

AMARANTH BORSUK
University of Southern California

“THERE HAVE BEEN PICTURES HERE”¹: SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND
PROJECTIVE MEDIUMSHIP IN *TRIBUTE TO FREUD*

Written in October and November of 1944, *Tribute to Freud* chronicles the analysis H.D. underwent with Sigmund Freud a decade earlier in order to prepare herself for the onslaught of war and to decipher a series of visionary experiences she had between 1914 and 1921. What might be missed in reading this “memoir” of her analysis with Freud in 1933 and ’34 is the profound impact H.D.’s concurrent immersion in spiritualism had in structuring her belated analysis of her “analysis.” Composed a year after she joined the International Institute for Psychic Investigation and began conducting séances with her partner Bryher and psychic Arthur Badhuri, H.D.’s *Tribute to Freud* is the only work to be published in her lifetime that directly addressed her connection to spiritualism. I contend that H.D.’s spiritualist endeavors enable her to return to her analysis with a new perspective on the visions Freud defined as a “dangerous symptom” (*TTF* 50). Specifically, H.D. relies on the medium of spirit photography to reconstruct these visions in order to provide Freud posthumously with the “evidence” proving her visionary experience—something she could not do during her sessions with him—and that the figure of the medium, capable of materializing visions as “projection,” enables her to synthesize her cinematic and psychoanalytic endeavors to heal her psychological wounds and defend the status of vision at a time of spiritual crisis.

Writing in the midst of the Blitz in London during the Second World War, H.D. sought the affirmation that would allow her to continue her creative work in the face of such large-scale destruction. As she explains of her decision to write *The Gift*, the memoir of her Moravian heritage composed during this period, “That outer threat and constant reminder of death, drove me inward.”² But this turning inward is not simply a revisiting of cherished memories; according to H.D., “the Child actually returns to that world, she lives actually in those reconstructed scenes, or she watches them like a moving picture” (192). What sort of technology is this that allows one to look inside and watch one’s own memories

¹ H.D., *Tribute to Freud* (New York, New Directions Books, 1984), 47; hereafter abbreviated *TTF*.

² H.D., “H.D. by Delia Alton [Notes on Recent Writing],” *Iowa Review*. 16.3 (1986): 192.

like Eliot's "nerves in patterns on a screen?"³ It is, she writes, a device in which "science and art [...] beget a new creative medium," one in which the mind becomes a "strange *camera obscura*" containing "complicated coils and wheels and springs that are brain-matter or the nerves and living tissues of the brain itself."⁴ This apparatus is a simultaneous absorber and projector of images, capable of both transmitting and receiving—a pinhole camera and projector in one. Her pun on the technological and occult meanings of "medium" aligns the camera and the clairvoyant as mechanisms for raising the dead, and alerts us to the device that would become central to H.D.'s literary endeavors of this later period in her career: the projective spirit-medium.⁵

It is by no means a stretch to refer to mediumship as a technology—spiritualists used technological metaphors for the work of mediums from the inception of the movement, referring to séances as exchanges of energy among those present, which was channeled by the medium to receive telegraphic messages from the beyond. Even the communication through a series of raps heard by the Hyde sisters in Rochester, New York in 1848, often cited as the start of the spiritualist movement, could be construed as a kind of Morse code from the spirit world. Although mediums might be either male or female, women were thought to be particularly "sensitive" to these vibrations in spiritualist circles, a sensitivity that led to their championing by spiritualists and to their branding as hysterics by doctors and psychologists who sought to restrict these excess energies. H.D. stands at this nexus where psychology, gender, and spiritualism meet, involved as she was in Freudian psychoanalysis and psychical research, and marked as she was by her bisexuality and her emotionally tenuous state. As the spiritualist movement progressed, so did the metaphors applied to the medium who offered her body as conduit for the energies of dead spirits desperate to commune with the living—she might be a wireless, radio, telephone, and eventually even a projector, casting images of and messages from the dead into the darkened room where her circle of sitters watched and waited, rapt.⁶

³ T.S. Eliot. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

⁴ H.D., *The Gift: The Complete Text*, ed. Jane Augustine (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 50.

⁵ Others have written eloquently on H.D.'s immersion in spiritualism and her lifelong fascination with astrology and occultism. This essay focuses specifically on the idea of the projective or "ideoplastic" medium that she gained from spiritualism as a new technology through which she could continue to write.

⁶ For an excellent exploration of the technological metaphors surrounding mediumship, see Jeffrey Sconce, "Mediums and Media," in *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies*, Ed. Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004). For further examination of the spectral metaphors surrounding new technologies, see Sconce's *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). H.D. herself refers to her solitary séance sessions as "psychic radio-communication" (93) in *The Sword Went Out to Sea* and describes herself as "a connecting wire of psychic communication" (125), demonstrating the extent to which mediumship licensed a merger of the human and the mechanical for H.D., as for many spiritualists. See H.D., *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007); hereafter abbreviated *Sword*.

H.D. was deeply involved in spiritualism during the Second World War, joining the International Institute for Psychic Investigation in 1941, in order, as she said, to use their library, and beginning a series of weekly and bi-weekly séances with psychic Arthur Badhuri and his mother together with her partner Bryher in their Lowndes square flat shortly thereafter. Although she was unable to publish the work that deals directly with her table-rapping experiments and spiritualist beliefs, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, in her lifetime,⁷ her investment in spiritualist thought and activity stimulates and permeates her writing of the period—a prolific output that includes several volumes of poetry, memoir, and autobiographical fiction. The book that deals most directly with her interest in mediumship and spiritualism in the 1940s is actually ostensibly about something else altogether—her *Tribute to Freud*, the “memoir” of her analysis written between September and November of 1944 to commemorate Freud’s death. In *Tribute*, one finds metaphors of writing as “projection,” a manifestation of images directly from the mind of the poet. As an exploration of psychical and visionary giftedness through projective mediumship, *Tribute to Freud* enables H.D. to put her “new creative medium” into play, redefining the poet as a projector of images and portraying history as a multiple exposure in which present, past, and future interpenetrate, a perspective that gave her hope during a time of cultural despair.

