

Notes on an Eternal Return:
Photographic Self-Portraiture and the Spectral Subject



by

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Amy Meleca

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Abstract

Focusing on the characteristics of ghostliness and haunting, my MA thesis project considers spectrality as a lens to rethink representations of otherness in photographic self-portraiture. Spectrality, a metaphor within the humanities, and now applied to visual art, foregrounds the presence of what is absent and testifies to the invisible aspects of our socially constructed subjectivities. I question how photographic self-portraiture initiates a dissociative transformation for the subject, and apply this line of questioning to an analysis of works by Claude Cahun, Suzy Lake, Eleanor Antin, and Mona Hatoum. I analyze how these artists present intentionally othered versions of themselves, by exploring and re-performing the intricacies of their identities. I support this research with a body of artistic work, where I embody the self-as-other and present myself as a spectral subject as a means to understand how we can rethink representations of the female body and female subjectivity.

Keywords: spectrality, subjectivity, self-portraiture, performance

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Introduction

*Visibility is a trap...
it summons surveillance and the law;
it provokes voyeurism, fetishism,
the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession.
Yet it retains a certain political appeal.*

Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*

*For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other:
a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity.*

Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

We are familiar with others on multiple levels of understanding, but mainly an ‘other’ is someone or something that exists in opposition to how we perceive ourselves to be. Others are those who are not our singular selves and by extension those who are not the collectively human *us*. Labelling an individual as other can be understood as an attempt to regulate their visibility within society by pushing them away from mainstream social space and into liminal existence.¹ Deviating from the normative expectations of western society has had profound repercussions on art practices that respond to these effects. One of the many factors in the rejecting of traditions in figural representation in the early twentieth century was the rise and proliferation of affordable photographic technology. This allowed artists to resist these practices in new and provocative ways, initiating their heightened visibility and destabilizing ideological frameworks dictating

¹ Here I forego the capital “O,” so as to indicate my frustration with the term early on in this document. I reject any definition of otherness as a limited and marginalized condition of existence, where non-conformity characteristic of the other is often met with anxiety and their value quickly dismissed. I avoid the Lacanian definition of the “Other” as an anonymous, over-arching, imposition of authority, power, and knowledge (Johnston 2014).

acceptable conceptions of self through techniques such as photomanipulation and photomontage, as seen in the artwork of the Surrealists. Symbolic representation of otherness is at the centre of the photographically based work of various women artists throughout the history of modern art; the goal of this thesis is to explore how their self-portraiture and treatment of themselves as other has the potential to expand existing understandings of subjectivity within visual art practice. More specifically, the primary objective of this thesis is to explore how investigations of subjectivity can be framed by the metaphor of haunting and thus benefit from spectrality as an analytical tool for re-examining how the self-as-other is activated in photographic self-portraiture by women artists.

In framing this exploration around the notion of haunting, I hope that the reader will hold the sigh (accompanied by the customary eye roll) that follows most mainstream dialogues affirming supernatural presences within popular culture, for I do not wish to validate or attest to any form of supernatural existence. Instead, I engage with how poststructuralist thought bridges contemporary art theory and performance studies, and offer hauntology as a compelling framework for discussing alternative conceptions of the self—ones that confront the viewer with a dispersed, incoherent, and selectively visible subject whose subjectivity is mediated through lens-based artworks. The significance of this exploration goes beyond highlighting misrepresentations of women within art history and locating its contemporary redemption; it is found within the analysis of artworks that foreground the profoundly honest experience of otherness and abjection, of erasure and omission, of invisibility and absence, and the persistence of these liminal figures in their aim to confront the viewer by laying bare their inherent inconsistencies.

Representing issues of subjective positioning, such as gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, has historically caused controversy, discomfort, and anxiety, especially when the subject does not conform to normative conceptions of identity within art historical canons. This is most likely when the viewer is assumed to be a normative, white, middle class male. Being labelled as other produces a potential for subverting norms, as it frees the subject from the confines of normative ideological frameworks, granting a new sense of agency. This agency does not come without its disadvantages at the hands of greater ideological structures, but within the context of visual art I maintain that the shift toward photographic self-portraiture as a mediator for discussing subjectivity as multiple, layered, iterative, and incoherent rather than singular, static, and coherent helps us see the other figures we understand as different from us on a broader scale. In this thesis I equate the agency of the female subject to the process of activating the spectral subject through the intentional self-othering that occurs through photographic self-portraiture. Otherness, as I explore it through the female subject and re-imagined through the lens of spectrality, finds its agency in its evasion of barriers and binaries, namely visibility and invisibility.

It is within this expansion and agency that I foreground spectrality, a metaphor derived from poststructuralist thought that foregrounds the characteristics of haunting as an analytical tool that favours interdisciplinary exploration and cross-cultural perspectives. The “spectral turn” within critical theory of the 1990s is where I locate my exploration of spectrality as a lens through which I analyze artworks, and then assert how my own practice-based research is informed by this model.² Spectrality signals a departure from traditional ways of thinking about subjectivity and the potential to subvert existing ideological structures by enacting what can be thought of as a haunting. As a

² For a more in-depth discussion, see ONE.

non-normative figure, the specter continues to reappear, despite its otherness, in order to assert its existence. The insistence on visibility performed by the non-normative subject characterizes a haunting.

Many avenues of inquiry exist with respect to contemporary understandings of the spectral and why it is important to consider it as an analytical tool. The range of conceptual applications is broad, with Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) being at the forefront of this conceptual movement, leading to other texts such as *Archive Fever* (1996). Derrida presents spectrality as an alternative ontology, suggesting that it is present in all forms of Being, exceeding our autonomy in its ability to constantly watch us but still evade our direct gaze and immediate perception. This position can be read as implicitly inclusive of the figure of the 'other' and it allows for expansion of this discourse into contexts that his initial ideas fail to include. While it is traditional to eradicate (or to use more fitting terminology, 'exorcize') the ghost or apparition, designating its presence as 'other,' an enemy or a threat, this erasure is less productive than positing this ghostly figure as a facilitator of communication between past and present, visual art and its viewers. Examining spectrality as an alternative conceptual framework also leads me to consider the contribution my studio practice offers to the expanded definition of what a photograph, and more specifically, what a self-portrait can be.

Before focusing on the relevance of spectrality in a contemporary context, it is important to look at past postulations and debates. In tracing its evolution, I locate how spectrality lends itself to the tangible side of the perceptual paradox of simultaneous visibility and invisibility with respect to notions of the archive and historiography. Being a complication of spatial and temporal realms, and stimulating an interaction between

them, spectrality acts as an important analytical tool for investigating histories entangled with artworks. The interaction of these topics facilitates the extension of the discussion of spectrality into other topics such as technical medium and even further, gender.

In thinking about the progression and expansion of reproductive technologies, Walter Benjamin is a key figure in its historical analysis. Benjamin's philosophical discussion of history extends farther than merely discussing technical media: he also discusses issues of the "historical-materialist" investigator—the historian (255). Benjamin notes: "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (ibid). This assertion highlights the precariousness of the historian's task, constituting the hunt for signs from the past that can be turned into questions in the present. How we interpret the past is grounded in the relationship to the present, where the exploration of the past is activated and enriched by the critical questions we pose in the present. To this end, pressing questions arise: What is our responsibility toward the past and how do we formulate it with respect to its lost subjects and objects in the process of writing history in the twenty-first century? What was omitted from this history?

What we may be able to recover from the past is often fragmentary. Each generation articulates a set of priorities in how it establishes a relationship with the past, what it preserves or archives, what it recounts, and how this history is told. How can our histories avoid overlooking the present while speaking to the past? We need to recognize our position with respect to the past and acknowledge the limits we face when engaging with this complex temporal relationship. What one presents as a historical narrative can transmute information from the past into the present, giving past events and ideas the opportunity to reappear and be translated into new frameworks of discourse. Framing

historiography as a form of haunting acknowledges that the past haunts the present and the present may also haunt the past: and by extension populate the future. This suggests that the future is always already populated with various potentials and prospects that can be derived from the past, its qualities sometimes difficult to grasp, likely to be interpreted as a failure of memory. What can be retained of the past is echoed through haunting as a state of being in the world: a search for meaning and knowledge.

The risk in revisiting spectrality lies in the variations in the literature that may often be too subtle, or too familiar, and thus are overlooked or not taken seriously, threatening to group its premises under the superficial entertainment value of the realm of “reality” television. Though it is important to note that dealing with ghosts has been addressed in numerous contexts, most of them commit to the literal existence of ghosts as a means to entertain the public through popular culture. In the context of this paper, I foreground how the figure of the specter “is adopted as able to (re)configure fundamental aspects of our culture and existence” (Blanco and Peeren 35). This positions spectrality as a metaphor rather than a search for the supernatural. This necessitates the spectral turn, as reclaiming the conceptual metaphor of the spectral within academic discourse incites the potential for it to expand and inform the future of art-based interdisciplinary research.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to existing dialogues surrounding subjectivity and all of its constituents through an exploration of photographic self-portraiture. I aim to do so through the analysis of salient artists whose practices inform my own, where my body is treated as the foundational material and any other materials or technologies used to represent my image—in all of its distorted glory—are mediators for the communication of how I have come to understand myself (and my *self*) through my research and/as practice. Another significant goal is to expand the understanding of the

medium of photography and offer broader definitions that rely on the conceptual exploration of what image making means. By foregrounding my agency as a woman, artist, writer, and researcher, I aim to engage with my understanding of myself by embodying and enacting the spectral and acknowledging that these characteristics are integral to this body of written and practice-based work. The physical process of writing this document is integral to my art practice, just as the process of making art is vital to my writing. The opportunity to blur the boundaries between artist and researcher by acknowledging them as one and the same in the context of this paper advances the understanding and viability of practice-based research within an academic setting.

It is with these goals in mind that I identify spectrality as a productive framework for rethinking conceptions of female subjectivity, leading me to pose the core question of this project: How does the self-as-other, as represented in photographic self-portraiture, act as a destabilizing force when read through the lens of spectrality? Though I will address this question in more detail, my aim is not necessarily to come to a finite answer, but to draw productive conclusions that illuminate avenues for further inquiry beyond the scope of this master of arts thesis. I explore how a select group of modern and contemporary artists—namely Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, Suzy Lake and Mona Hatoum—work through similar conceptual avenues to activate the self-as-other, engaging the symbolic ghosts that prod at the boundaries of ideologies of the self.

Focusing on the practices of Cahun, Antin, Lake and Hatoum, I will examine the pivotal points in the history of modern art at which their artistic practices re-imagined female subjectivity through photographic self-portraiture. I limit my study to these four artists based on how each of their practices address subjectivity and the representation of the female figure. All four artists address the representation of the female body through a

process of performative self-imaging. Through this process, each of their perspectives informs a set of idiosyncratic actions that result in diverse self-images. Each of the self-images I analyze belongs to a broader set of artistic practices that present the self-as-other, as multiple, incoherent, and often inconsumable. Examining the work of these artists in relation to each other develops a narrative within this thesis that frames subjectivity as performative, feminism as intersectional, and the self as constructed and constantly in flux. In turn, the self and the subject can also be considered as spectral, offering an alternative lens through which to consider the evolution of feminist subjectivity in lens-based media. I recognize that there are other artists working in the same fashion, foregrounding the characteristics of visibility and invisibility in relation representations of the female body, and whose works would also be interesting to revisit within the context of spectrality, such as Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman, Nikki S. Lee, and Hannah Wilke. The artists that I have chosen demonstrate very specific instances in which their resistance of the ways that western society considers them as other is manifested through performative self-imaging. The intentionality within these artworks acts in resistance to the dominant modes of thought or socio-cultural and socio-political circumstances that enforce the boundaries of normativity. I have chosen artists whose works are disruptive to normative representations of the female body and have also chosen to contextualize these works within specific periods of radical social upheaval that they work within and contribute to. Each work is disruptive in its own way, some being more radical than others, depending on the context of their production, but ultimately operate within an intentional and destabilizing space of self-representation. I begin my investigation with an exploration of Surrealist art and thought, suggesting that its influence on modern art stages a precedent-setting opportunity for reconsiderations of

female subjectivity. From an interdisciplinary perspective, I explore how the self-as-other is mobilized in the characteristically Surrealist practice of Claude Cahun and trace its evolution into the feminist self-portraiture of the 1970s and into the spectral turn of the 1990s.³

The questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. How does the Surrealist photographic practice of Claude Cahun set the stage for the concept of spectrality as a lens through which one can rethink photographic investigations of the self-as-other?
2. How can we posit spectrality as a useful lens for thinking through the works of Eleanor Antin and Suzy Lake, in the context of feminist self-portraiture of the 1970s, as a way to destabilize problematic preconceptions of female subjectivity?
3. How are notions of subjectivity presented by Cahun, Antin, and Lake, reshaped by the postcolonial underpinnings of “the spectral turn” of the 1990s and the work of Mona Hatoum?
4. How has my engagement with the self-as-other and the spectral subject been enriched by an investigation of Cahun, Antin, Lake, and Hatoum’s works?

These questions serve as a basis for an inquiry that posits spectrality as a useful analytical tool for rethinking self-representation in contemporary interdisciplinary inquiries into subjectivity and photographic self-portraiture, where the artists examined and the movements to which they respond exist as focal points for destabilizing acts of self-representation, staging an opportunity to reconsider representations of the female body and female subjectivity. Focusing on the historical instances of Surrealism in the 1930s, the Feminist Art Movement in the 1970s, and the spectral turn of the 1990s offers an opportunity to reimagine representations of the self-as-other as haunting in their insistence on visibility at the time of their creation, as well as how they come to be re-envisioned, reiterated, and redefined in relation to their predecessors.

³ The “spectral turn” will be discussed in TWO.

The significance of this project is to contribute to existing discussions of subjectivity and photographic self-portraiture within the discourse of visual and material culture, where few investigations currently exist of subjectivity analyzed through the lens of spectrality, mediated by self-portraiture, within the context of contemporary research and practice in the visual arts. Past discussions of spectrality will be discussed in the literature review section of the thesis, and will be expanded into more current discussions of spectrality and self-portraiture in contemporary art. In this project, photography acts as a mediator for the female body and female subjectivity. Positioning the female body, my own body, as a foundational material, I use photography as a tool through which discussions of female representation can expand. By foregrounding the works of Cahun, Antin, Lake, and Hatoum, I form a conceptual foundation upon which my research can, ideally, illuminate a different perspective within existing discussions of subjectivity and visual art. Most importantly, I position research and practice in the visual arts as tools for revisiting the socio-cultural marginalization of women artists by investigating a group of artworks that disrupt the repression of female subjectivity through the intentional self-othering of the artist herself.

Expanding on the poststructuralist discourse that foreground spectrality as an analytical tool, I approach this exploration of self-portraiture and subjectivity through specific historical instances to frame my body of original studio work. Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* is pivotal in framing the interdisciplinary approach I apply in this thesis. In this book, which investigates instances of women's historical erasure and omission through a sociological lens, Gordon states that, "To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it" (7). Through this statement, she analyzes the psychic or conceptual hauntings that result from instances of

historical erasure, omission, and sociocultural repression, starting with psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein.⁴ Suggesting haunting as an alternative lens through which to describe the psychic presence of that which is physically missing adds another dimension to how I define otherness within the parameters of this paper in order to then negate the term, as it exists.⁵ I follow Gordon's model to imagine subjectivity as something that is both haunting and haunted, expanding this into my studio practice by imagining my figure as a ghostly entity that is layered and multiple rather than singular and static.

In attempting to expand these categories through my practice, I first turn to spectrality so that I may distinguish exactly how a tangible medium can be considered spectral. The process of photography has the capacity to produce what Roland Barthes discusses as a symbolic death of the subject, where the version of the "self" produced in the photograph—achieved through the pose—is a moment from the past, crystalized in the present, which can be brought back as an artefact in the future. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes argues for the photograph's relationship to death, in that in modern life we exchange the space of death with our technologies of repetition, acting as a reminder of what once was (18). Barthes's text facilitates a work of mourning, asserting that photography is a technology of commemoration. For Barthes, the click of the shutter is the moment that implicitly reminds the collector of memories, the photographer, of the passing of time and the entry of death into the world of the living.

⁴ Gordon describes the case of Sabina Spielrein, an important female psychoanalyst, in *Ghostly Matters* pages 3-30.

⁵ Historically, photographic documentation of said otherness has been used to build archives for the classification of marginalized groups (such as those within the legal or psychiatric systems or institutions, racial minorities, individuals identifying outside of normative gender binaries, and of course, women) as deviant, or other.

The apparatus of the camera mediates the intersection between subjectivity and spectrality. The affective dimension of spectrality is where its presence is truly felt and marked as significant, for the origin of this conceptual haunting is not initially apparent and demands further investigation. Foregrounding photography as a spectral medium allows for an expanded investigation of even more abstract understandings of spectrality, such as the behaviour most characteristic of a specter: re-apparition. It is characteristic of a specter to appear and disappear, presenting itself in different places and times, though in an inconsistent manner. Repetitiously reappearing is an act of self-assertion, a statement of presence. The otherness associated with the specter comes from the variation in its apparition from that of a human being. In considering re-apparition I draw connections to relating and repetitive processes of self-representation such as Judith Butler's notion of "gender performativity" and her discussion of otherness (191). I address gender through Butler's model of gender as a set of performative acts, forming a concrete link to the performative photographic practice of Cahun and tracing that model throughout the works of Antin, Lake, and Hatoum. Cahun's complication of gender normativity through performative photography blurs the boundaries of gendered representation, offering a space in which her performative actions can be considered spectral. Exploring performativity as spectral, I will expand Butler's exploration of which bodies come to matter, exploring what *matter* can mean in all of the implications relevant to the scope of this text, applying it to an understanding of otherness through the notion of abjection, as defined by Julia Kristeva. These theories also inform the definition of self-portraiture and performance within my own practice, through what Amelia Jones discusses as "performative self-imaging." Jones' use of theory, methods, and subject matter is influential upon that of my own, and it is for that reason that I borrow from the title of her

2002 essay, “The ‘Eternal Return’: Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment” in titling my first major body of academic research and practice within the visual arts *Notes on an Eternal Return: Photographic Self-Portraiture and the Spectral Subject* and *Notes on an Eternal Return*, respectively. It is through this theoretical framework that I build upon and investigate the notion of the self-as-other as it comes to exist through the process of reiterative, performance-based, photographic self-portraiture, where the seemingly eternal returns of the women artists under study have made productive contributions to the history of modern art.

