incomplete nature of making the sexualized female spirit.

I see myself in the wake of the linguistic and material turns, attempting to inhabit the space between discourse and matter through a lens of performance, and looking for an ethical approach to problematic performance genres. Along these lines, Karen Barad's questioning of Judith Butler has been productive in performance studies, in asking "precisely *how* discursive practices produce material bodies" (810). Barad, as a significant voice in the "material turn," has pointed out that a linguistic approach to performativity and materialization continues to perpetuate epistemological violence by assuming matter to be inert and by relying upon Euro-centric notions of linguistic signification (J.L. Austin's notion of the "speech act" for one). More recently, new materialists (including Barad and Bennett) have been critiqued for their own Euro-centrism. Scholars in Indigenous studies have argued that White new materialists often fail to acknowledge the well-developed literature on nonhuman ontologies in Indigenous studies.[9] As a result, new materialists tend to enact Indigenous erasure in their literature. Conversely, scholars in Black studies have exposed how White new materialists often overlook the raciality of matter and ignore the radical ontological thinking created through Black life and subjectivity.[10] This is the blind spot that has become apparent in White new materialist literature, the fact that "matter" cannot be a universal ontological concept, for matter has been so influenced by Euro-centric intellectual traditions and racial thinking.

[9] See Zoe Todd, Jeryy Lee Rosiek, Jimmy Snyder, and Scott L Pratt.
[10] See Katherine McKittrick, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Alexander Weheliye, Uri McMillan, Louis Chude-Sokei, and Tavia Nyong'o.

Significantly, critiques of White new materialists center around some of the same issues that nineteenth century Spiritualists acted upon. In more specific terms, Spiritualists tended to overlook the voices of Indigenous and Black people, and they operated on a false neutrality when it came to animating matter. Cristin Ellis has argued that it is important to look to the nineteenth century (and specifically the connection between Spiritualism and eugenics) because the problem of defining or unsettling the concept of matter that preoccupies new materialists appears in a nascent form, revealing competing materialisms and regimes of embodiment. Ellis argues that mid-nineteenth-century biological racism "treats materiality as if it were unevenly distributed among humans—as if some peoples are inherently more and others less embodied, as if we are a species unevenly evolving from apes to angels" (5). This spiritual logic of evolution was the dominant form of racism in the Spiritualist movement, but attending to their practices reveal that they continually tested it. It helps to understand nineteenth century notions of materialism because some of these trends still operate today in the normative assumptions and tensions within White culture, biological thinking, and technological development. I take this connection between nineteenth-century and twenty-first century thinking as my own context, that which motivates my research into Whiteness and material performance. I want to understand how materialism can be a performance philosophy that implicitly does harm or engages with the harmful terms of racial thinking and settler-colonialism.

Methodology and Chapters

In these pages, I look at Spiritualist witness testimonies, spirit communications published by spirit mediums, and manuscripts of psychical researchers between the years

1848-1930, following the rise and fall of the movement in the United States and after its transnational boom across the Atlantic. For those who have not seen these materials, Spiritualist periodicals included accounts of séances, spirit communications, book reviews of Spiritualist texts, poetry, fiction, advertisements, national news, and political debates. They offer a sense of what Spiritualists were concerned with, as well as evidence of what séance performances looked like and how Spiritualists experienced them. In my reading of primary texts, I look for language describing racially othered spirits, racial Whiteness, femininity, performing objects, matter, and moral or aesthetic lightness and dark. While the case studies that I compare represent racial others in a range of ways, feminine Whiteness looks almost the same—as a spiritual technology, the doorway to the other side or the ideal apparatus to touch, produce, or birth spirit.

While the first three chapters focus on American mediums and specific contexts of industrialization, enslavement and Indian genocide, the fourth chapter looks at British and European mediums in relation to American mediums because I find it impossible to isolate Spiritualist repertoires within national boundaries at the turn of the century. In this sense, I take American practices of race as my primary context, but then I expand outward as the movement became transatlantic. When we see the movement cohere across borders, it helps us see how Whiteness began to cohere beyond specific geographical contexts. While there is a class dimension to Spiritualist activities, particularly in England when working class women were able to elevate their status through the new profession of mediumship,[11] this is not my focus because I am looking

[11] See Logie Barrow's *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850-1910.*

specifically at raciality and sexuality which were intertwined with the notion of matter in ways that class was not.[12]

Unlike scholars before me, I center stories of mediums that most histories ignore, like John Murray Spear, the inventor who was condemned by mainstream Spiritualists for his sexual rituals, and Paschal Beverly Randolph, controversial Black Spiritualist lecturer and sex magician. Mediums who were marginalized within the movement frequently discussed the racial and sexual dimensions of mediumship, and they help us understand what the central figures, particularly famous women, were unable to say, at risk of losing their followings. For this reason, this dissertation may be a bit disorienting because I go to the margins in order to upset the normative approach to Spiritualism.

The first chapter turns to the racialization of Indian spirits and the gesture of White mediums unearthing Indian remains.[13] I find it helpful to think of animism (the term coined by British anthropologist E.B. Tylor in 1869 to describe an Indigenous worldview populated with spirits) as Spiritualism's racialized other side. Animism describes the limit-case of Spiritualism, that which White spirit mediums attempted to channel (because animism seemed a strong argument for spiritual matter) while protecting themselves from its supposed dangers (fear of non-White spiritualities). I look at Jonathan Koons of Ohio and John Murray Spear's efforts in New York to unearth Indian remains in support of their mediumship, revealing that Indian spirits were understood as hyper-material because of their connection with the land. I expose how

[12] In further research, I hope to explore how hierarchies of matter relied upon nineteenth-century notions of class, but that is for a larger project.

[13] I will use the word Indian to refer to the spirits discussed by Spiritualists because that is how they were mentioned in the literature, and this term captures a specific White-settler imaginary of Indigeneity. When I discuss actual Indigenous peoples and scholars I will primarily use the term Indigenous.

significant Koons and Spear's excavations were as acts of epistemological violence. They literalized the genocidal logic of settler colonialism in a kind of overperformance—not just killing Indians, stealing their land, or memorializing them in their supposed "vanishing" (everyday practices of the settler-colonial state), but using their remains as spiritual touchstones, in a sense, colonizing the dead. In my analysis of their spirit communications, I show how Koons and Spear reversed responsibility for their actions through the logic of mediumship and the claim that these spirits consented, even entreated them, to unearth their graves. In the latter half of the chapter, I analyze spirit communications published by J.H. Conant of Boston, revealing that when Indian spirits sought revenge in the Spiritualist imaginary, they did so through an animist logic, claiming to rise up from the land itself, leading the United States to destruction in the Civil War. In the last section, I focus on Indian maiden spirits in Conant's communications to expose how reproductive powers from the past were transferred to an understanding of matter as being imbued with a maternal power (because, the argument goes, the Indian maiden sacrificed herself in the Indian wars and now offers a hand of friendship to her White "friends). Ultimately, this chapter shows how the material realities of settler-colonialism were abstracted through the logic of Spiritualist mediumship and then transformed into literalized acts of consumption: the idea that dead Indians were nourishment or a healing balm inside the Earth that could be a spiritual resource for White settlers. This chapter brings into focus recent critiques in Indigenous studies of new materialism and neo-animism, suggesting that animism as a concept bears the colonial legacy of those rooted within a White, Euro-centric epistemology attempting to find spirits in their material surroundings.

The second chapter turns to the relationship between White spirit mediums and Black spirits during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. Beginning with the Denton-Cridge psychometric visions, I discuss how spirit mediums looked through stones and fossils to travel to the distant past and outer space in order to investigate the racial origins of humanity. In these performances, the darkness of matter was mapped onto a racial darkness, suggesting that Black people were bound to matter or captured in stone. Mary Schindler, the proud "Southerner among the spirits" made her séance performances into a minstrel show by featuring a Black spirit dancing through a planchette (a heart-shaped wooden pointer for spirits to communicate with). Significantly, in Schindler's séances, unruly physical movement signified a material, masculine power of Blackness, which she employed to test the boundary of feminine Whiteness. Then I turn to G.A. Redman who used a Black corpse as a spiritual instrument, and then attempted to build what looked like a marionette out of the bones. I suggest that Schindler and Redman enacted literalizing gestures which exposed the implicit racial frame of séance Spiritualism. My last case study in this chapter exposes an instance in which a White medium tested the Spiritualist racial metaphysics by making her own White skin hyper material. Mary Comstock approached Frederick Douglass with an image of a kneeling slave (supposedly drawn by a spirit) on her arm, magnifying feminine Whiteness as the spiritual technology in Spiritualism while making an image of the enslaved, as if captured in or branded upon White flesh.

The third chapter looks at John Murray Spear of Boston and Paschal Beverly Randolph of New York, two mediums who attempted to bridge the divide between spirit and matter by turning heterosexual reproduction into ritualized processes of inventing

and becoming. I look at Spear's notion of "modelizing" as an attempt to create a new form of life (between human and nonhuman) by material acts and experiments with matter (as opposed to conscious design). Then I look at Randolph's notion of "blending" as a means of overcoming sexual and racial difference through biracial heterosexual rituals. This chapter establishes my point that in addition to looking for the material instantiation of spirit, Spiritualist thinking was about elevating material to the height of spirit, what I think of as a "vital materialism." Furthermore, my analysis exposes Spear and Randolph's practices as the most extreme cases of literalization in Spiritualist performance. In other words, they "upset the organization of meaning" (Cottom) by collapsing meaning and matter, effectively elevating matter and sexualizing the notion of spirit. Their practices were rooted in touch and experimentation, Spear creating sexual scenes with machines, and Randolph using his body as a technology and mobilizing feminine Whiteness as a resource to realize his own goals for becoming. I hope to show, in response to scholars who emphasize Spiritualists' enactment of metaphors, that this relation between the female body and the machine was not just metaphorical, but a process of literalization that was largely inspired by concerns raised in the emerging social sciences about raciality and reproduction.

The fourth chapter looks at the production of Whiteness through the materialization repertoire in the United States, England, and Western Europe, which culminated in the production of ectoplasm (unformed flesh) in séances at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. This chapter ventures outside of the United States because I see the transnational spread of the movement as revealing how feminine Whiteness traveled. I hope to show how racial otherness could look different in

different contexts (Orientalism being a much stronger influence on English Spiritualism), but feminine Whiteness looked the same—as a spiritual technology connecting light, white fabric, and White skin. While the previous chapters explored relations between seemingly immaterial Whiteness and material racial otherness, this chapter looks directly at White female mediums as they became hyper-material. I start the chapter with the Fox sisters and their table tipping repertoire that evolved into Kate Fox's first "full-form materialization." I argue that when we take their early "innocent" manifestations with the table in the context of the later materialization repertoire, it becomes clear that the reproductive capacity of the female body was significant throughout their career. I follow the materialization repertoire to England with Florence Cook, who employed a highly sexual repertoire of female doubling, and then Elizabeth d'Esperance, who channeled Orientalized female spirits, exposing a racial fantasy which manifest as a staging of feminine co-presence. Finally, I turn to the appearance of "ectoplasm," which was introduced by the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino in France, and then employed by the French medium Eva Carriere, and then Margery Crandon in the United States. I think of ectoplasmic performance as perverse reproduction and the fulfillment of Spear's wish to instrumentalize the female womb in making a new beyond-human life form. I suggest that materialization should be seen as the culminating act of the movement because it dramatically shifted the terms of mediumship toward material performance, and in doing so, it exposed the racial and sexual underpinnings of matter. This chapter argues that materialization was a kind of overperformance, relying upon a racial hierarchy that deemed Whiteness a moral and aesthetic good. When spirit mediums produced unformed

flesh (what increasingly looked like vaginal discharge or gooey body parts), it marked the decline of séance Spiritualism as a mass movement.

Ultimately, I hope to expose the centrality of matter, raciality, and sexuality to nineteenth century Spiritualist experimentation. I do not mean to valorize or demonize these actors but to ask what might live on in the present from these repertoires. Metaphysical racial gestures, I suggest, are becoming popular again (as in the rise of White witches calling upon Indian spirits, or the commodification of Haitian Vodou as "Black magic"). My larger project beyond the dissertation is to think about the spiritualization of Whiteness in its ongoing epistemological violence, hence my interest in neo-animism and new materialism. I hope that by revealing one specific history of material performance, I can show that there is no neutral or universal definition of matter, and that evoking or animating matter in performance can be highly charged with sexual and racial meanings.

Chapter One:
Indian Spirits, Animist Others

In 1870, spirit medium Emma Hardinge Britten claimed in her history of Spiritualism that "Indian spirits play a prominent and most noble part in the Spiritualism of America. Nearly every medium is attended by one of these beneficent beings" (481). She explained that Indian spirits were the greatest healers because of their knowledge of plants and "earthly productions." Furthermore, some "powerful and renown chiefs" had a mission to guard and protect mediums, sometimes performing "vast feats of physical strength, for which it is alleged their strong magnetic spiritual bodies are eminently fitted" (482). While benefitting from the unique powers of these spirits, Britten warned that there is a "darker side" to "Indian Spiritualism" because Indians were known to contact spirits of animals and other nonhuman beings, not only "the souls of ancestors" but also "beings of an unknown and doubtful character" (482). Britten went on to warn that these spirits can be "mixed up with rites and phenomena of a strange, occult, and repulsive character" (482). Because Spiritualists were thoroughly embedded in a Western notion of the human, and a Christian notion of spirit, as separate from animality and matter, they conceived of "Indian" spiritual practices as dangerous. Britten is referring to a settler colonial imaginary of the Indian as the disturbing inverse of the White self. Hence Britten's warning: take the spiritual gifts from the Indians, but only those that could be easily incorporated into White Spiritualism (only communicating with human spirits).

The White settler's attraction/repulsion toward the figure of the Indian is one of the most persistent tensions within American "modernity." Particularly in the nineteenth-

century, there was a great deal of energy poured into this theme in literature, art and theatre through figures like the savage warrior, innocent maiden, and noble Indian. In his insightful book *Playing Indian*, Philip Deloria exposed how "images of Indianness have often been translated into material forms" like costumes and figurines with which White actors could "play Indian" in an effort to create an American national character (6). As Philip Deloria has noted, the nineteenth century was the second era after the American Revolution when it became extremely popular for White Americans to "play Indian." For this reason, he defines modernity as "the long cultural moment in which the positive/negative and close/distant axes of Indian Otherness become inverted" (74). Significantly, settlers tended to play out fantasies of being Native while ignoring actual Indigenous peoples. One could see the spirit medium's draw to the Indian simply as a form of primitivism (an attempt to inhabit the "simple" or "natural" idyllic past represented by the Native), but I see something else at play here—the draw of White settlers to the imaginary figure of the Indian as a draw to the land or to matter itself.

The phenomenon of White spirit mediums channeling Indian spirits can be traced back to as early as 1826 among Shaker communities, and performances that gained national attention in the 1840s, when young Shaker women performed in trance under the influence of Indian spirits, dancing wildly, whooping, and singing Indian songs in meeting houses (Seeman 347). White people channeling or impersonating Indian spirits has remained a consistent aspect of American spirituality, but in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the phenomenon reached a peak when Indian spirits were thought to attend nearly every medium in the Spiritualist movement, as Britten claimed. During this time period, direct embodiment (or ethnic impersonation) was not the only way that

mediums called upon Indian spirits. Britten found it troubling, as she put it, that "the red Indian can do what we can neither explain nor imitate" (487), referring to rituals described by White settlers in travel journals (that she apparently never witnessed). As a result of this sentiment, White spirit mediums who attempted to access knowledge or abilities from Indian spirits often did so in a round-about way: Not playing Indian exactly, but using the Indian as a spiritual/material resource or touchstone. As I hope to expose in this chapter, White spirit mediums attempted to reenchant White "modernity" by using Indians as links to a lost/taboo spirituality located within the earth itself (as medicine, artifact, or human remains).

I want to be clear that I am looking at White people investing in Whiteness by positing an imaginary Indian. I attempt to orient myself toward these case studies by taking seriously critiques of Indigenous scholars regarding the ongoing violence of settler colonialism. This chapter is largely inspired by the influential work of Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr., and, as previously mentioned, the significant contribution of his son Philip Deloria with his analysis of "playing Indian." As Vine Deloria Jr. phrased the issue I face here: from the perspective of White settlers "the only Indians worth preserving were dead ones" (*God is Red* 14). Deloria made this statement while discussing an architectural dig that took place in Minnesota in 1971, and the attitude of White students from Minneapolis who did not understand the outrage of Indians in Minnesota when their burial grounds were disturbed. As Deloria described the situation: "The general attitude of the whites…was that they were the true spiritual descendants of the original Indians and that the contemporary Indians were foreigners who had no right to complain about their activities" (14). Grave robbing is one very real ongoing violence

of settler colonialism. I intend to expose how these activities were intimately tied to spiritual dynamics in the nineteenth century. Specifically, I mean to investigate repertoires that naturalized the belief held by White Americans that they were "the true spiritual descendants" of ancient Indians.

This chapter forces me to question what I mean by raciality, for while enslavement produced a powerful White/Black binary, the "Redness" of Indians has a very different history. Vine Deloria Jr. has clarified the difference between the violence enacted upon Black Americans and Indians, and the resulting objectification of both groups:

> Animals could be herded together on a piece of land, but they could not sell it. Therefore it took no time at all to discover that Indians were really people and should have the right to sell their lands. Land was the means of recognizing the Indian as a human being. It was the method whereby land could be stolen legally and not blatantly…We gave up land instead of life and labor. Because the Negro labored, he was considered a draft animal. Because the Indian occupied large areas of land, he was considered a wild animal. Had we given up anything else, or had anything else to give up, it is certain that we would have been considered some other thing (*Custer Died for Your Sins* 7-8).

What Deloria is referring to by "legally" stealing land was the signing of treaties that granted land to settlers, thereby recognizing Indians as human (a separate race of humans that is) only for use within the system of land ownership. While the next chapter will focus on the burden placed upon Blackness in White imaginaries, here I focus on land as the key to understanding the mythic figure of the Indian in Spiritualism. Along these lines, Patrick Wolfe has argued "Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (388). He makes this statement against those who center race in their analysis of colonization. Rather, he argues that race is not a primary motive for the elimination of Indigenous societies, but rather "It is made in the targeting" (388). That is to say that the

racialization of Indigenous peoples happens through the desire for land, and specific policies of displacement, assimilation, and genocide. Focusing on White spirit mediums' use of the figure of the Indian in this chapter, I intend to show how access to the land was translated into a spiritual inheritance for White spiritual seekers. In this way, I try not to impose an external sense of raciality onto these case studies, but pay attention to how racial thinking was generated by spirit mediums producing Indian spirits.

My research ultimately shows how linked Indigeneity and Blackness were in the spiritualizing of Whiteness, and the key to understanding how they mutually buttressed one another is in examining White mediums' enactments with matter. The invention of Whiteness in North America (framing White people as the inheritors of the Earth) heavily relied upon practices that targeted the "Red man" for elimination from the land. But I want to be careful not to reify "Redness" as a category akin to Whiteness or Blackness. As Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua recently posited: "antiracism is premised on an ongoing colonial project," in that antiracist scholarship tends to ignore ongoing colonization in the Americas and colonial logics within the settler state (123). I would add that the reification of Whiteness has a way of obscuring the specific power relations underlying racial constructs. To return to Wolfe, race "is made in the targeting" of land. I am investigating the practices by which White Spiritualists attempted to reach Indians through the earth, where they supposedly found healing "material productions" as Britten put it, and performing remains.

Significantly, Spiritualist engagements with Indian spirits involved a racial calculus that implicated imagined Indians in Black/White relations. Robert Cox, looking at the popularity of Indian spirits in materialization séances in the decades following the

Civil War, noted that race became "the spiritual core of identity" in Spiritualist understandings of the Summerland (Spiritualist heaven) (192). There was a debate between those who imagined Indian spirits to become White after death, and those who believed Indians occupied a completely separate sphere, a "happy hunting ground" positioned close to the Earth. Either way, White Spiritualists imagined that they were bonded to American Indians in the afterlife. To contextualize this within the larger frame of the dissertation, I am building a picture of Spiritualist performance to expose how emergent Whiteness was given a highly experimental and permissive space to unfold, partly due to the imagined distance and rediscovered intimacy between spirit mediums and racially othered spirits.

As this chapter will show, spirit mediums understood Indian spirits as a spiritual resource—either as a force to protect against the dangers of modernity, or a salve to heal wounds suffered in White American society. I am interested in the slippage between White mediums' thinking about matter and their thinking about Indians. Daryl Caterine has argued: "Spiritualists saw the transformation of the American 'wilderness' into the mechanized grid of modernity as a cosmic process of alchemical refinement, wherein the raw stuff of nature became rarefied into a finer, or more purified, form of matter" (373). Indians were framed as necessary sacrifices to modernity in this alchemical logic, sacrificed in the sense that their deaths were made meaningful or useful to White settlers. As a result, Indian death and afterlife became central to a dislocated White settler Spirituality. Spiritualists saw the mystification of the world around them through the figure of the Indian, and so, perhaps unsurprisingly, they sought Indian remains as touchstones in a project of enchantment or spiritual seeking.

The concept of animism helps us understand the attraction and repulsion that spirit mediums felt toward Indian figures. Animism is a historically specific concept that was introduced by British anthropologist E.B. Tylor in the mid-nineteenth century. According to him, animism is an Indigenous worldview asserting the presence of spirits within objects, plants, and natural phenomena. Animism was essentially the limit-case of Spiritualism, a worldview that White spirit mediums attempted to channel while protecting themselves from its supposed dangers. When mediums opened the door to matter and performing objects on North American soil, they glimpsed an animist worldview that modernity recognized and disavowed (on the surface), but that they longed for (from a sense of loss created by settler-colonialism and transcendent Whiteness). To add a complication, animism, when taken seriously by Spiritualists, was a view that tested the ability for White settlers to fully dominate the material world and the people within it. And so Indian spirits, as animist racial others, allowed White mediums to be caught up in material performance in a unique way—taking pleasure in the nonhuman world brought to life, and in the passivity of the medium in the face of material powers. As I will show, this material dynamic did not translate to an actual consideration of the ethical treatment of Indigenous peoples; more often than not performing matter would conjure fantasies of wild Indians or fear of threat or retribution from Indian agency.

In this chapter, I bring into focus practices that mediums undertook to understand matter through their own presence as White settlers on stolen land. In the first section, I unpack the history of animism as Spiritualism's racialized other side. Then I look at two mediums who were known for unearthing Indian remains as an essential part of their

practice, Jonathan Koons in Ohio and John Murray Spear in western New York. In the last two sections, I look at the spirit communications of J.H. Conant depicting Indian anger and the healing energy of Indian maidens. These communications reveal tensions at the heart of Whiteness: fear of retribution for settler-colonial crimes, as well as a sense of spiritual poverty within Whiteness that could lead to gestures of spiritual consumption, vampirism, or even cannibalism. I want to be explicit that these mediums were enacting a form of setter violence against real Indigenous peoples, whose communities include the dead. Ultimately, I contend that mediums treated Indian spirits as the practical link between the dualism spirit/matter that structured White-settler thought, and that dualism was inherently racial: While never being fully separated from the darkness of death associated with matter, Blackness and the underground, Indian guides offered Spiritualists mystical awakenings of the material world and the land through animism. Through my analysis in this chapter and the next, I hope to show that seeking spiritualized matter, which is a compelling thought to many contemporary new materialist scholars, puppeteers, and multimedia artists in the twenty-first century (vitalism or neo-animism), has a specific colonial/racial history in the United States. I hope that in exposing this performance genealogy, I can help White people learn to de-invest in a spiritual Whiteness that is rooted in fantasies of Indigenous disappearance.

1. Animism

In this project, animism (a worldview where spirits dwell in the material or natural world) describes a White-settler fascination with a racially othered spirituality associated with Indigenous figures. As Elizabeth Povinelli notes, “At the heart of the

figure of the Animist lies the imaginary of the Indigene" (2016: 17), an imaginary that, while certainly derived from the practices of actual Indigenous peoples, has often taken on a mystified role in Euro-American cultures. Animism marks a difference or a break from Western epistemology, freeing matter and nature from a worldview that assumes them to be dead or inert. In this way, animism could be the basis for a theory of agency and performance beyond the human, but with different political implications in different contexts. I suggest that the history of animism is significant to the study of performance, particularly at this moment when new materialist scholars are reviving notions of animism in their scholarship. For example, Isabelle Stengers argues in "Reclaiming Animism" that animism is about "recovering the capacity to honor experience, any experience we care for, as 'not ours' but rather as 'animating' us, making us witness to what is not us" (8). Or Anthony Kubiak calling for animism as an effort to "actualize the virtual personness of all things" (54), toward "a more conscious move to an interactive, performative way of living" (59). While new materialism, vitalism and neo-animism are terms that describe a wide range of scholarship, one common denominator is the desire to de-center Euro-centric notions of the human and life that reduce the material world to the logic of extractive capitalism (leading to ecological devastation), and often exclude women, racial others, and Indigenous people (relegating them to a space of animality, objecthood, or death).

The question that must be asked is how neo-animism is related to the anthropological and philosophical lineage of nineteenth-century animism they attempt to remake. As Elizabeth Povinelli argues: "The new vitalisms take advantage of the longstanding Western shadow imposition of the qualities of one of its categories (Life,

Leben) onto the key dynamics of its concept of existence (Being, Dasein)" (17). While I cannot dwell on the European philosophical traditions she is referring to, for our purposes I want to rephrase her argument in more simple terms: New vitalists take life and translate it into being, letting life, as a concept, roam freely beyond the boundary of humans and animals to stones, rivers, smoke, etc. This results in new categorization, but not necessarily freedom from the pull of the old categories. And significantly, this vitalism can become a blind spot: making it hard to see that life and being are not universal ideas but historically contingent concepts. Vitalism becomes, in this sense, a comfortable blanket that a Western-oriented thinker imposes on other (Indigenous) worldviews in order to accept the idea that a river or a rock can be alive. One example would be what Kubiak calls the "personness of all things." Nonlife, from the perspective of European colonizers, was used to describe plants, rocks, land, as well as Indigenous peoples (as vanishing or as part of the land). And so understandably, White scholars seek to undo this epistemological violence in the twenty-first century, but they do so in a way that has a tendency to erase difference and disallow for listening to actual Indigenous peoples.[14]

I seek to understand how the colonial history of animism inspired Spiritualism because I fear that a White settler spiritual orientation may be coded into the neo-animism of the present. Vine Deloria Jr. discusses the problem with thinking of animism as an abstraction:

> Indians do not talk about nature as some kind of concept or something 'out there.' They talk about the immediate environment in which they live. They do not

[14] I do not mean to argue that all neo-animists ignore Indigenous perspectives. One valuable contribution to the study of animism that includes Indigenous authors including Linda Hogan is *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* edited by Graham Harvey.

> embrace all trees or love all rivers and mountains. What is important is the relationship you have with a particular tree or mountain (*Spirit and Reason* 221).

Deloria's critique of neo-animists is quite plain: No one is animist in general. Indigenous people have specific relationships of care for nonhuman beings, but not everything in the same way. Chickasaw scholar Linda Hogan captured the nuance of approaching this new animism: "there is still a problem with the two minds, Western and Indigenous. Although occasional bridges are made, the two have not yet come together. With the recognition and the acceptance that our knowledge is important and valuable, we have more of a chance to uphold the continuation of this world" (22). Hogan discusses the growing acceptance of animism in Western culture as a growing acceptance of the rights of Indigenous people to tend to the world. Hogan, like Deloria, however, is skeptical of the term animism, and makes the point that Indigenous people call it "tradition," because of specific networks of care and mutuality between humans and nonhuman persons. She is hopeful, nevertheless, that this new animism could lead to something meaningful, a true engagement with Indigenous thought:

> I am grateful for the new animism, because it counts for something…It is a beginning, even without the history and aboriginal connection to this land. It says the human is searching and with a need to be in touch with this land, or other lands of origins in a time when the world is so achingly distressed (22).

As Hogan makes clear, the new animism is born out of a crisis in the White settler epistemology which manifests as a need to be connected to land. Neo-animism may offer the chance for settlers to pay attention to the world around them in new ways, but what, precisely, is this the beginning for: standing in actual solidarity with Indigenous people or celebrating an abstract or impersonal spirituality that is derived from Indigenous thought? The danger is that animist thinking can be used to appropriate Indigenous knowledge or

conjure Indigenous figures for White spiritual or intellectual practices. As Rosiek, Synder & Pratt have shown, new materialists and neo-animists often fail to acknowledge the well-developed literature on agent ontologies in Indigenous studies in favor of Eurocentric philosophical theory. I contend that neo-animism should be seen in relation to the history of the concept, as well as the practices and performances that were inspired by it.

As I hope to show in this chapter, I think of animism as so-called "modern" Spiritualism's racialized other side. In 1869, British anthropologist E.B. Tylor introduced animism as the preferable term for "the doctrine of all men who believe in active spiritual beings" (527). Tylor developed his theory of animism while undertaking ethnographic research in Spiritualist séances with such mediums as Kate Fox in London (Stocking). He argued that "modern spiritualism is a survival and a revival of savage thought, which the general tendency of civilization and science has been to discard" (528). Tylor understood animism as the basic form of all religion, and framed the Spiritualist séance as a practice displaced in time, providing a glimpse of a "primitive" past from within "modernity." While he often avoided speaking of race by speaking of culture, the relation between Spiritualism and animism was rooted in racial ambivalence, as he commented, "a modern medium is a red Indian or a Tartar shaman in a dress-coat" (528). Tylor wanted to make the point that Spiritualism and animism were two sides of the same coin, the underlying assumption being that the Spiritualist medium was a Whitened version of Indigenous shamans from across the world. Tylor represents a deep thread in anthropology and Western philosophy (including Karl Marx and his analysis of the fetish) that developed White self-knowledge with reference to an animist Other. Spiritualists, I suggest, actively

performed contradictions that the concept of animism was founded upon, namely, the strange relationship between animism and materialism, which was intertwined with questions about race.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, raciality and matter have a deep connection, the assumption being that White people are blessed with transcendence while racial others are tied to their bodies or bound to matter in some way. This chapter is an attempt to develop the relationship between Whiteness and matter by thinking through formations of the "Red man." Simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the "savage" ways of Indians, Spiritualists sought out the "Red man" as a much-desired link with the land as well as a borderland racial materiality (neither Black or White). Consequently, the liminal status of the Indian became an asset in Spiritualists' obsessive search for the link between spirit and matter (coded as White and Black). White settlers imagined that Indigenous people were more connected to objects and the land; as a result, settlers saw special Indian objects (Indian relics or remains underground) as opportunities for spiritual power.

2. Koons' Spirit Room: Self-playing Instruments and Warrior Remains

Jonathan Koons became a medium in February of 1852, receiving messages through raps and table-tipping from "the spirits of late deceased friends, Christian martyrs, Jewish rulers, American Indian chiefs, and antediluvian, and pre adamite spirits, also, a class of spirits, who called themselves primitive Americans" (Koons & Everett 1). Koons had a particular interest in "primitive" American spirits, and claimed in a letter to Spiritualist geologist William Denton: "I am in possession of a history of the origin of the

Red Men, given by a very ancient spirit," one "who claims to be one of the ancient fathers of that race." (Koons to Denton, 8). He went on to say "I am also in possession of the History of the trumpet spirit King's race—which, when taken in connection, seems very probable" (8). King was Koons' primary spirit guide and translator for other spirits. The *Christian Spiritualist* reported that King was the leader of 165 spirits, and in life, he "belonged to a people whose organization would in these days be called giants, and in consequence of this superior physical endowment, they were called a nation of kings" (Fowler 2). In spirit-form, King reportedly had the power to see the entire Earth through its many phases of development.[15] These two racial histories, one from an implicitly White "race of kings," and one racialized by Koons as a history of the "Redman," were developed in Koons' practices through two different treatments of matter: virtuosic object performance and the exhumation of Indian remains. Female bodies and performers are not mentioned in Koons' texts because his deepest concern appears to be male lineages of spiritual power. In this way he does not acknowledge any female role in the continuing of the two "races" or in mediumship, but this can be seen as an effort to create a uniquely masculine Spiritualist repertoire (in a context where Spiritualism and mediumship were feminized).