H.D. went to Freud to understand the series of visionary experiences she had between 1919 and 1920 during her recovery from the compounding traumas she experienced at the end of the First World War. As she explains it in *Writing on the Wall*, the first section of *Tribute*, “things had happened in my life, pictures, ‘real dreams,’ actual psychic or occult experiences that were superficially, at least, outside the province of established psychoanalysis” (TTF 39). She believed that the doctor might be able to “read her fortune” if she “[lay] the cards on the table” (40). When Bryher found her ill with double pneumonia, deeply depressed by her brother’s death at the front and her father’s subsequent death from “shock,” estranged from her husband Richard Aldington, and pregnant with the child of artist Cecil Gray, she saw to it the poet received medical care and was restored to health. After the baby, Perdita, was born, Bryher took H.D. to the Scilly Islands to recover, and there she had what she called her “‘jelly-fish’ experience of double-ego” (116). When the two women traveled to Greece the following spring, H.D. would have a series of mysterious experiences, beginning with a shipboard vision of their fellow passenger the archeologist Peter Rodeck pointing out land and a pod of dolphins on the sea-side of the ship (157). Rodeck would not remember the event, nor would any of the other passengers be able confirm the

⁷ The book is, thankfully, now available with an informative introduction by Cynthia Hogue and Julie Vandevere. As the editors note, *Sword* enables us to see the spiritualist underpinnings of *Trilogy*, the prophetic poems H.D. wrote and published during WWII. I argue here that *Tribute to Freud*, written concurrently with the spiritualist activities detailed later in *Sword*, and between each of the installments of *Trilogy*, also reveals the spiritualist leanings of the sequence, particularly in establishing the projective medium as a central figure in H.D.’s work.

strange sights. During their subsequent stay at the hotel Belle Venise on Corfu, H.D. would have her most unsettling vision of the titular “writing-on-the-wall,” and a few days later, would be, in her words, “possessed” in a series of “Indian Dance-Pictures” (172). By the time she began psychoanalysis, more than ten years later, these psychic experiences haunted her, such that she hoped “to lay, as it were, the ghost” of the visions to rest (40). H.D. turned to psychoanalysis for a solution at once scientific and occult, seeking, it seems, both the catharsis of “working through” her traumas and the “fortune” that would prepare her for the future. She undertook analysis with Freud in 1933 not only with the hope of healing herself from the series of shocks that devastated her at the end of the First World War, but also to prepare herself to heal others as the specter of another war loomed over Europe.

H.D.’s interest in the occult precedes the active engagements of the 1940s, as evinced by her *Notes on Thought and Vision*, composed while she was recovering with Bryher in the Scilly Islands in 1919. The text foreshadows the sort of mediumship she would explore later in life, figuring the “jelly-fish experience” as a dissociative visionary moment in which she felt herself encased in two “lenses” or “bell-jars.” Seeing the world through a “double-lens” (TTF 118) that implies sight and insight at once, H.D. becomes a crystal-ball-turned-projector, “for concentrating and directing pictures from the world of vision.”⁸ This experience suggests to her the possibility of séance for shocking the world out of its post-war trauma state: “Two or three people, with healthy bodies and the right sort of receiving brains, could turn the whole tide of human thought, could direct lightning flashes of electric power to slash across and destroy the world of dead, murky thought” (NTV 27). The notion that an individual with a “receiving brain”⁹ could somehow clarify and heal the minds of society at large reflects the appeal spiritualism, like cinema, had for H.D. as tools for, Laura Marcus suggests, “bridging national differences” (CU 104). This receptivity also resonates with her assertion in *Tribute to Freud* that a major goal of her analysis was “to fortify and equip myself to face war when it came, and to help in some subsidiary way, if my training were sufficient and my aptitudes suitable, with war-shocked and war-shattered people” (TTF 93). Writing in 1944, her tribute is not merely an attempt to work through the unfinished analysis, but to redeem her spiritualist beliefs in the face of the passing of the father of modern psychoanalysis. If she can transform the visions Freud called a “dangerous symptom” into “warnings from another world” (TTF 50), she can assert the potential of spiritualism and stake a claim for a photographic model of mind, one

⁸ H.D., *Notes on Thought and Vision* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1982), 50; hereafter abbreviated NTV.

⁹ Here H.D. echoes the notion of the spiritualist “sensitive.” As Deborah Blum explains in *Ghost Hunters: William James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death*, the sensitive “claim[s] an unusual sensitivity to messages from the summerland, the borderland, the spirit world,” liminal spaces resonant with H.D.’s own preoccupations (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 19.

that reflects what Terry Castle calls “the spectralization or ‘ghostifying’ of mental space” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰

II. “I could not get rid of the experience by writing about it”¹¹: The Search for New Technologies of Inscription

As the “ghosts” and “visions” mentioned in my brief summary of *Tribute* suggest, spiritualism held a strong interest for H.D. during the 1940s, as it did for many individuals feeling the psychological strain of the Great War, which brought unprecedented carnage to the forefront of national consciousness. Spiritualism, the belief that the soul survives the body after death, experienced a surge in popularity during World War I because it held out the possibility of transcendence at a time when the body seemed increasingly fragile, threatened as it was by new technologies of control, communication, and warcraft. The movement began in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century with a series of strange knockings heard by the Fox sisters in Hydesville, New York.¹² The sisters, claiming they could communicate with the knocking spirit, whom they called “split-foot,” quickly became popular entertainers thanks to P.T. Barnum, but the entertainment value of speaking to and through ghosts at séances soon gave way to a radical political agenda that advocated for communes, women’s rights, abolition, and temperance reforms. Female mediums, predominating in the movement, used their status as passive receivers of messages from the beyond to speak out on social issues in which they otherwise would have been denied a voice.