A major challenge within this project is distinguishing the notion of spectrality as a metaphor from its reference to ghostliness and haunting, as it exists within discussions of spirit photography or other sources that attempt to validate the existence of ghosts.⁶ This project focuses solely on the use of ghostliness to reframe thinking about subjectivity through visual art, alongside a discussion of the symbolic death associated with photography. The symbolic death the artist imposes upon their constructed and projected self through self-portraiture allows for a transformation of subjectivity through subsequent iterations of the photograph—asserting the spectral subject as a version of the self. Thinking of the self as spectral is challenging in its linkages to the folding of time and space that photography makes possible, as well as to the idea that the ghost has the ability to transgress space and time and manifest itself in a liminal state of visibility. Working with the aforementioned theoretical positions is challenging because it requires

⁶ Though spirit photography falls outside of the scope of my research, Tom Gunning’s discussion in “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision” in *Grey Room*, no. 26 (winter 2007): 94-127, considers its place in connecting phantasms, ontology, and imaging technologies.

abstract thought and a communication of that abstract thought through a material exploration, where navigating the paradox of visibility and invisibility that reside at the fringes of verbal understanding and communication will prove difficult as well.

The subsequent chapters expand the theoretical framework of spectrality and apply the methodology to the aforementioned case studies, forming a critical analysis and investigation of self-portraiture and subjectivity through the lens of spectrality. In ONE I conduct a literature review on the topic of spectrality to form a critical summary of recently published research. The review will consider the existing definitions and various uses of the term spectrality, exploring its theoretical implications with respect to gender and sexuality, medium specificity, and historiography. The themes and texts explored will establish the basis for the examination of my research questions. The conclusions drawn from these sources will work to contextualize my material investigation within the intertwined concepts of spectrality and subjectivity. This will lay the foundation for discussing the place of issues of performativity, performance, visibility and invisibility within my practice. Ultimately this section will lend itself to generating a more in-depth and interdisciplinary understanding of spectrality within contemporary art, and delineate where there is potential to expand upon existing research.

In TWO I analyze Claude Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* (1928). I chose this piece not only because of its place within the Surrealist project as a subversive display of subjectivity by a female artist, but because it is also a reflection of the potential of photography as a spectral medium. I include this short exploration of Surrealism because the movement pushed the limits of the photographic medium to transform subjects through its manipulability. As a medium assumed to be inherently 'honest,' photography was used in Surrealist practices to encourage the viewer to rethink believing

what we see or trusting what we know – or what we think we know. Surrealism asserts an expansion of ideological frameworks regulating representations of the female body and explores the potential that the depths of the unconscious can have on our social interactions and assumptions. This section will also locate performative self-imaging with the practice of women Surrealists and examine how Cahun uses this technique to embody a spectral subject and re-present the self-as-other.

In THREE I address Eleanor Antin's *Carving: Traditional Sculpture* (1972) as an example of early feminist photographic work that embodies both the notion of spectrality as a lens through which to discuss female subjectivity and a medium that works to realize this multifaceted notion. Contextualizing *Carving* within the feminist photographic self-portraits of the 1970s considers how the self-imaging practices of women artists have changed in the wake of civil rights movement, noting also the expansion of conceptual art to include greater social consciousness. Antin's works demonstrate the slow turn to invisibility that she is performing, re-performing a set of actions on a daily basis in order to subvert the ideological frameworks that call for a woman's worth to be defined by just how close to invisible she is. This analysis of Antin is complemented by a comparison of Antin's representational disappearance to that of Marian McAlpin, the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman* (1969). I examine this text as an example of how the symbolic actions that comprise self-performing can be empowering. In addition, I analyze Suzy Lake's *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* (1976) in order to explore how presenting a subject's image as evasive through self-imaging renders it spectral, where the viewer is presented with a highly obscured image and must navigate to what extent we as viewers believe it to be a representation of the artist.

Analyzed in FOUR is Mona Hatoum's *Corps étranger* (1994), as it speaks to the strangeness of the internal self. Here I maintain that the self-as-other is to be embraced because of its disruptive potential when used in dialogues about visual art and the body. I will discuss how Hatoum offers her body to the viewer as a gesture of self-othering, where Kristeva's notion of the abject will be incorporated in an analysis of how abjection presents otherness in representations of the female body. Spectral in medium, this piece is an extension of the discussion of photography as spectral though the use of video projection. The spectral nature of projection will be considered in brief reference to its place as a psychological defence mechanism in psychoanalytic thought. Gordon's exploration of haunting will be considered once more, where I will examine how one of Gordon's case studies, psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein, engaged with the uncanny, as well as her own otherness, and why this proved to be a productive gesture of self-assertion.

Apparitions

The artworks comprising my supporting exhibition, *Notes on an Eternal Return*, are addressed throughout this document as a series of apparitions. Using the same techniques of repetitive and sometimes incoherent iteration as my artworks, these will act as creative prompts that address the reader directly, implicating them in the recognition of my self-as-other. Treating the results of my material explorations as apparitions allows me to connect the iterations and versions of myself to the concepts that inspired them. These sections will act as interruptions in my reading of theoretical texts and work to destabilize the overall flow of the paper, including its singularity as an "academic document," while still maintaining its cohesiveness as a part of my practice-based research. These interruptions are meant to stay with the reader as they progress through

this document, working in reference to the multiple selves of Claude Cahun, the disappearing Eleanor Antin, the unfixable Suzy Lake, and the strange familiarity of Mona Hatoum. Through these apparitions I do not critique or analyze my own work, I simply draw from the theories and techniques discussed in the previous sections, connecting these with my own process and presentations of my multiple, dispersed, estranged, and fragmented selves. Here I become the haunting and the haunted.

ONE | On Spectrality

*What haunts are not the dead,
but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.*

Nicholas Abraham, *Notes on the Phantom*

Questions of death, perhaps more metaphorical than a physical cessation of being, are often intertwined with questions of identity. Death, an ever-mysterious phenomenon, continuously fuels human curiosity—a desire to overcome the fear of the unknown by coming to know and understand the mechanics behind such a perplexing circumstance. This fear stems from a limited understanding, a result of our finite capacities as mortal beings and natural to the human condition—a fear perpetuated by the profound emotional impact that death can have. The idea of haunting draws on the fear of death, returning and incarnate, and a symbiotic relationship unfolds. The living can claim to experience the return of the lost loved-one (or not-so-loved one), whether as a comfort or as a delusion manifest from the guilt or anxiety that the conditions of expiration or disappearance can provoke. The appearance of a ghost in the mortal realm poses a psychological disturbance due to the understanding we have of death as finite for the body, though many belief systems maintain the existence of the soul. Without becoming tangential in this argument, I briefly note that Western culture acknowledges Judeo-Christian values that identify the existence of the soul, noting that the apparition is almost

always human. The idea of haunting stimulates the pursuit of meaning through symbolic function, lending itself to questions of *who* and more broadly, *why*, and by extension, *what* is considered spectral?

In this section, I recontextualize the metaphor of haunting and the characteristics of the specter—spectrality—in order to form an intertwined reading of subjectivity and photographic self-portraiture. I read the topics of historiography, gender performativity, and photographic theory through spectrality, considering the characteristics of fluctuating visibility, reiteration, and incoherence associated with spectrality in order to position it as an analytical tool as well as a methodology. I then reimagine instances of self-representation by female artists through the spectral metaphor in order to better understand how the notion of the self-as-other can be a productive tool for destabilizing controversial preconceptions of female subjectivity. This reconsideration of the visibility of the female subject calls for an understanding of spectrality that is less cynical or sceptical than the more popular notion of haunting, where scholars Maria Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren categorize the “spectral turn” of the 1990s “not only as a turn *to* the spectral, but also as the spectralization *of* the turn – its unmooring from defined points of departure, notions of linear progress, and fixed destinations” (32). The spectral turn refers to scholarship produced in the 1990s that sees haunting as an analytical and methodological tool in the humanities and social sciences, particularly connected to Freudian psychoanalysis. This “turn” favours cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural perspectives, and seeks various disjunctions as compelling points of exploration (4). Driven by Derrida’s pioneering text *Specters of Marx*, hauntology foregrounds spectrality and bridges various disjunctions between disciplines by favouring an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective.

Spectrality as Interdisciplinary and the Interdisciplinary as Spectral

In this section I will critically summarize contemporary academic research on the topic of spectrality as it pertains to this thesis, positioning it as an analytical tool to examine photographic self-portraiture and the self-as-other. Considering issues in historiography, gender, and sexuality, as well as photographic theory, I will explore the theoretical implications of applying spectrality as a lens through which to analyze these concepts within the broader field of visual art. The investigation of spectrality through these topics will subsequently provide sufficient context for how my own practice is informed by the intersections of these concepts. It is for its profound metaphorical potential and versatility that I pursue an understanding of spectrality as an interdisciplinary framework for artistic practice. Applying spectrality—the characteristics of haunting—as an analytical tool establishes a point of interdisciplinarity between the discourses of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism, and visual art, and outlines the potential for expanding upon existing knowledge through contemporary art theory and the production of visual art itself.

In this section, the focal *what* that is to be explored is the spectral metaphor. Within that topic exist many avenues of inquiry with respect to what can be considered to be spectral and *why* it is important to consider it as an analytical tool for the interdisciplinary study of subjectivity in visual art. The fundamental symbolism defining haunting is inextricably bound to more popular notions of tracking supernatural activity or justifying paranormal presences. Theorizing or legitimizing paranormal presences falls outside of the scope of this research. However, in my research I foreground the tension between what is simultaneously visible and invisible, present and absent—the physical

characteristics that define a haunting. I refer to these characteristics as *spectrality* throughout the text.

An important intersection to mention is that of Sigmund Freud's exploration of the "uncanny." The uncanny refers to the return of a repressed memory, perception, image, or event, sensed through an object or even another person (22). The return of the repressed is perplexing, sometimes unintelligible, where the distinction between animate and inanimate is obscured and incites an "eclipse of the referential by the symbolic" (Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* 7).⁷ The haunting aspect brought about by the uncanny is discussed in relation to historical photographs in Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this section. However, Gordon's description of the uncanny is noteworthy, where she notes that "[t]he uncanny is the return, in psychoanalytic terms, of what the concept of the unconscious represses: the reality of being haunted by worldly contacts" (55). What Gordon refers to is the experience of being haunted by psychic events in daily life. In considering the uncanny I note an instance in which the distinction between self and other arises in the form of an anxiety-laden inability to distinguish the life force occupying an object from its reference to death. I will also note Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, where he explores photography in relation to death. Though recalling Barthes in this respect will also support the notion of photography as a spectral medium, to be discussed near the end of this section, I mention *Camera Lucida* now as a precursor to my review of the more contemporary works on spectrality and symbolic death that occur in the 1990s.

⁷ In *Compulsive Beauty*, Hal Foster describes the uncanny and the return of the repressed, its primary effect is that of anxiety when recognized by the subject. Also noted is Freud's distinction of the uncanny in relation to the German term *heimlich*, or homelike, referring to a sense of familiarity and comfort. Conversely, the *unheimlich* signals the return of the repressed (7).

Unpacking Spectrality: Hauntology and the Spectral Turn

The turn to the spectral metaphor was part of a larger shift in post-structuralist thought, especially critical theory, that sought to rectify various socio-cultural injustices by returning to key figures informing discourses of gender, sexuality, psychoanalysis, historiography, and technology, to name a few. One trend in critical theory that draws from, or rather returns to, mainly psychoanalytic discourses is *hauntology*. Hauntology is a trend in critical theory that originated in France in the early 1990s. The term first appears in Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, where Derrida argues that Marxism haunts Western society, long after the demise of communism. A twist on ontological study, hauntology replaces "the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis 373). Shakespeare's King Hamlet, referred to as "the ghost," is the focus of Derrida's text. Derrida discusses the return of the King's ghost with respect to the visor effect, the feeling that one is being watched, by someone who cannot be seen. In this sense, it is as if one is being chased but the pursuer is ever hidden; what persists is the feeling that one is being pursued.⁸ Crucial to hauntology is the element of something other returning, in a way that offers a bit of information that is unintelligible, visually suggested, but essentially residing beyond words. This small piece of information is at first unwelcome – a disturbance or interruption. In its interruption the figure of the ghost, or other, brings with it a lesson that seems incoherent at first – but incoherence does not signify a lack in value. As Colin Davis argues:

⁸ See Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* where the ghost of the King appears in Act I, Scenes i, iv, and v and Act III, Scene iv. The ghost of King Hamlet does not produce himself in the exact same way every time he appears, which lends itself to the discussion of performativity to be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

Attending to the ghost is an ethical injunction insofar as it occupies the place of the Levinasian Other: a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving. (373)

As a facilitator of communication, the specter is a messenger, indicating a “something-to-be-done” (Gordon xvi). If any intention or motivation can be assumed of this figure it is that it appears with a message, for a reason, if not for anything other than to impart a lesson-to-be-learned. Thinking of otherness as something that everyone can learn from, including those labelled as other, is thus a productive reclamation of agency.

Derrida’s theory draws attention to the figure of the ghost, including that it is fundamentally other to a mortal human being. This inclusivity urges the reader to reconsider the existence of a marginalized figure, where I expand what is originally considered hauntological discourse into contexts that Derrida’s initial ideas fail to include. Many scholars have expanded hauntology into new contexts, where the qualities of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, are applied to topics such as technology, subjectivity, globalization, trauma, in relation to memory and place, as well as historiography.⁹ The application of spectrality to these topics creates a space in which deeper issues can be explored, such as historical omission and erasure, otherness, and representation. I explore these particular issues through the discourses of feminism, historiography, and photographic theory in order to investigate how the self-portrait photographs of women artists work to destabilize narrow preconceptions of female subjectivity through the embrace of the self-as-other.¹⁰ Thinking of the self-as-other as it comes to exist through photographic self-portraiture allows an analysis of artists who

⁹ Maria Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren contextualize the development of hauntological discourse across disciplines in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, 1-27.

¹⁰ Chadwick and Jones’s ideas will be discussed at length in TWO.

treat self-representation as an opportunity for repetitive apparition—reiterations of subjective autonomy that work to destabilize repressive attitudes toward women. The strategies that link artists such as Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, Suzy Lake, and Mona Hatoum to the spectral metaphor include: insistent visibility, re-appearance or re-presentation, and the endurance of othering. Presenting countless iterations of themselves through performed characters, elaborately staged scenes, or more personal exposures of their bodies, the subjects that these artists repetitiously perform disrupt and destabilize outward categorizations of otherness. These artists perform themselves as other and use the agency afforded by self-portraiture as a tool for disrupting normative frameworks of identity. To that effect, the remainder of this section will examine various pivotal texts and form a cohesive account of contemporary theories on spectrality that determines which intersections should be explored more thoroughly.

Retracing Historical Omissions

In revisiting the past, Historiography often exposes instances of omission and erasure that do not make sense or are not immediately perceptible. Questioning the past involves an admission that certain things must remain unintelligible and can give rise to a multiplicity of versions of history filled with spectral subjects. Haunting can produce an alternate history, where the repressed returns to haunt the social body. In this sense, “ghosts operate as a particular kind of social memory, an alternate form of history making in which things usually forgotten, discarded or repressed become foregrounded, whether as items of fear, regret, explanation, or desire” (Blanco and Peeren 484). The symbol of the ghost has the capacity to reveal to the present the details that have fallen outside of the conventional record. The historiographer must recall an instance of haunting, a disruption in written history by the re-emergence of a figure whose contributions were

overlooked, and piece together the clues that have been left behind. This motivates the potential for spectrality as a socially conscious engagement, where the historiographer investigates a marginalized perspective in order to draw new conclusions and more detailed accounts. It is by this model that the process of writing history becomes a haunted and haunting practice, where the historiographer must unearth events that have been left behind and have faded beyond any coherent recollection.¹¹

Unearthing these clues from archival material acknowledges the traces of those omitted from history as haunting elements. These elements, once forgotten, re-emerge and haunt the present through an insistence on visibility, while having remained invisible for so long. This simultaneity of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, is explored in Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Spectrality is inherent to this short discussion of the archive, where Derrida postulates that the archive is concealed but simultaneously transparent, traditional and revolutionary, internal and external, to name a few of the dualities explored. Derrida begins by describing physical and psychological archives, drawing connections between material truth and memory, where there is essentially no archive without repetition and without lived experience there are no memories (or other artefacts) to be archived. Although the archive points to the past, it should question the potential for a revision of its contents in the future. Derrida states, "It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that

¹¹ Carla Freccero discusses the return of history into the present as spectral, contradicting the existing exclusionary frameworks of identity in Western society, in "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past". See also Judith Richardson's "A History of Unrest" for a discussion of historical continuity and haunting. Richardson notes: "While historical demands made ghosts useful and desirable, it was ironically the lack of historical continuity that made the past mysterious and ghostly" (25).

will have meant, we will only know in times to come” (36). We may not know the significance of the archive in the present moment, and will perhaps only recognize its significance when the future becomes the present. The “responsibility for tomorrow” that Derrida states works together with the repetitive return of memory from the psyche, also considering its material constituents, where investigations of archival material, such as Gordon’s investigation of Spielrein, speak to concerns of historical omission and re-imagine recorded history with contributions, such as Spielrein’s, that were once overlooked.

According to Derrida, the future of the archive, as well as its structure, are spectral, where this shifting between temporal states also allows for its redefinition. If records of experience are not founded in material traces, then repetition and recollection of lived experience, perhaps repressed events, trouble the concrete definition of the archive itself. In spite of conventional records of history being taken as truth, Derrida asserts that “[t]he truth is spectral” (87). Derrida describes a desire for the archive as something that is compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic, all of which relate to the repetitive and insistent re-appearance of the specter. When memory fails, material traces trigger memory, or in Gordon’s case, provoke an insatiable curiosity for that which has slipped from recognition in the conventional historical record.