The majority of spirits in Koons' story were either recognized as White kin or racialized as White through their lack of materiality. Significantly, these spirits were accessed through a machine and/or musical instruments, demonstrating a connection between Whiteness and technology. In August, Koons and his family began building a spirit room with an "electrical table" or "spirit machine" at the request of the spirits (King

[15] In some Spiritualist periodicals, King is identified as John King, the spirit of the Welsh privateer Henry Morgan, who was a spirit guide for a number of other mediums.

and Benjamin Franklin were credited as a few of the inventors) which was made for "collecting and focalizing the magnetic aura used in the manifestations" (Britten 308). The machine had a wooden surface with a woven canopy four feet high made out of copper wire, metal plates and small bells. Visitors would come from nearby towns and eastern cities to stay at the Koons farm and attend the séances, which were held in the dark and involved Jonathan Koons playing his fiddle along with an angel band. The spirits reportedly requested a number of instruments and trumpets to sing and speak through. Musical instruments implied human consciousness, but when played virtuosically by illuminated floating hands, pointed to beyond-human ability. J. Everett reported: "I have myself heard the musical sounds, not merely audible, but loud, and performed with a skill and excellence that far surpassed any specimen that can be performed by any musician of earth" (Koons & Everett 17). These demonstrations were performances of disembodiment, scenes of superhuman virtuosity without human bodies, and they were, implicitly, displays of Whiteness, as the dimension of human identity that could transcend and master the material world.

Almost all visitors to the room, both living and dead, were White, except for a few non-White spirits who were reportedly trapped in the sphere closest to the Earth for an extended period, a place one Chinese spirit called "a prison," and a "dark and dismal region" (Koons & Everett 61). Whiteness was understood, in this context, as a virtue of transcendence naturally possessed by White people, and a lengthy and arduous process of acculturation for racial others in the afterlife. This slippage between racial and cultural signifiers can be seen within the larger context of debates over Darwin's theory of evolution, as well as Tylor's theory of animism being a primitive form of religion

through which all humans emerge from. I want to show how Koons acted upon or literalized these theories without citing them, rather literalizing racial thinking through performances with matter. In the Koons spirit room, White or developed spirits were seen to possess superpowers of material production because of their seeming immateriality, for they had supposedly lost the link to their mortal bodies completely. One spirit of the outer realms claimed:

> Our bodies which are composed of spiritual matter, are not susceptible of casting a shadow, and are consequently rendered imperceptible through the organs of sense, or physical sight, except the spirit by his magnetic influence, which is controllable by his own will, transmutes himself into a material form, by attracting unto himself physical matter, from the surrounding elements, into the form of a hand, a person, a bird, or a beast, which is performed at the desire of our own wills (Koons & Everett 49).

These spirits were known to produce luminous, white, floating body parts or wings mid-air: "They say to us that they possess the power to create a hand at pleasure, from the surrounding elements" (18). This was to explain disembodied hands seen strumming instruments or flying above visitors' heads. Spiritualists believed themselves to be witnessing immaterial spirit made material for the first time, and, I suggest, this superpower was aligned with a magical power of Whiteness. Whiteness in the nineteenth century was the unmarked category of the human in Western culture, so while these Spiritualist texts do not use the word white as a racial term (more of an aesthetic of producing spirit), part of the labor of my dissertation is to show across these chapters how these transformations of bodies and matter into spirit were animated by racial thinking. This requires unpacking how different spirits were treated and why.

The figure of the Indian, in contrast to the White spirits of the "higher realms," inspired Koons to proceed as an archeologist would, in search of knowledge about the

dead through material remains. Significantly, at the beginning of Koons' book, an "Indian grave" is mentioned in a short list of evidence proving his mediumship including moving objects and self-playing instruments. I suggest that White mediums like Koons needed the "Red man" as a way to regain a body, or the powers of being linked in a body and to the land. This is the story he tells regarding this grave: In November of 1852, Koons claimed that an ancient Indian Chief directed the medium to dig up his grave, where burned bones, a stone battle axe, arrows and a stone breastplate were found. J. Everett cites the excavation to make an argument for spiritual existence:

> Were you to be addressed in an audible voice, by one representing himself to be the spirit of an Indian Chief, and you should be informed of the precise place where his bones were deposited, together with his armor and other implements of war, and such a length of time had transpired since the transaction that trees of large size had grown and were still standing over the spot designated as his grave, and you were to dig down the depth specified, and you should find the bones, and the armor, &c., just as had been described to you, would you then doubt whether angels were on this earth, or that a spirit had spoken to you? (Koons & Everett 14-15)

As Koons tells the story, his sons Nahum and Samuel were herding cows when they felt their arms moving against their will. That evening, a spirit named "Jewannah Gueannah Musco" spoke through a trumpet to describe his burial site. Koons, along with two "disinterested individuals," dug up the relics and confirmed everything that the spirit had claimed. The initial story of the mysterious possession of the boys' bodies was transformed into a search for evidence, effectively cleansing the relics by making them into decipherable objects. The result of this experience was to uncover a few prized collectables that Koons kept on display on his mantelpiece, and the story was included in his book as proof of mediumship. Whiteness, in this context, was the power of

ownership: the unmarked orientation of the White settler toward the land, history, and bodies held within it.

Through a narrative he supposedly received through this Indian spirit, Koons established a sort of equivalence between the White and Red man, which served to support his more practical project of unearthing remains. In essence, Koons framed himself as the rightful inheritor of the remains and the knowledge they imparted. When Koons claimed that he possessed a history of the Red Men, he was speaking of the information that Musco reportedly gave him regarding his death "During the contest between the Pale faces and the Red men" (Koons to Denton 6). Koons recounted the story through the voice of the spirit: "I placed myself at the head of my tribe, as commander in chief, and took up arms with other neighboring tribes of my race, in defense of our country and rights. Our united arms were, to exterminate, and repulse the palefaced intruders, from the home, and hunting-grounds of the Red Bretheren" (6). When one of his allies joined the White foe, Musco hunted them down but was killed by his "Red enemy." He finishes his story with "The only favour I now ask of this circle, is, to exhume my humble remains, and my small armour, that is buried with my ashes and preserve them, as a memorial of what I relate" (8). The Indian is framed as the ultimate aggressor on every front, and the use of the word exterminate is a reversal of the language used by White settlers attempting to eliminate Indigenous peoples, signaling a White fear of retaliation posed as an original Indian threat. It is significant that the spirit's final request is to preserve his remains as a memorial. In the context of the text, the purpose of the exhumation is to memorialize the Indian Chief's story, but I want to suggest that the true purpose was to reveal proof of Koons' mediumship: that the remains

were where he claimed they would be. Unearthing human remains and putting them on display is taboo in almost every culture, but particularly offensive in this racialized context where White settlers saw Indigenous remains as part of their inheritance from the land. Through narrative reversal and objectification, the Indian's death was depoliticized and made useful to the White settler.

The fact that White remains were not treated this way reveals that Koons understood racial difference as a different kind of spirit/matter connection, Indians being supposedly bound to their bodies and to the earth. In the next chapter, I will show how this differs from the spirit/matter connection related to Blackness, which has to do not with land, but with darkness as the interiority of any inanimate material substance. The act of turning each Indian Chief who entered the spirit room into material evidence reveals that the association between Indians and matter was foundational to Koons' mediumship. In January of 1853, Koons was sent on a second treasure hunt by an ancient Indian Chief named "Hommo," who reportedly lived 800 years previous to Koons. Hommo described the mode of his burial in detail and directed him to a grave mound to find his mummified corpse: "The spirit requested us to exhume his remains, and test his veracity, to our own satisfaction" (Koons & Everett 5). After uncovering the grave with two investigators, they all reportedly agreed that the bones were in the exact position that Hommo described. Koons took a few bone fragments home and added them to the collection of Musco's remains on his mantlepiece. Koons' project was a potent misdirection from the reality of Indian genocide and, at the same time, a crucial part of the process. From an Indigenous perspective, I can presume that these are not acts of collection and connectivity, but crimes and violations of the most horrific and damaging

kind. They were acts used to disrupt, demean, and fracture the fabric of relations in Indigenous societies (which includes the dead).

The two materialities—one transcendently White, and one Indian and underground—I suggest, provided the foundation for a Spiritualist racial metaphysics of the afterlife. In a séance with fifteen witnesses in 1853, another Indian identified as "Crow Bauk" visited Koons and sang a song recounting his transition in the afterlife. According to Koons, the Indian attempted to steal from a White man and was slain, to be mercifully Christianized after death. In an act of narrative reversal, Koons characterizes the figure of the Indian, whose land and life was stolen by settlers, as a thief. Crow Bauk then describes how it took him decades to progress from the lowest rung of the spirit world up to the sixth. Now he returns on a mission to teach his "white friends" to become "both white and pure" to enter heaven (Koons & Everett 59). Crow Bauk, like the other Indians in Koons' narrative, occupied the limit-case of the human as the "wild Indian" associated with the land he was entombed in. As Kathryn Troy has noted, Indian spirits in Spiritualist séances "were perceived as more bound to earth, connected still to its inhabitants, and *needing* to help living souls if they hoped to achieve higher planes of existence" (10). Crow Bauk came as a missionary to Earth to tell White people to become "white and pure," because he could reportedly achieve White transcendence in the afterlife with great effort, framing Whiteness as a universal good.

Here we see the slippage between White as skin hue and white as a moral category, a conflation that saturated Spiritualist discourse and imagery in séances. These kinds of slippages are what make me read Spiritualist performance as an investment in Whiteness: it is not only because of the color of spirit but because of the moralizing of

color difference and the different treatment of White and Indian dead. The first class of physical manifestations (self-moving objects or instruments) was often at the center of Spiritualist discourse because it was a demonstration drawing from technophilia (the technology of the show, the electric table, for instance, being a primary attraction). The second (unearthing Indian graves) was something else altogether: drawing out the performance of mediumship in time (no longer a discrete event but a process of excavation) and linking it to the land, doing violence to Indigenous communities while feeling fully authorized to do so because of a settler imaginary finding entombed Indians to be "almost ancestors" in the sense expressed by twentieth-century anthropologists Theodora Kroeber and Robert F. Heizer. Kroeber and Heizer described the American landscape as "A Vanished Garden" with figures of Indians as "flickering sparks," images "of a way of life alien, natural, belonging" (16). Thinking about Koons in the context of British and American anthropology, where animism played a central role in delimiting Indigenous from the "modern" spirituality, his actions are not surprising at all. Robert Cox has argued, citing Michael Taussig, that mediums frequently attempted to "capture or co-opt the power of the imagined other" (204), American Indians in particular. I suggest that the key point to understanding this dynamic is how they did it in a material way, alongside spirit communications and supposed immaterial transference (the idea that spirits impart their power onto the medium in the act of channeling). While anthropologists continued to wax poetic well into the mid-twentieth century about the metaphorical relation of Indians with the earth (as representing the loss at the heart of White modernity), in the next section, I will show how John Murray Spear made the earth

and Indians interchangeable and began unearthing traces of that so-called "vanished garden."

3. John Murray Spear's "Harmonial Cavity"

Born in Boston in 1804, John Murray Spear was a well-respected Unitarian minister, abolition, women's rights, labor reform, and anti-death penalty activist (steadily throughout the 1830s and 1840s) in Massachusetts. After giving a lecture in support of abolition in Portland, Maine in 1844, he was beaten by a White supremacist crowd within an inch of his life and while unconscious, he had a vision of himself recovering, and then dedicated himself to helping prisoners and escaped slaves Boston. He turned to Spiritualism in 1851 after reading the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, [16] and reportedly discovered that he was a medium in 1852 after feeling compelled to write messages in his own hand from the spirits, and then found that he could heal others by laying his hands on them (Spear, *The Educator* 24-26). At this time, Spear largely drifted away from his community of intellectuals and activists (among his colleagues were such famed abolitionists as Theodore Parker and William Lloyd Garrison). While some historians have considered Spear's turn to the spirits to be a turn away from his worldly causes, he considered his mediumship to be a powerful form of activism, albeit from a radically different entry-point than he had been accustomed to. The third chapter will look at Spear's most famous invention, what he called "The New Motor," but this chapter looks at a lesser-known project from the period of his mediumship when he believed he

[16] Andrew Jackson Davis, called the Poughkeepsie Seer, was the medium responsible for this publishing his "harmonial" philosophy. His description of the spirit world as seven spheres was taken up by most Spiritualists, relying heavily on Emmanuel Swedenborg. See: The *Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a voice to mankind*, 1847.

was under the influence of powerful Indian spirits. In 1858, John Murray Spear led an excavation in search of a lost city, playing out the Spiritualist association between Indian spirits and matter to its limit: reaching to "the bowels of the earth" to appropriate ancient knowledge and material powers of healing and transformation. Spear is a key figure for me in Spiritualist materialism because of his literalism, in the way that he exposed the implicit raciality and sexuality of seeking spirit through material means.

Spear founded a utopian community called Harmonia (alternately called Spiritual Springs or the Domain) in Chautauqua County, New York, after Spiritualist author and politician John Chase (who became a follower of Spear's) sent Spear medicinal powder made by boiling down water from a "spiritual spring" in the Kiantone valley. Following Chase's discovery, regional newspapers reported that the springs "were known to the Indians more than a thousand years since, and were revealed to the owners at the present time through the spirit of a defunct red man" (*Charleston Courier* 2). Spear took up this claim of antiquity in service of his utopian project, describing the spirits as "an ancient and highly cultivated people," advanced in many ways:

> They lived a pure and harmonious democracy. With them 'Reform' had done its perfect work; so that evil was wholly unknown. With them disease, physical or moral, was never named for they were exempt from it as were our first parents ere they were seduced by the forbidden fruit…They gazed on each other with a holy pleasure—spake, always uttering the unfettered words of affection…their spirits united and their souls' essence melted and blended as the vapors melt and blend in transparent ether—thus completing harmonial and holy wedlock ("A Spiritualist Convention in Chautauqua" 6).

As Molly McGarry has noted, Spiritualists often called out to the spirits to aide them in building a utopian future. In Spear's logic of radical reform (which centered on the abolition of both slavery and marriage), proper social arrangement had to be rooted in natural forms. Spear saw Indian spirits as useful mediators between White settlers and

nature. While Koons' version of genealogy ignored the maternal, Spear's ideas centered the ideal union of the male and female, which he believed would create a cohesive civilization. According to his narrative, when the harmonial city (the one he aimed to excavate) was opened to outsiders (i.e. settlers), vice led to violence and these ancient North American Indians wandered to Mexico and Central America, "where they were destroyed, as a distinct race, by Cortez and other Spanish adventurers" ("A Spiritualist Convention" 6). Some of the Kiantone people reportedly remained in the valley, becoming slaves to their conquerors:

> But full vengeance was not yet executed. It came at last. The earth rocked to and fro, palaces and temples fell, the multitude uttered piteous wailings, a deep dark chasm yawned like the jaws of a hideous monster, then closed again and silence reigned throughout all the Kiantonian Valley. And the city—*was gone*! The Magnetic Springs were swallowed up. Thousands of people were buried deep in the bowels of the earth! (6)

Spear sought to uncover their ancient city as proof of his mediumship, like Koons, but also to establish a second harmonial city on the same location as this Indigenous civilization. What was left out in this history, as in Koons' narrative, was the violence European settlers brought to Indigenous peoples in North America (which, in Spear's timeline would have happened much later). The omission is striking given the fact that the Indian Wars were raging in the western states at this time. But as Vine Deloria Jr. poignantly put it, the only Indians worth saving, in the White settler imaginary, were long-dead Indians. In Spear's story, the misled Indians were punished when the earth itself came up to swallow them, as if they belonged in the depths of the earth. And then they became a resource for White settlers like Spear to call upon.

Spear's judgement is similar to Koons' depiction of Indian deaths as fortuitous. The Indian's fate, in the eyes of White settlers, was sealed long ago for they belonged to

a race doomed to extinction. There is a great deal of literature concerning the narrative of the vanishing or dying Indian. As Jean M. O'Brien has argued, White amateur historians in the nineteenth century wrote of themselves as the first people to establish civilization in North America and the Indians as the last people to pass from the scene, considering "firsting and lasting" as dual narrative processes in the settler imaginary. O'Brien shows how White settlers attempted to replace American Indians through memorializing gestures and the excavation of grave sites in New England. Koons and Spear made similar moves in attempting to memorialize or take up the legacy of Indians. They essentially treated Indians as sacrificial victims, recounting their deaths as fortuitous preconditions to White mediumship, in relation to a precondition of clearing the land for a White settler state.

The image of Indians being swallowed by the earth, and particularly Spear's concerns over racial mixing and reproduction (the idea that these people remained a distinct race), could be inspired by ancient Greek myth of autochthony: the idea that certain Indigenous people rose out of the earth itself and did not mix with settlers. The concept of autochthony has been used in contexts across the globe by anthropologists and social scientists to describe a people's belonging to land which is distinct from but related to Indigeneity. While Indigeneity is most frequently deployed to describe the prior or the first inhabitants of a territory (sometimes nomadic peoples), autochthony is used to describe settled groups who may seek to exclude outsiders, so the terms come with very different political meanings (Gausset, Kenrick, & Gibb). On North American soil, the two terms are more intertwined: the mythic idea of Native people rising from or being trapped in the earth has particular resonance because of ongoing land dispossession, and

the fact, as Deloria noted, that land became the means of recognizing the Indian as a human being at all. In Spear's case, the figure of the ancient Indian and earth were interchangeable, demonstrating a literalizing logic. In other words, land was not a metaphor for Indians, but Spear understood the land to grant direct, practical access to Indians and Indian powers.

As a hyper-physical spirit medium, Spear was likely motivated by his interest in material powers residing in soil and minerals: by locating Indians inside the earth, he could access something beyond belonging, powers derived from matter itself. Spear and his followers labored for seven months from the summer to the winter of 1858 hoping to uncover the supposedly lost city. They dug a tunnel into the earth on a twenty-degree angle more than one hundred and thirty feet deep. Women in Spear's group built velvet-lined caskets to hold the remains they found. After all of their efforts, they only found a few arrowheads and "some things resembling diamonds and pearls" (Chautauqua History Company 831). Their project failed when the tunnel filled with water, but they capitalized on this turn of events by marketing the water as a tonic made from a mineral spring of legend: "Near the center of the city were two magnetic springs, the waters of which were sufficient to cure any disease with which human flesh was afflicted" ("A Spiritualist convention in Chautauqua" 6). The muddy water was boiled down into a salve and sold by mail as a cure-all to Spiritualist customers. This was not quite the same as Koons unearthing remains, but it was carried out in the same spirit because of Spear's representational logic: The substitution of earth and water for the Indian, whose powers were supposedly directly manifest in these forms.

I want to highlight the idea of healing water or earth as a kind of material agency. Producing a commodity that could heal the bodies of White settlers is a rather revealing practice within the Spiritualist racial metaphysics. As Daryl Caterine has noted, according to White mediums "Indian spirits reportedly deferred their ascension to higher spheres, content to hover over the industrializing nation in what amounted to a celestial nature preserve" throughout the nineteenth century (390). White American Spiritualists believed that Indian spirits were infinitely available to them because of the link between Indians and the land. And, significantly, taking medicine crafted by spirit mediums was an effort to materially take on Indian powers. In the words of Caterine:

> Consumers of patent medicines figuratively ate or drank the healing spirits of Native Americans by imbibing processed nature, and if Andrew Jackson Davis was to be read literally, white Spiritualists were also to consume the spirits of the vanished, like men sitting down at a table to "partake of beef," which then became part of them (391).

What Davis did symbolically, Spear did literally: Actually drinking and selling "magnetic" waters and minerals that were supposedly made powerful by Indians entombed within the earth. I have chosen to focus on the most literal mediums in this chapter because the more famous and visionary mediums (Andrew Jackson Davis being a prime example) never got their hands dirty, that is, they did not act out Spiritualist assumptions and questions about matter, and this generally protected them from critique.

In Spear and Koons' stories, there was a sense of spiritual/material consumption, particularly in the patent medicine Spear sold, but also in the way that Koons collected remains. This brings to mind Kyla Wazana Tompkins argument in *Racial Indigestion,* that "eating is central to the performative production of raced and gendered bodies in the nineteenth century" (7). Tompkins looks at images and experiences of White people

consuming racial others (mostly Black and Asian figures) in commodity culture. The idea of literalizing Whiteness takes on a horrific sense—Whiteness being the power of blind consumption or even cannibalism. Dylan Robinson has made a recent contribution to Indigenous sound studies, characterizing the settler positionality of listening as starvation (as when White settlers arrived in North America in the mid-nineteenth century both starved for food and for gold). As Robinson put it, "hungry listening prioritizes the capture of information over the affective feel, timbre, touch, and texture of sound" (38). This idea of capture helps us understand the orientation that Spear and Koons both had towards the land they investigated: they wanted to capture information and spiritual power, generally fulfilling their desires as to what they imagined Indians to be.

As discussed in the previous chapter, magnetism was a concept that Spiritualists used to explain the attraction between spirit and matter. One could even see that the Spiritualists' interest in magnetism led to a sense of vital materialism—the idea that magnetism was not only in human bodies, but in every material thing (in the following chapter, I will discuss mediums who believed they were reading "the souls of things"). In that way, the theory of magnetism seemed to appropriate a generalized animist idea, namely that there is spirit in everything and that magnetism exposes it. One Spiritualist author described magnetism as "your material mother," explaining how magnetism brings you into the afterlife: "After the mother magnetism has left the body, it adheres to the spirit, and departs with it to the land of souls; and is there again in beautiful use, in bringing souls into communion with other souls" ("The Philosophy of Magnetism" 4). Spiritualists understood magnetism as the attractive force between spirit, matter, land, and other people, particularly resulting in a strong pull towards Indian spirits because of

their link with the land and material powers. Evidence of this can be seen in Emma Hardinge Britten's description of Indians as possessing uniquely "strong magnetic spiritual bodies," as mentioned previously, as well Spear and Koons' narratives of feeling compelled by an Indian presence within the land.

I suggest that both Koons and Spear attempted to translate Indianness into an answer to the immateriality problem of Whiteness—Indian spirits being framed as a magnetic force calling out from the land itself. These mediums required a passive figure of the Indian, as linked to the assumed passivity of matter (to be awoken by the spirit medium). Both Koons and Spear understood themselves to be led by spirits of an ancient lineage, but where Koons held up King as a superior human, representing and presiding over all others, Spear described the Kiantone people as inferior in physicality (web-footed), doomed to be dominated and erased from the surface of the earth. These opposing fates correspond to racialized notions of embodiment. The White spirits in both Koons' and Spear's mediumship (more about Spear's spirits in the third chapter) had no link to their physical bodies, while Indian spirits were tied to their bodies and were thought to possess mysterious powers and knowledge from the underground. However, not all Indian spirits in séance rooms were so passive and malleable, as the next section will show. White mediums channeling Indians often conjured a fear of retribution for the crimes of colonization.

4. Indian Anger as the Source of Material Power

While the chapter up until now has focused on a relation between White male mediums and passive Indian spirits, here I bring in a female medium, J.H. (Frances Ann

or Fanny) who imagined a very different relationship between herself and Indian spirits. Conant was the resident medium (speaking in trance and delivering medical advice) for the most widely circulating Spiritualist periodical *The Banner of Light.* She conducted free public séances (the Banner Free Circle) in Boston and published spirit communications from these sittings for seventeen years, from the circle's inception in 1857 until her death in 1875. Significantly, Conant's communications took the Civil War as context for the communications with Indians, bringing Blackness into play as an unspoken background behind tensions between White settlers and Indians.

Many spirit communications published by mediums throughout the nineteenth century discussed the endless capacity for Indians to forgive the White colonizers (Cox, Troy, Caterine). As Robert Cox writes of spirit mediums channeling Indians, "if there was an Indian medical specialty, during the 1860s and 1870s, it was the treatment of the social malady of racial animosity" (198). Specifically, Indian spirits were known for healing the anger White Americans felt after the Civil War. J.H. Conant's mediumship points to an opposite effect of Indian spirits. According to her spirit communications, Indian spirits took responsibility for the Civil War, claiming that it was planned in the spirit world as part of a great reckoning for the settler state. On September 2, 1861, J.H. Conant reported this communication from Indian spirits:

> The sins of your fathers in the past are now being visited upon you of this day and generation. The thousands of spirits of the red man whom your fathers wronged are coming back with all the power of their spiritual existence, to fight against you of the North who are endeavoring to sustain the American Government, for they desire to see it overthrown, because they see its foundation was evil…The feeling your ancestors planted in the bosom of the red man, by their selfishness and avarice, will receive its law of compensation, and the result is unavoidable…It is their guide, and they are as fully governed by it as you are by your God—by your consciousness of right; and the red man, acting naturally through your material mediums in a thousand ways you do not know, upon the

> faculties of man susceptible of use, are exulting the coming of the hour when their souls may be sated with revenge. (*Banner of Light* 10.4, 6)

This communication reveals an existential fear at the heart of Whiteness that Indian spirits return for vengeance. Significantly, in the logic of mediumship, this thirst for vengeance could be turned into a spiritual resource. Daryl Caterine has argued: "The power that Indians had, and that whites most needed to capture and co-opt, was their ability to inflict retribution on the nation" (391). Caterine identifies a tension in the role that Indian spirits were made to play in Spiritualism—both healing and existential threat: "Before the Indians' spirits healed, they were careful to remind their white audiences that they could have just as easily inflicted death, had forgiveness not stayed their formerly violent hands" (391). In a very different way than in the Koons and Spear stories, Conant conceived of Indians as hyper material, but because of rage. James Martin Peebles, American physician and spirit medium who was a member of the Indian Peace Commission of 1868 (which negotiated the terms of treaties on behalf of the U.S. government with a number of tribes including the Comanche, Kiowa, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Lakota, Sioux, and Navajo), described feeling an "uncontrollable desire to kill" or "suicidal obsession" when Indian spirits were near him (6-7). I see Conant's message as an explicit test of Whiteness through mediumship: the ability of the frail White woman to contain these spirits, for one, and the Spiritualist community to potentially mediate between Indians and the state to manage the threat of the nation's destruction.

As Katheryn Troy has shown, Indian removal was one of the central issues featured in Spiritualist publications. For example, in one article published in *The Banner*

of Light in September 1860 entitled "The Cause of the Indians," there is a report from a religious convention in Providence, RI, where religious leaders wrote up a treatise advocating for Indian rights. The unnamed group of Spiritualist authors argue against "the almost universal conviction…that the Indians were a doomed race, destined in the course of Providence to pass away" (3). They argue that this belief has become a self-fulfilling prophesy: "when we are led to believe any object doomed to extermination, there is a kind of destructive instinct in humanity that leads us to do our part in the work" (3). The authors ask, did God exterminate the Indians? The answer is no, we (settlers) killed them. While there are many Spiritualist articles and books from this time reasserting the "vanishing Indian" trope, there was a sense that some Spiritualists were aware of and attempted to atone for the crimes of White settlers.[17]

Significantly, Conant's revenge fantasy, like Spear's story of the Kiantone entombment, took the form of the earth rising up. In one communication published in 1861 by Conant entitled "'The Indians' Influence in Spirit Life," the connection between Indian dead and the land was made explicit:

> Every Indian mound that rises from the Mississippi to the furthest lake, will answer with a voice of thunder, that the ashes of the Indian are full of the magnetism of hate to the white man.
>
> The White man calls for the shades of his sires to aid him, but the shades of his sires arise not. They are silent, for they see there is great wrong in the midst of the whites. The spirit of oppression and bigotry that walked among the whites centuries ago, that did its mission among the red men, driving them from their hunting-grounds, causes them to return with double power upon the white men (*Banner of Light* 9.13, 6).

[17] See Kathryn Troy's *Specter of the Indian* for a social history of how Spiritualists organized against Indian removal. My focus here is less on the direct political actions of Spiritualists than the link between affect and matter in the way Spiritualists understood Indian spirits.

In this passage, the Spiritualist notion of magnetism is an opening for the hyper-material racial other, and significantly, a source of danger in the land. The power in these messages is attributed to deep hatred instead of the passive animist fantasy that inspired Koons and Spear (the idea that spirits are just under the ground, available to settlers and waiting for mediums to discover them).

As the communication continues, there is an acknowledgement of living Indians, which was rare in Spiritualist texts because of the pervasiveness of the vanishing Indian trope:

> …And the shades of the red man, what do they in these trying times? They work for the remnants of their race who linger here. They work for the race who have arisen against the great father of the nation…Every particle of dust that is in your land is full of revenge! Every brook, every river, is filled with the red man's revenge! He skims your waters in his shadowy canoe, and looks at your hearts and knows them to be wrong.

Here we see an implicit animist claim, that spirit is imbued in every part of the land, and thus the angry spirits are everywhere the settlers look. This is an active spirit presence that overtakes the White settlers, who are disadvantaged by their supposed transcendence. In these communications, there is a sense that White settlers have no true spiritual power on North American soil, and also no access to the land they inhabit. In this way, spiritual and material hunger converge, exposing how Spiritualists conceived Whiteness as a kind of dislocation, a powerful force without a place, unrooted and bound to travel (as the following chapters will reveal).

It is important to note that these communications were not happy messages from the spirit land (Many Spiritualist texts served to assure readers that there is no death), but these enacted a spiritual threat that manifest as a material force. Significantly, rage was

the force of animation. What follows can be read as a critique of those, like Koons and Spear, who see themselves as the inheritors of North America:

> The red man looks into the future, and sees the white man, looking strong now, weak. The white man says, 'I will rear a tree of liberty,' but he knows nothing of liberty.
> …Does the white man think that because the Indian's ashes alone remain with you, that his ear is closed? All the Indians in the hunting grounds of the Great Spirit have heard this thunder, and have come forth. The shades of the red man are more mighty than the mounds that slumber here. While you fight for shadows, the red man fights for revenge.
>
> [The balance of this communication was so full of hate that we did not care to report it. We did not number this message, or the succeeding one, in our list; but on reflection concluded to publish them.] (*Banner of Light* 9.13, 6)

The Indian spirit is communicating through Conant to a group of White séance sitters in the Banner Free Circle, acknowledging the fact that many White settlers feel they have inherited this land. Ashes and land, seemingly inanimate matter from the perspective of White settler epistemology, were being animated through anger. Anger becomes a literal material force through the logic of magnetism (connecting the spirit with the material world). Significantly, these communications made settlers feel the effects of Indian genocide through contact with the land, not through sympathy, but imagination of revenge. The closing remark about hatred reveals that this message was somewhat outside of the goal of the conventional spirit circle. Conant found herself out of balance, it would seem, because of the great "magnetism of hate" attributed to Indian spirits. This is a gendered relationship, certainly, where feminine Whiteness is found too weak to contain the power of masculine Indian warriors.

It is notable that these spirits do not mention slavery in these communications while they take credit for the chaos of the Civil War. The anger of Indians seems to be

aligned more with Southerners in the effort to destroy the United States government than with enslaved Black Americans. The elision can be read as part of a racial calculus differentiating the Red man from the Black man. Slaves and Indians, while both hyper-material in the imagination of White Spiritualists, filled very different roles within White culture and the Spiritualist racial metaphysics. These Indian spirits were unnamed, long dead, speaking as a group, and reportedly rising up from the land. Blackness and slavery were present to White settlers in a very different way, in politics as well as the social lives and deaths of those fighting the war. Significantly, when Black spirits came to J.H. Conant, they did not enter with the force of anger that Indian spirits reportedly claimed.

Conant's communications were not material performances in the sense of flying instruments or possessing remains, but her spirit-discourse made a claim about animism that changed the way the material landscape of the United States was understood. It this way, she created an orientation that was about paying attention to material performance. If animism is taken seriously, the entire world is alive or vital, and for the White settler, that could be a terrifying thought. As I will show in the next section, gender and sexuality are intertwined with these material relationships inspired by raciality.