Intense interest in spiritualism followed each war of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly through the practice of spirit photography, portraits in which sitters appear accompanied by ghostly “extras” – figures, drawings, and sometimes even writing “not present” when the picture was taken. The first of these images, taken by William Mumler in Boston in 1861, capitalized on the hope of grieving Americans after the Civil War who wanted to believe in the possibility of contact with their dead brothers, sons, and fathers. These images played a central role in helping the nation work through its grief, as evinced by Mumler’s most famous image – Mary Todd Lincoln accompanied by the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. Spirit photography experienced a resurgence in Europe after the First World War through the mediums William Hope and

¹⁰ Terry Castle, “Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie,” *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (1988): 29. Castle argues that the changing meaning of “phantasmagoria” over the course of the nineteenth century from a term denoting a magic lantern show featuring ghosts to a psychological experience of scattered, haunting images reflects a growing sense of the untrustworthiness of the human mind which, like the magic lantern, creates illusions and projects them on the world.

¹¹ *TTF*, 40.

¹² Most histories of spiritualism begin with the Fox sisters, though tales of haunting and uncanny visitors long precede them. For an engaging account of the origins of spiritualism and the Society for Psychical Research, which was founded to study mediums and occult phenomena, see Blum.

Ada Emma Deane. Deane's 1924 photograph of dead soldiers hovering over the crowd during a moment of silence to commemorate Armistice Day appeared in the *Daily Sketch*, causing an uproar due to the resemblance of many of the soldiers to contemporary sports figures¹³—an excellent example of the kind of poor double-exposure that eventually earned spirit photography a bad reputation among both spiritualists and psychical researchers.

The period leading up to H.D.'s analysis with Freud was a time of great public interest in spirit photography in England: 1918 saw the founding of The Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures in London (of which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was Vice President); in 1920, Doyle published his article on the Cottingley Fairies (photographs of diminutive winged figures taken by two young women in Yorkshire) in *The Strand*, followed by his 1922 book *The Coming of the Fairies*, which argued for their authenticity; in 1922 The Society for Psychical Research endeavored to monitor and expose William Hope for doctoring his photographic plates, leading the credulous Doyle to publish *The Case for Spirit Photography* in Hope's defense the following year; and throughout the twenties and early thirties Ada Emma Deane produced photographs whose floating heads enveloped in gauzy fabric bore a striking resemblance to period magazine illustrations. Though skeptics and believers alike repeatedly questioned the veracity of these photographer/mediums, their images played an important role in uniting a fragmented society and psyche.¹⁴

The intersection between psychoanalysis, photography, and spiritualism in the Modern period merit consideration alongside H.D.'s well-documented cinephilic endeavors as a member of the POOL collective and writer for the avant-garde film journal *Close Up*.¹⁵ The visions that form the core of *Tribute to Freud* bear striking resemblances to spirit photographs. In fact, the cinematic and photographic often go hand in hand in the mediumistic metaphor of "projection" H.D. uses throughout the text, which could refer just as well to magic lantern images as to film.¹⁶ As Adalaide Morris has noted, the language of "projection"

¹³ For more on Deane and Hope, see Andreas Fischer, "The Most Disreputable Camera in the World," in Ch eroux et al., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); hereafter abbreviated *TPM*.

¹⁴ For more on post-war spirit photography, see Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*. Ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 66.

¹⁵ Bryher and H.D. founded the production and publishing company POOL at Bryher's home in Territet, Switzerland in 1926 together with her husband Kenneth Macpherson, and their friend Robert Herring. The group produced three silent films and a monthly journal of film criticism, *Close Up*.

¹⁶ H.D. bought a magic lantern for Perdita in 1928, which she herself enjoyed. In a letter to Bryher that year, she describes her proficiency with it (using the pet-name "cat" to refer to herself): "The magic lantern is so that tonight I can slip in little bits of film. I have already peeled and prepared the films for the private show I give one CAT tonight." Qtd. Rachel Connor, *H.D. and the Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 107.

permeates H.D.'s work, drawing on the word's cinematic, militaristic, cartographic, alchemical, and psychoanalytic inflections.¹⁷ The term is useful to H.D., Morris argues, because "projection is the thrust that bridges two worlds. It is the movement across a borderline" (413). H.D.'s preoccupation with crossing psychological, generic, and metaphysical "borderlines"¹⁸ is clear in *Tribute to Freud*, a text haunted by images, from the literal "writing on the wall" of H.D.'s Corfu visions to the repeated memories from her childhood that return as "dream-pictures" (TTF 35). These "pictures" act as a kind of album of "spirit photographs," allowing H.D. to materialize memory and history, to make evidence of her experience by externalizing her visions just as turn of the century mediums were able to project images of and writings by the dead into physical space and onto the photographic plate. For H.D., film was "a perfect medium"¹⁹ of which filmmakers and cinephiles alike must strive to be worthy. This "subtle device for portraying of the miraculous" (CU 112) had the power to manifest the invisible, whether by capturing movements too quick for the naked eye, like Edward Muybridge's chronophotography,²⁰ or by tricks that make impossible feats seem simple, as in the films of Georges Méliès. In this way, film and photography take the spectator "beyond" ordinary experience into a borderland where anything can happen.

Like many early proponents of film, H.D. and Bryher saw it as a universal language, embracing the art form for its ability to unite a world divided by national, geographical, and economic differences.²¹ This technological utopianism emerges in two poems H.D. published in *Close Up* in 1927,

¹⁷ See Adalaide Morris, "The Concept of Projection: H.D.'s Visionary Powers," *Contemporary Literature* 25.4 (1984): 411-436.