As a sociologist, Avery Gordon draws from archival material to trace the story of psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Haunted by Spielrein’s absence from a photograph in which she should be pictured, Gordon investigates and analyzes the interconnected stories of Spielrein, Freud, and Carl Jung, highlighting the difficulties and prejudices Spielrein faced as both a patient and subsequently as a psychoanalyst. Gordon’s inquiry into Spielrein’s story

revisits her diary entries, letters between Freud and Jung where she is mentioned, and one particularly haunting photograph, in order to examine how her contributions to psychoanalytic theory were misrepresented. The traces of Spielrein's connection to Freud and Jung are re-assembled and re-imagined through the metaphor of haunting, where Gordon expresses that:

To be haunted and to write from that location...produces its own insights and blindnesses. Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future. (22)

In the spirit of writing ghost stories, I draw from Gordon's re-tracing of Spielrein in order to locate past "representational mistakes" and explore artists who work to confront them and destabilize the ideological structures that made these mistakes possible to begin with. These mistakes refer to instances of othering that occur through the marginalization of identities that fall outside of a normative framework. Reading theories on gender, historiography, and photography through spectrality considers the qualities that the marginalized figure of the specter can offer to this expanded discussion in order to rewrite instances of omission and repression and reimagine those instances reflexively. In order to subvert the ideological frameworks and disciplinary order that establish and maintain otherness, I will discuss otherness. The matter-of-factness of that statement aside, the power of destabilizing the authorities that enforce otherness is to proclaim, support, express, and illuminate othering and otherness, to embrace difference and pursue unintelligibility, and most importantly, to allow otherness to be heard and then given the opportunity to speak for itself.

Performativity and Spectrality

I turn to an exploration of gender normativity in relation to haunting and spectral subjectivity in order to locate how the process of gender performativity can be considered spectral. In pursuit of this connection, I aim to consider how gender performativity can influence performing the self in photographic self-portraiture, bridging the processes of performativity and performance. This is where the questions of *who*, *what* and *why* intersect, extending into the realm of not only recognition, but of identification and its implications. Identity is comprised of various instances of interaction with humans, non-human animals, and objects, each of which we interact with differently. Interactions are influenced by many external factors, many of which we internalize and assimilate into our existing perspectives. Often complex, identification according to particular norms satisfies a chain of desires: acceptance from society, acceptance from a partner, and acceptance from oneself (often pending the former two outlets of approval).

As a social construct, gender identification traditionally requires conforming to normative standards of behaviour, dress, and self-presentation. Judith Butler discusses the complexity of otherness as it comes to be understood through gender performativity in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*.¹² Butler challenges the assumption that those who do not conform to the normative structures regulating gender and sexual identity do not “matter,” are less valuable, and even less human than those who identify normatively. She questions Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic investigations of “...the sexed body” as “secured through identificatory practices governed by regulatory schemas...”(13). Identification within a normative framework enforced by

¹² Published in 1993, *Bodies That Matter* is an extension of concerns and criticism raised by *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990.

ideology brings a subject into a collective societal embrace, whereas what falls outside of this assimilatory action is alienated. Referring to Jacques Lacan's symbolic law, Butler discusses power structures and the formation of an ideal subject, where "...the symbolic ought to be rethought as a series of normativizing injunctions that secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability" (14-5). By this model, Butler suggests that the citation of symbolic actions that align a subject with one sex or the other – male or female – on the normative binary can be re-imagined as a subversion of the very structures that enforce it. Butler states:

The process of that sedimentation or what we might call *materialization* will be a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the "I". (15)

The power associated with the formation of the "I" is contingent on its existence in opposition to a differently identified subject. This can be as straightforward as the difference between normatively identifying male and female subjects, further complicated when race, ethnicity, non-binary gender, or physical ability vary as well. The alienation, or othering, of these bodies and Butler's exploration of how the bodies of others are "abjected or delegitimated" (15) when falling outside of normative power structures is where I position one instance of haunting. Abjected bodies confront the viewer with their otherness, forcing the viewer to become hyper-aware of their own position in opposition to the abject.¹³

Butler's theory of performativity pertaining to sexuality and enactments of gender invokes a sense of spectrality in the way the constant reiterations of the norm required for its maintenance are never perfect reproductions. In an attempt to embody the

¹³ Julia Kristeva's exploration of abjection will be examined in detail in FOUR in relation to Mona Hatoum's *Corps Étranger*.

ideal self, a subject must maintain the appropriate interconnection of performativity and citationality. The subject's constructed identity continuously returns from the past, citing normative actions while simultaneously constituting its own futurity, as it arrives from and through iterative acts yet to occur. The ideal version of a self constantly – obsessively – strived for takes its place as a tool of repression and objectification, alienation and othering, within what can be thought of as a self-haunting.

The way these consistent actions of identification reappear in an inconsistent manner, in different spaces, at different times imbues them with spectral potential. In an instance of self-presentation a specific behaviour might be visible through a citational action, whereas another might be hidden, replaced with the former, in favour of social acceptance. Re-imagining instances of self-representation as spectral posits the method of the specter, through its process of appearance and disappearance, as citing instances of visibility in order to be seen. In addition, the boundaries between normative and non-normative subject positions, despite being heavily controlled, are not necessarily immediately perceptible. A failure to perceive and immediately identify can impart anxiety, a reminder that things are not as they seem, and that there may be more to the subject than meets the eye. Although the inconsistencies in performative actions can be seen as a threat to the norm, the boundaries that exist in western society around binaries and normative social positions are continuously challenged, where any claim to fixity seems increasingly archaic and contrived. The hidden behaviours and events, repressed in favour of normative actions, signal a ghostly intrusion. The ghostly intrusion is a disruption of normativity and the constant struggle for this ideal is always present, though always in flux between being recognizable and being repressed. The spectrality of this

repressed dimension implies its otherness while activating a part of subjective experience that is unwelcome, a part of the self that is other.

Photography as Spectral

Having considered how the other is identified through performativity, I now expand that understanding into the activation of the self-as-other. Where othering is an externalized process, projected outward from the “I,” self-othering involves a state of dissociated viewing of the self through visual representation, creating a space of self that is strange. The self-as-other is activated at the intersection of technical medium, metaphor, and personal expression – an intersection that is essential to this thesis.

The term itself, *other*, is a troublesome label in that it emphasizes the anxieties and fears that arise from normative boundaries being exceeded or challenged by individuals who choose not to, or naturally do not, conform to a mainstream gender, sexual, or racial identity, or who do not possess the same physical capabilities as other individuals. This is a rejection of conformity in favour of otherness. Those feeling threatened by another individual’s (or group of individuals’) nonconformity might project their fearful or anxious feelings onto them, causing a separation of *we* into *you* and *I*, or worse yet, *us* against *them*. Self-portraiture can provoke the same response, where the viewer/subject/artist might perceive the subject as other and thus the self as strange.

As explored in relation to Butler, subjectivity can be considered spectral through its repetitive gestures and fluctuating visual manifestations, indicating a gap between the self and the other. When artists present themselves through photographic self-portraiture, they present the self-as-other through the combined actions of performance, re-iteration, and self-othering. I will turn to the readings of Whitney Chadwick and Amelia Jones in order to support my exploration of how women artists present the self-as-other as a

spectral subject through these combined actions. First, however, I explore how photography can mediate the intersection between subjectivity and spectrality.

Barthes explores how the photographic image comes to communicate meaning and how it functions to shape the identity of the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer. Barthes describes the act of being photographed where he notes, “I then experience a micro-version of death.... I am truly becoming a specter” (14). This innocuous version of death occurs at the click of the shutter, where the photographer essentially “produces death while trying to preserve life” (92). For Barthes, the act of posing begins the cycle of the photographic paradox, where he explains that, “Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing,’ I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image” (10). With this active performance, Barthes describes a state of dissociated self-objectification that occurs when the subject is photographed and subsequently fails to recognize the subject as ‘I’ within the image, at first glance. Without any exaggerated or theatrical self-performance, the viewer experiences the self-as-other through looking at an image of them, even if only for a brief moment. The other body created through the act of posing is often greatly exaggerated through the performance-based self-imaging practices of Cahun, Antin, Lake, and Hatoum, to be explored in the subsequent sections of this thesis.

With respect to forming and performing the subject—or object—of photographic visualization, Barthes lists four image repertoires that intersect when being photographed: “the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one they make use of to exhibit their art” (13). The photographer has a significant amount of influence on our metaphorical existence in the moment we are

being photographed; how we are positioned depends on how we will be interpreted through cultural lenses and social frameworks. The aforementioned death and objectification of the subject occurs because the photograph marks a moment that will never happen again—it historicizes its subject. The subject is now only accessible through the memory that can also be provoked through the photograph, where the symbolic death of the subject that Barthes discusses marks an aspect of memory and recollection akin to the notion of haunting.

Drawing upon personal experiences of viewing images, Barthes develops the concept of *studium* and *punctum* to describe how the image affects its viewer. These notions are based on components of the image, where the *studium* refers to a culturally derived understanding of an image. It is a form of cultural education that encourages a polite curiosity and enables general legibility—the *studium* provokes engagement but it does not necessarily provide all of the tools necessary to engage in a critical or affective reading. It refers to the basic understanding of an image, not simply the formal qualities or denoted message. It also does not necessarily evoke a strong response to the photograph from the viewer - that is the function of the *punctum*. The *punctum* refers to the accidental element of an image, a detail or partial object, “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). It is something that makes a psychological connection with the viewer that draws them in for further exploration and analysis. The *punctum* is, of course, is highly subjective, but it can also be haunting.

Gordon notes:

...the *punctum* is what haunts. It is the detail, the little but heavily frightened thing that sparks the moment of arresting animation, that enlivens the world of ghosts. The enchanting detail cannot be predicted in advance or calculated for methodological rigor. (108)

Every viewer has the potential to be deeply affected by any one aspect of an image – it all depends on individual experiences and their influence on the individual’s worldview. The unpredictability of the punctum, the uncertainty of when it might reveal itself to the viewer, is much like the unpredictable re-appearance of the specter. It is then also connected to the uncanny, where “[t]he evidence for ghostly matter is what *I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there*” (ibid). What the viewer projects onto the image from within their psyche is where the true haunting resides, and like the punctum, each person is different and will be affected differently, just as they will project different instances of repression outward in different ways. Thinking of the photograph as spectral, as having the capacity to haunt through memory, calls upon the parts of the self that are other but also draws out the parts that fear otherness.

Thinking about photography as a spectral medium calls for an exploration of how the evolution of the medium has brought it into an increasingly spectral understanding. Tom Gunning traces the long history of the phantom in visual studies, where that which is ghostly reveals a crisis of the senses. For Gunning, “it is in the new media environment based in the proliferation of virtual images, [that] the concept of the phantasm gains a new valency as an element of the cultural imaginary” (98). In its fluctuation between visibility and invisibility, an apparition resides somewhere in between presence and absence, yet carries with it an abundance of symbolic meaning.

Gunning notes:

The term *phantasmatic* denotes images that oscillate between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality, often using transparency or some other manipulation of visual appearance to express this paradoxical ontological status. Beyond the literal sense of survival after death, ghosts, as phantasms reveal hidden assumptions about the nature of the visual image, still haunt our modern media landscape. (99)

When it comes to the virtual image, technology seems to be increasingly representational of spectrality. Gunning explores how “the virtual image becomes the modern phantom” (111). By using the ghost as a metaphor for the fluctuating materiality of virtual media, Gunning examines how contemporary reproductive media can be used to address ontological concerns. Gunning states that “[t]he ontological argument claims that photography not only portrays things but participates in, shares, or appropriates the very ontology of the things it portrays” (101). This sense of ontological exploration differs from that of Barthes, as it does not simply reactivate ontological readings of the photographic image. It allows for a creative reimagining of a subject’s sense of being, or sense of self, through photography. Gunning’s exploration addresses the haunting of cinema by the still image, the uncanniness of one transferred into the next. Gunning notes:

Instead of simply being present, the phantom occupies the ontologically ambiguous status of “haunting” – enduring and troubling in its uncanny claim to our awareness and sense of presence yet also unfamiliar and difficult to integrate into everyday space and time. (100)

The inability to distinguish an apparition as visible or invisible, other or *us*, living or dead, disrupts normative and linear conceptions of self, space, and time.¹⁴ Thinking about how a subject can embody a phantom, or rather, apparition, and how the apparition can be represented through imaging technology involves thinking about the implications of the medium in othering a subject.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Sconce explores how electronic media “have compelled citizens of the media age to reconsider increasingly dissociative relationships among body, mind, space, and time” (7).

Self-Portraiture and the Self-as-Other

How does otherness come to exist when the artist is the subject, as well as the viewer, and what happens when performances of the self, re-iterated poses, and theatrical enactments render the subject as spectral? Amelia Jones develops the notion of body/art as a model that emphasizes the multiply identified, technologically mediated, particularized, and dispersed self as communicated through self-portraiture. In *Body/Art: Performing the Subject*, published in 1998, Jones argues in favour of photographs recording private performances as more than just documentation. Jones argues for the existence of these photographs as sites of expansion of dialogues adhering to traditional notions of the medium. *Body/Art* is crucial in my investigation of women artists' self-representation through photographic self-portraiture, where Jones presents a discussion rooted in the rejection of representing the "body/self" according to a postmodern subject, where the rational, coherent, singular, and transcendent subject of modernism is faced with its own irrelevance and inaccuracy (7). She develops an understanding of the representation of the human body through a phenomenological lens that foregrounds the intersubjectivity of body-based art, rather than perpetuating the modernist subject/object divide. Jones traces the disruptive potential of body art in regards to modernist art's valorization of normative identities by emphasizing the particularities of each artist's body. This emphasis asserts that the artist's representation of their body/self becomes explicitly non-universal and non-transcendent, but rather, particular and embodied.

The particularities of bodies often focus on idiosyncrasies, which push the body further away from what is considered mainstream or normative, inching closer and closer into the territory of otherness. Jones describes the intersubjective quality of interpretive exchange that arises from the documentation of live performance and its relation to other

bodies, in spatial terms, in that “documents of the body-in-performance are just as easily, if not as obviously contingent in that the meaning that accrues to the image of the body is open-ended and dependent on the ways in which the image is contextualized and interpreted” (34). When faced with otherness the dynamic of interpretive exchange deviates because the image that the viewer is faced with is interpreted as a product of their projection of meaning onto it. The identity of the subject is contingent on the unconscious projections of the viewer, and on the cues given within the photograph of the performance, by the artist/subject’s body/self “the photograph of the body art event or performance could, in fact, be said to expose the body itself as supplementary, as both the visible proof of the self and its endless deferral” (34-35). The deferral of the self speaks to the spectral because of the oscillation between absence and presence, occurring between the moment of the performance or event and its documentation, as well as more deeply within the psyche when thinking about the performance of a version of the self that is active and intentional within the event. Jones states that, “The photograph, like the body image itself, is a supplement to the inescapable lack that founds subjectivity (the existence of the body in the social, vis-à-vis other subjects)” (35). Performing reiterations of the self presents a space of fragmentation and repetition, one that is marked by the constant deferral associated with the method of body art and the necessity of supplements, such as the camera, that act as a reminder of absence and lack in their simultaneous mediation of self-representation.

To contextualize these ideas within my own practice of body art, I draw from what Jones refers to as “phenomenologically inflected feminist poststructuralism” to assert the act of performance, whether public, private, anonymous, or semi-anonymous, as an act of reiteration crucial in the representation of subjectivity through photographic

self-portraiture (11). Jones maintains that representing subjectivity through body art expands the parameters of “art interpretation, encouraging the development of a new reading praxis that acknowledges the masculinist, racist, homophobic, and classist assumptions underlying the disciplines of art history and criticism and their rhetoric of disinterested aesthetic judgment and historical narration” (19). Bridging the gap between representation and interpretation, photographic self-portraiture that follows the model of body art has the potential to subvert all of these assumptions and structures, which I argue can be done through an insistence on visibility by the female artist/subject who is simultaneously, at some point, also the viewer. This blurring of boundaries and identities, fluctuation between visibility and invisibility reminiscent of haunting, demands an acknowledgement of the roles that desire and subjective specificity play in an intersubjective exchange.

Looking Forward

The pivotal texts examined in this review connect history and contemporary art, placing relevant issues from the past in conversation with those still relevant today. Considering spectrality as indicative of a repetitive, persistent resurgence of performative actions, recollecting events, and often pushing past what is present to comprehend the significance of what is absent, this thesis concludes that the term is a strong and widely applicable metaphor for formations of identity in contemporary art practice. Concepts drawn from the reiterative and performative aspects of the spectral are particularly informative of my own practice, in that I engage with photographic self-portraiture and private performance in order to explore and expand my own understanding of female subjectivity and the implications of such actions as a woman artist. Moving forward in this paper, I note how the majority of the discussion of the spectral defines it as other, a

typical identification to push the spectral into further liminality. I consider how the self-as-other and the spectral subject can be reimagined through the performative process of photographic self-portraiture, positing otherness as empowering.