4. Indian Maidens as Sacrificed Healers

While Koons and Spear assumed their separateness from the Indians, J.H. Conant claimed to be descended from an Indian Chief, and she professed to be attended by "Indian spirit-friends" consistently throughout her life. Her biographies frequently mention female Indian spirits by the names Winona, Metoka (Winona's mother), Starlight (Noanta in life), and Springflower, among others. One August 17, 1866, at

Conant's home (dubbed "Kanagawah Lodge"), these Indian spirits expressed a desire to throw a reception for the "pale-faces." Conant channeled Indian maidens one after the other; first Noanta delivered a welcome address, then the lively Springflower chatted with the group, followed by the stoic Metoka, composing a poem:

> From the lakes and from the rivers,
> Over plains and mountains tall,
> Many braves and many maidens
> Come in answer to your call.
>
> Are they welcome to your wigwam?
> Will your kindly greeting fall,
> Like your winter's spotless blanket,
> Over black, and red, and all? (Putnam & Conant, *Flashes of Light*, 26)

On the surface, this looks like a hopeful multiculturalism, as Kathy Gutierrez commented of the legacy of Spiritualism: "I believe that its lasting gifts have been to multiculturalism: the religion that opened heaven to all opened a new vista of ethical, not scientific possibility. The ghosts that Spiritualism loosed upon the world were ultimately happy specters, visions of the past ushering in a brighter future" (171). As I mentioned in the introduction, however, I am skeptical of depictions of Spiritualism as multiculturalism, for that reading frequently overlooks the implicitly racialized and violent gestures that I uncover in these pages. I would redirect our attention away from utopian rhetoric and towards the practices of mediums and the practices they describe in the spirit world, for the gestures and affective relationships between mediums and spirits often reveal sexual and racial assumptions and tensions. The poem published by Conant was part of a fantasy of Indian women hosting a reception for White people, a sort of "imagined intimacy," in the term offered by Adria Imada, where settlers imagine that an Indigenous host invites them into their local culture. We also see in this communication a

trope that was central to Spiritualism, that Indian spirits were tied to the land, and therefore accessible to the calls of settlers through proximity, and because Conant saw herself as descended from Indians, ancestry.

In contrast to the warrior spirits that Conant channeled to take responsibility for the Civil War, these Indian maidens presented a matrilineal genealogy of women teaching forgiveness in the spirit land. As previously mentioned, Indian spirits were commonly known for healing the anger White Americans felt in the aftermath of the Civil War. Blackness, in this racial calculus, became abstracted, as Russ Castronovo argues, as a burden upon the White mind (as opposed to a category invented through the actual violence of enslavement, and a reality lived by Black people). In this tumultuous time period, Black and Indian anger presented two threats that Indian maidens were supposedly able to heal. Conant's poem creates a utopian image that many Spiritualists shared of an inclusive racial future. However, the fact that numerous spirit communications recounted the tragic deaths of Indians (resembling popular literature and stage-plays of the time) placed these performances in a genre of glorifying dead Indians and supporting the notion of the vanishing Indian as the precondition for the American nation. This representational work, I suggest, served to entrench the figure of the Indian in matter and the underground, as both Koons and Spear did.

I believe these communications help us see a horror at the heart of White settler colonialism—the idea that White people consume Indians as they consume land and materials. In another poem by Metoka recounting the story of Winona, Metoka suggests the war between the Red and the White man began when the White man "planted his corn on the sacred mounds of the Indian, and shed no tears" (*Flashes of Light* 21). As the story

goes, instead of risking capture at the hands of the "pale faces" when the war began, Winona chose death at the hand of her father. Then, Conant reports, Winona "To the land of light was borne!" Where "the angels teach forgiveness for the white man's fearful wrong" (23). The end of the story plays into the dynamic of Indian maidens teaching forgiveness in the afterlife, but I want to focus on the treatment of the Indian dead in the narrative. The mention of farming on a burial mound makes the material connection between Indians and settlers explicit: The settlers consumed Indian remains, not just symbolically, but in a direct way by growing food from land filled with the bodies of Indians. As previously mentioned in the context of Spear's mediumship, Daryl Caterine made this relationship explicit in his reading of White Spiritualists engaging with Indian spirits by figuratively consuming them, as if sitting down to a table to "partake of beef." In the Conant communications, through the imagined intimacy of Indian maiden generosity, the sacrifice of the Indian's death becomes the bodily nourishment of the settler. This is narrative, of course, and could be taken metaphorically, but her other communications suggest we should take it literally, as we are to take the literal connection between Indian spirits and soil rising up to wage war.

What I hope to clarify is the spiritual dimension of this settler consumption, understood as a metaphysical operation to heal the dislocated White soul. J.H. Conant's spirits explained the attraction to Indians through the Spiritualist logic of magnetism (as the principle of attraction between spirit and matter). Because Indian spirits were seen to be close to "Mother Nature," they were thought to possess, as Conant put it, "a knowledge of the control of the more subtle elements of magnetic strength" greater than the White "modern" spirit, "whose civilization leads him farther and further into the

intricacies of artificial customs, appetites and fashions, till like the boy continually bent, the verve and spring of his physique succumbs to the constant strain, and he becomes but a walking automaton," or worse, something like a vampire "feeding upon the magnetic vitality of those around, sapping the springs of their life" (Putnam, *Mrs. J.H. Conant* 151). The White man is an automaton in Conant's view because of the unnatural demands of industrial modernity, but also, I suggest, he has a gap in his epistemology between spirit and matter. In slightly different terms, White settlers were in need of healing because of the separation of their bodies from spirit, likened to the separation of their bodies from the land. In the worst case scenario, the White man becomes a vampire sucking the life from the Indian because the demands of modernity has made the White subject into an unnatural, lifeless husk.

In this sense, White modernity looks like a vampiric or cannibalistic condition where the Indian is a source of vitality. This aligns with Dylan Robinson's characterization of the settler orientation as "hungry" or "starved," and therefore driven to consume Indigenous knowledge or cultural productions. My attempt has been to show that this dynamic was born of a spiritual crisis at the heart of Whiteness, namely, a crisis of disembodiment. As I discussed in the introduction, Russ Castronovo has shown how White Spiritualists consumed narratives of Black death to heal their troubled psyches in the nineteenth century. I have attempted to point out the dimension of White vampirism that fed on Indian spirits before I turn to Blackness, which was approached very differently from Indian materiality.

5. Conclusion

To reiterate, these Spiritualist mediums called upon Indian spirits to support a universal humanist project that was an implicit investment in Whiteness. This dynamic was fraught with racial thinking and ethical questions about land, violence, and whether sympathy or affect can truly connect humans or alter the world. In the first two sections, we saw how both Koons and Spear used Indian figures as spiritual touchstones, attempting to appropriate Indian material powers while also distinguishing themselves as White and modern; thus elevating themselves to a higher form of matter. Their performances relied upon metaphysical alterity, marking racial difference not just in identity content, but in the form of the material world's awakening (as self-playing instruments for White spirits vs. unearthed Indian remains or healing salve made from the earth). The communications of J.H. Conant add a third dimension to this situation: The Indian could only be a healing salve if the earth and matter remained inert, but Conant's spirits threatened to make the earth rise up and destroy White settlers (in a reversal of the logic of settler expansion where White people consumed Indians and their lands). Through her vengeful spirits and matrilineal sacrifice narrative, Conant suggested that the figure of the Indian could perhaps be a cure for the White man's disembodiment, albeit not a simple healing salve. To frame these scenarios as White settler approaches to animism (Spiritualists longing for and attempting to protect themselves from dangers associated with Indigenous spirituality) is to say that these dramas are not about Indians at all, but rather metaphysical dramas that tested Whiteness.

I cannot claim that these repertoires exist in the twenty-first century as they did in the nineteenth century, but I do see a gesture that lives on in the present. I suggest that Whiteness, from the nineteenth century to the present, can be a spiritual orientation that

frequently masquerades as a neutral, ethically-minded orientation of non-Indigenous people seeking to incorporate Indigenous knowledge. David Abram and other contemporary proponents of animism including Stengers and Kubiak, for example, have suggested that being open to the spirits now is an ethical way of being in the world. In Abram's words:

> By allowing such enigmatic phenomena [spirits] back into our discourse—acknowledging them neither as wholly objective entities nor as purely subjective experiences, but as ambiguous realities that move both around us and within us, and sometimes move through us—we rejuvenate the participatory sentience of our bodies…we loosen our capacity for intuition and empathic discernment, unearthing a subtlety of sensation that has long been buried in the modern era…the spirits are not intangible; they are not of another world. They are the way the local earth speaks when we step back inside *this* world (132).

Neo-animism may hold a necessary corrective to "modernity" and the capitalist logic of extraction that treats matter as raw material for industrialization, but I want to point to the fact that Spiritualists attempted to do just what Abram calls for, attending to the spirits of the "local earth," and what the consequences were: The mediums activated the land as a resource empowered by dead Indians. To return to the words of Vine Deloria: "Land was the means of recognizing the Indian as a human being" (7). Because land was the means of recognizing the Indian, calling upon spiritual presence in the local earth became a way of turning the figure of the Indian into a spiritual resource for the White settler.

This history matters because the thingliness made of Indians through settler desire for their land is an ongoing drama that White people continue to invest in. The horrific crimes of unearthing remains depicted in these pages are not in the past, for grave-robbing continues, and this violent material practice must be seen in relation to spiritual practices that conjure figures of Indians. It is no coincidence that countless New Age

spirit mediums persistently claim to have Indian spirit guides. The gestures are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, the sense that Indians are bound to or made of earth has continued to be a persistent aesthetic register, as is exemplified by Kroeber and Heizer's descriptions of different Indian tribes as being sculpted out of the earth, chiseled out of stone, or molded out of clay. The metaphors they use to explain the uniqueness of Indian physicality are related to what Philip Deloria has described as the material forms used to possess the Indian or to embody Indianness in White settler culture. Consider another example of presumed Indian materiality reaching to absurd proportions, the children's book (1980) and popular film *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1995), where an Indian figurine comes to life for a little White boy to play with. Animism, as associated with the imagined figure of the Indigene (Povinelli), is an inseparable context for Spiritualism, and, I suggest, neo-animism has become a contradictory foundation for radical materialisms because of the old racialized animism's ongoing practical and aesthetic uses, namely the fascination with the animation of inanimate objects within "modern" or White spaces.

Chapter Two:
Black Spirits in the "Shape of a Human Being"

In early June of 2020, soon after the murder of George Floyd, a White spirit medium named Carol Ann Collins claimed to have channeled Floyd's spirit, delivering this message to protesters in Minneapolis via Twitter: "go home—enjoy your family, tell them you love them…remove my name from being associated with hate…civil liberties are not what we need to be fighting for, be the one who says I love you to all" (Higgins). There was such an outpouring of anger on social media, Collins deleted her Twitter account and took her website down, taking no responsibility for her statement. Strangely enough, she was not the only White woman who claimed to channel Floyd that month, another medium, Denise Ramon, was featured in a YouTube video as she channeled Floyd, characterizing him as a king or a pirate in a past life who killed a police officer. Ramon went on to describe how Floyd found peace in the afterlife through forgiveness and now "He's kinda protective over this cop," his murderer, Derek Chauvin (Channeling Erik). What inspires this act, White women claiming a Black spirit as a pacifist martyr in support of a deadly status quo? There is a long tradition of White Americans valorizing Black pacifists and denouncing Black anger, so the sentiment is familiar, but the method was surprising: unabashedly speaking for the dead. One could argue that these mediums created a fantasy to heal a White anxiety (fear of Blackness masked by fear of rioting). A psychological interpretation, however, does not quite capture the causes or consequences of mediumship because it reduces performance to a drama taking place in the White subject's mind. Furthermore, the myth of the White subject secures power precisely by retreating back into the space of the mind, so it is necessary to bring these

communications back into the material world that was so central to nineteenth century Spiritualism.

I will widen the frame to see these messages in the context of Spiritualist practices, and specifically implicit racial meanings evoked through mediumship. As discussed in the introduction, I suggest that looking at implicit raciality helps us see the *how* of raciality, that which authorizes or lags behind an action. Particularly feminine Whiteness, I suggest, takes power from implicit meaning because it can be subtle or passive (while explicit anti-Black racism is much more visible). Collins and Ramon, for example, took up power in an indirect way, dissociating from their identities in order to make way for external content to enter, and so they believed that they had no responsibility for the things they said. In a different way, they made the spirit of George Floyd passive in their narratives and, I suggest, this is related to the fact that Floyd became a public figure through his death. In response to what they saw on televised media or YouTube, these White women were caught up in the drama of the virtual scene, responding in a way that refused to acknowledge the interiority or self-possession of a Black man, making him serve the status quo and support the police who killed him. I ask: What conditions seem to authorize this practice of White mediumship in the aftermath of anti-Black violence?

In this chapter, I look at White mediums who channeled Black spirits in the nineteenth century, which frequently resulted in a reassertion of a brutal, White supremacist racial order. Consider the spirit medium J.H. (Fanny) Conant channeling Black spirits shortly before the Civil War to deliver the message: "slavery is both right and proper…Many thousands find a gate to heaven through the system of slavery"

(*Banner of Light* 6.25, 6). For Conant in the nineteenth century and Collins in the twenty-first, attending to Black spirits allowed them to speak from the limit of the human in order to reconcile a contradiction at the heart of United States democracy: freedom only for White men of means. Significantly, these mediums reached reconciliation through the gesture of giving the Black dead a doorway to the White spirit world. This chapter is largely inspired by Russ Castronovo's work in *Necro Citizenship* and his argument that Spiritualist mediums consumed Black death to heal the White psyche. In his words:

> At the nexus of spirit messages and slave narrative, liberal (un)consciousness absorbs and then discards the black body as the ground for privileged white disembodiment. To search for everlasting equality was to return to and ignore the temporary bondage of the body; to speak of the liberated spirit was to speak of and forget enslaved blacks (186).

Castronovo is referring to the abundance of spirit communications discussing death as liberation from bondage. Castronovo highlights a process of abstraction by which White authors and spirit mediums transformed the actuality of enslavement into a metaphor—death as freedom, the only meaningful political life available for the enslaved, and an apparent resource for White Spiritualists.

My contribution to the literature on the raciality of Spiritualism is to bring matter into this dynamic, showing that the act of White Spiritualists appropriating Blackness was not only accomplished through narrative processes or within the White mind, but through performance repertoires that implicitly supported the idea of White transcendence and Black materiality. In my analysis, I attempt to show how mediums took Whiteness to absurd heights by employing Whiteness as a spiritual technology. In more specific terms, because spirit mediums understood themselves to be merely passive instruments, they dislocated themselves from authorship and often their bodies,

essentially freeing themselves from the restraints of responsibility. Then from this orientation, mediums touched and animated material things that were coded as Black. In the last chapter, I suggested that virtuosic object performances including self-playing instruments conjured sublime images of Whiteness. Conversely, I argued that Indian spirits were associated with matter due to their connection to the land and animism. In this chapter, I show how Black spirits were objectified as humanoids captured in stone, performing objects in domestic settings, spirits bound to corpses, and as images appearing on White skin. Each of my case studies displays a central issue: Placing the burden of race upon materials and performing objects, Whiteness became a spiritualized orientation of managing Black matter.

The context for these performances was the Civil War and Reconstruction, but also the intellectual and cultural shift effected by Darwin's theory of evolution. Michel Foucault has argued that the concept of "Man" became purely biological in the nineteenth century (310), and Sylvia Wynter has elaborated the consequences of such a turn: After Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), it became common belief that some humans could be deselected through human evolution, and as a function of this idea, "two population groups, one classified as white, the other as Negro and/or black, were to find themselves, the one locked into their whiteness, the other into their blackness" ("On How We Mistook the Map" 126). As a result of Darwin's origin narrative, all persons of Black African descent were held to be at some stage "in the slow process of evolution from monkey into man" (127). My research is indebted to Wynter, and the rich body of literature produced by Black intellectuals critiquing a Western humanism that excludes Blackness and often presents Black people as an ontological or

pathological problem.[18] As discussed in the introduction, scholars in Black studies have illuminated how Black life has persistently created radical ontological thinking and nuanced understandings of subjectivity beyond Western humanist limits.[19] As I will discuss later in this chapter, Hortense Spillers' differentiation between the discrete "body" of the White subject and the notion of Black "flesh" produced through enslavement captures the problematic that this dissertation attempts to address. To put it simply, Blackness has been overdetermined by its exclusion from the category of human in the Western order of things and its supposed connection with matter (as unformed material or "flesh"). On the opposite side of the Black/White binary, White people have frequently invested in disembodiment as a moral virtue (from the privileged status that assuming a discrete body offers).

I contend that Spiritualism has more to offer the study of raciality than has previously been recognized, particularly when it comes to understanding the link between raciality and matter. Along these lines, Cristin Ellis has described racialization as a materiality problem, such that mid-nineteenth-century biological racism "treats materiality as if it were unevenly distributed among humans—as if some peoples are inherently more and others less embodied, as if we are species unevenly evolving from apes to angels" (5). This is a hierarchy concerned with animality, but specifically animality understood as a low manifestation of matter. As a result of this logic, White mediums in the nineteenth century silenced the voices of actual Black people by creating

[18] W.E.B. Du Bois and Franz Fanon have been particularly influential in this regard, both in articulating the pathologizing of Blackness and the relation of Blackness to objecthood. Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism* is a pivotal contribution to the literature on objecthood and the commodity in the Marxist tradition.
[19] See the work of Katherine McKittrick, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Alexander Weheliye, Uri McMillan, Louis Chude-Sokei, Tina Post, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson.

a figure of a passive Black Other, a figure that was objectified in more ways than one—framed as a symbol of darkness and death, but also approached as a visitor rising from matter itself. One of Conant's spirits explained: Black spirits "produce the most wonderful physical manifestations" (animating objects, that is) because they "are more material than you," her White audience (*Banner of Light* 9.11). Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's notion of plasticity is an insightful way of understanding the materiality of racialization in this context: "Plasticity is a mode of transmogrification whereby the fleshy being of blackness is experimented with as if it were infinitely malleable lexical and biological matter, such that blackness is produced as sub/super/human at once, a form where form shall not hold" (3). Matter has two connotations here: lexical, such that materials can be given form akin to language, and biological, such that matter becomes a way of understanding genealogy, not as history, but as a congealing of time in materials and bodies that reproduce. These two aspects of matter guide my analysis, one points toward the construction of form and the other toward issues of temporality, reproduction, and the maternal. Both meanings were being displayed and tested in spirit mediums' demonstrations of spiritualized matter, and both staged racialized hierarchies of being.

These case studies are unique because of their extreme literalness enacting metaphysical issues about race, spirit, and matter. But what they reveal, I suggest, is a dynamic at play in the broader culture of the United States: Taking the White subject as the model of the human and racialized others as objects, instruments, or a "dark" side for the White subject to form against. Literalization is one way of exposing implicit layers of meaning by directly enacting them. As I discussed in the first chapter, instead of seeing Indians as metaphors for the land, Koons and Spear conflated the two and made them

interchangeable through practical treatments of land. In this chapter, I attempt to tease out how White mediums literalized Whiteness through object performance, exposing how spirit mediums understood the gap between spirit and matter as a racial divide between White and Black.

Many Spiritualist performances were influenced by American melodrama (*Uncle Tom's Cabin* being an iconic example), but the case studies that I examine exceeded the melodramatic frame. Linda Williams discusses melodrama as "an evolving mode of storytelling crucial to the establishment of moral good" (12), and significantly, melodrama was feminized and racialized in the nineteenth century, granting "moral legibility to race" (5). Following Linda Williams work on racial melodrama and Lauren Berlant on sentimentality in United States culture, Robert Cox looks at Spiritualist racial politics through the lens of Victorian sympathy. Cox argues that sympathy "created an emotional topography that enabled individuals to parse out and navigate the complex, confusing, and rapidly shifting social structures of mid-Victorian life" (165). Cox locates sympathy as an emotional survival tactic for White individuals under the changes of the Reconstruction era and under the terms of industrial "modernity." The mediums that I discuss, however, were not drawn to Black spirits because of sympathy, but because of the presumed physical power of Blackness (which could be a resource for the medium in performing "physical manifestations"). I mean to show what it meant for White mediums to use Black spirits as actual physical objects in performance in addition to symbolic or narrative objects.

In this chapter, I look at the mediums Elizabeth and Sherman Denton, Anne Denton Cridge, Mary Schindler, G.A. Redman, and Mary Comstock. In my analysis, I

expose how White spirit mediums performed disembodiment through their (often unconscious) investment in Whiteness, and they sought a body in a roundabout way (by way of the supposedly more material racial other). Ultimately, I argue that Blackness became conflated with matter in Spiritualist séances through actions that assumed matter to be a territory foreign to the human, a space of darkness, but also a resource to be used like a puppet to be animated or stone to be mined.

1. Captured in Stone: Blackness and the Material Past

Physical mediumship, like what occurred in the Koons spirit room in the previous chapter, was the most direct and overtly theatrical way that mediums attempted to reveal the presence of spirit in matter, but there were more subtle ways that mediums staged the awakening of matter. Psychometry was the act of touching a stone or object to receive a vision. Some of the first mediums to popularize this technique reveal that encounters with objects were often experienced as encounters with racial others. Here is a description of what the spirit medium Elizabeth Denton saw upon touching a fossil in 1863:

> I see a head; the lower part of the forehead is very prominent, so that the eyes seem deeply set. The forehead is very low, and round and receding. The face has an awful look; it is dark, and feathers are stuck round the neck…Now I see the chest and arms. It seems hardly human; yet it is not savage and wild, for I have no such sensation in connection with it…He is looking off. In front of him is a cave. It is sad to see such a pitiful object in the shape of a human being (*The Souls of Things*, vol. 1, 204).

Elizabeth's husband William was a prominent geologist and the two of them built a following for reading the deep geologic past of the Earth through psychometry. They produced three, extensive volumes of psychometric descriptions that they called *The Souls of Things.* Curiously, as Elizabeth looked into the deep past through fragments of

stone and fossil, she saw images of a pre-historic world populated by dark-skinned humanoids. In Elizabeth's description above, she switches back and forth between using the pronouns "it" and "he," and her final reflection reminds us that discourses of racial Whiteness and Blackness have been inextricably linked with issues of objecthood and matter. Her comment that it is "sad to see such a pitiful object in the shape of a human being" speaks to Franz Fanon's awareness: "I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (109), and George Lamming's description of the enslaved as "man-shaped ploughs" (21). Spirit mediums frequently attempted to rarify matter by imbuing it with spirit, and in the process, they exposed racial assumptions hiding within the duality matter/spirit. In the Denton visions, Blackness became the image of both the distant human past and its alien or animal cousin. Thinking through Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's notion of plasticity, Blackness is being treated here as a malleable biological form. The plasticity of Blackness seemed to authorize the endless combination of super/sub/human traits into a genealogy for White humans, becoming a placeholder for the prehistoric human or animal past, and, as subsequent psychometric visions revealed, a darkness found among aliens in outer space.

The Dentons' son Sherman and William's sister Anne Denton Cridge all had psychometric visions of life on Mars after touching meteorites. Looking deeper into their descriptions help us see two interconnected narratives about materiality and objecthood: that Whiteness was associated with technological progress and transcendence while Blackness was associated with hyper-materiality, labor, and stone (or any mineral that could be mined). In contrast to images of Earth's past, the Denton-Cridge visions of outer space include a wider range of racialized beings like luminescent humanoids, which

placed the "Anglo-Saxon race," as they put it, in the middle of a new extraterrestrial racial hierarchy. As William Denton concluded: "there are at least four distinct races of human beings on Mars," including "The four-digited race" described by his son Sherman, "the dark, stunted race" described by Elizabeth and Anne, a "pink-skinned" and "star-eyed race" described by all three, more advanced than the others, but lower than humans because they "worship images" or statues, and the fourth "superior race" described by Anne and Elizabeth, marked by their moral transparency, luminescence, simplicity, beauty and a "communistic system of living" (*Souls of Things*, vol. 3, 276). While having a vision of the "superior race" on June 13, 1873, Elizabeth exclaimed "oh such people! And such rooms! The people seem to be in advance of all I have seen on earth in many respects. They are physically and mentally our superiors" (vol. 3, 239). Elaborate architecture constructed with white stone seemed to play into the raciality of matter, for the Dentons came to the conclusion that the material surroundings seemed to reflect the supposed inner being and skin color of these people. Like Elizbeth, Anne noted that these people were superior to earthlings, for "They have senses like ours; but an electrical sense is super-added" (vol. 3, 223). All three mediums saw fantastic electrical technology among the two "superior races" including flying machines, electric cars, sewing machines, and automatons of all kinds. These mediums saw technological and moral advancement as directly related to physical embodiment, for both "races" appeared to be lighter in skin hue than earthly humans; as Elizabeth noted of the "superior" Martians: "The complexion is of a purer white than is that of the Anglo-Saxon race; the eyes are generally of a bright sky-blue" (vol. 3, 241). Elizabeth remarked that even the slightly less developed race seemed to have glowing skin: "The only difference I notice is a

slightly deeper and brighter tinge, apparently belonging to the skin itself, and giving it a peculiar pinkish hue" (vol. 3, 248).

In contrast to these images of Whiteness, light, and technological development, both Anne and Elizabeth described "dark-skinned" Martians as heavy, connected to the earth (as opposed to technology), and morally underdeveloped. Unsurprisingly, White Martians were placed in the northern hemisphere, while in the southwestern portion of the hemisphere, they found a landscape "something like Southern Africa." As Anne reported: "I see a race of men who are almost black, their bodies nearly covered with dark hair. They are very small in stature; and their heads are small, even in proportion to their small bodies. They do not live in houses. They are the most inferior race of human beings I have yet seen" (vol. 3, 219). Elizabeth remarked on this inferior race "I find antagonisms and selfishness that I did not find with that other people. All that I see here are dark colored,—very dark" (vol. 3, 242). These descriptions reflect the common biocentric racism of the time: seeing skin color as the ultimate indicator of a person's status on the ladder of evolution, conflating biological evolution with cultural progress.

Elizabeth Denton strengthened the boundary between White and Black Martians by applying the logic of ethnology—taking Darwinian evolution as a model for social development and supporting the idea that Black humanoids would be biologically de-selected as a result of a cultural block (the inability to progress). She reflects upon the dark Martians: "I do not think they know about the others" (White Martians), but changes her mind "Yes; they know about them: but they do not seem to have the least idea that they can ever be like them; nor do they care to be like them. They differ greatly from us in this respect" (vol. 3, 242). These Black Martians were objects of fascination because

they were supposedly becoming human, but, Elizabeth argued, they would never arrive. This assumption reflects the larger trend of American and British ethnologists of the time. John S. Haller has observed that when cultural anthropologists discussed "evolution" in the nineteenth century, they often conflated biological evolution with cultural "progress." As he put it: "Both the physiological or purely biological structure of man and the aspects of his social life became part of the same cosmic development" (711). Cosmic being the key word here, as outer space was framed as a parallel laboratory to Earth, supporting the idea of universal cultural and biological human progress. Psychometry took the moral meanings associated with the White/Black binary to expansive, metaphysical proportions. While Mars could have offered a completely different view of Earth in the Denton-Cridge visions, the mediums understood Mars as a mirror-world to Earth, or a laboratory to watch humanity develop along the assumed "natural" trajectory outlined by the ethnologists of the time: from Black formlessless to White human form.

Biocentric racism was becoming particularly prevalent in the nineteenth century, so the Dentons' visions are unsurprising, but the method is unique in its literalness, closing the gap between matter and raciality, leaving no metaphorical distance between the material and that which it was thought to represent. This is the implicit raciality of the performance: The White medium holds a stone, closes her eyes and reads "the soul" of the "thing." While she sees a fantasy of luminescent Whiteness, what she is troubled and fascinated by is a "darkness" of people on Mars that corresponds to a metaphysical darkness encountered through the surface of a stone. In this way, I suggest, these dark humanoids were understood as messages from within matter.

The touch between the White hand and the fossil or stone staged a colonial relation of the White subject possessing and producing knowledge of the entire Earth and the vastness of outer space. William and Elizabeth preferred to study materials from places they had never been to and many where no English or European colonizers had been, so that their visions would not be tainted by prior knowledge. This frames psychometry as a discovery of new worlds, these texts describing uncharted jungles, places in transformation like erupting volcanoes, and scenes of conflict between humanoids and strange animals. With a touch, it was as if these mediums could travel where no White person had been before, uncovering knowledge of human origins as varied as the landscapes they visited. Races became multiplied, as William commented "many more races of men have perished than live on our planet today" (vol. 2, 43). And yet the more races the Dentons collected images of, the more they deepened a binary between White and Black. Like John Murray Spear and Jonathan Koons' obsessive search for spiritual origins, the Dentons experienced material things as unlocking the past, but the consequences were quite different: Indigeneity for the Dentons became an aspect folded into Blackness, for the colonial encounter was expanded and made cosmic. And significantly, raciality was folded into stone, a quintessentially stable material that could be mined and experimented with (collected and categorized as evidence).

The touch between the medium and the stone, I suggest, implicitly tested the boundary that disconnected White people from racial others, creating racial encounters and traveling in time and space, all from the comfort of the White subject's mind. Psychometry was the performance of an awakening, a revelation where matter was cracked open and exposed as a racialized record of becoming human. And it is significant

as a process of material/spiritual collection: a gathering process of stones that corresponded to races, and as such, a technique of transcendent White performers managing the racialized material world.

2. Domestic Objects: A Spirit Performing Minstrelsy

On an implicit level, Spiritualist practices often conjured Black spirits as representatives of matter, which I see as the backdrop against which more explicit racial signifiers were cast. In the 1870s, the medium Mary Schindler invited a Black spirit into White spaces through the frame of a minstrel show, displaying the supposed connection between Blackness and performing objects. Schindler first mentions a Black spirit in her memoir when writing of a séance at her home in Texas, where she used a planchette (a heart-shaped wooden pointer for spirits to speak through, the origin of the Ouija board). The planchette danced on its two bottom corners, "cutting up" in imitation of a minstrel dance. Then the spirit signed his name Oliver, and asked if the ladies would pray to "the man" (God) to bring Black folks out of the "dark place" where, he explained, there are no White people (104-107). Schindler's depiction of the segregated afterlife mirrors images from other mediums such as Andrew Jackson Davis and Jonathan Koons. Davis argued that after death, "The ultimates of every race in the Summer-Land establish a community or a world of their own" (182). In his vision of Summerland, the White spirit would extend sympathy to the Black, but "the moment the opposite races touch perfectly, that moment they take separate rooms in the Father's house. They work for each other and through each other without affiliation or loss of individuality" (184). This was an argument against amalgamation, and it reveals the tendency for White Spiritualists to

support the existing racial order. Significantly for my project, the reason that some mediums gave for placing Black spirits in the sphere closest to Earth was that they were supposedly more material than transcendent White ones. This belief in Black materiality, I hope to show, was literalized by performances in which inanimate objects became animated through an unruly physicality.

Physical mediumship in séances always centered performing objects like the tipping table or planchette, but there was a racialized difference in how mediums framed these objects: White spirits commonly used objects like instruments while Black spirits effectively *became* the objects. Schindler's planchette, for instance, was used as a direct substitution for the Black spirit's body. Erratic and forceful movements of the planchette were Oliver's trademark, as he made the pointer dance upright like a doll with wooden feet. On one occasion, the object "began to caper violently," and the medium chastised him. Oliver reportedly protested by arguing that he needed the exercise. Schindler explained "violent" object performance through the unrestrained physical energy of a young Black man. Around this time in the country, toy makers were producing small wooden "jig dolls" that depicted a young Black man (the Sambo character of the minstrel show) dancing on a wooden board (Richards). These toys allowed children to take minstrel show traditions into their homes and their own hands. Schindler's repertoire with the planchette can be seen to reference child's play (which was a citation of the minstrel stage), but Schindler's mediumship was also what I think of as an over-performance of those forms—a performance that literalized Black objecthood (placing the actual spirit of the dead inside of the wooden doll) in excess of familiar domestic scenes. In other words,

Schindler staged Blackness as uncontainable material power in excess of stable objecthood.