¹⁸ A project clarified in the POOL film *Borderline* in which she plays a hysteric, jealous lover. For analysis of the film, see Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁹ James Donald, Anne Friedberg and Laura Marcus, eds. *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998); hereafter abbreviated *CU*. Many of H.D.'s essays in *Close Up* act as paeans to the power of cinema to speak a universal language and to unite the diverse peoples of the world. In an essay titled "Restraint," part two of a series on "Cinema and the Classics," H.D. writes: "A perfect medium has at last been granted us. Let us be worthy of it. / You and I have got to work. We have got to begin to care and to care and to care. Man has perfected a means of artistic expression, that, I assure you, would have made Phidias turn in his grave (if he had a grave) with envy. Light speaks, is pliant, is malleable. Light is our friend and our god. Let us be worthy of it" (*CU*, 112). For more on the connections between cinema and psychoanalysis, see McCabe.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin referred to these unacknowledged intermediate states as the "optical unconscious," suggesting a psychological repository of images most of us cannot access, much like that of the medium. See "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings, 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 511-512.

²¹ See Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 92. The *Close Up* group resisted sound film because they feared it would restrict this universality. Laura Marcus argues that this inclination reflects the influence of the populist strain in American Transcendentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*CU* 103).

“Projector” and “Projector II (Chang).”²² In these poems the projector’s beam becomes “god / and song,” a kind of deity with the power to unify the divided:

to readjust
all severings
and differings of thought,
all strife and strident bickering
and rest.

(*HD*CP 349)

H.D.’s metaphor, of course, draws on film’s mechanical properties; the seeming merger of discontinuous frames into a fluid image in “critical flicker fusion.”²³ Yet, on a larger scale, the poem asserts film’s ability to make whole “all severings,” including those of the human body and the body politic. In the projector’s beam, she writes,

vision returns
and with new vision
fresh
hope
to the impotent.

(*HD*CP 352)

From early on, then, the projector is associated with the visionary in her work, a medium both technological and spiritual through which, “our spirits walk elsewhere / with shadow-folk and ghost-beast” (*HD*CP 353). The projector wields light as a kind of power or “gift,” with which he enthralls his subjects and allows a kind of transcendence through disembodiment, a relinquishing of selfhood in which, she writes, echoing Rimbaud, “you are other” (*HD*CP 358). Film, then, for H.D. and her cohort, holds out the promise of escape from the problematic modern body in a complex merger: both with the other viewers in the darkened theater in which one “worship[s],” and with the visions on screen that pour on and around one.

This equation of the technological and occult “medium” in H.D.’s language is no coincidence—it permeates the discourse of both cinema and spiritualism of the period, each of which draws on the spectral implications of images written in light. In Robert Herring’s 1929 essay, “A New Cinema, Magic and the Avant Garde” in *Close Up*, for example, he implies that thanks to technological advances, cinema fans may all become mediums, as long as they possess the right tools. He writes, “You need not be a chamber to be haunted, nor need you

²² H.D., *Collected Poems 1912-1944* (New York: New Directions Books, 1986); hereafter abbreviated *HD*CP. For an examination of the poems’ relationship to H.D.’s writing for *POOL*, see Charlotte Mandel, “H.D.’s ‘Projector II’ and *Chang, a Film of the Jungle*,” *The H.D. Newsletter*, vol. 1, no. 2: 42-45.

²³ Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism’s Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

own the Roxy to let loose the spirit of cinema on yourself,"²⁴ and suggests one can "hire or buy or get on the easy system, a projector" to manifest figures in a beam of light. The "spirit" of cinema permeates not only the room, but the spectator as well, for "by moving your fingers before the beam, you interrupt them; by walking before it, your body absorbs them" (54). The projected images can be called up at will to "haunt" one's walls and oneself, to be both outside of and "absorbed" by the body in a manner similar to H.D.'s depiction of light's healing and occult power in the "Projector" poems.

Although H.D. stopped writing for the journal in December of that year, she would have been familiar with Herring's description of film as the product of "magic fingers writing on the wall," that can take the form of "an Aaron's rod flowering on the wall," and even "a snake" (54), metaphors strikingly similar to H.D.'s own descriptions of her visionary experiences in *Writing on the Wall* and *The Flowering of the Rod*. Herring remained close to Bryher and H.D. after *Close Up* ceased publication, assisting Bryher as editor of *Life and Letters Today*, the literary journal she published during World War II in which H.D.'s *Writing on the Wall* first appeared. His depiction of the projector's beam as fingers that "spread in blessing or convulse in terror [...] tap you lightly or drag you in" (CU 54) refers to the practice of manifestation séances, which became popular in turn-of-the-century England. At these gatherings, channeled spirit energies took shape in slimy, gauze-like strands known as "ectoplasm" that emerged from the medium's body in the dark, often containing words and photographs thought to be communications from the spirit world.²⁵ Several mediums specialized in manifesting hands, which scientists and psychical researchers dutifully fingerprinted and documented in search of proof of their occult powers.²⁶ It is in these projective mediums that H.D. would find a model for the merger of her psychoanalytic and cinematic endeavor to transcend bodily limitations and to unite a fragmented society.

Both psychoanalysts and spiritualists turned the camera on the body of the medium (particularly the female medium) at the turn of the twentieth century, the former in order to codify and control what were perceived as excess libidinal energies, often labeled "hysteria," and the latter to capture proof that those very excess energies made her, like the photographic plate, "sensitive" to the invisible currents of the spirit world. Although Freud studied briefly with Jean-Martin

²⁴ Herring also draws on Emily Dickinson's poem #670, which begins "One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted – / One need not be a House – / The Brain has Corridors – surpassing / Material Place –" in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 333. This allusion nicely connects the mind and the projector as sources of spectral images.

²⁵ Lawrence Rainey has written on the fascination these séances held for F.T. Marinetti, who draws on them as a metaphor for externalized will in his "Futurist Manifesto." See "Taking Dictation: Collage Poetics, Pathology and Politics," *Modernism/Modernity* 5.2 (1998): 123-153.

²⁶ See Pierre Apraxine, "The Margery Case," in *TPM*, 217-219.

Charcot,²⁷ who pioneered the photography of patients at the *Salpêtrière* between 1876 and 1879, he eventually diverged in his understanding and treatment of hysteria, moving from a visual to an oral emphasis as he developed “the talking cure,” which shifts the focus from the observable symptoms to the patient’s linguistic associations and personal history.²⁸ Interestingly, as psychoanalysis moves away from the image, spiritualism and psychical research move toward it, hoping to find in the photograph evidence to prove or debunk the survival of the soul after death.