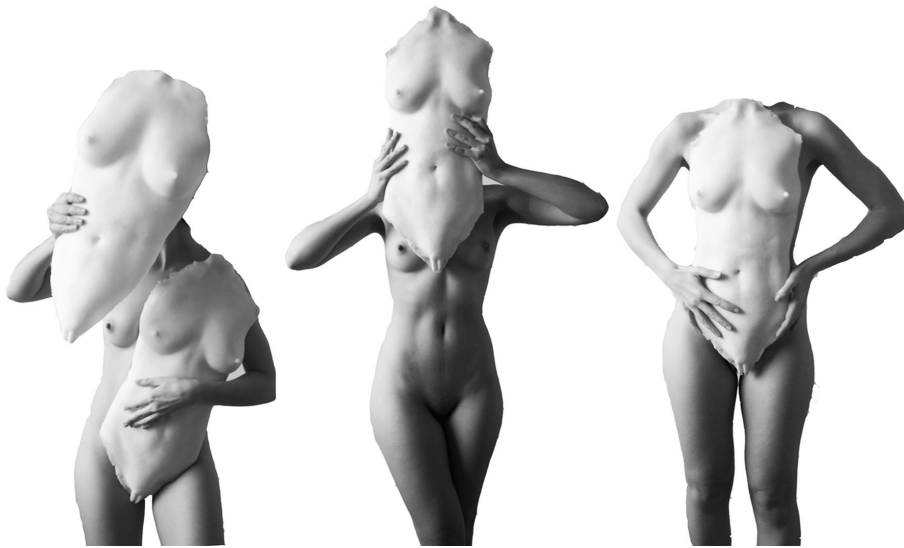


Figure 1. *(Re)Presentation*, 2016
Photo-transfer on mirror, 14" x 14", series of 3

FIRST APPARITION

(Re)Presentation

I first appear as a reflection of myself, onto you, upon yourself, upon myself. In my natural state I alternate between unembellished versions of my self - though in presenting my sexed body I recognize that unembellished does not translate to unreadable. My body will be read, interpreted, and scrutinized, though any attempts at a categorization beyond female are disrupted by the multiplicity of my torso. As a prop, and in many ways a mask, I alternate back and forth between which might fit me best. I alternate back and forth between which will hide my figure most effectively. I project myself outward but draw you inward, while I attempt to ground myself within one representation, to settle on one self. I am I and I am other. This iteration of myself—as/and—other eternally returns to previous iterations as though they might be more suited to how I imagine myself in the present moment. I present this private performance as a multi-part engagement with the translation of my body into representation. I offer my self as a reflection of your self, as I have literally transferred my iterations onto mirrors. I do not wish to confront the viewer with my gaze, nor do I wish to impose the power of my looking-back upon them. My body confronts rather than stares; it is a material in the process of transformation. I present an entity that is identified without its basic identifying traits, without the eyes, the mouth, the hair, or any of the head. These gestures are not pre-meditated acts – rationalization assumes no role in the playful performance of my selves. These acts are purely intuitive – a blocking of one form of consumption and the offering of another. Though since I am many and not simply one, a sense of inconsumability remains.

TWO | On Surrealism: A Spectral Intersection

*Who am I?
If this once I were to rely on a proverb,
then perhaps everything would amount
to knowing whom I “haunt”
...evidently referring to what
I must have ceased to be
in order to be who I am.*

André Breton, *Nadja*

Having traced a few contemporary discussions of spectrality pertinent to this thesis, I proceed by exploring the Surrealist movement, a point within the history of Western art at which, I suggest, the spectral metaphor is present within visual art and the greater conceptual framework of the movement. In this brief historical investigation, I foreground how women Surrealists have explored the self-as-other through performative self-imaging and establish themselves as a spectral subject within their practices. To contextualize my research, I will analyze Claude Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* in order to emphasize the concept of spectrality as a lens through which one can rethink photographic investigations of the self-as-other. Cahun's work offers a compelling starting point for determining the ways in which women artists drew from Surrealism's

use of rich symbolic imagery and metaphor, disrupting the restricting ideological frameworks at play in their ambivalent representations of the female body.¹⁵

Visual art that is “surreal” presents its subjects in ways that challenge the limits of an objective and external reality – the images presented to the viewer are highly unlikely to manifest “in real life.” They feature transformative visions and illogical scenes, often referring to everyday objects or implying a playfully clever message. I consider Surrealism in the terms used by Hal Foster in *Compulsive Beauty*, published in 1993, as “a related set of complex practices, one that develops its own ambiguous conceptions of aesthetics, politics, and history through difficult involvements in desire and sexuality, the unconscious and the drives...a theoretical object productive of its own critical concepts” (xvii-xviii). The intertwining of aesthetics, politics, and history with notions of desire and the complex mystery of the unconscious into an artistic movement serves as a complex model for tracing a short history of the self-as-other within the context of photographic self-portraiture by women artists. In the spirit of revolution—a revolution of consciousness, perhaps—Surrealist artworks such as *What Do You Want From Me?* are fueled by an urge to overcome the boundaries of a repressive reality, often presenting works whose subject matter transcend the boundaries of physical space, the understanding of linear time, and as mentioned, objective reality. This marks a transition from representational landscapes, consciously witnessed by the artist or inspired by a photograph, to mysticism and dreamscapes, as it is through dreams that the unconscious

¹⁵ In Surrealist artwork, such ambivalence toward otherness often takes the form of automatons, mannequins, and dolls, essentially signifying the mechanization, objectification, and commodification of the female figure and desire. For more on the treatment of women in Surrealist art see Robert J. Belton, “Men’s Woman, Women’s Woman” in *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art*, 219-268, and Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gloria Gwen Raaberg, *Surrealism and Women*, 1-26.

is most vividly manifested, visually and perhaps cinematically.¹⁶ Following the seemingly illogical content and incoherent bodies pictured within dreamscapes – nightmares included – I suggest that through the use of metaphor, symbolism, and interdisciplinary inquiry, Surrealist art and thought serves as a fertile point within modernism at which the conceptions of identity are challenged and the self-as-other is activated through reinventions of self through photographic representation.

Established by André Breton, Surrealism operates within a framework of psychologically driven principles, influenced by Sigmund Freud. In the first *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), Breton describes Surrealism as “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express...the actual functioning of thought...in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (26). Surrealism emerged as a cultural movement in 1924, with a strong focus on visual art and literature. Passionate in its response to the permeation of everyday life by traumatic events resulting from the First World War, Surrealist art and thought blend the marvelous and the real through experimental writing and image-making processes. Foster frames Surrealism as “improperly visual and impertinently literary, relatively inattentive to the imperatives of form and mostly indifferent to the laws of genre” (xii). These experimental processes adopted as a method of material exploration emphasize a space of transfiguration and anthropomorphism, where traditions in painting, and most relevant to this thesis, photography are reimagined both formally and conceptually. The Surrealist project aimed to explore the unconscious through what Hal Foster calls an engagement with “heterogeneous practices...[to explore] psychic conflict and social contradiction” (xvi). These practices refer to the variety of techniques that defined Surrealist art,

¹⁶ See the work of Remedios Varo, Frida Kahlo, and Salvador Dali, for example.

emphasizing creative methods that draw on unconscious psychological processes, such as psychic automatism, automatic writing, and the “exquisite corpse” method of drawing and collage. These techniques are an effort to communicate the instances of psychic conflict and social contradiction that Foster refers to. In this section I address these foundational concerns through the lens of spectrality, where the notion of haunting activates a visual disjunction and contradiction between life and death, presence and absence. Bridging spectrality and Surrealism offers a space in which the otherwise invisible, internalized, or repressed perceptions emerge from the unconscious and are communicated through visual art in an aim to resolve the incongruities between conscious and unconscious states, reality and surreality.

Surrealism asserts an expansion of rigid ideological frameworks surrounding normative conceptions of the human body, while exploring the influential potential that the depths of the unconscious can have on our social interactions and assumptions. Foster asserts that “surrealism is also the nodal point of three fundamental discourses of modernity—psychoanalysis, cultural Marxism, and ethnology—all of which inform surrealism as it in turn develops them” (xiv). Among three modernist discourses, hauntology also finds its niche; however I draw solely on the role of Freudian psychoanalysis in relation to haunting and the self-as-other. The insistence of women Surrealists on their visibility signals a call for autonomy from troubling preconceptions of female subjectivity that emerged from psychoanalysis and influenced the portrayal of women in Surrealist art.

Self-as-Other

The self-portraits of female Surrealists often reflect the framework of Surrealist thought while working against some of its fundamental ideas; those of women as

castrating, incoherent, and hysteric are rejected, often by embracing the idea of physical identity as incoherent, multiple, and dispersed (much like the movement itself in terms of its disjointed visual style and heterogeneous use of material). To consider how spectrality can manifest itself through photographic self-portraiture, I first turn to Whitney Chadwick's discussion of the self-as-other, a "process of objectification that enables the woman to describe herself *as if from outside the body*" (8). This process of objectification is a complex cycle of projection that is influenced by a patriarchal framework, consistently regarding the identity of woman as other to that of man, and the ideological structures that define normative and thus problematic conceptions of femininity.

Chadwick writes:

Positioned to collude in their objectification, unable to differentiate their own subjectivity from the condition of being seen, women artists have struggled toward ways of framing the otherness of woman that direct attention to moments of rupture with—or resistance to—cultural constructions of femininity. (9)

By examining specific artworks by Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin, Suzy Lake, and Mona Hatoum, I trace how women artists have responded to the notion of woman as other, challenging its narrow definition while destabilizing the cultural constructions that have provoked the need for resistance against their repressive effects. Exploring the notion of the self-as-other brings together the process of photographic self-portraiture and performed actions, reiteration and posing, in order to disrupt the ideological force of patriarchy in determining the subjectivity or feminine identity of woman as an other.

Regulated by the power dynamic of looking, woman's otherness is traditionally controlled by a desiring and normative male gaze.¹⁷ Chadwick discusses the mirror image

¹⁷ See Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," first published in 1975, for a discussion of the mirror phase and scopophilia, 345-346.

as one way that women Surrealists addressed the self-as-other as a disruptive force. Dorothea Tanning's *The Mirror*, painted in 1952, for instance, features an "anthropomorphic sunflower" in a cycle of self-contemplation mediated by a mirror—also a sunflower—where "the mirror has signified the social construction of femininity as specular consumption and the narcissistic identification of the woman with her reflected image" (9). Though this is not a lens-based self-representation, it embodies all of the characteristics that make performative self-representation so effective in disrupting traditional ways of seeing and relating to a subject. Thinking of the female body as a site of transformation, where Surrealism favoured its transformative representations and disruptions, women Surrealists often embrace the characteristically Surrealist technique of hybrid representation and elaborate, almost incoherent and nonsensical, scenes. These techniques of representation refused the viewer the satisfaction of an easily processed or consumable image, where "the unruly woman of the male Surrealist imagination – dismembered, mutable, eroticized – is recreated through women's eyes as self-possessed and capable of producing new narratives of the self" (Chadwick 11). By disrupting the opportunity to consume an objectified female body, women Surrealists were thus able to contest and reconstruct the specular and voyeuristic gaze of western representation, foregrounding their agency as women and as artists.

As such, the use of photographic self-portraiture offers a space of dissociated viewing, whereby photographic representation transforms seeing oneself from outside the body into an empowering experience. It is through the process of reiteration, the re-performance of self through photographic self-portraiture, and the dissociative experience of viewing the self as strange through self-representation, that the self-as-other emerges. I advance this investigation with an iconic Surrealist artist, Claude Cahun, in order to

locate and subsequently trace how women artists embody the self-as-other at pivotal times in the evolution of feminist concerns within the history of western art.

What Do You Want From Me?

Surrealist photographers such as Cahun challenge the frameworks of subjectivity and artistic convention through their coupling of performance/performative actions with the photographic medium. The Surrealist project marked a moment of reinvention with respect to the visual conventions of photography, where photomontage, blurring, and doubling were among the techniques commonly used in creating the characteristically “surreal” photographs that categorized the movement.¹⁸ As one of the few women considered to be a Surrealist, Cahun embraced photographic self-portraiture, experimenting with photo-manipulation in order to create diverse personae and hybrid objects that challenge normative conceptions of gender and sexual identity. Born Lucy Renée Mathilde Schwob, Cahun’s adoption of this literary pseudonym reveals her gender ambiguity in life and in practice. Part of the radicalness of Cahun’s practice comes from her androgyny, where the strategies of doubling and mirroring that occur throughout her practice are often coupled with unconventional and theatrical dress. Cahun portrays herself through many different identities in her many self-portraits; as a vampire, a puppet, and a body builder, to name a few, often exaggerating her attributes with make-up and props. Many of her photographs are manipulated in order to emphasize her intention to parody, satirize, or unapologetically critique gender normativity and homophobia in western society. In addition, Cahun’s identity as a Jewish woman living and working primarily in Paris during the interwar period meant that she likely

¹⁸ The word “surreal” will be used to describe the formal qualities of the Surrealist movement, specifically.

experienced anti-Semitic backlash. Her artistic practice includes a number of activist gestures performed by herself and her partner Marcel Moore during the Second World War; acts that would ultimately result in her imprisonment and subsequently dissolved death sentence (Doy 107-108). As an artist, intellectual, and political activist, Cahun's practice explores subjectivity through an unconventional approach to representing sexuality and gender fluidity.¹⁹ Rejecting the notion of subjectivity as singular and coherent, Cahun's multiple selves work alongside the tenets of Surrealism in her assertion of herself as many, staging a precursor to the feminist self-imaging practices that emerged in the 1970s. Foregrounding her body as her material, each of Cahun's self-portraits offers the viewer a potential part of her identity, testifying to the notion of selfhood as transformative. Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* is one of few titled works in her practice, where most are simply labelled as *Autoportrait*, meaning self-portrait. *What Do You Want From Me?* attests to the "theatrical exaggerations and strange inconsistencies [that] posit a self and a reality that are ultimately unknowable," a reaffirmation of Cahun's unconventional approach to self-assertion (Kline 73). Throughout her practice, Cahun's personally informed and politically inclined writing also supported her exploration of the self as unfixed, unstable, and dispersed.²⁰

Cahun's practice reflects many of the essential concerns of Surrealist art and thought, concerns that were investigated "in the name of a radical exploration of the unconscious rather than an aesthetic treatment of it" (Foster, "Compulsive Beauty" xv). Exploring the unconscious is undoubtedly an intriguing endeavour, especially when the aesthetic treatment of these explorations presents the viewer with images that are

¹⁹ See "Politics and its Objects" in Gen Doy's *Claude Cahun: A Sensual Politics of Photography*, 109-140.

²⁰ See Cahun's *Disavowals (Aveux non avenus)*, a personal narrative published in 1930.

reminiscent, in their strangeness, of dreamscapes, nightmares, and hallucinations. The aesthetic manifestation of these bizarre visions, read alongside Chadwick's discussion of the women Surrealists' transformation of their own otherness through self-portraiture, informs my exploration of the self-as-other as Cahun presents it through her photographic self-portraits.

In line with Chadwick's discussion, I explore Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* as a transformation of the artist into an entity that is other in relation to herself. Cahun contributes to Surrealist dialogues with her self-portrait photographs that, in true Surrealist fashion, disregard normality, often by disrupting the integrity of the human body (Kline 73). In this black and white photograph, Cahun appears as one half of a two-headed creature alongside (or technically, layered upon) Marcel Moore, her partner in art as in life. With hair shaved close to the scalp, their faces and bodies almost bare, the two figures seem to acknowledge each other as if engaged in dialogue. The viewer is not presented with a seamless or continuous figure—though Cahun and Moore's androgyny evokes the gender fluidity at the heart of their artistic practices. On the left, Cahun stares anxiously, while Moore leans into the shadows Cahun's body has created, maintaining a detached presence while appearing to whisper into her partner's ear. Leaning away from Moore, but eyes fixed in the direction of her partner's head, Cahun appears to be caught between intense repulsion and profound curiosity. Through her self-portrait with Moore, her 'significant other,' Cahun presents her otherness as haunting and haunted.

What Do You Want From Me? explores desire, sexuality, human nature, and personhood in order to challenge the ideologies that oppress anything labelled as other. Considering how artists intentionally present themselves as other calls for an exploration of the productive and empowering results of fluctuating between visibility and invisibility

at will, as well as being rendered visually inconsumable. Cahun's own otherness is at the core of her artistic practice, where she embraces herself as other, a Jewish, lesbian, and woman, by presenting the self-as-other within her work and challenging the narrow-minded labelling imposed upon her.

As a viewer, I am, at first glance, unsure of whether this image is meant to be a reflection of a nightmare, a hallucination, or a haunting. This is because I instinctively read it as a combination of all three states, where each of the three is an anomaly, a visual incongruence between consciousness and unconsciousness, connection to reality and disassociation. Cahun activates the self-as-other through her enactment of herself as other in relation to her partner, as well as in relation to the viewer. The confusion between the subjects as human and non-human, in what appears to be a state of transition between visibility and invisibility, brings the self-as-other, as Cahun presents it, into conversation with spectrality, where Cahun and Moore are spectral subjects.

What Do You Want From Me? demonstrates an instance of psychological disturbance where subjectivity is considered haunting and haunted. This piece is provocative and empowering in its challenge of formal and theoretical singularity, demonstrating how subjectivity can be haunting. Considering its context within the Surrealist movement, where women were often represented "with blinded, occluded or mutilated gazes, whose bodies are the fetishized site of desire/menace" (Bailey and Thynne 135), Cahun's image challenges repressive representations of women by refuting these rigid modes of representation. Though much has progressed by way of works such as Cahun's, in terms of representing women and the acknowledgement and acceptance of non-binary gender and sexual identification, traces of the anxiety that initially shocked viewers still remains and manifests itself in backlash against the other. *What Do You*

Want From Me? “evoke[s] sensual knowledges which defy easy categorization and visual mastery” (Bailey and Thynne 144). Asserting that the self can exist simultaneously and in multiple iterations leaves the viewer unable to predict how the artist will present themselves in subsequent re-appearitions. Referring back to Amelia Jones’ description of body art, the intersection of self-portraiture and theatrical, but often private, acts of performance work together to destabilize normative representations of the female body through a process she calls “performative self-imaging.”

The Eternal Returns of the Self-as-Other

The method of performative self-imaging engages the self-as-other as an outcome of private performance, self-objectification, and self-declaration through reiteration. In her essay, “The ‘Eternal Return’: Self-portrait photography as a technology of embodiment,” published in 2002, Jones explores ways of thinking about the relationship between the racially, sexually, and gender-identified subject and photography through the notions of “photographic self-performance” (947) and “performative self-imaging” (948). These terms can be used interchangeably, though in the context of this essay Jones uses performative self-imaging to describe the process by which an artist engages in an exaggerated style of self-performance (conveying instances of their subjectivities for the camera) to produce images that communicate the body and the subjective self through self-portrait photography. The use of self-portraiture within this process also positions the camera itself as an apparatus by which the duality of life and death coexist within the framework of thinking about “the body *as* representation,” emphasizing an “intimate relation to lack and loss” (949). This relationship to lack and loss is established through the relationship of the photographic image-object to the memory it represents. In this essay, Jones investigates the use of performative self-imaging at various points in the

history of art with respect to the self-portrait-based practices of women artists.