Russ Castronovo has shown how mediums translated the reality of enslavement into a burden on White minds, and, I would add, the White body. That is to say that White mediums tested Whiteness by attempting to embody the force of Black spirit, which they understood as strong and hyper-material. Schindler expressed the need to tame Oliver's wild antics because his performances made her White audiences anxious, but also because her body could not take the "violence." As one spirit in Schindler's circle explained: "the dark spirits exhaust the medium," so she needed to rest and recharge her magnetism in between visits (104). The White woman became a battery, a means of performance without performing herself. In other words, the invisible Black actor bore the burden of performance as an object, while the living White woman performed something like disembodiment or dissociation from her body through the logic of technology and White transcendence.

While Schindler supported the idea of spiritual segregation that was characteristic of the Spiritualist movement, I want to point out how her use of object performance was a test of that segregation, an act that may have been seen by her contemporaries as an act of generosity or a threat in the context of Reconstruction. Robert Cox, looking at the popularity of racialized spirits in séances in the years following the Civil War, argued that race became "the spiritual core of identity" in Spiritualist thinking (192). Along these lines, Schindler was the self-proclaimed "Southerner among the spirits," situating herself within the values and racialized anxieties of Southerners after the war. In one of his visits, Oliver spoke of his master, who was there in "the dark place" with him, and whose

skin had reportedly become Black (110). This was a clear reversal of White supremacy. In other instances, Schindler felt the need to police Oliver because of this apparent threat to the Southern racial order. In one séance, Oliver was the first spirit to arrive and she scolded "Oh, Oliver, you oughtn't to get before the white folks!" to which Oliver responded: "Missis, mam, de white folks aint no whiter dan Oliver in de spirit-world. I'm as good as any body. De one dat comes first, talks first. (Here planchette went rapidly all over the table, but did not write for some time) (110)." It is significant that Oliver's trademark was an unruly dancing object, for while he became something familiar like a minstrel puppet, he also represented a deep metaphysical anxiety at the heart of Whiteness: the presence of the almost human as a messenger from matter.

Oliver, the Sambo figure dancing as an object and advocating for his humanity, pushed against the contradictory terms of Whiteness: Whiteness defined as a universal model of the "human" that excluded the Black Other. Sylvia Wynter, writing of the importance of the minstrel show in constructing White identity, argues that Sambo signifies a return to nature, a figure of longing for White people who were anxious about the mechanization of life under modernity. But this "nature" is not quite human and represents terror at the same time: "The black exists as the Symbolic Object constituting the Lack, the Void of these qualities that have been postulated as the absolute sign of the certainty of being human. That a man or almost a man can exist, lacking these things, sets into play the terror that these attributes can be lost" ("Sambos and Minstrels" 152). This explains the attraction and fear that White Spiritualists expressed regarding séances in which White mediums channeled Black spirits. Both the minstrel stage and the séance were performances in which White people invested in Whiteness in an almost religious

way. White Spiritualists encountering "the Void" of Blackness could be a mystical experience, violent in a way that White actors or authors did not always recognize (the violence of Oliver's movements, for example, was on Schindler's mind, but not the violence of his enslavement or her own gesture of conjuring him). The question that Schindler began every encounter with, "Oliver, is that you?" brought up doubt as the frame of the performance: Who or what are we speaking to? Is "it" even human? The séance, in this case, was about the thrill of encountering the Void of Blackness through an object. White mediums rarely dealt directly with the racial contradictions involved. Instead, they continued implicitly supporting and sometimes testing a racial metaphysics by attempting to capture or tame Blackness in a familiar object (the planchette as jig doll). Like the stones of the Denton-Cridge visions, Schindler attempted to look through the planchette, separated enough from the Black spirit to retreat back into the world of White humanity. In both of these cases, mediums literalized Whiteness by experimenting with objects as representatives of Blackness, and this act preserved a blind spot, a secure place for the White subject to retreat back into.

3. Corpse as Performing Object

After exploring two examples from the Reconstruction era, I turn to cases of mediumship preceding the Civil War, when Spiritualists made the connection between performing objects and Blackness even clearer. This case brings Spiritualist literalization to a horrifying end, closing the representational distance, it would seem, between the White medium and the Black object. One article from May of 1858 entitled "Manifestations from a Dissection Room" recounts the story of the spirit medium G.A.

Redman, a White man and public medium in Boston who reportedly performed a séance while carrying out a dissection as a student at an unnamed medical institution:

> One day he was dissecting the body of a large negro; the flexor muscles proceeding down the fore arm and wrist, and whose office is to close the hand, were all cut, and he was cutting the integuments of the palm of the hand, when the *hand suddenly closed and grasped the knife by the blade*. He pulled it with a moderate degree of force for the purpose of extricating it, but the hand not relaxing its grip, he called the attention of some other persons to it, and left it sticking there till the next morning, when he found the fingers relaxed (*Banner of Light* 3.1, 6).

In this account, the Black corpse grabs the blade so that the dissection must stop, which I see as a visceral form of protest. Rather than bringing the author to question the treatment of the body, however, the event is noted in the article as a baffling new form of mediumship. I want to dwell for a moment on the assumption the article rested upon. Redman did not treat the Black man as a person, but rather "flesh," in the term used by Hortense Spillers, subject to experimentation. It is important to differentiate between Black "flesh," and the discrete "body" of a liberated subject. In Spillers words: "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography" ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" 67). Treating Black people as "flesh" was a technique developed through enslavement to secure Whiteness: The White subject conceals the (White) body under language and concepts, deepening the myth of the (White) human as constituted against base matter of Black "flesh."

Even though the spirit's presence could have presented a contradiction between dissecting the corpse and talking with the corpse's spirit, Redman proceeded without faltering in his use of the corpse. Redman looked through the corpse seemingly without

seeing, turning the corpse into an instrument in support of his mediumship. When Redman came back in the morning, the séance began:

> He then, in presence of witnesses, had recourse to his medium powers to obtain an interview with the spirit who had owned the body. His questions were answered *by lateral motions of the dead body* that was lying before him, and also by raps. In this way he received several particulars of the life and death of the negro, and among other things it was stated that he had died with delirium tremens. The brain, on being opened, presented strong evidence that such had been the cause of the man's death (6).

It is ironic that the "interview" takes place between the anatomy student and "spirit who had owned the body" at a time when Black people were treated as property and Whiteness defined by the power to own them. The horror of this scene, and of dissection in general (not to mention the inexpert treatment of a non-medical professional) is completely disregarded, as if the corpse could simply be an inert object.

White bodies were also dissected during this era, but mostly the corpses of criminals and the poor, while Black communities were disproportionately subject to dissection. The issue of dissection in America has long been racialized, which was exposed in the "Doctors' Riot" of 1788, when the New York Hospital was attacked after an announcement published in a local paper claimed the body of a White woman had been stolen from a local churchyard and dissected. Up until this point, it was common knowledge that young White medical students were stealing Black bodies to dissect. Around this time, a group of free and enslaved Black New Yorkers sent a petition requesting that these dissections be carried out with "decency and propriety" (De Costa & Miller). Much earlier than this, and persistently throughout the history of American medical institutions, White doctors and scientists subjected Black people to medical experimentation. Hortense Spillers documents how slave traders capitalized on, citing the

words of William Goodell in 1853, "diseased, *damaged* and disposable" slaves by selling them to medical institutions. As a result:

> …we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory ("Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" 68).

Spillers' work illuminating the brutality of the uniquely "American grammar" of raciality helps us see the depth of the violence produced by biocentric, anti-Black racism. Redman's treatment of the Black dead is a horrifying enactment of what Spillers calls "total objectification."

Surely, the history of White doctors dissecting Black corpses can be seen as a literal enactment of the total objectification of enslavement, but Redman did so in a way that altered the conventional frame of this practice. In a sense, he aestheticized it and made it sensational, literalizing the connection between Blackness and objecthood in such an extreme way, he made the violence of it highly visible. As I discussed in the introduction, I see literalization as a performance philosophy that does not proceed through metaphor or symbolic representation. Where a symbol and a referent have an ontological gap between them (the world of ideas and the material world), literalization makes a representation touch its referent (the idea of death and the actual corpse, for example). This is not a flat ontology that collapses difference altogether, but a performance practice that plays between and knits together different orders of being. Significantly, this representational labor can transform the fields of meaning and matter in the process. In this case, the corpse protests against its treatment and the Spiritualist community is baffled, and perhaps brought to question if there should be a limit on their

dealings with the dead (or perhaps I am being too generous in my speculation). Ultimately, Redman's literalization was an effort to make the Black body into a performing object like a planchette or puppet, foreclosing other alternatives.

There is more to say about how medicine, anatomical performance, and understandings of death were transforming at this time, but for the purposes of this project, I want to emphasize that a corpse was being treated as a performing object like a wooden pointer, and in this sense, not as a corpse at all. The example of the planchette in Schindler's memoir helps frame this issue: An instrument of spirit could be separated from the realities of life and death through something like a redirection (the performance becomes a scene of testing spirit-presence through animated matter, not an engagement with the dead person). To once again bring in the context that is overshadowed here: a Black corpse could only be treated in this way because the so-called "owner of the body" could not actually own his body, having no power to refuse such a violation. And significantly, unlike White spirits, this spirit was seen to be more connected to his body because of a racial differentiation. Like the Indian remains of Koons' and Spear's narratives, this corpse was fully othered from the ethical demands of White personhood, and yet the communication with the spirit raised the issue of personhood. This performance framed the corpse in a paradoxical way: Redman introduced a desire to communicate with the dead man through his body as an object—a gesture that both accentuated the objecthood of the corpse (no longer a medical specimen) and overlooked the object to address the person it represented. This is a double violation because Redman raised the specter of the body's personhood while reducing him to the "flesh" of a

medical specimen and then the object status of a Spiritualist instrument of communication.

The article "Manifestations from a Dissection Room" made a public sensation of Redman's performance, but it was brief and left much unsaid. Looking at Redman's own testimony and the testimony of one of his supporters, we get a much fuller sense of how he was oriented toward this corpse. G.A. Redman published a detailed account of these events in his autobiographical text *Mystic Hours*, locating the dissecting room in the Medical College of Philadelphia in the winter of 1857-58. As a student working with others on this dissection, he said he was able to choose one part of the body to dissect, so he chose the right arm. Then, in his words: "I took my scalpel and leisurely wrote my name on the skin of the negro" (349). This description reveals that Redman did not see this corpse as a person at all, but an object or material (as he notes, the skin took the place of a writing slate). While he was taking notes on his actual writing slate, "suddenly the table tipped and raps called for the alphabet." The spirit communicated: "You needn't make a memorandum book of my hide" (349). This was a protest against the White actor turning the Black body into an object. Within the context of enslavement, this was a reminder of Black personhood in a culture that actively denied it. On another evening in the dissection room, while Redman was dissecting the hand, the spirit animated the hand to grab the knife (as reported in the Spiritualist press). When Redman came back in the morning, the hand had relaxed and he was able to continue the dissection. According to Redman, because of weather and illness among the staff, the corpse was neglected and the other students abandoned it. He reported: "I found myself, therefore, often alone with my new acquaintance and we chatted together freely" (350). We are told that Redman

and the spirit developed a pleasant relationship through his corpse despite increasing decay, as if the two were simply chatting at a séance table.

The spirit introduces himself in these conversations as Cornelius Winne, and according to Redman, the two would have a close relationship for years to come. After the dissection was completed, the bones were raffled off to the doctors at the institution "as a desirable professional acquisition," but the spirit, Cornelius Winne, reportedly "expressed his desire that he [Dr. R.] should become the proprietor of his skeleton" (351). The spirit told Redman to take the first draw and Redman won the skeleton. All of this testimony is slightly different from the account published a year earlier. My goal is not to verify if or how this actually happened, but to tell this story as one performance authorized by the Spiritualist racial metaphysics. I find it striking that there is no mention of fear or disgust, no emotional reactions whatsoever to dissecting or communicating with the corpse. Significantly, there was a great deal of debate about Redman's mediumship in White Spiritualist circles (speculating that he was a fraud), but no protest regarding his treatment of the dead. This story was presented, in both Redman's account and in the Spiritualist press, as simply a novel form of mediumship.

Redman's dissection/mediumship exposed the biocentric racism of the time, and it was unique because of how he did this through a literalizing logic—using the Black body as an actual, not metaphorical, performing object. I want to point out the influence of minstrelsy on this gesture of making a Black corpse into a performing object, which is revealed in the latter part of the story. Redman graduated as a doctor in March and took up an office in New York while still living primarily in Hartford, CT. While in New York, he started working with Dr. J.R. Orton, who often slept at the office with Redman.

Orton wrote a long testimonial of Redman's next phase of mediumship, featuring some of Winne's bones that Redman had transported to New York. Orton describes hearing the bones rattle for the first time in the closet, and turned on a gas lamp to find a hip bone dancing inside. "Dr. R." (Redman) asked: "You here, Darkey?" Then the spirit made three loud raps on the floor, meaning yes. The term "Darkey" would have been associated with minstrel shows (and particularly the Sambo character, who was an ignorant fool character dear to White audiences). As in the Schindler case, this performance relied upon the idea that Black spirits were more likely to dance through objects and produce unruly bodily movement than White spirits. Then Redman speculated, "If we had those bones all here and wired together, I believe he could walk them across the room" (Redman 352).

According to Orton and Redman's accounts, Redman and the spirit collaborated in an attempt to do just this: construct a marionette puppet out of human bones. The next morning, the bone of a forearm reportedly flew across the office and hit Redman in the back while Orton was looking at him, with all of the doors and windows closed. Orton had a conversation with Cornelius Winne through Redman (acting as a medium, Redman would write these communications in handwriting supposedly distinct from his own). Orton asked, "could you not bring the rest of those bones from Hartford?" to which Winne replied "They're mine, ain't they?" When Orton asked "you are willing we should use them"? Cornelius replied, "Yes. Oh, I wouldn't have them under the sod for a ten spot" (353). This conversation is reminiscent of the Indian spirits in Koons and Spear's narratives who reportedly entreated the mediums to unearth their bones. This logic of getting consent was one way of authorizing spirit mediums' experiments. I see this

consent as an effort to feign irresponsibility for what is happening, raising the specter of personhood only enough to take possession of the racialized body.

Over the next few months, bones would fall out of the sky around Redman and Orton no matter where they were, on the street, inside of restaurants, while visiting with patients, etc. As more and more bones arrived, Redman started stringing them together with wire, but his efforts were reportedly met with some playful resistance from Winne throwing his bones around the room. According to Redman and Orton, on September 30, 1858 and into the next day, 109 bones fell in 18 hours of time in broad daylight on the piazza by the office, where four ladies who were in the office came out to witness it: "All of us then watched to the best of our ability, for about half an hour, during which time the bones continued to fall at intervals, and as we passed into the office through the hall, more came there, striking some of the ladies" (364). Then after they retired inside, bones continued to fall on the floor, chairs, and table, apparently rematerializing near the ceiling while Orton attempted to discover where they were coming from. After the testimony from Orton in the text, Redman gave his own statement: "I was promised by Cornelius, that all the bones should be brought, and that after they were wired together, he would move them about, that the public might see and know his power" (374). But apparently that would never happen because Winne refused to complete the task, saying "These fokes are makin a terrible fus about my cummin back, and tho' I knowed it wouldn't do you any good at the start, I see I am doin' you more hurt nor good" (374). Winne is referring to the bad press that Redman was receiving for this new "spiritual manifestation." Redman dismisses claims of fraud by asserting "I have been perfectly passive" through all of it (373). So ends the drama, leaving the dream of making the

marionette unfulfilled. I want to make it clear that I see this as a performance and narrative authored by a White medium making use of Blackness, not an actual performance of a Black spirit, and as such, it is a horrifying violation of the Black dead. I recount the story in these pages in order to reveal a striking literalization of the racial metaphysics of Spiritualist material performance.

In telling this story, I do not want to support an ontology that associates Blackness with objecthood but to point out its centrality in the Spiritualist imaginary. Reportedly in the months that followed, Winne visited J.H. Conant in Boston and a medium cited in the *Banner of Light* as Mrs. P. in Collinsville, CN on June 14, 1858. The author describes his interest in the "antics" displayed by Winne, "in violation of the commonly-received notions of gravitation" (*Banner of Light* 3.13, 8). The medium apparently was frightened by a spirit, and "tried to shrink back from an unpleasant spirit controlling her." She exclaimed "Oh, it is a great negro!" who gave his name as Winne. Then, after the medium accepted the presence of the Black spirit in her body, "The medium was made to perform remarkable feats of strength. She would smite the table repeatedly with her fist with sufficient force to break the bones of the hand, in a normal condition. Her arms were then extended, and made so rigid that a strong man was unable to bend them, although several present tried it. The medium is a small woman" (8). This séance confirms J.H. Conant's claim (as discussed in the beginning of the chapter) that Black spirits were more material than White ones. Mrs. P.'s performance was an implicit test of Whiteness in that this physical strength seemed too much for her small body, but when she disconnected from her body, blending with the spirit seemed to give her superhuman powers.

While these narratives depict the Black spirit as a resource for White mediums to perform physical mediumship, the three moments of protest from Cornelius Winne are significant (the spirit commenting on being treated as a writing pad, the corpse grabbing the knife, and the spirit throwing bones around the room) because they raise the issue of Black personhood and agency. Take the statement: "Don't make my skin into a hide!" which halted the performance by throwing a wrench in the representational flow. The "brush of discourse," in Hortense Spillers terminology, was a tool to protect White subjects from the taint of their own bodies or materiality, but in this case, language was turned around. The corpse spoke up from a position of dead "flesh." Cases like these reveal why literalization is important to think about: Literalization seems to take the magic out of White-authored representation or amplify it to the point of overperformance or absurdity. Surely, on multiple levels the stories in this chapter invested in Whiteness, but they also laid bare the violent terms of racial representation, and for this reason, they help us see what might be glossed over in histories of mainstream Spiritualism.

4. White Unconsciousness in Confronting the Real Black Other

To return to my central claim, Spiritualist mediums frequently employed Whiteness as a spiritual technology used to manage the racialized material world. Significantly, White mediums often performed unconsciously in order to display an affective break between the White self and Black objects they faced. This unconsciousness is one key characteristic of the feminization of mediumship (as passivity), which seemed to offer a kind of illusory barrier (a veil, one could say, as Du Bois discusses the White/Black binary) between White and Black, a veil that often hid

the reality of enslavement and anti-Black violence from White consciousness. In 1856, an adolescent girl named Mary Comstock, staying with a prominent Spiritualist family in Rochester NY, confronted Frederick Douglass with an image supposedly drawn by spirits on her arm. As the medium Emma Hardinge Britten reported:

> On examining the young woman's arm, Mrs. Burtis discovered that the red lines corruscated upon it had formed into a distinct and beautifully represented picture of a kneeling man, with a woolly head and African cast of features, a chain round his waist terminating in two balls, which were ingeniously fitted into the veins at the bend of the arm, whilst above the whole was written in fine characters the words, "A POOR OLD SLAVE." Perhaps a stranger scene could hardly be imagined than that quiet garden arbor presented. The immobile aspect of the medium, gazing indifferently at the mystery wrought in her own organization; the dark-hued stranger regarding with obviously intense emotion this touching memento of the beloved and martyred dead (196-7).

The image would have been seen as a reference to the Wedgewood seal that had become an icon for the English and American abolitionist movements, an illustration of a slave kneeling to pray and the words “Am I not a man and a brother?” Here, however, the words do not speak to a common humanity, but rather frame slavery as a pitiful, fixed state, like Elizabeth Denton’s image of an object in the shape of a man, or even a desirable state like J.H. Conant’s depiction of slavery as the doorway to heaven. Comstock was reportedly illiterate, having no understanding of the image’s significance or of Douglass’s identity, which her Spiritualist audience took as proof that she could not be producing the image herself. She even began the encounter by pointing at Douglass and using a racial slur. Conant used this behavior, which was naturalized by the culture of anti-Black racism in the United States, to strengthen her irresponsibility for the drawing. If a medium stood too far behind the words they communicated, one could argue that the medium was likely the author. This created a situation in which mediums performed

contradictory gestures constantly, either from an ignorant or unconscious state. It is significant that Spiritualist sources do not quote Douglass's response. The contradictory, unsympathetic displays of White mediums, I can only imagine, were difficult to respond to. As an aside, free-love Spiritualist Victoria Woodhull ran for President of the United States in 1872 and claimed Douglass as her running mate without his consent. This is to say that White female Spiritualists frequently made use of Black figures without considering them as people at all.

Spirit mediums provide a literal example of what many did metaphorically in nineteenth-century discourse: they obsessively called Black spirits into White spaces to question their place not only in the social world, but in a spiritual chain of existence, where Blackness was relegated to the bottom of the hierarchy alongside matter. These mediums were divided against themselves as the rule of the performance, being supposedly unconscious of what they spoke and how they acted. They often professed beliefs for and against slavery at once, speaking not as people but rather as surfaces of appearance and contestation for multiple spirits to speak through. While Comstock performed with her body, she made her White skin into a canvas or a slate (slate-writing being a popular mode of spirit communication at the time), such that the artist drawing on her arm was the one sympathetic to the slave, and not her. In this way, Comstock's performance implicitly supported anti-Black racism while citing the abolitionist cause.

I want to point out that while the unconsciousness of the medium supported the racial metaphysics I have been discussing in this chapter (deeming White people as transcendent and Black spirits as material), Comstock's performance also made the racial meaning stumble through literalization, what I think of as an overperformance of the

spiritual technology attributed to feminine Whiteness. In more specific terms, the image on Comstock's arm could be seen as an enactment of racial violence in reverse: It almost looks like branding (a horrific practice of enslavement), but painless, supernatural marking of skin that would disappear after a short time (demonstrating a magical power of White skin). In this way, her skin became the material surface of the Spiritualist project in order to display the Black object. This is by no means a counternarrative to the racial terms of mediumship, but more like a crossing of wires because she is the material surface and the Black image the spiritual sign.

As I discussed in the introduction, I have chosen to focus primarily on White spirit mediums because I find their "physical manifestations" to be revealing of the White tendency to appropriate a racially othered materiality from a sense of dislocation or disembodiment. I want to repeat that in this chapter, I have mainly been discussing imaginary Black figures that White mediums produced. Black Spiritualists tended to have a very different orientation toward the spirit world. Erin E. Forbes has recently argued that Harriet Jacobs' autobiographical novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* must be seen in the context of Spiritualism. Not only did Jacobs find herself in the company of some of the most prominent Spiritualist and Quaker abolitionists in Rochester, NY (Amy and Isaac Post, Lydia Marie Child) when she escaped to the North, but her story presents a radical approach to spirit against the spirit of the White subject. For Jacobs, "Haunting is not a convenient abstract metaphor for describing the horrors of enslaved life. And Jacobs regards the dead as neither absent nor silent. Instead, ghosts are key actors in her collectivist vision of social life and political agency" (468). Forbes looks at the many instances of death in Jacobs' narrative, and the feeling that her protagonist, Linda Brent,

is propelled onward by her kin on the other side. This is a very different sense of materializing the dead than the examples of mediumship in this dissertation. There is no obsessive search for spirit in matter, but rather a sense of rebellious groundedness in a collectivized life and afterlife (which had been overdetermined by the social death of enslavement). There is a reason that there were so few Black participants in the movement. As I mentioned in the introduction, there were a few prominent Black Spiritualists including Rebecca Cox Jackson (Shaker Eldress and visionary), Harriet E. Wilson (author of *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*), Sojourner Truth, and Paschal Beverly Randolph (whom I will discuss in the third chapter). It is important to recognize their leadership in the face of anti-Black thinking that pervaded the movement. My project is different from Kucich and Forbes, however, in that I do not seek to fix the wrong of Spiritualist racial practices and exclusions by writing an inclusive history. The significance of spirit communication within Black communities has not been my focus because I am trying to understand the ongoing violence of an implicitly White-centered spirituality. Comparing Mary Schindler and Harriet Jacobs, for example, reveals completely different goals and methods: The White medium chastises an unruly wooden pointer to test the assumed Whiteness of the afterlife while the Black medium collaborates with the dead to fight for her own freedom and survival. White Spiritualists, as I see it, were under the spell of the spiritual promises and contradictions of the mythic White subject, and their mediumship often resulted in contradictory gestures to test the boundary of Whiteness.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the performances of mediumship depicted in this chapter were implicitly racialized in the sense that Whiteness (as transcendence) was employed as a practical orientation to manage and test the ability for White actors to contain Blackness (as matter or material force). Black spirits were not the only supposedly hyper-material spirits, but White mediums saw them as the most extreme, particularly surrounding the Civil War. As one Black spirit channeled by J.H. Conant commented "there's black ghosts and white ghosts," and as another spirit observed, "De Lord Almighty fixes white folks" for Black spirits "to talk through," framing White women as mediators or doorways who were implicitly performing a kind of racial reconciliation (*Banner of Light* 10.1, 6). Another Black spirit in Conant's circle named John commented: "if light is one side, there must be a dark side, too. That's the reason, I suppose, why God made" Black people, "They are the dark side" (*Banner of Light* 9.13, 6). Racial thinking infused conversations about moral and aesthetic darkness/lightness and spirit/matter in Spiritualist circles. Even if abolitionist mediums like Conant sought racial equality in the afterlife, the metaphysical racial hierarchy (rooted in Darwinism and biocentric racism) was seemingly hard to escape.

To return to Collins and Ramon's mediumship in 2020, performance contexts have changed in the last century, but the gesture of White people reaching out to the Black dead has remained attractive because of what it seems to offer White people, to put it crudely, the opportunity to play with the dead without consideration of the ethical demands of White personhood. George Floyd was not objectified in the same way that these nineteenth-century spirits were made into objects, and yet the spectacle made of his body can be seen to share a certain quality with these séances. Somehow these White

spirit mediums felt the need to continually pose the question: Do Black people have spirits? Do they go to heaven? In the wake of the Black Lives Matter uprising across the country and the globe, I hope that my analysis can help expose the innerworkings of performance practices that bolster Whiteness by engaging with figures of Black death.

I contend that a literalizing gesture could have the effect of deepening the racial terms of a performance (the association of Blackness with matter, for example), but literalization could also expose the implicit racial frame and make racial assumptions fail through a kind of overperformance. As I discussed in the introduction, Daniel Cottom has suggested that the primary reason that Spiritualists were so radical was that their thinking was simply too literal in making spirits materialize. As Cottom put it, "tables were burdened with a responsibility no one had ever before dreamed they might have. Their dignity was in question: their *human* integrity" (766). In a sense, the table was becoming human. I have delayed talking about the table (which will be in the fourth chapter) because I have attempted to center more clearly racialized object performances before turning to seemingly neutral ones (I will discuss a spirit machine in the following chapter, and then the table). It is striking to me that Cottom discusses tables becoming human without considering the "total objectification" of slavery (Spillers) and the ideological weight of the efforts to make Black people become human (Jackson). As Cox and Castronovo have made clear, enslavement and race were deeply concerning to White Spiritualists. I have tried to show that racial thinking happened implicitly as well as explicitly in séances, and that the implicit meaning often bolstered explicit representations like the Sambo character. Spirit mediums made Black objects perform the assumption, as Cox put it, that race is the spiritual core of identity. As the next chapters

will reveal in more detail, literalizing Whiteness sometimes made the racial metaphysics stumble (as Comstock's spiritual branding did in a small way). While technology and sexuality were backgrounded to the racial thinking in these first two chapters, the following chapters expose how spirit mediums experimented at the intersection of sex and race through the logics of female reproduction and technological production.

Chapter Three:
Instrumentalizing the Womb

In November of 1852, John Murray Spear received a message (written with his own hand while in a trance) from the spirit of Benjamin Franklin and a group of spirits he called the "Association of Electrizers" announcing the imminent "birth" of a living machine called the "New Motive Power." The spirits, he reported, would provide the instructions for how to build it. Spear and a small group of followers assembled a machine on High Rock Tower in Lynn, Massachusetts. Constructed on top of a round wooden table, with metal pillars, plates, copper wires and magnetic spheres, it was intended to be a perpetual motion machine, and the source of endless free energy. Spear and his followers claimed that the machine would truly come to life, for it was not just modeled after human anatomy, with its metal lungs, heart, and legs. It was "modelized" over a nine-month gestation period, Spear insisted, by the spirits to create a new beyond-human anatomy.

Modelizing, for Spear, meant carrying out directions from the spirits that had never been performed before on Earth, bringing forth knowledge in the doing. And, significantly, he thought of this process as combining the powers of biological reproduction with technological production. As Spear described the process of inventing the "electrical infant:" the idea of the machine "will not, perhaps, at first ripen into words; but in a more advanced condition, it passes into acts or elaborations. That is, what is called an *idea* takes to itself *form,* and it is a *child,* an *offspring*" (238). For Spear, modelizing was the practice of inventing something through physical movements and processes, disregarding ontological boundaries between different kinds of entities

(human, object, concept, word, spirit) and without clear knowledge of what the end-result would be. Spear was the one who delivered the instructions to his followers, so in practice, he was the agent behind the project, but he did not see it that way. As S.C. Hewitt, the editor of his first published text as a medium clarifies, "he was only the PASSIVE MEDIUM…He is not, of course, to be held responsible for the sentiments of these discourses, for he is not their author" (*Messages from the Superior State* vii). Spirit mediumship in general was a mode of anti-authorship. Modelizing was a mode of mediumship that combined anti-authorship with a kind of vital materialism, placing human actors on a level plane with materials as instruments in the hands of spirits. The spirits, Spear insisted, designed the machine in an effort to help humans discover something their minds could not yet comprehend—the materiality of the immaterial. In the words of Spear, the spirits brought awareness to the truth that "all spirit is matter, though the material of the one is much finer than that of the other" (154).

Spear was writing at a time when the concepts matter and spirit were undergoing a transformation as a result of discoveries in the physical sciences regarding electricity and magnetism—Michael Faraday's invention of the electric motor in 1831 and Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in 1844, his first message sent over the wires being "What hath God wrought?" (Sconce 21). Invisible forces seemed to be becoming more and more tangible and subject to human agency while at the same time the material substrates of production less tangible. It is unsurprising that Spiritualists called the Fox sisters the "inventors of the spiritual telegraph" and many spirit mediums took Benjamin Franklin as their spirit guide, for Spiritualists understood electricity to be the actual substance of spirit. What I seek to understand in this chapter is how a correspondence

between material and spiritual realms was conceived of and acted upon through the combination of human biology and technology.

Returning to the central question of the dissertation: How did Spiritualism operate as a philosophy of performance to overcome or respond to difference, where one form of difference (spirit/matter) anchored others (White/Black, settler/Indian, feminine/masculine, present/past, powerful/powerless)? In the first chapter, I looked at how White mediums evoked Indian spirits as material/spiritual resources within the land, and in the second chapter, I focused on how mediums made Black spirits into performing objects, each of these case studies displaying what I think of as literalization—taking the terms of conventional racial representation and enacting them through touch, excavation, consumption, dissection, or puppetry, thereby collapsing the divide between matter and meaning. In these chapters, I argued that literalization uniquely exposed the implicit raciality of the spirit/matter binary. Sexuality figured into this analysis because feminine Whiteness was often seen as the highest form of transcendent Whiteness, and because of the association between femininity and passivity, female mediums became the mediators between racial difference. Now, after establishing the racial dynamics at play in spiritual matter, I hope to bring the sexual dimension center stage. In this chapter, I attend to how heterosexual coupling structured two mediums' efforts to produce spiritual matter, and I reveal the implicit racial structure at play in these sexual dramas.

Spear's anthropomorphic description of his machine demonstrates a logic that many scholars have considered to be representational error, namely taking a spiritual metaphor too literally. In contrast, I contend that literalization should be taken seriously as a performance philosophy because the term captures a range of different ways of

representing alongside or against metaphorical flow. For example, when Spear spoke of the machine's human parentage, he was not speaking in metaphor. As he clarified: "Not only must the human minds be sketched, modelized, but it were impossible to proceed in a labor so critical without drawing attention to the generative organs" ("Of the Electric Motor" 9). Drawing attention to the generative organs, I hope to show, was a way of resisting the flow of meaning *about* reproduction, rather attempting to produce something *with* the organs (a kind of perverse birth) through touch, ritual combinations, and choreographies of movement. The movements and actions of the metal spheres and wires were "wombonic" (a word Spear invented), not because they were like the womb, but they were intimately connected to one in the repertoires he facilitated. As Daryl Caterine has argued, "Spear's drama with the New Motor reflects the fact that these comparisons were not metaphorical, but understood literally: electricity and human thoughts were two distinct but analogous and even interchangeable forms of subtle matter" (383). Spear's logic, I contend, is a bit more perplexing than simply taking a metaphor too literally. As discussed previously, Daniel Cottom has argued that the primary reason that Spiritualism was so radical in the nineteenth century was the fact that Spiritualist activities upset the "organization of meaning," specifically "linguistic as well as other social and ideological relations" (776). What I see in Spear's description is indeed a reordering of meaning—not using the womb as a metaphor for invention, but inventing by drawing attention to an actual womb in performance, a process that I hope to make clear in the analysis of this chapter.