Both spiritualism and science relied on the status of the photograph as “index,” a writing of light onto the photographic plate or film, to provide visual evidence of intangible phenomena. Early spirit photographers like Mumler claimed they had no control over the image on the plate, but simply allowed light to do its work, thus evading prosecution.²⁹ Believers hypothesized that the ghostly “extras” that appeared in spirit photographs were projections of remembered images of the dead onto plates, either by the medium, the sitter, or spirits wanting to demonstrate their presence (*TPM* 139). This interpretation helped explain why images of “extras” often appeared to be duplicates of existing photographs, paintings, or magazine illustrations. The spirits used familiar images to make their presence known, to “materialize” themselves, thus participating in the uncanny economy of repetition by adding another layer of doubling to the spirit photograph.

As photographers like Mumler in Boston and Buguet in France were increasingly exposed as frauds selling double-exposures, both spiritualists and skeptical organizations like the Society for Psychical Research turned to the medium herself for evidence of her powers. Increasing emphasis was placed on manifestation séances, producing highly eroticized images in which materializations pour from the medium’s mouth, navel, and often from under her skirts. This process turns the medium into a camera herself: as Gunning notes, “the human body behaves like an uncanny photomat, dispensing images from its orifices” (1995, 58). When researchers turned their lenses on mediums themselves, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, noted doctor and sexologist, suggested the images produced at the séances he photographed emerged from

²⁷ Freud hung a lithograph of André Brouillet’s painting *Une Leçon Clinique à la Salpêtrière* over the couch in his study when he settled in London, though whether the image was there during H.D.’s sessions in Vienna is uncertain. H.D. notes, however, that a photograph of Charcot watches over Freud in his office. Brouillet’s image depicts one of Charcot’s theatrical “Tuesday lessons” in which a hysteric patient has collapsed into the arms of a sympathetic male doctor, her blouse pulled down to expose her shoulders and décolletage, her eyes closed and head tossed back as her arms and hands contort in pronation and Charcot continues to calmly address a room full of male spectators. Two female nurses hover at the edge of the frame, almost cut out of the image, their concerned stares directing our own glance to the bare chest and parted lips of the patient, Blanche Wittman.

²⁸ For more on this transition, see Gunning (1997) and Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Gunning (1995), 48-51.

the medium's "subliminal consciousness,"³⁰ materialized images from her own mind or those of other participants in the séance. His theory not only plays with the popular conception of photography as a form of writing that communicates directly with the mind through the eye,³¹ it also enables him to brush off the fact that the medium he photographed for four years, Eva C., often manifested seemingly two-dimensional images that look in the photographs like cardboard cut-outs and magazine covers. Thus spirit photographs could both be and record "ideoplasty," to use Schrenck-Notzing's term (qtd. *TPM* 178): a materialization of thought.³²

III. "An unusual way to think"³³: The Poet as Projectionist

H.D.'s Corfu visions, as described in *Tribute to Freud*, resemble spirit photographs both in their visual content and ideoplastic function. She is explicit about the mediumistic quality of these images, deeming them akin to "a sort of halfway state between ordinary dream and the vision of those who, for lack of a more definite term, we must call psychics or clairvoyants" (*TTF* 41). H.D. describes the "wall" on which these visions appear as a "black-board (or light board) or screen" (*TTF* 55), three surfaces in one, a "black-board" like the kind used for mediumistic slate-writing, a "light board" against which slides or transparencies can be viewed, and a "screen" on which images and films can be projected. The illuminated images against this dark screen are fixed by her rapt gaze, they are "light-pictures" written by light like the spirit photographs.³⁴ Although she initially mistakes the images for shadows cast by the trees outside

³⁰ Andreas Fischer, "'The Reciprocal Adaptation of Optics and Phenomena': The photographic recording of materializations," *TPM*, 178.

³¹ North, 5.

³² H.D.'s interest in Camille Flammarion, astronomer and founder of the *Société Astronomique de France*, provides strong evidence for her interest in mediumship from a scientific perspective. She began reading his work as early as 1910, much to her father's chagrin, according to Barbara Guest (25). *The Gift* opens with a quote from his *Death and its Mystery* that foregrounds the passivity of the medium and the connection between vision and photography: "The brain comes into play, yes, but it is only the tool...the telephone is not the person speaking over it. The dark room is not the photograph" (qtd. *TG* 33). Not only was Flammarion an astronomer, he was deeply interested in spiritualism, and when he met the popular medium Eusapia Palladino in 1897 he undertook a study of her manifestation and levitation phenomena, photographs of which he reproduced in his book *Mysterious Psychic Forces* in 1909 and referred to in *Death and Its Mystery*. In *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, written in 1947, H.D. claims to have read Flammarion's "ouija board and table-rapping analysis" (23) which had the greatest impact on her of all the books she borrowed from Stanford House.

³³ *TTF*, 47.

³⁴ As Eduardo Cadava has eloquently written of photographic indexicality and spectrality, "Photography is nothing else than a writing of light, a script of light, what Talbot elsewhere called 'the pencil of nature.' Its citational character tells us as well that history is sealed within the movement of language. This is why photography requires that we think about the impact of history on language: there is no word or image that is not haunted by history." See *Words of Light; Theses on the Photography of History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), xvii.

her window, once the first picture resolves itself, she deciphers, a “stencil or stamp,” “a silhouette cut of light, not shadow, and so impersonal it might have been anyone, of almost any country” (*TTF* 45). The only feature she can make out is a “visored cap,” which tells her the silhouette is a “soldier or airman,” familiar, yet “unidentified.” This face is reminiscent of the type of photographic “extra,” for which William Hope was known, in which the luminous face of a spirit appears in a dark portion of a sitter’s photograph. Members of the Society for Psychical Research, seeking to expose Hope as a trickster, noted the odd circularity of the faces, and eventually traced them to a tool they called a “ghost stamp,” a tube with a slide on the end that, when a flashlight was shone through it during the sitting (while the photographer was safely hidden under the camera’s hood), would leave an image on the negative (*TPM* 74-75). The vagueness of the figure’s features enables H.D. to identify him multiply, to relate him to her “dead brother” or a “lost friend,” though she can’t be sure which. Nevertheless, she has a strong feeling that the image is “somebody” – the same will to believe that provided spirit photographers with supporters even after their devices were exposed.