Investigating the impact of imaging technologies on subject formation and an artist's response to their contemporary socio-cultural conditions through representations of the self, Jones argues that photography, as a "death-dealing apparatus" has the ability to "fetishize and congeal time," where representation of the body – the body becoming a representation or object – implies a symbolic death of the subject as well (ibid.).

Conversely and concurrently, the "exaggerated theatricality" of self-performance through self-portrait photography reaffirms the "life-giving" quality that balances this paradox and positions self-portrait photography as a "*technology of embodiment...one that paradoxically points to our tenuousness and incoherence as living, embodied subjects*" (949-50). By performing the self through photographic means, Claude Cahun engages with the instabilities of human identity and existence in what has been, and continues to be, a highly technologized and rapidly changing world. For Cahun, exploring the process by which we constitute ourselves in relation to others draws on the increasing mobilization of technologies of representation, such as photography, and an artists' ability to reiterate and reconstruct their bodies and selves "across the interpretive bridges that connect them" (950). As I move forward to explore Suzy Lake, Eleanor Antin, and Mona Hatoum, I keep in mind these interpretive bridges that connect and differentiate subject, artist, and viewer, as well as the technologies specific to each artist that work to mediate the reiteration of themselves as other.

In an analysis of Claude Cahun's *Autoportrait (Self-Portrait)* (c. 1939), Jones explains how Cahun's performative self-imaging is key to the transformation of conceptions of self-portraiture that began to emerge in early Victorian portraits, then growing in visibility within modernist practice, clearly becoming most evident in

postmodern practices such as feminist self-portraiture of the 1970s. These instances work to expand our understanding of what a self-portrait is by foregrounding the performative dimension of subjectivity, where the artists' performances result in representations that are often theatrical in their elaborate staging, yet remain a reflection of who the artists imagine and understand themselves to be. They are truly re-presentations of the self-as-other. These exaggerated versions of themselves "foreground the 'I' as other to itself, the artistic subject as 'taking place' in the future through interpretive acts that bring [them] back to life via memory and desire" (950). As observed in Cahun's eclectic self-imaging practice, artists who engage with performative self-imaging often reinvent themselves again and again in their artistic practices, foregrounding the self as a product of reiteration and interpersonal relations often rooted in desire. Jones explores various theoretical constructs that work to highlight a different aspect of the reciprocal engagement that establishes the "I" in relation to "them," and us in relation to such images. Recalling the objectification of a female subject through a desiring gaze, performative self-imaging returns the agency of the female subject back to herself when she becomes the photographer as well. By presenting the self as not only other, but iterative, dispersed, multiple, and layered, the performative self-imaging process of the woman artist engages a form of agency that allows the subject to disrupt conventional notions of representation as well as normative notions of desire and identity. In this sense, the female subject is insistent on her visibility as a complex being, embracing a more productive course of action in favour of the other as an agent of social change. The insistent visibility of the female subject becomes spectral through its commitment to repetitive apparition and disappearance and strategic fluctuation between visibility and invisibility that is enacted through the act of posing.

I draw from Jones' investigations of "the gaze, reiteration, [and] the pose" (949) in order to analyze how the performative self-imaging practices, such as that of Cahun, are influential on generations of women artists to follow in that they have embraced a mode of othering through representation that is a productive form of disruption. Jones describes her intentions as follows:

I want to counter the dominant, repressive modes of visual interpretation that privilege closure over productive instability in relation to both subjectivity (of the artist, of ourselves) and meaning. Such acts of closure are motivated by our desire to defend ourselves against incoherence by projecting otherness outward. I want to offer a new way of reading pictures, then, that involves deliciously relinquishing our power as viewing subjects and revelling in our own otherness. (952)

Following Jones' model, I investigate how the pose, the gaze, and reiteration intersect and interact within the self-portrait photograph to destabilize problematic preconceptions of female subjectivity through the acknowledgement and enactment of the self-as-other. The pose is important to this process in that it represents the death-dealing aspect of the paradoxical photographic apparatus. Through the pose, the body is frozen in an instant and an action that enacts the fetishizing power of immobility. According to Barthes, when projected by the viewer onto the photographic object, this immobility can also signal the potential for a transformation of this projected death into life. Drawing on Derrida, Jones notes, "This is a life sustained via deferral through the other" (956).²¹ Such a deferral occurs through the "spectatorial engagement" of the viewer, where they are likely to project their unconscious desires, innermost anxieties, and perhaps more constructively, their empathy, onto the pictured subject.

²¹ See Derrida's discussion of otherness in "Roundtable on Autobiography" in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*.

This projection often occurs in the form of a desiring gaze, where Jones argues that the viewing of the subject through the gaze imparts a navigation and dictation of otherness. Drawing from Lacan's notion of the photograph as a screen on which intersubjective meaning is produced, Jones notes that it "defines the process through which we perform ourselves simultaneously as subjects and objects of looking" where "the photographic portrait can thus be viewed as a screen across and through which complex processes of identification and projection take place in an ongoing dynamic of subject formation or *subjectification*" (958).²² Subject formation, in all its complexity, relies heavily on the process of projection within intersubjective exchange. Adding another layer to this complex system, Jones states that it is "through the pose [that]...the embodied subject is exposed as being a mask or screen, a site of projection and identification," for the viewer, artist, and subject alike (959). The interconnection of these identifications is where the notion of the self-as-other becomes apparent and the productive and paradoxical interconnections of self-portrait photography and otherness are revealed.

By way of projection, we imagine ourselves as the subject of a photograph, and the subject of the photograph as ourselves. As a viewer, I can imagine myself to be the character within a photograph, as either or both the haunting and haunted subjects observed in the self-portrait of Cahun and Moore. It is through even my own subjective gaze as a viewer that the reciprocity of intersubjective exchange is activated and the subject I view becomes an-other to my-self, especially, in this case, when the subject pictured is decidedly *me*. The traditional white, male, heterosexual, and colonizing gaze

²² See Lacan's "What is a Picture?" in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* for a discussion of the photograph as screen where intersubjective meaning is produced.

relies on its own imposition of power to construct the viewed subject as a coherent, passive, and singular feminine object. But the gaze itself can be incoherent, if not only destabilized by the incoherence of its objectified subject. The traditional gaze relies on the order it imposes upon its subject in order to produce an object that is static and coherent, a product of the ideologies that inform the power dynamic between gazing viewer and its subject, in order for it to remain coherent in its own identification. When the subject/artist engages in the process of performative self-imaging, the “reiteration of self becomes an effective strategy” for disrupting and destabilizing this gaze. It is through the fetishization brought about by the pose that the object produced by the male gaze “is so insistently reiterated that it becomes unhinged” (960). The effects of the gaze are interrupted when the domains of spectatorial desire are presented with images that foreground ‘authorial/female self-assertion’ rather than an ideologically dictated and coherent subject.

An artist can use the techniques of reiteration and posing to disrupt the desiring, objectifying, and fetishizing gaze, all of which are connected through the acknowledgement and embodiment of the self-as-other through the process of self-portraiture. Embracing the notion of the self-as-other through performative self-imaging positions photographic representation as a mediator for discussions of subjectivity within visual art, working in tandem to disrupt the narrow definitions and accepted traditions of gendered representation and subjectivity. In the work of Claude Cahun, examined in relation to the Surrealist mode of art and thought, the non-normative female subject foregrounds her own agency by positing herself as artist and subject/object, exhibiting this agency through her freedom to reiterate and re-present herself as a multitude of subject identities through performative self-imaging. Following a conceptual framework

with equally profound intentions, feminist artists of the 1970s provoke the audience and reveal themselves in order to assert the profundity of their identities despite their constant representation as two-dimensional personalities. The insistence of women on their visibility on their own terms marks a sort of “eternal return” that foregrounds re-appearance as a method for expanding dialogues about feminism, representations of the female body, and the treatment of female identity on an individual basis rather than as a collectively reduced whole.

The concept of spectrality is central to a deeper comprehension of Cahun’s intervention into enforced ideologies of invisibility, confronting said ideologies with her insistence on visibility. Cahun’s *What Do You Want From Me?* addresses otherness and evokes sociocultural discourses on gender and sexuality by engaging the symbolism of the supernatural or subhuman—a challenge of belief in that which exists on the fringes of the human realm. Images of ghosts and monsters provoke fear and anxiety precisely because of the unpredictable re-appearance understood to be a product of their social nonconformity.²³ Nonconformist in many ways, Cahun embodies identity as a re-iterative accumulation of personae, where “[her] many masks and maneuvers reflect rather than deflect” (Kline 68). Returning the othering gaze back onto the viewer, Cahun’s self-portraits make no attempt to soothe the viewer. Many of Cahun’s works feature herself in multiples, mostly mirror images of herself performing a number of different identities, where “[t]he theatrical exaggerations and strange inconsistencies posit a self and a reality that are ultimately unknowable” (Kline 73). The “unknowability” of a subject is where

²³ This description of ghosts and monsters recalls Gothic tales and early Science Fiction, such as that written by Edgar Allan Poe or H.P. Lovecraft.

social attitudes defining how western society regards physical appearance, gender, and sexuality are disrupted and where the other becomes apparent.

The reclamation of a woman's representation through performative self-portraiture embodies the self-as-other but also activates the symbolic potential of the spectral metaphor in that reiterative performance and re-presentation of the self mirror the qualities of haunting. When thinking of the self-as-other in terms of spectrality, the emphasis on visibility is just as important as that on invisibility. Avery Gordon's investigation of Sabina Spielrein, the author asserts that "psychoanalysis does not know as much about haunting as it might seem" (27). I take this not as a challenge to complete any sort of picture of haunting in psychoanalytic thought within the social sciences, but rather as an opportunity to refer to its influence in locating spectrality and the self-as-other within visual art. Spielrein's absence from the photograph Gordon encounters reminds us of the significance of the uncanny and the limits of representation. Had Spielrein been pictured, the photograph would not have haunted Gordon and it would have not led her through this particular path of something-to-be-done. Spielrein's absence is a powerful presence even though her visibility fluctuates. Although she is absent from the photograph she still emerges through her diary entries and letters to Freud and Jung. Her dual identity as patient and practitioner of psychoanalysis grants her a unique position as able to work within, and outside of, frameworks of social normativity and otherness. Gordon draws on Spielrein's diary, recounting an instance when Spielrein became a stranger to herself, when she saw herself as other, perhaps in a transformative sense similar to that valued by the Surrealists. Gordon explains that "[Spielrein] looked into the mirror and saw a wolf. Everything that differentiates her experience of the uncanny from Freud's rests on what she did next. She spoke to it, asking it what it

wanted. And lo and behold, it answered back” (49-50). Haunted by herself, Spielrein engaged with her experience of otherness instead of repressing it.

Similarly, Cahun is pictured confronting her otherness in *What Do You Want From Me?*, making herself visible through her own agency as an artist and engaging with some of the differences that combine to form this particular iteration of her self. Cahun’s ghostly portrait effectively attests to the formal and aesthetic qualities of the spectral, where she “disrupts the integrity of the body” (Kline 73). By this model, Cahun’s *What Do You Want From Me?* presents the other in a way that can be at once intensely private but also uninhibited in its embrace of the haunting and haunted – spectral – self:

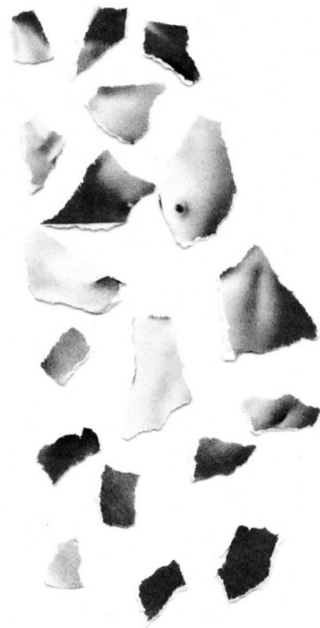
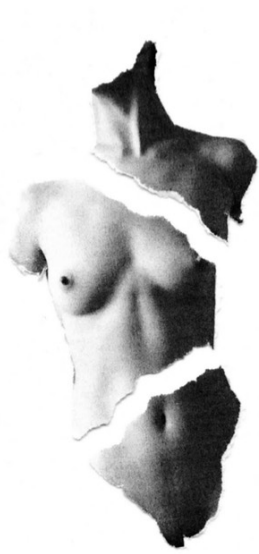
“Through paradox, reversal, and repetition, Cahun’s multiple identities, her monstrous and abject objects, create mischief, denying the power to control and categorize through the gaze, throwing back to the viewer the question that he seeks to answer” (Bailey and Thynne 148). Effectively, this defiance reimagines the subject as spectral and the self as other, positioning otherness as agency.

In the case of Cahun—as well as Antin, Lake, and Hatoum, to be explored in the upcoming sections—we as viewers are presented with images that insistently represent the autonomy of the woman and woman artist through her self-representation as a complex and multiply identified being. Thinking of the constructed identities of these women artists as apparitions applies spectrality onto an analysis of their practices, foregrounding their process of self-performance—their performative self-imaging—and the intentional obscuring or exposure of their bodies in their self-portrait photographs. Once shocking in their challenge of social norms, Cahun’s photographs continue to be relevant within a contemporary context as oppressive social constructs continue to be challenged by more contemporary artists such as Eleanor Antin, Suzy Lake, and Mona

Hatoum. Each of these artists experiments with their visibility as subjects by performing themselves in flux, as subjects whose identities are not fixed to a single identification or category and who use the method of performative self-imaging to present a spectral subject. Their practices explore taboo subjects through representation of the female body in all of its distinguished otherness – from the inside out and the outside in – to address what constitutes the other and challenge ideas of desire and visual consumption in western society.

Cahun's piece works as a primary reference point within this thesis for discerning how women artists were able to resist and reconstruct the repressive frameworks of female representation in the western canon of visual art. Artists such as Cahun valued the transformative potential of the unconscious in determining how identity could manifest and communicate itself through dreams and into daily life. The resistance of women Surrealists to their aesthetic decimation relied on the same techniques, though the use of self-portraiture and self-representation granted them authorial autonomy and ultimate control over how their image would be presented. In the generations of women artists that follow, feminist concerns coincide with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and self-portraiture becomes an even more powerful and profound claim to the artistic – and even social – autonomy of women through a productive embrace of their own otherness through the feminist photographic self-portraiture of the 1970s. A movement toward gender and racial equality highlighted broad conceptions of otherness based on gendered and racial representation, where feminist artists sought to reclaim their autonomy from the regulation imposed by patriarchal ideology. One way that they did this was to engage with their subjectivity as multiple, incoherent, performative, and most importantly, as

other, but with radical social change came a deeper need to perform and present photographic investigations of the self-as-other.



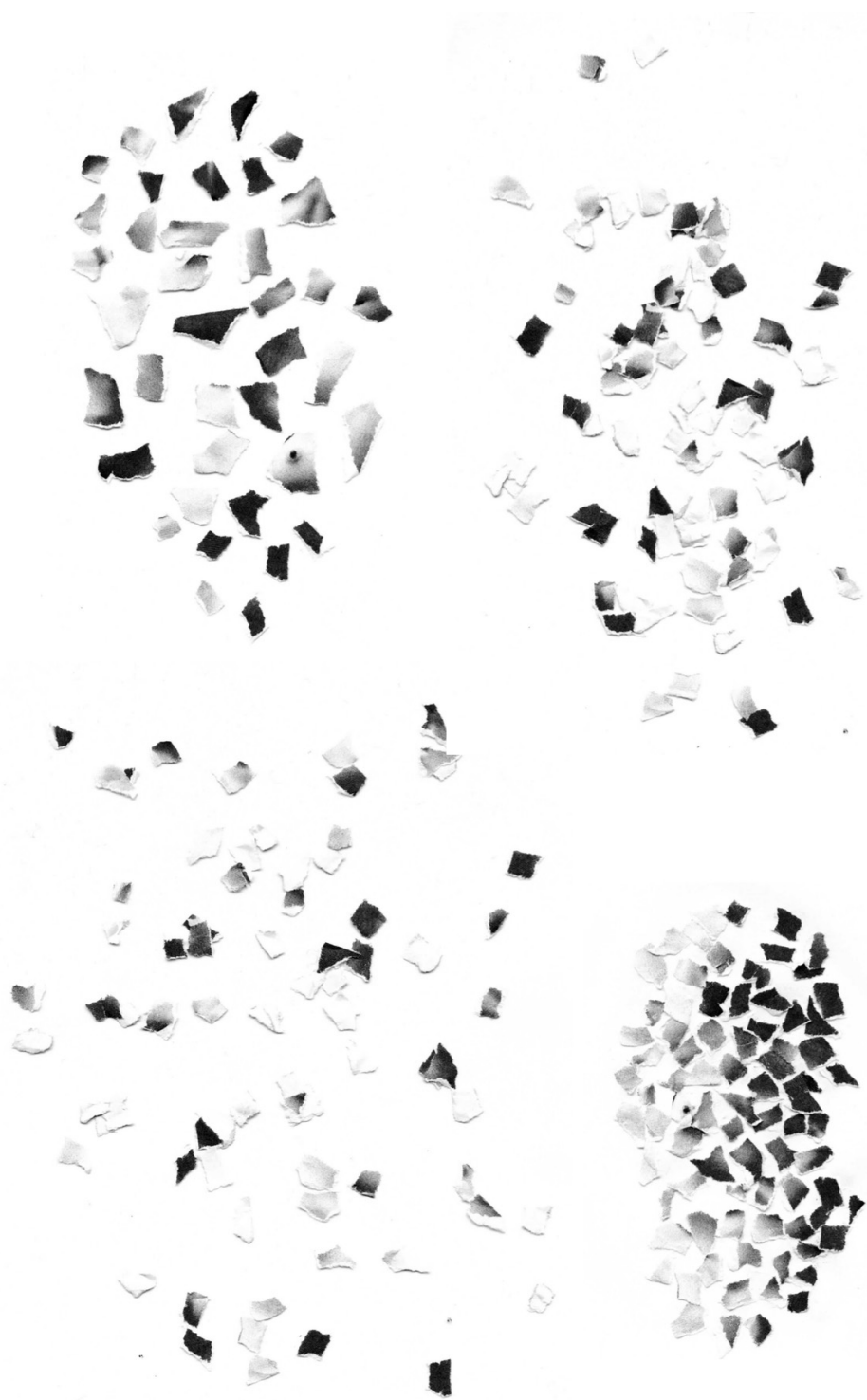


Figure 2. *(Re)Collection*, 2016
Photograph, acrylic and wood frame, 8" x 10", series of 8

SECOND APPARITION

(Re)Collection

I appear once more as a collection of many, an amassing of fragments dispersed and gathered once more. My image becomes incoherent in its iteration, as I carry it further into abstraction. The mask of myself that I juggle is broken down and examined. It is gathered once more and fixed again in an assemblage of bits. These are traces of myself torn apart, revised, and presented for evaluation. In its transformation it is incoherent, unpredictable, and each subsequent presentation is a destabilization of the last. These are the traces of traces of a contained self, destabilizing in its transformation and attempted transcendence of the traces framing repressive interactions. These traces are preserved as a sequence of self-destruction, an archival endeavour that maintains my multiple selves. The selves I present here began as a photograph – traditional and technically sound. Once printed, I tear my torso from the image. It leaves a jagged hole, a notable absence, within the page. The page is then discarded. There is no way for the viewer to know the origins of this dislocated self-image. I tear up this image, though only in a few places. I create another image, another technically sound photograph – a photograph of a photograph. I repeat this part of the process until I am left with a pile of tiny paper shreds. I fail as I attempt to put myself back together through a final gesture toward self-preservation. I am no longer like the first version of myself, just as I had anticipated. With each repetition I am a new collection of experiences and actions, I am a (re)collected self.