As I proposed in the introduction, Spiritualist treatments of matter must be taken in the context of three separate, but related sets of power relations: Black enslavement,

Indian genocide, and the sexual subjugation of women. "The new religion of whiteness" that Du Bois described at the close of the nineteenth century was about investing in White transcendence against hyper-material racial others. This gesture created a crisis of disembodiment at the heart of Whiteness—a crisis that sometimes led White people to enact metaphysical or magical operations inspired by blending or resolving racial difference. For example, Spear's entire project was oriented toward the two goals of creating sexual and racial equality, abolishing both marriage and slavery. Spear intended his machine to "redeem the race from the drudgery of physical toil" (252), referring to the human race, but implying those who bore the burden of labor and materiality in the United States: enslaved Americans. As Joseph Laycock put it, "Spear's followers believed that a free energy source would make slavery unnecessary and bring about a socialist paradise on earth" (64). Significantly, Spear's secret sexual rituals capitalized on the power of combining racial difference, essentially fixing the world through amalgamation, an idea that was played out more fully by one of Spear's early followers, African American sex magician and Rosicrucian Paschal Beverly Randolph.

The reason that Spear and Randolph were marginalized within the Spiritualist movement is the reason that I take them as central thinkers when it comes to Spiritualist materialism: They were hyper-literal and practical, and their literalness exposed conditions that other mediums acted upon less consciously or openly. As discussed in the introduction, the two regimes of meaning that spirit mediums disordered were scientific materialism (where matter was assumed inanimate) and a Protestant Christian notion of spirit (as elevated above matter and sexuality). Spear and Randolph upset these orders of meaning in a more extreme way than mainstream Spiritualists by elevating matter and

explicitly sexualizing spirit. Cathy Gutierrez captures this central tension: "The production of ontological uncertainty, far from being the desired outcome of the early Spiritualist seance, stood as its antithesis" (3). In other words, the unsettling of concepts like matter, spirit, and the human was not the goal of Spiritualist practices, but an unintended consequence. This is one way of thinking about implicit as opposed to explicit meaning: What is implicit in performance often gets communicated unconsciously, viscerally, or accidently, but that does not make it meaningless; it can be more powerful because it motivates action without being on the surface of a show or in the content of communication. I suggest that Spear and Randolph made the ontological uncertainty born of Spiritualist premises painfully clear, and for that reason we should attend to their theories and performances. Significantly, like Cristine Ferguson, Gutierrez highlights the often overlooked role of Spiritualists in developing "eugenic doctrines of sexual reproduction, and occult raciology" (2). No one did this more overtly than Spear and Randolph. By their contemporaries, Spear and Randolph were often described as fools or sexual deviants, and so they have often been cast aside as mis-performers. By contrast, I see Spear and Randolph as over-performers in the sense that they exposed implicit assumptions that the wider movement held but could not speak about openly.

In this chapter, I focus on Spear's idea of "modelizing" and Randolph's notion of "blending," which were two attempts to fill the gap between spirit and matter. Spear made himself extremely passive in order to incorporate vital materialism into his practice and conversely, Randolph practiced "blending" in order to transform and elevate the human body on a molecular level. Through these techniques, they exposed the underlying dynamic of the Spiritualist movement more broadly: That seeking spirit in matter in the

nineteenth century was implicitly a sexualized and racialized gesture. Ultimately, I contend that both Spear and Randolph literalized Whiteness by acting upon the assumption that feminine Whiteness was the gateway to spiritual and material transformation.

1. The New Motor and John Murray Spear's "Modelizing" Process

As discussed in the first chapter, John Murray Spear became a medium in 1851, and continued throughout the nineteenth century to carry out the instructions of spirits in different experiments, inventions, and an excavation of a lost Indian civilization. I now return to his most iconic invention, the "New Motor." Spear envisioned his New Motor as "God's last, best gift to mankind" to help heal the world by doing away with racial and sexual inequality and providing enough energy to fuel trains, ships, and industrializing projects. In this section, I show how Spear attempted to demystify the female womb in his process of invention, and how sexual coupling was instrumental in his idea of "modelizing."

Spear's materialism was rooted in a perceived equivalence between the human body and nonhuman materials, and he expected to find power in their combination. According to a description of the New Motor published by Spear and Alonzo Newton (one of Spear's followers and the editor of the Spiritualist periodicals *New Era, New-England Spiritualist*, and *The Spiritual Age*), Spear first attempted to charge the motor by giving his own bodily electricity to the machine, donning a costume "composed of a combination of metallic plates, strips, and bands, etc., positive and negative in their relations; and including at proper locations, some of the precious metals, jewels and other

minerals alleged to enter prominently into the constitution of the human body" (245). Spear was not versed in electrical science but believed himself to be directed by Benjamin Franklin and his "Association of Electrizers" in the spirit world. Spear touched the machine and was directed by the spirits "to submit himself to an operation, the precise nature and purposes of which were at the time designedly concealed" (245). While we cannot know the exact details of this "operation," one of the witnesses reported seeing "a stream of light, a sort of umbilicum, emanating (from the encased person) to and enveloping the mechanism" (245). Historian John B. Buescher has described the stream of energy as a "spiritual ejaculate" (113). After all of his efforts, the apparatus did not move, and Spear and his followers came to believe that female "magnetism" was the missing element. A note on sources, what we know about Spear's rituals largely come from the writings of Spear himself, mostly spirit communications that he dictated while in a trance to his followers, and the Spiritualist press reporting on these activities (besides Alonzo Newton, most editors found these activities rather ridiculous). Thanks to Spear's biographer, John Buescher, we have a sketch of what Spear's life looked like: He may have been one of the most earnest mediums of the time, believing himself to be fully under the control of spirits for most of his adult life. This is one of the reasons I am drawn to him, his complete earnestness and dedication to a goal that seemed out of place or illogical for a number of reasons. As I see it, he dramatically meant to redraw the order of meaning that relegated women and Black Americans to the lowest rungs of the social ladder. And significantly, he did so by choreographing a sex ritual between humans and materials. I hope to show why he made this choice.

One of Spear's female followers was called "The New Mary" because it was she, the group claimed, who spiritually gave birth to the machine. For the nine-month building period, she reportedly exhibited physical signs of pregnancy, and when the time came, she climbed the hill to High Rock Tower. When in the presence of the machine, she performed as if going through labor, and Spear and Newton reported, "her own perceptions were clear and distinct that in these agonizing throes the most interior and refined elements of her spiritual being were imparted to, and absorbed by, the appropriate portions of the mechanism" (245). Spear reported that these pains lasted for two hours, after which some witnesses reported seeing dangling magnets on the machine move. The pulsations would increase when she moved close to it, "thus indicating that the mechanism had been brought into such a state as to be susceptible to the action of human magnetism" (246). On the surface, this may have looked like a woman in a spiritual trance (which at this time was rather common in New England), but unlike scenes like the Shaker possessions (from the 1830s and 40s, when young women would dance wildly under spirit influence), or mainstream Spiritualist séances or speeches (where mediums delivered orations in trance at tables or podiums), this performance had a wordless bodily rhythm to it, the rhythm of a female body and nothing else. There was no spirit communication to quote, just the pulsations and releases of a body in the pains of what looked like physical labor. It was as if the actions of her womb, as Spear would say, could affect all of the surrounding elements (and hopefully the machine). I can imagine that Spear's followers watched her with wonder as she moved about in these "agonizing throes" and then longingly at the machine, that reportedly fulfilled their wish for animation. I imagine that Spear was watching for there is no mention of Spear in this

performance, but as he notes in his private writings, there was much that he needed to keep secret (particularly the sexual acts involved in his rituals). At the top of this hill, overlooking Nahat Bay from a great height, this was a purely American nativity.

Though the woman's name was never published by witnesses, Buescher came to the conclusion that the woman must have been Sarah Newton, Alonzo's wife, and this is supported by the claim made by Daniel Douglass Home in 1877 that the New Mary was "Mrs. A.E. N____ of Boston" (261). "The New Mary" stood in for the reproductive powers of the womb, and as such, she did not need to be identified as a single woman, but was thought to embody the "finest and purest" female principle of life: the virgin mother. Spear and his followers likened the miraculous birth to a second-coming of Christ, and emphasized how the motor was indeed alive. In the words of the spirits (presumably the "Association of Electrizers"), as spoken through Spear and transcribed by Newton:

> Unto your Earth a child is born. Its name shall be called the ELECTRICAL MOTOR. It is the offspring of mind,—of the union of mind with matter impregnated by invisible elements. It is to *move* the moral, scientific, philosophic, and religious worlds… It (the mechanism) is now thoroughly, electrically, magnetically, chemically, spiritually, and celestially, impregnated. It needs material care, like other new-born babes. It hungers for that nourishment on which it can feed, and by which it can expand and grow (248).

Mary's immaculate conception provided the perfect comparison because Spear believed in a kind of sex that transcended human boundaries; if God and a human could create a child so could the spirits, with the right materials.

Critics compared the machine to Frankenstein's monster, and while this was a dismissal, the comparison is revealing. Mary Shelley's fictional monster was created out of a fascination with Galvanism and the discovery of "animal electricity" in the late

eighteenth century. Significantly, Shelley's novel contemplated reproduction through male agency. Shelley described her dream that led to the writing of the story: "I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion" (Ingpen 109). This image captures an anxiety that coexisted alongside nineteenth-century technophilia, namely the possibility that men could play God and create life without the influence of female reproduction. The difference between Spear's performance and Shelley's story was, in addition to Spear's earnestness and literalness, Spear's interest in replicating birth through minerals and heterosexual combination, which was a sexual orientation beyond human flesh and against human death and decay. But I want to note that both Spear and Shelley were responding to a crisis within White Anglophone modernity: The sense that industrialization and the mechanization of life could lead to both advancement and unspeakable violence and horror. As an aside, *Frankenstein* had a specific meaning in the United Kingdom due to Luddite activists, anti-industrial or anti-automation textile workers, who made the human costs of mechanized labor visible. Throughout this dissertation, I will be tracking fears of automation and animated matter alongside fantasies of progress, for this is what I feel haunts White modernity—that matter and all of her rejected, oppressed conspirators (based on race, class, and sex) could rise up.

Spear, in contrast to Shelley, had rose-colored glasses when it came to "modernity" and industrialization, believing that matter was imbued with the same reproductive "magnetism" existing in humans, and could create a new utopian order. In contrast to the spiritual messiah, Spear's machine was intended to be the "physical"

savior, born to illuminate and help humans reap the rewards of powers within matter, what would amount to practical proof and use of spirit.

> THE THING MOVES!…And this new motive power is to lead the way in the great speedily-coming salvation. It is to be the physical Saviour of the race. The history of its inception, its various stages of progress, and its completion, will show the world a most beautiful and significant analogy to the advent of Jesus as the spiritual Saviour of the race. . .Hence we most confidently assert that the advent of the science of all sciences, the philosophy of all philosophies, and the art of all arts has now fairly commenced. The child is born; not long hence he will go alone (qtd. in Home 262, Britten 222).

"The thing moves!" could almost be a direct quote from *Frankenstein*, and because the narrative was established theatrical property at this time (being produced in London to great acclaim in 1823 and soon after in Paris and New York), Spear's statement would have drawn this connection. The "electrical infant" only produced a few pulsations of the appendages (something "half vital" as Shelley put it, not fully alive), and Spear's promise remained unfulfilled. Because of rumors of ritual sex accompanying the machine's construction, locals in Lynn, Massachusetts began to protest and the group moved the machine to Randolph, NY where an angry mob reportedly "tore out the heart of the mechanism, trampled it beneath their feet, and scattered it to the four winds," in the words of Spear (qtd. in Brittan 397-398). This end sounds like a ritual sacrifice worthy of a god.

The New Motor was given a great deal of negative attention in the Spiritualist press. While Spear had a few champions, most Spiritualists considered it to be an embarrassing failure and published accounts of the story to warn of the dangers of a too-practical or too-physical Spiritualism. The famous medium Daniel Douglas Home called the project an "extraordinary display of human folly" (260). Emma Hardinge Britten commented "The prurient mind, stimulated by the awkward and most injudicious claims

of a human parentage for a material machine, indulged in scandalous and even atrocious rumors, whose effect have marked the parties concerned so injuriously that it requires the most unprejudiced consideration of the real facts of the case to disrobe it of its dark and obnoxious features," namely the rumors of sex and the machine's human parentage (221). Once it was disrobed (or cleansed of sexuality), it could look like another practical experiment in communicating with spirits (like Koons electrical table, for instance). The "dark" features of the machine, however they upset outsiders, were key to Spear's project. Near the end of his career as a spirit medium, he insisted: "the human structure should be discoursed of, until the relations which naturally exist between the sexes shall be thoroughly understood" ("Of Education"). He was not alone in this goal, for nineteenth-century scientists found sexuality, particularly female sexuality and reproduction, mysterious, but developments in embryology were beginning to unfold the workings of the womb (Karl Ernst von Baer, the first person to study actual human ova, published his treatise in 1827). While Spear produced a great deal of language on the principles of sex, he was proudly no scientist or philosopher, rather a man performing actions (guided by unseen spirits) that were meant to unfold knowledge in the doing.

Spear's discussion of sex was not altogether taboo, but his interest in combining human sex with material invention was a twist of the common discourse. As Michel Foucault has influentially argued (against the "repressive hypothesis," the idea that sexuality was repressed in this era), discourse surrounding sexuality increased in the nineteenth century. Through the rise of medical, juridical, and psychological institutions (developed to manage reproduction), sexuality became linked with truth itself. Knowledge of and confession about sex were seen to hold the ultimate truth of the self.

Foucault reveals the specific terms of power that made sex meaningful in this way. In his words, "Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke *of* sexuality and *to* sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target" (147). To speak *to* sexuality could look like anti-"perversion" legislation or population control, and significantly, the rise of eugenics, which, as Cristin Ellis has poignantly argued, was one of the core doctrines developed through Spiritualism. As she argues, Spiritualist racial biologism was an "an attempt to quarantine privileged populations from the illiberal taint of their own materiality" (5). In this context, Spear's obsession with exploring the secrets of sex and designing the future of "the race" or "the species" was certainly in line with his mainstream contemporaries. Spear was not alone in his interest in sexual reform.

He did something unique, however, in the way he combined the sexual act with technological innovation. Magnetism was the key concept that structured his performances, namely a magnetism that was understood as the bridge between spirit and matter, as well as the power produced through heterosexual combination. Here is Spear's explanation of magnetism's centrality in producing the New Motor:

> Let that model mechanism be examined: there will be found the masculine minerals, and the feminine minerals; there also will be found the magnetism which answers to the sexual intercommunication. And from this marriage of the masculine with the feminine, aided by the flowing magnetic currents, there must be a new birth, which may be called motion. It will correspond to the first wombomic motion which universally follows sexual intercommunication. Hence, this little mechanism has been appropriately denominated a child — a babe — just about to enter into activity (*The Educator* 192).

In this passage, magnetic attraction stands in for heterosexual attraction. Spear thought of the magnetic force involved in reproduction not in metaphorical terms, but in a practical sense, where magnetism actually was the attraction that led to the sex act, a sex act that

would alter the world. Significantly, he did not see an ontological difference between humans and matter, so this must be seen as a literalization of terms that were treated metaphorically in the broader culture. As an aside, only very recently has "object sexuality" been recognized as a sexual orientation (when people have intimate relations with nonhuman beings like buildings, carnival rides, or monuments). This brings a whole new meaning to American technophilia, revealing a persistent taboo regarding nonhuman sexuality.

When we look at Spiritualist critics of Spear, it becomes clear that their main objection was how he dealt with materials in his experiments. In a sense, he made spirit vulgar by attending so carefully to material agency, and by alluding to nonhuman sexual reproduction. Andrew Jackson Davis had interest in Spear's project and visited the machine while it was under construction. He commented upon the unique logic of the affair:

> They invest the very materialism of the mechanism with principles of interpretation which give out an emanation of religious feeling altogether new in the development of scientific truth. Each wire is precious, sacred, as a spiritual verse. Each plate of zinc and copper is clothed with symbolized meanings, corresponding throughout with the principles and parts involved in the living human organism (qtd. in Britten 223).

This is an example of what I think of as Spear's process of literalization: touching and treating these materials in a way that would unlock their meaning or purpose. In doing so, he interacted with materials without elevating himself to the level of ideas or design. Spear could travel back and forth between matter and meaning, and that was what made his experiment a radical representational practice. Davis did not condone Spear's project, for while he suggested that the machine was indeed "a demonstration of the fact of spiritual intercourse" it could never be what Spear intended it, proof "that spirits [who

were once men] can overstep the boundaries of human intuition and reason, and give us light which we cannot obtain by the proper means" (qtd. in Britten 225). The proper means would have been either the well-worn repertoire of spirit communication, orderly sitting around a table and conversing with spirits through an instrument (like the séance table or a writing slate), or, conversely, having a vision and recording it. Davis's harmonial philosophy was based upon his own visions of the spirit world (mimicking or, some suggest, plagiarizing Emmanuel Swedenborg's visions from the eighteenth century). Davis could not take Spear's proposition seriously: That spirits could create a new source of life by capitalizing on powers within matter, and in such a disorderly way. On the other hand, Emma Hardinge Britten's mainstream Spiritualism could not bear the overtly sexual aspect of Spear's invention. The two problems were folded into each other, for matter's agency and sexual reproduction composed the underside of abundant Spiritualist discourse regarding the elevated realm of spirits. In other words, to be sexual and to be material became overlapped.

It was through what I call material performance, the carrying-out of a ritualized construction process in collaboration with materials, that Spear investigated the sexual nature of matter. And this was unacceptable to mainstream Spiritualists for two reasons: 1) His actions elevated matter, and 2) Physicalized spirit through sex and materials. These were reverse but connected gestures of manifesting spiritual matter. Mainstream Spiritualist rituals often placed material objects center stage, but Spiritualist texts frequently underplayed the significance of matter's agency. In other words, mainstream Spiritualists wanted to look through performing objects like the table (to communicate through them) instead of directly with them. This is a key point that will return

throughout the dissertation: To look through an object as an instrument allows one to accept, with limitations, a vital materialist position, but to look directly at and interact with matter, as Spear did, was considered irrational or inappropriate for it was a practical engagement with nonhuman agency.

Spear's theory of spirit-led performance, "modelizing," was about combining biological movements with technological innovation. Spear was clearly inspired by nineteenth-century technophilia surrounding such inventions as the telegraph, the camera, and John Ericsson's "breathing ship" with a "caloric" engine that increased coal efficiency (Beuscher, "Revisiting John Murray Spear" 10). Spear, inspired by the seemingly magical capacity for these inventions to produce images, sound, and movement out of thin air, attempted to enter the space of materializing technologies without knowledge of engineering or scientific principles. He was proudly no scientist, calling himself merely a "passive medium," but a man devoted to scientism (an exaggerated trust in the scientific method that applied to every area of investigation). As Lawrence Moore has observed regarding the movement more broadly: "leading spiritualists held a childlike faith in empirical science as the only approach to knowledge. They tried to emulate the scientific method; more important, they copied and helped popularize scientific language" (7). Significantly, Spear connected physics with the human sciences. Through his interest in reproduction, we can see Spear as responding to advances in embryology and early ideas of human evolution. There are a few representational moves that Spear had to make to get to his technological/biological overlap: Electricity was elided with spirit, which in turn became elided with the invisible powers of reproduction. Spear was not unique in drawing this chain of connection.

Female biology and electricity, for example, were central discourses deployed by Spiritualists and anti-Spiritualists alike to either support the idea of female mysticism or frame Spiritualism as hysteria or female insanity. The reason that I find Spear so fascinating is that he acted on the feminization of mediumship in an extremely literal way, disordering the different spheres of social meaning that inspired him (physics, biology, engineering, etc.).

The relationship between representation and sexuality came up time and again in Spear's activities: Where symbols and bodies intermingled through acts and creative processes. Spear's spirits announced that the New Motor was meant "to unfold the grand circulatory laws; to present a model of the womb itself, so that the absorbent, conceptional, and gestational processes can be comprehended—showing all the laws of growth or expansion from the time that that condition of matter called semen is formed, ripened and deposited, until life appears" (*The Educator* 256-7). Spear considered semen to be the source of light, will-power and wisdom, encompassing "entire universes," while the female element was dark and receptive. While this sounds like an ancient, moralizing heterosexual metaphor to emphasize the power of paternity, Spear saw it differently. The dark place of the womb was, for him, the space of agency, where the design for his machine would be deposited by the spirits. Significantly, Spear and his followers persistently claimed that theirs were not merely metaphorical labors, that the child was truly alive, and the New Mary was the mother.

When we look at the unpublished writings of Spear, we see traces of things he had to keep secret which were central to his performance philosophy. In the crossed-out section of his essay "Of the Electrical Motor," he writes:

> Treading on ground so delicate it was to be expected that some casts of mind would not comprehend the purposes aimed at; hence, secret action for the time being was enjoined. Nevertheless it was felt by the ablest counsellors that the time was drawing nigh when persons could with patience listen to subjects of this sort (10).

These notes would have been written down for him and his followers alone. Through his investigations, Beuscher came to the conclusion that "John, Sarah, and others were undertaking actual, not metaphorical, sexual labors in their attempts to create the New Motor" (*The Remarkable Life* 131). Spear's private papers in the Thaddeus Sheldon archive allude to secret sexual acts confirming this conclusion. In another crossed-out section of his essay, Spear explains how the bodies performing the rituals had to be engaged:

> Not only must the human minds be sketched, modelized, but it were impossible to proceed in a labor so critical without drawing attention to the generative organs. A child to be begotten could only come into being through an electric and magnetic use of these portions of the human body. Wombonic principles, wombonic motions, wombonic forms, wombonic actions, must be so far unfolded as would tend to the illustration of electric action. The womb must, as it were, be modelized, its attractive forces illustrated ("Of the Electric Motor" 9-10).

Spear made the point that the actual female womb had to be attended to in the ritual, but he was hesitant to describe precisely how. In another personal paper, he wrote to make it clear that the sexual organs had to be engaged in this act, the spirits clarified: "When the womb of the mind is to be opened, the lower correspondent of the person must also be similarly affected" ("Of Reconstruction"). As context, free love Spiritualism was gaining ground during the 1850s, with free love conventions being held in Ohio and New York state in 1856 and 1857. Perhaps Spear was correct in his judgement that the sexual aspects of his rituals would soon be less taboo. The dual gestures of sexualizing spirit and

elevating matter, however, made his theories particularly difficult for the mainstream movement to stomach.

At the heart of this spiritual practice was a unique philosophy of material performance: A woman had to carry out the precise instructions of the spirits (as initially delivered through Spear) without knowing the inner workings of the machine, because the very doing of the actions would reveal the principles of the machine. And the machine stood in for the womb in a curious way, not as a symbolic representation, but a working model, open and unfinished. Instead of being modeled after something known to humans, the motor was a part of an active process of inventing something that had never existed before on Earth. "Modelizing" was about making manifest, what I think of as literalization in the sense of collapsing the gap between matter and meaning. The female body was the ultimate instrument to this end: "The entire material world was a model, an illustration of what it corresponded to in spirit. When the unusually sensitive woman had sex, she would be taken over by spirit operators with whom she would be in spiritual union, and she would give birth to the thought of what the machine should be" (Beuscher, *The Remarkable Life* 130). By opening up her womb, Spear insisted, the mind of the woman could receive an image of the workings of the machine. Marina Warner has argued that spirit mediums in this era were metaphorically compared to cameras, but I consider this performance to be something beyond metaphor. The New Motor's invention involved an attempt to produce knowledge through ritualized sexual acts of devising and construction. In Spear's imagination, the womb was the space where all of this valuable information would develop, specifically the womb of a White mother. The darkness of

her womb (as a mysterious interior space) was connected to the dark powers of matter, holding the spark of animacy that would make the machine move.

John Murray Spear only mentioned race explicitly in his published writings to refer to a racial equality that would come, but in his personal notes, heterosexual combination was connected to racial difference. According to Spear, a man he called "The Disenthraller" provided a necessary partner to the White woman in a sexual act to animate the machine. Here is his description of the sexual coupling necessary in the ritual to create the New Motor:

> The womb must have its seasons of desire. There could be electrical impartations, the organisms of a choice person was acted upon. A person having an unusual amount of electric power could be brought within her sphere. The Disenthraller, rough, course, lacking culture, hospitality had the elements deemed essential for this important branch of labor. At times he must be in the objective condition; must be erratic; must take into his being inordinate quantities of stimulants. Acting under impulse, that person could be made to say and do things of an extraordinary character ("Of the Electric Motor" 10).

It is unclear whether this actually took place in the way he imagined it, but the previous statement about secrecy leads me to believe that something happened in his circle that was sexually taboo. The people who played these roles were never identified in Spear's writings, but John B. Beuscher argues that Spear enlisted Paschal Beverly Randolph as the Disenthraller, a Black Spiritualist claiming ancestry from a royal lineage from Madagascar as well as Native Americans, who was known for being "erratic," using drugs and claimed to have sexual magnetism that drew women to him (*The Remarkable Life* 132). There are a number of distinctions being made between the female and male actors in the passage above: Class, racial, and sexual dimensions of this performance seemed instrumental in the magical operation being performed: the "finest" energy was

given by a White woman and complementary "erratic" energy was given by a man who represented the other in multiple ways.

It is significant that the Disenthraller must be "in the objective condition," recalling not only the idea of the medium as a passive object, but also, I suggest, a racialized notion of objecthood. The title Disenthraller framed this person as someone who had the power to liberate from bondage, and one could speculate that Randolph's reputation as a successful free Black man before Emancipation might have been significant in this role. While I cannot be certain that Randolph was the Disenthraller, there are many signs that point to his participation, for none of Spear's other followers were frequently described as "course," "rough," and "erratic," qualities that the Spiritualist press frequently credited Randolph with. Furthermore, a theory of sexual and bi-racial combination that may have inspired this ritual is more explicitly outlined in Randolph's later writings. As Randolph's biographer noted: "Spear's spirits appear to have been teaching and Spear appears to have been following a rudimentary form of sexual magic" (Deveney 18). Spear's relationship with one of his followers, Caroline Hinckley, who reportedly gave birth to a superior child, revealed Spear's interest in sexual magic. Both men were increasingly concerned with the sexual act as the means of fixing the world, and it is unsurprising given the context: In Anglophone cultures, concerns over reproduction were becoming racialized due to Darwin's theory of evolution.

To reiterate, Spear's theory of "modelizing" was about bringing the human down to the level of materials, a position that made sense coming from a White man oriented toward a utopian anti-racist and anti-sexist future. As discussed in the introduction,

because of an investment in Whiteness as transcendence, White actors like Spear have had the tendency to take up matter or objecthood (as racialized signifiers) in gestures seeking a body. Spear's use of the Disentraller can be seen as one such gesture: In his published writings, he described his own influence on the machine (donning the metal costume and spiritually imparting his "stream of light" on the machine), but in his private writings, he recognized the need for a more extreme embodiment, the ultimate other to the White woman. Without delving too much into the details of Spear's experiments after this, I want to note that Spear seemed to approach the same problem throughout his life: He saw a potentiality in matter that he approached through a sexual logic and it never quite paid off. As Spear increasingly drew away from mainstream Spiritualism, another rose, through a similar cloud of controversy, becoming one of the strongest voices for sexual occultism in the nineteenth century, Paschal Beverly Randolph. His theories of sex and matter explored what Spear barely dared to say in writing.

2. Paschal Beverly Randolph: Bi-Racial Blending and Sex as Technology

Paschal Beverly Randolph was born in New York City in 1825 to a Black woman named Flora Clark and a White "gentleman from Virginia," who Randolph identified as William Beverly Randolph, a man who abandoned him in the streets of New York (Deveney 1). His mother died when he was only five or six, and this was the moment when he remembers receiving his powers as a medium as well as his "passional," "love-starved" personality (2). He reportedly taught himself to read and write while living on the streets, and became a cabin boy in his teens, working on ships that traveled between the Americas and England. Early in the 1840s, he settled in Portland, Maine, where he

received a little education and became a barber. Throughout his life, he remained dedicated to his studies of philosophy, linguistics, theology, and occultism. As his biographer Patrick Deveney writes: "Randolph became and was recognized as a remarkably literate and even learned man…his writings reveal him to be a seer, a man who was trying to relate what he knew first-hand rather than merely recapitulating the works of his predecessors" (4). As I will show in this section, Randolph's theory of "blending" between spirits was an original, hyper-physical gesture enacted on the fringes of Spiritualism, and, I suggest, reveals the conflation of Whiteness with transcendence and Blackness with matter.

Randolph was an early follower of John Murray Spear but he broke ties with Spear over a difference in how he understood mediumship: Randolph believed in "blending" consciously with spirits where both parties were consciously co-present. Spear's mediumship and his process of "modelizing" was about being caught up in the flow of action under the influence of spirit (what amounted to unconscious, passive action). As mentioned in the previous section, this gesture made sense coming from Spear's orientation as a White man responding to a sense of crisis in his own view of the world. In contrast, "blending" was active and conscious. Randolph, as a Black man, was subject to the burdens, dangers, and fantasies of Whiteness in a very different way. To be "in the objective condition," as Spear put it, was not simply taking on power without authorship. Randolph found that being an object in the passive sense was dangerous. After a number of years in Spear's circle, Randolph had an awakening that he described as leaving a dream or freeing himself from a puppet master. Significantly, Randolph refused to be an object in Spear's plans or a passive medium to spirits in general.

This is how the two split paths: In the spring of 1855, Randolph was sent by Spear to be a missionary spreading Spiritualist ideas to England and Western Europe. Primarily, he was sent to deliver a letter to London for Robert Dale Owen's World Congress (Owen was a famous Spiritualist and Scottish-born socialist who represented Indiana in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1843-1847), but he was sent away without speaking at the conference. One can speculate that the reason for this was that Spear's reputation was tarnished in mainstream Spiritualist circles because of the New Motor, but Randolph was also becoming known in his own right as a trance lecturer, so it may have been a personal affront to Randolph or a case of racial discrimination. Randolph felt insulted and embarked on a journey that would lead him away from Spear and American Spiritualism and towards secretive magical orders of Europe. In the years that followed, he was influenced by spiritualities of the Middle East and North Africa, which eventually led him to found a Rosicrucian order in the United States. After he returned from his travels in 1858, Randolph publicly denounced Spear as a manipulative and deluded leader, particularly because of his views on free love, or the "law of affinities":

> I met John M. Spear, and he filled my brain with some Important mission which he said I had to perform. He made me believe that everything in society was corrupt and wrong. I swallowed those Ideas, and believed that I had a great work to do on earth. I discovered that my wife was not my affinity. I went round the country preaching my scandalous Impressions. I was crazy; these Ideas of radical reform made me mad. This was four or five years ago, I went to Europe, carrying my Insanity with me, and I came in contact with no one who thought as I did; and by meeting so many with sane minds, I was finally magnetized back to sanity, and returned home in a normal condition. And I became conscious that radicalism was abnormal, and its tendency was to degrade the race. It was then I said that I would abjure all radicalism, and would flee from the hell into which I had fallen ("P.B. Randolph at Washington Hall" 4).

Randolph believed that Spear was the cause of his failed marriage. The importance that Randolph placed upon the human will in magic can be seen as a response to Spear's totalitarian tendencies. Randolph believed that in his years spent with Spear as a trance lecturer, he was under the control of an evil spirit or "vampire," that "for years his speech and his every movement had been controlled" (Deveney 67). It is unclear whether the vampire he refers to is a spirit in Spear's circle of spirit guides, or Spear himself, but perhaps they amounted to the same thing, for Spear was constantly delivering instructions to his followers that he claimed were from spirits.