As in the spirit photographs of the early twentieth century, H.D. is unsure of the source of these images, which she likens to “formal patterns stamped on picture cards” (*TTF* 45), a kind of Tarot or ESP deck consisting of a goblet, a tripod or spirit-lamp, and, later, a ladder, and serpentine “S,” occult symbols reminiscent of the spirit writing or drawing that appears around the figures in some spirit photographs. These visions are all products of H.D.’s “crystal-gazing stare at the wall” (47), a look both into and through crystal that recalls her bell-jar experience in *Notes on Thought and Vision*.³⁵ Not only does she gaze at the images as though in a crystal ball, her gaze seems to produce them as through a lens, such that she is afraid if she looks away “the pictures will fade out” (49), no longer illuminated by the vision of her projective gaze. She claims she is uncertain whether the ghostly “hand or person” writing these images on the wall comes from, as she says, “my own subconscious mind, or whether they are projected from outside” (46), whether she is responsible or the spirits themselves make contact with the “sensitive” medium of the “light board,” equivocations that belie her sense of her own visionary powers. Despite her professed doubts, she refers to these “projected pictures” as “an unusual way to *think*” (47), making the “writing-on-the-wall” a kind of externalized thinking or “ideoplasm,” and recasting the scene of writing as a manifestation séance.

The act of “projection” in the Corfu visions, then, provides both the materialization of thought and a (spirit) photographic record. H.D. notes the

³⁵ Jean Gallagher suggests this “rapt, undistracted gaze,” which appears frequently in H.D.’s work of the 1920s, reflects “the literally entrancing effects of lesbian desire” and a rejection of the “narcissistic” qualities attributed to it by psychoanalysis. See “H.D.’s Distractions: Cinematic Stasis and Lesbian Desire,” *Modernism/modernity* 9.3 (2002): 407-422. A further connection might be made with H.D.’s mirror-dream, reported in *Advent*, in which her mother brings her a mirror from H.D.’s childhood on which she had painted narcissus flowers (*TTF* 151).

latent pun in the image of the tripod or “spirit-lamp” —a portable stove used, as she says, “when we boil water for that extra sustaining cup of tea upstairs in our room” (46). H.D. recognizes in the “spirit-lamp” a “shortcut” for her own visionary role in which “the objects are projected outward from my own brain” (46). The spirit-lamp burns volatile spirits, but also potentially acts as a kind of magic lantern that throws “spirits” onto the walls of the room. Not only does the lamp provide the kind of pun on which Freudian analysis thrives, it brings Bryher, until now unmentioned, into the frame of this visionary moment. As many scholars have noted, Bryher plays a central role in H.D.’s vision; without her, the poet says, “I couldn’t go on” (48). The tripod introduces her into the scene and provides a network of visual metaphors for her life with H.D. As Susan McCabe has noted, the three-legged “tripod” of the spirit-lamp alludes both to the Delphic oracle, H.D.’s overt visionary self-image, and the camera tripod, at the top of which perches a container for light, be it a motion picture or a still camera (McCabe 137). Most interestingly, the tripod also recalls the three-legged oak William Morris table on which H.D. and Bryher conducted their séances at the time she was writing *Tribute*.³⁶ The table would become increasingly important to HD in 1944 and 1945, when she began table-rapping on her own after attending a lecture by Lord Hugh Dowding, the Royal Air Force commander and psychical researcher who advocated the idea of past lives and the possibility of communicating with spirits who have progressed beyond this world as a kind of comfort during war time. Air Chief Marshal Dowding, credited with winning the Battle of Britain against the German Luftwaffe, claimed to receive messages from R.A.F. pilots lost in battle offering assurances that they lived happily on in another dimension. H.D.’s private séances, described in *Majic Ring* and *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, led to her own series of conversations with a group of spirits she referred to as the “RAF boys,” Royal Air Force pilots whose messages, she believed, included the coordinates for atomic bomb sites about which they wished to warn the living.³⁷ This tripod, then, is a locus for her spiritualist, cinematic, and poetic praxis, a network of activities facilitated by Bryher. One might say she herself haunts this text—she stands at so many of the nodes.³⁸

³⁶ See Susan Stanford Friedman, *Psyche Reborn: the Emergence of H.D.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 173; and Helen Sword, “H.D.’s *Majic Ring*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 14.2 (1995): 348.

³⁷ H.D. spent several years attempting to become part of Dowding’s circle and corresponded with him about her own R.A.F. messages to no avail. Dowding would recur as a fictionalized character in several later works as both a thwarted lover and intellectual detractor. For more on Dowding’s role in H.D.’s life, see Friedman, *Psyche Reborn*, and Barbara Guest, *Herself Defined: The Poet H.D. and Her World* (New York: Doubleday, 1984). Also see Cynthia Hogue and Julie Vandivere’s introduction to H.D.’s *Sword*. Jane Augustine’s forthcoming *The Poet and the Airman* (Florida) should offer much insight into their stormy relationship and H.D.’s spiritualist activities.