THREE | Feminist Self-Portraiture of the 1970s

*...she was afraid of losing her shape,
spreading out,
not being able to contain herself any longer...*

Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman*

Similar to the women artists of Surrealism, feminist artists of the 1970s used photographic self-portraiture to destabilize narrow and rigid notions of female subjectivity. Feminist art emerged in the 1970s when conceptual art was the prevalent style in western visual art, where photography was the medium central to the movement. Jayne Wark writes of four prominent artists, Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Wilson, who addressed feminist concerns through self-portrait photography. Modifying the didactic style of conceptual photography for more politically engaged purposes, women artists adapted its “methodological premises to their growing awareness of the vital struggles of the civil rights and feminist movements, which in turn constituted a crucial shift in the notion of how art could have a critical social and political resonance” (Wark 44). These socially engaged investigations and confrontations called for greater agency of women and racial minorities, where “the emancipatory struggles of these agencies made the participants aware of the limitations of class-oriented politics in accounting for how oppression and ideological control are embedded within all forms of social institutions” (Wark 44). Challenging various social institutions, feminist art fully

embraces the disruption of social constructs aimed at the repression of female sexuality and adherence to the social construct of “woman.”

These artists often challenged these injustices through the use of the female body – their own bodies – recorded in instantaneous happenings, enacted through a prolonged process of physical transformation, or through various engagements with public performance. Within the context of self-portraiture, performances and performative actions often exposed the artist’s body in a series of images that lay her figure bare or completely obscured it, though there were many other techniques used. We can observe the feminist self-portrait photography of the 1970s as a call for the same reverence for the realistic and complex subjectivity of the female subject granted to the nude, given instead to the now *naked* female subject embodied and enacted through a process of performative self-imaging. A challenge of the hyper-visibility of western art’s cherished and coherent female nude emerges, though this is of course not the first time conventions of representing women are disrupted.

Asserting the subjective complexity of womanhood through representations and performances of the female figure, artists such as Piper and Antin worked through a more productive model of self-representation than what was current in Conceptual art. They worked to “recognize the potential of subjecting Conceptual art’s strategies and methodological premises to modifications that would advance the fundamentally different critical ethos informing their work” (Wark 44). This modification of methodology occurred at a time when the complexity of female subjectivity was explored through the diverse constructions and representations of identity obtainable through visual art. Feminist artists who sought empowerment and addressed varying questions of otherness through their artwork challenged the often-reductive representation of the female identity.

Seeking political emancipation and greater agency, feminist artists of the 1970s explored and challenged notions of subject formation through their treatment of subjectivity as “an unstable category tenuously negotiated within both private and public social structures” (Wark 47). For Eleanor Antin, this artistic treatment draws on the techniques of posing and reiteration to challenge troublesome assumptions about the female identity through the complex process of performative self-imaging.

Antin’s practice is a diverse inquiry into the multiple formations of identity, conceptions of otherness, and the representation of both. Throughout her practice, Antin critiques the regard for women as objects, inferior to a male counterpart, and irrelevant to the broader scope of visual art (Wark 47). Foregrounding private aspects of daily life, Antin explores the complexity of the female identity through her treatment of identity as an unstable condition, much like Cahun did. As a Jewish-American woman, Antin uses the strategy of performance to demonstrate her “self” as multiple selves, working within first wave feminism (Wark 47). Like Cahun, Antin developed multiple personae such as a prima ballerina, a king, a nurse from the Crimean war, and an African-American movie star, all of whom acted as disruptions to the distinctions between being and acting (Wark 47).²⁴ Within the broader scope of feminist art, Antin sought to disrupt the socio-cultural and socio-political forces that regulated women’s political emancipation and restricted their agency. Many of Antin’s photographic works incorporate a sculptural element, mainly props that support the embodiment and enactment of a persona. Through her

²⁴ Antin was noted to have received backlash for performing in blackface. For a critique and analysis of this aspect of Antin’s complex practice see Huey Copeland’s “Some Ways of Playing Antinova,” in *Multiple Occupancy: Eleanor Antin’s “Selves,”* 30-40.

elaborately staged sets, Antin makes reference to historical instances that work to layer intersections of fiction, history, and political acts.

Carving: A Traditional Sculpture

Unlike the majority of her works, Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* is unembellished by any props. *Carving* is a series of 148 black and white self-portrait photographs that document the artist's loss of eleven-and-a-half pounds over the course of thirty-seven days (Meeker n.p.). In this series, the artist's body is the sole object of focus. Performed in a private space, Antin's series of self-portraits challenges the simultaneous presence and absence demanded of the idealized woman in that she is largely visible insofar as social convention allows. Testing the boundaries of public exhibition and private performance, Antin considers the physical disappearance of her own female figure while putting the representation of her naked body on display for public viewing and, by extension, consumption. Antin engages with performative self-imaging through her repetitive posing and documentation of her slowly disappearing figure. These poses vary as she is photographed from multiple angles, though the frame consistently captures her figure from head to toe. This style of private performance in the name of social concern creates a profoundly conceptual statement against the various ways in which the representation of women was limited to idealizing and objectifying standards. The title itself, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, imparts the double meaning of the artwork onto the viewer as we can clearly see that the artist is not a sculpture in any technical sense of the word or artistic process. Antin's clever reference to the traditionally reductive process of sculpting does, however, present the artist as an exaggerated form of sculpture, where she controls her outward appearance and representation, as she performs what can surely be extrapolated into a conceptual—or even an eventually physical—

disappearance, dispersal, or dematerialization. The wilful self-objectification of the artist's figure brought about through artistic decision provokes the destabilizing potential of performative self-imaging, reinforcing the agency of the female artist against the patriarchal canon of western art.

Antin treats her body as a material and her identity as unfixed, multiple, and unpredictable in its re-appearance. Her process addresses the complexity of femininity, and “[b]y thus counterposing authenticity and artifice and dissembling fixed distinctions between being and acting, Antin asserted the femininity was simultaneously a role that women played and a position that determined how they experienced the world” (Wark 47-8). Through *Carving*, Antin invokes multiple meanings of the terms sculpture, material, tradition, and visibility, while challenging the assumption of femininity as singular, the female body as hyper-sexualized, and the radicality of otherness. Carlene Meeker writes:

Antin's body becomes a work in progress as she meticulously photographs herself daily from frontal, back and side views. At first glance it seems Antin is referencing the desire in our society for physical perfection and how women are always concerned with the need to improve their bodies. However, on closer examination, Antin raises deeper, more disturbing issues. She stands before us completely naked, the body of a white Jewish woman, at once a member of two oppressed minorities, one female, the other ethnic. The representation of the female nude is always prone to erotic interpretation, but in this work Antin presents her body as an impersonal object, subject to some type of classification system. (n.p.)

A likeness of her body is presented to the viewer as if it were a specimen, ready for examination. Such a bold presentation leaves her vulnerable to intense scrutiny, as is the custom with images of the female body. The reiteration of her self through the repetition of documentary images offers the viewer a subject that is entangled in a play of difference to, as well as consistency with, the previous image. Antin presents herself as simultaneously present and absent, travelling along the continuum from visible to

invisible as the series progresses. Each image in *Carving* is a re-presentation of the artist's changing body, under more exaggerated circumstances than the day-to-day, unnoticeable eliminatory changes the human body incurs. In this sense, she presents herself differently in each frame. At the same time, she is still the same person – we are still looking the same artist's disappearing body. She is at once there and *less* there, where each image brings her closer and closer to nothingness. Through this process, Antin's subjectivity is presented as spectral. Her engagement with re-appearance, varying states of visibility, as well as her challenge to traditional notions of material and materialization, recall the insistent visibility of a spectral subject.

Spectral Methods: Self-Consumption

With Antin's process of re-appearance in mind, I expand upon her presentation as a spectral subject by engaging in a discussion of visual consumption that exists when viewing performances of the female body and operates within the power dynamic between viewer and subject. Drawing from Antin's engagement with dematerialization, I aim to connect how invisibility and disappearance work together to activate the spectral subject as it comes to exist within feminist art of the 1970s. To draw this exploration of visibility/invisibility further, I look to feminist literature of the 1970s and the symbolic use of the body in Margaret Atwood's 1969 novel *The Edible Woman*. Analysis of *The Edible Woman* locates how "self-consuming" actions and self-representation in varying states of visibility disrupts the patriarchal, consumerist values of Western society, idealizing representations of the female figure to the point of neurosis.

In *The Edible Woman*, protagonist Marian McAlpin finds herself losing her sense of identity at the hands of her partner, Peter, described as "superior and amused" (75). Peter is described as attractive and successful, though often domineering, and it is his

domineering nature that crystalizes Marian's fear of her identity being consumed not only by the patriarchal society she fears, but by Peter. Atwood mimics Marian's struggle with her identity, such that the novel begins in the first person perspective, switches to the third, and then back to the first. The switch from first to third person perspective is where the reader becomes explicitly aware of the dissociation that Marian experiences at the hands of societal pressure.

Atwood also positions Peter's character as a symbol of patriarchy. According to literary critic Victoria Boyton, Marian is troubled by her role in a "capitalist culture of women either having or not having the right surface," living with a "critical consciousness of how their bodies are socially constructed" (51). Marian is explicitly aware of her appearance when she is pressured to satisfy Peter's desires. When Marian resists Peter's pressure, he accuses her of rejecting her femininity. His repressive and condescending attitude contributes to Marian's paranoia, fuelled by a fear of consumption, leading to her subsequent struggle with an eating disorder. The eating disorder symbolizes her rejection of the rigid standards of beauty dictated by Western society, as she resists becoming commodified.

The increasing decay of Marian's identity is evident when she dreams that she is literally beginning to dissolve and "the ends of [her] fingers [are] turning transparent" (38). This dream causes her to realize that every aspect of her identity is beginning to slip away from her. She continues to feel this way after Peter proposes marriage, and she unconsciously becomes passive towards all his wants, including his sexual desires. Upon realizing this, Marian rejects eating as a means of rejecting the pressure Peter imposes upon her, in addition to that of the male dominated society she feels is already consuming her. Literary critic Alice M. Palumbo finds that Marian becomes "a victim of her own

body” (74). Marian falls victim to the oppressions of society, and the shift in perspective to third person singular indicates Marian’s loss of her sense of control. The feeling that the fate of her identity as a woman is predetermined by the normative values of Western society torments Marian. Eventually, she takes action against Peter through one major self-consuming act. Marian bakes a cake in the shape of a woman, calling it “The Edible Woman.” The cake is a symbol of her self-image and the rebellion against Peter. His character is society manifested as a concentrated source of oppression upon Marian, and the act of baking and consuming this cake ultimately relieves her of her paranoia. This performative, even theatrical, act is intended to “fend off her metaphorical consumption by Peter” (Palumbo 74). By consuming herself, she embodies the society that distresses her. Marian confronts Peter: “You’ve been trying to destroy me, haven’t you...you’ve been trying to assimilate me. But I’ve made you a substitute, something you’ll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn’t it? I’ll get you a fork” (Atwood 284). Her long awaited self-assertion destabilizes the imbalance that Peter’s actions attempt to enforce. Her return to speaking in the first person singular indicates a relinquishing of her position as a victim of society, where her physical struggle with literal consumption results in a disruptive act.

Marian’s struggle with her own visibility, with the power of her own voice, is manifest through a theatrical performance of eating a cake made in the image of a woman. Moreover, her use of symbolism through self-consumption is representative of her acknowledgement or understanding of herself as other to Peter. Her process of destabilization is similar to the performative self-imaging of Cahun, and subsequently, Antin, in that she reproduces a woman in cake, as a symbol of her own femininity. This extended self-portrait engages the performative actions of Marian consuming her cake-

self, rendering her self as other, then alienating her self, and reclaiming her agency in the end. The obscuring of Marian's sense of self by her self, in order to resist the pressures of Western society, brings together the significance of dematerialization as well as that of re-materialization and by extension, re-appearance. For it is through her dissociated yet engaged regard for her identity that she experienced both a haunting of herself by ideals and social norms which manifest themselves as paranoia, but also a haunting of her self by her self, through her repetitive attempts to comply with the standards of femininity imposed upon her. In turn, her haunting becomes productive and creates a space where symbolic action results in not only a confrontation and dialogue with her oppressor, but also a sense of reclaimed agency and resolution. Of course, in the context of reading a novel, some kind of resolution is generally expected. It is satisfying for myself as a reader to see Marian develop into a strong character and creatively provoke those who challenge her. In the context of artworks such as Antin's, self-consuming actions are provocative in that they engage discussions of power and control. Antin exercises control over her physical body in order to challenge how her metaphysical self, her femininity, is within her control and can be presented as such. However, self-exposure and self-consumption are but two strategies through which feminist artists of the 1970s engage with the self-as-other in order to disrupt contrived notions of female identity. Investigating performative self-imaging practices of the same era, I turn my attention to a self-imaging technique that renders the subject entirely inconsumable. Suzy Lake, in *Choreographed Puppet #4-5*, does so by concealing her figure rather than revealing it, and obscuring her image even further through motion-blurring, rendering herself visually evasive, and, I argue, spectral.

Choreographed Puppet #4-5

Contemporaneous to Antin, the Toronto-based, American-born Suzy Lake also engages in a performance-based exploration of subjectivity through self-imaging.²⁵ In her practice, Lake theatrically enacts her self-representation in order to explore an interest in “process and revision, the way roles are inhabited by living bodies, [rather] than in maintaining anything like illusion” (Baird 99). Works such as the *Choreographed Puppets* series demonstrate that “she is more interested in the moment the illusion is imperfectly adopted, and when it breaks down” (99). Like Antin, Lake re-presents herself in order to challenge the rigid ideological frameworks that define female identity. Reiterative and exaggerated self-performance reappear throughout Lake’s artwork, where she often engages with symbolic actions in her explorations of subjectivity. Her artwork is rooted in feminist concerns, however Lake did not wholly identify with much of the politically-driven artwork of the 1970s, “since it was more conceptual than [her own]” (Baird 98). From the mid-1970s onward, Lake’s work was rooted in formalist concerns inspired by minimalism, but also foregrounded performance and the body (99). Classifying Lake’s work within a movement is not crucial to this argument, nor is it my intention, but I do suggest that it is quite similar to the revised version of conceptual art that Antin and Piper worked though. At the very least, Lake shares these artists’ concerns with embodiment and disappearance in relation to representations of the female identity and female subjectivity, and challenges the limits that society imposes on the female body.

²⁵ Daniel Baird also suggests that “Cindy Sherman’s iconic ‘Untitled Film Stills’ of 1979,” are “undoubtedly influenced by Lake’s series of just a few years earlier...” (101). This is an intriguing observation considering the amount of recognition Sherman has received for the series.

Despite her self-proclaimed difference from the feminist work of the 1970s, Lake's practice is comprised of mainly photographic works that demonstrate her political inclination and feminist perspective. Her time as a political activist in Detroit in the late 1960s led her to relocate to Montréal, where her practice nurtured a feminist representation of herself through photographic self-portraiture, where she strived to connect her classical training and activist work (Baird 100). Through self-representation, Lake addresses issues such as confinement, resistance, and repression, all of which are read through images of the female body navigating various spaces, both public and private. Like Cahun and Antin, Lake explores a politically inclined, lens-based, performative practice. However, her approach to theatricality is more physically strenuous, in the sense that her performative actions range from painting her face, to recorded breathing, to demolishing walls with a sledgehammer, to tumbling down stairs. I focus on Lake's performative actions in *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* in order to develop the narrative of destabilizing acts of self-representation further, where the works of Cahun and Antin have already set the stage for a reading of performative self-imaging as disruptive to normative conventions of femininity and assertive of identity as constantly in flux.