While Randolph broke with Spear over marriage and mediumship, they continued to share certain beliefs about sexual difference, the nature of the womb, race, and matter. Their stories also have a number of similarities including a failed first marriage due to directives given by spirits and a public trial for sexual misconduct. Randolph was tried by the state of Massachusetts for publishing obscene literature while Spear was tried in a Spiritualist court in 1862 in Boston for what one of his ex-followers called his "immoral practices, teachings, and tendencies" (Deveney 20). Unlike Spear, Randolph made the sexual and racial dimension of his practices explicit in his published writings. In this sense, Spear may have been literal in his performances, but Randolph was literal in both word and action. Randolph was also involved in a cultural shift in the United States away from Spiritualist mediumship to active occultism by the end of the nineteenth century. The significant difference being agency: The mainstream Spiritualist medium was ideally passive, merely receiving communications and, significantly, feminized. In contrast, the occult magician sought to craft the world according to *his* will. In the 1860s, Randolph broke entirely with Spiritualists' expectations and capitalized on the power of his own

body in sex. In Randolph's philosophy, matter was rarified on a molecular level through sex within a female body, and race was a marker of one's relation to matter. In this sense, racial mixing was the means of elevating the soul, for he thought the combination of the greatest difference would create the greatest power. As I will show in this section, Randolph argued for the powers of a mixed-race identity and sexual knowledge of an Orientalized racial other, but he cleansed his teachings with a moralizing aesthetic of "White Magic" that privileged racial Whiteness. While Spear and Randolph's contemporaries saw them as exceptional or downright deviant, I see them as revealing, from different positions, the centrality of feminine Whiteness to Spiritualism and a nuance in how the power of feminine Whiteness could be activated.

Randolph has recently been noted as a significant figure in American history, as a Spiritualist lecturer, sex magician, and self-educated African American author, but he has been ignored by a number of scholars of African American literature and culture because of his contradictory views on race (Finley). Randolph was an abolitionist and he spent time in Louisiana conscripting soldiers for the Union army during the Civil War and later building a school for Black Americans during Reconstruction, but he alienated Black communities by repeatedly claiming to not possess any Black African blood. Throughout the course of his career, he told conflicting accounts of his ancestry, claiming that his mother was descended from a Queen of Madagascar, his father descended from Native Americans, and that he was the product of many other distinct and noble bloodlines. In his last book, *Eulis! The History of Love*, Randolph emphatically wrote against his critics who slandered him: "I am a SANG MELEE; and not less than twelve strains of blood rush through my veins," that he was "Proud of his descent from the kings and queens, not

of Nigritia, but of Madagascar, to say nothing,—to say nothing of the Randolphs, nor their rise from Warwick, the king-maker!" (121-123). Randolph was a polygenecist, believing that there was not one origin for humans as Darwin claimed, but rather multiple distinct lineages, a claim that was often used in the nineteenth-century to justify White supremacy and anti-miscegenation laws. In Randolph's words: "Black, brown, white, yellow races, are all as clear cut and distinct from each other as are greyhounds from poodle dogs, or bantam fowls from headstrong, long-spurred, do-or-die game; nor will one race, even by admixture, produce a perfect specimen of either of the others" (172). The reason that he argued for the separation of races may be counter-intuitive. As a mixed-race person himself, he believed that true power comes from the combination of difference, so the sexual coupling of the racially distinct would produce the most powerful offspring, not perfect specimens of one origin, but *sang-melees* with more power than each distinct line. Power, in this context, was the capacity to alter the world according to one's will, a mystical skill that Randolph professed to develop through his practice of sex magic.

Randolph was an abolitionist but he held on to the concept of biological race because it was useful in his worldview where difference and a hierarchy of being was necessary for his version of human becoming through "blending." Cristine Ferguson has argued that in Randolph's theory, "polygenesis becomes, not just (or even at all) an ideological justification for racial subjugation, but a necessary foundation for the radical difference that blending requires" (129). Randolph's theory of blending was introduced in *Dealings with the Dead* (1862), where he defined it as a deliberate union between two souls in which both retain their own consciousness but share in the other's completely, "if

they are adapted to each other, their spheres—nay, their very lives—blend together" (138). Blending could also happen through love between sexual partners, as he understood himself to share his magnetism with a partner and vice versa. In this way, no human is ever solitary or distinct, no blood "pure," but all humans are born of blended differences, experienced in the womb and in every intimate encounter thereafter. While explaining the molecular changes that happen through sex, he takes the example of a biracial couple:

> It is utterly impossible for a negress having borne a child to a white father ever to give birth to one perfectly negro, – even though its father, like herself, has never a drop of other blood in him, – for the reason that the blood of the white man, through his child, has mingled in the mother's veins. More than that, her blood under the microscope will not show the same crystalline forms after the birth of the mixed child as it did before. Just so is it impossible for us not to be made better or worse by lip touching (*Eulis* 15-16).

Like Spear, Randolph turned to the mysteries of the womb to settle the questions regarding human immortality and the state of the world, arguing that "All Nature is a system of births" (*Dealings With the Dead* 131). Randolph went further than Spear, however, to argue that the very cells in our bodies are altered by a sexual encounter, and that the initiate of sex magic could craft their own biology and consciously blend with superior souls. Even though he imagined a spirit world where people of all races intermingled, he made statements that reinforced racial hierarchies, as when he plainly stated: "I do not believe in the, to *me*, absurd dogma of human equality" (*Eulis* 103). The reason for this argument has to do with Randolph's personal history, as his biographer John Patrick Deveney argued that he could not reconcile his own achievements with bestialized images of Black people (150). Randolph frequently singled out sub-Saharan Africans as the humans he had no relation to, but in other contexts, he would state: "I

stand here tonight as representative of the African" (Deveney 159). There was a contradiction that Ferguson identifies in Randolph's racial politics: "Randolph's occult philosophy of the bedroom expresses all the potential, and all the infuriating limitations, of a mystical eugenic system that simultaneously affirms and denies the fixity of racial biotype" (139).

In Randolph's autobiographical novel, *The Wonderful Story of Ravalette*, he argues that the greatest power comes from the combination of the greatest difference. In the story of *Ravalette*, the main character Beverly's choice of sexual partner is the main source of drama. A mysterious figure Dhoula Bel, the spirit of a grand magician ordered to be executed by Beverly in a past life, shows up in different forms attempting to stop Beverly's marriage with "a woman in whom not one drop of the blood of Adam circulates," meaning that she is descended from an entirely separate human race than the Adam of the Christian origin (56). In order for Beverly to be free from the loop of reincarnation that Dhoula Bel has locked him in, his mulatto mother tells him he has to marry a woman descended from non-Adamite humans. The marriage leads to the birth of a son, Osiris Budh, the name that Randolph would give to his own child later in life. In this story, Beverly's soul is freed to progress onto higher forms and the future is secured by the birth of a superior child. This fictional story is an argument for how bi-racial marriage could fix the world, but only if partners were truly well-developed humans and well-suited to love each other.

In Randolph's worldview, matter, specifically the biology of humans, was reflective of the state of souls, and he saw less developed humans as closer to matter

itself. Upon posing the question whether all humans are immortal in *Eulis*, he responds with an emphatic no:

> The imperfect must go back to the domain of chemics and matter; nor can they, with hope, knock at the doors of the golden temples of Eternity, except they be full, fair, pure, free, and good, even though their discipline extends through a billion of ages; and the greater the gifts or talent, genius or innate power one has, the heavier shall be the price paid for all accorded unto him (140).

This judgement has racial undertones, for he considered the sub-Saharan African to be the least developed of the human races, and the White American the pinnacle of development when it came to the mind. The ultimate good for Randolph was love, which he saw darker races to be more intuitively capable of, but he made a point to clarify that this had to become a focused, cultured love, "In beasts, apes, etcetera, this vivific force is diffused. In some human beings it is condensed and crystallized. In some it is not. The first is immortal. The latter not so. Beasts, apes, Low-grade people, have instincts, attachments, magnetic attractions, and affection:—Man,—true men—alone have love!" (182). For Randolph, love was the animating force of human life, "the informing and formative pulse of matter" (84), and true actions out of love could earn a person an eternal soul. Most Spiritualists claimed that there is no hell, but Randolph argued for sharp distinctions between good and evil as well as the reality of hell. Randolph considered his techniques to be "White Magic," a moral claim that has a racial foundation: "The White Magic, which I here reveal, teaches how to rapport the good. The Black Magic of Africa and America (Voudooism) rapports us with the denizens of hell; and crime and wretchedness as surely flow out from the one affiliation, as the good flows forth from the other" (77). Matter, hell, and the "dark race" were intertwined in his thinking, but he thought it was possible for the lowest humans to rise up the chain of

being through the transformative powers of sex. Here we see Randolph investing in Whiteness as a spiritual good in an explicit way. While White actors often did this implicitly, Randolph, as a man seeking power in a world that would grant him very little, found a way to tap into Whiteness. But in order to do so, he had to continually denounce his "dark" side.

I want to note that Spear and Randolph were two rather controlling men who sought their power within female bodies. In this sense, matter stood in for maternity and vice versa: These men saw themselves as the agents or instruments of spirit while feminine bodies were the resource. Spear understood modelizing as a gesture that would unfold the mysterious inner workings of the womb. In contrast, Randolph experimented with female bodies, but described relationships with women in their entirety (not just their wombs, but their present, living bodies). In Randolph's words:

> Power, true power, can only descend from heaven to true loving souls, because power is feminine, and woman represents it, albeit she is practically ignorant of the fact; and a man has yet to learn that the seeds of power descend either through the feminine channels of his soul, or to him through woman (*Eulis* 79).

In contrast to the racialized space of dark matter, Randolph developed a moral aesthetic that highly prized femininity, particularly a vision of White femininity. The soul, for him was "A ball of dazzling WHITE FIRE!" (*Eulis* 63), an image that reflects much of the imagery in Spiritualist literature.

Beyond the color, he made Whiteness a racial signifier in his narrative by attributing the brilliance of his own soul to experiences with White women and girls. For instance, he narrates his moment of awakening to a touch from a little White girl. As he tells the story, he was experiencing a jealous rage over an argument with a friend, when he was saved:.

> I caught sight of a scintillant flash of white light issuant from her head, like the radiant gleam of a peerless diamond, when all the lamps are brightly burning; and a glowing, streaming iridescence flowed from her lips. I had drawn her to me, and pressed her rosy, childish face to mine, inhaling the balmy aroma of her pure, fresh, joyous soul; and a portion of the roseate fire of her sweet lips had clung to mine. I saw it, like a thin cloud of opalescence, waving gently to and fro, as I moved my head, or breathed. I began to study the meaning of a kiss (*Eulis* 11).

The white clouds he inhaled from the girl's body were her spirit, Randolph believed, the substance that communicates between the body and soul. Like Spear, Randolph found a revelation in the touch of feminine Whiteness. Both were certainly influenced by the culture surrounding "the cult of true womanhood" (Welter) which framed White women in the nineteenth century as "angels of the house," morally elevated and elevating through their innocence and spirituality. Innocence, as Robin Bernstein has shown, was itself raced White in the nineteenth century, and, as I will discuss in the fourth chapter, figures of innocent White girls (beginning with the Fox sisters) were at the center of Spiritualist discourse. The encounter described by Randolph can be likened to little Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and a moralized Whiteness where the innocence of White girls is contagious through touch or kiss. The innocence of feminine Whiteness must be contrasted to the racialized female other that played a role in Randolph's sexual awakening.

Randolph's spiritual visions partook of feminine Whiteness as an illuminating and elevating force, but his techniques of sex magic were drawn from his travels in the Middle East, and women who were thought to be more naturally in touch with their bodies and sexual power. He tells the story of how he learned the secret of his sex rituals:

> One night—it was in far-off Jerusalem or Bethlehem, I really forget which—I made love to, and was loved by, a dusky maiden of Arabic blood. I of her, and that experience, learned—not directly, but by suggestion—the fundamental principle of the White Magic of Love; subsequently I became affiliated with some

> dervishes and fakirs of whom, by suggestion still, I found the road to other knowledges; and of these devout practicers of a simple, but sublime and holy magic, I obtained additional clues—little threads of suggestion, which, being persistently followed, led my soul into labyrinths of knowledge themselves did not even suspect the existence of. I became practically, what I was naturally—a mystic, and in time chief of the lofty brethren; taking the clues left by the masters, and pursuing them farther than they had ever been before; actually discovering the ELIXER OF LIFE the universal Solvent, or celestial Alkahest; the water of beauty and perpetual youth, and the philosopher's stone—all of which this book contains (*Eulis* 48).

There is some debate over how much of Randolph's texts are rooted in fact, and where precisely he spent his time abroad, but the general sense is that he did travel much more broadly than most Spiritualists, and he had a certain credibility because of it. He said things that most people would not dare because he claimed to have learned these things in exotic foreign places (the Holy Land and Arab maidens will show up in the next chapter as one significant source of Spiritualist racial fantasies). The book goes on to describe sexual magic in general terms, claiming to produce benefits such as wealth, health, knowledge, and perpetual youth. The specifics of the rituals were laid out in an earlier text, *The Ansairetic Mystery* (1873), which was privately circulated to his students and correspondents. He argues that magnetic power could only be absorbed in the "orgasmal instant of BOTH—not one alone! for then, and *then only*, do the mystic forces of the SOUL OPEN TO THE SPACES" (qtd. in Deveney 314). Randolph argued that both sexual partners had to orgasm at the same instant, focusing on a shared intention, and while they inhaled in the moment of climax, they could breathe great power in through their nostrils from the spaces of higher beings. In this way, Randolph made his own body into a spiritual technology that was meant for heterosexual coupling.

It is important to understand the difference between Spear and Randolph's spiritual orientations through their positions on either side of the Black/White divide. Spear's process of literalization made metal parts and human bodies equivalent, which can be seen as a gesture reacting to the privilege and disembodiment associated with Whiteness. Furthermore, Spear took up power in a seemingly passive, but ultimately totalitarian way, taking no responsibility for his power over others' actions. As discussed in the introduction, this passivity is characteristic of Whiteness: to take up power in an invisible way. In contrast, Randolph invested in racial and sexual hierarchies because securing a relationship across difference is what he believed could produce the greatest power. Significantly, blending across difference explained Randolph's own personal experience, his identity as a *sang melee*, and his understanding of mediumship. Randolph's change in orientation toward his own mastery and will over the world was a means of changing his fate, in both a racial and class dimension: Using his body, Randolph attempted to master spiritualized Whiteness (coded as White magic) as well as gain the knowledge of a racialized other (the Arab maiden). Ultimately, he attempted to rarify matter by elevating the molecular and spiritual make-up of his own self to secure power, wealth, and access to the afterlife. In this way, Randolph turned his own body into a supreme instrument of spirit.

Conclusion:

I understand raciality in Spear and Randolph's performances through gestures investigating the limit-case of the human, which were largely inspired by bioessentialism and racialized theories of human origins. In both Spear and Randolph's theories, the

White woman was a practical spiritual resource, heterosexual coupling the means of unlocking female spiritual power, and Blackness was seen as hyper-materiality or hyper-embodiment. There is speculation in my analysis regarding the racial dimension of Spear's work (we cannot be certain that Randolph was the Disenthraller), but I think that Randolph's testimony upon breaking with Spear supports the idea that a racialized power differential structured their relationship, specifically Randolph's claim that Spear was a "vampire" who used the spirits to control his followers.

Marginalized mediums are at the center in my project because I want to unsettle the familiar story that focuses on the famous Fox sisters and pushes deviance to the side. I contend that Spear and Randolph's practices exposed assumptions held more broadly within the Spiritualist movement: The elevation of feminine Whiteness and the material potentiality of darkened racial others. They certainly were not the only Spiritualists acting on racialized and sexualized assumptions about matter, but they did so in a hyper-literal and practical way. For example, Spear's machine with human parentage was not just a symbol of a reality outside it, but a technology meant to transform reality. The earnestness in which both Spear and Randolph conversed with spirits and invented rituals seems almost absurd in a secularized twenty-first century culture, and yet, as I hope to show in the following chapter, the primary impulse behind their work (to lay bare the workings of the womb) has been significant to the Spiritualist movement and central to the invention of Whiteness.

Chapter Four:
Materializing Whiteness

FIG. 18. AUTHOR'S FLASHLIGHT PHOTOGRAPH OF 11 NOVEMBER, 1910.

Fig. 3

At the end of the nineteenth century, séance Spiritualism took a turn from table-tipping to "materialization" and the production of "ectoplasm," a gooey substance that oozed from the orifices of spirit mediums. Spiritualists defined materialization as the clothing of a spirit in a visible substance, using the medium's "magnetism" to help the spirit transform the invisible "subtle matter" of the spirit-body into something visitors could see and touch. Materialization could be partial (forming hands and faces), "full-form" (producing a whole spirit-body), or ectoplasmic, which was an unformed spirit substance. Often, all three manifestations would occur in a single sitting with a medium. Into the early twentieth century in the United States, England, France, Italy, and Germany, psychical researchers were particularly baffled by scenes of women producing ectoplasm, which seemed to them a rare and base form of animate matter or, alternately, an elaborate trick. The photograph above was taken by German psychical researcher Alfred von Schrenck-Notzing in a séance with the medium Eva Carriere in 1910 in Paris.

Schrenck-Notzing described this performance: "we saw a white mass, larger than a hand, resembling a white unformed aggregate endowed with life…" Then, "before our eyes, this semi-liquid substance, endowed with some kind of animal life, changed its appearance, until it assumed the form of a correctly-drawn left hand" (74). Ectoplasm was usually brilliantly white, pale or glowing, but also grotesque, appearing as a bodily discharge or unformed flesh. Beyond the color, I suggest that ectoplasm must be understood as a racial signifier because of the way that it moved in and out of form between the border of the human and matter. Most of the examples discussed in this dissertation exposed a racial metaphysics that deemed Whiteness immaterial, and yet at the turn of the century, at the height of Spiritualism's transnationalism, White, unformed matter became the iconic form of spirit in the movement. Why this change in orientation?

In the previous chapters, the White subject was not directly racialized but invested in as a universal, transcendent good (while Indigenous, Black, and Orientalized people bore the burden of racial thinking), but this chapter reveals a turn: Materialization mediums racialized the White subject. As I established in the previous chapters, physical manifestations relied upon the assumption that racial others were more material than White people. This was an assumption drawn from Darwinian biological evolution but taken to spiritual proportions, as Cristin Ellis put it, supporting the idea that humans "are a species unevenly evolving from apes to angels" (5). As the range of stories in this dissertation attest, there were two types of racial representational practices happening in Spiritualism: 1) Explicit representation of racial others through ethnic impersonation or narrative and; 2) Performances that relied upon an implicit racial hierarchy of matter. Most case studies that I have discussed in this dissertation framed Blackness or

Indigeneity as hyper-material, but the materializations I will discuss in this chapter made feminine Whiteness hyper-material. I ask: What did scenes of ectoplasmic production do to support or trouble the sexual and racial categories that were bound up with matter? I contend that ectoplasm was made meaningful by racial assumptions, but it also disordered racial distinctions, creating a kind of ontological chaos.

This chapter places American mediums in relation to English, French, and Italian mediums because, I suggest, we cannot understand Spiritualist matter without attending to the transatlantic growth of the movement and the interconnected networks of mediums and psychical researchers. Furthermore, we cannot understand Whiteness without recognizing the way in which it was defined by a disconnection from any specific place, ethnicity, or cultural context. Whiteness as a discourse was distinguished by universalist claims and a global spread of meaning along the lines of cultural dissemination established by imperialism and capital expansion. I am drawing a boundary on my analysis, however, by focusing on Anglophone sources. I include texts from France, Italy, and Germany that were translated into English in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly texts that preoccupied American Spiritualists, but I do not attempt to capture the full range of Spiritualist practices in these diverse national contexts. This is my attempt to singularize the form of Whiteness that I see being reproduced through physical mediumship, but also to follow where this repertoire traveled.[20]

[20] I do not attempt to characterize Spiritualist movements in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe because these cultural contexts were distinct from the transatlantic region and mediumship had very different histories and meanings. While there certainly are connections across these contexts, I will leave those questions for further research. What I focus on here is a culture of Spiritualism that was mainly circulated within Anglophone print cultures and social contexts. French, Italian, and German texts produced by spirit mediums and psychical researchers were often translated into English and cited in American Spiritualist periodicals. Psychical researchers communicated with each other across a wider range of national contexts, but the repertoires and the version of Whiteness I study here generally traveled back and forth across the Atlantic.

There is a difference between repertoires from the early days of Spiritualism (1848-1870, characterized by table-tipping, rapping, and trance lectures), and the later years (1870-1930, materialization séances, spirit photography, and spirit art). The key difference was rooted in mediumship's relation to femininity—early manifestations were associated with the "innocence" of adolescent girls and the later manifestations associated with adult women performing much more sexually explicit acts, revealing skin, body parts, and producing spirits out of their orifices. In spite of these significant differences, however, I intend to reveal the continuity of a racial metaphysics across changing practices of physical mediumship. What all of these performances had in common was the centrality of feminine Whiteness in a productive relationship with objects, materials, and unformed matter.

While the American movement was in decline at the end of the nineteenth century, Spiritualism became increasingly transatlantic, with séance practices rising in popularity in England and France in particular.[21] Significantly, the performances that took place under the banner of Spiritualism (the Anglophone term) and Spiritism (in French) at the turn of the century took colonial expansion and Orientalism to be meaningful sources of racial and spiritual thinking. A shift in the Spiritualist discourse from calling upon Black and Indian spirits towards a greater range of colonized others signals a change of context and, I suggest, an investment in a generalized, dislocated Whiteness. To put it simply, spirit mediums conjured a range of racial others, but

[21] As discussed in the introduction, Bridgett Bennett has argued that Spiritualism must be seen as a transatlantic movement, and others have followed in this orientation like L. Anne Delgado and Giula Hoffman. Around the turn of the century, Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy and Rudolph Steiner's Anthoposophy took off in Western and Central Europe, as well as more secretive forms of occultism. These trajectories are certainly related to the way that particularly European mediums were perceived in the early twentieth century, but they involved different kinds of performances and are outside the scope of this dissertation.

feminine Whiteness looked eerily the same across different contexts. I suggest that attending to the globalizing of the séance performance genre helps us see Whiteness as a non-local spiritual construct, and a performative power that was loosed from the specific contexts of American slavery and Indian genocide. This process of expansion, I hope to show, was intertwined with changing terms of mediumship as a form of technology.

While early mediumship relied upon the invisible "magnetism" of the female body or a mystified object (like the Koons' instruments) to capture spirit, around the turn of the century, mediumship became increasingly aligned with photography. There were two photographic practices involved in Spiritualism, "spirit photography" (where the bereaved would sit for a portrait with their dead loved ones)[22] and photography employed by psychical researchers in séance performances (such was the case with the photograph of Eva Carriere above). In the latter context, photography operated as an extension of the bodily powers of the spirit medium by attempting to capture the medium and ectoplasm mid-action. Psychical researchers (men with professional backgrounds in the physical, psychological, and social sciences) employed photography as evidence of successful mediumship or proof of fraud. With this opportunity to prove themselves and gain prominent supporters, mediums learned to perform for the camera. Techniques of hiding and reveling bodies through the curtains of the materialization cabinet generated an erotic play of appearing/disappearing White female skin and body parts, which was represented in print through photographs that featured a high contrast between darkness

[22] William Mumler became a famous spirit photographer in the 1860s, and many others followed. Most spirit photographs were taken for the bereaved, with the spirit of a loved one posing over the living subject's shoulders. While I wish I could spend time analyzing both forms of photography, for the purposes of this chapter, I look at photographs that attempted to capture the materialization repertoire directly.

and light. As discussed in the previous chapters, Spiritualist imagery was saturated with discourse that conflated light with racial Whiteness as well as a moral good associated with spiritual transcendence.

To repeat a claim that I have made in different ways throughout this dissertation, the racialization of these performances and photographs was not only evidenced by the value of Whiteness in the photo, but also in the desires and aversions related to human definitions, origins, and reproduction. Materialization mediums staged the making and dissolving of human forms, and, significantly, the medium was often draped in black fabric, tied down to a chair, sealed up in a bag, or nailed to the floor. Then when the White spirit formed out of and against the flesh of the medium, the White spirit dazzled, and that is what the photographs attempted to capture. In this sense, the medium could perform something like anti-transcendence (transforming into base, dark matter) in order to produce spirit, but photography was oriented toward transcendence. As I will reveal in this chapter, Spiritualist material performance was rooted in anti-transcendent gestures from the tipping table to ectoplasm, and photography had a strange relationship to these performance repertoires. Photography could be called materialization in a sense (making an image of a spirit, one that a person could hold, touch and return to), but this was not materialization in the sense that mediums performed it. Materialization was a specific performance repertoire that centered women who were exposed (sometimes partially or fully in the nude), vulnerable (in the sense that many of them were debunked in this era), and highly sexualized (investigators touching mediums and spirits in darkened rooms).

As I discussed in the introduction, the representational work of materialization, as I see it, was not that it literalized spirit and debased it (as Daniel Cottom suggests), but

rather that materialization séances literalized Whiteness by taking away its metaphorical, and thus sacred, claim to transcend the material world. Richard Dyer has argued that photography and cinema were instrumental in constructing Whiteness by creating a "culture of light," consciously representing Whiteness as a moral good. I believe that his insights illuminate the late manifestations of Spiritualism, and particularly spirit photography, but there is more to be said about how Spiritualist performance invested in a "culture of light" while also testing it or making its assumptions falter. In this chapter, I attempt to understand what performances of materialization were doing alongside the photographic technologies that psychical researchers employed to capture it.

This chapter looks closely at the actions of female mediums in repertoires that presumed their hyper-embodiment. What we find are scenes of perverse reproduction, processes of feminine form-making, women producing doubles through touch and through excretion. As discussed in the introduction, mediumship was associated with femininity, and I want to note that this femininity was pathologized by the psychical researchers who studied them. Laurence Moore suggests that critics or skeptics of Spiritualism defined a medium as "a person whose generalized female traits had developed in perverse and bizarre ways" (105). To put it differently, male scientists tended to see mediumship as a form of feminized passivity which often led to pathology (producing hysteria). Ectoplasm could be seen as the most extreme indicator of an abnormal biology, and therefore of great concern for male researchers who still found female sexuality and reproduction to constitute what Freud famously called a "dark continent" (Chasseguet-Smirgel).

I hope to show how these performances echoed or overlapped with photography as a medium of capturing spirits. Photography capitalized on the idea that the White female medium was a spiritual technology in her own right, attempting to tame or capture an unruly performance. In doing so, photography reordered the basic dramaturgy of the séance, displacing the audience in space and time, orienting the performance toward witnesses who could not touch spiritual productions. Nevertheless, there was a sense of spirit presence captured in a photograph, and this was one of the reasons that photography largely replaced physical mediumship within the movement. Photography fulfilled the desire to witness material spirits in a way that more closely aligned with nineteenth-century notions of technological progress: No problematic, pathologized female body in the middle anymore, something clean and orderly. Significantly, the shift from materialization to photography was related to the transnational grown of the movement, for images of spirits could be analyzed and shared across vast distances. American, English, French, Italian, and German psychical researchers could all formulate their own arguments regarding specific mediums by using the photographs to orient themselves.

In this chapter, first I show how the repertoire of tipping tables gave way to the materialization repertoire, revealing that physical manifestations were about literalizing the reproductive powers of White women; then I look at mediums who channeled White and Orientalized female spirits; finally, I discuss how photography altered the representational core of the séance repertoire to feature aesthetic Whiteness, and in the last section, I look at ectoplasm as a perverse birth, revealing anxieties over White reproduction and futurity. This trip across the Atlantic and back reveals that across a

variety of contexts, Whiteness was employed as a spiritual technology. While seeking spirit in the material often relied upon the presence of racial others, mediums also attempted to demonstrate "spiritual matter" through the supposed internal powers of the White female body.

1. Fox Origin Story: From Tables to Full-Form Materialization

In this section, I establish how the sexual dimension of mediumship was implicit even in the early table-tipping performances, and then how that sexuality was racialized. Significantly, performing matter in physical manifestations was linked to Whiteness through the dual moralizing gestures of creating light in the darkness and form out of formlessness. When Spiritualist texts discuss the origin story of the Fox sisters, they frame mediumship as a special gift from the spirits bestowed upon innocent girls on the edge of sexual maturity. As Ann Braude put it, "Americans throughout the country found messages from spirits more plausible when delivered through the agency of adolescent girls" (26). Why might this have been the case? Robin Bernstein has argued: "Childhood innocence—itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness—secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status, in the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth" (8). Implicitly White childhood innocence has been the basis of a moral economy in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century when characters in literature like little Eva of Harriett Beecher Stowe's Uncl*e Tom's Cabin* (1852) lit up American imaginaries. Significantly, the fictional Eva dies in girlhood, securing her innocence forever, but the Fox sisters grew to womanhood while continuing to perform

mediumship. In this section, I attend to the evolution of the Fox sisters' practice over the course of decades to highlight the difference between the "racial innocence" of the early table-rapping repertoire and the explicit sexuality and literalized Whiteness of later ones.

I return to the Fox sisters because they were the most observed mediums of the American movement, and it was largely because of their fame that feminine Whiteness became so central to mediumship. As I discussed in the introduction, the origin story of Spiritualism begins with "spirit rapping" in Hydesville, NY in 1848, curious sounds that emanated from wooden surfaces when the Fox sisters were near. According to their elder sister Leah, the Fox sisters' spirits would move wooden furniture and objects wildly in any domestic space, and touch or strike those attempting to communicate with them (Underhill). Kate and Maggie tamed this unruly physical power through table rapping and tipping (to answer yes/no questions or spell out words by rapping on spoken letters of the alphabet, the so-called "spiritual telegraph"). The Fox sisters and many other spirit mediums practiced these techniques for decades. After the initial Hydesville raps, Kate and Maggie gave their first public demonstration of mediumship in Corinthian Hall in Rochester in November of 1849. In 1850, Kate and Maggie held séances in New York and were investigated by a number of well-known men including William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Lloyd Garrison. Significantly, many witnesses attested to their genuineness by commenting upon their Whiteness and youthful innocence. As one journalist for the *New York Tribune* reported: "Their eyes and hair are dark, and their complexions of a transparent paleness" which seemed to make them susceptible to otherworldly influence and look innocent, for "their whole deportment exhibited an apparent frankness and sincerity which would dispose one to acquit them of

any intent to deceive" (1). This journalist could not explain the raps and table movements, but others reporting for the *Tribune* in 1850 and 1851 found an explanation in the girls cracking their toe joints (Hansel 235). In 1853, Maggie met Elisha Kane, who urged her to quit mediumship and whom she reportedly married in secret before he died on an expedition to the Arctic in 1857. Kate maintained a solo career as a medium, and despite accusations of fraud, remained the most famous spirit medium in the United States and England into the 1880s.

In 1861, Kate reportedly produced a full-form materialization of a spirit in New York, that of Charles Livermore's deceased wife Estelle. This case is revealing of a racial metaphysics in that it features both light and white fabric as the basis for the materialization. On the night of the séance, Livermore and Kate sat alone in the room and he held both of Kate's hands on the table. They sat ten feet from the wall, where a figure began to appear. In the words of Livermore:

> Then an illuminated substance like gauze rose from the floor behind us, moved about the room and finally came in front of us. Vigorous electrical sounds were heard. The gauze-like substance assumed the form of a human head covered, the covering drawn close around the neck. It touched me; then receded and again approached…when, a third time, it came close to me the light had brightened, the gauze had changed in form; a female hand grasped it, concealing the lower part of the face, but the upper part was revealed: it was that of Estelle-eyes, forehead, and expression in perfection…The figure reappeared several times, the recognition becoming each time more nearly perfect. Afterward her head was laid upon mine, the hair falling over my face…The light moved to a point about midway between us and the wall; the electrical cracklings increased; the wall was illuminated and brought out an entire female figure facing that side of the room, the light apparently in one of her hands. The form remained in sight fully half an hour and each movement was distinctly visible, Then came the message: 'Now see me rise:' and immediately, in full brightness, the figure rose to the ceiling, remained there a few moments suspended; then gently descending, disappeared (Owen, *The Debatable Land* 485-486).