³⁸ In *Cinematic Modernism*, Susan McCabe notes that part of H.D.’s project in *Tribute* to Freud is to “connect psychoanalysis with cinema” in a way that allows for the articulation of queer desire by “blur[ing] the boundaries between the hysteric and the visionary” (217). The femme fatale McCabe discusses behaves much like the medium, who also “put on a mask of womanliness or femininity as a defense to avert the anxiety

Like the kindred “receiving” minds in H.D.’s *Notes on Thought and Vision*, H.D. and Bryher share the Corfu vision as a kind of two-person séance. Bryher “carries on the ‘reading’” (TTF 56) when H.D. can no longer sustain her trance-like gaze. After the first succession of images drawn by a ghostly “moving finger” (52), H.D.’s vision culminates in a “moving picture” (55) of a winged figure seen from behind progressing through a field of tent-like triangles. For H.D. this figure, which she calls “Niké, Victory” is the climax of the vision, the point at which she can look away, having seen an image of the end of war, a picture, she believes, of herself “in another, winged dimension” (56).³⁹ Yet even as H.D. stops projecting the image and drops her trance-like stare, Bryher carries on the séance without her to reveal the complete picture—a circular disk in which the sun god “was reaching out to draw the image of a woman (my Niké) into the sun beside him” (58). In this “reading,” the final image of the Corfu vision is a double exposure created jointly by Bryher and H.D. While H.D. thinks she has seen the spirit manifestation, only when her own projection “cut[s] out” does “the explosion [take] place” (56), a blast reminiscent of both the threat of nuclear war and the camera’s flashbulb, an explosion that exposes the film to a second set of eyes. With Bryher’s contribution, the “extra” truly appears, in this case as a circular spirit figure reaching out to the portrait’s subject, a figure of peace and hope reminiscent of those post-war double exposures in which loved ones embrace and watch over their survivors.

Ultimately, it seems, Freud failed to tell H.D.’s “fortune,” or to fully understand the import of these “pictures” and writing on the wall, discounting them as symptoms of her “desire for union with [her] mother” (44) and rejecting any occult potential they may have had. In *Advent*, the selection of journal entries from her analysis that form the second part of *Tribute*, when H.D. wishes she had an artist’s rendering of the Corfu visions in order to show them to Freud, he responds, “There would be value in the pictures only if you yourself drew them” (173). This suggestion that the images must come from H.D.’s own hand (and not some secondary or ghostly one) reinforces Freud’s emphasis on reading the language of the image—in order to discern the connections between the image-content and H.D.’s hidden desires, the artifact, like a linguistic free-association,

and retribution feared by men,” to apply Joan Rivière’s formulation (qtd. McCabe 218). McCabe further explores the concept of cinematic “projection” as a means of achieving “the hysteric’s bisexual fantasy of being both active and passive” (49). One might argue, then, that the “ghost” haunting H.D. and *Tribute to Freud* is the specter of same-sex desire associated with the Corfu images (and with Freud’s dismissal of them as “dangerous symptom”).

³⁹ Pictures of a nude H.D. playing the role of Athena Niké appear in the H.D. scrapbook at the Beinecke library. Taken by Bryher on their trip to Carmel with Helen Wolle Doolittle in 1920 and collaged into Greek settings by Kenneth Macpherson, who was both Bryher’s husband and H.D.’s lover for a time, the photos establish H.D.’s belief in this “winged dimension” from an early point. For a wonderful exploration of the images in the scrapbook, see Diana Collecott, “Images at the Crossroads: the ‘H.D. Scrapbook,’” in *H.D. Woman and Poet*, ed. Michael King (Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986).

must be her own. However, this suggestion, like H.D.'s visions, "can be read in two ways" (51), and alternately might provide the impetus behind the spirit photographs throughout the book, a call for evidence, for a physical manifestation of those ethereal visions only she and Bryher witnessed. To believe them, Freud, too, must see them, must be faced with an ideoplastic trace. In a sense, H.D.'s projections are a compromise between the desire for visionary experience and the need for tangible evidence—a means of illustrating the text without actually illustrating it.

In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. captures the Corfu visions and memories from her childhood as "projections" or "dream-pictures," "transparencies, set before candles in a dark room" (TTF 29), an album of double-exposed spirit photographs that allow her to materialize memory, vision, and Freud himself. This new "perfect medium" is projective, able to externalize the contents of the mind, and to "manifest" vision as "writing on the wall" —a powerful metaphor for poetic vocation. Such ideoplasty makes objects of subjective experience, satisfying both Freud's desire for what H.D. calls the "accumulated data of scientific observation" (77) and her own belief in the prophetic value of poetry. Positioning herself as a "projector" of images from a supernatural source enables H.D. to displace her poetic authority just as female mediums at the turn of the century used their apparently passive position to hold forth on women's suffrage, prostitution, and other subjects on which their opinions would have been pushed aside had they not come from an unknown (and often male) ethereal source.

Yet this fascinating attempt at self-occlusion paradoxically brings the poet herself back into view, reaffirming her visionary status and bodily presence much as her POOL films brought her image to the screen.⁴⁰ If H.D. is the medium/projector casting her images, then the page itself becomes the wall on which we can see her writing; somewhere overhead, her light reaches out with ghostly hands for the page. We must be aware of H.D. standing over our shoulder, not just because she writes in first person, but because of the phenomenological consequences of her technological metamorphosis. As in her projector poems, we feel the poet's own light, an "unrecorded grace / over / and under / and through us."⁴¹ We must also recall the source of H.D.'s name for these visions (and the title under which her *Tribute* was first published), *The Writing on the Wall*: the Biblical story of Belshazzar's feast in which the Babylonian king lets his party guests drink out of sacred vessels sacked from Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. During the feast, a

⁴⁰ In *H.D. and the Image*, Rachel Connor suggests that H.D.'s depiction of visionary experience positions her as a "seer" in an attempt to evade the appraising gaze of psychoanalysis, heteronormativity, and modern life. She considers this visuality part of a "preoccupation with interiority that characterizes modernism: a preoccupation that opposes those technologies designed to bring more and more of the body into view" (14). While Connor's thorough analysis of the visual and visionary in H.D.'s work is exemplary, the images in *Tribute to Freud* seem to me to court the gaze as often as they push it away, creating a space for the "hysteric" body in art and culture.