Lake's *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* is an image from the series *Choreographed Puppets*, completed in 1976 and reprinted between 2007 and 2015. This series of black and white photographs documents a performance by the artist, pictured hanging, strung like a puppet, from a large wooden frame. Two men rest at the top of the frame, manipulating the straps that secure Lake to the wooden structure. Lake notes that, "Choreographed Puppets is about control and resistance, gravity and momentum and friction...[as well as] the controlling hand of the other" (Baird 102). As Lake moves her

body, the movements fix an image with a blurred subject. The wooden frame in this photograph both supports and contains the subject, where her puppeteers symbolize the oppressive control of ideology over the subjects that it manipulates, and where her constant movements and abstracted form allow her to evade a consistent and cohesive capturing of her image. I consider the blurring of her figure to be particularly important when considering how the artist can use the strategy of reiteration to embody the self-as-other and disrupt the desiring gaze. The evasiveness of her figure renders it spectral in the visual sense, in that her visibility is highly obscured. We are presented with an image that we are told is of the artist, but that knowledge is simply a matter of trusting the information we are given. This image captures Lake in motion, and though it is blurred, the viewer must rely on their own projected interpretations in order to discern almost anything about the subject's identity. This is how Lake is able to defy categorization and gendered representation through this image in particular. Her technique also suggests a metaphorical transcendence of the rigid ideological frameworks implied by the wooden frame, where she is struggling against the literal and figurative power of the patriarchal structure. In addition, scholar Alisia Chase notes that Lake also had women act as puppeteers, suggesting that the work "transcends gender" (36), and that all humans are subject to the greater manipulative forces of ideology. These manipulative forces work through ideology to form the notion of otherness as well as influence the actions it produces that work to alienate, objectify, and diminish the worth of a subject. In addition to her blurred figure, Lake is able to defy the desiring gaze in that she is dressed all in black with only head and hands bare, failing to provide the viewer with any explicit clues as to her gender, leaving little room for the subject to be consumed in the traditional visual sense. By not performing any of the characteristics of her gender, this image offers

the viewer no opportunity to consume the figure. Instead, the viewer is encouraged to seek a deeper understanding of the image, moving beyond the figure itself and focusing on its metaphorical capacity to challenge the forces that bind, consume, and alienate it. Lake's self-portrait clearly demonstrates that there is little disruptive potential in remaining static and singular.

Furthermore, the blurring of the figure in *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* also resists stasis and singularity through its layering of multiple actions into one long-exposure photograph, rather than having the figure strike a static pose for the capturing of an image. Instead, Lake layers multiple poses into one durational image to disrupt traditional notions of perceiving linear time through a photograph. Her engagement with blurring continues throughout her practice, where her *Extended Breathing* series (2008-2009) presents her recorded actions as traces, or even ghostly visions, of her actions. In this series, Lake stands still in public places for extended amounts of time, recording her breathing, the only movement her body makes, through long-exposure photographs. As a result, her figure is blurred. Lake's blurred works "function in durational terms" (Baird 103). These terms are those by which the representation of the body is fixed into a single image, but the figure represented has been recorded in motion, over an extended period of time. By capturing multiple actions performed over extended periods, long-exposure images can capture the traces of a subject's iterative actions and thus evoke spectral characteristics. Freezing past space-times into an image-object, photographs crystallize moments in the present, which instantaneously become parts of the past, to be revisited within the future where, "seen as a deadening artefact, the photograph indicates that life outside continues, time flows by, and the captured object has slipped away" (De Duve 113). The manipulation of the female form through blurring, distortion, and

multiplication freezes the figure in a moment where they are enacting their purpose as a subject, but leaving only the traces of a performed self for the viewer to perceive. The traces of Lake's movement are reminiscent of the distortion that occurs between states of visibility that are associated with spectral apparition, traces that can evade any gaze and slip back into nothingness, or develop into a figure that evades visual consumption almost entirely.

Lake's works can be considered as "experiments delimiting the boundaries of the body and the self from the world of society and history and, increasingly, from the natural world" (Baird 104). Her body is presented in a performative struggle against many of her materials, where in *Choreographed Puppet #4-5* she struggles against her bindings within the crude wooden frame. The experimental nature of this work is evident in its existence as a self-portrait, as Lake was not able to predict exactly how her image would look because she was performing within the frame. As a result, her obscured visibility could only be anticipated, much like the obscured visibility of the specter. Despite its eventual fixity in the photograph itself, Lake's blurred representation suggests that her spectral subjectivity goes beyond what is pictured. Like Antin, Lake engages with performative self-imaging in order to destabilize conventional representations of female subjectivity. Though they present themselves differently, Antin naked and Lake fully clothed, they explore the continuum of visibility and disrupt preconceptions of the female identity as passive, singular, and other. Through their embodiment and enactment of spectral characteristics, both artists re-present themselves as other as a means to empower the female subject and resist reductive categorizations associated with femininity. Antin and Lake present themselves as spectral subjects who are capable of engaging with the norms and conventions restricting their empowerment as women artists in order to completely

destabilize them. Their evasion of visual consumption as they foreground the self-as-other allows them to reimagine otherness as a productive identification, where the female body becomes a representation of assertion and social change rather than a reflection of passivity.



Figure 3. *Superimposition*, 2016
Wax, acrylic and wood frame, 12" x 6" x 25", series of 3

THIRD APPARITION

Superimposition

This image is unlike the rest – it is not lens-based, in any traditional sense. If the lens is the mediator for the camera's recording of re-presented images of subjectivity then, by extension, my hands carry the medium that records my likeness. Through this recording, I make a mask of myself, a vessel from where my multiples will emerge. This vessel is one of transformation, where materials are re-shaped into my likeness. These materials become the tangible embodiment of myself, its existence as an accumulation of layers amassed through performative acts. The cycle of transformation begins and ends with the hands, but it is transmuted through this vessel that is simultaneously mask and artefact, throughout varying iterative acts of re-presentation. This vessel is a reminder of how my body looked at a particular moment in time. Though the changes are miniscule, it no longer looks exactly like this. This is a reminder of who I was only weeks ago, a ghost of a part of myself that I attempt to preserve and present through self-imaging. Layers of wax are built up into a mould of my torso, a vessel that holds my image. Each layer deposits only a tiny bit of wax, a fine coating that preserves what has already accumulated. By multiplying my image, I create a disjointed account of figural representation. The exposure of my self becomes an imposition in layered proportions.

FOUR | Spectral (Re)Turns

How can one be afraid of the stranger if the stranger is within?

Tamar Tembeck, “Mona Hatoum’s Corporeal Xenology”

The idea of selfhood that I explore in this thesis is never static or singular, never entirely normative, and never consistently coherent—a conjecture I continue to support through an analysis of Mona Hatoum’s *Corps Étranger*. Drawing briefly once more from Amelia Jones’ reading of body art, I expand this exploration of the self-as-other into Tamar Tembeck’s discussion of xenology and self-othering, Christine Ross’s reading of abjection, and Avery Gordon’s investigation of sociological haunting. I connect these ideas in order to analyze them within the dialogue of subjectivity as spectral, as both haunting and haunted. By locating *Corps Étranger* within the spectral turn of the 1990s, I consider how representations of the self-as-other, as presented by Claude Cahun, Eleanor Antin and Suzy Lake, are reshaped within contemporary lens-based art practices through performative self-imaging.

As discussed in the reading of *Body Art*, Amelia Jones considers how artists working through lens-based self-portraiture in the 1990s engage with the notion of the dispersed, fragmented, particularized, and technologically mediated self. Jones asserts a need for a shift in the way “gendered, sexualized, racialized, classed, and otherwise particularized body/self (including our own),” is experienced, “in its contingency on the

other and the world” (235). Engaging self-portraiture within this model allows the reader to rethink the traditional art historical portrayals of subjectivity that alienate otherness, focusing instead on the other as a subject whose re-presentation is empowering in that it repetitiously asserts its presence through re-appearance. Rethinking subjectivity as spectral through the repetitive practice of performative self-imaging recognizes otherness as a productively destabilizing force, pushing the (non-artist, non-subject) viewer to recognize their position in relation to the other. As noted, reading the subject of a self-portrait through Western ideology produces an understanding of the female figure as singular, passive, and static – this is the ideal art historical female subject. Reading the female subject as particularized, though materially and conceptually uncontainable, emphasizes female subjectivity as a space that can be navigated through self-portraiture and reimagined as dispersed and multiple, even spectral. However, with this reimagining comes the challenge of investigating a non-idealized and thus unpredictable subject.

Expressing the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of the human body through photographic self-portraiture traditionally relies on the external qualities of the figure represented in order to convey the intended message. For Mona Hatoum, the presentation of a non-idealized self through the self-as-other extends into a literal exposure of her insides in order to express how our own internal anatomy can be strange to ourselves.

Tamar Tembeck contextualizes Hatoum’s practice:

As a Beirut-born Palestinian exiled in London, Hatoum speaks as a stranger through an adopted tongue. She has adapted the European and masculine language of Minimalism only to subvert its foundational tenets by injecting anatomical discrepancies into the minimal grid. Hatoum practices resistance from the inside out (as an established artist), and from the outside in (as an immigrant to London). (59)

Hatoum’s practice speaks from a position of exile and explores strangeness from a geopolitical standpoint. Her practice is comprised of mainly sculptural installations and

some video work. Through her performance-based works, Hatoum explores the othered and abject aspects of subjectivity using objects with strong associations in order to explore socio-cultural and socio-political issues. Many of Hatoum's earlier works are performance-based, where she incorporated herself as a performer. As her practice developed, she began to focus more so on the implication of the viewer and their body within her work, creating a more psychologically intense space in which the artwork can be experienced. Through intentional and symbolic arrangements of objects, images, and other subject matter, Hatoum's more recent works continue to address issues of displacement and loss as a result of war and political unrest. Few of her works are photographic self-portraits in the same sense as those of Cahun, Antin, and Lake. Hatoum's performative self-imaging, observed in *Corps Étranger*, explores identity from a very unconventional point of view.

Corps Étranger

Hatoum's *Corps Étranger*, literally translating to strange body or foreign body, presents the internal body of the artist as a space of strangeness and unfamiliarity. Hatoum had a team of doctors perform an endoscopy on her in order to generate video footage of her internal body, which she then projected onto the floor of the exhibition space – a small, dark, semi-enclosed cylindrical space at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The video footage allows the viewer to engage with the pulsing, writhing, stretching, and shifting parts of her self, visually as well as aurally, as the endoscopic camera travels through Hatoum's body and an ultrasound simultaneously records the sound of her breathing, as well as her heart beating. The projection of this video piece reflects the mechanism of projection on a technological and psychological level, where Hatoum's piece appears to be a ghostly intrusion.

Corps Étranger communicates a fundamental sense of otherness that resides within all human beings – that of the internal body. Tamar Tembeck discusses xenology, the study of otherness, and the treatment of the self-as-other in *Corps Étranger* as contingent on the notion of “the body as the seat or the ‘home’ of the self” (59). With this in mind, the foreign aspect of Hatoum’s body explored in *Corps Étranger* exists in opposition to traditional practices of self-portraiture that value the presentation of the external body as an indicator for coherent identity. In these representations, “the epidermis is the corporeal delineation of the end of one’s self” (Tembeck 60). Valuing the external body as a marker for the internal, metaphysical or psychic self reduces a subject to social criticisms made against them. Making assumptions about a subject’s identity, their normativity or their otherness, based on the boundaries of skin comes with “[t]he insurance of coherent identity...” which Tembeck notes, “is little more than a masquerade” (61). If a fixing of the metaphysical self – the coherent and singular subject – is achieved through the presentation of an idealized body, then Hatoum’s self-presentation is truly evocative of otherness. In turn, I question how the self-as-other exists within the spectral landscape created by the projection of *Corps Étranger*.

This alternative style of self-portraiture offers an extended framework for thinking about spectrality and the self-as-other in relation to the divergence of photography into video, and the intersections of photographic theory with the power dynamics shaping visual representations of the female body. Hatoum’s self-presentation speaks to the gaze of the self upon itself, the self-objectifying gaze that can render the self-as-other, where “self-othering, or subjective objectification, is part and parcel of the materialization of self” (Tembeck 60). Self-othering is essential to the process of self-portraiture, where the body presented represents the artist’s subjectivity but is

transformed into an image-object. The subject of *Corps Étranger* is established as other to the viewer through the psychological mechanism of projection layered upon the physical mechanism and technological medium of projection. Hatoum's engagement with performative self-imaging relies on the intersubjective exchange between the piece and the viewer in order to activate the dynamic of othering and wilful self-alienation, where works engaging re-iterative processes, such as *Corps Étranger*, are "[t]aken strictly in their fixity, within their physical boundaries or as objects of the past, the works become mere corpses, traces of themselves" (60). The participation of the spectator is what truly activates the intersection of performative self-imaging and the self-as-other as a space in which the spectral emerges, as this is where the traces of the works, as objects of the past, that Tembeck mentions, reside. The traces of the works are activated through re-iteration, the re-apparition of the self-as-other through performative self-imaging.

Corps Étranger challenges normative notions of identity and consumption that fuel the dynamic of interpretive exchange that can occur between viewer, subject, and artwork, refuting the conventional experience of viewing, as well as constructing, representations of the female figure. This interplay is especially intriguing when the viewer/subject/artist is faced with an instance of self-representation that is completely unrecognizable as an iteration of the self. Like Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* and Lake's *Choreographed Puppet #4-5*, the body presented in *Corps Étranger* mostly evades gendered representation. Without these clues, the focus of the viewer is forced to shift into anxious contemplation of how this indiscernible subject relates to their self. Like *Choreographed Puppet #4.5*, the presentation of an obscured and mostly ungendered self-representation in *Corps Étranger* "provokes a certain constructive alienation, revealing the unfixity of bodily parameters, art object parameters, and

ultimately, personal identity” (Tembeck 62). Hatoum’s non-traditional use of self-portraiture demonstrates a self-alienation, in addition to that of the viewer, where by experiencing Hatoum’s “foreign” body, the viewer “choose[s] to be alienated. But as they leave, they may become aware of their intolerance towards being rendered foreign themselves” (Tembeck 62). By experiencing the piece within the small semi-enclosure of its presentation, the viewer is confronted with an image that reminds them of the strangeness that resides within them as well. Unfixing the parameters of the subject and the art object, *Corps Étranger* presents a non-idealized and abject subject. In *Corps Étranger* the viewer is “ingested and digested, and the looping of these images reproduces the cycles of existence in the daily repetition of intake and excretion” (Tembeck 61). The presence of the abject foregrounds what the body naturally rejects, such as vomit or excrement, and the causative processes that are unacceptable to exhibit or enact publically. By extension, the internal spaces where these processes occur are also abject and recognizing abjection involves recognizing the process of casting off that these internal spaces are biologically programmed to enact. Tembeck suggests that “Hatoum presents her body in sacrifice, as an offering open to exploration. But it does not let itself be freely consumed” (61). The viewer is granted access to Hatoum’s un-idealized body, where her identity is not immediately perceptible, stifling any attempt in forming a stable relation from the viewer’s self (*my* self) to that of another (the *other*). Through abjection, Hatoum’s body is rendered inconsumable through normative frameworks of desire enacted through looking.

The Abject

In order to locate the symbolic power of the abject in destabilizing normative conceptions of subjectivity, I consider Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject, and art

historian Christine Ross's subsequent analysis of abjection in relation to contemporary performances of the female body. Ross explores the performance of female subjectivity and representation of the female form in relation to abjection in the visual arts, drawing from Julia Kristeva's discussion of the abject as an experience of disgust, revulsion, and even horror that the child experiences in attempting to assert its own subject formation at the expense of separating itself from the already abject mother (Kristeva 1982). Kristeva discusses the interconnection between subject and object, *other* and *I*, when delineating the abject in the context of Western society. She frames the abject as a disruptive force, noting that "there is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (5). In relation to this recognition and the subsequent construction of the other in relation to I, Ross questions how Kristeva's abject finds its return in contemporary presentations of female subjectivity. In this investigation, Ross asks a crucial question: "Is the use of revulsion and disgust a shock strategy elaborated in response to a cybernetic age where the body is threatened with disappearance into virtual reality?" (149). Performing female subjectivity while drawing from the notion of abjection asserts physicality and presence, and incorporating digital technology into these performances destabilizes this assertion by offering a space in which visibility and invisibility, absence and presence, can exist simultaneously. This simultaneity also connects self-portraiture to spectrality by producing a spectral subject. Ross writes of abjection as a threatening force to subjectivity, "for the abject never ceases to haunt the borders of identity; it constantly threatens to dissolve the unity of the subject" (149). This again refers to the differentiation between other and I that is at the core of identity formation, but the key to the power of abjection is that the "I" is not thoroughly successful in separating itself from

the other. Artists whose practices involve performing the abject have the potential to destabilize normative constructions of identity and otherness as well as the pleasurable, sanitized viewing experience that comes with looking at idealized bodies. Ross describes Hatoum's *Corps Étranger* as ambivalent in its movement between being "incorporating and incorporated" (150). Ross elaborates:

In the first instance, the body is represented as incorporated (as much by the camera that penetrates it as by the viewer who follows its movement); in the second instance, the body becomes an incorporating power to the extent that, by following the intrusive action of the camera, viewers end up feeling themselves absorbed by what they are looking at so intently, as if they themselves were being pulled down into the profound darkness of the body's cavities. This ambivalence assumes its full meaning when one realizes that the body is the body of a woman. (Ibid.)

As mentioned earlier in relation to Surrealism, the identity of woman holds a similar place of ambivalence within Surrealist practice, where her representation simultaneously revered and limited her sexuality and subjectivity. Ross recalls Freud's establishment of the life and death drives as well as the castrated and castrating woman in order to explore *Corps Étranger* as reminiscent of a devouring creature.²⁶ Hatoum's piece demonstrates the intersection between the categories of the female body and subjectivity with technology in order to construct a space of strangeness, evoking a sense of unease at the recognition of the other. In addition, presenting her internal self as other invokes the process of performative self-imaging, where the female body is reimagined as a disruptive force to the idealized figures and identities historically valued in institutional spaces.

²⁶ Ross refers to the "vagina dentata" as discussed by Elizabeth Grosz in "Animal Sex: Libido as Desire and Death" in *Space, Time, and Perversion: The Politics of the Body*, 187-206.