This became the first well-known example of what Spiritualists called full-form materialization (when a spirit formed a complete body and then disappeared in the presence of witnesses). The aesthetic of Whiteness and light would be mimicked by many other mediums utilizing white mist, gauze-like fabric, or other substances to exhibit or drape spirit-forms. This scene is reminiscent of the iconic scene of little Eva's death in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Robin Bernstein has described as "a blizzard of whiteness," the paleness of Eva's body and the Whiteness of everything in the room carrying a racial and moral significance (5). White fabric, floating lights, pale skin, and long hair would become the trademarks of spirit materialization at the end of the nineteenth century. Significantly, in the Kate Fox materialization, there was female doubling: Kate disappeared into the background as a White figure took and lost form, a feature that would become characteristic of materialization séances in the following decades. Séances like this one capitalized on the powers of a female body to reproduce through a perverse "spiritual biology," making another body out of the substance of the medium's body. I see this repertoire as literalizing Whiteness by making light into flesh, making Whiteness material as opposed to transcendent.

These performances have been overdetermined by debates about fraud, for psychical researchers and magicians like Harry Houdini famously exposed mediums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, rather than using the idea of female trickery to dismiss or validate the repertoire (to find power, for instance, in the female trickster figure), I think of discourse over fraud as a conversation about matter (the truth of the event always relying upon certain assumptions about and an orientation toward matter). When Maggie confessed to fraud in 1888, she stood before 2,000 people

in the New York Academy of Music and demonstrated sounds produced by cracking her toe joints. Kate sat in the balcony and applauded (Weisburg 244-245). The newspapers widely quoted Maggie's statement: "I am here tonight as one of the founders of Spiritualism to denounce it as an absolute falsehood from beginning to end, as the flimsiest of superstitions, the most wicked blasphemy known to the world" (Davenport 76). The press generally used this event to support their own assumptions, with Spiritualist periodicals suggesting that Maggie accepted a bribe to make a false confession, and non-Spiritualist journalists celebrating that the truth had finally been exposed.

As I see it, the most profound impact of the confession is that it changed the relation between femaleness and mediumship. Shaker Elder Frederick William Evans published an article arguing that this exposure could not kill the movement. He claimed "Spiritualism is a Shaker product," and that after an exposure of fraud, the movement is brought back to the true manifestations of spirits: "After the fraud Katie King exposure, Spiritualism took an upward move of progress, and has spread far and wide. It will do the same again, until the public learns that even a donkey can be a medium" (3). Evans compares Maggie's confession to the exposure of Jennie and Nelson Holmes in 1875 in New York, when the actress impersonating the spirit of Katie King came to the press. Spirit mediums, Evans insisted, were not special but rather magnetic material, at best, or frauds at worst. A year later, Maggie retracted the confession. I see this shift as evidence of a change in the sisters' orientation toward matter, an orientation that reflected a change in the broader movement. Specifically, sexual maturity had changed what kinds of objects were in reach of the Fox sisters as White women—no longer "innocent" girls

producing miraculous sounds, they became known, not only for fraud, but tragic love stories, family turmoil, and alcohol abuse. Kate Fox died in 1892 from alcoholism and Maggie died the next year of the same cause (Pond 427). The Fox sisters lived complicated lives that mainstream Spiritualists attempted to expunge from the Spiritualist record, the "darkness" of drunkenness (as spirits frequently warned) not unlike the "dark and obnoxious features" of sexually explicit mediumship which led John Murray Spear and Paschal Beverly Randolph to become outcast (Britten 221).

I frame the Fox sisters' story in this way to show what mainstream Spiritualists were attempting to protect: Mediumship as it was associated with feminine (ideally youthful) White innocence. In the next section, I hope to show how this repertoire traveled, how materialization mediums produced Whiteness differently than in other more socially acceptable forms of racialization. Significantly, the focus on the spirit medium's body shifted. Against Elder Evans' hope that the female body would become less significant to mediumship, it became more central, but in a new way: Men felt the urgency to debunk fraudulent women and female mediums learned to perform for these men, the body becoming a more intimate site of spiritual investigation.

2. Florence Cook and Katie King

In the next two sections, I focus on British spirit mediums in order to reveal that the Whiteness prized in materialization séances looked like the same transcendent Whiteness as in the American context (feminine bodies doubling, White skin, light, white mist, and fabric), but racial otherness was coded differently, mainly through Orientalism. In 1870, fourteen-year-old Florence Cook, who was born into a working class family in

London, began holding full-form materialization séances. As discussed in the introduction, there are a number of excellent studies of British Spiritualism (See Owen, Oppenheim, Tromp, Kontou, and Willburn), which was connected to American Spiritualism but had a few significant differences: For one, the séance took on a more explicit class discourse by offering social mobility for working-class women who became mediums (Owen). Additionally, as Marlene Tromp put it, "Spiritualism was sexy" ("Spirited Sexuality" 67), more explicitly so at the end of the nineteenth century when the movement took off in England, and particularly due to materialization cabinets or curtains where mediums and spirits would disappear and reveal body parts to audiences in darkened rooms.

I have centered American mediumship thus far, but this is where I broaden my context to show that Whiteness gained power through translatability and a lack of a proper place. Bridgett Bennett has argued that the movement must be seen beyond the American national frame, and I take this claim in the context of work following Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* and Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead.* The flow of people and culture back and forth across the Atlantic produced unique dynamics of racialization, violence, and cultural exchange. As discussed in the introduction, one outcome of this transatlantic movement was the "dislocating dazzle of 'whiteness,'" in the words of Paul Gilroy (9). As I discussed in the second chapter with the Denton-Cridge visions, the dislocation of Whiteness was often employed as a spiritual orientation toward material substances or surfaces, and thus Whiteness became a technique of managing matter (as matter stood in for racial others). Significantly, Florence Cook's "spirit control" (the spirit who came most frequently to the medium and often translated for or assisted other

spirits) was known as Katie King or Annie Owens Morgan, reportedly the daughter of the spirit John King (identified as the Welsh privateer Sir Henry Morgan). Both of these spirits were spirit controls for a number of American and English mediums throughout the nineteenth century. The spirit-Kings reportedly hopped back and forth across the Atlantic, as American mediums did when they came on "missions" to England, like Paschal Beverly Randolph in 1855 and Kate Fox in 1871.

In 1873, Florence Cook became famous for accomplishing the first full-form materialization in Britain. Like the description of the Fox materialization, descriptions of Cook's performance center her White skin and female doubling, but the mise en scene produced a different racial meaning:

> In a short time, however, Katie—as the familiar Miss B. [Miss Blank, Florence Cook] was termed—thought she would be able to 'materialise' herself so far as to present the whole form, if we arranged the corner cupboard so as to admit her of doing so. Accordingly we opened the door, and from it suspended a rug or two opening in the centre, after the fashion of a Bedouin Arab's tent, formed a semicircle, sat and sang Longfellow's 'Footsteps of Angels'….And lo and behold, though we had left Miss B. tied and sealed to her chair, and clad in an ordinary black dress somewhat voluminous as to the skirts, a tall female figure draped classically in white, with bare arms and feet, did enter at the open door, or rather down the centre from between the two rugs, and stood statuelike before us, spoke a few words, and retired; after which we entered the Bedouin tent and found pretty Miss B. with her dress as before, knots and seals secure, and her boots on! This was Form No. 1, the first I had ever seen. It looked as material as myself (Davies 342, qtd. in Owen 48).

I want to note that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was a popular American cultural icon at this time, a sort of celebrity of sentimental transcendence poetry. The fact that Longfellow's words were sung in the circle places this performance in a transatlantic context already, as does the similarity to Kate Fox's materialization (a full female figure dressed in white). In addition to the American association, the Bedouin tent referenced a fantasy world of Orientalized female others, an exoticizing influence that characterized

much of British Spiritualism. I want to clarify that Orientalism in the United Kingdom was very different from anti-Blackness or anti-Indianness in the United States, but I suggest that performances of feminine Whiteness manifest in both contexts were mutually intelligible, even translatable as a repertoire across these contexts. Florence Maryatt, a well-known author and actress who was a supporter of Florence Cook, published a book describing her experiences in Cook's séances. She described how Miss Cook would retire to a back room divided from the audience by a thin curtain (the Bedouin tent) and she would be tied down to a chair while Katie King came out to walk among the visitors in a loose white dress.

This séance repertoire became explicitly sexual through the revealing of the spirit's body. On one occasion, Maryatt described a séance in which Katie showed her full naked body to Maryatt as the medium lay on the floor next to the spirit.

> On another very warm evening she [Katie] sat on my lap amongst the audience, and I felt perspiration on her arm. This surprised me; and I asked her if, for the time being, she had the veins, nerves, and secretions of a human being; if blood ran through her body, and she had a heart and lungs. Her answer was, "I have everything that Florrie has." On that occasion also she called me after her into the back room, and, dropping her white garment, stood perfectly naked before me. "Now," she said "you can see that I am a woman." Which indeed she was, and a most beautifully-made woman too; and I examined her well, whilst Miss Cook lay beside us on the floor. Instead of dismissing me this time, "Katie" told me to sit down by the medium, and, having brought me a candle and matches, said I was to strike a light as soon as she gave three knocks, as Florrie would be hysterical on awaking, and need my assistance. She then knelt down and kissed me, and I saw she was still naked. "Where is your dress, Katie?" I asked. "Oh that's gone," she said; "I've sent it on before me." As she spoke thus, kneeling beside me, she rapped three times on the floor. I struck the match almost simultaneously with the signal; but as it flared up, "Katie King" was gone like a flash of lightning, and Miss Cook, as she had predicted, awoke with a burst of frightened tears, and had to be soothed into tranquility again (142).

This was an erotic encounter between the female "investigator" and the spirit as female double, revealing a connection between White skin, white fabric, and a female sexual power. The passivity and unconsciousness of the spirit medium, which in the American context was staged as a medium sitting at a table, was made more dramatic and sexualized through elaborate systems of restraint. Maryatt described: "I have seen Florrie's dark curls *nailed down to the floor*, outside the curtain, in view of the audience, whilst 'Katie' walked about and talked with us…I have seen both Florrie and 'Katie' together on several occasions, so I can have no doubt on the subject that they were two separate creatures" (140-141). It seems that the medium's body had to be made into base matter (dark, mute, material) in order to support the transcendent White materialization.

The Florence Cook séances were explicitly sexual, and, I suggest, implicitly racialized. The racial dimension is visible when one attends to the racial metaphysics behind the show. As explored in the previous chapter, the "blending" of spirit with matter in the American context could be an anchor for blending Whiteness with Blackness. Racial formation in the British context was very different. As opposed to the United States, where segregation was enforced with violence, the racial other in England was largely a fantasy projection, as well as the rationale for a distant Empire. Significantly, Edward Ziter has argued that Orientalism in England manifest in nineteenth-century theatre as "fantasies of miscegenation." Ziter discusses scenes of White actors joining Native tribes or sneaking into harems, arguing that the stage became a "space of racial examination" in the nineteenth century, "an exploration directed beneath darkened skin" (608). I suggest that the séance was also a space of racial exploration, but in a more

implicit way because mediums often experimented with racial difference by testing spiritual/material boundaries.

At the end of the nineteenth century, psychical researchers investigated the bodies of mediums and spirits for clues as to the "biology of the spirits." Results from these investigations were often published by scientific journals like the *Quarterly Journal of Science, Scientific American*, the journal of the London-based Society for Psychical Research, or by Spiritualist presses in London, Boston, or New York. Florence Cook was at the center of debates in the Anglophone world of psychical research when she sat for séances with the famous physicist Sir William Crookes between 1871 and 1874. A Few photographs of Katie King survive, despite Crookes's claims that they were lost.[23]

Fig. 4

In this image, Katie is fully formed in her white costume. She holds her arms crossed on her chest in a gesture that is reminiscent of a saint praying in Catholic imagery. She creates an air of innocence magnified by a White aesthetic, while capitalizing on vaguely

[23] There is some speculation as to why he claimed they were lost. He was ridiculed as a dupe in the scientific community and it is possible that he wanted to erase the record of his investigations. The photographs, however, were seen by Spiritualists as a great triumph and proof of spirit.

Orientalized images of spiritual figures from the Holy Land. Fabric and skin were primary surfaces of exploration, and the photographs were attempts to capture what had been a haptic display of feminine Whiteness. The photo indexes the séance event, letting researchers analyze it as if they were analyzing Katie King herself. I want to clarify that I am not attempting to make ontological claims about photography, but relational ones: It is not that photography actually captured the event, but researchers believed it could because they understood photography as the highest form of truth-telling (not as art or artifice, but as evidence).

From my perspective, this image must be seen in the context of performance. The performance was time-based and immersive, and the supposedly miraculous part of the show was to witness the creation and dissolution of the human form, a process that was implicitly about testing the limits of the (White) human. On one occasion, the spirit circle watched Katie dematerialize before their eyes as they turned on full gas lighting:

> She looked like herself for the space of a second only, then she began gradually to melt away. I can compare the dematerialization of her form to nothing but a wax doll melting before a hot fire. First, the features became blurred and indistinct; they seemed to run into each other. The eyes sunk in the sockets, the nose disappeared, the frontal bone fell in. Next the limbs appeared to give way under her, and she sank lower and lower on the carpet like a crumbling edifice. At last there was *nothing but her head* left above the ground—then a heap of white drapery only, which disappeared with a whisk, as if a hand had pulled it after her (Maryatt 143).

It could be horrifying, I can imagine, to watch a female body come into being and then dissolve. It brings to mind the very real violence done to women, particularly sexualized women, in this era. And it also brings into question the concept of the human in relation

to objecthood, as she is compared to a melting doll.[24] This part of the performance, in contrast to the sentimental content of spirit communication, was about matter and the White spirit performing a miraculous material transformation. In contrast to the Fox mediumship, implicit racial meaning was more present in the Cook techniques because Cook leaned into the moments that produced attraction/repulsion in her audience (making and breaking bodies). Dr. J.M. Gully, a psychical researcher working with William Crookes, described an encounter with Katie: "The feel of the skin was quite natural, soft and warm; her movements were natural and graceful, except when she stooped to pick up anything from the floor, when it seemed as if her legs as well as her trunk bent backwards" (Sargent 54). Here we have feminine grace coupled with a horrifying nonhuman element.

In addition to the dazzling Whiteness of Katie King's appearance, Cook's performances were implicitly racialized because Cook played with gaining, losing, and troubling human distinctions, which, I suggest, were implicitly racialized gestures. Whiteness, as the ideology that secured an ideal version of the human (and thus the unmarked, normal human) encountered a tension in this context: White femininity became a pleasurable object or surface (smooth skin and beautiful body captured in a photo) as well as perversity (in the sense of the demonic sub/super human females of Bram Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*). Materialization mediums both invested in Whiteness by placing a moral value on light, white fabric, and White skin, but they also enabled the disordering of bodies and the material hierarchy through the anti-transcendent gesture of

[24] I would like to do more research concerning wax as a liminal state of matter at this time, and material practices that centered wax dolls and figures. Marina Warner's *Phantasmagoria* discusses the relation between wax and mediumship for wax metaphorically captures the dead.

bringing Whiteness down to material formation and dissolution. The famous criminologist and supporter of materialization mediums, Cesare Lambroso, commented upon the strange materiality of Katie King:

> Phantasms are covered with a white woven stuff, extremely fine, sometimes doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled. They seem to draw it out from the clothes of the medium. This mediumistic tissue is indispensable, as Katie King said to Crookes, as the envelope of their fluidic organism and to keep it from dissolving in the light (331).

Significantly, Lambroso was developing criminology through a logic of racial biologism at this time, so his attachment to materialization mediums can be seen as one field that helped him think about human biology and deviance. In the above passage, Lambroso employs metaphors of photography and cell membrane in an attempt to capture the medium's materiality. Discussing Cook's mediumship in this way allowed him to treat her as a form of technology that produced evidence. What he exposes in this text is his own tendency to conflate biology with technology, as well as the fact that Spiritualist performances tended to inspire this kind of collapsed representational thinking.

Looking back to Cook's performance repertoire, it is significant that the medium and the medium's clothes became the raw material for spirit, locating spirit-presence in both skin and textiles. Cook's iconic black dress becomes the white frock of Katie's through material transformation, changing from base matter into spiritual matter. Significantly, Katie was known for cutting pieces of her white dress and distributing them among séance-goers, after which she would reveal the clothing to be uncut (Bennett, "The Farewell Séance of Katie King"). In a series of farewell performances that Florence Cook staged in May of 1874, the Spiritualist press described Katie King:

> She was dressed in pure white, with low neck and short sleeves. She had long hair of a light auburn or golden colour, which hung in ringlets down her back and each

> side of her head, reaching nearly to her waist. She wore a long white veil, but this was only drawn over her face once or twice during the seance. ("The Farewell Séance" 258)

Under gas lighting, Katie distributed flowers and pieces of her garment to the audience. She mended her clothing with a shake of the fabric, letting those near her examine it, and then affectionately said farewell. Bridgett Bennett has analyzed Cook's farewell performances in relation to the death of little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Eva shining her moral light on her loved ones before departing. Significantly, Bennett notes that Spiritualists denied the fact of death altogether, so when Cook appropriated the form of little Eva's death, the Katie King farewell performances "took the rhetoric and practices of dying and transformed them into a new form of performance" (1). Specifically, the performance involved the distribution of "affect-laden objects" including hair and fabric, which cited practices of mourning but became something else altogether. In contrast to the discussion of Katie melting away like a wax doll, here she remains through these sympathetic objects. This new form of performance, I suggest, was not only an elaboration of Victorian sympathy or melodrama but staged Whiteness as a spiritual/material technology, as a means of making Whiteness touch down and remain in a material way. Katie King was material in a special sense because her body was miraculously productive (in growing fabric and flowers from thin air) and Cook's body was reproductive in a perverse way (producing a female double).

Katie King was an iconic spirit of Spiritualism's transnatlantic moment; like her supposed father in the Summerland, John King, she represented the colonial spirit traversing all boundaries in time and space, seemingly moved by a desire to connect humans and levels of the afterlife. In contrast to specific acts of colonization, the Kings

represented an abstract, endless kind of colonization akin to the Denton-Cridge visions of Earth and outer space. Whiteness, when loosed from a specific context and oriented as a spiritual technology, could move through repertoires and touch down in different ways. After Cook offered a series of farewell performances in London in 1874, Jennie and Nelson Holmes took Katie King as their spirit guide back in the United States. Whiteness was a fantasy, but one rooted in repertoires and cultural exchanges back and forth across the Atlantic. The fact that mediums kept calling the same spirits into their séance rooms suggests that mediums had knowledge of each other's performances. Katie King was a particularly attractive spirit because of the way she performed Whiteness with just a hint of Orientalist fantasy and superhuman perversity, displaying a glowing light and youthful innocence while performing inviting sexualized gestures (examine my body, she says, I'm real).

3. D'Esperance and Arab Others

Madame d'Esperance was an English spirit medium born Elizabeth Hope in London in 1855. Her story reveals a more explicit racial relationship between the medium and the Arab female spirits she channeled. In her autobiography, she describes a lonely childhood in a haunted mansion, where she became acquainted with "shadow people" or spirits of the dead. She became a medium in the 1870s and toured around France and Britain giving séances, becoming famous for materialization. D'Esperance's mediumship dealt with racial fantasies of colonialism, and these narratives served to enhance her material performances. D'Esperance's "spirit control" was identified as "Yolande," who she described as "a young Arab girl of fifteen or sixteen years," visible to all the sitters to

be “a slender olive-skinned maiden whose naivete and gracefulness made her the wonder and admiration of the circle” (248). Yolande’s performances capitalized on a sexual fantasy at the heart of British colonialism, the young, sexually precocious dark-skinned maiden. Here is a description from d’Esperance’s biography:

> Her thin draperies allowed the rich olive tint of her neck, shoulders, arms, and ankles to be plainly visible. The long black waving hair hung over her shoulders to below her waist and was confined by a small turban-shaped headdress. Her features were small, straight, and piquant; the eyes were dark, large, and lively; her every movement was as full of grace as those of a young child, or as it stuck me when I saw her standing half shyly, half boldly, between the curtains, like a young roe-deer (251-252).

This description conjures a discourse of Orientalized feminine sexuality that was distinct from feminine Whiteness. Yolande is human but behaves like an animal, fully grown but childlike.

Significantly, her Arab “shadow person” came into being through Esperance’s White body and white fabric, as in the Fox and Cook materializations. D’Esperance cites a description given by one of the sitters in her séance:

> First a filmy, cloudy, patch of something white is observed on the floor, in front of the cabinet. It then gradually expands, visibly extending itself as if it were an animated patch of muslin, lying fold upon fold, on the floor, until extending about two and a half by three feet and having a depth of a few inches—perhaps six or more. Presently it begins to rise slowly in or near the centre, as if a human head were underneath it, while the cloudy film on the floor begins to look more like muslin falling into folds about the portion so mysteriously rising. By the time it has attained two or more feet, it looks as if a child were under it and moving its arms about in all directions as if manipulating something underneath.
>
> It continues rising, oftentimes sinking somewhat to rise again higher than before, until it attains a height of about five feet, when its form can be seen as if arranging the folds of drapery about its figure. Presently the arms rise considerably above the head and open outwards through a mass of cloud like spirit drapery, and Yolande stands before us unveiled, graceful and beautiful (254-255).

These séances were frequently held with two gas lamps in the room, so the sitters could dimly see what was happening. Unlike the previous examples of materialization, the female spirit was exoticized as non-White, but the aesthetic was still a storm of White mist and fabric. Like the Katie King séances of Florence Cook, where pieces of the spirit's white dress were taken home as tokens, this white dress was touched and inspected, and became the remains of the spirit-body itself. Significantly, when Yolande dematerialized, she disappeared into the fabric:

> Stepping forward to show herself and be identified by any strangers then present, she slowly and deliberately opens out the veil-like superfluous drapery: expanding it she places it over her head, and spreads it around her like a great bridal veil, and then immediately but slowly sinks down, becoming less bulky as she collapses, dematerialising her body beneath the cloud-like drapery until it has little or no resemblance to Yolande. Then she further collapses until she has no resemblance to a human form, and more rapidly sinks down to fifteen or twelve inches. Then suddenly the form falls into a heaped patch of drapery—literally Yolande's left-off clothing which slowly but visibly melts into nothingness (256).

What could almost be a strip tease is framed as an uncloaking of invisible matter. The story captures the Spiritualist fascination with transformation, from spirit to matter and back again, or rather becoming and unbecoming human. Materialization performances were racialized differently in different contexts, but they always relied upon an aesthetic Whiteness, a borderline materiality, and femininity as a capacity to make and unmake bodies.

Materialization séances usually did not take racial difference as the primary content of the show, but racial Whiteness, as a transcendent technology, was the implicit frame of the show. D'Esperance's process of producing racial others reveals how a foundational racial hierarchy of matter amplified more specific content about raciality and coloniality. In contrast to the bright white cotton fabric or muslin that was central to

American séances, Yolande reportedly emerged out of silks, products brought to Europe from the colonies. D'Esperance describes two other female spirits in Yolande's spirit-life, one being "Ninia," a small girl who on one occasion manages to come pick up Yolande's fabric, "Yolande's remains," and drape it around herself. There was another taller spirit identified as "Y-Ay-Ali," Yolande's teacher: "one of the most perfectly beautiful creatures the mind can conceive, her tall stately form and dazzling fairness, majestic bearing and graceful movements, being a distinct contrast to Yolande's kitten-like gestures. Y-Ay-Ali was indeed a creature from a higher world" (257-258). The depiction of Y-Ay-Ali as a light-skinned Arab woman positions her as the most desirable of racialized women, a sort of sexual ideal. Thinking back to Gilroy's term, the "dislocating dazzle of Whiteness," this mention of fairness shows us that dazzling fairness could be loosed from specific Euro-centric identities and spread between bodies in the process of materialization.

From a performance perspective, this looks like a case of d'Esperance "playing Arab." How might this be different from "playing Indian"? "Playing Indian," in the sense used by Philip Deloria, was about impersonating Indians in order to establish belonging on American soil and support White nativism. While there were many spirit mediums who played Indian through ethnic impersonation, I attempted to show in the first chapter that the racialization of Indian spirits also happened according to a racial metaphysics (Indians entombed in the Earth as spiritual boons for White settlers), supporting Koons' and Spear's projects of unearthing Indian remains. The Arab spirits in d'Esperance's séances were differently racialized, but still in both senses (implicitly and explicitly). In more specific terms, d'Esperance could be seen as impersonating racialized behavior and

magnifying a racial metaphysics that afforded the Orientalized spirit with a material superpower. What was distinct about this playing Arab, however, was a difference in imagined colonial land and space. While American mediums channeled Indians as healers connected to the specific ground of North America, d'Esperance channeled Arab women as spirits willingly on the move, or as gifts transported by European colonizers—like a flower or a blushing bride from the colonies.

Materializations of objects show how the racial designation of Yolande was related to the magic of the objects she materialized. Yolande was known for materializing flowers, and at a séance held August 4, 1880, a Ixora Crocata, a flower from India, was reportedly produced in a pitcher of sand, a plant that looked like it was years old, and sitters were unable to remove the plant from the bottle. D'Esperance posed the question: "How did the plant come here? Did it grow in the bottle? Had it been brought from India in a dematerialized state and rematerialized in the séance-room?" (266). Significantly, spirits racialized as other frequently did the bidding of the medium and the séance-goers, attempting to fulfill the desires of those in the room. There is a difference between White spirits and darkened ones, as the previous chapters have shown, and materialization repertoires capitalized on this difference. John and Katie King were ideal representatives of Whiteness (colonizers in the spirit world, pirates accustomed to sailing uncharted waters, reportedly leading others in the afterlife). Yolande, in contrast, was a demure sexualized object and material messenger from the colonies.

I see Elizabeth d'Esperance's séances as responding to a sense of White dislocation, which was apparently healed by a sense of proximity to exoticized female racial others. As Edward Said has argued, Orientalized women were pictured as

possessing "unlimited sensuality" as "creatures of a male power-fantasy" (207). This certainly may have been the draw for White men who attended d'Esperance's séances, receiving kisses and caresses from d'Esperance's exoticized female spirits. As a side-note, these performances should be contextualized by sex work in the nineteenth century, which was itself Orientalized (as is evidenced by the rising popularity of the "coochee coochee dance," the origin of both belly-dance and stripping). There was something else happening in these séances, however, because d'Esperance claimed to be co-present with these spirits. Unlike most other spirit mediums, she was reportedly fully conscious while channeling them. These scenes of racial blending created an extreme sense of "imagined intimacy," in the term used by Adria Imada, between the White medium and her racialized female others. As Imada argues regarding the colonial relation between the United States and Hawaii, the performance of hula created "imagined intimacy" between the colonizer and colonized: "a potent fantasy that enabled Americans to possess their island colony physically and figuratively" (11). I consider d'Esperance's performances as enactments of a White female fantasy of imagined intimacy born of a materiality problem—the same materiality problem that haunts each chapter of this dissertation in a different way. Whiteness, when held up as transcendence, creates a lack, a desire for embodiment and belonging which can seemingly be healed through "fantasies of miscegenation" (Ziter) in explicitly sexual encounters, or "imagined intimacy" (between racial others who blend according to kinship or co-presence). In other words, Spiritualist Orientalism was an answer to the challenge of White dematerialization.

The other crucial part to understand about this dynamic of White disembodiment or dislocation was how mediums made Whiteness into matter. In more specific terms,

materialization séances made Whiteness literal and touchable, which disordered the prevailing racial hierarchy of White transcendence and racialized matter by making White women into visceral performing objects. Looking to the moment when d'Esperance was exposed as a fraud is revealing because she resorted to a logic of a performing object to explain what she had been doing. In 1880, a sitter in one of d'Esperance's séances grabbed the spirit and found it to be the medium herself. The curious thing is that d'Esperance managed to find an explanation that was compelling to psychical researchers including Cesare Lambroso. Esperance describes the experience:

> What actually occurred I had to learn afterwards. All I knew was a horrible excruciating sensation of being doubled up and squeezed together, as I can imagine a hollow gutta percha doll would feel, if it had sensation, when violently embraced by its baby owner. A Sense of terror and agonizing pain came over me, as though I were losing hold of life and was falling into some fearful abyss, yet knowing nothing, seeing nothing, hearing nothing except the echo of a scream which I tried to save myself, to grasp at something, but missed it; and then came a blank from which I awakened with a shuddering horror and sense of being bruised to death (*What I Know* 298, qtd. in Tromp 94).

Marlene Tromp has argued that d'Esperance's reaction to this unmasking (illness and terror) was "the logical outcome to the intimacy of connection" between the medium and the Arab spirit, "and their intimacy reveals the damaging effects of attempting to control, manage, and contain the 'othered' subject" (94). Like many other examples in this chapter, the medium is compared to a doll, but in this text, the experience is described from inside of the object, and significantly, as Tromp noted, the experience was racialized because it was reportedly the outcome of her sharing a body with a racial other. Gutta percha dolls, Robin Bernstein has shown, were racialized "scriptive things" in the nineteenth century. Made of durable rubber, they could withstand abuse. Bernstein argues that in the United States, these dolls scripted White children to enact scenes of abusing

Black slaves because of the myth that Black people were impervious to pain (71). In a different context but still with racial undertones, d'Esperance referenced a scene of violent childhood play to point to a special kind of embodiment made possible through mediumship: As she was partially forming her racially othered spirit, the two were ripped apart.

It is significant that d'Esperance expressed a racial anxiety through the image of a doll, which is the ultimate childhood object used to represent both femininity and the concept of the uncanny. The "uncanny valley" is the iconic borderland, drawn from Freud, where an automaton or doll approaches becoming human and perhaps gets too close, a phenomenon that Louis Chude-Sokei has shown to be inspired by racial anxieties (an issue that will become clearer in the next section). When d'Esperance compared herself to a doll, she was linking mediumship with a form of nonlife that was associated with matter, death, and racial others in bondage—becoming mute, powerless, shrouded in darkness, or trapped in a body. As Tromp alludes to, this perilous situation was supposedly the result of d'Esperance's intimacy with Orientalized female spirits. In a different context but similar racial logic, Mary Schindler's channeling of Black spirits in the second chapter framed the White female body as too passive or weak to control the overwhelming material power of racial others. D'Esperance's statement exposed how mediumship implicitly tested Whiteness, because anyone could enter her from the spirit world. In this sense, feminine Whiteness could not be secured or bounded. This trip across the Atlantic has revealed a form of feminine Whiteness on the move, all three mediums manifesting female doubling, first White and then Orientalized spirits.

Significantly, the materialization repertoire literalized Whiteness by capitalizing on a female power to reproduce (making Whiteness material in a perverse way).

4. Birthing Ectoplasm

The term ectoplasm was first used by French psychical researcher Charles Richet to refer to an outer layer of spirit like the outer membrane of a cell. He was describing the mediumship of Eusapia Palladino, an Italian woman from Naples who became internationally famous for her materialization séances in Italy and France. Palladino, in her photographs and descriptions, was a stout, short woman with pale skin and dark black hair and brown eyes. She was generally not identified in racial terms in the press, but she was often introduced as a "peasant," and particularly in the United States, she was noted for her foreignness. Apparently when she arrived to be tested by the American Society for Psychical Research in New York in 1909, she did not speak a word of English. Despite her supposed lack in this regard, she managed to convince a number of professional physical and social scientists of the genuineness of her mediumship, such that she came to be known as "the diva of scientists." Significantly, it was Palladino who transformed the materialization séance into a repertoire that was about producing unformed matter.