⁴¹ *HDGP*, 350.

disembodied hand appears, writing a coded message on the wall that, when translated by Daniel, foretells Belshazzar's doom. Because of Belshazzar's disrespect, he is weighed in the scales and found wanting, and in due course he dies that night. The hand is as important to the vision as the cryptic message it leaves. Like the medium's ectoplasmic manifestations, it makes the supernatural material in a way that cannot be ignored.

This physiological emphasis alters the scene of writing traditionally associated with high modernism—that of the poet laboring over verse and engaged in what T.E. Hulme famously called “a terrific struggle with language.”⁴² In *Tribute to Freud*, H.D. repeatedly halts the narrative to bring the reader directly into her London apartment in the midst of the Blitz, after Freud's death and a decade beyond her analysis with him. Describing the “theme” of psychoanalysis, she notes, “I write the word and wonder why I write it” (*TTF* 82), and often, it seems to her that one of these strange words, like the writing on the wall, simply “wrote itself” (92). H.D. reformulates her poetic role as that of a woman possessed, “impelled (almost compelled) to copy this out” (105), as she tells us when quoting Matthew Arnold's sonnet to Shakespeare, extending her mediumship to the act of writing her tribute. In this way, even the language of the text is haunted. These self-referential moments force us to see H.D. at her writing desk, bent over the page we are reading. We not only feel the projector at our backs, we also stand in its way, as Herring says, “absorbing” the image. H.D. thus achieves a simultaneous self-inscription alongside the passivity the text implies. Like the mediums before her, she belies her own agency in order to take on an active social role. She positions the book as a “tribute” to her mentor, rather than an argument with him or a tribute to herself and her own creative vision.

This duality also mediates between the poetic poles of H.D.'s early and late work. While her first books were closely associated with Pound's Imagism, which they no doubt inspired, for their moments of descriptive visual intensity, her late work, particularly the poems of *Trilogy*, also written during the Blitz, is far more spiritual and transcendental. The poet-as-medium enables H.D. to combine her urge for Romantic inspiration with her rejection of subjective wholeness due to the traumas of war and modernity more generally. By allowing her to inhabit the borderline between the spirit world and the material world, mediumship enables H.D. to mediate subjective experience—to write at a time in which the self threatens to scatter and shatter, caught in the drift of a war bringing air raids, black-outs, ration cards, and collateral damage into Londoners' daily lives, as well as images of death and destruction into their homes in newspapers, radio broadcasts, and letters. To write through this period, H.D. needed something to believe in and some sense that her work had purpose. As she notes in the autobiographical novel *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, written just three years after *The Writing on the Wall*, “Our material foundations were being undermined. At such a time, we need a surer certainty of heaven” (*Sword*

⁴² T.E. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism,” *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992), 732.

130). With the failure of the material world, H.D. sought supernatural comfort; spirit photography enabled her to have visionary experiences that remain grounded in concrete images, thus satisfying the Imagist demand for precision while fulfilling her own desire for transcendence.

IV. "The elaborate and detailed picture of an afterlife"⁴³: The Medium's Art

In considering the role of projective mediumship in her poetry, however, one can't ignore H.D.'s disavowal of the technology of spirit photography in that same novel, *The Sword Went Out to Sea*, in which she claims of her research at Stanford House, "I rejected the volumes devoted to spirit photography and found the 'spirit' photographs not only patently faked, but inartistic to a degree and in the worst of taste" (*Sword* 129). Her denial of spirit photography reflects a perspective common in the 1940s after a number of high-profile public refutations of the technique. However, H.D.'s chief complaint is the "inartistic" quality of the images, suggesting perhaps that her own double-exposed visions or "picture-writing" (*Sword* 131) attempt to add an element of artistry to the technology—to blur, as she hoped, "science and art" as she did in her avant-garde films. As a filmmaker, she had firsthand experience with super-imposition, which she and Bryher used in a memorable scene from *Borderline* in which H.D.'s Astrid directs a jealously burning gaze at her departing lover projecting a hallucinatory image of his mistress onto the side of his closed suitcase, a final insult that sends her into a hysteric fit. H.D.'s interest at Stanford House, as evinced by her fascination with Camille Flammarion, among whose works she found "the most scientific of these volumes [because of their...] accurately recorded data" (*Sword* 129), is the medium herself, the human who creates these projections, adding "art" to the image and providing evidence of the visionary in manifestations that surpass the power of words.

The receptive and projective medium, then, allows H.D. to become a kind of camera for materializing thought, image, and vision. In Kenneth Macpherson's words, she is "the recording angel" (*TTF* 117), an occult figure with a practical purpose: creating a record of her time. Her vision of memory as part projector, part *camera obscura* merges the acts of projection and recording such that one can't be sure what exactly this angel registers in her book or on her screen. The medium herself blurs the boundary between reportage and invention, present and past, body and ectoplasm, image and ghost. In *Advent*, H.D. expresses her calling: "I must find new words as the professor found or coined new words to explain certain as yet unrecorded states of mind or being" (*TTF* 145). Her materializations inaugurate a new scene of disembodied light-writing in which unforeseen images develop. Through the projective medium, H.D. makes her memories and dreams part of an "illuminated manuscript" (92)—as she says of one dream—ancient texts with ornate lettering and illustrations, but also lit, like the writing on the wall, a manuscript of luminous pictures whose leitmotiv is light itself.

⁴³ *TTF* 103.

AMARANTH BORSUK is a PhD candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Southern California. Her work focuses on poets who turn to various technologies in order to mediate their poetics and distance themselves from the page. Her essays and book reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in *Writing Technologies*, *Slope*, and *International Journal of Women's Studies*, and *Lana Turner: A Journal of Poetry and Opinion*. Her poems have appeared in a number of journals, including *ZYZZYVA*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Pool*, *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art*, and *The Drunken Boat*, among others. She is interested in digital poetics and textual materiality, and works part time in the Lab Press, a letterpress studio, at Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles.

© Amaranth Borsuk.

Borsuk, Amaranth. "'There have been pictures here': Spirit Photography and Projective Mediumship in *Tribute to Freud*," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 10 no. 2 (Spring 2010): 65-82.