The foreign body in *Corps Étranger* is a product of performing female subjectivity, an engagement with re-iterative self-performance that brings the other much closer to the I. Ross describes the uncontrollable body as:

...a dysfunctional body, a body both threatened and threatening, an 'it' that reveals itself as something different from me, something stranger and harder to control. 'Absent' and yet present in the manifestation of the *symptom*: a negative presence. (152)

The recognition of the body as uncontrollable provokes an anxious anticipation of its re-presentation, raising insecurity toward how the other can be “dealt with,” should it choose to re-appear. Loss of control is very powerful in destabilizing preconceptions for acceptable bodies in Western society. The agency of the uncontrollable—othered—body is not unlike the unpredictable nature of the specter’s re-appearance. Its negative presence is an indication of social dysfunction, when considering subjectivity as spectral. By extension, social dysfunction at the hands of spectrality can be a disruptive force in that it creates a space for otherness to emerge as productively destabilizing. Reimagining the performance of identity as spectral challenges the typical regard for the specter as an other whose only purpose is to alienate those who witness its re-appearance. Continuing to suggest that alienation can be productive, I consider Tembeck and Ross’ ideas of otherness, abjection, and the self-as-other, in order to elaborate on how subjectivity can be spectral. Considering subjectivity as haunting and haunted, wherein the labels of identification vacillate between visibility and invisibility, we can consider the process of forming, or performing, otherness as spectral as well.

Much like engaging with the subject of the self-portrait photograph (or video), the subject’s identity continuously returns from the past, citing a history while simultaneously constituting its own futurity, as it arrives from and through iterative acts yet to occur. That is to say that actions such as donning a dress to assert femininity or

maintaining a muscular physique to assert masculinity cite an ideological archive of normative behaviours that must be consistently re-performed. Failure to do so results in marginalization of the nonconformist figure, where they become other. The consistent reiteration of these characteristics, however, is never realistically obtainable. The unpredictability of unconscious enactment is much like the foreign body of the reappearing specter, whose re-appearance is an indication of disorder on some level.

Recalling Avery Gordon's sociological approach to haunting, I turn back to the photograph that both haunted Gordon and inspired *Ghostly Matters* in order to support the role of the photographic object as spectral as well as assert the connections between subjectivity and spectrality. Gordon's investigation of Sabina Spielrein's mysterious absence from a photograph in which she is to be pictured, which Gordon was able to verify from many letters between Freud and Jung, asserts the haunting power of absence in a space where there should be a visible presence. Gordon notes:

...the ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a lost, sometimes a life, sometimes a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope.
(64)

Spielrein's invisibility haunted Gordon, who was enthralled by this curious case and thus sought to trace the haunting of this particular ghost. The moment that Spielrein looked in the mirror and saw a wolf instead of a human woman, how she perceived herself to look, she experienced herself as other. This disappearance of her self as she understood it to be caused her discomfort in addition to that already caused by being seemingly out of control of her own psyche, a factor that likely contributed to her disappearance from the photograph that Gordon analyzes.

Compelled by Gordon's investigation of Spielrein, I too am intrigued by the possibility that searching for ghosts could be much more profound than a nervous willing of the Ouija board to give me a sign from the other side. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* also offers a historiographical model for investigating the figures, such as Spielrein, that haunt the stories from which they disappear. Gordon writes of disappearance as "an exemplary instance in which the boundaries of rational and irrational, fact and fiction, subjectivity and objectivity, person and system, force and effect, conscious and unconscious, knowing and not knowing are constitutively unstable" (97). When the unpredictability of a subject's appearance and the mystery of their disappearance come together in the form of a photograph, our recognition of a certain disjunction or dysfunction affectively reminds us of a haunting. The photographs Gordon discusses are within the context of what she calls "state-sponsored disappearance" (103). Gordon elaborates on another form of disappearance in the context of Argentinian psychoanalysis, where she examines Luisa Valenzuela's critique of the lack of social context in scientific practice in her 1977 novel *He Who Searches*. Valenzuela writes of disappearing Argentinian women in relation to photographs existing as proof of a person's existence, where the state produces its own ghosts in response to the ones already existing. Disappearance highlights the "precariousness of social order" (126). Government forms of producing disappearance are an exercise of power that attempts to staunch existing hauntings with new and more malevolent ones. It is clear that haunting social forces, especially at the intersection of gender, race, and class, are capable of destabilizing present social life through multiple engagements with visibility and invisibility and in multiple contexts.

The investigation of the self-as-other I pursue here emphasizes the importance of recognizing the voice of the other and their potential to teach us the value of empowering

the other, rather than repressing its voice and re-appearance as a means to preserve subjectivity as normative, ordered, or coherent. Just like the abject focuses on what must be cast out, the specter itself is a figure who is traditionally exorcized, eradicated, hunted; anything but heard, anything but truly seen. The strategy of repetitive appearance as a disruptive force defines spectrality. If the repulsive aspects of our bodies remind us of an otherness within ourselves, and a performance of these parts of our bodies is disruptive to normative conceptions of female representation, then the insistent visibility and re-presentation associated with performing the self-as-other through the abject elevates marginalized figures through re-appearance and re-iteration.



Figure 4. *Accretion/Erasure*, 2016
Wax, acrylic, dimensions variable

FINAL APPARITION

Accretion/Erasure

My body is my material and I often refer to it as a whole, while presenting it in pieces. My hands act as the main translators of tactility, they are the messengers between the rest of my body and the objects and people I interact with. My hands facilitate gestures of accretion, the accumulation of the objects that combine to form my self; they also revise, in discarding what does not fit and what I do not require. They repeatedly dismember my image, working around and within the confines of convention. By presenting my hands in multiples I am layering my tools upon each other, stacking them as though they are engaged in the process of constructing an image. They combine to become a melting, fatty-coloured pillar of iteration, where each action is supported by the last and defines the foundation for the actions and gestures to come. They grasp through one and other and grapple with containment, while navigating a space of isolation and preservation that takes its shape as a transparent box, balanced near the top of the pillar. Within these actions reside a beginning and a conclusion, but with little finality, as they still hold the potential to be built upon or broken down. Their existence in wax speaks to an inherent potential for iteration; they can be melted down and transformed into something entirely different. The purpose of the mould from which these hands are pulled is to be repetitively occupied. What resides within the mould in one state quickly becomes another as liquid turns into solid. The interior soon becomes exterior and the mould experiences a loss. The mould experiences fullness, presence, and then emptiness, absence. In the same way, I experience the presence and absence of my self-portraits as a dissociated spectator. From this perspective my hands become strange, they are not mine,

simply images of my body, a layering of materials. They have presented, collected, imposed, fragmented, dismembered, and most importantly, produced. They have led my production of myself as a spectral subject, an accumulation of research – of actions and gestures all centered around the accumulation of experience and knowledge – that were once fragmented, perhaps even nonsensical, until they are assembled into a reflection of my self.

An Interrupted Conclusion

Notes on an Eternal Return: Photographic Self-Portraiture and the Spectral

Subject is a culmination of a written thesis and my artistic practice, where both elements of this project are expressions of research-led practice. My thesis project is a detailed attempt at developing and gaining an understanding of the self-as-other, as it comes to exist through photographic self-portraiture. My goal in this project was to investigate the potential of applying haunting as a metaphor for subjectivity by engaging in an artistic process wherein I am simultaneously subject and object, the photographer and the photographed. My research and practice exist symbiotically, where one is also the other. I suggest that this structure is non-hierarchical, positioning practice and research as equal components to a process of thinking through creating, writing, investigating, and semi-anonymously performing before the camera, exploring what it can mean to have an interdisciplinary approach to research and art production. In this thesis, I have addressed the intersections of theory and practice, as they have come to inform the production of my own body of artwork, titled *Notes on an Eternal Return*. This includes a discussion of the intentions, challenges, influences (direct and indirectly reflected within my practice), that I have encountered in preparation for my thesis exhibition. In the previous chapters I have engaged with theories and artworks that form the theoretical foundation of my thesis paper, thus allowing me to question and investigate the implications of my own self-imaging and its material constituents. In this final section, I consider the possibilities of spectrality as both analytical tool and subject position, as I reflect upon the research and process informing my artwork and the multiplicity of my own perspective as a layered, dispersed, and othered subject.

Throughout this paper, I have explored the performative practices of Claude Cahun, Suzy Lake, Eleanor Antin, and Mona Hatoum, artists whose work responds to repressive ideologies and challenge representations of women that frame female identity within a normative framework. The corresponding historical instances that these artists worked within are points in history crucial to the development and elevation of feminist interventions within visual art. Exploring Surrealist art and thought has set up my investigation of the intersection between subjectivity, self-portraiture, and spectrality through the mirror image, doubling, and photo-manipulation. Cahun's *What Do You Want From Me?* demonstrates a reflection of the othering and specular gaze back upon the viewer, provoking anxious contemplation when faced with an instance of self-othering through representation. Cahun's presentation of the self-as-other, and the self *and* other, foregrounds the transformative potential of herself as a subject, challenging what otherness means in terms of visibility.

Shifting my focus to visibility and invisibility as it comes to be understood through consumption, I addressed how Antin's *Carving*, like Margaret Atwood's "edible woman," is empowering through its inconsumable nature. Depicting un-idealized bodies blocks the traditional power dynamic of looking and brings the viewer into contact with difference and otherness. This contact can occur when the body is bare, like Antin's, or when it is clothed, like Suzy Lake in *Choreographed Puppet #4-5*. The crucial aspect to this disruption of visual consumption is the element of performance, reiteration, and obscuring the figure. When the figure is obscured through repetitive acts it destabilizes assumptions of the ideal female figure. These re-appearitions, obscured through their liminal visibility, recall the insistent visibility of the specter.

Focusing the external gaze inward, Mona Hatoum's *Corps Étranger* brings self-representation to the extreme. Confronting the viewer with a representation of her abject body, Hatoum alienates and is alienated, presenting her otherness through the ghostly medium of projection. Layering understandings of spectrality, Hatoum presents the self-as-other as something that is not necessarily as foreign, strange, or repulsive as it seems, as we all share the same basic human anatomy. This investigation of how women artists present themselves as other, as spectral subjects, reveals that the act of repetitive performance, reiteration, and obscuring of the figure is a powerful tool of destabilization. As such, I have simultaneously explored how I might activate this destabilization through my own practice.

In my private performances, I found myself finally able to regard my body as a material, and this form of detachment, even dissociation, from myself allowed me to perform iterations of my self as representation. I enacted what quickly became an “eternal return” of my self through reiterative actions. Having always regarded materials as other to myself, yet essential to my practice, acknowledging my body as a material offered me the opportunity to activate the symbolic potential that living in a sexed body allows.

Notes on an Eternal Return has led me to consider the conditions under which I strive to navigate the implications of my own self-representation, and as a result, my relationship to my body as a material has also been placed under investigation. My inquiries included how I could perform multiple identities; how I could obscure and reveal my figure; and how I could use self-representation to disrupt conventional ways of looking at the female body as representation. As my artistic production developed, I became increasingly motivated to make invisible things—mainly myself and my processes—visible. This took the form of recording my actions as I made my artwork

and, in turn, offering the artwork as a record of my actions. In the process of this material exploration I also re-imagined instances of performative self-imaging as productive of a spectral subject. I alternated between multiple selves, such as artist, subject matter, and viewer, and found that the conclusions I was able to draw were multiple, unfixed, dispersed, and sometimes incoherent at first.

I began by thinking about how I could expand the definitions of self-portraiture and photography, which led me to prefer the term “image-making”. This term encompassed the basic definitions of both processes and allowed me to expand my material exploration into sculptural work as well. As a duplicate and record of my body, *Superimposition* (Figure 3) quickly became the focal point of my exhibition. The sculptures in *Superimposition* are wax castings of the front of my torso, which come from a single mould. I experimented by filling the mould with various materials such as plaster, concrete, and paper pulp. Because I was producing an image of a human body, I knew it would be especially important to consider the broader associations that each material carries. The characteristics of weight, texture, and colour would ultimately lead me to pouring wax into the mould, as it created a fragile object that would better lend itself to the varying states of visibility that my written research has explored. This mould allowed me to produce three versions of my torso that would later act as props in *(Re)Presentation* (Figure 1), a photo-based work.

In *(Re)Presentation*, I incorporated the sculptures, known as *Superimposition*, as superimpositions. I explored how the wax torsos could act as masks, while concealing and revealing my figure while simultaneously photographing my private performance. These images were transferred onto three round mirrors with the intention of bringing the viewer into a space of performance that they would only access through imagination. I

presented these image transfers as records of my private performance, allowing the viewer to become integrated in the piece, and implicated by their subjectivity, through the perception of their mirror image and then through the projection of their own ideas onto the work. I installed *Superimposition* and *(Re)Presentation* on adjacent walls in order to emphasize the cyclical dialogue between the actions that comprise the works and their final iterations.

In addition, *(Re)Collection* (Figure 2) was installed on the wall opposite to *(Re)Presentation*, acting in further demonstration of the performance of multiple, fragmented, and dispersed selves. In this case, I began with a photograph, rather than a sculptural reproduction, of my body. My torso quickly became a prop once more, as I tore it from the page and isolated it as the first iteration of the series. For each of the eight images in this series, I tore pieces from my imaged torso and recorded the fragmented version of myself that I had created. I repeated the process of tearing and re-recording for each image. In the final image, I attempted to reassemble the shredded torso, but failed, just as I had intended to. This piece was more than an exercise in futility; it was a reaffirmation of the tension between self-preservation, self-recognition, and the passing of time. This piece also reflects the repetitive collection of actions that comprise the transformation of subjectivity over time.

To emphasize these actions even further, I produced *Accretion/Erasure* (Figure 4). Like *Superimposition*, *Accretion/Erasure* was produced from a mould of my body. In this case, my hands were the focal point of the piece. I presented what I imagined to be an accumulation of actions that resulted in all of the works that comprised *Notes on an Eternal Return*, focusing instead on the role of my hands in the production of the work. I imagined my hands working through the invisible boundaries imposed by ideologies of

subjectivity. These boundaries are presented throughout the exhibition as transparent boxes, working in combination with the images produced as well as the wax sculptures. This piece is a sculptural self-portrait rather than a lens-based one, and draws on the overarching theme of intertwining the conceptual premises of photography and sculpture, most notably seen in Antin's *Carving*. Hatoum's *Corps Étranger* also intertwines a sculptural element within her work—the small structure wherein the projection is housed. This structure is similar to the frame that Lake performs within, a structure that simultaneously contains and supports her performative process. The incorporation of sculptural elements into the works of these artists has informed my own expansion from photography, which lends itself directly to spectrality, into a more tactile space of material exploration. The sculptural elements that I have incorporated into my private performances support the use of my body as a material, one whose visibility I am able to manipulate through photography or more tangible means such as melting wax or tearing paper.

Manipulating my visibility allowed me to incorporate the techniques of that Cahun, Antin, Lake, and Hatoum use in their self-imaging. I draw on how these artists confound their self-representations—bodies easily identified as female—with techniques such as doubling, blurring, repetition, and distortion. These are all techniques that are reminiscent of spectrality, presenting the subject as spectral, as an apparition that evades traditions of representing the female body as well as viewing it. My position as a viewer, where I was able to experience my own work in a dissociated state of looking, differed greatly from what I observed as other viewers circulated through the exhibition. Through the presentation of my body I aimed to implicate the viewer, as I did with the use of mirrors. As viewers approached the mirrors in *(Re)Presentation*, I noticed them change

their position once they recognized themselves in the mirrors. Shifting their bodies, the viewers engaged with the work in a way that I had anticipated. What I had also anticipated was an initial sense of surprise, or even shock, at the sight of realistic reproductions of a female torso. These pieces also generated the most verbal feedback, that is, questions about how the piece was made and what it was like to use myself as a prop, engaging with my body in such an intimate, and yet disconnected, way. This disconnect acted as a form of erasure, where previous versions of myself became secondary when considering my body as a material.

Throughout this paper I have also addressed the production of these artworks as apparitions. I have engaged with a more creative style of writing in order to connect the theories discussed in relation to the artists chosen in order to locate how the technique performative self-imaging has informed the body of work presented in *Notes on an Eternal Return*. I have presented these apparitions as points of connection between each of the sections and the artwork, offering a space in which a more intimate reading of my artwork can emerge. These sections activated spectrality in their interruptive, repetitive, and insistent appearance, and have allowed me to produce a written document that, through its format, mimics a haunting, further intertwining my research and practice.

Having included a dialogue between the issues of gender, historiography, and technical medium within my written and material research has led me to examine the intersections of issues in which the notion of spectrality can be activated. Asking questions about the complexities of representation and subjectivity, *Notes on an Eternal Return* has contributed valuable research through a process of thinking through my proposed questions. While my research was very focused on four specific artists and their techniques, I recognize that what this thesis is also haunted by what I have chosen to

exclude. These exclusions refer to paths that this course of study could have followed, but fell outside of the scope of the research. What I have made visible through this body of research and practice has led me to consider how I can draw on the ideas that remained invisible and incorporate them into future bodies of work. This research can lead to countless areas of interest, namely a more detailed reading of the role of subjectivity and the archive, more extensive analysis of otherness in relation to racial politics, and even the role of early photography in developing subjectivities. I note here that all of these areas of study are integral to an understanding of how our social lives are deeply intertwined with the past, but must be reimagined in order to be more productive in the future.

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Appendix A: Exhibition Material

Notes on an Eternal Return was held at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Z Gallery, from 16 – 24 March 2016



Figure 5. Installation view, entrance to Z Gallery, Northwest corner. Pictured left to right: *Accretion/Erasure*, *(Re)Presentation*.



Figure 6. Installation view, Northeast corner of Z Gallery. Pictured left to right:
(Re)Collection, Accretion/Erasure.



Figure 7. Installation view, Northeast wall of Z Gallery. Pictured: *(Re)Presentation*.



Figure 8. Installation view, Northeast wall of Z Gallery. Pictured: *(Re)Presentation*, detail.



Figure 9. Installation view, Southeast corner of Z Gallery. Pictured left to right:
Superimposition, (Re)Collection.



Figure 10. Installation view, Southwest corner of Z Gallery. Pictured: *(Re)Collection*.



Figure 11. Exhibition card, front side

Notes on an Eternal Return

An OCAD University thesis exhibition
by Amy Meleca

Interdisciplinary Master's
in Art, Media, and Design

YYZ Artists' Outlet
401 Richmond St W

March 16-24

Opening reception March 17, 7 - 9 p.m.

Figure 12. Exhibition card, back side