Ectoplasm was an exceptional physical manifestation because it tended to be both brilliantly white and grotesque, creating both aversion and a sense of fulfillment in audiences who desired to make spirit touchable. In 1894, Eusapia Palladino sat for a series of séances on a remote island off the southern coast of France, L'île du Grand Ribaud, attended by the famous psychical researchers Charles Richet, Oliver Lodge,

Frederic Myers, Julian Ochorowicz and Richet's secretary, M. Bellier. The group of investigators sat with the medium around a table, while Bellier watched from the other side of the window, making sure no one entered or exited the room. The medium's feet were placed on a surface that would ring a bell if she lifted her foot, and the men held her body down in different ways to make sure she was not cheating, one man under the table holding her legs and another standing behind her with an arm hooked around her neck, or two men standing beside her holding her hands tightly. Under these conditions, Palladino managed to accomplish a number of feats: raps upon the séance table, moving furniture from a distance, lifting the heavy séance table while her hands and feet were restrained, creating movements and forms in curtains with no wind, producing spirit-hands that touched the visitors far from where Palladino sat, effecting changes in temperature (Lodge, *Past Years* 310-312). The séance would sometimes progress into a deeper state of trance when Palladino lost consciousness completely and her body transformed. Lodge reported seeing "the extrusion of ectoplasmic material from the body," which was "at first a repellent object of inquiry." He saw "a protuberance gradually stretching out in the dim light…emanating from [Palladino's] side, through her clothes, a sort of supernumerary arm" (*Past Years* 301). Palladino had produced fleshy spirit materializations before, but on the island, Richet gave the substance the name ectoplasm. Referencing the protoplasmic material found in the interior of a cell, ectoplasm was supposedly an exteriorization of an interior state of matter, flesh appearing outside of the body, animate but formless.

I see ectoplasm as a test of feminine Whiteness in the sense that the boundaries placed on Whiteness (as a discrete body or transcendent subject) were exceeded.

Ectoplasmic performances went so far in the direction of proto-matter that it was no longer about reproducing Whiteness as a social or aesthetic category but excreting it out the other side of a bodily process. Palladino and her materializations have been discussed as phallic (Delgado). I want to suggest that her sexual boundary-bending must also be understood in relation to British and European colonization and the racial thinking it generated. Her spirit guide was John King, adding support to the idea that Spiritualism was transatlantic, with spirits traversing boundaries in an age of colonial fantasies. Katie King, as discussed in the Florence Cook mediumship, was a feminine sexual icon exhibiting a Whiteness that was born of materiality (coming into being through white fabric), but John King was more of an authoritative voice and a pirate character, presenting an opportunity for a trance medium to act out of social conventions with masculine bravado. When he possessed Palladino, she would strut around the room, touch, and even hit her visitors. Unlike the mediums who channeled female spirits, Palladino transgressed gender boundaries by performing in the role of a masculine pirate. Overlaid with this sexual ambiguity, Palladino's ectoplasmic appendage was an example of materialization that departed from idyllic forms of feminine Whiteness like mist and fabric and ventured into the territory of racialized sub/super/human, animal, or base matter. In contrast to the Fox and Cook materializations, this "repellent object of inquiry" was not aesthetically pleasing or framed within a brilliant White aesthetic or femininity.

There is a dichotomy between brilliance and ooze as two emanations of ectoplasm. One dazzles, and the other repels. What work, I ask, is the repellent materialization doing? Is it still a literalization of Whiteness? It is important to understand that the fascination of these audiences (male psychical researchers from the

physical, psychological, and social sciences) were guiding questions in the nineteenth-century human sciences, like Cesare Lambroso's concern with the connection between biology and pathology. As scholars of Italian Spiritualism Alvarado and Biondi have noted, in Lambroso's investigations of Palladino, "the medium took the role of the criminal, the mentally ill and women in general" (232), suggesting that while he gained something personally from watching her perform (he saw his own mother in materialized form), Palladino was ultimately a laboratory where he could explore his ideas about criminal or perverse tendencies being rooted in biological causes.

As the mother of "ectoplasm," Palladino's performances raised questions about materiality and bodies that were, I suggest, inherently racialized. Ercole Chiaia was the one who brought international attention to Palladino in 1888 when he vouched for her mediumship in a letter inviting Cesare Lambroso to investigate the phenomena. He explained his interest:

> She attracts to her the articles of furniture which surround her, lifts them up, holds them suspended in the air like Mahomet's coffin, and makes them come down again with undulatory movements…she increases her height or lessens it according to her pleasure. She raps or taps upon the walls, the ceiling, the floor…something like flashes of electricity shoot forth from her body… [She] seems to lie upon the empty air, as on a couch, contrary to all the laws of gravity…She is like an India rubber doll, like an automaton of a new kind; she takes strange forms. How many legs and arms has she? We do not know (Raia 210).

Here Palladino is described as a creature of unknown form, something like a woman but more akin to a puppet or machine. "Mahomet's coffin" refers to a legend circulating in Europe since the eleventh century that the prophet Mohammed's coffin levitated in the air due to magnets that he concealed in the dome of a 'church' in Mecca (Yolles and Weiss). This narrative was a Christian myth that depicted Mohammed as a false prophet,

and deployed in this context, it layers a fascination/aversion towards Orientalized Arab others under a fascination with magic and magnetism. The allusion to dolls and automatons signals that Palladino's materiality was at stake, in a line of questioning (Is she human?) most frequently directed toward Black people because of a biocentric racism generated to support enslavement. Like the gutta percha doll of d'Esperance's description, Palladino's body does not seem to abide by human limits, breaking and being remade without apparent sign of pain, like the rubber doll designed to withhold abuse.

Louis Chude-Sokei has shown how nineteenth-century anxieties over automatons were racialized. He argues that racial metaphors for technology have become so naturalized as to become almost invisible (3). For example, Chude-Sokei shows how mechanized dolls or early "robots" (meaning slaves, a term introduced in 1920 by Czech writer Karel Čapek) raised the fear of a Black uprising. That connection is now frequently overlooked in favor of more generalized or seemingly universal fears of automation like the Freudian-derived "uncanny valley" (when a robot gets too close to mimicking the human). The masked racialized fear, as I see it, is not only a sign of White double-consciousness (the fear of Blackness without an acknowledgement of the violent subjection of Black people). The fear of automation can be a recognition of the ongoing history of enslavement as well as a potential opening within the White order of things. Building off of Sylvia Wynter, Chude-Sokei argues that the overrepresentation of (White) "Man" effectively "transforms humans into objects but allows objects to claim the category of the human by virtue of the fundamental errors of the episteme in its capacity to assign life and meaning to those that exist in the uncanny valleys" (222). In other words, the uncanny valley that places the robot and the slave in a space of horror and

threat is also the means of breaking the "human" (White) world from the inside, from the crack in its episteme or reality. As Chude-Sokei puts it: "It is those who are excluded from the category who expand and complete it" (222), referring to the category of human and Black people who have always imagined and lived other versions of the human than the Whitened Western human. This potentiality to upset the White order of things—of performing objects holding the key to re-imagining the human—is the reason that images of dolls have been continually deployed in these primary texts to describe what spirit mediums were doing. Dolls, puppets, and automatons, like Sambo of the minstrel tradition, inhabited the space of the "almost human," as Sylvia Wynter frames it, a space that was a contradictory foundation for the invention of Whiteness.

Significantly, the materialization repertoire has been discussed in the secondary literature as a "humiliating" debasement of the female actor. I discussed Ann Braude's aversion to materialization in the introduction, and I would like to return to it to think about how materialization mediums dealt in the moral and affective economies surrounding the concepts of matter and the human. In her words:

> When materialization replaced trance speaking as the most note-worthy public manifestation of Spiritualism, the meaning of mediumship changed. Like other forms of sensational mediumship, the new manifestations emphasized the medium's passivity in new and humiliating ways and downplayed her empowerment. Test conditions frequently called for materialization mediums to be blindfolded, gagged, and bound…While trance speakers often traveled independently, most of the new mediums required male confederates or managers to orchestrate séances, during which the mediums neither spoke nor moved. In most cases, manifestations appeared only after the medium was securely bound and hidden in a cabinet, her effectiveness depending on invisibility and powerlessness…Letters of appreciation and admiration did not follow the appearance of a woman in a sack nailed to the floor.
>
> While materialization diluted the meaning of mediumship, it also opened Spiritualism to new and more spectacular forms of fraud and self-aggrandizement (177).

Braude's characterization of materialization as "diluting" mediumship is revealing of what mainstream Spiritualists generally wanted to protect. As I discussed with reference to the Fox sisters, Spiritualists generally wanted to protect an air of innocence associated with young White women, as well as a sense that Spiritualism could be elevating as opposed to debasing. Braude's description of the medium in a sack nailed to the floor is noteworthy in the context of Chude-Sokei's argument about objecthood. When these White women were made into mute objects, captured, or tied to the ground, they presented a different kind of opportunity than the trance medium who was supposedly "elevating her sex" by channeling famous White men from history like William Shakespeare. The point I have attempted to establish with these case studies is that physical manifestations of spirit were implicitly racialized in the way that mediums performed the relationship between humans and objects. Significantly, literalizing acts tended to expose this implicit frame. In the case of the materialization repertoire, the metaphorical flow of feminine Whiteness was reversed, the medium became a mute background figure draped in black fabric to provide the landscape for a dazzling White spirit to form against. The investment in Whiteness was still there, but the technology of mediumship had changed to feature a feminine "darkness" and mysterious sexual power associated with matter through maternity.

5. Photographing the Medium

It is important to think about how photographic technology has been related to the materialization repertoire, for as Richard Dyer has shown, early photography and cinema embedded a racialized aesthetic within processes of image production. In Dyer's words:

"photographic media are centerpieces in a whole culture of light that is founded on two particular notions, namely that reality can be represented as being on a ground of white, and that light comes from above" (84). These assumptions advantage White people in representation and they also have a spiritual and moral dimension, suggesting that White people are connected to light itself. During the late nineteenth-century, this aesthetic became pivotal to mass culture through photography, and in the early twentieth century, through cinema. An iconic example that Dyer analyzes is the White storm of little Eva's death in the silent film of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1927): A beam of light enters from the rooftop over Eva's bed and she ascends to heaven in a White mist. This scene perfectly matches the way that Spiritualists understood spirit, and it was deployed in a specifically racialized way—using Whiteness and light to represent moral purity.

There are a number of insightful studies of photography and Spiritualism in media studies (Sconce, Gunning, Beckman, Warner) showing how spirit mediums drew from fascination with photographic and cinematic media in the nineteenth-century (the idea, for example, as Sconce put it, of "haunted media"). As discussed in the introduction, contemporary critics of Spiritualists and media scholars both have had a tendency to think of mediums as acting out technological metaphors, the camera being key among them. However, in my opinion, Spiritualist performance has been overdetermined by the photographic metaphor, and that raises questions for me about what photography allows us to see and how it directs a viewer to see it. Photography, in the context of the materialization repertoire, could be a tool to gloss over the haptic literalization that happened when White women gave birth to ectoplasm. Literalization, as I discussed in the introduction, is generally defined as an anti-metaphorical process, but one could also

see it as a mode of representational labor that happens alongside metaphor—sometimes supporting the metaphorical interpretation or, at other times, making it falter by knitting together a symbol and a referent in a way that looks like an overperformance. In other words, a metaphor names a relation (the female medium is like a camera), but the precise nature of that relation between two things is outside the frame of the metaphor. Literalization, in this sense, is the performance that draws connection between concepts and material bodies through haptic experiments.

With this problem in mind, I want to turn to two photographs from the early twentieth century: The French medium Eva Carriere (Eva C.) and the American medium Margery (Mina) Crandon.


Fig. 5


Fig. 6

The photograph on the left was taken by Alfred Schrenck-Notzing during a séance in Paris in 1911 with the French medium Eva Carriere. With a flashlight, the scientist captured the medium mid-performance. Schrenck-Notzing published this photograph as evidence of the unexplainable phenomena of the séances he attended. Eva's right hand and foot are being held by Schrenck-Notzing and the left by the other male investigator, M.G. de Fontenay, and the third observer in the séance was sculptor and psychical

researcher Julliette Bisson. In this scene, ectoplasm emanates from the medium's chest and crotch, what Schrenck-Notzing described as a "veil-like mass." He writes: "I approached my hand in order to grasp it, but it regularly receded before me" (96). Then after the flash-light was ignited for the photo, the mass disappeared.

The aesthetic of white fabric, which was central to the materialization séances previously described in the chapter, continued to be at the center of ectoplasmic repertoires, but that repertoire became increasingly sexual. Fabric no longer was a surface or dress but a growing feminine substance. Juliette Bisson described one manifestation in these series of sittings:

> On my expressing a wish, the medium parted her thighs and I saw that material assumed a curious shape, resembling an orchid, decreased slowly, and entered the vagina. During the whole process I held her hands. Eva then said, 'Wait, we will try to facilitate the passage.' She rose, mounted on the chair, and sat down on one of the arm-rests, her feet touching the seat. Before my eyes, and with the curtain open a large spherical mass, about 8 inches in diameter, emerged from the vagina and quickly placed itself on her left thigh while she crossed her legs. I distinctly recognized in the mass a still unfinished face, whose eyes looked at me (116, Qtd. in Delgado).

This scene staged perverse birth through a collaborative process, Bisson as the investigator-become-midwife. Ectoplasm was a curious object in three senses: A material subject to scientific investigation, performing matter staged for capture in an image, and a sexual object. There is a dynamic of exposure and subterfuge that scholars like Delgado have found empowering, namely the idea that Carriere and Bisson (if she was an accomplice in these acts) made fools of educated men.

The photograph on the right depicts the medium Margery Crandon in the United States, who became famous for volunteering herself to investigations hosted by the researchers for *Scientific American* in 1924 and the American Society for Psychical

Research in the early 1930s. Psychical researcher Walter Franklin Prince published this photo in an article in *Scientific American* (1933) exposing Crandon as a fraud. Prince argued that proof of her tricks (famously demonstrated by Harry Houdini) had been overshadowed by the spectacle of the show, her hyper-sexualized repertoire, and her supporters who, many speculated, were having affairs with her (most significantly Hereward Carrington, Eusapia Palladino's promoter in the United States). Prince was a well-respected psychical researcher, psychologist, and theologian, and the only other American besides William James who served as the president of the Society for Psychical Research in London (between 1930 and 1931). His writings would have been read across the Atlantic, particularly because he took a stance against the American Society for Psychical Research over the Crandon case, which was taken over by a Spiritualist faction led by Frederick Edwards. In the image, ectoplasm exudes from beneath Margery's skirt, forming a hand (reportedly of Margery's deceased brother and spirit-guide Walter) that reaches out and shakes the hand of the psychical researcher seated to her left (representatives of the American Society for Psychical Research, not mentioned by name in the article). Crandon's ectoplasm was phallic like Palladino's, suggesting sexual transgression, but there was an added layer to this perverse birth in the claim that this was Crandon's own brother's appendage reaching out of her vagina.

These two images reveal a similarity between ectoplasmic repertoires from opposite sides of the Atlantic, exposing a dramaturgy that focused on the mysteries and perversities of the female body as well as the potential deception of female actors. In both photographs, the medium is held by the hands (and feet in Eva C.'s case) by male psychical researchers while the center of her body is the space of materialization. Eva

C.'s tricks were exposed by psychical researchers, including wires run to animate ectoplasm and paper cutouts from magazines used to represent spirits. Crandon's ectoplasm was inspected by psychical researchers who came to the conclusion that it was an animal liver carved into the shape of a hand. Despite accusations of fraud, however, like the other mediums discussed in this chapter, Eva C. and Margery Crandon had many supporters. Crandon taunted psychical researchers from her deathbed: "all you 'psychical researchers' can go to hell…You'll all be guessing…for the rest of your lives" (qtd. in Delgado 37). It is understandable that scholars like Delgado have found pleasure in the figures of these mediums as tricksters making fools of educated men. This sentiment is reminiscent of Emma Hardinge Britten's claim that spirit-rappings "will forever remain one of the unfinished problems of the universe" (55).

Physical mediumship, from tipping tables to ectoplasm, baffled audiences by engaging with matter through female bodies. To be sure, the table was a very different kind of performing object than ectoplasm, an innocent object, one could say, associated with adolescent girls assumed to be innocent because of their supposed undeveloped sexuality and Whiteness. Reading early physical manifestations alongside materialization and ectoplasmic repertoires helps us see that sexual and racial undercurrents were present in the beginning of the movement despite consistent efforts to protect or cleanse Spiritualism from their dangers (namely, the agency of matter, objects, women, and racial others as potentially radical interruptions in the ordering of the world). Emma Hardinge Britten's comments, for instance, form a through-line in each chapter as attempts to protect the movement from "dark" tendencies including sex, physicality, and non-White spiritualities. And yet, as I hope these chapters have revealed, there was something

essential that Spiritualists hoped to unlock from these territories that they could only access through material performance and feminine Whiteness.

Art historian Meredith Reddy considers materializations like those produced by Eva C. to be "symbolic creations, much like artworks, which carried implicit cultural and aesthetic meaning" (ii-iii). While I also think of ectoplasm as exposing implicit meaning, I consider the production of meaning in a different sense than symbolism. Meaning created through literalization, I suggest, was not a linear process of production (like producing an art object), but involved gesture, touch, dissolution of forms, and ontological disorder in the time of performance. Paula Vilaplana de Miguel's recent comparison of spirit mediums with feminist performance artists of the late twentieth century is helpful by attending to the haptic nature of Spiritualist performance, but she also misses the unique logic of these performances by resorting to a different artistic frame (which effectively cleanses the performance of spirit and its radical connection with matter). I recognize that ectoplasmic performances were aestheticized and captured in photographs, but they were also born of an ontological and authorial chaos (the medium never claimed responsibility for her creation and rarely claimed to be conscious). To read these performances through the desire to recover female agency is to miss out on the perplexing form of agency that was at play in these scenes—White female mediums had a way of dissociating from their bodies in order to perform hyper-embodiment, entering into the flow of creating spiritual matter and literalizing Whiteness in the process.

It is important to think about who took these photos and for whom they mattered. The photographers were White men inspecting sexually transgressive White female

performers. Karen Beckman argued that ectoplasm created an "epistemological longing, a desire to understand the limits of our ability to grasp and represent the elusive truth of our own existence" (91). What is coded into this "we" is the assumed White male subject coming to terms with his "human" existence from the shadowy borderlands of matter, populated by various sexualized and racialized others. While this might seem an extreme or shocking performance, I want to suggest that it was the logical outcome of a repertoire fueled by literalization and haptic demonstrations, a repertoire which had always centered the mystery of the female womb and Whiteness, from table-tipping to ectoplasm. What this chapter reveals that the previous ones did not, however, is the racialization of the White subject through its connection with matter. Whiteness becomes flesh, and in that way, it cannot be the universal, transcendent category that seems to secure its power.

This chapter has centered the questions: What did it mean for White women to body forth unformed flesh? And did it produce meaning differently? Of course, women give birth all of the time, so the thrill and threat of materialization was not in staging sexual reproduction but rather perverse reproduction, creating moments of emergence without genealogies or fathers. Perhaps this explains the male fascination with materialization mediums. Matter and maternity were made monstrous in these performances, and the affects produced by these scenes played into the racialized discourse of the time. Debates over Darwinian evolution that colored the pages of Spiritualist texts gave way in the twentieth century to people like Lambroso who practiced the racialized social "science" of criminology. Another case in point was the rise of the "sexual hygiene" or eugenics movement. As Christine Ferguson argues, the Spiritualist movement was "a vital, dynamic and eccentric site of nineteenth-century

eugenic utopianism, one which sought to appropriate the findings and speculations of the new evolutionary and hereditary sciences for its own otherworldly, but never anti-materialist, cause" (2). There may have been a great range in the politics and goals of Spiritualists, but they had a few things in common: The idea of progress, or the evolution of the human "race" or "races" in the afterlife, and, as Ferguson notes, a very materialist way of thinking about spirit. On one hand, materialization séances reinforced the magical transcendence of White skin but they also had the potential to make the racial hierarchy stumble by making Whiteness hyper-material. This is by no means a case of utopian performance, but a case of overperformance: Troubling White transcendence by exceeding its boundaries. The physical manifestations of Spiritualism could be considered mis-performances if one considers how many critiques they generated, but I see them as over-performances in the sense that they literalized a current running throughout the Spiritualist movement.

Photography has become the lens through which mediumship is viewed, but I suggest photography should rather be seen as a parallel technology that was aligned with bodily mediumship in an attempt to tame an unruly female performance repertoire. Photography tamed performing women in the sense that photographs sanitized or attempted to fix unformed flesh (to capture it or make it lasting evidence). As Kathleen Pierce has argued, photography in the nineteenth century was understood to be indexical, referring to the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce, where an index points to an object in context, in this case the event of the séance. As an index to a performance, the photograph signifies differently than a symbol because the photo has a relation to a context. This is the case whether the image is mined for proof of spirit or proof of fraud.

The relation between photography and spirit reveals, as Kriebel and Zervigón argue, that photography could "meet social and psychological needs ranging from scientific certainty to supernatural affirmation. That the medium should nourish such opposing human desires—empiricism and metaphysics—underscores photography's ever-fluid identity" (4). Rather than let the photograph be the last word on the event, I want to think about it as one (highly privileged) extension of the material/spiritual problem of the séance, namely, performing matter.

6. Conclusion

Spiritualists believed that White women were supremely fitted to the task of making spirit material because of their unique "magnetism." I interpret this concept of magnetism as relying upon a combination of the reproductive power of female bodies combined with their association with transcendent Whiteness. When these mediums performed, they were not discrete beings, but spiritual technologies that could be deployed in two ways: either to reproduce the "human" (White colonial) order of things, or, conversely, they could test Whiteness by inviting in materiality, sexuality, and racially othered spirits. In one way, these performances tended to invest in Whiteness as a transcendent force (when a White spirit like Katie King dazzled her audience), but sometimes materialization repertoires made the racial metaphysics stumble by performing anti-transcendent gestures, ectoplasm being key among them.

Each chapter of this dissertation has looked at texts and images produced by Spiritualists who attempted to gain a body because of a loss inherited from Western humanism's "degodding" (Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map"), or dispiriting of the

world. It's not that the "moderns" have ever truly been without spirit, but many of them found it impossible to access through their own bodies because of an association between Whiteness and transcendent spirit. Spiritualism changed that. This chapter looked at the most spectacularized of Spiritualist material performances: Those that mined Whiteness for what it had lost at the expense of its transcendence. White skin, fabric, hair, and domestic objects like flowers and tables were all resources in this search, as materials and surfaces that provided direct connection between this world and the next. I hope I have established that the context for these performances was not a specific local or national culture, but an abstract space—a dazzling space of Whiteness that could be loosed from specific places, genealogies, and ethnicities and then touch down in a re-materialized form.

The most significant influence on this materialization repertoire (perhaps what brought an end to physical mediumship altogether) was photography, as a means of capturing or taming the unruly behaviors of female mediums. I have attended to photographs of materialization mediums here, but I have left spirit portrait photography and spirit art out of the frame because they present two very different orientations toward femininity and matter. In spirit portraiture, there was no spirit medium required (the bereaved would draw the spirit and the camera would capture it). As I see it, spirit portraiture fulfilled the dream of materializing the immaterial while cleansing it of the physicality of female presence. Along these lines, spirit artists created images that could be separated from the context of their creation (the spirit and the female body) as art objects. Hence Mary Ann Howitt's description of her artistic practice as an elevation of matter as opposed to materialization, which she saw as a debasement of spirit.

Materialization mediums, as I see it, presented a materiality problem with feminine Whiteness—think of all the melting and twisted dolls mentioned in the descriptions of their activities. They could dazzle and baffle audiences, not only by being sexual, but by being hyper-material, and, significantly, by being literal: Not trance poets or artists but White women producing White flesh through touch and excretion.

Conclusion

In October of 2018, The Guggenheim Museum hosted the first major solo exhibition in the United States of the paintings of Swedish spirit artist Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). In 1879, af Klint began experimenting with Spiritism, and later formed a group of women who called themselves "The Five," holding séances and channeling a group of spirits that they designated the "High Masters." The paintings in the exhibition were a collection that af Klint created between 1906 and 1915, which she set aside as "Paintings for the Future," images that were to adorn a temple designed by the High Masters. The show received a great deal of positive attention, prompting some scholars to rewrite art history, recognizing her as the first abstract artist. Significantly, af Klint did not believe herself to be the primary artist. She gave this statement regarding a series that she painted in 1907: "The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict" (Schwartz 88).

The fact that she was a medium has continued to raise questions about her art: Can we consider her the artist? Can we view these paintings without considering her method of creating? As one reviewer of the exhibition discussed:

> Absorbing af Klint's work, viewers may feel that they must hold in their minds that the forms, even the colors, in her pictures express symbolic meanings—such as that blue stands for female, yellow for male, and green for the idea of union. That her pictures were made by someone who believed herself to be a medium for unseen forces presents an even bigger barrier. It makes us wonder if we have any liberty in appraising her mind and motives. Yet I think most viewers ease these concerns as they encounter a body of work that quickly comes to feel coherent (Schwartz 85-86).

In this statement, af Klint's mediumship is a barrier that must be overcome by audiences seeing the work, a barrier that might classify her, as art critic Sanford Schwartz suggests his article, among artists who made work while experiencing severe mental illness. This tells you a great deal about where Spiritualism stands in the Anglophone art world and, I suggest, academia and the arts more broadly. While a number of scholars in history, religious studies, media arts, and the humanities have attempted to salvage Spiritualism from the trash pile of history for the past fifty years or so for different reasons, there is a still a sense that Spiritualism presents a "barrier" to legitimate regimes of meaning, ways of seeing, knowing, and being.

The issue that haunts this dissertation is that theatre, in addition to the visual arts, has continually made use of metaphors or suggestions of spirit and yet scholars frequently protect themselves from the danger of actual spirit presence. I do not mean to make any claims about what is or is not possible when it comes to spirit communication, and that is perhaps why I am so drawn to Spiritualism. Other spiritual movements are easier to categorize and singularize. Other spirit mediums are easier to think with. However, I contend that there is something to be gained in the challenge of encountering these materialist mediums. Approaching performance as epistemology (as a way of knowing and doing, not only as a practice or event) allows us to think beyond the assumption that there is one truth to be uncovered here (were these spirits real?), and rather attend to how something (feminine Whiteness) was supported and sustained through repertoires, even as those repertoires changed.

I have attempted to reveal how Spiritualists simultaneously invested in and tested Whiteness, and how those tests ended up exposing the underlying racial frame (which

could be usefully revealing, or unabashedly violent). I do not see it as a triumph that Spiritualist material performance was replaced by more socially acceptable forms of representation like spirit photography and spirit art. This shift, I suggest, signals an investment in transcendence (which is still implicitly coded as White). It is significant that af Klint, as a Swedish White woman who was never married, is the face of Spiritualism in the twenty-first century, appearing from the past to share her "paintings for the future" with an eager New York audience. Much like the early framing of the adolescent Fox sisters, the figure of af Klint that has received so much positive attention in the press has a racial and sexual innocence about her, and her practice of mediumship (turning spirit into art objects) elevated matter in a way that feminine Whiteness has historically tended to (against the materiality of the body). I do not mean to diminish the accomplishments of Hilma af Klint or to make claims about how the Spiritualist movement operated in Sweden in the nineteenth century. Rather, I want to draw attention to how the Anglophone art world understands her in order to show how transcendent mediumship is the version of Spiritualism that remains socially acceptable and valued in popular culture today. In a sense, she can be an icon of performing feminine Whiteness, even if she is still pathologized for her belief in spirits, because her mediumship is of the mind and produces objects that are valuable within high culture. In contrast, the material performance repertoires featured in this dissertation made it seem impossible to adequately perform Whiteness—playing between transcendence and the material presence of performance, often exposing violent racial thinking, and knitting together layers of sexual and racial meaning through experiments with matter.

This dissertation has been oriented to critique Whiteness because of the ongoing anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence in the United States and abroad. I do not intend to suggest a new way of living or behaving for White people, but rather along the lines of Sara Ahmed's work, to "maintain the force of the critique." I attempt to give myself and others the grounds to question how Whiteness may live on in previously unrecognized ways. In my first chapter, I spoke to neo-animist scholars who argue that being open to the influence of spirit is an ethical way of being in the world in response to Western humanism's disenchantment or de-spiriting of the world. I attempted to show that Spiritualists were doing just this, attending to "the spirits of the local earth" (Abram) around them, and that led them to unearth graves. I do not mean to imply that the connection between an awareness of spirits and a material action is inevitable, but there is a gap that needs more attention between a "phenomenology of spirits" as an orientation and the range of actions that orientation could authorize. Thinking of Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson and Stó:lō sound studies scholar Dylan Robinson's use of refusal in their writing (choosing not to share Indigenous knowledge with non-Indigenous readers), I think White actors and scholars should practice much more refusal. It is in the power of White people to refuse to take up the White subject as a universal orientation to the world, as if all lands, spirits, and knowledge were available to us/them.

In further research, I hope to make more explicit connections between nineteenth century repertoires and twenty-first century performance practices like puppetry, dance, and performance art. Ultimately, I hope that this kind of analysis may help scholars and artists engage more mindfully with implicit racial meanings in performance. Take, for example, the dance/theatre piece *Betroffenheit* presented by Kidd Pivot/Electric Company

Theatre (a collaboration between Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite and actor Jonathon Young) in March of 2016 at the University of Minnesota. Young played the protagonist in the piece that depicted his own experience of loss (losing his child and her two young cousins in a cabin fire), trauma, and addiction. The show received rave reviews when it premiered in Toronto in 2015, and when it toured North America in 2016 and 2017, reviewers called it a work of "genius," "enthralling," "a stunning testament to what can happen when life turns into art" ("Betroffenheit"). While I was watching the show in Minnesota, I was taken aback by what seemed to be an uncritical staging of racial Blackness as connected to materiality and darkness. I find it interesting that only one reviewer, Laura Chrisman writing for *The Seattle Star*, mentioned racial dynamics in the production:

> The addict's inner demons come to populate this inferno, and trap him inside it. Chief demon, and alter-ego, is—who better—the ensemble's only black performer. Dressed in identical suits, their movements in synch, Jonathon and Jermaine Maurice Spivey pair up as emcees. At times, the black man performs solo dances lifted straight from minstrelsy tradition. Zip Coon lives on.

I do not wish to diminish the virtuosic performance given by Spivey, but to point to an example of White theatre-makers unknowingly designing a show to feature a racial construct—the Black man as demon or darkness from which the White man must differentiate. Chrisman continued:

> And no, for those who might want to appeal to 'deconstructive intent', or 'irony', this production is much too earnest, far too absorbed by the agony of its white protagonist, to want to squeeze in an anti-racist commentary on its own exploitation of black imagery. In a work that is otherwise tremendously inventive, this clichéd equation of black men with the dark forces that oppose and threaten white humanity's happiness, reason, and health, is disappointing. As is, more generally, reducing a black person to a function of someone else's psycho-drama.

As I, a White student, sat in a predominantly White audience in a predominantly White university before a predominantly White group of performers, I looked around and thought, does anyone else see what I am seeing? The use of Black imagery was made even more extreme at a point in the show when Young came on stage with a Black marionette puppet which represented the alter-ego character performed by Spivey. This is why the production has stuck in my mind these past years—The show literally made the Black character into a performing object at the same time that it used the Black character metaphorically as an object for the White psyche to re-form against. As I walked out of the theatre that night, I turned to a friend and asked: What did you think of the racial power stuff in the show? My White friend responded with the familiar refrain: It's not about race.

At this moment when theatre-makers and scholars are asking how White supremacy lives on in our institutions, aesthetics, and techniques, I have attempted to point to a dimension of raciality that is often overlooked by White artists and audiences because of its implicitness—Racial meaning produced not through explicit references, but through what I think of as a racial metaphysics behind a gesture (while Chrisman was focused on Zip Coon as a reference to minstrelsy, I found the use of the puppet to be even more troubling). In other words, when the White subject takes center stage in theatre, a search for meaning, materiality, or embodiment can take the form of a White character calling upon or making use of racial others as objects. As I see it, repertoires of White people conjuring Black or Indian objects—literally in puppetry, or more symbolically through narrative or performance techniques—are born of metaphysical or spiritual violence. And significantly, that violence can be ignored because of a gravity surrounding

the White subject as protagonist. Chrisman's description of the show being "absorbed in the agony of its White protagonist" could be used to describe a condition of Whiteness in general. As Ahmed suggests, there is not a way to simply fix the centrality of the White subject. I acknowledge that my work on this front will never be finished.

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